

Event Title:

Redefining Power: Indigenizing the Hybrid Poem

Event Description:

Five Indigenous poets will read their creative work, define hybrid poetry, and discuss the agency Indigenous writers create within the hybrid form. Here, the hybrid poem is a means to dissect a complex history and hold it accountable. Panelists will consider the role of hybridity in their cultures and languages, and how the inclusion of such elements redistributes power. Panelists will also examine the stigma surrounding hybrid forms, and the intersection between archival and creative work.

Event Category: Poetry Craft & Criticism

Event Organizer & Moderator:

Mary Leuna Christensen, an enrolled member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, is a PhD candidate at the University of Southern Mississippi. Mary is Managing Editor of The Swamp Literary Magazine. Her work can be found in Cream City Review, the Laurel Review, Southern Humanities Review, Denver Quarterly, and the Gettysburg Review, among others. She was also named a 2022 Indigenous Nations Poets fellow.

Event Participants:

Halee Kirkwood is a poet and descendant of the Fond Du Lac Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe. They are a 2023.-2025 Jerome Hill Artist Fellow, an inaugural IN-NA-PO fellow, and was a 2019-20 Loft Mentor Series Fellow. Their work has been published in Poetry Magazine, Ecotone, Poem-A-Day, and others.

Tacey M. Atsitty, Diné, is a recipient of numerous prizes and awards. Her work has appeared in The Hopkins Review, Massachusetts Review, Shenandoah, Leavings, Hairstreak Butterfly, etc. Her first book is Rain Scald. She is an inaugural In-Na-Po fellow and a PhD candidate at Florida State University.

Annie Wenstrup received her MFA in creative writing from Stonecoast (Summer 2022). She's a Smithsonian Arctic Studies Fellow and an Indigenous Nations

Poetry Fellow. She serves on the Kachemak Bay Writers' Conference Advisory Committee.

Casandra Lopez, a Chicana/Cahuilla/Tongva/Luiseño writer is the author of the poetry collection *Brother Bullet*. A CantoMundo fellow and Headlands and Hedgebrook resident, she teaches at Northwest Indian College.

Moderator's Opening Remarks:

Good afternoon, and welcome to “Redefining Power: Indigenizing the Hybrid Poem.” My name is Mary Leana Christensen, and I am the panel organizer and moderator. I’m so excited to be here with wonderful friends and panelists Halee Kirkwood, Tacey Atsitty, Annie Wenstrup, and Cassandra Lopez.

Before diving into our panel, a few quick reminders from AWP:

- For those needing to follow along to a written text, please let me know, and a printed copy will be delivered to you.
- Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers.
- Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.
- Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from wearing scented products.
- Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone’s use of an accommodation while at the conference, including for chairs reserved for those with disabilities.

Thank you for being here.

As an avid reader of contemporary Indigenous literature and as an Indigenous person who writes, I kept finding myself thinking about the relationships between Indigeneity and what is often classified as a “hybrid” text. So much of what I was reading could be defined as hybrid. Or more specifically, the work I was reading matched my definition of a hybrid text— a text that somehow breaks away from the expected. The fact that there are Indigenous writers sharing their voices and

perspectives is, in itself, a breaking of the expected. We are still here despite historical and systematic suppression. For me, hybridity allows room for the breaking of restrictions, prescriptive English grammar, and guidelines set by the western canon.

I'll happily expand more on what hybridity looks like in the context of my own work later, for now I'm eager to hear what Halee, Tacey, Annie, and Cassandra have to say.

I want to pose an opening question: How do you define hybridity?

To help exemplify their personal definitions, each panelist has kindly agreed to share a sample of their work with us.

Participant Initial Remarks:

Halee Kirkwood

Hybridity in literature to me is a form that is open to new ways of understanding our relationship with languages - both English and Indigenous languages - a form that encourages play, experimentation, and collaboration. I will share excerpts from a hybrid work-in-progress titled *Dragonfly Writing*, which looks at the ways the English language subjugates members of the Insect Nation while weaving in teachings about Manidoonsag from traditional Ojibwe storytelling. In this work, I use the generosity of form afforded by hybrid literature to tease apart the elements of the English language that represent meaning - particularly looking at punctuation as a symbol for communicating that which continues on, divides, or stops - in an effort to discover new ways to express, honor, and collaborate with Manidoonsag. Through this work-in-progress, I hope to offer new ways for readers to think about writing and living in a more harmonious way, to think of how we can work toward a decolonization of even our smallest interactions.

Tacey Atsitty

In my years of writing and studying poetry, I was often taught to never accompany my poetry with images because “the poem should be able to speak for itself” or because the images take away from the poem. However, oral and visual literatures were the first types of literature for many tribes, including my own: Dine. While growing up I was interested in the poetic devices of refrain and repetition, as they are found in our epistemologies through ceremony and songs. And also the cliff

drawings or pictographs that tell the same stories. At present, I am particularly interested in the narratives of monsters in our creation stories and exploring them through images and short poems, much like Henry Peacham's *Minerva Britanna, 1612*. As I receive a PhD in Creative Writing through an almost all-western lens, I enjoy learning their forms and history and braiding those Western forms together with our ideologies. I have begun and will share about a bestiary of Navajo monsters in the emblematic form, with illustrations of the monsters side-by-side with poetry.

Annie Wenstrup

To begin, I want to recognize the complications of using terms like “hybrid,” and “form” while discussing Indigenous poetics. I think the problem exists because as writers and critics, when we talk about genre there's often an uncritical acceptance of the system of categories and classifications of text. In that acceptance, there's a reification of the different powers, primarily marketing and academia, that codify what a text is. The differentiation exists—at least in part—to name how a text is supposed to function: prayer is different than a screenplay, usually an instruction manual is different from a poem. Working with hybrid forms encourages me to resist making my own casual assumptions about how a text and its audience orients itself in the world. Today I'll share excerpts from my work *The Museum of Unnatural Histories* which borrows organizational schemas from visual art to consider the relationship between what the eye sees and what it names.

Cassandra Lopez

My first understanding of creative writing was not categorized by genre. I grew up with all kinds of storytellers. When I did start to formally study creative writing I was eager to learn and took it all in without question. A part of my own decolonization process has been questioning what I have been taught. I have found myself drawn to hybrid and experimental texts. It is a way to challenge myself as well as a way that sometimes seems the best fit for my own identity, my own multiplicities. I think it also appeals to my own contrarian nature. The hybrid form is exciting because of it presents never ending possibilities.

Moderator Question:

“What about hybridity lends itself well to decolonization?”

Closing Moderator Statements, Audience Q &A