

In-Na-Poets & En-treaties: Writing Indigenous—What Does it Mean Now?

Category: Panel Discussion: Poetry Craft & Criticism

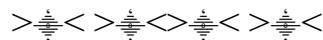
Moderator: Kimberly Blaeser, Founding Director Indigenous Nations Poets

Opening Remarks:

Boozhoo nindinawemaaganidog. Kim Blaeser nindizhinikaaz. Anishinaabekwe nindow. Gaa-waabaabiganikaag nindoonjibaa. Hello my relatives. My name is Kim Blaeser. I'm Anishinaabe from the White Earth Nation of northwestern Minnesota. I'm founding director of In-Na-Po, Indigenous Nations Poets.

In-Na-Po is national Indigenous poetry community committed to mentoring emerging writers, nurturing the growth of Indigenous poetic practices, and raising the visibility of all Native Writers past, present, and future. We recognize the important role poetry plays in sustaining tribal sovereign nations and Native languages.

245 years after the Delaware Nation signed the first Native American/U.S. treaty, what does it mean for Indigenous poets to write “from” tribal nations or as colonized or diasporic peoples? With Muskogee Creek Joy Harjo’s recent U. S. Poet Laureateship, Mojave Natalie Diaz’s Pulitzer Prize, and recent Indigenous poetry anthologies from publishers like Norton, Native poetry may seem to have become mainstream. And yet, Indigenous poets continue to draw deeply from their unique tribal nations and historical realities. Recent publications such as *Navigating CHamoru Poetry* and *The Diné Reader* highlight unique poetic qualities—distinctions in both purpose and performance of the poetic texts. This panel explores how Indigenous history, culture, politics, and aesthetics and the very treaty language itself still marks contemporary poetry from the more than 570 tribes as a movement unto itself.



Allow me to introduce our wonderful panelists:

Elise Paschen, an enrolled member of the Osage Nation, is the author of *The Nightlife*, *Bestiary*, *Infidelities*, winner of the Nicholas Roerich Prize, and *Houses: Coasts*. Her poems have appeared in *The Norton Anthology of Native Nations*

Poetry, *Best American Poetry*, and *Poetry*, among other anthologies and magazines. She has edited and co-edited many anthologies, including, most recently, *The Eloquent Poem*, as well as *The New York Times* bestseller, *Poetry Speaks*. Paschen teaches in the MFA Writing Program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Crisosto Apache is originally from Mescalero, New Mexico, on the Mescalero Apache reservation, and currently lives in the Denver area with their spouse. They are Mescalero Apache, Chiricahua Apache, and Diné (Navajo) of the Salt Clan born for the Towering House Clan. They hold an MFA from the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and are an Assistant Professor of English. Crisosto's debut collection is *GENESIS* (Lost Alphabet). Their second collection is *Ghostword* (Gnashing Teeth Publications). They are Associate Editor of *The Offing Magazine*, and their profile can be seen on the Poetry Foundation's website as well as their website.

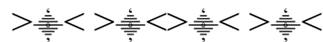
Kenzie Allen is a Haudenosaunee poet and multimodal artist; she is a descendant of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin. Kenzie is a recipient of a 92NY Discovery Prize, the James Welch Prize for Indigenous Poets, the 49th Parallel Award for Poetry, and the Littoral Press Prize, as well as fellowships from Vermont Studio Center, Aspen Summer Words, and Indigenous Nations Poets (In-Na-Po). A finalist for the National Poetry Series, her work can be found in *Poetry* magazine, *Boston Review*, *Narrative* magazine, Poets.org, *The Paris Review's* *The Daily*, *Best New Poets*, and other venues. Born in West Texas, she is currently an Assistant Professor in Indigenous Literatures and Creative Writing at York University in Toronto.

Jake Skeets is the author of *Eyes Bottle Dark with a Mouthful of Flowers*, winner of the National Poetry Series. He is the recipient of a 92Y Discovery Poetry Prize, a Mellon Projecting All Voices Fellowship, an American Book Award, and a Whiting Award. He is from the Navajo Nation and teaches at University of Oklahoma in Norman.

MODERATOR BIO:

I'm **Kimberly Blaeser**, founding director of In-Na-Po and a past Wisconsin Poet Laureate. I'm the author of five poetry collections, most recently the bi-lingual *Résister en dansant/Ikwe-niimi: Dancing Resistance* (2020) and *Copper Yearning*

(2019). I edited the anthology *Traces in Blood, Bone, and Stone: Contemporary Ojibwe Poetry*, and my scholarly study, *Gerald Vizenor: Writing in the Oral Tradition*, was the first native-authored book-length study of an Indigenous author. I'm an Anishinaabe activist and environmentalist, an enrolled member of the White Earth Nation and grew up on the reservation in northwestern Minnesota. I'm a Professor Emerita at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and an MFA faculty member for the low residency program in Creative Writing at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe. I'm the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Native Writers Circle of the Americas. My next poetry collection *Ancient Light* is forthcoming from University of Arizona's Sun Track series in spring 2024.



ELISE PASCHEN:

Elise will discuss the influences of Osage culture, history and language on her work. She will talk about The Reign of Terror (1921-1926), a horrific period of American history when outsiders married Osage women and killed them for their oil headrights, and will read her poem, “Wi’-gi-e” which inspired David Grann’s nonfiction book, “Killers of the Flower Moon,” now being made into a movie by Martin Scorsese. She also will discuss the origins and composition of her new long poem, “Heritage of the Blood Wolf Moon,” as well as her exploration of the Osage language.

POEM TEXT:

Wi’-gi-e

Anna Kyle Brown. Osage. 1896-1921. Fairfax, Oklahoma.

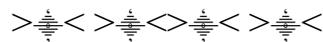
Because she died where the ravine falls into water.
Because they dragged her down to the creek.
In death, she wore her blue broadcloth skirt.
Though frost blanketed the grass she cooled her feet in the spring.
Because I turned the log with my foot.

Her slippers floated downstream into the dam.
Because, after the thaw, the hunters discovered her body.

Because she lived without our mother.
Because she had inherited headrights for oil beneath the land.
She was carrying his offspring.
The sheriff disguised her death as whiskey poisoning.
Because, when he carved her body up, he saw the bullet hole in her skull.

Because, when she was murdered, the *leg clutchers* bloomed.
But then froze under the weight of frost.
During *Xtha-cka Zhi-ga Tse-the*, the *Killer of the Flowers Moon*.
I will wade across the river of the blackfish, the otter, the beaver.
I will climb the bank where the willow never dies.

Elise Paschen
Published in *Bestiary* (Red Hen Press, 2009)



CRISOTO APACHE:

Outline Discussion Points:

- Discussion with other poets & poems as a prompt within the poem
- Embedding the “self” into the poem
- Memory and persona as a poetic catalyst
- Impact of “self” after war

POEM TEXT:

Poem - From *Ghostword* (Gnashing Teeth Publishing, 2022)

12. Carrizo
for E. Daklugie

The submarine's inside was dim. —R.
Akutagawa, 12. Naval Base

in my youth I hitched a ride to San
Diego, across chirping desert and
distant night, I gazed upon a slow
moving dark encasing a convex
cerulean cavity

each night I stood beneath the sky for hours
mesmerized at the perplex reformatory of
twinkling lights and brokenglass fragments
spreading against a glistening sunset

a faceless man behind a lost
reflection of a glass at a drive-up
window informs me
too bad, you know nothing of your past

how far will I walk against the
night confirming to captivity I
had never realized

some years later under the kitchen table
they all huddle as the rampage continues
toward the back of the house

a clash of debris crashing from the
other room recoils and broken sounds
escape the barricade of doors

— all I remember is returning in 1970

— all they remember is me sitting at the

edge of my bed with the war still in my
hands



KENZIE ALLEN:

Kenzie will discuss multimodality and other markers of cultural sovereignties in Indigenous poetic works, and the use of cultural materials in her own poetry, including Haudenosaunee frameworks and archival records from the Carlisle Indian Industrial Boarding School. She will discuss ethical considerations in working with these cultural materials, and she will share multimodal storytelling approaches used in her manuscript-in-progress, *Wampum*.

Poem text:

"But We Are Still Here"

The babies on our backs can't know
what's left behind. The muddy shores where quahogs wait

to be pried from their mooring, the forests
of home no longer home. I was a bricklayer

gone south for better work, I was a student
of unlearned ways. I was an Antone

but too woman to keep it, so much and so little
of blood. It's earth you walk on, lined with greed;

it's just history—if you bleed on it, it's yours. It's just
land, so walk on it. It's just a neck, so walk on that, too.

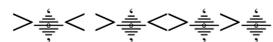
Invisible, until we've done wrong. Unworthy, 'til we've
picked the right horse. Then bullseye, then

savage, wagon-menace, currency. A pile of skulls
as far as the eye can see. But you who yearn,

on the Edge of the Woods we welcome. We wipe your eyes
of the long walk dust, that you may see the generations ahead.

We offer safe passage, though Turtle's back is shrinking, still.
We protect the water, what remains, what must remain,

because we, too, know thirst—and endure.



KIMBERLY BLAESER:

Kim will discuss the use of the archive by contemporary Indigenous poets—both official archival materials housed in collections and the unofficial materials left out of the formal (often settler colonial) archive. She will identify several significant examples, notably work by Craig Santos Perez, Gerald Vizenor, and Layli Long Soldier. Her presentation will consider the role of documentary poetry in reclaiming Indigenous stories and asserting representational sovereignty. She will read her poem “Rattle” and discuss the series of poems she wrote in response to and including language from Sister Inez Hilger’s *Chippewa Families: A Social Study of White Earth Reservation, 1938.*”

Poem Text:

Rattle

I fold the ghost of paper *of peace and friendship*
gently as if words could break,
tuck it *final and binding* inside my muklaks
hidden now beneath my feet.

(Feet, windows of the soul,
souls lost in that history,
history a banquet
without enough chairs.)

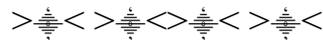
I take the pemmican, treaty whiskey,
the pipe. Still sacred.
I relative of all X marks.
fold the ghost of paper *obligatory upon the Indians*.

Thin stick syllables of deceit
the second clause of the second article,
voices of spine and serif
hereunto set their hands and affixed their seals.

Blood smear of hollow promises
this dream paper inked
or etched like scars on skin
redskin. *Hereby ceded.*

Forget the treaty—*privilege of hunting,*
fishing, and gathering the wild rice—
old history they tell me:
excepting the reservations made and described.

In their ears trees don't rattle
rattle haunted with copper longing.
The folded paper, ghost of folded life:
pursuits of civilized—a sheaf in capture code.



JAKE SKEETS:

Jake will discuss the way he uses Diné while not being a fluent speaker, including meditations on the ways translation operates from a Native language in English and vice versa. It's an interesting space to be within first and second languages and Jake will discuss the way Navajo language textbooks and learning manuals are informing the way we structures poems and how Diné words capture the current climate (and climate changes) better than English.

Poem Text:

Anthropocene: A Dictionary

Dibé bighan: sheep corral

juniper beams caught charcoal in the late summer morning
night still pooled in hoof prints; deer panicked run from water

Ooljéé' biná'adinídíín: moonlight

perched above the town drowned in orange and streetlamp
the road back home dips with the earth

shines black in the sirens

Bit'a' : its sails or — its wing (s)

driving through the mountain pass

dólii, mountain bluebird, swings out —

from swollen branches

I never see those anymore, someone says

Diyóół : wind (

wind (more of it) more wind as in (to come up)

plastic bags driftwood the fence line

Nihootsoii

: evening — somewhere northward fire

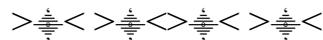
twists around the shrublands;

sky dipped in smoke — twilight

there is a word for this, someone says

: Deidííídíid they burned it

: Kódeiiyaa we did this

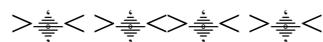


MODERATOR QUESTIONS:

- During her recent terms as U. S. Poet Laureate, Joy Harjo spent time honoring “ancestor poets.” Indeed, Indigenous literatures have always built

themselves partly from the frame of and conversations with the longstanding stories, songs, and other artistic traditions that belong to the centuries-long genealogy of tribal arts. I always say Indigenous literatures do not proceed from what has popularly been called “an anxiety of influence,” but rather from a “celebration of influence.” Speaking about your own writing or that of other Indigenous poets, how do you see that honoring of literary predecessors? I don’t mean so much the nod of naming someone, but the actual entanglement of ideas, aesthetic, maybe even language or form with the oral or written songs and poems of our ancestors.

- You have likely all heard the claim: “Language is destiny.” In 1992, Gerald Vizenor introduced the terms “wordarrows” and “Word Wars.” In 1996, the collection *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language*, edited by Gloria Bird and Joy Harjo, emerged on the literary scene. To what degree are contemporary Indigenous poetics still engaged in critiquing and resisting the colonization of LANGUAGE itself? In what ways are we as poets conscious of the need to rewrite the narrative, to revive our own languages, to re-invent the stereotypic or totalitarian language of dominance?
- In what specific ways do you see Indigenous poetics engaging with actual historical texts such as treaty documents? With physical representations of tribal people in photographs or various “collections”? In what ways are poets working within or outside the official “archive.”



Q & A SESSION with Audience