

Review of Jordan Scott's *Night & Ox*

Carmen Faye Mathes

Jordan Scott's *Night & Ox* limns a heterotopic space for the 21st century, making of new fatherhood a vivid (and sometimes twilight) zone. Michel Foucault describes the "heterotopia" as a "sacred or hidden" place for transition or transgression, which develops when a society's preoccupation with time, history and progress becomes instead that of space, "simultaneity," "juxtaposition." Like an image in a mirror, the heterotopia is virtual but not unreal. While the state does its best to mobilize heterotopias to contain and control, there are certain heterotopias, according to Foucault, that might also be "la plus grande réserve d'imagination." These—for instance, ships on the high seas—are powerful because they are the habitations of adventurers and pirates.

Night & Ox exploits such imaginative potential by inviting readers into the real-unreal space of a new parent's heterotopic existence. Scott's book-length poem, much of which comprises a single vertical stanza of no more than three words per line, evokes a dimly lit baby's room at three in the morning; a bed filled with sleep-deprived, unfulfilled desire; a ramble through "bonkers canyon" with his baby strapped to his chest; gazing out the kitchen window in the sudden realization of domesticity's sweetness. Fatherhood, for Scott, is as much a space as it is a time; "your first / moments" don't pass, he writes, but "trespass" (34). In the tense displays of language

that distinguish Scott's body of work (*Silt* (2005); *blert* (2008); *Decomp* with Stephen Collis (2013); *Clearance Process* with Jason Starnes (2016)), *Night & Ox* has a cadence like binomial nomenclature:

you're small
 your small
 so cry's
 inky stampede
 blotchy
 in bee
 costume
 in
 glyph kitchen
 on
 glottis island
 studded
 sturgeon (22)

Amongst the gorgeous gnomonic phrases (two favourites: "starlit parsnip" (10); "rumpus perogy" (67)), Scott captures a new father's exhausted elation, which is never quite pure tedium or pure awe. Overwhelmed with love, he also catches himself caring for his sons while daydreaming, "instagramming," and composing lines of poetry (11). This side-by-side-ness, both of form and content, exposes limitlessness in the mundane, turning the milky way, "stratosphere's whirl," into what seems like baby formula: "brick dust / milk powder" (11). Simultaneity, in a poem like this one, means content that is hard to parse only if you stop reading; keep moving, and whole universes open

up before you, in all their “planetoid / fruitfulness” (11). This poem is a taxonomic atmospheric, where language surrounds as it galvanizes, envelops as it animates, and all the while hurtles you into the unknown.

Scott’s play on cosmonaut, the “cosmoglot,” yokes intergalactic exploration to the poet’s facility for language. Although Foucault was thinking about oceans rather than galaxies when he called the ship “the heterotopia par excellence,” his claim that the imagination needs such spaces (“In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up”) aligns evocatively with a poem which, Scott tells us, was written under the aegis of the Rosetta spacecraft having reached Comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko. In the fatherhood zone, space and language become the “moltenness” that Scott associates with love: in one nighttime scene, “celestial / bodies’ / spacecraft shot” meet “haywire tongues” that “half / articulate / melt / me / linguistically” (23). In this, a collision of imperfect communication with perfect feeling, #dadlife seems most clearly to resonate with a spacecraft hitched to something vaster than itself. Hitched, perhaps, to two sons like celestial bodies, with their own mass, movement, and force.

Work Cited:

“Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias.” *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* 5 (1984): 46-49.

Original Publication: *Conférence au Cercle d’études architecturales, 14 mars 1967*. Accessed 15 December 2016 via: <http://bit.ly/2i3cpQA>

Review of Aja Couchois Duncan’s *Restless Continent*

Cam Scott

Aja Couchois Duncan’s *Restless Continent* is many things: a deep ecological survey, a poetic habitat, a recollected lexicon or decolonial vocabulary, beginning indefinitely long ago:

if they say we have come from
oceanic witnesses
then who am i to differ (3)

“Emerging from the muck,” tracing the shore, the poem is at sea. Its subject is emergent, and yet there is already a “we,” related to a legislating “they.” Memory “is prehistoric knowledge, is deep water” (7), but identification with the non-human is anthropomorphic, too. Here the earth is figured feminine, a lap or “that which bears the brunt of it,” which is no less upsetting a representation for its stated intent, to impugn the gendered violence, and the gendering of nature, implicit in capitalist accumulation.

After the pre-natal invocation comes the first of several “worst case scenario” poems: “Do not panic when your body breaks through the ice to the shock of water below ... Do not be confused by the blurring of horizon and sky” (15). From this cautionary tale proceeds the centrepiece, *Nomenclature, Miigaadiwin, A Forked Tongue*, a bilingual glossary

and document of the author's "writing (toward) Ojibwe" (94).

Duncan places the problem of translation in a landscape, and her poem is translation of a landscape. "My story is the history of frontier, a wooded terrain" (19). Language is both a tool for and an object of incessant translation—a movement between outside-and-inside, outside-as-inside. "Dawn is not self referential. Neither is dusk" (21). This is to say the mirror of the sky is never empty. She explains, "I am a writer of apposition and so in Nomenclature the words are placed side by side, Ojibwe and English, English and Ojibwe. And yet their meanings are rarely, if ever, the same. Wittgenstein wrote that 'uttering a word is like striking a note on the keyboard of imagination,' and for me Ojibwe became a kind of music, a way of hearing the world, its animate and intransitive self" (94).

Wittgenstein alludes to an imagistic use of language, and Duncan's glossary has everything to do with language's purchase not only upon the imagination, but its imaginary purchase upon the world: "You once said that nouns were for accumulation, for bartering and trade. Use everything you can, you said...In which language should I describe the different parts of me? Inzid, nininj, there is another" (21).

Orality implies a shared space of transmission; conditions that cannot be relegated to the past without directly repudiating the speaker's being. Duncan's text confronts what Leanne Betasamosake

Simpson terms "cognitive imperialism," according to which there is no archive, no concept, prior to European translation. This is to finalize the violent interruption of traditional knowledge by colonialism once and for all. The poet calls upon the body, summoning foot and hand by name, but another body overlays her ancestral language. The body is not only alienated in language, but its music, the poet's imaginary self-identification, appears alienated in another tongue: "I have sorted the dismembered pieces of me according to their function" (21). Duncan writes the violence of colonial encounter as so many conquests sedimented into speech: "The French mated their way through the colonies. The English claimed only their mirror image. Later the science of alterity would explain such predilections" (23).

The most profound words in this section arrive as lament for the continent, broken into states, and for its colonized people: "We people, the first people. Our word for ourselves is the word for our tongue. There is no difference between the naming and those being named; language calls the world into being" (31). *In Situ*, a concluding suite, closes as the book opens, on restive origins and vast distress, pre-historical yet not impersonal: "when darkness is memory and geology/an unnatural burial" (89). Duncan affirms the antecedence of the terrain over the map, the arc of her work decolonizing, surfacing, constructive. "There is an art to this, to all things partial and approximate" (44).

Review of *IRL* (Birds LLC, 2016)

Samantha Nock

There's a checklist that Indigenous writers are expected to fulfill in order to authenticate our work. We have to write about time being circular, and ancestors' hands on our shoulders, or how our skin is like the earth, or how we are wild and free. We have to write about the violence that happens to our bodies in a way that's easily consumable: we have to fit 500 years of colonial trauma into 500 words. We are expected to play invisible and imaginary stoic "Indians" from John Wayne films or traumatized victims of Settler domination. We are rarely depicted as young, contemporary, urban peoples who go out, date, hook up, use Tinder and Grindr, fall in and out of love, and listen to Beyoncé.

In Tommy Pico's 100-page poem, *IRL*, we are all of these things and more: we are urban, we are queer, we are homesick, and we are mixed up, confused young people searching. We are all these things while balancing our histories as Indigenous peoples on our shoulders.

Pico is a Brooklyn based poet, originally from the Viejas Reservation of the Kumeyaay Nation, near San Diego, California. Written in broken prose and internet jargon, *IRL* captures the experiences of a twenty-to-thirty-something queer person living in Brooklyn who left his reservation to move to the city. Pico draws you in with the humour

and voice of queer urban youth culture and delivers truths about guilt, sadness, and historical traumas:

Some things can go on
forever, like looping "You da One"
by Rihanna, or the colonial legacy
called "constant Debbie Downer."
I find other ppl with internalized
gnashing (and have no gods,
dubious of "facts,"
oh and hate nature) n
call them family.

I was not sure how I was going to connect to Pico's poetry until I found myself in it. Our stories are not that different. I am all the things that have been woven throughout his poetry: urban, displaced, homesick, Indigenous, queer, and chasing love and lovers. Pico's writing breathes life into the multidimensional lives of Indigenous peoples, bridging the gaps created by settler cognitive dissonance. We are here, having fun and healing heartbreaks and chasing dreams and going to parties and listening to Beyoncé, and we are doing all this while carrying the full weight of colonization on our shoulders. For the young Indigenous reader, Pico's words are a comfort in knowing that our existences are contemporary and we have kin out there living and loving and experimenting.