Theodore C. Van Alst Jr., ed. *The Faster Redder Road: The Best UnAmerican Stories of Stephen Graham Jones*. University of New Mexico Press, 2015.

http://unmpress.com/books.php?ID=20000000006088

Billy J. Stratton, ed. *The Fictions of Stephen Graham Jones: A Critical Companion*. University of New Mexico Press, 2016.

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> "I don't know if it's about visiting another world, a dream world. I think what it's about is the fact that the world doesn't make sense to me. But I can write a story that's twenty-four pages long, and for those twenty-four pages I can make the world make sense. I need those injections of the world making sense. It allows me to fake my way through this world that doesn't make sense." Stephen Graham Jones, *The Fictions of Stephen Graham Jones* (17).

From red ford trucks to teenage Halloween horror, and from West Texas to Montana, Stephen Graham Jones writes complicated and affective narratives about the American West. As editor of *The Faster Redder Road*, Theodore Van Alst Jr. explains that Jones is an author who 'can wrench your gut with horror and humor, leave you wandering and wondering, and ultimately make you ask for more hours in the day' (xvi). In this collected anthology of Jones's work, Van Alst has worked hard to include some of Jones's most exciting and challenging writing. He brings together a wide breath of Jones's previously published work ranging from eight novel extracts to 27 short stories. Some works that appear in both Van Alst's collection and Billy J. Stratton's *The Fictions of Stephen Graham Jones* include *The Fast Red Road: A Plainsong*, "Captivity Narrative 109", *The Long Trial of Nolan Bugatti*, *Demon Theory*, *It Came from Del Rio*, and *The Last Final Girl*. If you have never read Jones, *The Faster Redder Road* is the place to start.

Part of the draw of this collection is Van Alst's introduction, where he sheds light on Jones's ability to write stories that explore more than what it means to be 'Indian in the twenty-first century' (xvi). He joyfully points out that 'finally, finally, when I read these stories, unless I am told otherwise, all of the characters are Indian. But best of all, very best of all, they're incidentally Indian'(xiv). This collection is as diverse as some of Jones's influences, which include Gerald Vizenor, Bret Easton Ellis, Louise Erdrich, Phillip K. Dick, and Stephen King. 'Infused with nostalgia', we travel with Jones to convenience stores, diners, playgrounds, and high schools (xvi). Reading like an all-access behind the scenes pass, Jones's story notes appear at the end of each narrative and explain Jones's writing techniques and thoughts when writing a particular character, place, or memory.

Two notable narratives that make us feel, as Van Alst explains, like we 'can't look away' or 'get away' are "So Perfect" and *The Last Final Girl* (xvi). "So Perfect" illustrates two murderous teenage girls and a gruesome tick infestation that is sure to make you queasy. Set on Halloween night, *The Last Final Girl* features a murderer in a Michael Jackson mask and turns the slasher genre on its head. Another of my favorites is "To Run Without Falling" a story of a 14-year-old boy and his friends' injurious teenage nights at a playground, where blood mixes with gravel and

'seesaws greased so quiet that we had to make up for it by screaming our presence, that we existed' (108). One of the most disturbing stories is "Father, Son, Holy Rabbit", which hauntingly portrays a father and son lost on a hunting trip. In a snowy wilderness, species boundaries are challenged as a father's love for his son turns deadly. Also, consider this from truck stop narrative "Paleogenesis, Circa 1970", one of the list stories in the collection: "This is how I say rain, in little grey drops of noise that roll down the face of the page, a silent patter that has been falling for years. But it's not raining now. Listen. This is how I say truck stop: a finger of neon light on the horizon; the feel of idling rigs in the stained concrete; the smell of diesel, grease, chiliburger, toys bought that will someday be the only thing a child has left" (135) . Followed by Jones's story note: "This one's just me sitting in a booth. Or, "me," I should say" (142). This is just one example of Jones bleeding onto the page as what he calls his shadow self. This is elaborated upon further by Jones in *The Fictions of Stephen Graham Jones*.

As editor of the critical essay collection, Stratton has orchestrated a timely and well-focused collection on an author whose work has previously not been given the scholarly attention it deserves. Reflecting on the ever-multiplying works of Jones and the variety of genres that he deploys, Stratton anchors the collection with an essay by Jones himself "Letter to a Just-Starting-Out Indian Writer— and Maybe to Myself". As an invitation to 'come for the icing, stay for the cake', Stratton's introduction hits right to the core of Jones's allure—empathy. It is precisely Jones's intense 'emotional core' and the authenticity of his work that pulls us as readers into each page (20). This is followed closely by a standout piece in the form of an interview with Jones titled "Observations of the Shadow Self". In the interview, Jones says when writing fiction he always is 'looking over at that shadow self, that other self that could have been' (21). Referring to his characters as his shadow selves, he says 'the way I make them real is by saying they're me'(21-22).

Genre bending and fusing 'literary territories' with memory, Jones's human and more-than-human characters resist categorization and often reveal the blurred boundaries between the living and the dead (4). Jones's fiction involves many forms ranging from 'slipstream, thriller, sci-fi, horror, detective fiction, the graphic novel, film treatments, short stories, microfiction, and even blogging' (4). As Frances Washburn notes, Jones's novels 'rupture' American Indian literature in the sense that he writes in a genre that is his own (68). Jones has done countless interviews, many of which can be found on his site demontheory.net, and Stratton's interview reveals the 'dark pathways' and the major themes of Jones work (259). He has organized the collection into three main sections, each centered on Jones's dialogue with survivance, history, and genre. I focus on a few selected essays that illustrate the diversity of Jones's writing.

Welcoming us into the 'brave red world' of Jones, Stratton's love and dedication to Jones's work is apparent (402). His chapter stands out amongst the strongest of the collection and he points us towards the unique nature of Jones's work at every turn. Focusing on Jones's first novel *The Fast Red Road*, Stratton points out Jones's ability to lead the reader 'into territories beyond the belief to face the mystery of storytelling and what it can teach us' (107). As a postmodern gothic, *The Fast Red Road* layers conventions common to genre fiction whilst illuminating the spectral hauntings of colonial invasion from West Texas to New Mexico. There is a particularly succinct comparative exploration of *The Fast Red Road* and Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49,*

which illustrates Jones's deconstruction of meaning and postmodernist influences. Intertextuality is central to Stratton's chapter and much of Jones's work. Also exploring Jones's postmodern fiction, Kristina Baudemann explains how Jones's formatting is postmodern creating 'a sense of direction, metafiction, and différance' (161).

Birgit Däwes's insightful chapter on *The Bird is Gone* uniquely explores the detective narrative perspective, ecological themes, and Jones's speculative future where the Great Plains is returned back into 'Indian Territories' (134). She is quick to point out that this novel is 'a Rubik's Cube' that has to be twisted and turned many times in order to tie together the narrative streams (68). John Gamber's chapter, which follows Däwes's, is also on *The Bird is Gone*, and offers an in-depth analysis of the legal implications of land re-allocation in Jones's novel. Pinpointing the central current of the novel, he asks 'what if Native American proprietorship were suddenly recognized by the United States' (133). He successfully argues how Jones further complicates the notion of wilderness space through the mythos of the Great Plains and the frontier offering an insight into contemporary Native land issues (135). Both Däwes and Gamber break down what is known as one of Jones's 'least accessible novels' with a zeal that proves that *The Bird is Gone* is worth exploring (116).

Analysis of Jones's novels are covered extensively but the sections dedicated to his short stories illuminate why more attention should be paid to Jones's 200 plus short stories. Chris LaLonde's "Cryptic Portrayals" discusses the short story collection *Bleed Into Me*. Noting that when reading Jones 'one is rarely far from death' (218). A. Robert Lee also discusses a few of Jones's short story collections together in "Dark Illumination". Notable here are some of Lee's readings from *The Ones That Got Away*; his short analysis of 'Monsters', which involves a young boy's summer vacation, a cadaver dog, and a vampire, underlines why 'memory again becomes haunt'(266). Lee pinpoints the often cyclical nature of Jones's writing and reveals how he transforms the most ordinary situation into a nightmare.

The third and final section of the book deals with Jones's genre fiction, and builds on earlier discussions. Van Alst explores the Old West and the New West in "Lapin Noir: To Del Rio It Went". Describing *It Came from Del Rio* as 'literary noir' and 'Texas twisted', he offers an analysis of the novel alongside films such as *Repo Man*, *Touch of Evil*, and *Navajo Joe* (328). Rebecca M. Lush discusses two of Jones's more recent novels, *The Last Final Girl* and *Zombie Bake-Off*, in her contribution "Dead Celebrities and Horror Archetypes". Layered with zombie apocalypse, horror, and humor, Lush's analysis develops an understanding of Jones's engagement with horror and pop culture. Although Jones's more recent horror works deal less explicitly with Native themes, Lush notes that 'the Native is never too far around the proverbial corner' (306). She delivers a reading of Jones's horror and speculative fiction that demonstrates his deconstruction of classic horror tropes. As Jones disrupts narrative conventions of the horror genre, Lush shows how Jones engages with the slasher theme and zombies in order to flesh out how the boundaries between life and death remain tenuous.

Bookending Stratton's collection is Grace L. Dillon's mediation on Native slipstream and science fiction "Native Slipstream: Blackfeet Physics in *The Fast Red Road*". She explores *The Fast Red Road*, where time bends and realities blur. The novel reads as an Indian road trip narrative with a 'Native shuffle step' that switches between time periods (352). Dillon defines Native

slipstream as alternative and multiple realities that promote 'cultural, economic, and environmental sustainabilities for self-determining Indigenous peoples' (344). She also links quantum physics and Indigenous futurism to the theme of the 'Native Glitch', where 'a series of defining moments or characters in Native history' are destined to repeat in an 'endless loop' (351). Demonstrating the relationship between speculative fiction, time-travel, and Native fiction, Dillon argues that these conventions are 'central to Native epistemologies' (345). Finished with over 20 pages of manuscript pages with Jones's notes scribbled in the margins, a glossary of terms, and an excerpt from the graphic novel of *Demon Theory,* this collection skilfully brings together essays that prove the many ways that Jones makes sense of living in the twenty-first century.

Entering the world of Stephen Graham Jones is an otherworldly experience and his characters live on in your mind long after the book closes. When read together, these collections insist upon how relatable and experimental Jones's fiction is. Reading Jones is certain to hot-wire your sight but, as both Van Alst and Stratton's collections show, the vision may not be quite what you had expected. Anything will happen; we just have to be brave enough to turn the page.

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