Indigenous Anthropocenes in Poetry: Mvskoke Homelands in Jennifer Elise Foerster's *Bright Raft in the Afterweather*

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In his book, *Red Alert: Saving the Planet with Indigenous Knowledge*, Daniel Wildcat calls for a "cultural climate change" (5). This would entail a change in our thinking and actions regarding climate change and the environment. To Wildcat, the best solution for spurring a cultural climate change is "indigenuity," his term for Indigenous ingenuity (74). Mvskoke (Creek) poet Jennifer Elise Foerster's work begins to answer this call for a cultural climate change by amplifying an Indigenous-specific, and Mvskoke-specific, notion of the Anthropocene in her second collection of poetry, *Bright Raft in the Afterweather* (2018). She blends time, weaving past, present, and future (in no particular order) to convey a catastrophic future mirrored by difficult but resilient Mvskoke pasts and presents. In a 2017 interview with the University of Arizona Press, Foerster discussed the environment in *Bright Raft in the Afterweather*. Foerster states, "The characters of the poems are suffused by their ecologies and energy systems, including the systems we can't see" (UA Press). Foerster often features recurring characters and voices in and across her collections, and these characters have important connections to the environment and to Mvskoke stories.

Foerster also discusses important connections between poetry, the environment, and healing. She states, "Poetry, I believe… can reveal the invisible landscapes, histories, and stories that we've forgotten, that we need to remember in order to continue. When I say 'transform' I'm talking about healing, which naturally involves ecological balance" (UA Press*). Bright Raft in the Afterweather* highlights the

importance of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and cultural healing in narrating one version of a Mvskoke Anthropocene. Foerster utilizes this moment of the Anthropocene to story Mvskoke homelands, histories, and futures by recognizing human and nonhuman agency. I read Foerster's poetry as a symbiocene, a balance between human and nonhuman, and a poetics that seeks to heal, not solely express survival. The Mvskoke Anthropocene in *Bright Raft in the Afterweather,* conveys Mvskoke specific experiences of colonial climate disaster leading to broken contracts with the natural world along with Mvskoke ingenuity in survival and imagining futures.

Indigenous Anthropocenes

The term Anthropocene is one used popularly in scholarship now, although there are efforts to restructure the study of this epoch to take non-Western perspectives into account. Eugene Stormer began the study of the Anthropocene in the 1980s, and atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen popularized this term in the early 2000s (Grusin vii). The Anthropocene is "the proposed name for a geological epoch defined by the overwhelming human influence upon the earth" (Grusin vii). However, scientists cannot agree on exactly how recently this era began. Scientists debate the start of the Anthropocene, ranging from 1610, to the start of the Industrial Revolution, and even as late as 1964 for reasons such as a decrease in atmospheric carbon dioxide, the increase of fossil fuel burning, and peaks in radioactivity (Lewis, Maslin 175-177). The date does matter, although it may never be agreed upon, because it affects the perception of human action on the environment (Lewis, Maslin 177). Geographers Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin note that the arrival of Europeans in the Caribbean in 1492 along with the "subsequent annexing of the Americas led to the largest population replacement in the past 13,000 years," and "the cross-continental movement of food and animals alone contributed to a swift, ongoing radical reorganization of life on Earth without

geological precedent" (174). This summation of the profound impact of colonization on Indigenous populations allows for an argument of a much earlier start date to the Anthropocene.

Many Indigenous scholars date the beginning of the Anthropocene based on environmental impact at the beginning of European colonization of the Americas. Recent studies reveal that European settlers killed roughly "56 million indigenous people over about 100 years in South, Central, and North America" (Kent). This led to a rise in abandonment of farmland followed by reforestation that decreased carbon dioxide levels, and by 1610, "carbon levels changed enough to cool the Earth" (Kent). The genocide of Indigenous peoples and the swift shift in land management changed the temperature of the earth. In her book *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None,* Kathryn Yusoff writes that "Black and brown death is the precondition of every Anthropocene origin story" (Yusoff 66). The beginning of any Anthropocene narrative includes enslavement of Africans and/or genocide of Indigenous peoples. Similarly, Donna Haraway writes, "It's more than climate change; it's also extraordinary burdens of toxic chemistry, mining, depletion of lakes and rivers under and above ground, ecosystem simplification, vast genocides of people and other critters… in systematically linked patterns that threaten major system collapse" (159). Genocide is directly and systematically tied to environmental destruction, and Yusoff notes that while colonial Anthropocenes all start the same way, no population experiences the Anthropocene in the same way, hence the plural of the term. Further, various tribal nations have experienced (and continue to experience) the Anthropocene differently.

Citizen Potawatomi scholar Kyle Powys Whyte argues that what Indigenous peoples "are currently facing is not different from environmental destruction of settler colonialism in North America" (1). Settler colonialism brought the destruction of local plants, animals, and lands, along with the genocide of Indigenous peoples. Just as

Kent's argument previously linked genocide to environmental destruction, Whyte also draws the connection between initial colonial struggles harming tribal lands and waters to contemporary twenty-first century struggles. Whyte argues that "in the Anthropocene… some indigenous peoples already inhabit what [their] ancestors would have likely characterized as a dystopian future" (Whyte 2). The dystopia that colonizers created for Indigenous peoples upon first contact only persists today, and it functions in complex systems that threaten various forms of sovereignty.

While many focus arguments on the start date of the Anthropocene, it is also important to shift the focus of the study of this epoch to humanitarian and environmental concerns stemming from colonization. Elizabeth DeLoughrey argues that "postcolonial critiques of the world-making claims of ecology and empire have been overlooked in the scramble for originary claims about the Anthropocene" (12). Here, DeLoughrey contends that more pressing questions entail asking *whom* and *what practices* caused the Anthropocene. This is also why scholars argue about the naming of Anthropocene. Heather Davis and Zoe Todd argue that the "Anthropocene is a universalizing project; it serves to re-invisibilize the power of Eurocentric narratives" (Davis et al. 763). In their scrambling to date the Anthropocene to the 1600s or later, scholars and scientists overlook questions about early colonial structures and systems. Lewis and Maslin argue that "the Anthropocene as the extension and enactment of colonial logic systematically erases difference, by way of genocide and forced integration and through projects of climate change that imply the radical transformation of the biosphere" (769). This is precisely why we must tease out tribally specific Anthropocene narratives, in order to combat colonial erasure and to highlight the ways Indigenous traditional knowledge systems helped tribes to survive the origins of colonial catastrophe.

Mvskoke Anthropocene in *Bright Raft in the Afterweather*

Bright Raft in the Afterweather is divided into 4 sections: "Before the Hurricane," "At the Midnight Galleries," "After I Bury the Nightingale," and "The Outer Bank." Some common threads are the movement of the sea, the slippery nature of memory, the disjointed body or the disembodied self, and fractured or circular time. In the poem, "River," a woman questions "what if we were to dream / each moment before us as we dream / each moment behind us?" (16-18). Imagined futures and remembered pasts, along with imagined pasts and remembered futures, are critical to Foerster's collection. Through these memories and reflections, Mvskoke homelands are conjured, from the past, present, and future. Gan et al. believe that there are ways to study this kind of palimpsest of both human and nonhuman life as they theorize the "ghosts" of the Anthropocene. They write, "The winds of the Anthropocene carry ghosts—the vestiges and signs of past ways of life still charged in the present" (Gan et al. 1). These "ghosts are the traces of more-than-human histories through which ecologies are made and unmade" (Gan et al. 1). This argument implies that both making and unmaking constitute the Anthropocene, not unmaking alone.

The notion of Anthropocene ghosts also closely relates to David Farrier's concept of future fossils. Farrier writes, "In my search for future fossils, I took to the air, the oceans, and the rock, from the bubble of ice drawn from the heart of Antarctica to a tomb for radioactive waste deep beneath the Finnish bedrock" (22). Farrier stresses the significance of scouring for "landscapes and objects that will endure the longest and the changes they will undergo" and recognizing that seeking future fossils is also a "search for what will be lost" (22). The notions of Anthropocene ghosts and future fossils are particularly powerful in connection with Foerster's poetry. The characters and agents in the collection haunt the landscape and seascape, the nonhumans, especially,

exist within their own temporalities, living long before and after humans. These are Mvskoke Anthropocene ghosts. Foerster examines the colonial culpability relevant to environmental destruction while paving a way for Mvskoke futures. *Bright Raft in the Afterweather* creates a productive Anthropocene intervention because her poetry imagines (or describes an already current) catastrophic present and/or future while conveying the relationship Mvskoke peoples have with the environment to begin to heal colonial human impact.

Old Woman and the Sea

Creation stories are imperative to all homelands (both physical and spiritual). The first poem of the collection "Old Woman and the Sea" relays a kind of creation narrative through the dialogue of three different agents: a woman figure named Hoktvlwv, the speaker of the poem, and the sea. A note at the end of the poem tells readers that "Hoktvlwv" is Mvskoke for elderly woman. Throughout the collection, Hoktvlwv often appears as a female spirit or figure of the coastline. Hoktvlwv may also be analyzed as a time traveling ancestor. Channette Romero theorizes the use of spiritual temporalities, especially as they are utilized in literature written by women of color. Her concept of "spirit time" seems relevant in understanding who Hoktvlwv is in Foerster's poetry. Spirit time "describes a temporality where spirit beings and ancestors literally reinsert themselves into the present" and "this temporality shows how all times are connected, how the past always touches the present through the existence and embodiment of spirits" (57). Hoktvlwv appears in order to help create futures while also embodying the past and Mvskoke traditions in the collection. The reference to Hoktvlwv as an "old woman" in the title also supports the analysis that she is an ancestor or spirit with powerful traditional knowledge.

"*A star, the sun, was born in the dark. / Salt leached from rocks. / The ocean rusted*" the poem begins (1-3). The poem alternates between italicized stanzas and non-italicized stanzas, creating the distinction between Hoktvlwv's voice and the speaker's voice. The speaker and Hoktvlwv are "talking / at the shore beside the tin carcasses" (4-5). A new world beginning from a previous ending is implied from these lines through language like "rusted" and "carcasses," which suggest a kind of deterioration. The poem also states, "The continent drapes its burnt cape behind us" (9). The scorched mass of land and water creases and decays from slow violence.

Rob Nixon defines slow violence as "violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence as delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is usually not typically viewed as violence at all" (Nixon 2). A few examples of slow violence that Nixon identifies that are relevant to Foerster's poetry include climate change, deforestation, and acidifying oceans (Nixon 2). The forced removal from Mvskoke lands in the Southeast by the U.S. government and military is one form of slow violence against both the land and Mvskoke peoples. According to the Muscogee (Creek) Nation website, "The Muscogee (Creek) people are descendants of a remarkable culture that, before 1500 AD, spanned the entire region known today as the Southeastern United States" and "the historic Muscogee, known as Mound builders, later built expansive towns within these same broad river valleys in the present states of Alabama, Georgia, Florida and South Carolina." To Mvskoke (Creek) peoples, "what was important were the rivers, the piedmont, the coastal plain, and the fall line, for these natural features defined the Nation and marked its limits" (Green 1). The Mvskoke nation had a "small fertile crescent," "heavy tree cover," and six major river systems (Green 2). Forced removal and so-called voluntary emigrations beginning in 1827 separated Mvskoke people from their traditional homelands, though, and this would prove traumatic to the land and to the Mvskoke.

Climate change is another form of slow violence, but Foerster does not suggest that it is impossible to heal from this slow violence. She proposes a way forward while acknowledging this violence inflicted upon the natural world. In "Old Woman and the Sea," readers are warned about the impact of humans emerging from the natural world, but potentially failing to return enough care and reciprocity to it. Indigenous scientific literacies and TEK offer further insight to this problem, though. Indigenous scientific literacies are one expression of "indigenuity" that pre-date all other knowledge systems. Grace Dillon writes, "Indigenous scientific literacies are those practices used by indigenous native peoples to manipulate the natural environment in order to improve existence in areas including medicine, agriculture, and sustainability" (25). Indigenous scientific literacies impact everyday life, along with ceremonial and traditional practices, while shaping how Indigenous peoples interact with nonhumans. Robin Wall Kimmerer writes that "the traditional ecological knowledge of Indigenous harvesters is rich in prescriptions for sustainability. They are found in Native science and philosophy, in lifeways and practices, but most of all in stories, the ones that are told to help restore balance" (179). TEK is all about achieving and sustaining balance between the human and nonhuman worlds, but it can be difficult to sustain balance when colonization disrupts these practices. Kimmerer also reminds her readers to turn to story to better understand the goal of balance.

Hoktvlwv shares a Mvskoke story about creation. Hoktvlwv is able to hum/speak/sing things into existence. The poem states "Hoktvlwv hums / A ship's light passes" (10-11). She seems to possess the power to conjure the ship into existence, or at the very least, detect the ship's arrival through the signs that the sea provides. In this way, Hoktvlwv is able to read and communicate with the sea.

Lines 12-15 of the poem read:

Lava, ash

and song began us.

The foam drags back,

unclenches its hand.

The natural elements of lava and ash, along with song, constitute the beginning, or re-beginning, of a Mvskoke narrative here. Hoktvlwv hums and sings, but the sea also produces a song of its own. The movement of the sea is constant. There is a push and pull between shoreline and sea, a giving and a taking away as the sea foam of the waves touches the shore and recedes. The personification of the hand of the sea also relays the grasp and control that the sea has over the land and humans alike. Kimmerer writes that "the animacy of the world is something we already know, but the language of animacy teeters on extinction" (57). Kimmerer notes that Indigenous knowledge inherently purports that nonhumans and the natural world are alive and agential, but Western cultures seek to undermine this fact. The term "animacy" and the idea of personification of nonhuman worlds also threaten the true enchantment and thought, in Eduardo Kohn's terms, of plants, animals, water, land, and all other nonhuman agents. In his book *How Forests Think,* Eduardo Kohn writes, "If thoughts are alive and if that which lives, thinks, then perhaps the living world is enchanted. What I mean is that the world beyond the human is not a meaningless one made meaningful by humans" (72). Kohn's approach to anthropology is one that considers the Amazon rainforest as a host of various thinking and living beings that are no less important than humans. Ecosystems and animals are also indigenous to place, along with humans. Kohn's notion of enchantment is one that provides a great bridge between human and nonhuman in terms of the Anthropocene. The nonhuman world is enchanted, and in listening closely to its messages, human and nonhuman can heal their relations.

In "The Old Woman and the Sea," the movements of the waves mirror the relationship between the natural world and humanity. Reciprocity and balance is intended, but is not always achieved. Later in the poem, the speaker tells us that Hoktvlwv writes in the sand: "*What the sea returns / is enough"* (19-20). She etches this sentiment into the coastline. Readers may question if humans return enough to the sea, though, with this declaration.

The sea has its own kind of currency that it gifts Hoktvlwv, a figure of balance. Earlier in the poem, the speaker states, "sand dollars clink at our feet" (17). The tide sends in this symbol to Hoktvlwv and the speaker. Later, Hoktvlwv "clears a briar path" (24) with "coins in her cart" (23) and the poem ends with the line "Her tracks are jagged and deep" (26). Hoktvlwv collects the blessings that the ocean has offered and moves inland. Hoktvlwv walks away from the shore further inland and leaves traces of her presence for the speaker to follow. She works with and against nature here, clearing briars and imprinting her feet to the earth. This path is one for the reader to follow throughout the rest of the collection.

The term "old woman" is a name found in Nahue stories and contemporary Indigenous narratives with "Hoktvlwv" as one particular Mvskoke example. The name of this poem may also be a re-naming or re-working of the Ernest Hemingway novel *The Old Man and the Sea.* Foerster's poem features the female figure Hoktvlwv and a speaker who listens and learns about the sea and its languages. Hemingway's novel features an old man protagonist and his young friend who fish together off the coast of Cuba. The protagonist, Santiago, struggles with a marlin and shark in the novel. In "Old Woman and the Sea" there is no article "The" before the title like there is in *The Old Man and the Sea*, which suggests more of a communal approach to nature in contrast with the rugged male individualism of Hemingway's title and the themes in the novel. Hoktvlwv is a spirit figure who teaches the speaker of the poem about a

symbiotic relationship with the sea, whereas Santiago is alone in his quest to catch the marlin throughout most of the novel. Although Santiago may think of the marlin as a worthy adversary, he does not seem to establish or seek a mutual relationship with the ocean or its beings. He just wants to catch and kill the marlin. Hemingway expresses a dualistic man vs. nature ontology as Santiago reflects heroic individualism in trying to tame nature. Whether the title of the poem is a reference to Hemingway's novel or not, the human-nonhuman relationship contrast is noteworthy to consider.

Nightingale

"Nightingale" is a four and a half page poem that appears roughly mid-way through the collection. Hoktvlwv also appears in this poem, but on land, along with a nightingale and the speaker. "I've heard the nightingale tapping at the window, / seen her singing in the pitch-black trees" (1-2) the poem begins. The black trees are important in this poem as a source of memory and permanence. The trees are also a kind of Anthropocene ghost. Researchers have studied the changes in the use of southeastern Mvskoke homelands after forced removal. Foster et al. studied the Fort Benning Military Reservation, which is "situated along the fall line which borders the Appalachian Piedmont and the Gulf Coastal Plain in central Georgia and Alabama" (150). They discovered that:

> The military base is on land that was occupied for at least 15,000 years by Native Americans. The native population used the land for hunting and seasonal occupation for the majority of that time and then during approximately the last 2000 years engaged in shifting cultivation of native plants. They fished and hunted for deer, bison, and turkey. The native horticultural techniques included removing trees by girdling the trunk, burning undergrowth, and multicropping the same field every year until the crop yield was unsatisfactory, after which they

> would establish new fields nearby (Williams 1989:35). Fields were usually on the rich soils near major rivers such as the Chattahoochee River (Foster 2003). The land was used in this way until around 1825 when the Native American peoples were forcibly removed to Alabama and eventually to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). (150-151)

After Mvskoke removal, the use of land shifted drastically. The history shows that "settlers from Georgia and other regions of the United States began using the land for intensive agriculture" (Foster et al. 151). To study the change in geographic features of the land, Foster et al. used land survey maps and satellite data (151). They also "supplemented archaeological settlement data with historic data from 'witness trees.' Witness trees are land boundary markers that were recorded on historic maps by government land surveyors" (Foster et al. 151). Originally, "pine forests dominated the landscape at Fort Benning in the early 1800s. Native Americans lived where Fort Benning is located until about 1825. At that time over 75 percent of the land area was in pine forest with the second highest category, mixed forest, covering only about 12 percent" (Foster et al. 153). However, "by the early 1970s, pine forests had declined to about 25 percent of the cover, and deciduous forests dominated the landscape" (Foster et al. 154). From these studies, it is clear that settlers, specifically the U.S. military, quickly altered Mvskoke homelands and depleted the forests. However, the data collected by researchers also reveals that the palimpsest of Mvskoke presence remains. Foster et al. conclude that "anthropological data offer information about human impacts on the past, the intensity of the impact, and the type of impact. Historical data are necessary for an understanding of culture and the relations of power that underlie how humans interact with landscapes" (155). The mapping and tracing of Fort Benning that Foster et al. performed is an important approach not only to track

the colonial changes to a portion of Mvskoke homelands, but to also trace the Mvskoke history and cultural practices embedded in the land.

The Foster et al. study of "witness trees" of the Southeastern Mvskoke homelands provides for a way of understanding how natural monuments witness the nonhuman and human activity of a landscape. Daniel Williams calls nonhuman witnesses "attestants" to theorize "the sense of an ensemble bridging human and nonhuman worlds in a testimonial sense" (7). Williams writes, "The portmanteau concept of the nonhuman witness… helps disclose the narrative, ethical, and ecological work performed by peripheral objects in literature, showing the necessary entanglement of human and nonhuman concerns" (2). In "Nightingale," the witness trees seem to extend the boundaries of homelands, creation, loss, and re-creation beyond physical levels. They are attestants to change over time.

The dark trees in "Nightingale" have a profound impact on Hoktvlwv and the speaker. The speaker states, "Hoktvlwv walks out in the moonrise. / She wakes the nightingales, pierces their throats, / steals the eggs and the blind chicks crackling" (8-10). Hoktvlwv is a figure of both creation and destruction, death and birth. She propels an awakening of the nightingales and the resting earth. The attestant trees are present for the continual cycles of slumber and reawakening of the human and nonhuman worlds and the transformation that occurs in the poem.

The poem continues:

> Later I carried her into the woods—
> scratched off sap—balm
> for her body—stitched us
> a new bark throat (12-14)

The speaker utilizes sap and bark from the dark tree to heal Hoktvlwv, and the verbs "carried" and "stitched" suggest a kind of birth and re-making. The speaker fashions a

bark throat and the tree becomes part of Hoktvlwv's body. Hoktvlwv embodies the tree, then, which is a marker and witness of Mvskoke history and story. The tree has its own time and slow rhythm. As a much older enchanted (in Kohn's terms) being than humans, the tree possesses the power and knowledge to heal.

The healing witness/attestant tree also binds human and nonhuman in the poem. Elizabeth Grosz studies the phenomenon of the "nature/culture opposition," which implies that nature is "understood as timeless, unchanging raw material, somehow dynamized and rendered historical only through the activities of the cultural and the physical orders it generates" (45). Grosz takes issue with this perspective that nature is something that is changed by humans and culture instead of a set of forces with agency. Grosz argues that "the natural is *not* the inert, passive, unchanging element against which culture elaborates itself but the matter of the cultural, that which enables and actively facilitates cultural variation and change" (47). For Mvskoke peoples, and for all removed and relocated Indigenous tribes, the natural world and new landscapes in Indian Territory inevitably led to some changes in cultural practice based on place. Upon Mvskoke peoples' arrival to Indian Country after forced removal, "the quality of the soil and water, and the diversity of the flora and fauna, varied greatly… depending on location" (Haveman 151). Haveman describes the new Mvskoke land:

> The western Creek country was a mix of rolling and gently rolling prairies, cut up by numerous rivers and streams. Timber grew in "streaks and groves" along the riverbanks and was interspersed throughout the prairie lands. Cottonwood, various species of oaks, and pecan were the most common tree types. The area is sandstone, limestone, and shale country, and the rock not only underlay much of the terrain but also was exposed in many areas near the rivers and tributaries. (152)

The new landscapes and waterways changed the way Mvskoke daily culture functioned and they experienced issues building homes and obtaining fresh water (Haveman 151). The nation's website states:

> For the majority of Muscogee people the process of severing ties to a land they felt so much a part of proved impossible" and they were forcibly removed by the U.S. Army unlike some who took money in exchange for ceding their land. The removal from homeland was extremely traumatic. But, "within the new nation the Lower Muscogees located their farms and plantations on the Arkansas and Verdigris rivers. The Upper Muscogees re-established their ancient towns on the Canadian River and its northern branches" ("Muscogee Creek Nation History").

This eventually led to "a new prosperity" ("Muscogee Creek Nation History"). The natural world always has agency that shapes and changes culture. Returning to the upset of nature/culture opposition, Mvskoke history clearly demonstrates the connections between natural surroundings and culture. Further, Donna Haraway's notion of "naturecultures" directly erases the nature/culture divide as she expresses that her companion species manifesto tells "a story of co-habitation, co-evolution, and embodied cross-species sociality" (4). The surrounding natural world will always influence culture. But human culture can also cause destruction to the natural world as we see with the mismanagement of Mvskoke southeastern homelands by the U.S. military post-Removal.

Mvskoke oral traditions also enlighten the role of the dark trees and the nightingale in this poem. According to one creation story, the Cowetas, a Muskhogean-speaking group, were "delayed during their emergence by a root of a tree that grew in the mouth of the cave" (Grantham 17). In this story, the tree had the power to slow the emergence of people, sending a message of lack of readiness in the

land for humans. Animals are also significant nonhumans. Birds "are an important class of Upper World beings among all Creek groups. They have the ability to transcend all three worlds" (Grantham 32). The three worlds Grantham refers to here are the Upper, Middle, and Lower worlds of Creek cosmology. The middle world is considered to be the Earth where humans dwell and the upper and lower worlds are where powerful spirits and/or "departed souls" reside (Grantham 21). This does not mean that these worlds cannot and do not intersect and interact, though.

The nightingale in the poem has the ability to travel among the worlds and send messages to other beings. This interaction, along with Hoktvlwv's communication with humans and animals, points out the interrelated web of human and nonhuman beings. In her pivotal Indigenous feminist book *The Sacred Hoop,* Paula Gunn Allen argues that "the structures that embody expressed and implied relationships between human and nonhuman beings, as well as the symbols that signify and articulate them, are designed to integrate the various orders of consciousness" (63). Therefore, as Allen argues, human and nonhuman consciousness always do, and should, overlap.

The roles are reversed between Hoktvlwv and the speaker later in the poem as Hoktvlwv nurtures the speaker. The speaker awakes "in a bathtub to an old woman / sponging down [her] bloody abrasions" (45-46). Hoktvlwv heals the speaker, gently cleaning her wounds. Later in the poem, there is a bit of slippage between Hoktvlwv's and the speaker's voices. The speaker states, "I have slipped through the cracks / of the clock hands, / peeled the bark from my throat" (76-78). The speaker mended Hoktvlwv earlier in the poem by pressing bark to her throat, but now they peel it from their own neck while they slip through the clock. Time is non-linear as the speaker becomes Hoktvlwv or Hoktvlwv and the speaker blend into one figure. This may even refer to the speaker returning to the past with Hoktvlwv as a figure from the future. The speaker then states:

Old woman, immortal bird

perched in your silent, forever-green glade

will you weave me a nest,

lay me down in the shade? (72-75)

Here, it is possible Hoktvlwv may be the immortal bird or the old woman who walks alongside the immortal bird, and they last through a time of eternal greenery and life. The speaker asks Hoktvlwv to make her a dwelling or resting place to lay them down. The nightingale as an "immortal bird" relates to an earlier reference in the poem. The speaker refers to the nightingale as an "old ghost" (34). The shade in this passage may represent the end of a human life, or just a period of dormancy between the ending and beginning of worlds. In one of the last lines of the poem, the speaker says, *"leave the root in the ground, / cut just above the node"* (84-85), which alludes to their awareness that one must sever part of the growth of the tree in order for new life to flourish in the future. The root of the tree returns back to the Coweta story of the root of the tree as an agent in the story of human life. It is a symbol and witness to or attestant of new life.

Lost Coast

The poem "Lost Coast" traces the continuous splitting and reassembling of the continent through non-linear time. There is a simultaneous unmaking and remaking occurring in the poems. René Dietrich argues that "remaking becomes necessary in order to counter the threat of nothingness experienced in the historical catastrophe" (331). Further, "more than a post-apocalyptic poem simply being a creation after the destruction, and standing for the possibility of creation in the face of destruction, the processes of creation and destruction are inextricably linked" (Dietrich 336). The ending and beginning of worlds in catastrophic and Indigenous Anthropocene poetics

document the simultaneous making and unmaking which cannot be separated. The re-making or re-building that Hoktvlwv facilitates also suggests that what makes a homeland is spirit and memory, not just a physical place. Foerster's poetry reveals that homelands are not rooted in one solitary place. Homelands can be physical geographical spaces. They can be embodied. They can spiritual. And they can be re-built.

"Lost Coast" is the second-to-last poem in the collection and by far the most directly catastrophic in theme and tone. "The continent is dismantling. / I go to its shores— / the outer reaches of a fracturing hand" (1-3) the poem begins. This dismantling and fracturing may refer to contemporary climate change causing the splitting of earth and glaciers or may refer even as far back as splintering Pangea. In "Lost Coast" the speaker refers to the city as "a ship in a bottle" (10). The city appears to exist within a fleeting, ephemeral moment in time. It is easily manipulated, and will most likely end up being tossed into the ocean. Hoktvlwv appears again in this poem and the following lines refer to her:

She birthed twin girls
by blowing sand
from her palm's crease—

moon unsheathed from clouds,

cities bloomed from her mouth. (5-9)

Hoktvlwv creates two humans out of sand that emerges from her own hand. With the reveal of the moonlight, cities are shaped and they flourish, stemming from Hoktvlwv's being. The two line breaks in this passage function to create space on the page

representing the progression of creation which involves both Hoktvlwv and the moon and night sky.

Like the other poems in Foerster's collection, there is a continuous push and pull, a cycle of destruction and re-creation. The ocean is a hungry tide, coming to swallow the earth that humans have polluted and destroyed. But the speaker also longs to bond with the sea and create a connection. The speaker states, "Dense fog spills over studded chimneys" (13). These lines paint imagery of air pollution spilling out from building chimneys and human chimneys, harming public health, which also harms the environment's health. The human pollution directly connects to rapid changes in the environment, reinforcing the contemporary effects of the colonial induced Anthropocene. The lack of a symbiotic relationship between humanity and the environment also leads to a loss of spiritual connection. The air is clouded with smog and pollution. The speaker of the poem states, "Often I have gone to the sea / and not been able to find it" (45-46). The speaker does not refer to the literal inability to be able to find the sea, but the inability to connect with the water spiritually because of a broken relationship. Kimmerer writes, "Cultures of gratitude must also be cultures of reciprocity. Each person, human or no, is bound to every other in a reciprocal relationship" (115). When this relationship is broken, both human and nonhuman suffer.

Along with the "lost coast," the poem features an urban center where people commute by train, and the speaker tows their "trash to the curb" (18). These mundane tasks are contrasted with catastrophic events like hurricanes and coastal flooding. Hoktvlwv's "body splits into continents" (43). These lines are separated from the previous stanza to create the physical separation on the page as well. Later, the speaker states, "This continent is a memory / remapped each morning" (56-57). Hoktvlwv is part of this continual re-mapping and re-making. Mishuana Goeman writes that "our ability to understand the connections between stories, place, landscape, clan

systems, and Native Nations means the difference between loss and continuity" (300). Stories and memory of loss, of unmaking, also aid in re-making and creating. Hoktvlwv embodies the fracture and the re-making of home and homeland.

Foerster specifically refers to Mvskoke homelands in the southeastern United States as stated in the following lines: "The southeastern deltas / will soon be blooming. Soon / the ark will sail without me" (62-64). The blooming may refer to the flourishing of the tribe, or algal blooms, or an invasion of settlers, or all of the previously mentioned simultaneously. The biblical reference to the ark that leaves without the speaker also creates the possibility of several connotations. It represents the Mvskoke people who left on their own and traveled up to Alabama or migrated West "voluntarily" with money from the U.S. government in their pocket. It also represents forced removal, the throngs of Mvskoke people who were mercilessly forced out from the Southeast by the U.S. government.

The fracturing continent also stands in for the fractures of Mvskoke culture caused by displacement. It represents the duplicity of existing within multiple physical homelands and nations along with the scattering of the population and goals to transfer homelands to spiritual embodied homelands. In the poem, the ocean splits the city. "Dissembled by the sea / the city collects itself / ravenously around me" (77-79). The speaker and the city are surrounded by the sea. One woman survives the coastal flooding:

I gather eelgrass
tangled in foam

weave a raft of seaweed
beneath the churning fog

blow white sand
from the creases of my palm

until there is only
one woman in the sea

and me in the remains
of a coastal city. (86-95)

The speaker uses her ingenuity to survive the storm, weaving a raft. She is the only woman in the sea. Again, there is slippage between the speaker and Hoktvlwv. Earlier in the poem, Hoktvlwv blows sand from her palms to create a new world, but here, the speaker does the same until they are the only person left in the remains of the city. This brings us back to the first poem in the collection, "The Old Woman and the Sea," where Hoktvlwv emerges from the sea to help create a new world.

Hoktvlwv is a powerful Mvskoke figure of survival and ingenuity. The settler colonial population looking to combat catastrophic human impact on the earth have much to learn from Indigenous peoples. Lewis and Maslin write, "This indigenous resistance in the face of apocalypse and the renewal and resurgence of indigenous communities *in spite* of world-ending violence is something that euro-Western thinkers should have as we contend with the implications of the Imperial forces that set in motion the seismic upheaval of worlds in 1492" (773). The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), for example, has only recently started to consider Indigenous scientific knowledge a valuable asset in the face of climate change. Reports and literature reviews produced by the USDA recognize the "possibility" and potential of TEK paired with Western science to slow climate change (Vinyeta et al.). One such report states, "Indigenous populations are projected to face disproportionate impacts

as a result of climate change in comparison to non-indigenous populations" (Vinyeta et al. i). However, the USDA must realize that Indigenous populations have *already* faced disproportionate devastations due to settler colonialism having affected their homelands and cultural practices and inflicted other trauma such as language loss due to not only obvious colonial practices such as boarding schools, but also to a warming climate and environmental change that make words along with practices obsolete. If the resistant USDA, for example, wants to truly address climate change, then they will need to acknowledge Indigenous experience and knowledge and work with Indigenous communities.

In "Four Theses" Chakrabarty argues that "we have to insert ourselves into a future 'without us' in order to be able to visualize it. Thus, our usual historical practices for visualizing times, past and future, times inaccessible to us personally—the exercise of historical understanding—are thrown into a deep contradiction and confusion" (197-198). "Lost Coast" poses Mvskoke survivance in the face of the Anthropocene, past, present, and future. It also models coping and survival for the Western world while encouraging re-evaluation of the Anthropocene in regards to its ties to colonization and removal. As readers can see in these three poems from Foerster, it is possible to visualize a time "without us" in the past and in the future in order to bring justice to nonhumans and begin to make efforts to achieve balance.

Conclusion

The 2020 Supreme Court ruling in the case of McGirt v. Oklahoma affirmed "that much of eastern Oklahoma falls within an Indian reservation" (Healy, Liptak). This was a win for the Mvskoke nation on multiple levels. Ian Gershengorn, one of the lawyers who argued on behalf of the tribe in the hearing, stated, "Congress persuaded the Creek Nation to walk the Trail of Tears with promises of a reservation—and the Court today

correctly recognized that this reservation endures" (KickingWoman). McGirt v. Oklahoma simultaneously ensures that the Mvskoke nation has tribal jurisdiction over crimes committed on their reservation while providing federal recognition of Mvskoke sovereignty over the land.

After centuries of suppression of Indigenous knowledge, language, and cultural practices, through mass genocide, forced removal, devastation of homelands, boarding schools, and continued discrimination, Indigenous peoples and lands have survived many catastrophes. Catastrophe and unmaking are part of re-making, especially for Indigenous peoples. The Anthropocene seems new to settlers who have never weathered such devastation to the degree that global Indigenous populations have due to colonialism and its horrid realities. Art, poetry in this case, can help relay the reality that not only have Indigenous peoples experienced human-induced radical change to culture and the environment before, but that they have survived and re-created. Mishuana Goeman suggests, "Rather than rely on settler-colonial legal systems that restructure Native lands and assert settler ownership, Native communities need to promote the forms of spatiality and sovereignty found in tribal memories and stories" (301). Jennifer Foerster's keen focus on reviving Mvskoke homelands on the page promotes sovereignty and storytelling while challenging accepted narratives of the Anthropocene, imposing one specific Mvskoke Anthropocene narrative.

Beyond human sovereignty, acknowledging nonhuman agency can build reciprocal Indigenous futures devoid of colonial epistemologies that pollute the mind, body, and spirit. As one example of this recognition of the ties between human and nonhuman, Robin Wall Kimmerer recognizes lichens as "some of the Earth's oldest beings... born from reciprocity" (275). Kimmerer writes:

> These ancients carry teachings in the same ways that they live. They remind us of the enduring power that arises from mutualism, from the sharing of the gifts

> carried by each species. Balanced reciprocity has enabled them to flourish under the most stressful of conditions. Their success is measured not by consumption and growth, but by graceful longevity and simplicity, by persistence while the world changed around them. It is changing now. (275)

As Kimmerer listens to lichens and communicates their invaluable lessons, Foerster looks to nonhumans and Mvskoke Anthropocene ghosts to inform humans how the world has changed, is currently changing, and how to translate catastrophe into healing. This healing preserves homelands, forms futures, and may ultimately begin to restore balance.

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