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# Red English

## Duality and Representation in Contemporary Native American Poetics

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## Abstract

This thesis explores representations of duality across the work of contemporary Native American poets. Through the use of several analytic methods and postcolonial theories, this thesis will analyse representations of language, place, and identity, and argue that they are constructed in the border between Native American and American consciousness.

Firstly, Tommy Pico's *Nature Poem* will be read alongside a selection of Native American poets. Through a comparative analysis, the duality that characterises Pico's verse will be highlighted, and will place him in a tradition of indigenous poets who demonstrate that duality is a defining feature of Native American poetry.

Secondly, an in-depth analysis of language in Layli Long Soldier's *Whereas* will be made, and connections with *Nature Poem* highlighted. Long Soldier's work demonstrates the complicated relationship between Native American poets and the English language, utilising linguistic and poetic methods to disrupt the hierarchical power of English in public discourse. Through analysis of these common motifs, this thesis will argue that contemporary Native American poets are forging a uniquely Native American poetics that is formed on the borders, replacing stereotypical misrepresentations with authentic representations of Native American life.

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### **A Note on Nomenclature**

It is believed that the term Indian was ascribed to the indigenous peoples of North America when Christopher Columbus mistakenly believed he had landed ashore in India. Used to describe a vast variety of cultures and tribes, the term itself has no referent in the very cultures to which it refers. Gerald Vizenor describes the word Indian as “a colonial enactment, not a loan word, [whose] dominance is sustained by the simulation that has superseded the real tribal names” (11).

In academic writing about Native American literature, one will find a variety of nomenclature to describe America’s indigenous. Kenneth Roemer claims that all the typical labels associated with indigenous peoples “pose ethical and descriptive problems because they impose European concepts and language that...transform diversity into a vague essentialist category that can be used to marginalize or misrepresent” (9). The variety of terms and lack of consensus in Native American literary studies does highlight the reality that this nomenclature is a postcolonial issue. The act of translating, packaging, or essentializing almost 600 recognized cultures is certainly one of convenience for a Eurocentric audience.

However, the diversity of Native American poets is considered in the literature. An author’s tribal membership is always included before or after their name, foregrounding the role of their culture in their work. As the poet Heid E. Erdrich (Ojibwe) wrote, “there is no such thing as Native American poetry. We are poets who belong to Native Nations” (Erdrich “Native American Poetry”).

For continuity, in this thesis the term Native American will be used.

## Introduction

The history of Native Americans after the arrival of the pilgrims in 1620 is one of disenfranchisement, genocide, and forced migration. As America's colonizers aggressively moved West in the name of Manifest Destiny, tribes were forcibly moved, and their dealings with the federal government ratified in hundreds of treaties. One third of these were treaties of peace, and the rest were for land cession to the white man (Deloria, Jr 32). Between 1788 and 1871, of the 500 treaties made, all but one was broken or violated by the government (Oliff). Treaty violation, however, does not nullify their legality, and Native American tribes to this day still live under the laws and restrictions that have controlled their sovereignty for hundreds of years.

In 2009, the United States Federal Government issued an "acknowledgement and apology," acknowledging a "long history of official depredations and ill-conceived policies" in its dealings with Native Americans (Congress.gov). The resolution was published in the 2010 Defense Appropriations Act, receiving very little acknowledgement in the American press. The publication of a text so carefully constructed with legally non-binding terms and saturated with use of the passive voice was, to many Native Americans, unsurprising in the context of dealings between Native American tribes and the Federal Government. Described as a response to the apology's delivery (Long Soldier 57), Layli Long Soldier (Oglala Lakota) makes the duplicitous role of language central in her collection *Whereas* (2017). Working ironically the same discourse of the federal resolution, Long Soldier dismantles boundaries of language, both physically and figuratively, and interrogates the destructive and formative power the English language has for centuries held over tribal nations. By asking just *how* one is supposed to "language a collision arrived at through separation" (70), Long Soldier places herself in the tradition of Native American poets who operate in a border space: both American *and* Native American, and speaking and creating in English – the language of the colonizer.

Alongside Long Soldier's *Whereas*, Kumeyaay Nation poet Tommy Pico's *Nature Poem* (2017) will form the textual focal point of this thesis. Like *Whereas*, Pico's long-form poem is also a response: not to a federal apology, but to the weight of expectation placed on Pico to write and perform stereotypical assumptions of Native American people for a Euramerican audience. In his poetry, Pico explores the dissonance he experiences living alongside his colonizers and speaking and creating in their language. Pico engages with stereotypes which dominate representations of Native American cultures, propagated by a colonizing culture whose actions essentialize and memorialize them, as well as eschewing

any responsibility for the ongoing effects of the disenfranchisement of Native Americans. Alongside a selection from contemporary Native American poets, *Whereas* and *Nature Poem* will serve to illustrate how Native American poets strive to autonomously represent both their identity and the reality of living in a postcolonial society, outside of the influence of stereotypes which misrepresent them in the public discourse. Through comparative analysis, this thesis will map concerns that occur across tribal divisions, highlighting common experiences between Native American cultures post-contact, enabling a contemporary Native American poetics to be formulated. The thesis will demonstrate that far from the commercialised and commodified Euramerican stereotypes of Native American cultures and literature, its poetry is diverse, divisive, often political, and aware of its own position at the borderland of identity, place, and language. Through investigation into these three areas, each one a common motif in contemporary Native American poetry, this thesis will establish how a dual consciousness of each contributes to the formation of a uniquely Native American poetics.

Native American Literature, and thus its criticism, was established in 1969, when N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) won the Pulitzer Prize for his novel *House Made of Dawn*. Prior to this, Native American literary studies were solely an ethnographic discipline (Roemer 1). Today, the academic study of Native American literature is not well-established outside of North America and remains a somewhat specialist enquiry for researchers. However, this thesis will situate itself in recent debates concerning the duality of Native American experience, as well as established postcolonial theories, by linking recurrent motifs in the poetry of contemporary Native American authors.

In part one, a comparative analysis between Pico's *Nature Poem* and a selection of secondary poems by Native American poets will be made. Firstly, the representation of language will be explored. Concerns about writing and speaking in English as one's first language, bilingualism and monolingualism, and the politics of the act of translation, are all important themes in Native American poetry. Postcolonial theories of abrogation and appropriation, as outlined in *The Empire Writes Back* (1989, Ashcroft et al.), will be utilised, alongside the literary reproduction of oral culture in poetry.

Following the analysis of identity, the representation of place in *Nature Poem* will be explored. The dual consciousness experienced as a result of living in a postcolonial country, either in reservations or in urban areas, is a concern in Pico's poetry. Lawrence Gross' (Anishinaabe) theory of Post-Apocalyptic Stress Syndrome, used to describe the collective effects of stress on Native American communities due to the continuing effect of colonialism,

will be used to illuminate a common motif in work by Native American poets who represent communities that continue to exist outside of the concern and responsibility of American government and culture.

From place, the representation of Native American identity in *Nature Poem* will then be explored. Through several theoretical positions, notably Gerald Vizenor's (Chippewa) concepts of Survivance and Manifest Manners, the difficulty of self-identification in a postcolonial country will be analysed. Being both Native American *and* American is a location of conflict for many individuals, one which is commonly expressed in Native American poetry.

In part two, an analysis of *Whereas* will be conducted, focussing largely on how Long Soldier utilizes language, form, and diction, to direct the readers' attention to how language has long since dominated Native American cultures and their representation in public discourse. The second part of this thesis' analysis will follow a different structure to that of the first part, as lines of division between representations of identity, language, and place are harder to make, and so a different approach will be more conducive. As *Whereas* is a collection of individual poems in three stylistically distinct sections, the poems will be discussed as such, while their position as part of the collection will be taken into consideration. Long Soldier's poetry is primarily concerned with language, the analysis of which will form the foundation of this chapter. Unlike the analysis of *Nature Poem*, no individual analysis of the representations of the duality of place and identity will be included, but will instead be integrated into the discussion of the duality of language. This approach will provide a more in-depth discussion of Long Soldier's poetics, and her representation of the duality of contemporary Native American life.

Through these critical and comparative approaches, this thesis will argue that as Native American poetry is established on the borders of language, identity, and place, it is through this indeterminacy that a uniquely Native American poetics is arrived at, one which is resistant to the Euramerican paradigm that has dominated representations of Native American cultures. Through the exploration of a number of literary techniques, this thesis will highlight the methods used by Native American poets to construct representations of identity, language, and place that challenge dominant misrepresentations of Native American cultures in the public discourse.

While Native American literature often is approached as separate to North American literature, this thesis will approach it as a literature that works within the dominant literary paradigm, subverting it through the manipulation of both language and expectations. It is

through this subversion that Native American poets can authentically and autonomously represent themselves. Poetry has long been a tool for resistance and expression for the disenfranchised or colonized, and like many literatures of resistance, the poetry analysed in this thesis aids in the re-establishment and continuation of Native American cultural sovereignty.



## Historical Background

The history of Native American cultures post-contact has been characterised by the propagation of the Native American's 'Otherness.' Joy Porter claims that when Columbus first encountered Native Americans, his "sense of cultural and religious superiority was such that because the Indians he first encountered did not speak his own language, he deemed them to have no conceptual language at all" (44). She explains that European colonizers perceived Native Americans in antithesis to themselves: "because they thought themselves civilized, dynamic, and *in* history, they judged Indians to be culturally static and somehow *outside* of history" (Porter 45). It would serve Columbus and subsequent colonizers from Europe well to view Native Americans as less than human, as justification for the systematic expansion that forced Native American tribes from their ancestral lands. In 1683, Puritan settlers established the first reservations where Native Americans would live away from their white neighbours, convert to Christianity, and 'detrribalize': a de-socialization that aimed to enable future socialization with the Puritans. Reservations quickly became a site of poverty, disease and death for many Native Americans, while the land around them which had provided every form of sustenance was destroyed by the settlers, rendering subsistence economics unviable (Porter 52).

All dealings with Native Americans were ratified in federal treaties, establishing rules of where tribes can live and hunt, how much land is to be ceded to the colonizer, and establishing a precedence of peace between the individual tribe and the government. To this day, treaties continue to shape the borders and workings of Native American tribes, despite being criticized by detractors as unfair or unjust. Many tribal leaders, it is claimed, were duped into signing the treaties, being unable to fully understand either the English language, or the consequences of the negotiations. The language in which these interactions were conducted is referred to as Red English, a "contact pidgin language...used by both Europeans and Indians in the early period of colonization" (Gillis 182). As the Red English referred to in the title of this thesis, the pidgin language is currently the most widely spoken dialect in North America, and the "first language learned by two thirds of today's American Indian youth" (Gillis 185).

Despite some peaceful and co-operative dealings between Native American tribes and settlers, after the American War of Independence the Native American was perceived as a blight on a progressive country. The myth of the "Indian Savage" was created, and "Indian absence, either through death or the cultural death of complete assimilation, was deemed necessary to the future of the new republic" (Porter 50). In 1830, the Indian Removal Act was

established, forcibly displacing tribes whose land stood in the path of American expansion. In 1875, the American government established the Indian Boarding school system. Native American children were taken from their homes and placed into boarding schools or non-Native adoptive families, where it was hoped they would assimilate to white Euramerican culture. The Indian Boarding School system not only separated Native American families, but as a tool of assimilation and indoctrination, it “whittle[d] away [at] Indian identities, frayed the linguistic bonds that provided an intelligible net of communication,” and severed ties between individuals and their ancestral language communities (Rader and Gould 10). At the opening of the first school, cavalry captain Richard Henry Pratt delivered a speech in which he declared “kill the Indian in him, and save the man” (Little). Children were punished for speaking their Native languages, and many died from exposure to diseases like tuberculosis. The schools formally closed in 1978, with the passing of the Child Welfare Act (Porter 52).

The human and cultural expense of colonization is apparent in what has been lost. Porter claims that pre-contact, there were five hundred languages spoken in what is now North America and Canada. Currently, less than two hundred are spoken (42). Official estimates of Native American lives lost post-contact range from one to ten million (40). The poet Joy Harjo (Creek) has described this incredible loss of life as a destruction of grandchildren, and a ‘famine of stories’ (qtd. in Porter 40)

The ‘famine of stories’ is not limited to the written word. Native American cultures were oral cultures, where the performance of narratives and songs was a prized skill, and integral to tribal life (Roemer 4). While it is correct that Native American cultures did not utilize alphabetic literacy pre-contact, narratives and important cultural events were materially recorded in items such as paintings, pictographs, wampum belts, and painted and carved baskets (Fitzgerald and Wyss 275). The tradition of collecting written Native American stories began in 1772, when Samson Occom, a Mohegan minister, published a sermon, that was followed in 1774 with a collection of hymns (Roemer 1). The influence of European cultural forms on Native American life, represented in the production of written narratives, can be traced back to this time.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ethnographers endeavoured to collect, preserve, and translate the oral narratives of Native American cultures. Literary publications by Native American writers in either English or their tribal language, however, remained rare. Autobiographies, and collections of poetry and essays have been published since the early nineteenth century

(Roemer 1), but this cultural output was always perceived as an ethnographic or anthropologic resource.

The assumption that Native American cultures did not produce literature written in English was however changed in 1969. The Native American Renaissance, a surge in creative cultural output by indigenous authors, began when Momaday (Kiowa) won the Pulitzer Prize for the novel *House Made of Dawn*, and Vine Deloria Jr. (Sioux) published *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, that championed the re-establishment of Native political sovereignty. Nancy J. Peterson notes that Momaday was immersed in American Modernist techniques, studying authors like Eliot, Lawrence, and Faulkner at Stanford with the poet Yvor Winters (2). This familiarity with a contemporary discourse of narratives allowed Momaday to produce a novel of recognizable style, one described by Louis Owens as “a novel a type of well-schooled readers could both recognize and sink their teeth into” (qtd. in Peterson 2). The method of conveying unfamiliar content through the familiarity of established genres is an established postcolonial technique, one which is common across Native American literatures, as existing modes of expression were utilised to convey Native American narratives by Native American authors.

While Native American writers are now published more frequently, and some, like Sherman Alexie (Spokane-Coeur d’Alene) and Louise Erdrich (Chippewa), found international fame, the publication of Native American authors remains a niche business. The editor and poet Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (Sioux) notes the obstacles which face Native American authors, especially those who write about their identity, claiming that “they are limited in their wish to create something new...and must borrow aesthetics from an already existing written language (English), and forego any interest in or sympathy for native culture and oral traditions...because they lie beyond the ken of the mainstream reader, publisher, or critic” (29). Cook-Lynn wrote this in 1993, and it is an assertion which has certainly been challenged since. As Long Soldier and Pico both prove, publishing subversive collections of poetry which challenge the dominant culture and ideology can find a place in what Cook-Lynn would consider the mainstream: *Whereas*, for instance, was a finalist for the National Book Award for poetry in 2017.

The history of Native Americans post-contact is longer and more complex than this thesis can describe. However, by foregrounding several historical events, this thesis demonstrates the centuries-old pattern of disenfranchisement and resistance that occurs to this day. Native American literature may be a somewhat recent discourse but is clearly one

entwined with the politics of history, cultural sovereignty, and the relation between the colonizing force and the indigenous population.

### **Theoretical Background**

This thesis will approach a selection of contemporary Native American poetry through the analysis of three different areas of investigation: language, place, and identity. Several concepts from postcolonial theory will be used to form a wide theoretical framework, highlighting techniques utilised by Native American poets to resist the hierarchical dominance of the English language in their work.

As a methodological framework to support this thesis' analysis of duality and representation in contemporary Native American poetry, Robin Riley Fast's critical concept of America as a borderland will encompass and link all areas of investigation. Building on the works of Latin American literary scholars D. Emily Hicks and Gloria Anzaldúa, Fast applies their theories of borderlands in Chicano writing to Native American poetry. In "Borderland Voices in contemporary Native American Poetry," Fast argues that American history "conspires to make the whole continent a borderland for Native Americans and to make inevitable, in contemporary Native consciousness, a high degree of awareness of borders and boundaries between Native and non-Native" (508). Fast articulates the difficulty for many Native Americans in navigating the borders that surround them, not only the physical borders of place or social borders, but borders of languages and identity. Fast claims that it is possible to approach these borders as functional, even desirable, to the artistic process for Native American poets, as the crossing or blurring of boundaries and the navigation of the site of tension enables the generation of new poetic forms.

As contemporary Native American poetry is generally dialogic (512), Fast argues that the dialogism reflects both internal and external borders, writing that "emotional, political, economic, and cultural barriers are imposed on Native peoples from without and may then be internalized by individuals and communities" (514). The conflict generated by these borders is reflected in the voices and languages of the poetry, which emphasise "the differences in reference codes between two or more cultures" (509). In forging links between cross-tribal experiences represented in contemporary Native American poetry, Fast argues that "inner and outer struggles have often been simultaneous, with different aspects coming into sharper focus depending on the context" (510). As an analytical tool, Fast's definition of a borderland and borderland writing is vital in recognising both how and why contemporary Native American poetry is characterised by representations of duality.

In her critical writing on the politics of translation, Emily Apter describes Untranslatables as signifiers that are “not strictly speaking English, but... English nonetheless,” where meaning is *not* carried over or translated, but transmitted “at a half-crooked semantic angle” (34-35). Translations where the semantic power of the source signifier is lost or diluted are a common indication of the Untranslatable. Apter describes this condition as the “differential weight assigned by cultures to common cognates,” which is also registered in the “distribution of pages to ideas” (35). One can see this ‘differential weight’ in a word like ‘force,’ which “hardly qualifies as a philosophical concept in the Anglophone context” (35), but warrants multiple entries in French, crossing boundaries of disciplines and concepts to truly demonstrate the variety of meaning contained. The Untranslatable is useful in the study of Native American poetry, as many poets address the richness of their tribal language, and the frustration of being unable to adequately translate this richness into English. In “The First Water is the Body,” Natalie Diaz (Mojave) describes the protest by Native American communities at the Standing Rock Indian Reservation against the building of the Dakota Access Pipeline through sacred Native American land. Diaz writes:

If I say, *My river is disappearing*, do I also mean, *My people are disappearing*?  
 How can I translate – not in words but in belief  
 that a river is a body, as  
 alive as you or I, that there can be no life without it? (62-69)

Diaz’s frustration is clear: as she addresses the ideological impasse between protestors and contractors, it is the inability of English to convey the historical, spiritual and cultural connections to the land and the river which frustrates. Concepts in certain cultures that are encoded and represented by language are not always easily translated into other cultures, so when no equivalent is present in the dominant language, meaning is diluted, or lost completely. Diaz demonstrates that the Untranslatable moves beyond the signifier, to the insufficiency of language to represent the nuance of cultures that differ from a Eurocentric paradigm.

Closely related to ideas of translation and Untranslatables, is the concept of glossing. To provide a gloss of a signifier is to provide a translation. Similarly, to leave a signifier untranslated in a text without a gloss, not only registers a sense of cultural distinctiveness, argue Ashcroft et al, “but forces the reader into an active engagement with the horizons of the culture in which these terms have meaning” (65). These horizons of culture are an example of Fast’s borderlands. Fast argues that the inclusion of a Native American language, with or

without a gloss “draws attention to a border that requires the non-Native reader to define him or herself in relation to it” (514). This defining will often manifest itself in an evaluation of the reader’s inclusion in either the source culture or the receptor culture. The recognition that the receptor culture, or the culture to which the gloss is written for, is endowed with a higher status in the hierarchies of power, is a consequence of glossing (Ashcroft et al. 66).

Many Native American poets utilize their tribal language in their work, endowing it with a sense of cultural distinctiveness. Poets like Long Soldier explore the politics of translation and Untranslatables in the inclusion of glosses in their work, drawing attention to how representations of cultures can be diluted or misrepresented in the repackaging of translation. However, “cultural difference is not *inherent* in the text but is *infused* by such strategies” as non-translated words, argue Ashcroft et al (65; emphasis added). It is through the analysis of these strategies that it is possible to gain an impression of the cultural source from whence it came.

In *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), Ashcroft et al identify two features which define the postcolonial text as follows: “The abrogation of [the] imperial center within the text; and the active appropriation of the language and culture of that center.” (83) This, they argue, is achieved through both formal and thematic subversions but must begin with the privileging of the voice of the periphery over the voice of the center. The center stands as the model of order and the “metropolitan source of standard language,” while the periphery utilizes the “edges” of languages, remaining “a tissue of disorder” (87). The reconstitution of the marginalized, colonized voice in postcolonial writing to the center is achieved through a seizure of the language of the center, and a refiguring of the discourse to where it is “fully adapted to the colonized place” (38).

Postcolonial writing achieves this through the processes of abrogation and appropriation. The abrogation of English is a denial of its privilege, and a “rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication” (38). This step in postcolonial writing is crucial for the subordinate culture to challenge the power structures of English and reclaim control of a discourse, creating a “vital moment in the decolonizing of the language and the writing of English” (38). For the decolonization of English, abrogation must be followed by appropriation, or the “reconstitution of the language of the center, the process of capturing and remoulding the language to new usages,” which re-establishes this ‘new’ English as separate from the center of colonial privilege (38). For a postcolonial writer, they argue that literature is “written out of the tension between the abrogation of the received English which

speaks from the center, and the act of appropriation which brings it under the influence of a vernacular tongue” (39).

Abrogation and appropriation are common tactics used by Native American writers, who must reckon with their own use of English in what is often a monoglossic society, where indigenous languages have either been made extinct, or pushed to the periphery of public consciousness. In *Whereas*, for example, Long Soldier endeavours to abrogate the power of English over all Native Americans, and appropriate it to replace herself, and the Native American voice, at the center of power. She writes, “If I’m transformed by language, I am often / crouched in footnote or blazing in title. / Where in the body do I begin” (61. 13-15). In this tercet, Long Soldier signals her intent to reconstitute Native American people, represented by the synecdoche “I,” to the center of power, representing their own subjectivity, rather than being re-presented by the colonizing culture.

Alongside theories of language, this thesis will argue that a common duality found in contemporary Native American poetry is that of place. Parallel to the representation of America that many would find familiar, is the representation of a country which is ideologically divided, dangerous, and steeped in poverty. This dichotomy is elucidated in the work of Lawrence Gross (Anishinaabe), who argues that “American Indians in general have seen the end of *our* worlds” (449; emphasis added). Gross argues that the forcible change to Native American cultures has produced profound and far reaching consequences for its members. As human-made constructions, Gross claims that cultures “are inherently unstable...the societies people create are not permanent” (439). This instability leaves cultures vulnerable to the negative effects of extreme circumstances.

Gross cites the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755 which killed up to 100,000 people, devastating the religious foundations of Portugal’s Catholic society. The questioning of the motivations of a God who would cause this disaster, Gross states, prompted an intellectual refiguring of the world, ending in the Age of Optimism (439). Adjusting to the new reality of one’s world after a paradigm-shifting event can result in what Gross has called Post Apocalypse Stress Syndrome (PASS): “post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) raised to the level of an entire community” (449).

However, Gross’ vision of apocalypticism is not limited to the historical transformation of Native American cultures post-contact. His study is firmly rooted in contemporary culture, making distinctions between the personal and institutional effects caused by post-contact apocalypticism. On the personal level, Gross argues, a post-apocalyptic period will include factors such as an increase in violence, especially domestic;

an increase in suicides and mental illness; a sense of despair; and a sense of survivor's guilt. On an institutional level, family structures, governmental and educational institutions, and health care delivery systems will either collapse or weaken (450).

According to Gross, cultures must enter a recovery period to address PASS, a process that "principally entails rebuilding the cultural world" (451). The reformation of cultural practices and sovereignty in a new landscape characterised by the proximity of the dominant, colonizing culture, is a recurring motif in the work of many Native American poets. In "Molly Brant, Iroquois Matron, Speaks," Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Sioux) conjures a post-apocalyptic land populated by both "aliens" (16) and "people" (17), where the division between the vibrant, prosperous past, and the wasted landscape of the present are sharply defined:

Progress is what  
they call it. I call it a cemetery,  
charnel house, soul sickness  
artificial mockery  
of what we called life. (25-29)

The border of consciousness is delineated boldly: the PASS demonstrated by Gunn Allen, whose "charnel house" home signals death, contrasts with the viewpoint of the implied colonizer, who sees only progress. The ability of poetry to convey positive representations of Native American voices and cultural practices in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, is arguably what Gross calls for in a rebuilding of the cultural world. The critical ideas of Gross provide a constructive method of analysing place in contemporary Native American poetry and ascertaining the social and political roots of its representation.

Finally, in addition to the analysis of language and place, the representation of identity will be analysed.

While the critical writing of W.E.B Du Bois is most commonly applied to African American literature, Du Bois' concept of 'Double Consciousness' provides a useful method for analysing representations of identity in Native American poetry. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois explains the sensation of being African American as being neither wholly African nor American, his identity remaining liminal. Du Bois asks "Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house?" (4) emphasising the effects that double consciousness has on an individual's placement in society. This question also demonstrates Du Bois' effectiveness in analysing Native American literature, as his sense of



being outcast in his 'own house' is a useful metaphor for the removal and relocation of Native Americans post-contact. He continues:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings. (4)

Du Bois' reference to the 'eyes of others' establish a difference between how the subjects view themselves and how they imagine they are viewed by others. "The eyes of others" represents a complicated nexus of self-awareness dominated by the realization that representation is created and enforced by negative stereotypes from the dominant culture, forbidding the peaceful reconciliation of identity and self-representation. Du Bois writes that "such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism" (137), emphasising the duality that characterises the life of those who exist on the periphery.

This sense of doubleness is a valuable method for analysing representations of Native American consciousness. In *Whereas*, Long Soldier encapsulates this pervasive Double Consciousness, when she writes "I am a citizen of the United States and an enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe ... in this dual citizenship, I must work, I must eat, I must art, I must mother, I must friend, I must listen, I must observe, constantly I must live" (57). The conflict of Double Consciousness is present in every facet of Long Soldier's life, from the mundane to the profound. As a motif represented by many contemporary Native American poets, the recognition and confrontation of one's double consciousness is an urgent concern.

Perhaps the most important contributor to Native American academic rhetoric is the poet and academic Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe). In several foundational books such as *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (1999), Vizenor establishes an academic discourse and vocabulary that enables the link between Native American literature, postcolonialism, and representation to be made in a meaningful way. Three interlinking critical terms established by Vizenor will prove especially useful to this thesis: Manifest Manners, the Postindian, and Survivance.

Manifest Manners, Vizenor explains, "are the simulations of dominance; the notions and misnomers that are read as authentic and sustained as representations of American Indians" (5-6). These simulations, propagated by the colonizing culture, "are the annihilation, not the survivance of tribal stories" (9). The enduring trope of the drunk or savage Indian is

an example of Manifest Manners, whose presence displaces authentic representations of Native Americans in the public consciousness. Manifest Destiny, the 19<sup>th</sup> century attempt to displace and eradicate Native American cultures, replacing them with the colonizing culture, has become Manifest Manners in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Vizenor argues, or “the elimination of tribal cultures through false myths and representations of ‘Indianness’” (Shackleton 70).

As an analytical concept, Manifest Manners identifies and attacks misrepresentations of Native American cultures in the dominant colonial discourse, where hierarchies of power allow such misrepresentations to become the dominant representation by silencing any authentic representation of and by Native American people. Over time, misrepresentations of Native American cultures become “embedded in the mind of readers,” functioning as authentic representations and “replacing any trace of tribal reality in public discourse” (Miles 36). Vizenor quotes literary historian Larzer Ziff, who writes that “treating living Indians as sources for a literary construction of a vanished way of life rather than as members of vital continuing cultures, [writers] used words to replace rather than to represent Indian reality” (8). This literary annihilation, Ziff argues, stops only when Native American writers can autonomously represent their own culture in public discourse. This form of literary resistance, found extensively in the work of contemporary Native American poets, is what Vizenor identifies as Manifest Manners.

As Manifest Manners operates in a literary and cultural discourse, Vizenor proposes the figure of the ‘postindian’ to counteract misrepresentations and reclaim Native American identity in the national imagination. He writes “the Indian is a simulation, the absence of Natives; the Indian transposes the real and the simulation of the real has no referent, memories, or Native stories. The postindian must waver over the aesthetic ruins of Indian simulations” (qtd. in Miles 35). The postindian is a postcolonial figure, using English to disassemble “fabricated versions” of Natives Americans and Native American culture, replacing them with authentic representations (Miles 36). To achieve this, the postindian operates within a discourse that “expects a certain stereotypical representation,” upsetting the expectations and exposing the stereotypes for the fabrications they are. Miles argues that the postindian is bound to the dominant misrepresentations of Native American cultures, utilizing this relationship to subvert to harmful misrepresentations that dominate perceptions of Native American cultures in the public discourse (36).

As an important figure in contemporary Native American poetry, Vizenor explains that the acts of the postindian “are the simulations of survivance” (12). Survivance is a term that encompasses both the rhetorical presence of Native Americans in public discourse, and

the replacement of narratives which propagate Manifest Manners (Miles 40). Survivance, like its name suggests, is simply the “presence of Native people in public discourse,” coupled with the active resistance of misrepresentations (Miles 40). Acts of Survivance by postindian figures are common across Native American poetry, as writers who have the power to represent themselves outside of the dominance of Euramerican culture challenge stereotypes that have shaped their public representation for centuries. In a dominant and oppressive culture, acts of Survivance enables the continuity of Native American cultural forms, through methods of resistance and defiance.

In *IRL* by Tommy Pico, he describes refusing to have his picture taken at a party:

He says *oh*

*come on*. I say calmly

*No*. n he asks *is this*

*an Indian thing? Like*

*does a pic steal yr soul*

*or something?* (“New Poets of Native Nations” 25-30; original emphasis)

Pico makes it clear that he does not believe his soul will be stolen, but it is the stereotyping of his culture as mystical and beyond the spiritual understanding of Euramericans to an absurd flippant remark which frustrates him. He goes on to challenge dominance of Native American stereotypes and misrepresentations, replacing them with subjective portrayals of contemporary Native American life. He later writes:

My Dad grows

his hair long Black waves

cascade down his back b/c knives

crop the ceremony of his

mother’s hair at the NDN boarding

school I cut mine in mourning

for the old life but I grow

my poems long. A dark

reminder on white pages.

A new ceremony. (127-136)

In *IRL*, Pico’s blending of contemporary forms of diction and representations of both Native American culture and American culture work to “create a presence that upsets and unravels discursive control over Native people” (Miles 41). The stereotypes of Manifest Manners here

are replaced with a subjective representation of complex, contemporary Native American life, acts of Survivance by a postindian figure.

As critical approaches, the theories outlined above will all serve to highlight common, recurring motifs in the contemporary Native American poetry discussed in this thesis, establishing the precedent for a Native American poetics that is organized around concepts of duality and representation.

**“English is some Stockholm shit”:**

**Tommy Pico and Language**

Tommy Pico grew up on the Viejas Reservation in California, where his father was chairman. He earned a pre-medical degree from Sarah Lawrence College, with the hope of researching treatments for diabetes, the occurrence of which is exponentially more frequent among Native American communities. On the Pine Ridge reservation in North Dakota, for example, the diabetes rate is 800% higher than the national average (Williams). After his senior year Pico left college, weighted with the realisation that the problems on the Viejas Reservation were insurmountable for one individual (Moskowitz). For thirteen years, he has lived in New York City, writing poetry that centres around his experiences on the reservation and in the city. In *Nature Poem*, Pico writes entirely in English, his verse devoid of the tribal languages that are a common feature of Native American poetry. The English of *Nature Poem*, however, represents Fast’s “border,” a metaphorical meeting between two points of experience, forcing both author and reader to negotiate the tensions that are created at this point. Fast claims that “the use of English in and of itself may constitute a border crossing or an inability to cross a border, or may define a poem’s place as a borderland, and a meaning might be lost” (514). It is on this border of both language and place that the duality which defines Pico’s poetry is generated. *Nature Poem* is autobiographical and confessional in tone, and Pico’s monolingualism erects a border between himself and his Native American culture, from which he feels removed. Language is an obstacle to the poet, and to the reconciliation of the dual factions of his ego.

The tension of *Nature Poem* as a borderland is reflected in several aspects of the language used by Pico, perhaps most apparently in its dialogic nature and its engagement with Native American oral culture. Fast writes that “contemporary Native poetry is generally dialogic: it has antecedents in traditional song, chant, and story, forms that are generally anonymous, tribal, or communal rather than authored by one person” (512). *Nature Poem* is “spoken” by Pico, who positions himself as the orator and performer of the poem, delivering his discourse to a receiving audience. This is reflected in the repetition of certain phrases throughout the poem. Pico refers to his audience towards the beginning, writing “I wd slap a tree across the face / I say to my audience” (18-19). The audience is implied as non-Native American, who can enjoy Pico’s playful rejection of Native American cultural stereotypes. In an interview with *The New Yorker*, Pico explains the frustration caused by his audience that

he experiences whilst performing, feeling “fucking pissed off at everyone sitting in those seats, for the most part because none of them are Indian people” (Moskowitz).

Later, Pico writes:

You can't be an NDN<sup>1</sup> person in today's world  
and write a nature poem. I swore to myself I would never write a nature  
poem. Let's be clear, I hate nature – hate its *guts*

I say to my audience (1022-1025; emphasis original)

He goes on to write “*I don't hate nature at all*” (1026), italicized in the suggestion of thought. Pico consistently confesses his inability to write the nature poem, whilst conversely writing a nature poem. Separating what Pico thinks and *performs* establishes a line between the persona he creates for the commodification of his audience and his authentic self. The audience is important in oral culture, as narratives are performed for those who are expected to receive, retain, and perform the communal stories of Native American tribes. Fast writes that “a contemporary poet writing unto and out of a native oral tradition, even tenuously, inevitably participates in a dialogic project from the moment that ‘speaking’ voice identifies itself in any way” (512). In a scene when Pico performs at a poetry reading, he suddenly becomes overwhelmed with the weight of his ancestor's history, his “throat full of survivors” (850). He writes:

When yr descended from a clever self adept at evading an occupying  
force, when contact meant another swath of sick cousins, another  
cosmology snuffed, another stolen sister

and the water and the blood and the blood and the blood and the  
blood and the blood

u flush under the hot lights (857-862)

The repetition, muscular in its pounding rhythm and stark in its isolation, foregrounds the internal battle felt by Pico when performing, embodying performative and repetitious techniques from oral cultures. Here Pico is participating in a ‘dialogic project,’ where one's speaking voice establishes a representation of the culture from where it came, by creating metaphoric links with the profound nature of Native American history in relation to the colonizing culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Used to signify “Indian.”

Repetition of motifs and phrases which reflect the oral culture of Pico's tribe, is prevalent across *Nature Poem*. In *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft et al. refer to such techniques as power words, power rhythms, or power syntax: techniques which "reproduce the culture by some process of embodiment" (52). This transportation of cultural practices to a new, or colonizing culture, are "metaphoric in their inference of identity and totality" (52). The power rhythms of *Nature Poem* are to be found in this repetition, which in oral cultures is a memory aid and a performative strategy. Pico repeats the phrases "I am missing many cousins, have you seen them?" (650;926), and "I'm a weirdo NDN faggot" (32;901), while creating dialogues around the themes of premature death and sexuality. Perhaps the most effective 'power rhythm' is to be found in the repetition and variation of "I can't write a nature poem" (16), a dynamic metaphor that represents both the commodification and performativity of Native American culture, and a reflection of the changing, corrupted concepts of nature and the natural. When writing of the helpless despair felt at watching "Men smack // the monoliths in Mosul back to stone and dust" (99-100), he writes "How do statues become more galvanizing than refugees / is not something I wd include in a nature poem" (117-118). Shortly after he repeats this motif, writing "OKCupid asks what's worse – a starving child or a starving dog, and / I'm like *is this a fucking joke?* / ... / That's not a kind of nature I would write a poem about" (126-127, 145; original emphasis). Through these reflections, Pico "reproduces [Native] culture by some process of embodiment" (Ashcroft et al. 52), evoking the concept of the traditional nature poem, violently juxtaposing it with concerns of contemporary society, thereby casting a line between the two that Pico is reluctant to cross.

Unlike other Native American poets, Pico does not use tribal languages in his poetry. His relationship with the English language is however represented as difficult and fraught with tension. It has been argued that "the very absence of a native language within a given literary text can reveal much about the sociohistorical context of the work" (Stratton and Washburn 58). In *Nature Poem*, this absence could be attributed to Pico's involvement in urban American culture, living outside of the community of the reservation. The 2006-2010 U.S. Census Bureau reported that over 70% of Native Americans only speak English at home, and that a Native American language is spoken in the homes of barely 15% of the Native American population (Lee). While many Native American languages are now dead, and few Native Americans speak their indigenous language, poets like Pico navigate the power structures of speaking and creating in English when it is the only language available to them. Joy Harjo (Creek) addresses this tension when she writes that "to speak, at whatever

the cost, is to become empowered rather than victimized by destruction... We've transformed these enemy's languages" (Harjo and Bird 21-22).

Pico is hyper-aware of the effect of speaking English and grappling with its implications to Native American history. In one scene, he writes:

He says *I can't win with you*  
 because he already did  
 because he always will  
 because he could write a nature  
 poem, or anything he wants, he doesn't understand

why I can't write a fucking nature  
 poem. (223-229)

In depicting a quarrel with his Caucasian American boyfriend, Pico exposes hundreds of years of oppression from colonization that still impacts Native American lives to this day. By returning to the motif of the nature poem, a division is created between *who* is speaking English, and the degree of power that each speaker possesses. Pico argues that he can't write a nature poem because of its associations with his ancestral heritage, from which he feels forcibly removed and unable to engage with in the non-Native environment of the metropolis. The concept of the nature poem encapsulates the colonial power of English, while emphasizing the inability of many Euramerican individuals to recognize their privilege. In these lines, the 'he' that represents Pico's partner is metonymic for all Euramericans who enjoy the freedom of English and don't feel the weight of its oppressive expansion. Immediately after, Pico writes "Later when he is fucking / me I bite him on the cheek draw / blood I reify savage lust" (230-232). The final two lines of this tercet are telling of Pico's engagement with irony and wordplay, a common tactic by Native American writers to abrogate the power of the English language. 'Reify' is defined as a formal verb, to "make (something abstract) more concrete and real" ("Reify"). Pico reifies the abstract 'savage,' a loaded term historically used to derogatorily describe Native Americans, concretizing it as he 'draws blood.' Here, Pico concedes to play the 'Indian' for the 'White man,' taking advantages of stereotypes long used to falsely describe and misrepresent Native American cultures. The metaphorical bridge between the abstract and the real that Pico crosses is indicative of the dual consciousness represented by many Native American writers.

"Written in Blood" by Tiffany Midge (Lakota) is a frustrated meditation on the effort to write in English. She begins with a 'surrender to *Roget's Pocket Thesaurus*' (1), an



outsider breaking into the “container of words” (2) in the vain hope to find the right ones. She continues “I robbed / from this vault of words, language of the enemy, in hopes // I could capture these people” (5-7), explaining her need for reassurance that she is “not grieving merely from the guilt // of that European blood that separates me from two worlds.” (9-10). Midge expresses an acute sense of the burden of being monolingual, as well as the ‘guilt’ of having a mixed Native American and Euramerican heritage, and thus living between two worlds. Like the nature poem, Midge’s thesaurus becomes oppressive, leaving the poet unable to express herself authentically. The poem concludes:

In my search for synonyms for *murder*, I find *Cain*,  
*assassin, barbarian, gunman, brute*  
*hoodlum, killer, executioner, butcher*  
*savage, Apache, redskin.* (15-18).

The powerful trio of final nouns, all historically and derogatorily applied to Native Americans, used here as synonyms for murder, highlight the power held by those allowed to speak. The writer of the thesaurus holds the power to influence, as words not only describe, but can often shape our shared reality. The entry establishes a dichotomy between the colonizing culture and the colonized, the center and the periphery, emphasizing the many ways in which language as propaganda has been used to legitimize the ‘othering’ of Native Americans. Pico’s approach to this language differs from Midge, in that he ironically embodies the term, arguably through the inclusion of the verb *reify*, while resisting its oppressive power over his identity. Both poets, however, demonstrate a lucid understanding of the hierarchies of power in *who* gets to speak English, and *who* decides what to say.

The duplicitous potentiality of English is continually interrogated by Pico. In one scene, he describes observing a conversation between “two white ladies” (865) as they inspect displays of “‘traditional’ garb from one tribe or another it doesn’t really matter to anyone” (866). He writes:

*it’s horrible how their culture was destroyed*

as if in some reckless storm

*but thank god we were able to save some of these artefacts – history is so important. Will you look at this metalwork? I could cry-* (871-874; original emphasis)

The duality of this encounter is established as a clash, as Pico observes items from Native American culture being observed by the colonizing force whose actions led them to hang in

the museum, from his position as an outsider. It has been argued that Native American writers “sometimes employ ‘double-voiced discourse’ which addresses two audiences from the often jarring standpoint of being both within and outside native culture” (Van Dyke 86). By representing the conversation of the white women, Pico establishes the dual consciousness of being Native American in contemporary America, and the feeling of being both inside and outside his indigenous culture. This sense of disconnection is compounded by the women’s use of the passive voice, a device which detaches them from the language they employ, and thus any sense of responsibility or awareness of history. Laura Da’ (Shawnee) addresses the cultural tendency to use the passive voice when discussing the history of Native American peoples in her poem “Passive Voice.” She writes:

I wonder if these  
sixth graders will recollect,  
on summer vacation,  
as they stretch their legs  
on the way home  
from Yellowstone or Yosemite  
and the byways historical marker  
beckons them to the  
site of an Indian village

Where *trouble was brewing*.

Where, *after further hostilities, the army was directed to enter*.

Where *the village was razed after the skirmish occurred*.

Where *most were women and children*. (9-21: original emphasis)

Da’ contrasts the safe vantage point from which her young students will encounter the Indian village as tourists, with the passive voice describing the atrocities that took place there. The passive voice abrogates the speaker of accountability, creating a safe distance from where to view the events. This denial of responsibility through grammar is acutely recognised by Native writers such as Pico and Da’, who must operate within the enemy’s language, which continues to subjugate and misrepresent Native American history.

From his position as a monolingual Native American writer, Pico further examines the challenges of creating art in the enemy’s language. He writes:

I can’t write a nature poem bc English is some Stockholm shit,  
makes me complicit in my tribe’s erasure – why shd I give a fuck abt

“poetry”? It’s a container  
 for words like *whilst* and *hither* and *tamp*. It conducts something of  
*permanent* and *universal* interest. (760-764; original emphasis)

Stockholm syndrome, a condition where captives form an alliance with their captors as a method of survival, functions as a metaphor for the psychological need of Native Americans like Pico to become complicit with the colonizing culture, lest they endanger their existence. The irony of writing a nature poem in English is depicted as a metaphorical hostage situation, where Pico is conditioned to accept his circumstances as the status quo. Pico challenges the Eurocentric prescriptivism of poetry by abrogating normal rules of grammar and diction, choosing to compose his verse in ‘text speak’ and colloquialisms. By enclosing the word poetry in speech marks, Pico highlights what he describes as an established method of composing poetry as nothing more than a ‘container,’ an empty signifier that bears no relevance to Pico’s culture and perspective. He goes on to describe his nihilistic reaction to “poetry” and the expectations placed on him to compose Native American themed work:

I wd give a wedgie to a sacred mountain and gladly piss on the grass of  
 the park of poetic form  
 while no one’s lookin

I wd stroll into the china shop of grammar and shout *LET’S TRASH*  
*THIS DUMP* then gingerly slip out (769-774)

By denying the power of English and the prescriptive power of the Eurocentric poetic form, Pico establishes a strong sense of resistance to poetry that is prevalent through all of *Nature Poem*. The poem is often described as a contemporary epic, a play on the European form of poetry that tells in long, narrative verse, the heroic journey of an individual, usually involving dramatic situations and superhuman feats. By writing in this discourse, Pico abrogates its power, as the narrative could not be said to include conventional epic dramatic situations and a heroic journey. Rather, Pico foregrounds the hundreds of micro acts of heroism, perseverance, and resistance it takes to survive as a Native American in contemporary North America.

The relationship between the poem and the Native American poet is also explored by Natalie Diaz (Mojave) in “The First Water is the Body.” Diaz writes:

The Colorado River is the most endangered river in the United States –  
 also, it is a part of my body.  
 I carry a river. It is who I am: ‘*Aha Makav*.

This is not a metaphor.

When a Mojave says, *Inyech 'Aha Makavch ithuum*, we are saying our name. We are telling a story of our existence. *The river runs through the middle of my body.*

So far, I have said the word *river* in every stanza. I don't want to waste water. I must preserve the river in my body.

In future stanzas, I will try to be more conservative. (1-10; original emphasis)

Diaz establishes that *'Aha Makav* isn't a metaphor, presumably for the benefit of a Euramerican reader who would assume that the metaphysical connection is a poetic device. The insistence that the river is part of the poet is a resistance of the Euramerican propensity to view Native American cultures through the lens of ethnography or primitive tradition. Diaz demonstrates the difficulty of composing a nature poem for an audience that is unable to comprehend a cultural, holistic relationship with nature. Diaz's link between language and the body is also reflected in Pico's chaotic representation of his physical actions in the "china shop of grammar" (773), connecting the Native American poet to the fraught relationship of composing in English, which evidently is unable to fully convey the poet's intention and the consequences of this on the poet's psychic and physical wellbeing.

For monolingual poets like Pico, transforming the reductive dominance of the 'enemy's language' is achieved through methods of abrogation and appropriation. Abrogation is "a refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or 'correct' usage, and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning 'inscribed' in the words" (Ashcroft et al 53). Pico often challenges traditional or fixed meaning in *Nature Poem*, as "naming is basic and audacious, a claim" (547). In one instance, he argues with his boyfriend James about the immutability of facts. Pico counters with asking just what a fact is, to which James replies "*Facts are real. Proven. Objective*" (745; original emphasis). James represents the imperial dominance of English, which is positioned as an objective vehicle for the truth. In discussing the concept of truth in postcolonialism, Ashcroft et al write that "language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth,' 'order,' and 'reality' become established" (7). James, who is metonymic for Euramerican culture, is unwilling or unable to question the dominance of English in constructing facts or truths. Pico abrogates this metropolitan power when he responds:

*I say Facts are fallacies, created and curate by authority figures w/ agendas and I say Facts are used to subjugate, intimidate, enslave, and kill entire “races” of ppl reproductive rights etc I say so yeah I have a complicated relationship with facts and pretty much everything. The only thing objective abt facts is yr blind allegiance to them. James.*

or, I say nothing cos I’m tryin to get lucky. (754-759; original emphasis)

In attacking the dominance of English in discourses of history, Pico underscores the propagandistic role language has played in the shaping of Native American cultures post-contact, and its foundation established on fear, political gain, and false pretences. The facts purported by the American government in relation to Native American history continue to negatively impact Native American lives, so Pico challenges its dominance in a private discourse. However, it is revealed that the diatribe is left unsaid, as the implications of the counterargument would cause too much upset of the status quo. Pico’s method of abrogation is often demonstrably limited to his verse, in which he appropriates English, bringing it “under the influence of [his] vernacular tongue” (Ashcroft et al 39). By utilizing its representative power to convey a history that is at odds with one which dominates the public discourse, Pico moves the site of power of English from the center, to the periphery, where he is able to represent his subjective history and poetic voice. Pico depicts the tension generated in the process of abrogation and appropriation through juxtaposition, which situates Native American vernacular in the clash between Native American life and contemporary American life. A leitmotif in *Nature Poem* is that of Pico’s dead cousins, too numerous to count. He writes:

When my dad texts me two cousins dead this week, one 26 the other 30, what I’m really trying to understand is what trainers @ the gym mean when they say “engage” in the phrase “engage your core” also “core”

restless terms batted back and forth. (441-445)

The juxtaposition between profoundly bad news and the mundanity of training at the gym exposes the absurdity experienced by Pico at navigating the minutiae of his Native American identity. The news of his cousins’ premature deaths is subordinated and deflected to his contemplation of “engage your core,” metaphoric for how Native American voices at the periphery are dominated and quietened by those at the powerful center.

Ashcroft et al write that “all postcolonial literatures are cross-cultural because they negotiate a gap between ‘worlds’” (39). This gap represents Fast’s concept of a borderland, a liminal space of continued cultural survival from where the Native American poet operates, cognizant of their position at the intersection of two separate cultures. Fast lists certain techniques employed by Native American authors used to abrogate the dominance of English, such as “the use of colloquial expressions in contexts that undermine their intent... and allusions to historical events or cultural references in contexts that foreground contrasting interpretations” (513). Pico uses juxtaposition to both undermine and highlight the expanse of the ‘gap’ between worlds, and its continuing effect on Native Americans who must operate in its border. Pico creates allusions to historical events, as Fast suggests, where the distinction between who is speaking is blurred. In one stanza, he writes from the perspective of Native Americans during the Californian Gold Rush:

I’m old women scattered  
 along the creek  
 my little hands squeeze  
 my little mouth shut (665-668)

“Shaggy men on horseback” (672) who “seek brown bodies / for target practice” (679-680) are described as the antagonists. The plural form of women signals a collective identity, which Pico embodies, as he juxtaposes this historical scene between scenes from contemporary life. The dual consciousness of using English as a monolingual Native American poet, demonstrated in the above scene, is reflected in the use of metonymy, and the reflection of cultural difference encoded into language. Ashcroft et al argue for the distinction between metaphor and metonymy in postcolonial texts. They paraphrase Homi k. Bhabha, writing that the interpretation of figures in a postcolonial text as metaphorical imposes a universality onto the text, where there ought to be cultural specificity instead. “For Bhabha, it is preferable to read the tropes of the text as metonyms, which symptomizes the text, reading through its features the social, cultural, and political forces which traverse it” (52), they write. Metonymic language such as Pico’s “old women scattered” (665) represent the cultural context from where it came. The old women are not simply metaphorical, a symbolic representation which in fact represents another thing, but metonyms, a substitution for the untold number of Native Americans terrorised by Euramerican bounty hunters.

Throughout *Nature Poem*, there are several instances of metonymy which establish a connection between Pico and his cultural heritage. He writes “I’m telling YOU about ME // In order to prove OUR intelligence, OUR right to live, WE / becomes I” (233-235). The

pronouns, capitalised for greater emphasis, are metonymic for the dual cultures Pico inhabits. “You” is representative of Euramerican society, and “our” and “we” of Native Americans. The strong communal ties of culture are encoded in these collective pronouns, which distil into the metonym ‘I.’ This collective metonymic ‘I’ is a common feature across the work of many Native American poets, who strive to represent the collective and historical conscious in their work, often making little separation between the individual and the collective. In “Dear Websters,” Connie Fife (Cree) writes “i am the one whose death was intended / and didn’t die” (61-62), emphasising Native American survival in the face of cultural genocide. In this case, Fife’s repeated use of the lowercase ‘i’ in her poem seems to deemphasise the subjectivity of the pronoun, and instead shifts focus to its collectively.

Ashcroft et al argue that “worlds exist by means of languages, their horizons extended as far as the processes of neologism, innovation, tropes, and imaginative uses generally will allow the horizons of the language itself to be extended” (44). However, they stress that language does not embody culture through its use, but through difference, and while this “therefore proposes no inherent obstacles to the communication of meaning, the notion of difference, of an indecipherable juncture between cultural realities, is often just as diligently constructed in the text as that of identity” (57). In *Nature Poem*, Pico embodies the cultural difference he experiences through various linguistic strategies. By using collective pronouns, or depicting a historical event through his own perspective, the notion of difference is established, and with it, Pico’s position in navigating its boundaries.

Through the myriad of linguistic techniques and representations of language detailed above, it is demonstrable that *Nature Poem* is a poem of resistance, working within the English language to abrogate its dominance, while establishing a subjective representation of contemporary Native American life through techniques of appropriation. Of Native American poets, James Ruppert writes “their work may grow out of Western literary forms, but they are forms being used to Native Purposes, and that may vary from negative stereotypes to emphasizing cultural survival” (qtd. in Weaver 162), highlighting the long tradition of poetry as a method of cultural survival, in which Pico operates.

**“An NDN person in occupied America”:**

**Tommy Pico and Place**

The 2000 U.S. census reported that more than half of the 4.1 million American citizens who identified as Native American lived in urban areas, away from the reservations which typically comprise Native communities (Roemer 17). Kenneth Roemer reflects on this fact when he considers how Native American authors articulate a sense of place in their work, claiming that many contemporary writers “demonstrate sympathy for the difficulty of establishing a sense of place by stressing the paradoxical presence of absence: an awareness of the continuing presence of the absence of former tribal lands and the limits of Indian sovereignty” (17-18). Roemer argues that this awareness manifests itself in the consciousness of land lost, and the ongoing effects of forced relocation and removal, such as the Indian Removal Act of 1830, and the Dawes General Allotment Act of 1887. The sense of place and feeling of connection or disconnection to ancestral lands is a common motif in contemporary Native American poetry. Roemer argues that “the crucial link between landscape and community identity, the post-apocalyptic sense of land lost...the organic ties between storytelling and place...challenge modern Indian and non-Indian readers to (re)consider their concepts of the American landscape,” as they appear to contract the dominant representation of America (18).

Despite growing up on the Viejas Reservation, Pico has lived his adult life in cities, a fact reflected in the landscape of *Nature Poem*. This dichotomy of place is expressed in Pico’s attempt to reconcile his Native American identity with his urban American one. He expresses concern that the physical space he occupies now precludes him from engaging in cultural or traditional practices, writing “I can’t write a nature poem / bc I only fuck with the city” (57-58). This sense of disengagement continues, as he writes “I wd say how far I am from *my* mountains tell you why I carry / Kumeyaay basket designs on my body” (450-451; emphasis added). Tattooing culturally significant designs on his body enables Pico to feel connected to his heritage, in a place that is devoid of traces of Native American cultures. Joy Porter emphasises the relationship to the land, when she argues that common aspects of belief connect Native American cultures, and for the Native American, “place, self, and community are so intimately linked that loss of territory is a deprivation of psychic strength” (43). Pico is not the only poet who represents feeling a disintegration of psychic strength due to their relationship with the land.



In “A Mighty Pulverizing Machine,” Laura Da’ (Shawnee) explores the cultural devastation caused by the enactment of the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887, in which the federal government removed communal ownership of native land, allotting small pieces of land to those who agreed to move away from their tribes. Da’ ironically embodies the anti-Native American rhetoric of the government at the time, becoming progressively more aggressive with each stanza, the poetic voice gradually losing its restraint. The poem ends:

To each half blood, each quarter strain – so long as you yearn for the broken  
ploughshare, you will be provided with a spade honed to razor in its place.  
When every acre of your allotment has been leased or sold, you will turn it  
on yourself. From that date begins our real and permanent progress. (16-19)

Da’ describes the waste land in which the Native American now lives, subordinated to the colonial power. The subjects of the poem do not survive this apocalyptic scene but provide fertilized ground from which the colonial power grows, its power dependent on the absence of the Native American. The psychic effects of forcible removal and relocation reverberate through the centuries and are also felt in *Nature Poem*. Even though Pico chooses to live outside of the reservation, he does not forget that reservations are arbitrary borders, established to separate Native American tribes from the rest of the country, on land which once belonged to the indigenous peoples of America.

Fitzgerald and Wyss argue that a holistic connection to the land and the damage caused by its theft is a literary concern among Native American authors, as “stories, songs, and even words attach themselves to landscape features, recounting their narrative to those who are able to ‘hear’ or ‘read’ them” (272). In the paradigm of the Nature Poem, a traditional form of Native American poetry that celebrates the land and its physical and spiritual bounty, Pico repeatedly draws attention to the landscape, while professing his inability to *write about* nature. In one scene, he describes going to cut sage in the hills with his father, who tells him to “*thank / the plant for its sacrifice, son*” (342-343; original emphasis). Pico writes, “My mother waves at oak trees. A doctor delivers her diagnosis” (346), highlighting the discord between an indigenous, holistic relation to nature, and one ruled by scientific rationality and scepticism. Pico positions himself between these two traditions, evoking the imagined audience to whom he performs:

When she ascends the mountains to pick acorn, my mother  
motherfucking waves at oak trees. Watching her stand there, her  
hands behind her back, rocking, grinning,  
into the face of the bark –

They are talking to each other.

*I am nothing like that, I say to my audience.*

*I say, I went to Sarah Lawrence College*

*I make quinoa n shit (347-354; original emphasis).*

In his inability to consolidate his parents' (and thus his cultures') relationship to the land with his own as urban-dwelling, Pico examines the tension of trying to exist as Native American in a colonized country, and the feeling of guilt caused by a lack of cultural engagement. The difficulties of moving freely between one's own cultural traditions and spaces, and the urban, non-Native American spaces force an individual like Pico to evaluate his identity and its connection to the land. In his rejection of the landscape's vitality, Pico emphasises how contemporary Native Americans may experience a feeling of disconnection from nature, and the resistance to what Fitzgerald and Wyss may consider hearing or reading the landscape's narratives emphasises the issues faced by individuals who may not be able to connect to their cultural heritage.

The sense of connection to the land and to land lost is expressed in so much Native American poetry, because as Gross states, "there is no nation that enjoys unabridged sovereignty, as existed in the past. In effect, the world of our ancestors has come to an end" (449). As evidenced by the contemporary work of Native American poets, Gross' arguments concerning PASS encapsulates current concerns facing Native American reservations across North America. In his TED talk "America's Native Prisoners of War," photographer Aaron Huey describes the years he spent photographing the Oglala Lakota tribe on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. What he found correlates with Gross' assertions of PASS: unemployment at Pine Ridge is between 85 and 90%; 39% of homes have no electricity, and 60% are infested with toxic black mould; more than 90% live below the federal poverty line; infant mortality is three times the national average; and the life expectancy for men is 46 – the same as in Somalia and Afghanistan (Huey). Behind these facts hides the legacy of colonization and Native American displacement, and the mental and emotional strain of surviving these conditions. While many poets like Pico reside in urban areas, their work represents the communal pressure of existing in a postcolonial, post-apocalyptic country, evoking a memory that is "at once personal and collective" (Gould 797).

In *Nature Poem*, Pico articulates his anger at the events which led to the near destruction of Native American cultures, which Louise Erdrich (Ojibwe) likens to annihilation more thorough than “a nuclear disaster” (qtd. in Roemer 12). When discussing how “from 1850 to 1870, the indigenous population / fell by 60%” (923-924), Pico writes “Anthropologists write ‘population decline’ with the gentle implication of / a drying fog” (927-928). Again, the passive voice, often used in discourse *about* Native Americans, constitutes an erasure of history, by suggesting the decline was a natural occurrence, and not a result of aggressive colonial practices and the accompanying onslaught of new diseases.

The evocation of a post-apocalyptic landscape is represented by Pico as the location for acts of individual, communal, and cultural survival. He asks:

How cd u not feel like a miracle

in the sense that everyone in yr line had to survive primordial waves of SoCal dehydration, waves of European disease, active predation by men whose bullets were bought by the US government the pendulum of genocidal legislation intended to rob yr tribe of its sovereignty, the cultural bleach of NDN boarding schools that robbed yr grandmother’s generation of the language, meth infestation of the 80s, and like George W. Bush. (934-940)

Pico expresses astonishment at his existence, listing occurrence after occurrence which ought to have destroyed his bloodline. Like Pico, other Native American writers address the idea that their survival in a post-apocalyptic country is something of a miracle. In “Anasazi,” Tacey M. Atsitty (Diné) uses the setting of the Native American kitchen, a common motif in Native American poetry representing strong communal ties, and strips it of any human presence. She writes “How can we die when we’re already / prone to leaving the table mid-meal” (1-2), suggesting the indifference felt towards the continuation of people whose eradication was intended. She continues:

We’ve practiced dying  
 for a long time  
 .....  
 Sorry we rushed off;  
 the food wasn’t ours. Sorry the grease sits  
 white on our plates (6-7, 10-12)

The kitchen, once a vibrant locus of life, has become a ghost town. Now it is a post-apocalyptic scene where people are vanished so quickly that the table is still set for dinner, an analogy for the systematic removal of Native American people.

In “The Old Indian Granny,” Chrystos (Menominee) explores the absence of Native American culture through the figure of the granny, who represents the extreme poverty and destitution endured by many Native Americans, who exist as a type of ghost in a cultural graveyard. The narrator reflects on the similarity between her own life and that of the granny, suggesting a commonality, or at its worst, a pre-determination, of the manifestation of symptoms of PASS. Chrystos ends her poem with a chilling quatrain:

It’s knowing with each invisible breath  
that if you don’t make something pretty  
they can hang on their walls or wear around their necks  
you might as well be dead. (32-35)

The ghostly spectre of Native American culture is a common theme in poetry that depicts North America as post-apocalyptic. Chrystos’ assertion that the Native American’s worth is today bound in cultural artefacts or items for commodification is shared by Pico. In a scene where he reflects on “*colonialist plundering*” (102; emphasis original), he writes “Kumeyaay buries urns dug from their context, their ashes dumped and placed / on display at the Museum of Man. Casket art, mantlepieces in SoCal / social well-to-do living rooms” (104-106). There is dissonance in Pico’s verse, as the Kumeyaay burial urns are metonymic for his missing or displaced culture, of which he is now an observer rather than a participant. There is the suggestion that for non-Natives, Native American culture is to only be observed, enjoyed, and commodified in safe, non-Native spaces, far removed from their origin. “*My family’s experience isn’t fodder / for artwork*” (637-638; emphasis original), Pico writes. He criticises the tendency for non-Native cultures to selectively choose aesthetically appealing aspects of Native American art and culture, whilst ignoring the post-apocalyptic conditions of many contemporary Native American communities, directly caused by the legacy of colonialism. The distance of his own cultural practices, separated from him by the border of the dominant culture, is a common motif in *Nature Poem*. In one scene, Pico describes desperate attempts made by him and his cousins to construct a cultural connection, by “wearing bone / chokers wanting an artefact of my identity wanting life or death to / touch something of the rugged absence” (964-966), while acknowledging the futility of the act.

In her essay “A Stranger in My Own Life,” Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) argues that Native American poetry is characterised by alienation, in which “the Indian is presented

as a victim of hostile and alien forces, excluded from America (where real life and power are seen to lie), deprived of status and customs” (6-7). The exclusion from American life in Pico’s poetry is signified by the profound sense of alienation from his Native American culture, whilst being immersed in the colonial culture which enveloped it. In his meditation on absence, Pico writes, “Absence, as if Kumeyaay just didn’t show up, as if it slept in, as if there / weren’t a government intent on extermination” (967-968), recalling Roemer’s assertion that Native American writers stress the presence of absence (17). Kumeyaay culture is portrayed as a ghostly spectre, where echoes of its presence reverberate, but do not form a tangible whole.

Wendy Rose (Hopi Miwok) approaches the relationship between culture and place in terms of the ghostly in “The Poet Haunted.” She writes “Ghosts of myself fooled,” (31) possibly evoking the hundreds of broken treaties, and the good faith of the Native American tribes which could be said to have been fooled by the federal government. Rose uses repetition as she writes “Ghosts these brothers / Ghosts these mountains / Ghosts these buffalo” (33-35), bringing to mind the countless lost, the mountains stolen, and the sacred buffalo, which were hunted to near extinction by European settlers. Rose’s poem, like Pico’s descriptions of Kumeyaay art and culture, is elegiac in tone, and longs for all that has been lost post-contact. The ghost is an apparition of the past, immaterial and otherworldly, never to return to its full incarnate form.

Pico often writes about death, evoking memories of the constant funerals on the reservations, and stating that “‘Funeral’ was / the first game my brother played. I’d turn to my cousins wonder which / one of us wd make it to old age” (572-574). For Pico, premature and unnatural death has become normalized by its frequency. He writes that “NDN teens have the highest rate of suicide of any population group” (596), later addressing a frustrated diatribe to an unspecified receiver:

But what if by not wearing that headdress in yr music  
video or changing yr damn mascot and perhaps adding 0.5% of personal  
annoyance to yr life for the twenty minute it lasts, the 103 young ppl  
who tried to kill themselves on the Pine Ridge Indian reservation over  
the past four months wanted to live 50% more. (878-882)

The tension between the center and the periphery here is vividly elicited. Death is a subject which colours Pico’s verse with anger, as he represents the post-apocalyptic conditions - on reservations in particular – that characterise the existence of many Native Americans, and their frustrating proximity to the rest of “occupied America” (551). In “Last Rites,” Odilia

Galván Rodríguez (Lipan Apache) explores the disconnect between Native American and Euramerican cultural practices surrounding death, and the profound implications of dying in a postcolonial country where spiritual or religious practices are disturbed or disregarded. Rodríguez writes: “your body should have been washing in the finest herbs and flowers then wrapped in soft cloth / instead they slit you open like a fish inspected you like so many sides of beef left you ripe” (1-2). The visceral descriptions of a post-mortem render Rodríguez’s subject an animal carcass for inspection, instead of a physical body, being prepared for “the next world” so “your ancestors would recognize you” (3,4). The care that the body receives, and the discord between the cultures, is metonymic for the tension generated when dominant and subordinate cultures are unable to merge. The poem evokes Gross’ PASS, as it recalls a pre-apocalyptic world, where complete cultural sovereignty and autonomy can only be remembered or imagined. These consequences are carried over into death, as the subject of Rodríguez’s poem is assumed to be lost in the afterlife, the missing ceremonial tattoos and body paint leaving them unrecognizable to the “hunters and gatherers” (5).

Despite the presence of death in many contemporary Native American poet’s works, Roemer argues that “one of the hallmarks of the best American Indian writing is an unflinching awareness of the impact of tragic losses and a persistent articulation, even celebration, of the good stories of survival” (12). Pico, like his contemporaries, strives to articulate how the stories of their ancestors reverberate in their lives to this day. However, representations of post-apocalyptic America also exist alongside hopeful, resilient, and holistic representations and connections. Towards the end of *Nature Poem*, Pico concedes to his audience, admitting “What if I really do feel connected to the land? / What if the mountains around the valley where I was born / What if I see them like faces when I close my eyes” (1105-1107). Pico’s admission that he *does* feel connected with nature, despite his protestations, is what Roemer might characterise as a celebration of survival, both individual and cultural.

**“You can’t be an NDN person in today’s world and write a nature poem”:**

**Tommy Pico and Identity**

Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) identifies alienation as a predominant feature of contemporary Native American poetry. This is in contradistinction to traditional Native American literatures, both oral and early written forms, which “display an attractive absence of a sense of ‘otherness’ ...[as] belonging was a central concern” (3). Gunn Allen describes how the importance of tribal values and unification in traditional narratives has been replaced with a revolutionary individualistic stance, and an “unbalanced romanticism toward American Indian life and people” in contemporary Native American poetry (3).

As discussed in relation to place, there is a sense of alienation from reservation life and community expressed in *Nature Poem*, but Pico also represents contemporary concerns of alienation from tribal culture. Neal McLeod (Cree) describes this alienation as an ideological diaspora, or “alienation from collective memories found in tribal stories,” which results in the need to preserve cultural traditions (qtd. in Shackleton 69). Pico’s ideological diaspora is apparent in his verse, as he explores its effects on his sense of identity. Of composing in English, Pico writes that it makes him “complicit in my tribe’s erasure” (761), foregrounding the perpetual awareness that identity is part of the complicated nexus of his history and ancestry.

Identity is often interrogated by Pico, alongside how strangers perceive him, and his sense of otherness. In one scene, Pico describes a patron in a bar shouting the question “WHAT’S YR NATIONALITY!?!?” (138) to him across a crowded room. What the patron perhaps envisioned as an innocuous question sparks a complicated reflection on the complexity of self-identification. Returning to the discourse of nature, Pico addresses the essentialization that is required of him when talking about his identity. He writes “In order to talk about a hurricane, you first have to talk about a / preexisting disturbance over the ocean, so you have to talk about mean / ocean temperature, so you have to talk about human industry” (140-142), continuing all the way back to the origin of the universe, the Big Bang. “How far back do you have to go to answer any question about race?” (148) Pico asks. The complexity of identity cannot be reduced to a single signifier, especially when the dominant colonizing culture demands essentialization. The difficulty of navigating a dual consciousness is framed as a quotidian problem because, depending on the context, Pico offers different answers to questions regarding his race and identity. The alienation from his tribal culture is represented as a contemporary issue, as the separation is both spatial and

ideological, to the degree where identifying as a Kumeyaay is fraught with social and political tension. When he describes tattooing Kumeyaay art on his body, it's prefaced with the comment "I w[oul]d say" (459), suggesting a conscious decision to withhold the information. He goes on to write "but I don't want to be an identity or a belief or a feedbag. I wanna b / me. I want to open my arms like winning a foot race and keep my / stories to myself, I tell my audience." (453-455). This tercet is significant as it demonstrates the danger for Native Americans in discussing their identity, as any utterance has the power to stereotype the speaker to an "identity or a belief." Pico attempts to balance celebrating his Native American identity with the projection of his personality in public, non-Native settings. The audience, who may listen with sympathy to his concerns, are nevertheless embedded in centuries of oppression, creating a site of tension when Pico interrogates the public perception of his identity.

Gail Tremblay (Onondaga Micmac) explores the duality of identity in her poem "Indian Singing in 20<sup>th</sup> Century America." She writes:

We stumble out into streets;  
 patterns of wires invented by strangers  
 are strung between eye and sky,  
 and we dance in two worlds,  
 inevitable as seasons in one,  
 exotic curiosities in the other (5-10).

The consciousness and constant reminder of being Native American in North America is depicted as a "dance in two worlds," where the border between them prevents any kind of reconciliation. However, the frustration of this dance in *Nature Poem* is missing in Tremblay's verse, as she celebrates a contemporary Native American identity characterised by the resistance of the dominant culture. Tremblay describes the duality of living with Euramerican industry and inventions, framing them in a Native American paradigm, where "Earth breath eddies between factories / and office buildings" (26-27). Alienation from American culture is expressed and counteracted with resistance from the poet, as she declares "we're always there...impossible to ignore" (37, 39).

The difficulty of expressing one's identity is complicated by physical perception, and stereotypical ideas of what Native Americans look like. Pico writes "*oh, but you don't look very Indian* is a thing ppl feel comfortable saying / to me on dates." (194-195; original emphasis), the non-specificity of the encounter suggesting its frequency. He goes on to write that "it's hard to look 'like' something most people remember as a ghost" (197), bringing to



mind both the dominance of Native American stereotypes in public discourse, and the lack of representation of contemporary Native Americans. Pico recognizes that the ‘ghost’ of Native Americans, appearing as a faded memory, renders the expression of subjective identity an extremely difficult task. He continuously interrogates his sense of belonging in both Native American and American communities, leading to his sense of double consciousness. This is apparent in his internal monologue on the problems of self-identification, especially in conversation with non-Native people, who demand an essentialized definition of identity. One page of *Nature Poem* contains only the question “Who dis?” (1021), a question to which the answer changes depending on the context, but which potentially conceals a concern at the heart of Pico’s work – that of existing as Native American in what is an American colony.

Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness hinges on the idea of alienation from society, and the strive to reconcile a splintered identity. Of his subject, he writes “he simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows” (5). The double consciousness expressed by Pico does not reach the extremes of Du Bois’ description, but instead details minor interactions that have larger implications for his sense of identity. In one scene he describes a singing lesson where his teacher implores him to focus on his breath. He writes:

Can’t you see I’m trying super hard *not*  
to focus on my breath? I’m  
trying to forget.

I look up at the night thinking  
and getting dizzy so I have to sit down. (994-998; original emphasis)

Even during the mundane activity of a singing lesson, Pico experiences the crushing consciousness of his heritage, and is unable to reconcile his awareness of it. His inability to explain the difficulty on focussing on his breath marks the border of consciousness between his teacher and himself, and Pico’s struggle in bearing the weight of his ancestry. He implies that being forced to focus only on his breath allows painful memories to enter the forefront of his mind: in an earlier moment he writes that “*The gift of panic is clarity*” (847; original emphasis), and so his need to avoid clarity of mind is an instinct for survival and mental wellbeing. His teacher tells him “*you still have to sing the note, and the next / one and the next*” (1004-1005; original emphasis), reminding Pico that there is no respite from the warring factions of his consciousness.

When describing alienation in Native American writing, Gunn Allen writes that:

The world is seen in terms of antagonistic principles, so that good is set against bad, Indian against ‘white,’ and tradition against cultural borrowing; personal significance becomes lost in a confusion of dualities. For many, this process has meant rejection of Indianism. (8)

The rejection of antagonistic binaries is a common literary tactic by contemporary Native American poets, especially apparent when analysed in the rhetoric of Gerald Vizenor. When analysing Pico’s poetry through Vizenor’s theoretical methods, it is possible to recognize and interpret multiple acts of resistance, which result in the poet’s “cultural survival through the interpretation of, and resistant response to, stereotypical representations” (Shackleton 70). With Vizenor’s discourse, one can locate simulations of survivance, i.e. the representation of Native Americans in public discourse and the resistance of dominant representations, in *Nature Poem*. Pico embodies the role of Vizenor’s Postindian, as he continuously interrogates, rejects, and replaces stereotypical representations of Native Americans, or what Vizenor describes as Manifest Manners. In *Nature Poem*, Pico describes encounters with non-Native individuals where he is required to challenge the Manifest Manners that control other’s perceptions of him. Strangers tell him “*you don’t look very Indian*” (194; original emphasis), perversely precluding him from an arguably imaginary Native American culture because of his appearance. Others make assumptions about him based on the misrepresentation of Native American cultures. Of an encounter with a stranger, Pico writes:

This white guy asks do I feel more connected to nature  
bc I’m NDN  
asks did I live *like in a regular house*  
growing up on the rez  
or something more salt  
of the earth, something reedy  
says it’s hot do I have any rain  
ceremonies (212-219; original emphasis)

In discussing Manifest Manners, Vizenor isn’t denying the existence of certain ways of life or being for Native Americans, but is challenging the dominance of misrepresentations, which survive as “‘authentic’ representations of Indian cultures” (qtd. in Miles 360). Heid E. Erdrich (Ojibwe) echoes Vizenor, writing “We do and do not write of treaties, battles, and drums. We do and do not write of eagles, spirits, and canyons. Native poetry may be those things, but it is not only those things...But who would know?” (“New Poets” xiv). When Pico states “I express frustration” (220) at the encounter, it is at the dominance of

misrepresentations which deny any subjective or diverse representations of contemporary Native American individuals and cultures. In another exchange with a non-Native individual, Pico writes:

Once on campus I see a York Peppermint Pattie wrapper on the ground,  
pick it up, and throw it away. *Yr such a good Indian* says some dick  
walking to class. So,  
I no longer pick up trash. (355-358; original emphasis)

Pico's reactiveness is a resistance to Manifest Manners, and a rejection of the idea that all Native Americans live in a holistic relationship with nature. The figure of the "good Indian" is metonymic for the idea of the fully assimilated Native American, recalling the forced assimilation and socialization enacted through the Indian Boarding Schools programme. Pico references the assumptions around Native American poetry when he writes "An NDN poem must reference alcoholism" (886), but resists this notion by writing "*I started drinking again after Mike Brown and Sandra Bland and Charleston / I felt so underwater it made no sense to keep dry*" (887-888; original emphasis). By forgoing what one might expect as 'typical' Native American subject matter, Pico situates his poetry in a contemporary setting, while still utilising and subverting stereotypes that dominate his art to serve as a vehicle for his writing.

The duality of consciousness, and the wish to integrate traditional cultural practices in a contemporary milieu without being generalized or stereotyped is also addressed by Nila Northsun (Shoshone Chippewa) in "99 things to do before you die." The poem is a response to a list of the same name in *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Northsun laments her exclusion from the list, writing "so what's a poor indian to do? / come up with a list that's more / culturally relevant" (21-23), before composing her own. "[W]atch a miwok deer dance / attend a hopi kachina dance / owl dance with a yakama" (36-38) she writes, listing them alongside other culturally specific activities, ones that are not translated for a non-Native reader. In this way, Northsun establishes a cultural binary where the usually subordinate Native American culture is elevated to dominance, which "upsets and unravels discursive control over Native people" (Miles 41). These small acts of resistance are what Vizenor characterises as simulations of Survivance, or the "active presence of Native people in public discourse, and the practice of actively resisting dominant representations" (Miles 40).

A common characteristic of the postindian figure is to undermine the status quo through humour, as it subverts expectations of a colonized literature, and Pico is no exception (Shackleton 70). His poetry is playful and sardonic, using abbreviated spellings and constant pop-culture references to represent how contemporary life is often enacted through digital

means. Pico blurs boundaries of discourses, juxtaposing the natural sciences with postcolonialism, and Native American folklore with pop-culture. He writes “Some see objects in the Earth, where I see lungs. Sky mother falls thru / a hole, lands on a turtle. // Hole is my favourite band,” forging associations with Native American creation myths and contemporary music (1036-1038). In doing so, Pico bridges the gap between reverence for his cultural heritage, and his position as a young, metropolitan Native American. In an interview Pico likens his simulations of *Survivance* to an ambush on a non-Native audience, a poetic trojan horse. He explains: “I gotta be, like “this is a gift of a beautiful horse I gave you,” then put the drawbridge up, and it’s chaos” (Moskowitz).

The postindian figure is free from the restraints of the empty signifier of Indian or Native American, and limitless in its ability to represent a complex, multi-faceted identity. Vizenor suggests the imperative cultural responsibility of the postindian, who “encounter[s] their enemies with the same courage in literature as their ancestors once evinced on horses” (4). Pico describes the frustrating lack of representation, writing “it was first a thrill / to see a tribe in those hugging pages / I took what I cd get” (471-473). However, as a poet with the opportunity to create and propagate authentic representations of Native Americans, he continues “But now I see the night and she is a dancing bird” (474), a reference to the sacred bird songs and dances of the Kumeyaay culture. Pico rejoices in the privilege and opportunity to re-present authentic, contemporary images of Native American life, embodying Vizenor’s image of the courageous postindian.

Perhaps the most significant act of Pico as a postindian figure is the evolution of the ‘nature poem’ motif. He repeatedly writes “I swore to myself I would never write a nature poem” (9), protesting his hatred for both nature and the nature poem, as “nature is kind of over my head” (309). Eventually, however, he enters into conversation with nature herself. The evolution from an abstraction to a reactive organism with whom he converses enables Pico to confront the tension that the nature poem represents –his inability to freely express his cultural heritage in a non-Native space. Towards the conclusion of *Nature Poem* as he interrogates his own relationship to nature, he writes:

I get so disappointed by stupid NDNs writing their dumb nature  
poems like grow up faggots

I look this thought full in the face and want to throw myself into traffic

Admit it. This is the poem you wanted all along. (1115-1118)

It is unclear to who the ‘you’ in the final line refers to, its semantic richness meaning either or both Pico, and the reader. The nature poem “you wanted all along” is certainly a departure

from a traditional nature poem, a form which celebrates the bountiful earth and one's close relationship with it. However, Pico's own nature poem reimagines nature from his contemporary, subjective point-of-view, transcending the beautiful, and coming to represent the disfunction of modern life. The motif of the nature poem is significant, as it represents Pico's dance around the concept of Native American identity, from his refusal to embrace his heritage, to his eventual acceptance and celebration of the complexity of his subjectivity. As a postindian figure, Pico is able to celebrate his identity: as a queer Native American from the reservation who resides in the non-Native environment of New York, he is an individual that refuses generalization and essentialisation. It is on these borders of identity that Pico establishes a contemporary and subjective representation of Native American life. "What, I learn to ask, *does an NDN person look like exactly?*" (211) he writes, suggesting that identity is a learning process, always in tension with, and developing alongside, colonial power.

**“I climb the backs of languages and ride them into exhaustion”:**

**Layli Long Soldier’s *Whereas***

In March 2017, two months before the publication of *Nature Poem*, Layli Long Soldier’s *Whereas* was published. Like *Nature Poem*, Long Soldier’s poetry revolves around representations of Native American identity, in particular how contemporary Native American lives are shaped by a language which describes and restricts them. The subjective nature of identity is represented in both Long Soldier and Pico’s poetry, but both poets always return to the idea that the expression of communal identity is a literary concern of Native American authors. Roemer writes that senses of community are reflected in “authorial senses of responsibility to the community,” which are apparent to non-Native readers “because they contrast so markedly with the mainstream sense of individualism” (13). In *Whereas*, Long Soldier varies between detailing communal and personal senses of destruction and disenfranchisement still felt due to continuing government policies regarding Native American communities. The title of *Whereas* refers to the federal government’s formal apology to all Native Americans and to the legalese which works to surreptitiously conceal any meaningful or legally binding apology. In *Whereas*, Long Soldier works to abrogate the power of the English language, appropriating it to disrupt hierarchies of power and truth. This intention is signalled by the inclusion of a prologue from the work of Chinese American poet Arthur Sze, who writes: “No word has any special hierarchy over any other” (i). Sze’s statement has clear associations with Long Soldier’s own approach to using English, especially as she blends discourses and uses her native Lakota language in her poetry.

Part one of *Whereas* is titled “These Being the Concerns,” and is a collection of poems in which Long Soldier explores how Native American cultures still deal with the fallout from relations with the North American government, through the embodiment of a communal point-of-view. “Ĥe Sápa,” the first poem, is a cycle divided into five numbered parts. Ĥe Sápa is commonly known as the Lakota Black Hills, a sacred mountain range which was stolen from the Lakota in a treaty violation in 1889. Originally protected from European settlers, the discovery of gold in the hills prompted the U.S. government to break the treaty and take back the land, reassigning the Lakota to small reservations. The United States vs the Sioux Nation of Indians is one of the longest running court cases in U.S. history: the Supreme Court ruled in 1980 that Ĥe Sápa was taken illegally; however, the Lakota have refused monetary compensation, stating they want only the return of Ĥe Sápa. Part one begins “Ĥe is a mountain as hé is a horn that comes from a shift in the river, throat to mouth” (1),

suggesting that *Ĥe* is the word for mountain in Long Soldier's tribal language. Much like Pico's personification of nature, with hills "that have backs that love / being stroked by our eyes" (1026-1027), Long Soldier describes the mountain in anthropomorphic terms. She continues: "Remember. *Ĥe Sápa* is not a black hill, not / *Pahá Sápa*, by any name you call it. When it lives in past tense, one would say it *was* not Red / Horn either" (2-4). Her assertion that *Ĥe Sápa* lives in the past tense establishes a duality of place and time, indicating the representative power of language in her work. That *Ĥe Sápa* is described as living in the past tense emphasises the feeling of culture-wide grief of living on historically stolen or colonized land, as well as drawing attention to the rules and boundaries of English semantics which have reshaped native lives. Gross writes that the realization to Native Americans that a return to pre-contact culture is impossible, forcing an unbreachable division between the culture of their ancestors and their contemporary culture, is a contributory factor to the formation of Post-Apocalyptic Stress Syndrome (449).

Long Soldier continues this focus in part two of "*Ĥe Sápa*," which begins: "Because *drag* changes when spoken of in the past i.e. he *was dragged* or they *drug* him down" (1). The exploration of the nuances of English grammar recalls Pico's, as he interrogates the implication of the tense "hangs," and its relation to the representation of cultures often described in past tense (Pico 867). Recognizing the obstacles of word choice and tense - "And to *drag* has a begin / point" (2-3; original emphasis) - Long Soldier decides to repurpose the language, as she writes "so we take the word to our own uses and say:" (4).

The notion of beginnings, and whether they are a clear cut in linear time or a point in the circularity of time is a concern to Long Soldier. The emphasis on tense in the first two parts of "*Ĥe Sápa*" and the insistence on beginnings not only questions if there is a clear ending to what has begun, but implies an author, or one who *creates* the representation of the beginning. In an interview with Long Soldier, Joy Harjo (Muscogee) discusses the Native American relationship with time when she says "I always remember hearing someone older and wiser in the circle point out that we are in a continuum that has gone on for millennia, and colonization is just a moment. It will destroy itself, and we will go on" (qtd. in Long Soldier "Beyond Language"). The Native American approach to time as a self-regulating continuum is contrasted with what could be considered a Euramerican propensity for consigning past events to the past, a point in the linearity of time, regardless of whether they have ended or still reverberate through time. Long Soldier challenges the representation of *Ĥe Sápa*, suggesting that the colonization of America is not relegated to the distant past, but

continues to this day, and can no longer continue to be misrepresented by non-Natives in the public discourse.

“Ĥe Sápa” is divided into numerically labelled parts, suggesting a linearity between them, a beginning and an end. However, Long Soldier interrogates the requirement for start and end points in part three of “Ĥe Sápa.” The text of the poem forms a calligram of a box, incomplete as its edges are punctuated by gaps, points of entry and exit. Each side of the box is a variation of the same line:

This is how you see me in the space in which to place me

This is how to place you in the space in which to see

The space in me you see      is this place

To see this space      see how you place me in you” (1-4)

As in part two, she formulates the query of where to begin, suggesting through the playful reformulation of the text, that boundaries, both physical and literal, are often arbitrary. Through the formal ordering of the text on the page, Long Soldier forces the reader to approach the text as a physical, two-dimensional object, whose meaning changes dependent on point-of-view. As important as the black of text is the white space, the large swathes of page devoid of any marking or representation. “The space in me you see      is this place” (2) she writes, directing the reader’s attention to the gap between clauses, and the space which separates opposite sides of the ‘box.’ The space Long Soldier writes of is metaphoric for all that remains unsaid, unwritten, and unrepresented of Native American cultures. The ‘box’ is a contradictory structure, erecting incomplete borders to separate the ‘you’ and ‘me’ of the poem. Space in the box is provided for Native Americans to occupy and represent their own culture, *and* for non-Natives to project their own image of Native Americans in the white space.

In part four, Long Soldier writes:

As I am limited to a few

words at command, such as *waŋbli*. This

was how I wanted to begin, with the little

I know. (4-7; original emphasis)

Waŋbli is the Lakota word for eagle, a symbol of a sacred messenger in Lakota culture. Long Soldier laments the loss of her native language, and her inability to “begin there” (20), but the choice of waŋbli is significant. The sacred messenger, representative of the loss of culture and the ability to impart messages of importance, fails to allow Long Soldier to begin, and she is left impotent, unable to express herself in both English and Lakota. In the final part of



“Ĥe Sápa” the setting moves to the domestic, the “hairline light of kitchen and home” (2). Here she details an interaction with her daughter, whose staring prompts her to ask, “*are you looking at how I’ve become two?*” (4), the conversation recounted in past tense, in marked comparison to the immediacy of the present tense of the rest of the poem. The duality of Long Soldier’s life, from her exploration of Ĥe Sápa living in the past tense, to the binary of ‘you’ and ‘me’ in part three, has now split her identity for those who observe her. However, unlike Pico, who reacts angrily when his identity is questioned by non-Natives, Long Soldier is conversing with her daughter, a native Lakota, to whom she explains “Born in us, two of everything” (7). The self-identified duality is a common motif in Native American creation myths, which eschew any borders or binaries that separate genders, individuals and experiences, acting in anthesis to the Western focus on individuality. “Ĥe Sápa” begins in part one with an emphasis on what the Lakota have lost, by referring to the mountains in the past tense. However, Long Soldier attempts to reconcile the past with the present through the “Ĥe Sápa” cycle. She writes of “dragging” (10) herself to the surface, listening to the words from the “hollow of a black horn” (11), recalling the dragging and the black horn of part one and two. The cycle ends with the proclamation “Not one word sounds as before. / Circuitous this / I know.” (12-14). The circuitous nature of time serves as the final point in the circuitous nature of “Ĥe Sápa,” as each part is intricately linked to each other. Long Soldier makes points of connection between language and the representation of history in “Ĥe Sápa,” alerting to the reader how these can affect the construction of personal identity. Long Soldier is estranged from her native language, from the sacred land of her ancestors, and physically constructs on the page the space which she occupies, one which is characterised by the duality of her experience.

Borders and sites of separation which surround Native Americans in literature are the focus of the poem “Diction,” the third in Part One of *Whereas*. Like “Ĥe Sápa,” “Diction” is comprised of eight distinct parts. The first is a complex play on the notions of reflections. Long Soldier writes:

grind the nose into a mirror  
 flatten the head  
 I to eye to I  
 am a door to a room I smear to enter  
 fog from the mouth as:

### noiJoiC Diction (1-6)

The use of the mirror as a metaphor is particularly evocative, as Long Soldier conjures the duality of reflection, and the unreality of seeing one's own image projected back, once removed from the source. Much like Pico's rejection of Manifest Manners and the stereotypical notions of Native American cultures ascribed to his identity by non-Natives, the mirror in "Diction" creates a distance between the observer viewing their unobscured image, and an obstacle in accessing an authentic representation. The visceral imagery of the poet grinding and flattening her head into the mirror suggests a deep desire to observe her reflection, with the dual play of the homonyms of the third line, and its arrangement into a palindrome, reinforcing the symmetrical nature of "Diction." The physical mirroring of the word "diction" in the final line emphasizes a key aspect of Long Soldier's poetics. The word and the poetic form are reconceptualised, prompting a reconsideration of the rules which so often dictate English language, expression, and representation. Through this mirroring effect, Long Soldier invites the reader to consider how identity can become distorted or concealed. The symmetry of the word establishes a division, and a marked difference in the subjective and ontological reality of the word, demonstrating Long Soldier's assertion that representation is wholly dependent on one's vantage point.

In the second part of "Diction," the tone becomes mocking and sardonic, addressing an unknown speaker who demands of her perfect diction. She writes:

I cogitate I  
tune up to  
terms of pre  
vailing stand  
ards  
accept  
ability  
enunci  
ation (10-18)

The speaker's diction, which becomes fractured in this second stanza due to the unusual mid-word enjambments, could be interpreted as parodic of Red English, the early pidgin spoken by Native Americans post-contact. The poem begins with the line "I understand *yes*" (1; original emphasis), the focalizer responding to a suggested criticism or questioning of the speaker's language skills or cognizance. The response implies a preformulated representation

which the focalizer must challenge in order to re-present herself accurately. Joy Porter claims that European colonizers viewed Native Americans in anthesis to themselves: uncivilized, unintelligent, and culturally static (45), and thus always in conflict with degrading and unfounded representations, a fact that is reflected in the first line of “Diction.”

In the third part of “Diction,” Long Soldier visually reworks a paragraph from *Impressions of an Indian Childhood*, the 1921 memoir of Zitkála Šá (Yankton Dakota Sioux). She prefaces this paragraph with the statement “*though I’m told I come from a small world a lifted paragraph from one or other book:*” (25; original emphasis), returning to the idea that representation of Native Americans is often bound to and by the English language, and Native American self-representation is often relegated to odd paragraphs in books. She continues:

~~It took many trials before I learned how to knot my sinew thread on the point of my finger, as I saw her do. Then the next difficulty was in keeping my thread stiffly twisted, so that I could easily string my beads upon it. My mother required of me original designs for my lessons in beading. As first I frequently ensnared many a sunny hour into working a long design. Soon I learned from self-inflicted punishment to refrain from drawing complex patters, for I have to finish whatever I began. (26-32)~~

By physically striking through the text, Long Soldier removes adjectives, details, and descriptions of traditional cultural practices, eliminating any trace of Native American identity from the text. The manipulated text is grammatically correct, offering no obstacle to comprehension, although the tone and content is completely altered. In her decision to alter Zitkála Šá’s writing, Long Soldier questions the formulation of Native American identity, which can become as fractured as the text in the dominant colonial paradigm. Along with Pocahontas, Zitkála Šá is arguably the most famous Native American woman in history. As a writer, educator, and activist, Zitkála Šá’s writing often addressed the chasm left in her sense of cultural identity after her education at a missionary Quaker boarding school in Indiana. On returning to her tribe with the feeling that she no longer belonged to either her Native American culture or the white culture into which her assimilation had been forced, Zitkála Šá wrote “I’ve lost my long hair, my eagle plumes too. / For you my own people, I’ve gone astray. / A wanderer now, with no place to stay” (qtd. in Wilson 148). Reminiscent of DuBois’ assertion that “one ever feels his twoness” (4), the inclusion of Zitkála Šá’s text in *Whereas* is revealing. Reading the paragraph in the two distinct ways that Long Soldier has

manipulated the text provides a ‘twoness’ to the text, emphasising the idea that the relationship between identity and representation is malleable.

The effect of striking out the text is continued in the fourth section of “Diction.” Again, a well-known and contextually immediate intertext is used, this time from James Welch’s (Blackfeet A’aninin) non-fiction book *Killing Custer* (1994). Long Soldier formats the text to the right side of the page, each stanza forming a slight slope. It is apparent that large sections of the text are missing, as sentences are fragmented, and clarity is wanting:

was a purpose, a purpose  
gratuitous slaughter: It was  
would be there in the world  
enemy without arms or legs or  
there. They wanted to live in peace. (57-61)

As with the intertext from Zitkála Šá’s memoir, Long Soldier physically reformulates the text, altering its meaning. In the Welch intertext, however, text is not simply struck through, but deleted, leaving behind the suggestive white space of the page. The narrative is left incomplete and misrepresented on the page, metaphoric for the power that language wields over representation. It is in this white space that the representation of history is questioned, erased, and potentially re-written or re-presented.

Through observing the conceptualisation of her poetry and manipulation of the English language, the duality of meaning to be found in representation is revealed to be a constant concern to Long Soldier, who treats the form with the suspicion of one who has experienced the negative and duplicitous potential of language. In each poem of Part One of *Whereas*, she displays an awareness and vigilance of every choice made regarding language and expression, a need for clarity which is rooted in the knowledge that language can conceal, decimate, and disenfranchise. In “Vaporative,” a poem about poetry, she writes “I understand the need to define / as a need for stability.” (70-71). As a concern to Long Soldier, the need to define is not always fulfilled, especially when she writes of her Native Lakotan language. In poem “Tókħaḥ’aṅ,” she begins by providing a gloss for the reader, presumably from a Lakota dictionary: “- to lose, to suffer loss, to be gone, lost.” (1). This contrasts with the poems by Tiffany Midge and Connie Fife discussed previously, which are constructed around glosses from English dictionaries. Long Soldier continues to explain the pragmatic use of tókħaḥ’aṅ, as “Used in reply to *what has become of it?*” (2; original emphasis). Ashcroft et al discuss how postcolonial writers often refuse to gloss their native language in their literature, as the refusal to gloss “not only registers a sense of cultural distinctiveness,

but forces the reader into an active engagement with the horizons of the culture in which these terms have meaning” (65). “Tókǰǰ’ǰ,” however, is a reflection on the gloss of the word in a Lakota dictionary, a dictionary whose audience is presumably comprised of Native Americans with Lakotan heritage, and who through centuries of linguicide, are statistically unlikely to speak Lakotan. “Tókǰǰ’ǰ,” then, does register a sense of cultural distinctiveness, but for the poet, who is estranged from her ancestral language in her colonized country. In the poem, Long Soldier describes receiving a picture from a friend in an email, of his bruised and beaten face “lumped as blue-purple-one” (9). His angular features, softened by violence, recall in her the “back-forth stroke of a Z, a letter wherein I found a poet’s / fondness for *zither* and *zeal*” (10-11). She wonders *why* he would have clicked send, a question she writes “must be answered with an alternate word” (16). She then begins to search for the alternate word in her mind, and through the “guts and spine of / bone-dry pages” (19-20) of her aged Lakota dictionary. Eventually she concedes, writing that “I will not find it again, this / countersign I failed to seize in our language for *crying in a long sustained man- / ner, some sometimes endless. > Gone.*” (21-23; original emphasis). The word, evoked in her memory by the “Z” of her friend’s face, and consigned to remain lost to history and memory, is metonymic for the loss of the Lakota Sioux languages, the loss of which Long Soldier acutely feels the pain. The word *tókǰǰ’ǰ* describes this loss, a signifier which she describes as a “shell and husk, the outer word” (24). Not simply metonymic for the loss of language, *tókǰǰ’ǰ* also represents other losses, such as human connection, cultural connection, and the shock of violent loss. She describes the friend as someone she has not “seen for years” (14), a statement which seems to compound the grief she expresses in “Tókǰǰ’ǰ.” The close connection between the violence committed against her friend, and the memories of lost language which this evokes, suggests that violence and history is inextricably linked in the consciousness of Native Americans. In “Tókǰǰ’ǰ,” Long Soldier thus exposes the dual consciousness of the Native American mind, which must exist in the dominant, colonial culture, while desperately grasping for vestiges of threatened ancestral culture, as delicate as the brittle pages of an aged dictionary.

In “Wakǰǰyapi,” she expands on the use of glosses as a poetic device. Formatted like a dictionary entry with several offered descriptions of the word, “Wakǰǰyapi” begins with “1. a word commonly used for coffee;” (1). However, the second line begins “2. formally meaning anything that is boiled.” (2), followed by 18 lines of descriptive examples. Long Soldier explains *wakǰǰyapi* “As in the rabbit in the cage outside in the sun. As in / the heat, as it boiled the rabbit was dead. As in the checks and bank statements Momma / boiled in the

kitchen. As in the riddance of debt; a ceremony, a boiling.” (12-14). The contrast, both in length and in description between the two entries represents what Emily Apter refers to as “the differential weight assigned by cultures to common cognates [which] is also registered in the distribution of pages to ideas” (35). The first description describes the common usage, entirely straightforward and clear in its meaning. The second, however, represents all that the common usage conceals, the differential weight that endows the signifier with deep and rich layers of culturally specific meaning.

By establishing “Wakǰályapi” as a dictionary entry, Long Soldier is working within a traditionally Western format while subverting its form. The contrast between the descriptions emphasises the tension that occurs when the dominant, Western cultural paradigm, clashes with the Native American one. In the long, formal explanation of wakǰályapi, Long Soldier illuminates the rich linguistic diversity that is threatened with extinction in North America. In it, she details different colloquial and folkloric uses of wakǰályapi, which in turn lead to a stream of associations, detailing aspects of traditional Native American lifestyles. The implication that such semantic richness cannot be contained or described by a dictionary is metaphoric for what has been lost with the decline of Native American oral culture post-contact. The dictionary proves an inadequate method for representing the culture of language, its format hegemonic in the face of immense diversity. David Murray argues that what contemporary readers encounter as “Indian literature is already some steps removed from [oral culture], in that it is in textualized form and is either translated or written by someone who is some distance from that tribe and oral situation” (69). In “Wakǰályapi,” Long Soldier attempts to bridge the gap between a threatened oral culture and contemporary written literature, by representing the heteroglossic definitions of the word wakǰályapi, a distinctly Native American signifier, in a traditionally Western discourse.

In “Waǰpániča,” Long Soldier again uses the device of a Lakotan signifier to explore the limitations of language as a means of expression and representation. In the poem she contemplates the grammatical structure of a letter written to her husband. Of importance are the commas which divide the text of her letter and dominate the rhythms of her life. She textually represents the punctuation, writing “Alone / alone I instruct *sit down* comma *eat up* comma and I write in detail to hush an echo comma / the rupture of a fault line.” (5-7; original emphasis). In the second stanza, she provides a gloss for the reader, informing the subject of her contemplation: “I wanted to write about waǰpániča a word translated into English as *poor* comma which means / more precisely *to be destitute to have nothing of one’s own*.” (8-9; original emphasis), emphasising her operation within two distinct languages, and

two modes of expression. The implications of the word *waḥpániča*, however, leave her unable to approach the subject, to “swing a worn hammer at poverty” (10), prompting her to ask “what else is there to hear?” (11). The conscious shift from written expression, which leaves the poet wanting, to the oral and aural mode of expressing and receiving information, highlight the fact that, for Long Soldier, meaning and intention cannot be fully expressed through written language. At the heart of “*Waḥpániča*” is a sense of longing for the traditional oral culture of her tribe, as the written literacy of Western culture fails as a vehicle for representation. Colonial initiatives to culturally assimilate Native Americans through English literacy are here exposed as a failure. In place of a wholly assimilated group of people, is one which must instead operate on the borders of a fractured consciousness and identity, unable to fully express themselves in either English or Native American modes of representation.

For Long Soldier, the grammar which orders poetry and makes it intelligible to the reader, also conceals the vitality of the producing voice. This could be viewed through the dichotomy of traditional oral narratives and contemporary written ones, and the attempt of contemporary Native American authors to reproduce the rhythms of speech in written literary narratives. Long Soldier demonstrates the disconnect felt between the two modes of storytelling, writing: “then a friend remarks When we speak comma question marks dashes lines little black dots / don’t flash or jiggle in the air before us comma in truth it’s the rise and fall of the voice we must / capture to mean a thing in writing.” (17-19). In “*Waḥpániča*,” she displays an acute awareness of the limitations of contemporary Native American poets, who *must* operate in the dominant English discourse, by way of their (statistically-probable) monolingualism, and their desire to connect with the centuries of Native oral tradition of their ancestors.

In the second half of “*Waḥpániča*,” Long Soldier interrogates the meaning of *waḥpániča*, specific to the Native American tribes of her subject. Although never mentioned by name, it can be assumed that when Long Soldier writes of the poverty endemic to reservations, she is referencing the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, where she was raised. The dual consciousness of expression which is evoked by the signifier *waḥpániča* also prompts Long Soldier to explore the duality of place on the reservation, and the lifestyle of poverty faced by the Native Americans who live there, separated only by a border from their more affluent, American neighbours. “Yet I feel forced to decide if *poor* really means brittle hands dust and candy stained mouths” (25), Long Soldier queries. In an urgent sentence devoid of any punctuation, she continues:

my sweeping chill hantavirus the ripe smell a horse chewed ripped its backbone exposed  
 the swarms of do-gooders their goodly photos the heat the cold the drunks we pass waving dol-  
 lar bills again tonight a bang on the door the stories no one here can stop the urge to tell I am  
 buried in. (28-31)

The “swarm of do-gooders” recalls the benevolent but ignorant tourist of Native American cultures, whom Pico observes elegizing how “*it’s horrible how their culture was destroyed*” (871; original emphasis). The “do-gooders” observe safely from their non-Native vantage point, expressing outrage that such conditions exist alongside theirs, reinforcing the duality of contemporary Native American life, existing at the side-lines of American culture and concern. Long Soldier’s assertion that she is “buried” in these stories, and the details of reservation life that are stacked upon one another like an unstoppable flow, are reminiscent of Gross’ descriptions of PASS. Disease, hunger, alcoholism, and sub-standard living conditions all conspire to lend waḥpániča an urgent quality. Long Soldier writes that “waḥpániča means to have *nothing* of one’s own” (36; original emphasis), a nothing characterised by the poverty of money, of culture, and of language. In the final stanza of “Waḥpániča,” the semantic meaning of waḥpániča becomes inseparable from Long Soldier’s sense-of-self. She writes “I beg from a dictionary to learn our word for *poor* comma in a language I dare to call *my lan- / guage comma who am I*” (44-45; original emphasis). The destitution that waḥpániča represents is a painful awareness for Long Soldier of the destitution of her language, both English and Lakota. As means of expression, neither can fully represent the meaning contained in poetry, and thus an abyss is formed in which Long Soldier must attempt to operate. She concludes with the claim that waḥpániča is “a spill-over translation for how I cannot speak / my mind comma the meta-phrasal ache of being *language poor*” (46-47; original emphasis). The financial poverty suggested by waḥpániča also represents the poverty of language experienced by so many Native Americans.

The final poem and focal point of the first part of *Whereas* is “38,” a lengthy poem which represents a departure from Long Soldier’s poetics, and a divergent move into the discourse that dominates the second and third parts of the collection. “38” begins:

Here, the sentence will be respected.

I will compose each sentence with care, by minding what the rules of writing dictate.

For example, all sentences will begin with capital letters.

Likewise, the history of the sentence will be honoured by ending each one with appropriate punctuation such as a period or question mark, thus bringing the idea to (momentary) completion. (1-5)

These first lines of “38” function as a creative manifesto to the poem, demonstrating that Long Soldier will take an approach to verse that is in contradistinction to the previous poems



in *Whereas*. The insistence of orderly grammar, syntax, and punctuation in “38” emphasise the methods by which Long Soldier composes and conceptualises her poetry, with the implication that her verse disregards the rules of English diction. The lack of punctuation in “Waḥpániča,” for example, can be seen as a rejection of the “(momentary) completion” of the sentence, and a resistance to the static quality that punctuation can instil in a text.

Long Soldier addresses the reader, stating “[y]ou may like to know, I do not consider this a “creative piece.”” (6), establishing a clear border between her previous poetry and “38,” in both form and content. Fast claims that contemporary writers foreground dialogism through the “use of multiple levels of registers of discourse, and allusions to historical events or cultural references in contexts that foreground contrasting interpretations” (513). In “38,” Long Soldier’s carefully considered verse subverts the discourse of official governmental documents, by working within its form. She signals her intent to write unobstructive sentences with clarity, founded on clear adherence to the rules of English grammar, with the intention that interpretation will not be necessary, or even allowed. As with Fast’s estimation, the dialogism of “38” soon reveals the contrasting interpretations of history, a dichotomy that is carefully created by Long Soldier. The 38 of the title is a reference to The Dakota 38, “thirty-eight Dakota men who were executed by hanging, under orders / from President Abraham Lincoln.” (13-14). She states that “[t]o date, this is the largest “legal” mass execution in US history.” (15). Here, the use of speech marks which enclose the word legal provide emphasis, inviting the reader to scrutinise its inclusion. As a device, this instance can be approached along with her insistence that “38” is not a “creative piece” (6), and the assurance that events will not be “dramatized for an “interesting” read” (8). All three examples are highly suggestive, their inclusion in speech marks suggesting an irony or a duality of meaning. Shortly later, as she endeavours to explain the history behind the hanging and the Sioux Uprising which led to it, she explains that “During the 1800s, when the US expanded territory, they “purchased” land from the Dakota / people as well as other tribes.” (33-34). As with the other examples, both the use and concept of purchased is queried, with Long Soldier immediately providing an alternative interpretation of the word. She writes “But another way to understand that sort of “purchase” is: Dakota leaders ceded land to the US / government in exchange for money or goods, but most importantly, the safety of their people.” (35-36). By offering another way to understand the sentence, Long Soldier directs the reader’s attention to the heteroglossia of the signifiers, emphasising how meaning may differ dependent on one’s vantage point. In treaties and in official historical narratives, Native American land is commonly described as being purchased by the U.S. government, implying

a mutually agreed upon and completed transaction. Working within the same type of discourse, suggestive of legally-binding language, Long Soldier begins to undermine its authority as an objective purveyor of truth, by exposing the duplicitous nature of language often used to describe Native American history. Of the “purchase,” she writes that “others call the entire negotiation “trickery.”” (39), highlighting exactly how language can obfuscate, especially when used between those with no shared language or understanding of events.

This obfuscation in official language is apparent as Long Soldier explains her difficulties in “unravelling the terms of these treaties, given the legal speak and congressional language.” (42-43). In order to bridge the gap in comprehension created by the legalese of treaties, she provides glosses for words which are better explained with other, less ambiguous signifiers: in discussing the abrogation of treaties, she includes the word “broken” in parenthesis (44), as a qualifier to abrogation, a potentially duplicitous word. Similarly, she writes that “just seven years later, in 1858, the northern portion was ceded (taken) and the southern / portion was (conveniently) allotted, which reduced Dakota land to a stark ten-mile tract.” (49-50). In translating the language commonly found in treaties and official histories, she attempts to demystify the aura of multiplicity concealed in the language. Her unambiguous method of approach aims to re-tell the official story of The Dakota 38, as well as all non-Native dominated discourses of Native American history, as Long Soldier is very aware of the power of language to influence and shape history.

The composition of sentences in “38,” parodic of the style of treaties, abrogates the power of this formal congressional language, by exposing in its verse the catastrophic effects of these official negotiations. Long Soldier appropriates the discourse to her own uses, reconstituting “the language of the center,” and in the process of exposing the events which led to the largest mass execution in history, “marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege” (Ashcroft et al. 38). The Dakota people, she explains, were promised money in the treaty, “for the land the Dakota ceded; for living within as- / signed boundaries (a reservation); and for relinquishing rights to their vast hunting territory / which, in turn, made Dakota people dependent on other means to survive: money.” (57-59). The Dakota were not paid, were refused credit by government traders, and with no legal right “to hunt beyond their ten-mile tract of land, Dakota people / began to starve.” (65-66). The colonial privilege which is manifested in the control of historical narratives sympathetic to the colonial power is attacked in “38,” as Long Soldier highlights the rarely-recognized sequence of government-sanctioned events which led to the Sioux Uprising. In abolishing the “trickery” (39) characteristic of non-Native discourse about Native American people, she plainly states:

The Dakota people were starving.

The Dakota people starved.

In the preceding sentence, the word “starved” does not need italics for emphasis.

One should read “The Dakota people starved” as a straightforward and plainly stated fact.

(67-70)

The formality of the discourse, of which Long Soldier claims a sense of responsibility to the “orderly sentence; conveyor of thought” (9), exposes an undercurrent of anger and vitality, which its form ought to suppress. The incompatibility between her composition of “38” and the narrative it tells is metonymic for the tension that arises when a colonial discourse has control over the dissemination of narratives, especially when the subject is disenfranchised. In “38,” she suggests that the tension between these non-Native and Native American discourses, incompatible in their politics, will eventually lead to a break-down in representation.

Towards the end of “38,” the ordered structure of the verses’ sentences undergo a reformulation, their physical composition no longer containing the narrative it conveys. Long Soldier recounts the story of Andrew Myrick, a trader who refused to sell to the Dakota, stating “if they are hungry, let them eat grass.” (98). After the Sioux Uprising, Myrick was executed. Long Soldier writes:

When Myrick’s body was found,

his mouth was stuffed with grass. (102-103).

This is the first line break in “38,” and the first stray from the rules of diction outlined the poem’s beginning. The break, forcing a pause and emphasising the figurative weight of the words, constitutes the beginning of the poem: the anthesis to the “creative piece” Long Soldier claims “38” was not. The boundaries erected by the discourse in which Long Soldier begins “38” are traversed and disregarded completely. She writes that she is “inclined to call this act by the Dakota warriors a poem” (104), as “*“Real” poems do not “really” require words*” (107; original emphasis), longing for a return to oral culture. By the poem’s conclusion, the boundaries of the discourse, the diction to which Long Soldier initially pledges allegiance, and even the boundaries erected by language to enclose the Dakota people, are all broken. She writes:

Sometimes, when in a circle, if I wish to exit, I must leap.

And let the body swing.

From the platform

## Out

to the grasses.

(112-116)

In these closing lines, the verse manifests textually a physical action, the words appearing to swing back and forth from the source, finally freeing itself as the narrator lands in “the grasses.” The freedom represented by the movement in the verse is a physical emancipation from the restrictions of the poem’s discourse, a traditionally Western form. In freeing her verse from the prescriptive diction to which she is initially married to in “38,” Long Soldier demonstrates how Native American poets attempt to wrest narrative control and agency over their history, often by utilising and subverting dominant modes of expression.

Part Two of *Whereas* is titled “Whereas.” In a preface, Long Soldier outlines the events which prompted the collection’s composition. In 2009, she explains, US President Barack Obama “signed the Congressional Resolution of Apology to Native Americans.” (1-2). No tribal leaders were invited to receive the apology, and President Obama never read it aloud. Five months later, however, the senator for Kansas read the apology to “a gathering of five tribal leaders, though there are more than 560 federally recognized tribes in the US” (5-6). As Long Soldier goes on to explain:

My response is directed to the Apology’s delivery, as well as the language, crafting, and arrangement of the written document. I am a citizen of the United States and an enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, meaning I am a citizen of the Oglala Lakota Nation – and in this dual citizenship, I must work, I must eat, I must mother, I must friend, must listen, I must observe, constantly I must live. (8-12)

The preface to Part Two functions as an explanation of her ethos, and furnishes the reader with knowledge of events, integral to a complete and complex understanding of the poet’s artistic and political motivation. The titling of the poems as “Whereas Statements” provides a hermeneutic basis for analysis, considering that the reader can easily access the congressional apology, and its whereas statements. Long Soldier’s response stresses the duality of her experience, as both an American Citizen and a member of the Oglala Sioux tribe, endowing her verse with a renewed sense of two-ness.

The first part of the official congressional apology is comprised of twenty whereas statements, each detailing a statement of fact regarding the historical relationship between Native Americans and European colonizers. For example, the apology reads “Whereas for millennia, Native Peoples have honoured, protected, and stewarded this land we cherish”

(Congress.gov). According to the legal dictionary, “When *whereas* is placed at the beginning of a legislative bill, it means ‘because’ and is followed by an explanation for the enactment of the legislation” (“Whereas”). While Long Soldier’s *whereas* statements match the congressional statements in number, they are not individual responses: rather, each is composed in a similar discourse, appropriating the congressional style, while subverting and reconstructing the content. If “*whereas*” is to be understood as a legal synonym for “because,” each of Long Soldier’s ‘*whereas* statements’ details an autobiographical moment depicting the effects of colonialism on her life, the ‘because’ of living in a colony. The abstraction of the congressional *whereas* statements, so firmly rooted in the distant past is reformed in the immediate subjectivity of her verse.

“Whereas One” establishes the tone for Part Two, a suspicion of language as a container for meaning. “Pages are cavernous places, white at entrance, black in absorption”

(11) Long Soldier writes, before concluding with the tercet:

If I’m transformed by language, I am often  
Crouched in footnote or blazing in title.

Where in the body do I begin; (13-15)

The notion of physicality being interpreted as instances of poetry established in “38” is again evoked, as she ponders the connection between the language of representation and the self. The “cavernous” page is an unforgiving landscape, unsympathetic to the concerns of the poet. As in “Diction,” where she states her origins are “*from a small world a lifted paragraph*” (25; original emphasis), the white page is an oppressive space, which figuratively relegates her to a small and incomplete space of representation. Her uncertainty in how to approach language in her ‘*whereas* statements’ is evidenced in the question of the final line. Her words display her uncertainty in using English, and a suspicion of the medium which can be traced to her appropriation of the double-speak of the congressional *whereas* statement. Ashcroft et al discuss the role of English in postcolonial texts, arguing that they “distance themselves from the universalist view of the function of language as representation” (42). As seen in both “Tókhǎh’aj” and “Wakhályapi,” Long Soldier questions the function of language as representation, casting a critical eye on the logocentrism of Western culture.

In “Whereas Six,” the ability of language to conceal authentic expression is explored. Long Soldier begins by writing “WHEREAS my eyes land on the shoreline of ‘the arrival of Europeans in North America / opened a new chapter in the history of Native Peoples.’” (1-2). Using an intertext from the congressional apology, the passive voice of its construction is foregrounded, the mundanity of the phrase obscuring untold horrors of centuries of

colonization. The “new chapter” as a Western metaphor, recalling the novel and narrativization, to describe the destruction of cultures that did not utilize alphabetic literacy, is an irony not lost on Long Soldier. The metaphoric shoreline of the text indicates a border, both between the incompatible material states of land and sea, but also a border of understanding. The shoreline is a barrier between realities, and a site of disconnect between what is written in the apology, and the reality which the text conceals. Beginning “Whereas Six” with this intertext produces a wariness around the representational abilities of the English language. She describes her daughter being helped into their house by her friends after tripping and scraping her hands and knees whilst playing. From her arms and legs “deep red streams” left “trails on white tile” (5,6). Long Soldier does not recognize her daughter’s expression however, writing that “she braved a new behaviour, feigned a grin – I couldn’t name it but I could spot it.” (7-8). The poverty of language articulated in “Tókħaǰ’aj” is present here, as she fails to ascribe a name to an emotion to which she observes. She tells her daughter, “*stop, my girl. If you’re hurting, cry,*” and that “*in our home in our family we are ourselves, real feelings. Be true*” (8, 11; original emphasis). The safety of the home in which her daughter is urged to cry without reservation is established as a haven from what lies beyond its boundaries, where the statement “*she just fell, she’s bleeding!*” (5; original emphasis) requires a prescribed reaction of hardiness, and a brush-off of any pain that is concealed in the adverb “just.” This scene, so surely normal in the life of a parent, conceals within it a recognition of the border between expression and what is *being* expressed, and a rejection of language as the ultimate arbiter of representation. The border is the shoreline, and the innate failure of the congressional whereas statements to adequately represent the reality of Native American colonization.

More than an abstraction, the language used in the congressional whereas statements actively works to separate the Euramericans and the Native Americans addressed. In “Whereas Nine,” Long Soldier responds to a statement claiming “Native Peoples are endowed by their / Creator with certain unalienable rights” (1-2), the pronoun of ‘their’ announcing the division between the statement’s authors and the statement’s subject. The duality of her consciousness is here officially ratified by those who forced its fracture. She describes a violent, urgent impact with the statement’s diction, writing “Yet I smash head-on into this specific / differentiation: *the* Creator vs. *their* Creator” (9-10), demanding an explanation. This passage recalls Ashcroft et al’s assertion that notions of difference are constructed in postcolonial texts. Through carefully constructed syntax, this notion is established, and the core belief in the fundamental difference between Native Americans and

Euramerican's is propagated. "[H]ow do / I language a collision arrived at through separation?" (9-10), writes Long Soldier, with a desperation that betrays the frustration felt by many Native American writers who write in the dominant English paradigm.

"Whereas Nine" addresses the crux of Long Soldier's argument in her 'whereas statements': that the congressional whereas statements are a cynical political exercise, manipulating language, and that they are ultimately worthless. As she accurately recognizes in "Whereas Nine," the grammatical construction of the text deliberately precludes the government from any legal liability. So, while the official apology recognizes a "long history of official depredations and ill-conceived policies," (Congress.gov), including land stolen, treaties broken, and monetary compensation not honoured, no Native American tribe will have legal recourse due to their dealings with the government being officially recognized as illegal. In essence, what Long Soldier directs the reader's attention towards is how truth can be easily distorted through language, and how the relationship between Native Americans and their colonizers as represented through language is rarely, if ever, unbiased. "Whereas Twelve" begins with the statement "WHEREAS I tire" (1), expressing the fatigue of one bound to a language that fails to express fully. "How much must I labor / to signify what's real" (12-13) Long Soldier writes – a question formed as a statement, the exasperated tone requiring no answer. She describes how she may "climb the backs of languages, ride them into exhaustion" (15), emphasizing the physicality of her tussle with language, as she attempts to represent what is real. Of truth, Ashcroft et al write that "language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth,' 'order,' and 'reality' become established" (7). The English language of the official discourse that Long Soldier seeks to subvert in "Whereas" perpetuates the power from whence it came, establishing its source as an arbiter of truth and order, a notion she then quickly begins to dismantle in her own whereas statements. The complicated and distrustful relationship between Native Americans and written English has its roots in the centuries of dealings with the American government. "In addition to the civilizing mission of Christianity, words in the form of treaties, laws, deeds, and tax documents have historically been used as tools of Native dispossession," Fitzgerald and Wyss argue (275), and Long Soldier demonstrates that this is not a practice relegated to history, but one occurring to this day.

The potential multiplicities of language and its effects are closely related to the formation of identity and to the practice of self-representation through written language. Like Pico, Long Soldier rejects essentialist categories and the Manifest Manners which seek to

misrepresent her. In “Whereas Two,” she describes feeling a “sticky current of Indian emptiness” (3), in the same vein that Pico envisions a “sticky kind of ancestral sadness” (552), being Native American in “occupied America” (553). Both poets descriptions, strikingly similar, denote their negative feelings as sticky, an unusual adjective which conjures an uncomfortably oppressive feeling, impossible to remove all traces. Long Soldier’s feeling is prompted by a note in the Oxford English Dictionary’s entry for “Indian,” which warns to “*not use Indian or Red Indian to talk about American native peoples, as these / terms are now outdated; use American Indian instead.*” (6-7; original emphasis).

Contemplating this note with a friend, Long Soldier writes “the terms American Indian parts our conversation like a hollow bloated / boat that is not ours that neither my friend nor I want to board, knowing it will never take us / anywhere but to rot.” (10-12). The metaphor which she creates represents an inevitable decay if one were to adopt the term American Indian. In this passage, the potential for self-representation is denied, and Long Soldier is faced with a distorted image of her identity, constructed and propagated by those who sit atop the hierarchical structure of power, and who define with a perceived authority.

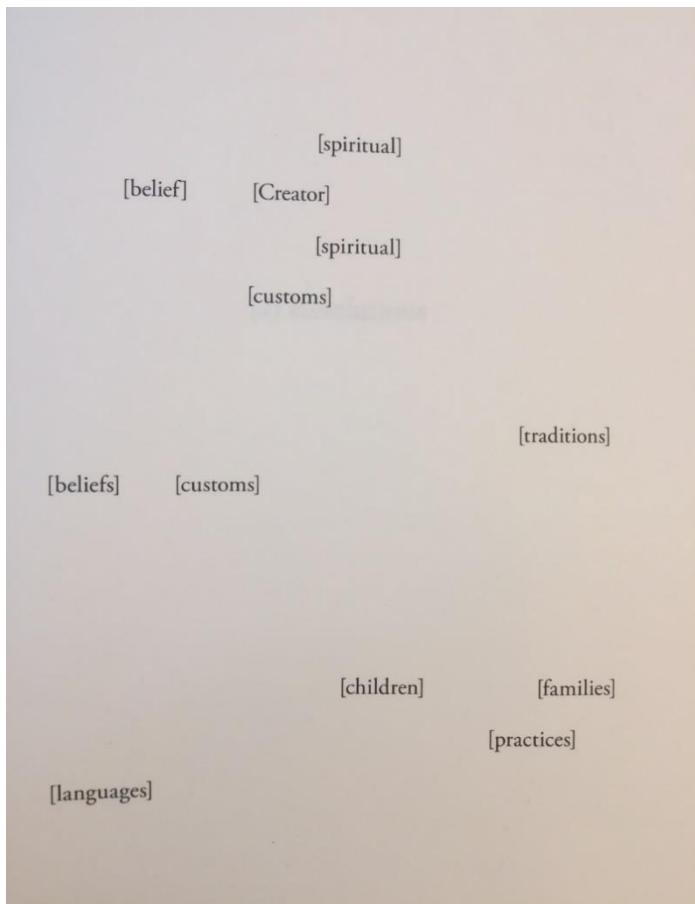
In “Whereas Thirteen,” she writes that she is “reminded of the linguistic impossibility of identity” (21). Worrying that she will be unable to teach her daughter “what it is to be Lakota” (1) due to her piecemeal knowledge of the language, Long Soldier reaches the conclusion that language, either English or Lakota, won’t ever be able to encapsulate and represent the infinitely complicated tapestry of history, heritage, and experience – in other words, everything that converges to form one’s identity. Her investigation into the potential shortcomings of her monolingualism recalls the argument made by Ashcroft et al that language does not embody culture (57). Hence, Long Soldier’s proficiency in Lakota should not pose any obstacle to her daughter’s cultural education. After expressing her initial panic, she finds comfort in the knowledge that actions, and *not* language, will teach her daughter the importance of her Native American heritage. Her father sings traditional songs to her in Diné, his tribal language, while she observes her reactions, watching “her *be* in multiple musics” (6). Ashcroft et al theorise this complicated relationship between language and reality as follows:

The ‘world’ as it exists ‘in’ language is an unfolding reality which owes its relationship to language to the fact that language interprets the world in practice, not to some imputed referentiality. Language exists, therefore, neither before the fact nor after the fact but in the fact. 44



Ashcroft et al are discussing postcolonial texts, and this approach refutes the logocentric bias of Western cultures. In “Whereas Thirteen,” Long Soldier demonstrates this realisation that language only *describes* her actions and her culture, and does not embody them. In this way, as language does not wield any hierarchical power over expression and representation, her tribal culture, from which she felt a growing estrangement due to her monolingualism, reveals itself anew, unburdened from what she previously referred to as the “ache of being *language poor*” (“Waḥpániča” 47).

This scepticism of language as a mode of representation, especially in the discourse of the congressional whereas statements, is taken up by Long Soldier in “Whereas Nineteen.” Opening the poem with a critique of the official statement’s ability in “re- / structuring complex / ideas into simpler / ones” (3-5), she announces her intention to physically cordon ideas off in “safety” (10) in parenthesis, as a measure against “the threat / of re- / ductive / [thinking]:” (12-15). The structure and format of “Whereas Nineteen” is significant. Long Soldier’s ‘statement’ is featured on one page, opposite to the federal whereas statements which are taken as intertexts. The statements, concerning a Native American connection to the land, and the negative impact of the General Allotment Act and the Indian Boarding School program, are punctuated by white space, large gaps in parenthesis where it is apparent key words have been deleted. “Whereas Twenty” is printed on the following page; however, opposite this are the federal statement’s missing words, positioned to fill in the gaps their absence left.



(Long Soldier 85)

The effect is disorientating, as nouns float out of context on the white of the page, an imprint of a poem that has already ended. Many are repeated, and all are reductive, appearing like buzzwords that describe stereotypical assumptions about Native American culture. Cordoned into parenthesis, their isolation brings into focus the vast empty space of the page around them, metaphoric for the lack of authentic, diverse representation of the more than 500 Native American tribes. As in “Diction,” Long Soldier exploits the empty space of the page, which in its suggestiveness becomes a part of the poem. She disrupts the flow of the text, and attacks its comprehensibility, forcing the reader to confront preconceptions of how language functions as a representative tool. Fast argues that “the use of English in and of itself may constitute a border crossing” (514), and as Long Soldier’s chosen medium of communication, her use of English deconstructs the borders created by language and diction, enabling a border crossing between two opposing modes of representation. The disjointed format of the poem, spanning four pages that include another poem, demonstrate how easily borders of form can be rearranged when placed closely under scrutiny. “Whereas Nineteen” loses the structure that has thus far dominated Long Soldier’s ‘whereas statements,’ which are predicated on the organizational structure of the congressional whereas statements. This

conclusion to the whereas statements functions as an introduction to the second section of Part Two, titled “Resolutions.”

“Resolutions,” in which Long Soldier responds to the official apologies’ “resolution of apology to native peoples of the united states” (Congress.gov), radically subverts the form and diction of the official apology, wholly restructuring it as intertext, generating opposing meaning. The first striking change she makes is to change the voice of the resolutions. The official list of resolutions is prefaced with the note that “The United States, acting through Congress” (Congress.gov), followed by a numerical list, each beginning with an active verb such as recognizes, commends, and apologizes. Long Soldier instead begins each of her resolutions with the first-person personal pronoun I, immediately forcing a reconsideration of the text and its subjective meaning to the speaker. In “Resolution Two,” the power of the written word is brought into relief, and its contentious relationship with Native American tribes is established as a metaphor on the page. The official resolution states that it “honours Native Peoples for the thousands of years that they have stewarded and protected this land” (Congress.gov). Long Soldier formats this intertext to the left side of the page, each word beginning a new line. The words “this land” spread across the page like a territory, claiming the bare white of the page. Somewhere in-between, however, lies a small outline of a square. The square is oppressively small in stature, representing the ever-decreasing borders of the reservations into which Native American tribes were quickly and legally forced post-contact, as well as the shrinking representation of contemporary Native American cultures in the U.S. The irony of the official resolution is highlighted, and Long Soldier reforms the words to demonstrate a pictorial representation of what is concealed by the official discourse. Likewise, in “Resolution Three” she proves how easily one can manipulate language and how a simple syntactic reorganization exposes the weaknesses of the statement. It is the syntactic organization of the signifier which endows it with meaning, as the signifier does not contain any inherent meaning. Recalling “Whereas One” in which the poet exclaims “If I’m transformed by language, I am often / crouched in footnote or blazing in title” (13-14), she reformats the official resolution, relegating much of the text to literally crouch in footnotes. The physical separation of the resolution establishes two new, grammatically correct and comprehensible sentences, emphasising both the malleability of language, and the corruptibility of representation. Utilising the “cut-up” technique of rearranging text to generate new meaning, the text which dominates the page now reads:

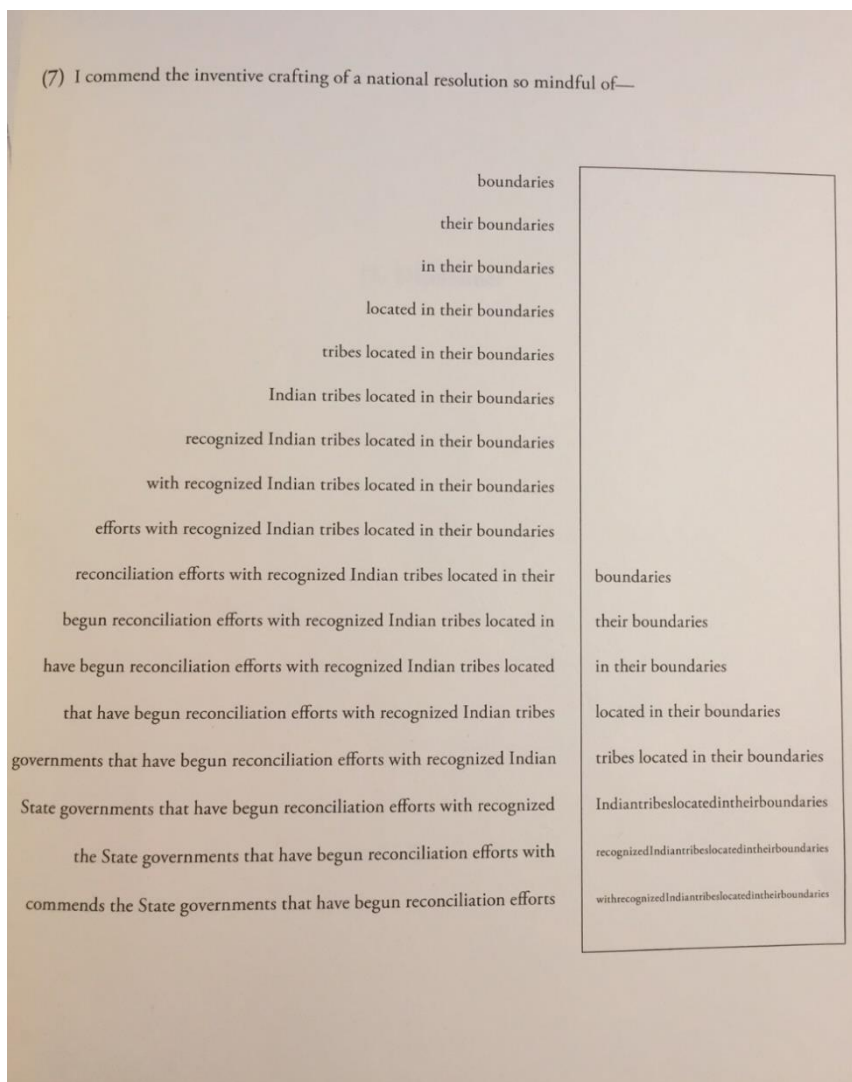
I  
recognize

that  
 official  
 ill-  
 breaking of  
 the  
 Indian (1-8)

The 'new' resolution now conveys an altered meaning, elucidating in bare terms the effects of the colonization of the Native American people and their land. By deconstructing the official resolutions, she exposes the multiplicity of perspectives that official discourses attempt to disguise and reduce to a single perspective. Here, the dual consciousness of Long Soldier, and by extension of the Native American mind, recognizes how the English language, long since an oppressive tool of European colonizers, continues to subjugate Native Americans by controlling and misrepresenting events in official public discourse. By appropriating the text of this discourse and altering it to re-present its content, she strips it of its power by abrogating its representative hold over Native American lives. Ashcroft et al argue that "the crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that postcolonial writing define itself by seizing the language of the center and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place" (38). Long Soldier's astute awareness of her position as a Native American citizen who exists on the borders of culture, language, and place, enables her to adapt the discourse of the apology to represent a uniquely Native American position and origin.

In "Resolution Six" Long Soldier writes "I acknowledge a plurality of ways / to resist oppression" (20, 22), recognising the potential power of her poetics to resist the dominant colonial paradigm. "Resolution Six" marks a slight departure from the previous resolutions, as it incorporates two other intertexts from two Native American activists, regarding the protests at the Standing Rock Indian Reservation over the construction of Dakota Access Pipeline. These intertexts, conceptualised so that they interlink with one another side by side, represent a protest against the official resolution's claims that an acknowledgment of the apology from the president is necessary "in order to bring healing to this land" (Congress.gov). The meaning of the official resolution is in direct conflict with what the other intertexts reveal: that despite the apology's resolution, Native American land continues to be under threat from the federal government. The juxtaposition of opposing sentiments is constructed to reveal the reality of contemporary Native American life, and to form a literary demonstration of the dual consciousness that dominates the perceptions of many Native

Americans. The duality of place is represented in the clash between the official discourse's description of land now under the protective healing purview of the powers that-be, and the alternative reality put forth by the Native American activists, who describe attempting to protect the land from the apocalyptic threat of the proposed pipeline. "Resolution Six" demonstrates that the intersections of language, place, and identity, are intricately linked in contemporary Native American poetry. In a final critique on the boundaries that still exist between Native Americans and Euramericans, "Resolution Seven" is crafted as a visual metaphor for this separation.



(Long Soldier 97)

The resolution's text begins with the final word of the official resolution. At each new line, the previous word of the resolution is added, eventually forcing part of the text into the box, decreasing in size so that it is included on the same line. The effect of this boxing is clear and unambiguous: the government of the United States is unable to conceal in its language the boundaries it continues to erect around Native American tribes. Long Soldier's repetition of

“boundaries” and the striking visual effect created here demonstrates that tribes will continue to be thought of as things that *need* to remain within boundaries, be it the boundaries of reservations, or of representation. The final line, which is enclosed in the lines of the box, is so small that it verges on unreadable, and is metonymic for the near erasure of Native American representation in public discourse.

Through the deconstruction and reconstruction of intertexts in Long Soldier’s resolution poems, she reminds the reader that boundaries meant to enclose, govern, and prescribe actions, are also meant to be traversed and subverted. The English language that has for so long influenced the lives of Native Americans, dominating the formation of identity in public discourse, can be effectively appropriated to disrupt hierarchies of power and representation. By working within a Western medium, Long Soldier deconstructs Western concepts of Native American identity through subversive form and diction, replacing it with an autonomous representation of contemporary Native American life and identity.

## Conclusion

In the last two years, Tommy Pico and Layli Long Soldier have published collections of poetry that are focussed on the issue of contemporary Native American identity. Through a comparative analysis of these works and others by Native American poets, this thesis has aimed to answer how Native American poets construct autonomous representations of identity, and how this can be construed as an act of resistance to Euramerican misrepresentations of Native American cultures in the public discourse. This thesis has aimed to demonstrate how Native American poets that work within the dominant paradigm reclaim power over their representation through the subversion of language, form, and expectations. Through the texts chosen, this thesis has hypothesised that contemporary Native American poetry is characterised by duality of representation. A close analysis of language, place, and identity in these poems has demonstrated that contemporary Native American poets display an awareness of the duality that characterises their lives as a colonized people, and it is around these borders that a uniquely Native American poetics is established.

In the first chapter, *Nature Poem* by Tommy Pico is read comparatively with a selection of secondary texts by Native American poets. Through several linguistic and literary techniques, Pico proves that writing and speaking in English is a task fraught with tension, due to the dual consciousness of being Native American in a colonized country. *Nature Poem* is dialogic in its form, in its evocation of the audience, the reproduction of oral culture through techniques such as power rhythms, and the use of double-voiced discourse. Pico explores the impact of monolingualism on his identity and interrogates the implications of writing in English, as well as the hierarchies of power involved in *who* speaks. Through a myriad of techniques, chiefly the abrogation and appropriation of English, Pico proves that a resistance to the imperial dominance of English is a key step in the decolonization of Native American poetry.

In representations of place, Pico depicts an America that, for the Native American, is characterised by duality. The loss of land taken from Native American tribes is reflected as a deprivation of psychic strength, and Pico frequently highlights the presence of absence that is the feature of much of contemporary Native American poetry. However, this thesis demonstrates that for Pico and his contemporaries, Post-Apocalyptic Stress Syndrome does not necessarily result in poetry that is devoid of hope, but the opposite: stories of cultural survival dominate the poetry of Native Americans.

In representations of identity, this thesis exhibits how Pico's verse is populated with acts of Survivance and resistance to Manifest Manners, all enacted by Pico's postindian figure. Pico and the other poets demonstrate that their identity is characterised by the duality of being both American and Native American. In this poetry, it is imperative for the poet to replace Euramerican misrepresentations of identity which dominate the public discourse, with autonomous representations of identity.

In chapter two, this thesis analyses how Layli Long Soldier's *Whereas* disrupts the hierarchical dominance of English in the public discourse. Long Soldier explores how language has shaped representations of Native Americans for centuries and replaces them with authentic representations of Native American history and life. In *Whereas*, Long Soldier rejects the position of the English language as the privileged arbiter of truth and representation, abrogating the power it holds over Native American representation. Following this is the appropriation of the form, which reinstates Long Soldier's voice to the center of power from the periphery. In *Whereas*, Long Soldier proves that the duality which characterises Native American poetry is not a detriment, but a key aspect of Native American poetics, enabling the poet to resist enduring misrepresentations. This thesis demonstrates that Long Soldier achieves this through the reconceptualization of the poetic form and a subversion of English diction. Long Soldier's use of intertext, her play with the white space of the page, and embodiment and subversion of other discourses contributes to a poetics that is concerned with the ongoing sovereignty of Native American cultural works.

While none of the poetry discussed explicitly makes use of the Red English of this thesis' title, the term provides a useful metaphor by situating the language used by the poets at a border, or metaphorical point of contact. The dual consciousness displayed by Pico and Long Soldier is evidenced in their thematic struggle with language – both English and indigenous – and the political and cultural implications of choosing to create in them. It is on these border that a Native American poetics is established. Contemporary Native American poetry utilizes and subverts Euramerican forms and expectations, bridging the gap between discourses, and creating a new mode of understanding that is familiar to both Native American and Euramerican audiences. Through the establishment of this hybrid discourse, the continuation of contemporary Native American cultural sovereignty and autonomy is enabled.

While this thesis has only covered a limited selection of contemporary poetry, it would be difficult to claim that duality of representation is a defining feature of other forms of Native American literature. In an interview with Long Soldier, the poet Joy Harjo (Creek)



expresses her realisation at an early age that language is a responsibility, claiming “we come from cultures that still understand that to speak something is a powerful and dangerous thing, but it can bring incredible beauty” (qtd. in Long Soldier “Beyond Language”). Harjo’s awareness of the dual consciousness that is present in many Native American cultures may certainly correlate to representations of duality across Native American cultural forms.

Despite a history of social and cultural depredation, Native American poetry is a literature of resistance and rejuvenation, one which celebrates its own role in the continuation of Native American cultural output. Linda Hogan (Chickasaw) claims that “poetry is a significant method for decolonizing ourselves” (qtd. in Erdrich, “New Poets” 1), emphasising the vital political and cultural importance of poetry to Native American cultures today.

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