"Our Bodies Dazzle in the Light": A Review of *Love After the End: An Anthology of Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer Speculative Fiction*

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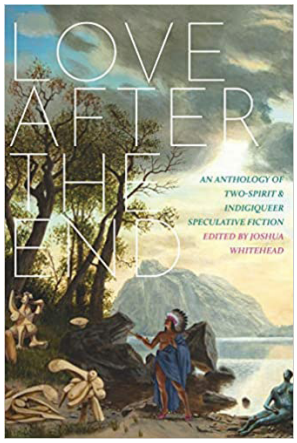

How does anyone consider intimacy or eroticism in the age of the Anthropocene and the collapse of a world in the ruins of climate change and extractive capitalism? Even more, how do communities that have endured decades of violence and oppressive colonialism love within the apocalyptic? In Joshua Whitehead's (Oji-Cree/nêhiyâw) edited collection *Love After the End: An Anthology of Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer Speculative Fiction,* he argues that a turn toward the utopian is a centrally important political shift. He writes, "For, as we know, we have already survived the apocalypse—this, right here, right now, is a dystopian present. What better way to imagine survivability than to think about how we may flourish into being joyously animated rather than merely alive?" (10-11). This point is, I think, the crux of this collection: intimacy, joy, growth, and love can be imagined into the present and future, even in the face of undeniable collapse. Perhaps this is the power of queer love: to face this paradox, love after the end, head-on, unwavering in the truth of potential.

Love After the End is a collection of stories that highlight the joy, love, and eroticism of 2SQ (two-spirit, queer) communities, whether in the love between human and AI-augmented animals or between two-spirit indigiqueers and the doomed planet they leave behind. It is a collection of stories about finding "what we need when we need it: through community and through our relations" (15). Kinship ties and communal love, erotic or otherwise, provide the ground upon which these stories build, showing the life-sustaining power of relations despite settler dominance and the continuation of unsustainable social, cultural, and economic structures.

Many of the stories begin with or concern ecological devastation of the Earth, though the devastation itself is rarely the primary focus. Rather, these stories seem to center on responses to the devastation: personal responses, interpersonal responses, communal responses, and global responses. For instance, in Jaye Simpson's (Oji-Cree Saulteaux) "The Ark of the Turtle's Back"

we are introduced to a world on the verge of collapse; colonies have been established on the moon and on Mars, using the labor of Indigenous peoples to set up and sustain them. Ni, the protagonist, considers, "It will only be a matter of time before they come to take everyone capable from the Rez to work. The moon's atmosphere is so successful that their oceans formed sooner than anticipated, and now they're filling the waters with formerly extinct species. But at what cost? Our brown bodies?" (68). In a final escape attempt, the characters are convinced by Ni's sister, Dakib, to escape on a series of arks; however, this exodus requires sacrifice: "we're using energy from Earth's kinetic core to fuel the trip. Upon takeoff, the core will cool almost entirely and cause significant damage to the planet. The magnetic field protecting Earth from solar winds and solar radiation will collapse and essentially turn Earth into the new Mars" (69). Simpson considers the weight of sacrifice and how much is too much. Should we leave the planet in an attempt to save our communities or should we stay as Ni argues: "Our people woundn't leave her, and you know it. We would stay until her last breath and go with her. We are the caretakers, and if she dies, we die too."

A similar complication arises in Adam Garnet Jones's (Cree/Métis/Danish) "History of the New World," which tells the story of a family—Em, a Cree woman; Thorah, her non-Native wife; and Asêciwan, their daughter—as they decide between staying on a collapsing Earth or going through a portal to "the New World." In clear reference to settler colonial discourse, the New World is often assumed to be without history. Indeed, Thorah even argues, "The New World is a blank page…we can make our story there, anything we want" (43). This rhetoric clearly replicates the doctrine of Terra Nullius used to bolster so many settler claims to Indigenous lands. Eventually, and through a complex series of events, Em and Asêciwan decide to stay on Earth, joining an Indigenous camp in the center of Toronto: "A hand-painted sign above the entrance announced our arrival at NAGWEYAAB ANISHINAABEK CAMP: RAINBOW PEOPLES' CAMP. A HOME FOR INDIGNEOUS 2SLGBTTQI PEOPLE AND FAMILIES" (59).

While the responses to collapse in these two stories are different—and we get similar responses in Mari Kurisato's (Cote First Nation Ojibwe) "Seed Children"—each story centers 2SQ people and highlights the ways their choices depict love—love for their kin, love for the Earth, love for their partners. Whether in the scene of family ceremony on the departing ship carrying some land, flora, and fauna of the Earth in "The Ark of the Turtle's Back" or in the decision to stay on a potentially doomed Earth in "History of the New World," the stories focus more on the effects of having to make such decisions—and the potentials for joy within the decisions—rather than the idea that there is a correct choice to be made. While many of the stories about leaving give voice to the rights and responsibilities within Indigenous communities and in relation to the Earth through individual characters, they all refrain from casting judgment as if staying—or leaving—were the "more Native" thing to do.

A central facet to each of these stories is also the importance of stories themselves as vehicles for cultural knowledge, connection, and kinship. Indeed, story becomes a pivotal tool in considering "intimacy during doomsday" (10). In Kai Minosh Pyle's (Métis/Baawiting

Nishnaabe) "How to Survive the Apocalypse for Native Girls," we are introduced to Nigig, a two-spirit Anishinaabe girl, as she navigates life and compiles a primer for existing in the apocalypse of settler colonialism. Nigig's entries include pieces of advice and wisdom, including, "when the apocalypse happens, make sure you bring your kookum" (80), "Everyone has ancestors, but not everyone knows theirs" (84), "Watch those in power carefully" (87), and "Love is good" (82). These instructions and the remainder of the story consider the importance of kinship in creating community and connection, both not always pleasant experiences: "Love is part of Kinship laws—it is the Kinship laws. Of course, in reality Kinship is just as much about hating each other and messing each other up as it is about loving each other, but without Love there wouldn't be any Kinship at all" (83). Story is about the messiness of connecting, especially in the messiness of apocalypse.

We see this same messiness in "Andwànikàdjigan" by Gabriel Castilloux Calderon (Mi'kmaq/Algonquin/Scottish/French Canadian), which tells the story of A'tugwewinu (Winu) living in a world where settlers have tried wipe out storytellers and carriers of Indigenous cultural knowledge. New storytellers and knowledge keepers become marked with memory markings, which appear "when someone share[s] a story and you truly listened, listened with all your heart" (97). When storytellers touch these marks on their bodies "words would appear in your head, and you would repeat the story back, verbatim, as if you were the one who shared it in the first place." These markings and those who carry them become targets for the Enforcers—the militaristic, settler presence in the story. Much like in Pyle's story, Calderon here offers story as a tool for connection; In "Andwànikàdjigan" the connection extends cross-communally, for it is only through real, intimate connection across communities that we can hope to survive and thrive in the face of abusive settler powers. As much as "Andwànikàdjigan" is a love story between the two-spirit Winu and Bel, it is also about the literal power of stories to shake the foundations of settler worldviews and a reminder that, despite settler conceptions otherwise, we are really only stories.[1]

Throughout this collection, the stories course through some of the central sub-genres now associated with Indigenous futurism, some of which provide the structure for the pivotal collection Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction edited by Grace L. Dillon (Anishinaabe). We get stories of slipstream ("Nameless" and "Eloise"), stories of the Native apocalypse ("The Ark of the Turtle's Back" and "History of the New World"), stories about Indigenous science and sustainability ("Seed Children"), and—coursing through all of this—the central notion of Biskaabiiyang, "Returning to Ourselves." Yet, what this collection does differently is centering 2SQ stories. As Whitehead writes, "we have put Two-Spiritedness in the front, for once, and in that leading position we will walk into the future, in whatever form that may take, together, hand in hand, strong, resilient, extraneously queer, and singing a round dance song that calls us all back together" (12). So throughout it all, we are offered stories of connection, of the messiness of kinship, and of the potential that lies in the future and in queer love. The trials of history mark queer communities and their stories, but they are not silenced. As Whitehead notes, "we have lived in torture chambers, we have excelled under the weight of killing machinations,

we've hardened into bedrock—see how our bodies dazzle in the light? (12). These stories, and the bodies in them, certainly dazzle in this light.

Notes

1. For more on the importance of story, see Thomas King's *The Truth About Stories*.

Works Cited

Dillon, Grace L., Ed. *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*. University of Arizona Press, 2012.

King, Thomas. *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*. House of Anansi Press, 2011.

Jeremy M. Carnes, Ph.D., is currently a Visiting Lecturer at the University of Central Florida. His work is situated within both comics studies and Indigenous studies. He is the outgoing Fiction Reviews Editor and incoming Associate Editor for the *SFRA Review* and co-editor for the forthcoming collection T*he Futures of Cartoons Past: The Cultural History of X-Men: The Animated Series* (UP of Mississippi). He is working on his first book on Indigenous comics.