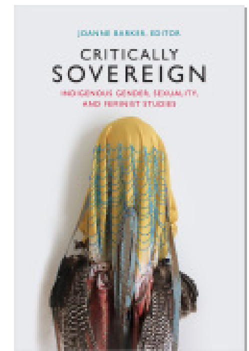
Critically Sovereign

Barker, Joanne



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GETTING DIRTY

The Eco-Eroticism of Women in Indigenous Oral Literatures

MELISSA K. NELSON

Physical bodies can beckon us toward a more complex understanding of how the personal, the political, and the material are braided together.—**Stacy Alaimo,** *Material Feminisms*

We do not come into this world; we come out of it, as leaves from a tree.—**Alan Watts,** *The Book*

Prelude

Some of my first memories are of eating dirt. Eating dirt with great joy. I felt an intimate, sensuous, and, dare I say, "erotic" relationship with the physical earth I consumed.[1] Red rock on red tongue, slick, earth clay slowly sliding down my throat, the tart tingle of metallic gravity and the delicious irony of iron resonating with the core of my blood cells, like a lightning bolt to my flesh and bones. Ingesting the world, "eating the landscape," and enjoying the original "soil/soul food" is a long and old tradition of many cultures around

the world, including many Native American cultures here on Turtle Island, especially among women with eco-erotic proclivities.[2]

I also remember relishing as a child the curves on a piece of driftwood and even later and now feeling wooed by the smell and shape of buckeye blossoms; getting aroused by the splash of ocean waves on granite rock, stirred by the flying movements of a pileated woodpecker, intoxicated by the incessant power of a waterfall, caressed by the warm wind on top of a desert mountain, or feeling a little sleazy by the penetrating clarity, color, and twinkle of the star Sirius. All of these things arouse deep feelings in me still. They stimulate my senses and awaken a desire to be intimate, to be fully alive. These eco-erotic moments make me feel connected to something outside and distant yet connected to my human skin. They remind me that I am a semipermeable membrane and that life is filled with fluid attractions and intimate encounters, if we only allow ourselves to feel and experience them.

In the face of such sensuous ecological encounters, both ordinary and spectacular, I step outside the sense of myself as a contained being. I am no longer a solid center but part of an unending field of entwined energies. I am connecting to another, greater life force, embodied in dirt, the material soil and source of matter. Whether watching a simple brown sparrow bathing in a mud puddle on a street or smelling the aromatic heat off a sage plant, these encounters stimulate, arouse, awaken, and excite me in profoundly meaningful ways. They can break my heart open, take my breath away, make me shed tears, or force me to listen with the ears of my ancestors. In these moments, I often feel dwarfed, in awe, vulnerable, even shocked. And in the act of sex, I feel these same emotions—these vulnerable feelings combined with a strange sense of authentic, surging power.

The French call orgasm *la petite mort* (the little death), where we can actually be relieved of being ourselves and disappear for an ecstatic moment. The Sanskrit root meaning of the word "nirvana" means "extinction, disappearance (of the individual soul into the universal)."[3] It is in these moments of disappearing and ego extinction in the sexual act that most of us find solace and bliss. This relief from our persona helps us get in touch with a deeper sense of being—some would say, a larger sense of self; an ecological or even a cosmological self.

Likewise, eco-erotics is a type of *meta* (after, higher)-sexual or *trans* (over, beyond)-sexual intimate ecological encounter in which we are momentarily and simultaneously taken outside of ourselves by the beauty, or sometimes the horror, of the more-than-human natural world. This means we are potentially aroused by *any*thing, meaning "pan," or all: pansexual. The Anishinaabe

writer Louise Erdrich says it so well in *Love Medicine*: "I'll be out there as a piece of endless body of the world feeling pleasures so much larger than skin and bones and blood."[4]

Feeling inside this fluid, living entity of what we call "nature" does have its consequences, as my sensuality often gets in the way of my scholarship. But then again, my scholarship often gets in the way of my sensuality. It is a common conundrum, feeling the difference between the world of thought and the world of my other senses. Do I read through that wetlands ecology essay or that classic piece on Zen Buddhism, or do I work with my hands in the garden repotting lupine and sage and revel in the smell of sweet-smelling medicine plants and fresh dirt? Do I sit and pull black-and-white words from full-spectrum thoughts or walk in a damp redwood forest to feel like a small mammal? There is a profound relationship between these different activities. As I stimulate many senses and decenter thought, I eventually illuminate new cognitive pathways and storylines. I enjoy the challenge of precipitating words from inner imaginings (and sensations) and offering them to the page to share with others for enticement, arousal, and critique: "The writing down of words is a relatively recent practice for the human animal. We two-legged have long been creatures of language, of course, but verbal language lived first in the shaped breath of utterance, it laughed and stuttered on the tongue long before it lay down on the page, and longer still before it arrayed itself in rows across the glowing screen."[5] Language used to be more like music, perhaps, spoken and heard in ephemeral moments rather than recorded as "permanent," future visual references. Here I make these offerings of written words as I grapple with the old stories of Native women loving other-than-humans and the new fields of Indigenous eco-erotics and queer ecologies.

Introduction

In some vocabularies, these encounters would be intersections where emotional and erotic intelligences, biophilia, and eco-literacy come together.[6] These are encounters anyone can have anywhere on the planet; this is one of the reasons people love to travel so much, especially for "peak experiences" at spectacular places. I believe that these fresh, often ahistorical moments of superficial arousal or stimulation are important and interesting but potentially problematic. I see that they can be linked to colonial desire and exotic romanticism in a way that is nearly *opposite* of what I want to explore in terms of stories about Indigenous peoples' long-term, ancestral connections to specific places and particular more-than-human others.

The feminist scholar Stacy Alaimo writes, "Crucial ethical and political possibilities emerge from this literal 'contact zone' between human corporeality and more than human nature."[7] In this chapter, I argue that these encounters at the contact zone of human and more-than-human can provide critical eco-erotic experiences that are conducive to embodying an ethic of kinship so needed in the world today to address ecological and cultural challenges. This "contact zone" is the place that I call "getting dirty"—a messy, visceral, eco-erotic boundary-crossing entanglement of difference that can engender empathy and kinship and a lived environmental ethic. I assert that this contact zone is facilitated and supported by communities that practice oral traditions about territorial attachment to ancestral places and beings. Indigenous eco-erotics are maintained and strengthened through pansexual stories, clan and family identification, and a trans-human concept of nationhood.

I suggest that this eco-erotic impulse is deeply human and part of a coevolutionary pansexual adaptation not only for survival but also for regeneration. For survival it is key, as it encourages us to understand "carnal knowledge" and the risks and opportunities of intraspecies encounters for mates and interspecies encounters for sustainable food. For regeneration, procreation is key not only for our biological species but also for our imaginative and spiritual capacities to be in intimate relationship with the more-than-human world, on which we are completely dependent for life. We are always inside other beings and inside what the Kogi Mamas of Colombia believe is "the very mind of Nature itself."[8] Other beings are always inside of us—bacteria, viruses. That is basic biology. But to truly feel the sensuous gravity of the life that surrounds us and is within us is an act of profound intimacy, vulnerability, and courage.

Being alive means that in every moment we are involved in the interpenetration of air, water, food, sound, smell, taste, and sight. Humans are completely dependent on these numerous natural processes to give us life, and Indigenous peoples of the Americas tell many stories that describe these intimate encounters with natural phenomenon and other-than-human persons: "Such narratives depict humans, animals, and other nonhuman beings engaged in an astonishing variety of activities and committed to mutually sustaining relationships that ensure the continuing well-being of the world."[9] These stories offer teachings about reciprocity, belonging, communal connections, and essential kinship bonds.

Tragically, these beautiful stories of embodied connection have been demonized and silenced by patriarchal, colonial, and Judeo-Christian ideologies, and these rich eco-erotic experiences have been suppressed and,

in many cases, extinguished. The history of colonial and sexual violence against Native peoples and the imperial imperative of severing First Peoples' relations with land have had severe intergenerational consequences for the health of Native peoples and for the "well-being of the world." It could also be said that this profound historical disruption of human-environment relations has led to the ecological and social crises we face today.

I am committed to remembering these stories of relationship and re-awakening and embodying the metaphysics and praxis of Indigenous eco-erotics. I believe it is our human birthright and, as Native people, we have an additional responsibility to decolonize and reignite the spark of these ancestral relations. According to Anishinaabeg prophecy, we are people of the seventh fire (generation) since the time before colonial impact, and we have a cultural obligation to restore our traditional knowledge and sacred ways, not only for ourselves, but also ultimately for all peoples and life. For me as an educator, that translates into seeing how these Indigenous oral stories and the ethical insights they share about human–more-than-human relations can be productively and creatively applied in academia and social movements and, specifically, in addressing the dire need to mend the human split with our sacred Earth.

Out of the Tipi: A Collective Resurgence of Indigenous Erotica

Today the topics of nature, sexuality, and Indigeneity are converging in some very exciting and novel ways and are showing up in academia, popular media, environmental movements, and arts circles. Eco-erotics. Pansexuality. Erotic ecology. Ecofeminism. Queer ecology. Ecosexual. Eco-porn. SexEcology. Queer Indigenous. Sovereign erotic. Erotics of place. Indigenous erotica. The convergence of ecology and sexuality studies may seem like a spurious connection to some. For decades, the two fields have not been analyzed or theorized together except in the simplest Darwinian sense (i.e., notions of evolutionary sexual selection). To many of us, however, it is an obvious and fertile overlap. Nature is sex, sex is nature, and *we* are nature. Add Indigenous studies to the mix and you have a potent and possibly "dirty" fusion of theories and methods. The explicit subject of Indigenous eco-erotics is still on the fringe in academia (and in Native communities); yet the actual *practice* of it is very old and very common, just more tacit and often hidden or silenced due to centuries of colonial oppression.

As Joanne Barker's introduction outlines, this silence is being broke with a plethora of new publications in the area of Native sexualities, with titles such

as *Queer Indigenous Studies, Sovereign Erotic,* and *Me Sexy*.[10] These radical, recent texts have opened up profound questions and discussions about previously transgressive subjects in fresh, insightful, and humorous ways. They are a reanimation of the erotic intelligence embedded (and mostly dormant) within Native worldviews, oral literatures, and practices. As Drew Hayden Taylor shares in *Me Sexy,* "Since that fabled age known as Time Immemorial, we, the First Nations people of this country, have all been intimately familiar with our delightful practices of passion, but for reasons unknown, members of the dominant culture have other perceptions about said topics."[11] From the same great text, the Cree writer Tomson Highway provides a "reason" for these other perceptions of Indigenous erotica. Highway claims that it is the Christian myth of the Garden of Eden, with its emphasis on human "eviction from the garden," that disconnects some Eurocentric cultures from the human body and nature: "At that moment, the human body became a thing of evil, and nature became an enemy."[12] Highway claims that under this myth, humans and the English language became disembodied, or only located in the head. Native myths and languages, however, do not cut humans off from nature and our bodily functions. In fact, they celebrate our fun and funny body parts and honor human sexuality as a sacred process. The very notion of "original sin" injects profound notions of shame into one's relationship with bodies and sexualities. This religious teaching, although one of many Christian myths and interpretations, was repeatedly and often zealously promulgated in American Indian boarding schools; thus, the critical emphasis on healing from it for many Native peoples today.[13] Other Native scholars, such as Kim TallBear, are examining how "both 'sex' and 'nature' and their politics are at the heart of narratives and strategies used to colonize Indigenous peoples."[14] TallBear and I share an interest in "greening" Indigenous queer theory and investigating how Indigenous stories portray social relations with nonhumans.

I am a Native ecologist, and I am deeply interested in the interrelationships and theoretical synergy among ecology, sex, and Native cultures—or, put more academically, among the fields of ecology, sexuality studies, and Indigenous studies. I am interested in what an Indigenous environmental sexuality study would look like. I may be presumptuous or horribly naive to think that a "Native eco-erotics for dummies" manual could lead to a more sustainable future for all life. What if every human being—or, at least, a lot more than at present—could awaken to their pansexual nature, to the fact that we are living animals in sensuous interaction with the material fabric of life that provides us with everything we need to survive? The evolution-

ary biologist Stephen Jay Gould claimed, "We cannot win this battle to save species and environments without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature—for we will not fight to save what we do not love."[15]

Walking barefoot on the earth; drinking a cold glass of water; eating a fresh summer peach; breathing in warm air—these basic, often unconscious daily acts are not in fact mundane but are sublime and sensuous eco-erotic connections to the more-than-human world. If we truly felt this, in our guts, in our cells, would we continue to poison our soils and water? Mine our mountains? Genetically alter our seeds? I think not. The metaphysics of eco-erotics teaches us that we are related to everything through a visceral kinship and that our cosmo-genealogical connections to all life demand that we treat our relatives with great reverence and appreciation.[16]

This topic is also important because it is an essential part of the decolonization process. Decolonizing the "self" includes decolonizing our whole beings: body, mind, heart, spirit, and more. Decolonizing requires a fierce reexamination of our colonial, and often sexist and homophobic, conditioning and an honest inventory of our pansexual natures and visceral connections to the more-than-human world. Reclaiming our eco-erotic birthright as human beings and Indigenous citizens requires a peeling away of the colonial and religious impositions of patriarchy, heteronormativity, internalized oppression, original sin, shame, and guilt (among many other idiosyncratic layers), especially in relation to our bodies and our capacity for intimacy and pleasure. These beliefs are based on a fear of the wild and uncontrollable, both in nature and in ourselves. After centuries of oppression, expressing the joy and diversity of our Native sexualities is truly an anticolonial, liberating act. Questioning the internalized authoritarianism that denies and demonizes our psychospiritual and animal closeness to "nature" is a decolonial and revolutionary act of survivance.[17]

Can there be a way to explore Indigenous eco-erotics that embraces the science and poetry of it without falling into the binary of objectivity and subjectivity? To do this, we will need to create and use new theoretical frameworks and decolonize nature itself. Stacy Alaimo has proposed the term "trans-corporeality" as a "theoretical site where corporeal theories and environmental theories meet and mingle in productive ways."[18] Catherine Baumgartner, an independent researcher, is using biocultural neuroscience to explore "embodied ecologies." Her objective is to "investigate and understand the essential role of embodied sensory experience in human relationships to the places and ecosystems we inhabit."[19] Her work is showing how critical it is to integrate sensory, emotional, cultural, symbolic, and other

aspects into an embodied sense of place. She is also exploring how place attachment is key to human health and well-being; yet most people in industrial society have attachment *disruption* due to removal, dislocation, migration, diaspora, and general environmental degradation. The cultural critic T. J. Demos says, "To 'decolonize nature' would suggest the cancellation of this subject-object relation between humans and the environment, the removal of the conditions of mastery and appropriation that determine the connection between the two, and the absolution of the multiple levels of violence that mediate the relation of human power over the world."[20]

Given these theoretical frameworks of trans-corporeality, embodied ecologies, and a decolonized nature, I envision an intellectual ecosystem in which these different species of knowledge—ecological, critical Indigenous, and sexual theories and metaphors—can inform and inspire one another for a deeper dialogue and greater understanding of the enmeshed relations humans have with one another and the more-than-human world. I contend that this multivocal dialogue is essential for decolonization, liberation, and even the very survival of our, and other, species. As Barker states in this volume's introduction, this collective work "anticipates a decolonized future of gender and sexual relations."

Pansexuality in Oral Narratives

Human nature is a multispecies relationship.—**Anna Tsing,** "Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species"

One significant (and vastly underused) source of insights into eco-erotic questions comes from Native oral literatures, the "original instructions" or metaphysical blueprints for many Indigenous cultures.[21] These oral narratives often appear as fanciful and poetic stories yet contain insightful "scientific" observations about ecological patterns and political insights into social patterns. These stories are deeply significant because, as the Cherokee author Thomas King says, "The truth about stories is that's all we are."[22] Yet, there really is no "original" here, as stories are told, retold, interpreted, changed, and transformed over time and place. There is a strange sameness and difference each time an Indigenous oral story is shared, much like complex bird and whale songs.[23] As the Okanagan writer Jeannette Armstrong has stated, "Words come from many tongues and mouths and the land around them. I am a listener to the language of stories and when my words form I am merely re-telling the same stories in different patterns."[24] Native

stories transcend many Western binaries such as past and present, original and derivative, and so on. The Anishinaabe scholar Kimberly Blaeser says it well: "Native stories are seldom about separate parallel existences but about intricately linked relationships and intersections."[25]

Numerous Native stories explore these intersections and erotic contact zones between humans and nonhuman others. The Métis artist and writer Michelle McGeough writes, "Oral traditions often incorporated what Europeans considered erotic elements."[26] In hearing and reading these stories, it is clear that a whole other level of Indigenous sexuality and "carnal knowledge" is happening that is deeply tied to tribally specific understandings of sovereignty, language, relationship, and place. These stories can reveal profoundly diverse Indigenous epistemologies of pansexuality and visceral ontologies of intimacy. I believe that a deeper investigation into these stories can offer fruitful ways to Indigenize queer ecology, "green" Indigenous erotica, and reclaim Indigenous erotic intelligence that recognizes women's (and humans') inheritance as pansexual, eco-erotic beings that have ethical obligations to our more-than-human relatives.

These stories often demonstrate Indigenous women's historically adopted role as mediators of kinship with the more-than human world. In this tricky territory of story re-interpretation and precarious "legibility," Barker reminds us that we must "grapple with the demands of asserting a sovereign, self-determining Indigenous subject without reifying racialized essentialisms and authenticities." Given these complications, many oral narratives describe interspecies and trans-species relationships and speak to both their promise and their dangers.

According to numerous stories in Native American oral literature, Native women have a propensity to fall in love with other-than-human beings. And I truly mean "other than human": animals, plants, stars, even sticks and rocks. Underwater serpents, coyote men, cloud beings, and even the wind have also been gendered and sexualized characters with which Native women have carnal relations. These personified others have masculine and feminine qualities, like humans, and many variations in between this oversimplified gender binary. Within many Indigenous worldviews, it is common—dare I say, "natural"—for young women to fall in love with these other beings: to marry them, make love, and live together as lovers and married couples.

According to modern society's standards, this sounds ludicrous. It sounds fanciful and downright dangerous. According to the late environmental author Theodore Roszak, the person who coined the terms "counter-culture"

and "eco-psychology"—the only references to "nature" in the psychologists' bible, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-*IV*) are seasonal affect disorder and bestiality.[27] "Funny how psychiatrists are absolutely inspired when it comes to mapping sexual dysfunction," Roszak writes, "but fail to chart the strong emotional bond we have with the natural habitat."[28] Humans' sensuous relationships with "nature" are often considered a mental illness. We see this message again and again from modern literature (e.g., *Equus*) and contemporary comedians who regularly make fun of tree hugging and bestiality.

It is true that these traditional stories often do not end well for the women. Torrid romances with nonhumans are dangerous business. Some women go mad; some die; some are banished to horrible circumstances. Sometimes they live happily ever after or make sacrifices to feed the nation. Often they create relationship agreements and covenants for a nation to follow. Many live as most married couples, experiencing the usual ups and downs of relationship dynamics. So why are these interspecies stories so prevalent in Native cultures, and what are their deeper messages? I assert that these stories provide critical insights about humans' eco-erotic relationship with other than human beings and that stories about falling in love with a star or a beaver should be considered signs of intelligence about the ethics involved with maintaining harmonious and resilient kinship relations.

In *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places,* Chris Philo and Christ Wilbert clearly outline that human-animal relations are very important for human health and often overlooked. They elaborate, "Stories of animals are especially valuable in helping their human tellers and hearers to develop their own moral identities and psychological interiorities."[29] In thinking through her relationship with her dog Cayenne, the maverick scholar Donna Haraway writes about "companion species." In her *Companion Species Manifesto* (2000), she articulates the profound and messy "significant otherness" of human-animal relations to reexamine species boundary constructions and naturecultures in a technoscientific era.[30] The profundity of human-animal relations—and, thus, human-nature relations—is finally getting some thoughtful attention, yet Indigenous oral literature has always featured such multispecies and trans-human interactions.

In Native American and Indigenous communities today—and, I assume, throughout colonial history—there are many boisterous and hushed conversations that hark back to these stories with relished details about naughty pleasures, affairs, and lust. I once tried very earnestly to interview a ninety-six-year-old elder from the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Reservation about

traditional foods and language. She and her seventy-year-old daughters started speaking "Michif" and laughing hysterically.[31] Once I got my mom to stop laughing, I asked her to translate for me, and she said that the conversation had quickly turned to puns on oral sex.

References to "oral" traditions have led to many wordplays and jokes about kissing, oral sex, flirting, and the "hunt." Erdrich writes that the word for flirting and hunting is very close in the Ojibwe language.[32] This conjures up the idea that although there are different forms of human desire, the desire for flesh in food and sex may have a similar core root. This alludes to the dangers of the hunt (potentially getting hurt by the "prey") and the ultimate satisfaction of the conquest of the hunted. This connection also gives new meaning to the common term "carnal knowledge," as with anything we eat, consume, or have sex with, we are engaged in a similar interspecies or intraspecies biological transformation of substance and energy with uncertain results: strength or sickness from the quality and metabolism of food; bliss, pregnancy, or sickness from the quality and communicability of the person "consumed" in sex. In eating food and in sex, two become one, even for a moment.

Interspecies and trans-species sex are common occurrences in Native oral literature.[33] These stories often celebrate the various plants, animals, and other living beings of a specific territory as teaching tools for educating the young about the material environment that provides life—water, air, food, medicine, clothing, shelter. Native taxonomies are quite sophisticated and are often more complex than modern biology's binomial system of species identification.[34] These elements of the environment are considered animate, living beings, and important relatives that give life, so they are spoken about with great respect and reverence. Thus, it is natural to refer to them with familiarity and humor as they embody human traits, both sacred and profane.

In many tribal creation stories, these different species connect, converse, fight, and get together as commonly as humans do. In fact, they are considered "people" with their own individual and species sovereignty, yet they are all interrelated through creation or what ecologists call "ecosystem dynamics" or "food webs": eventually, everything eats everything. So much interspecies co-mingling is going on. Other oral narratives speak about strange, zoomorphic, mythic creatures, such as Thunderbirds and other winged creatures; underwater serpents and strange water monsters; the Little People; Rock beings and underground creatures. Even common, natural phenomena such as the elements have agency and personality. These "trans-species" beings are also randy. They, like all these other people, enjoy pleasure and sex.

Add to these types of sex the trickster character with his or her lascivious nature and ability to shape-shift. Tricksters can be transgendered, bisexual, polyamorous, and downright horny creatures. The So:lo scholar Jo-ann Archibald writes, "The English word 'trickster' is a poor one because it cannot portray the diverse range of ideas that First Nations associate with the Trickster, who is sometimes like a magician, an enchanter, an absurd prankster, or a Shaman, who sometimes is a shape-shifter, and who often takes on human characteristics."[35] In many traditions, Trickster takes on a significant spiritual and sacred role. But "trickster's amusing—and sometimes frightening—licentiousness is a significant danger to the social fabric."[36] Given the fact that Trickster holds a sacred role and is also a transgressor of boundaries, including gender and species boundaries, one sees a more open understanding of the fluidity of self, gender, spirituality, and sexuality in these stories. "Getting dirty" is Trickster's business. As King has written, "The Trickster is an important figure. . . . it allows us to create a particular kind of world in which Judeo-Christian obsession with good and evil and order and disorder is replaced with the more native concern of balance and harmony."[37] Given Trickster's wanderlust, gender fluidity, dirty nature, and shape-shifting ability, it is easy to understand how sex with an other-than-human being could occur and could be part of an Indigenous eco-erotic repertoire. With this outline of interspecies, trans-species, and Trickster sexuality themes, we can now dive into some of the oral narratives.

Retellings of Oral Stories

The stories in this [essay] about . . . the birth and death of naanabozho, that figuration of a compassionate tribal trickster, have been heard and remembered by tribal people in many generations; the published versions of these stories are various, and a sense of contradiction is endowed in postcolonial literature.—**Gerald Vizenor,** *Summer in the Spring*, 13

Writing about published oral literature is contradictory, at best. These "postcolonial literatures" have been spoken, performed, recorded, translated, transcribed, published, interpreted, forgotten, reinterpreted, remembered, dismembered, misinterpreted, and re-written many times in different contexts and times. They are fragments of orality re-presented here as stories of Native women's connections to the more-than-human world. I have faith that the seeds of these stories were once spoken and performed and passed on through listening, memory, and voice. Still, they are not unproblematic "traditional" stories but fragments of perspectives that contribute both prac-

tical advice and metaphoric value. I invite you into these messy storyscapes to discern your own understanding about the meaning of these offerings.

In re-telling human–more-than-human marriage stories, I first offer a couple of short anecdotal stories to introduce the concepts and some key elements. I then explore the bear marriage stories because it has global implications. Finally, I delve into one extensive narrative: a very specific and popular tribal story from my own Anishinaabeg heritage that has also been retold and published by contemporary Anishinaabe writers.

"STAR HUSBAND"

"Star Husband" is a short story from the Kootenai tradition about a young woman who desires and marries a star.[38] She is enamored with a particular star's beauty and wants the "little, nice" star to marry her. Her desire is so strong that the little star hears her and takes her to the star world. She realizes that the little stars are the old men and the large stars are the young men, and she ends up married to an old man. She finds herself in a cold star world with an old Star Husband away from her home country, and she cries. She "wished upon a star" and literally got what she wanted, to marry the Star Husband. She realizes the foolishness of her desire and wants to return to her human world. She is out digging roots with the Star Women, and they warn her not to dig too deeply by a tree. She does what they tell her *not* to do, and she digs through the thin layer and sees her home and family down below. She makes a ladder and lets herself down to Earth to reunite with her family. Her parents are very happy to see her; they ask about what happened to her, and she tells them. The Star Husband realizes his wife is missing and is not coming back. The young woman and her family go to bed. When they try to wake her in the morning, she is dead. The Star Husband struck her down.

This is clearly a warning story about the potential consequences of women's desire. It dramatically demonstrates the "be careful what you wish for" idiom. The girl is young and naive; she expresses her desire before thinking about it. Her impulsiveness is enacted, but with dire results. It is unclear whether she is punished for wanting something beyond her sphere or not wanting the world she was in. These traditional warning stories often remind us of the consequences of not expressing gratitude for the place one finds oneself in. This story shows us that impulsiveness and the desire for something beyond our current world, something "foreign," can be very dangerous, indeed. It is also a precautionary tale communicating that if one goes to another world (beyond one's boundaries) and tries to come home again, things will never be the same. In fact, "coming home" may not be possible.

Through another lens, this story could speak to the familiarity and even affection this people had for stars and could be a way to get young people to look up into the night sky with curiosity and attention.

"STICK HUSBAND"

There is a particularly fascinating story about a Coast Yuki woman who marries a stick.[39] Yes, a small piece of wood. In the story of "Stick Husband," a young woman lives with her grandmother, who is blind. The young woman helps her grandma by fetching wood and water, gathering food, and generally taking good care of her. One day while out picking up wood the girl notices a special stick. "What a pretty stick," she thinks. Soon after that, the stick rolls up to her and starts following her wherever she goes. She kind of likes it and develops a fondness for the stick. At night when she goes to bed, it rolls into her bed with her. The next morning she sees the stick roll out of bed and come back with a dead deer, a rare and special gift of fresh meat. The girl feeds her grandma this fresh meat and realizes she has to tell her grandma what has happened. The grandma is very happy about the girl's relationship with the stick. At night the stick started to roll all over the girl: on her body, between her legs, everywhere. Soon she is pregnant and has a baby boy. She then gets pregnant again and has a baby girl. The Stick Husband is good to her, keeps her warm at night, and provides good food and shelter.

Here we see a young girl having a satisfying relationship with an animate stick being. The grandmother approves, and they have a happy life together. What is this story telling us about Indigenous eco-erotics, or what is possible for two women in the absence of a man? Is it suggesting that it is normal and healthy for a woman to be autoerotic, to satisfy herself sexually with a stick? Is this an Indigenous precursor to the "vibrator," discovered in England in the 1800s? This story of Stick Husband illustrates woman's autonomy from human man and her ability to live well and satisfy herself on many levels absent a human man in her life. This Yuki narrative also illustrates the profound intimacy a woman can have with a stick, something the modern, industrial world would call an "inanimate" object but that, in the Yuki worldview, is a unique "person" with important qualities worthy of a relationship. The writer and publisher Malcolm Margolin comments on this story, "To live in a world in which everything was animate and had personhood was to live in a world of endless potentiality. The most common objects around one were filled with power, intelligence, and even sexual desire, making for a thoroughly unpredictable and magical world."[40] The unpredictability of nature (even its unknowability in some cases) is an important teaching imbedded

in these pansexual stories and contributes to a sense of ordinariness with surprise and the unusual.

"The Woman Who Married a Beaver"

There is a well-known Anishinaabeg story about a woman who married a beaver; there are also many other stories about beaver marriages from tribes throughout the Great Lakes, upper Midwest, and Northwest.[41] The woman lived with the beaver for a long time and had four children with him. He eventually died, and she returned to the human world to tell humans about the importance of maintaining loving and respectful relations with the Beaver nation.

Like all of these stories, the story has many layers. It goes something like this: a young woman went out to fast for a vision quest, probably during her puberty time. While on her fast she met a human-looking person who spoke to her and eventually asked her to come live with him. She went to live with him and eventually married him. He treated her very well, with good food, shelter, and clothing. She soon was pregnant and ultimately gave birth to four children. She then started to notice odd things about her husband and finally realized she had married a beaver. She noticed that from time to time her husband and children would leave their home, which she was forbidden to leave, and they would meet with a human being. When they returned from these outings, they were always rich with new items—kettles, bowls, knives, tobacco, "all the things that are used when a beaver is eaten."[42] The woman soon realized that the beavers were going to the humans to get these goods, but also to give them their fur; she understood that they were being killed, but not *really* killed, because they would come back home with their gifts. After much exchange like this, the old Beaver Husband eventually died. The woman returned to the life of human beings and lived to be an old woman. She often told the story of her experience being married to a beaver and always told people to be kind to the beavers and never speak ill of them, because then they would never be able to kill them: "And he who never speaks ill of a beaver is very much loved by it; in the same ways as people often love another, so is one held in the mind of the beaver, particularly lucky then is one at killing beavers."[43]

This story illustrates the important message of "carnal knowledge" of food and the need to treat what we eat with great respect so it will keep sacrificing itself for our nourishment and survival. It speaks to the necessity of reciprocity in our physical consumption of other beings. It points out that to live, we have to eat; to eat, we have to kill. How do we kill with care? With kindness?

How is hunting like flirting? Insights into these questions can be found in these human-animal marriage stories. This story also problematizes the usual narrative of the human predator hunting the beaver prey by opening up the possibility that the beavers were actually using the humans to meet *their* material needs.[44] This, sadly, did not happen historically, as the beavers were driven nearly to extinction by the fur trade. But it is interesting that this story alludes to beavers' agency and this imagined reverse exploitation. This story could also be a rationalization for Native peoples' internalizing and adopting the new materialism of the frontier fur trade and colonial economy for survival—that is, the beaver was a good exchange for the kettles, knives, and other goods supplied by the fur trade. This story also indicates, like so many others, that women have a distinct role as mediators between humans and other beings and that they are fluid boundary crossers who can enter and maintain erotic intimacy and economic trade with nonhumans.

"THE WOMAN WHO MARRIED A BEAR"

The story of "the woman who married a bear" is relatively omnipresent in traditional cultures wherever bears are found, especially in the deep North.[45] Bear mythology, art, literature, and rituals are found around the world, and one can find human-bear marriage stories throughout North America, South America, Russia, Siberia, Japan, Europe, and Asia.[46] I tell a specific Kashaya Pomo bear story in the conclusion to this chapter. There are bear clans, bear dances, bear symbols, bear songs, and many extraordinary stories highlighting humans' deep relationship with bear nations, including Yup'ik and Cree of the north, Maidu in California, Lakota in the Northern Plains, Navajo in the desert, and Seneca in the East. Regardless of culture or tradition, these narratives speak to the profound closeness humans feel with bears historically and the exceptional reverence humans have for this powerful creature.

Some tribes and traditional societies have bear laws that say one can never eat the bear because he or she is so similar to humans it would be like cannibalism. Most have profound messages that outline the moral codes for hunting, coexisting with, and consuming bears in detailed rituals. Most Native bear stories highlight how similar we truly are as mammals: we are omnivores; our skeletal structures are very similar (especially in the hands and feet); we share a walking style (plantigrade locomotion); we are highly intelligent and family-oriented: "The Blackfeet word *o-kits-iks* refers to both the human hand and a bear's paw."[47] Because of this uncanny likeness, some stories say, humans and bears at one time were actually the same. Other narratives say that humans and bears spoke the same language. Due to this likeness, and

given Indigenous kin-centric worldviews, the human-bear marriage stories seem fairly obvious, or expected. There are profound differences, of course, between our two species, such as bears' practicing hibernation and regular infanticide, but humans' mythical and spiritual connection with bears is mysterious, strong, and enduring. There are many rich variations on the bear marriage theme, yet most human-bear stories feature a young woman and a male bear. There are some stories, however, that include men who marry female bears.[48]

Bear stories by nature are long, involved, diverse, and complicated. The king of the land deserves such time and respect. The power of the bear and the global diversity of his or her stories is found in many works.[49] I am not going to retell one here.

I do want to share one very interesting aspect of bear stories that I found in many that I have encountered: that bears should not be made fun of, especially their scat or waste. Bears' waste often contains seeds from berries and other forest foods and bones from salmon and other water and land animals and therefore is a critical part of the sacred food web. Bears' "waste" is actually a critical part of life regeneration so should not be stepped in, jumped over, or made fun of in any way. Scat contains seeds and creates soil; seeds and soil contain and create the groundwork of life.

The Birth of Nanaboozhoo

My Anishinaabeg oral tradition has a very important creation story of how our trickster icon Nanaboozhoo was created. Of course, there are many different versions of this story, but the basic narrative goes something like this: this is the story of how Winonah, the mother of our trickster cultural hero Nanaboozhoo, was impregnated by the West Wind Ae-pungishimook. In the North Woods of Anishinaabeg-Aki (Ojibwe territory), a young woman lived with her grandmother. It was berry-picking season, and Nokomis, the grandmother, asked her granddaughter to go to a particular patch to pick a pail or two of June berries. She warned the girl to stick to business and just go there, pick the berries, and return home before dark. In some versions, the grandmother/mother figure is very specific about instructing the young girl never to face the West Wind directly or to turn her back to it while urinating.[50] The daughter politely accepts these instructions and goes out to the forest to collect the berries. She has picked a good pail of berries but knew she should pick more. Just as she sits down for a moment to pause (or pee), she feels a strong wind whip up all around her. It is a very boisterous wind that starts to

pull at her clothes and lift her dress. She feels a warm, strong sensation under her dress and then sighs and falls back onto the ground, feeling exposed and vulnerable.

The Ojibwe scholar Gerald Vizenor retells this important story in *Summer in the Spring*. In his version, the girl is living with her mother, not grandmother, and it is the North Wind, not the West Wind, that takes her. As he describes of the scene, "While she was busily engaged gathering berries, the *giiwedin manidoo*, in a very noisily and boisterous manner, came to her, took her in his arms and kissed her, fluttered her garments and then departed from whence he had come. For some time the young girls was overcome with a delicious feeling of joy and happiness and she reclined to rest."[51]

The renowned Ojibwe historian and author Basil Johnson retells a less romantic and more violating version of this scene: "When *Ae-pungishimook* saw Winonah's little moss-covered cleft, the coals of lust glowed in his loins, and without prolonged foreplay or the recitation of sweet nothings, he cast his loincloth aside and humped the girl then and there. When his fire had petered out, *Ae-pungishimook* put his loincloth back on and staggered away, leaving poor Winonah to manage for herself and to face the future alone. Winonah rued the day that she had ever seen the Manitou and never expected to see him again."[52]

The environmental philosophers J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson also retell an Anglicized version of this story:

> Now such was the way it was, for it was true that at the time heedful was this woman who was a maiden. Never with men had she intimate association. But once on a time unmindful became the maiden; so when out of the doors she went and afterwards sat down facing the west, then heard she the sound of wind coming hitherward. When she felt it, she was chilled there at the place of the passage out. Accordingly she quickly leaped to her feet. "o my mother, behold the state that I am in? It may be that what you told me of is the matter with me."[53]

In some versions of the story the young woman picks more berries and then heads home. She does not tell her grandmother/mother until she starts showing that she is pregnant. In other stories she feels so distraught and sullied she heads straight home and tells her grandmother/mother all about it right away. And in yet other stories, her grandmother/mother already knows what has happened to her. This "immaculate conception" or "trans-human conception" of a young Anishinaabe woman by the West Wind gives birth to one of our most celebrated cultural icons, Nanaboozhoo.

As the examples show, in some versions of this story the girl is nearly raped. This could be a precautionary tale about not listening to your mother's warnings about the dangers of men's lust and power, and their dire consequences. It could also be a reinforcement of certain gender roles, however patriarchal or unjust they may seem to us now. Johnson interprets this encounter in a metaphoric way. He says that the West Direction and the West Wind represent age and destiny. The young woman represents youth and innocence. It is an important life teaching that "age will always ravish youth."[54] In other versions of this story, the girl has more agency and enjoys the experience as a young woman can enjoy being seduced by a powerful man—in this case the West Wind. In Johnson's version, Winonah bears four sons by the West Wind. The Wind, by its nature and definition, is an invisible, immaterial force. Yet wind is deeply visceral and in the stories express attraction, desire, and power in taking the young girl. This communicates that more-than-human natural phenomena have great power and unpredictability and that there are appropriate and wrong ways to interact with them, even if they are invisible.

For contrast, I now share a contemporary version of this Native story that, on one hand, emulates many of the same plot points and character traits of this Nanaboozhoo birthing story, but, on the other hand, flips some of the gender dynamics in what Vizenor called a "sacred reversal." What follows is a summary of one story that is part of the "Potchikoo Stories," a series of short stories by the award-winning contemporary Ojibwe author Louise Erdrich: Potchikoo is an Ojibwe man who is a modern Nanaboozhoo, as he has a difficult time repressing his hunger for food and women and often has to trick or lie to people to get what he wants. But in the end, his heart is good, and he does try to help his community. He had an unusual birth, just like Nanaboozhoo: his mother was taken by the Sun in a potato patch, and nine months later she gave birth to a potato-looking boy, Potchikoo. His mother's "pregnancy" was also unique in that his mother was impregnated by the powerful sunlight, much as Winonah was impregnated by the Wind.

Potchikoo lives on the Chippewa Indian reservation in the Turtle Mountains in postcontact times, probably in the 1950s. He, like any good trickster, goes through many adventures, and Erdrich writes several wonderful short stories and poems about his life and death. In one story, Potchikoo is out walking in the woods when he sees beautiful smooth stones emerging from mud. He finds himself drawn to the stones. He is quite attracted to them and is aroused by their smoothness. To him, the rocks resemble women's breasts. He caresses them, fondles them, and grows sexually excited. The rocks are

located in a slough, and the warm mud starts to rise around the rocks. "When the slough rises to his crotch he enters an ambisexual encounter with the mud and rocks."[55] In the end, he "makes love to the slough."[56] As a result of this sexual act, three rock daughters are born. One day they go to visit their father and hug him. They end up crushing him under their weight and accidentally kill him. But then he is magically and miraculously revived.[57]

Here we see a man having pansexual experiences with stones and mud. He takes it beyond a multisensory experience into a definitive eco-sexual—or, more accurately, *geo*-sexual—experience that results in the birth of three hybrid stone daughters. As Callicott and Nelson write, "Sex is not what these marriages (or encounters) are all about."[58] So what are they about? I attempt to answer this question in the conclusion.

Modern Science Confirming Indigenous Sexuality Knowledge

Many Native traditions refer to the Earth as a Mother. The co-sexual activist Annie Sprinkles says we need to start thinking of Earth as a Lover.[59] Western scientists have come up with the "Gaia hypothesis," based on the Greek story of Gaia, which theorizes that the Earth is a living organism that is capable of self-regulation.[60] Regardless of assigned gender or relationship, modern geology tells us that the Earth has a magnetic iron core, and gravity is one of the fundamental laws of nature. Things are attracted to each other; this is an obvious statement but one that is uniquely reinforced by Native oral stories about human–more-than-human marriage stories. As Western science posits, basically the whole universe, including the Earth and us, is based on gravitational attraction and magnetism. It is about getting pulled into someone's orbit or pulling someone into your orbit, whether consciously or not.

Most of us take gravity for granted, yet it is a constant force between any two objects with mass, and it provides our most basic needs and desires: feet to earth (walking), mouth to apple (food), head to pillow (sleep), and so on. As the eco-philosopher David Abram writes, "We now scorn the ground. Gravity, we think, is a drag upon our aspirations; it pulls us down, holds us back, makes life a weight and a burden."[61] But gravity is a fundamental force that affects all of life *all* of the time. I believe that many Native peoples were historically aware of this force but spoke of it in different terms. For example, the Chickasaw law professor and Native science scholar James Sakej Henderson writes, "*Kesalttimkewey* (deep love) or *kesalk* (spirit of love) is a Mi'kmaq concept for gravity, it is like dark matter gravity. Thoughts [*snkita'suti*] are like the stars or white light gravity."[62]

From a Western scientific perspective, specific gravity is highest in rocks or things rich in the element of iron. Blood is red because an iron atom is at the core of our blood cells, just like the iron core of the Earth, making gravity and attraction inescapable. Every free body is falling toward every other; this implies a universal force of gravitation as articulated by Isaac Newton and others. Indigenous and other peoples for millennia knew this modern "law of gravity" as a fundamental "natural law," a life force of kinship, attraction, and, according to Sakej Henderson's understanding of Mi'kmaq, deep love. Abram continues, "The gravitational draw that holds us to the ground was once known as Eros—as Desire!—the lovelorn yearning of our body for the larger Body of the Earth, and of the Earth for us. The old affinity between gravity and desire remains evident, perhaps, when we say that we have fallen in love—as though we were off-balance and tumbling through air, as though it was the steady pull of the planet that somehow lay behind the Eros we feel toward another person."[63] A visceral, proprioceptive awareness of gravity is a critical way to reawaken our eco-erotic nature. For Indigenous peoples marinated in diverse, creative, and sexy stories of "deep love" with nonhumans, this sensuous definition of gravity is familiar.

Similarly, the concept of magnetic force tells us that we are all filled with little magnets (electrons), but they exert a major force on us and others only when they are lined up, or aligned. Also, magnetism, unlike gravity, depends on specific properties of objects. The interesting thing about the magnetic force is that it can either pull two objects together *or* push them apart, depending on the alignment of the magnets. In terms of eco-erotics, all of the Earth (every ecological and cosmological element) has a gravitational pull on us. This is the basic pull of life and fundamental desire for distant bodies; it is a constant, perhaps unquenchable longing. Magnetism, however, is a specifically strong yet fickle attraction that depends on mysterious alignments. It can create an extraordinary allure, or "animal magnetism," that draws unlikely "people" together on an instinctive, unconscious level. It can then equally repel these same two "people" or "objects." This kind of magnetic attraction and repulsion on an erotic level provides the ingredients for torrid love affairs, lust, obsession, and heartbreak, the exciting ingredients often explored in poetry and literature.

Our senses are easily attracted and seduced by physical desire: the smell of fresh baked bread, the sight of luscious strawberries, the rare beauty of a person's smile. In the stories shared in this chapter, we see this gravitational attraction between the young woman and the star, a woman and a stick, the wind and a woman, an old man and smooth stones, and so on. Our senses

and the mysterious spark of erotic attraction become an undeniable force that brings people and energies together—sometimes like a light mist; at other times like a crashing wave.

Our minds and creative imaginations are also seduced, but by a different type of attraction: by story and metaphor; by the ability to wonder, imagine, learn, and know. Stories stretch our minds and provide other types of desire and fulfillment. Stories can demonstrate powerful types of yearning in the human spirit and expand our sense of self. One could say that all attractions are based on some form of gravity or urge to connect. The anthropologist Edward T. Hall has said, "The drive to learn is as strong as the sexual drive. It begins earlier and lasts longer."[64] Others have said that the mind is the greatest sex organ.[65] No doubt, humans have an erotic mind, and with this erotic mind we are able to transcend species divisions and find intimacy and connection with countless other-than-human beings. In all fairness to gravity (and many modern people's feeling toward it), it is also important to point out that Nietzsche and other existentialists correlated gravity with "the grave" and even "the Devil," and that there is an equal and opposite existential force to intimacy that can pull us toward emptiness and despair.[66] These poles of intimacy and loneliness are also reflected in the oral narratives shared here, as one experience can quickly lead to the other, and this is the precarious nature of magnetic attraction.

Regarding the topic of women's pansexuality and queerness, the developmental psychologist Lisa Diamond did an extraordinary study following one hundred women over ten years to understand and, if possible, determine their sexual preferences. Her conclusions state that women have an amazing capacity for sexual fluidity within our own species.[67] That is, women can easily flow between the standard categories and identities of heterosexuality and homosexuality over time and include other liminal identities such as bisexual, transsexual, queer and "unlabeled." According to Diamond's study, many women apparently make little distinction between attraction to men and attraction to women, and their love and desire are more context-dependent than gender-specific. Many women also can enjoy long periods of celibacy or autosexuality with much contentment.

Diamond also points out how many women can "fall in love" with other women without having a physical attraction or sexual component. This emotional bonding is quite profound and includes the usual "love drugs" of the brain—dopamine and oxytocin—but does not necessarily spill into a physical or sexual arousal.[68] Recent scientific studies about women's sexual fluid-

ity (and ability to fall in love without a sexual component) confirm some of the fluid erotic relations Native women have in the various stories shared. If women's desires are "person"-dependent rather than gender-dependent,[69] and according to many Indigenous worldviews, other-than-humans are considered "people," it makes complete sense that human women (and, surely, men and other gendered people) could fall in love and have relationships with "other" people such as stars, beavers, bears, wind, and sticks.

These Native stories, and some stories from modern Western science, remind us that humans—as individuals, clans, nations, and species—are always entangled within complex ecologies and cosmologies and that humans are eco-erotic, pansexual animals. This is our birthright and our responsibility: to care for other life forms in respectful, reciprocal, and joyful ways. It is a sign of erotic intelligence that has meaningful implications for decolonizing and re-Indigenizing our relationships with the natural world, one that feeds us literally and metaphorically.

Native oral literature and its many stories about interspecies, trans-species, and pansexual intimacy are not necessarily about the literal act of sex as we experience it, although sometimes it could be. As James Mallet, a biologist at the University of London, has stated, "Sex with another species may be very occasionally quite a good idea."[70] An article published by Mallet in *Nature* in 2007 noted that, on average, 10 percent of animal species and 25 percent of plant species engage in "interspecies sex" in a process known as hybrid speciation.[71] This occurs when two separate species mate and produce sexually fertile hybrid offspring that can evolve into separate species. Butterflies and bears have successfully mated with other species within their own kind, blurring the species boundary and showing that interspecies mating can be successful for producing new life forms. Mallett states, "it might be worth throwing the dice every now and then to try for something really weird and see if it works out."[72] Apparently, nature *does* play dice and experiment with interspecies sex. This is something that Indigenous cultures clearly know about with the theme of the trickster, and they communicated these possibilities through their zoomorphic, shape-shifting, transformative stories and images of eco-erotic affairs. Yet this understanding that some species did literally mix with each other does not mean that humans should entertain this notion of actual sex with other species. These stories tell us we should care for and love these "others"—whether animal, plant, stone, stick, or star—and do so with a sense of ethics and consent. The whole topic of bestiality is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is clear that, "based on the literature,

bestiality—sexual relations with animals has been part of the human race throughout history, in every place and culture in the world."[73] Many cultures, including Native cultures, have strict taboos against sexual relations with animals, yet like all taboos, they often come from bad past experiences. They also spark forbidden curiosity, as erotic desire is often fueled by the opportunity (thought, fantasy) or act of transgression.

Conclusion

If we appreciate the foolishness of human exceptionalism, then we know that becoming is always becoming with—in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake.—**Donna Haraway,** *When Species Meet*

In these extraordinary stories, sex with more-than-humans may actually sometimes be about sex as we know it, but most likely, sex is a metaphor. Sex is a symbol for intimate, visceral, embodied kinship relations with other species and with natural phenomenon. The "sex," the "intercourse" (from the Old French *entrecours* "exchange, commerce; and from the Late Latin *intercursus* "a running between, intervention"[74]), is an emotional and ethical transaction, an agreement, a treaty of obligations. These often unspoken agreements arise out of the ecotone between the sovereignty of humans and the sovereignty of other-than-human people. It is the "contact zone" where carnal knowledge is exchanged and codes of behavior are learned or instilled. As the Anishinaabeg political scientist Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark has noted, "There is a rich body of scholarship that calls for us to seriously consider how narratives, whether encoded in law or circulated throughout the dominant society and embedded in the national consciousness, shape and inform how we understand ourselves and relate to others."[75] In other words, stories create law, and law is a story. Barker affirms that this process is a way of "narrating Indigenous peoples back into their governance, territories, and cultures."

For example, in a lovely short story from Otis Parrish of the Kashaya Pomo Nation in northern California, we learn about the in-depth "treaty" between the bear and the huckleberry and then the humans. This story, like many, is communicated in a song yet outlines a type of territorially and tribally specific interspecies agreement. It is an example of what Barker calls "the polity of the Indigenous." According to the story, when Creator made the world, he made it so that some of the plants and animals were paired off together. He gave "Huckleberry the right to be made for food and the Bear

was given the taste for Huckleberries."[76] Creator then gave Bear a beautiful song, and Huckleberry heard it and fell in love with the song. Creator gave Huckleberry its berries and made Bear taste them. Bear fell in love with the taste of the berries. Huckleberry said, "If you want to have my beautiful, tasty berries, you have to sing your most beautiful song for me every time you want my beautiful, tasty berries." Bear had a beautiful voice but got stingy with it and did not always want to sing. Huckleberry warned Bear that if he did not sing his song, the quality of his voice would get worse, and he would not get his berries. Finally, Bear tried to sing his song, but only grunts and ugly sounds came out. Huckleberry had warned him, but he did not listen. Bear started to cry and throw a tantrum, rolling around on the ground and kicking up dust. Huckleberry felt sorry for him and finally gave him the right to eat the berries, but he still had to sing his song, even in his ugly voice. Then humans entered the picture and loved the taste of the berries, too. Bear warned them that they could not eat the berries or he would kill them. They could eat the berries only if they sang his Bear song to Huckleberry. Huckleberry agreed that humans had to sing Bear's song to them before taking any of the berries or else "old lady Bear will drag you into the deep woods, and you'll never come back."

Humans made an agreement with Huckleberry and Bear. From that point on, humans agreed to sing Bear's song for the Huckleberries, and Huckleberry would provide its berries for medicine and food. Bear, too, could still sing his song and access Huckleberries, and since humans sang the Bear song, they could all coexist and benefit from the "beautiful, tasty" Huckleberries.

This story is about "carnal knowledge" in the sense of food rather than sex, but it is still a type of erotic partnership and includes many of the same elements of attraction, desire, "falling in love," consumption, and agreements and rules about how natural "people" are to consume one another. It outlines a sort of interspecies "treaty" among three distinct creatures that ultimately all want the same thing: to eat and be sustained as autonomous beings yet acknowledge their essential interdependence with others. This story, and others, shows us that diverse living beings can enter a contact zone" of reciprocal relations with others in which all benefit. As the Potawatomie botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer has stated, "We are all bound by the moral covenant of reciprocity."[77] Beyond the utilitarian benefits of these interspecies treaties, this story also alludes to the fact that huckleberry bushes and bears can fall in love with songs and taste, both immaterial and material offerings. This

explicit acknowledgment of love and attraction to food and song is an essential part of Indigenous eco-erotics. The Jamaican writer and linguist Esther Figueroa proposes that this trope of "romance" is also used strategically as a way for humans to pay attention and remember these instructions.[78]

In terms of women's unique role in forging ahead with these trans-species relationships, the stories certainly remind us that women have great curiosity and complex desires. Cultural and ecological boundaries can be blurry at times, and it is often difficult to know when desires are healthy and beneficial and when they are dangerous and potentially destructive. In many versions of the Haudenasaunee creation story, it is Sky Woman's *curiosity* that leads her to look down the hole in the sky and fall through to Turtle's back, creating Turtle Island. Where would we be if she had not followed her impulses rather than the rules? Native oral narratives show us the adventures, benefits, risks, and consequences of following women's desires, and trickster stories show how ambivalent and complicated our desires can be. In these compassionate and often humorous narratives we are warned about lust, greed, and other overly acquisitive behavior. The woman-other marriages make us aware of the permanency of change when some boundaries are transgressed. There are other stories, however, that go to the extreme to warn against insatiable desire and overconsumption; these are the Windigo/Wetiko, or cannibal, stories. These stories show, in gruesome ways, that unchecked desire will lead to greed and cannibalism and a hunger so desperate and dark that one becomes a monster. The late Lenape scholar Jack D. Forbes linked colonialism to this Windigo spirit.[79]

These rich stories of independent women also allude to the patriarchal control wielded historically in some tribal nations—for example, that women could be the property of their fathers and husbands and that they needed to be watched, controlled, and warned about the consequences of transgressing patriarchal rules and protocols. But many tribal nations were equally matriarchal or women-centered. In these cases, these stories could speak to women's ability to define their own rules and protocols; to test and break taboos (in many cases without severe consequence); and to be self-sufficient, productive, and happy without a human man or with other-than-human husbands and partners. These narratives also illustrate that women have a profound connection with the natural elements—wind, water, soil—and with plant and animal species and sticks and rocks. This is not meant to imply the old, essentialist "woman as nature" trope. It is simply a comment on the diversity of relations women have in these stories. It could also speak to a unique aspect of women's psychology and fluid sexual behavior that (as noted earlier)

is currently being researched by contemporary female scientists, with surprising discoveries and intriguing theories.

Human pansexuality is queer and polyamorous within our own species; it is also interspecies and trans-species. It alludes to the fact that our creative imaginations and animal bodies and senses can be aroused and stimulated in erotic ways by other-than-human beings. I call this *re-Indigenizing our senses* by relearning to listen, once again, to the languages of our four-legged, finned, and winged relatives, as well as those of our rooted and stationary kin: the plants and trees and stone grandfathers. Reawakening all of our senses, including the metaphoric mind but especially our kinesthetic, visceral sense, helps us remember our primal intimacy with, and fluency in, the languages of the more-than-human world. It is what Abram calls "becoming animal"—that is, "getting dirty" in a physical and metaphysical way.

"Getting dirty" means we become fully human by remembering and embodying our trans-human animalness. This requires a decolonization process, because we must question and shed the conditioned beliefs that say we are more intelligent than, different from, or better than our animal nature and other natural beings (i.e., human exceptionalism). Our bodies are filled with intelligences that are faster than and beyond the intelligence of our cognitive brains. Reawakening these intelligences and our intuitive and imaginative capacities reconnect us to the natural world in ways that can engender reciprocal coexistence. The Mohawk scholar Dan Roronhiakewen Longboat reminds us that *imagination is a place*. It is not the exclusive domain of human consciousness, and "spiritual and intellectual integrity is achieved on Turtle Island by the interplay of human and more-than-human consciousness."[80] This critical interplay of consciousness is mirrored and expressed in these place-based pansexual stories that outline crucial interspecies agreements and a trans-human concept of nationhood.

These Native stories outline the fertility and fluidity of Indigenous imaginations and remind us that we are always human animal, one of many, made up of dirt and stardust. Gravity is unavoidable. Magnetic attractions are ever present, when the mysterious alignments occur. All life depends on other life for survival, regeneration, and celebration. The Indigenous eco-erotics evident in these oral narratives remind us that humans (and all life forms) are capable of profound intimacies and transformations if we embrace rather than repress our fundamental desires and the permeability of our consciousness. Embracing our eco-erotic nature helps us recognize the generosity of creation, and our part in it, so we can truly embody an ethic of kinship.

NOTES

Epigraphs: Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); Alan Watts, *The Book: On the Taboo against Knowing Who You Are* (Visalia, CA: Vintage, 1989), 83; Anna Tsing, "Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species," *Environmental Humanities* 1 (November 2012): 141; Gerald Vizenor, *Summer in the Spring: Anishinaabe Lyric Poems and Stories* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1993), 13; Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet (Posthumanities)*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2007, 244.1.

1. By "erotic" I mean the "ambiguous space between anxiety and fascination" and the heightened holistic arousal of connecting with an "other": Esther Perel, *Mating in Captivity: Unlocking Erotic Intelligence*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2007, 18. Eroticism is playing on the edge of self and other, certainty and uncertainty, security and danger, power and surrender.

2. Eating dirt is a long and old tradition and is technically known as "geophagy." Many Native American cultures historically practiced this, especially women, and still do: Carol Diaz-Granados and James R. Duncan, *Rock-Art of Eastern North America: Capturing Images and Insight* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004). See also Marc Lallanilla, "Eating Dirt: It Might Be Good for You," ABC News, October 3, 2005, http://abcnews.go.com/Health/Diet/story?id=1167623&page=1; Enrique Salmon, *Eating the Landscape: American Indian Stories of Food, Identity, and Resilience* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012).

3. See http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=nirvana.

4. Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993 [1984]), 287.

5. David Abram, *Becoming Animal—An Earthly Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon, 2010), 27.

6. Greg Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence* (Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light, 1999); Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ* (New York: Bantam, 2005); Stephen Kellert and E. O. Wilson, *The Biophilia Hypothesis* (Covelo, CA: Island, 1995); David Orr, *Ecoliteracy: Educating Our Children for a Sustainable World* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 2012).

7. Alaimo and Hekman, *Material Feminisms*, 238.

8. Alan Ereira, dir., *From the Heart of the World*, documentary, BBC Worldwide, London, 1990.

9. Julie Cruikshank, *The Social Life of Stories: Narratives and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), xii.

10. *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature.* Qwo-Li Driskill, Chris Finley, Brian Gilley, and Scott Morgensen (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011)*; Sovereign Erotics: A Collection of Two-Spirit Literature*, Qwo-Li Driskill, Daniel Heath Justice, Deborah Miranda, and Lisa Tatonetti (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011)*; Me Sexy: An Exploration of Native Sex and Sexuality, Drew Hayden Taylor* (Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 2008).

11. Taylor, *Me Sexy*, 2.

12. Tomson Highway, "Why Cree is the Sexiest of All Languages," in Taylor, *Me Sexy*, 38.

13. At the urgings of First Nations leaders who demanded the Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, Canada instituted a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to help support the healing "truth and reconciliation" process of Native peoples from the abuses they experienced in residential school. See http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/.

14. Kim TallBear, "Indigeneity and Technoscience," blog, http://www.kimtallbear.com.

15. Stephen Jay Gould, *Eight Little Piggies: Reflections in Natural History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), 40.

16. Sadly, this perspective is anathema to the prevalent paradigms of the day. Many political and religious ideologies insist on a type of sexual purity and control of women and reproduction that amputates healthy eroticism from daily life. Repression and denial become the norm, with global capitalism exploiting this void with hypersexualized marketing strategies, pornography, and, worse, criminal sex trafficking and slavery.

17. "Survivance" is a critical term in Indigenous studies. It was used by Gerald Vizenor to emphasize both survival and resistance and emphasize a "renunciation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (Vizenor 1999, vii).

18. Alaimo and Hekman, *Material Feminisms,* 238.

19. See http://embodiedecologies.moonfruit.com.

20. T. J. Demos, "Decolonizing Nature: Making the World Matter*," Social Text* (no vol./no. found online (March 8, 2015), http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/decolonizing-nature-making-the-world-matter.

21. Melissa K. Nelson, *Original Instructions*: *Indigenous Teachings for a Sustainable Future* (Rochester: Bear & Company, 2008).

22. Thomas King, *The Truth about Stories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

23. See David Rothenberg, *Why Birds Sing: A Journey into the Mystery of Birdsong* (New York: Basic, 2006); David Rothenberg, *Thousand-Mile Song: Whale Music in a Sea of Sound* (New York: Basic, 2010).

24. Jeannette Armstrong, "Land Speaking," in *Speaking for the Generations,* ed. Simon Ortiz (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998), 181.

25. Kimberly M. Blaeser, "Like 'Reeds through the Ribs of a Basket': Native Women Weaving Stories," in *Other Sisterhoods: Literary Theory and U.S. Women of Colour*, ed. Sandra Kumamoto Stanley (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 268.

26. Michelle McGeough, "Norval Morrisseau and the Erotic," in Taylor, *Me Sexy*, 59.

27. American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

28. Theodore Roszak, "The Nature of Sanity." *Psychology Today*, Vol. 29 (1), January 1, 1996, 22.

29. Chris Philo and Christ Wilbert, *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human-Animal Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 24.

30. See Donna Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press), 2003.

31. "Michif" is a language spoken and an identity expressed at the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Reservation and other Métis communities in North Dakota, Montana, and Manitoba, Canada. The word comes from "Métis," meaning mixed-blood French Indians, and the language is a mix of Plains Cree, Ojibwe, and French: see Peter Bakker, *A Language of Our Own: The Genesis of Michif, the Mixed Cree-French Language of the Canadian Metis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

32. "The same Chippewa word is used both for flirting and hunting game, while another Chippewa word connotes both using force in intercourse and also killing a bear with one's bare hands": R. W. Dunning, *Social and Economic Change among the Northern Ojibwa* (1959), quoted in Louise Erdrich, *Jacklight* (New York: Henry Holt, 1984).

33. I use the term "species" loosely here because it is a Eurocentric social construct. Although it is usually taken as a solid concept in biology, it has been questioned recently as a fixed category: see Donna Haraway, *The Species Companion Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2003). On the exciting new field of "multispecies ethnography," see, e.g., Kirksey and Helmreich, "The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography," *Cultural Anthropology* website, June 14, 2010. https://culanth.org/fieldsights/277-the-emergence-of-multispecies-ethnography.

34. This system was interestingly based on Karl Linneaus, a Swedish botanist in the eighteenth century who learned a lot about plants from the local, Indigenous Saami; see "The Expedition to Lapland," http://www.linnaeus.uu.se/online/life/5_4.html.

35. Jo-ann Archibald, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), 5.

36. Franchot Ballinger, *Living Sideways: Tricksters in American Indian Oral Traditions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 88.

37. King, Thomas. *One Good Story, that one: Stories* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993), xiii.

38. Donald Frey, *Stories That Make the World: Oral Literature of the Indian Peoples of the Inland Northwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 160–62.

39. Malcolm Margolin, *The Way We Lived: California Indian Stories, Songs, and Reminiscences* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday, 1992), 91.

40. Margolin, *The Way We Lived*, 91.

41. See Bruce M. White, "The Woman Who Married a Beaver: Trade Patterns and Gender Roles in the Ojibwa Fur Trade," *Ethnohistory* 46, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 109–47.

42. White, "The Woman Who Married a Beaver," 110.

43. White, "The Woman Who Married a Beaver," 110.

44. White, "The Woman Who Married a Beaver," 111.

45. See A. Hollowell, "Bear ceremonialism in the northern hemisphere" (*American Anthropologist* 28[1]: 1–175, 1926); and Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (New York: Viking Press, 1959), 339.

46. See Bruchac, *Native American Animal Stories* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing 1992); Michel Pastoureau, *Bear: History of a Fallen King* (Cambridge: Belknap Press: 2011; David Rockwell, *Giving Voice to Bear: North American Indian Rituals, Myths and*

Images of the Bear (Lanham, MA: Roberts Rinehart, 2002); Paul Shepard, *The Sacred Paw: the Bear in Nature, Myth, and Literature* (New York: Penguin Group/Arkana, 1992) .

47. See Rockwell, *Giving Voice to Bear*, 2.

48. See Franz Boas, *Folk-Tales of Salishan and Sahaptin Tribes* (New York: American Folk-Lore Society, 1917), 198–200, quoted at http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/animalindian.html#sahaptinbear.

49. See, e.g., D. A. Clark and D. S. Slocombe, "Respect for Grizzly Bear: An Aboriginal Approach for Co-existence and Resilience," *Ecology and Society* 14, no. 1 (2009): 42; and Boaz 1917; Rockwell 2002, Pastoureau 2011, Shepard, 1992 cited above.

50. Interestingly, in some interpretations of the birth of the Greek god Eros, he was also born to a West Wind father: see http://www.theoi.com/Ouranios/Eros.html#Birth.

51. Vizenor, *Summer in the Spring*, 101.

52. Basil Johnson, *The Manitous: The Spiritual World of the Ojibway* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001), 17.

53. J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, *American Indian Environmental Ethics—An Ojibwa Case Study*, 79)

54. Johnson, *The Manitous*, 238.

55. Dean Rader, *Engaged Resistance: American Indian Art, Literature, and Film from Alcatraz to NMAI* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 142.

56. Erdrich, *Jacklight*, 78.

57. See Louise Erdrich, *Original Fire: Selected and New Poems (*New York: Harper Perennial, 2004), 35–54.

58. Callicott and Nelson, *American Indian Environmental Ethics*, 120.

59. See Annie Sprinkles, "Eco-Sexual Manifesto," http://sexecology.org/research-writing/ecosex-manifesto.

60. James Lovelock and Lyn Margulis, "Atmospheric Homeostasis by and for the Biosphere: The Gaia Gypothesis," *Tellus* 26, nos. 1–2 (1974): 2–10.

61. Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 27.

62. James Sakej Henderson to the author, personal e-mail, April 20, 2015.

63. Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 27.

64. Edward T. Hall quoted in Peter Senge, *Schools That Learn: A Fifth Discipline Resource* (Redfern: Australia, Currency, 2000), 4.

65. See Jack Morin, *The Erotic Mind: Unlocking the Inner Sources of Passion and Fulfillment* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1996).

66. Nietzsche connects gravity to the Devil, writing, "Especially . . . I am hostile to the spirit of gravity, that is bird-nature:—verily, deadly hostile, supremely hostile, originally hostile! Oh, whither hath my hostility not flown and misflown! And when I saw my devil, I found him serious, thorough, profound, solemn: he was the spirit of gravity—through him all things fall": Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (New York: Dover, 1999), chap. 55.

67. Lisa Diamond, *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women's Love and Desire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

68. Diamond, *Sexual Fluidity*, 219–20.

69. Diamond, *Sexual Fluidity*, 173.

70. Mallet quoted in James Owen's, "Interspecies Sex: Evolution's Hidden Secret?," *National Geographic News*, March 14, 2007.

71. Mallet, James. Hybrid Speciation. *Nature* 446, 279–83 (March 15, 2007).

72. Owen, "Interspecies Sex."

73. See Hani Meletski, "A History of Bestiality," in *Bestiality and Zoophilia: Sexual Relations with Animals*, edited by Anthony L. Podberscek and Andrea M. Beetz, *Anthrozoos* Series. (Oxford: Berg, 2005): 1–22.

74. See *Etymology Dictionary*, http://www.etymonline.com.

75. Jill Doerfler, Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark, *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies: Understanding the World through Stories* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 262.

76. Otis Parrish, "Healing the Kashaya Way," in *Healing and Mental Health for Native Americans: Speaking in Red*, eds. Ethan Nebelkopf and Mary Phillips (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2004), 123.

77. See Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Scientific Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed, 2013).

78. Personal communication with Esther Figueroa, August 17, 2014. See Figueroa, *Limbo: A Novel About Jamaica*. Arcade Publishing, 2014.

79. See Jack D. Forbes, *Columbus and Other Cannibals* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008).

80. See Joe Sheridan and Roronhiakewen, "He Clears the Sky"; Dan Longboat, "The Haudenosaunee Imagination and the Ecology of the Sacred," *Space and Culture* 9 (2006): 365.