

reminder of the historical legacies, mindsets, and racisms of colonialism that pervade our twenty-first century world.

Joe Dale Tate Nevaquaya. *Leaving Holes & Selected New Writings*. Norman: Mongrel Empire P, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-9833052-2-4. 64 pp.
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Joe Dale Tate Nevaquaya is a visual artist and poet. He is tribally affiliated with the Yuchi and Comanche tribes of Oklahoma. His first published book, *Leaving Holes & Selected New Writings*, has a history as interesting as the poems and stories it contains. In 1992 the original manuscript was selected as co-winner for the very first (then called) Diane Decorah Memorial Award for Poetry, today known as the Native Writer's Circle of America's First Book Award for Poetry. As Native scholar Geary Hobson explains in a foreword to *Leaving Holes*, the small press that had originally planned to publish this award-winning manuscript shut down before the project could be completed, regrettably leaving this remarkable work unpublished for nineteen years. Finally in 2011 the project was picked up by Mongrel Empire Press of Norman, Oklahoma. What should have rightfully happened nearly two decades ago has finally seen fruition, and this deserving work is now in print. This past April, shortly after its release, *Leaving Holes* was awarded the prestigious 2012 Oklahoma Book Award for Poetry, further confirmation of the superior and timeless quality of Nevaquaya's work. We have waited a long time to get this two-time award-winning book in our hands, and now we can say that it has been well worth the wait.

Nevaquaya is a true master of words. With his words he paints vivid, stark, cutting images that defy deconstruction, words that haunt the periphery of our consciousness long after their reading. The topography of the book invites a rigorous navigation, its divisions marked by abrupt shifts in styles and content. This is due largely to the span of time and human experience that these poems have witnessed in the last two decades: their voices reflect the life of the poet—his struggles, his pain, his endurance.

The first section of the book comprises the complete works from the 1992 manuscript. It includes poems that are defiantly abstract, yet organically tangible. Mary E. "Sass" White, in the introduction to *Leav-*

ing *Holes*, describes it best: “Like the skin of my own flesh, I know what his words feel like to the touch” (xi). Though many of these poems are written with an opaqueness that resists explication, they are excitingly powerful, eliciting an emotional reaction that can only be felt, not described. Their voices are broken and raw, wrapped in ancient longing and memory. These are poems that one must experience, not force into explanation. For example, in the poem “Fear and Passing”:

Unfolding the drops of salt and silent blood
 sprinkled around the spaces of sleep, widows
 weep in rage of the sea metallic tears
 in sharkskins of envelopes, and snatch down
 these moments of breathlessness
 and naked drownings. (7–12)

Also included among the first section is a grouping of poems referred to as “Poems for those remembered.” These are short honor poems, titled for the particular individuals to whom they are addressed. For example:

Poem for Pamela White Thunder
 An ancient dragonfly
 hovers inside the mirror, remembering
 a favored child
 is tasting rain
 with a new tongue. (32)

These poems are both private and revealing; reading them feels like peering briefly into a secret window to the soul of the poet.

The second section of *Leaving Holes* consists of Nevaquaya’s “Selected New Writings” and includes a collection of short prose “letters” entitled “Hizzoner, The Mayor of Red Wasp.” Each letter begins with “Notes from the Desk of the Mayor over to Red Wasp,” followed by an often lively report of the strange and recent “going-ons” in a small town dying a slow, but imminent death: “There’s just a handful of us left here in town, and a few old timers out past the single amber light blinking in all kinds of weather; hell even the drunks have died off, the ones that used to sleep in the abandoned ball field, where there hasn’t been no happy voices of children playing in years . . . There ain’t nothing more haunting at night than an abandoned ball field with a history” (43). Though located in the fictional town of Red Wasp, Oklahoma, the setting is a familiar backdrop for any reader who has ever experienced rural “coun-

try living.” Red Wasp, despite its dwindling population, is replete with its eclectic assortment of characters: there’s “Wilbur Red Rib, the paint-sniffing shape shifter and his boyfriend Tex,” Old Woman Owl Cud, Sylvestene Corn Husk, and the mayor himself, Hizzoner, among others who are as equally intriguing. In one letter Hizzoner writes:

There has been complaints coming into the office on a regular basis that there has been something walking on the roof tops since the full moon came to stay. Everyone has taken to putting out dinner plates full of pork steak and green onion, iced tea and cigars to boot . . . even Mamie Marie Eisenhower sat out a full fifth of Four Roses trying to appease the wanton visitor. I myself believe it’s the ghost of Ray Bradbury. Everyone pretends to go home and go to bed, though I know that they are sitting up in bed with their eyes fixed towards the ceiling, waiting and trying to remember their prayers from the Indian side of their family. (44)

These “letters” are amusing and yet tinged with the deeper notes of despondency. Are these strange things really happening in Red Wasp? Or has stagnancy eroded reality, a slow decay of both town and residents, resulting in the need for something—anything—to happen, even if it is fictive. Regardless, the strange familiarity of Red Wasp pulls its readers into its infectious madness.

Concluding the book is a collection of Nevaquaya’s new poetry entitled “Poems of November’s Grace.” Most of these are written as prose poems, displaying a more reflective quality than previous poems in the book: these poems, which read more like short stories, invite contemplation. They ask the reader to see the greater social issues that reside in the heart of their words. For example, in one poem entitled “Sistuh,” the narrator and his companions stop at a Mississippi roadside drive-in to get coffee, when they notice a missing person flyer of a “woman in her mid-twenties [who] was last seen driving to work” (61). Sadly, the flyer has been amended to reflect the outcome: the woman “was later found shot to death in her car, parked along one of these red clay roads” (61). The narrator continues:

I am transfixed by her face and the circumstances of her life and death, my thoughts are interrupted by the sliding screen through which our coffees are being passed. The woman inside sees me

staring at the flyer and she says in a sad drawl, *She was one of our sistuhs and I can see that she could've been one of your sistuhs too.* She pulls her red knuckled hand back through the small opening, leaving the coffees steaming in the Mississippi air . . . As we slish away into the sparse traffic of this out of the way road, I turn once over my shoulder to look and she returns my gaze with a thoughtful smile, and for hundreds of miles I cannot remember the name but I hear these words, *She could've been one of your sistuhs too.* (61)

The contrast of these latter poems against the poems of two decades ago is striking, almost as if two different people have written them. However, given the space of life that has eclipsed the beginning roots of this book, it is possible, and probable, that the Nevaquaya who finished these works is indeed much changed from the one who began them.

The effect of such varying works collected into one book is strangely cohesive, offering a sense of growth and transformation. Thus, in reading *Leaving Holes*, one can trace the poet's journey from the beautifully raw fierceness of the original poems, to the wry humor of the Red Wasp letters, to the reflective meditations of his most recent works. For the reader, it is a journey well worth taking.

Daniel Heath Justice. *The Way of Thorn and Thunder: The Kynship Chronicles*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 2011.
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The Way of Thorn and Thunder: The Kynship Chronicles, an omnibus volume of Daniel Heath Justice's previously published novels *Kynship* (2005), *Wyrwood* (2006), and *Dreyd* (2007), is a compelling tale that successfully melds the narrative and mythic conventions of the high fantasy genre with the traditions and history of the Indigenous peoples in the Americas, particularly their violent encounters with Europeans. Justice effectively adapts a genre most often associated with Northern European legends by drawing upon American Indian spirituality and customs, creating a world and peoples that are at once familiar and alien, an alternate history of North America in the 1700s as the British colonies advanced westward and displaced the native inhabitants. Readers will easily dis-