

KWEWAG DREAMING: A BORDERLESS SONIC GEOGRAPHY

On July 1st, 2017, I had the following dream:

“I dreamt I was at a long table in the woods with women from different nations across Turtle Island. Each woman introduced herself in her native tongue and as they spoke the AV [auditory-visual] synesthesia I experience in my mind's eye became projected before me and hovered over the centre of the table. The colour, shape and texture of the image would shift in tandem with the rhythm and timbre of speech, like a map of territory over time. When it came my turn, I found that my tongue was frozen and my mouth ached for sound.”

In her essay “Through Iskigamizigan (The Sugar Bush): A Poetics of Decolonization.” Poet Waaseyaa’sin Christine Sy notes that “Anishinaabe peoples obtain knowledges from multiple sources and methods: observations, reflections, intuition, sleeping, ceremonies, fasting, and dreaming.” In seeing the validity of dream knowledge Sy “accept[ed] certain paths presented to [her] through dreamtime” such as the insight she was shown through paawaanhije (dream) in her relation to the iskigamizigan (sugar bush), particularly regarding “the feminine forces of the sugar bush and the gendered nature of the work.”

Having been given the task of generating a creative response to Fireweed 22 (1986) “Native Women,” an offering which contains the voices of more than 31 women from over 20 different nations across Turtle Island, I recognized the importance and instruction of my dream. Over the past five months I have been dreaming alongside this text and this text has become a kind of dreaming. A place where borders dissolve. A polyvocal dream song. A borderless sonic geography.

*

“Native Women” arrived in the form of a scanned pdf. Its first page displays Fireweed’s logo, a capital F on top of the titular flower in illustration. A definition follows:

“fire•weed *n* : a hardy perennial so called because it is the first growth to reappear in fire-scarred areas; a troublesome weed which spreads like wildfire invading clearings, bomb-sites, waste land and other disturbed areas”

*

I know fireweed as an organism of secondary succession. Secondary succession is an ecological process whereby organisms grow and thrive in areas disturbed by external forces such as fire, insect invasion, landslide, or human activity. The deep pink beauty of fireweed is a beauty born of disaster.

There is a field of fireweed behind my cousin’s home in Biigtigong Nishnaabeg, a reserve on the northern shore of Lake Superior. My grandmother’s niece, I visited her for the first time this past summer. Like myself she is no stranger to estrangement and welcomed me openly. She asked me to take her picture out on the deck that overlooks the fireweed. It strikes me now that she is of the same generation of many of the women published in “Native Women.” When she shared her stories with me, I knew I had been entrusted to preserve her words and carry them forward within me. Knowledge as connection survives and propagates.

*

“Native Women” was curated by a guest collective of editors: Ivy Chaske, Connie Fife, Jan Champagne, Edna King and Midnight Sun. Their opening editorials spoke to the reality of Indigenous women’s writing as being “unheard, silenced and invalidated,” that their task

was to continue to share and celebrate the life and work of Indigenous women, and that they refused to be bounded by nor defined by colonial strictures, especially the geographical boundaries of nation-states. The voices and nationhood of the issue's authors transcend the false, imposed border between the lands called Canada and the United States.

Dreaming is also a place where borders fall away. In Western science the brain activity associated with REM sleep, the period of sleep most associated with dreaming, is indistinguishable from the waking state. One theory regarding the discursive nature of dreams offers that dreaming is the by-product the activation, recombination, and synthetic consolidation of old and new sensory data towards the formation of long-term memories. For Anishinabeg, dreaming brings us into the realm of *mnidoo*, spirit or mystery, where knowledge and songs can be revealed. Anishinaabe philosopher Dolleen Tisawii'ashii Manning has stated that she "...undertake[s] *mnidoo*-worlding to be an unconscious conceding or an interruption of intentions that is embedded over generations."

My dream could be seen as a manifestation of generational processes conducted through the orchestra of *mnidoo* intelligence. By rendering these processes explicit through my own embodiment (voice, curation, and inscription) I enact a dream song.

In her article "Traditional Native Poetry," Dr. Agnes Grant provides an account of the nature and importance of dream songs:

"Songs which served as tribal conductor of dream powers are found universally. In dreams spiritual powers spoke to the tribal members, giving their daily lives contact with the sacred through awareness heightened by dreams. Supernatural elements could be dealt with through dreams; dreams could also be medicinal or therapeutic leading to personal well-being through contact with forces beyond human limitations. Songs appearing in dreams and visions might cover any aspect of life and usually remained personal and private property. Dream songs were the most precious personal possessions

of the individual, often having been received only after suffering and loneliness. The obligations of the dream were as binding as the necessity to fulfill a vow but a person might go a lifetime without fully understanding the dream.”

KWEWAG DREAMING is a dream song of generationally embedded desire lines, a topography of sound, and a humble offering among the secondary succession of Native women’s voices as we continue to thrive and create within the disturbed earth of colonialism.

This is kwe as method. As Anishinaabe author Leanne Betasamosake Simpson has written: “... kwe as method is about refusal ... I exist as a kwe because of the refusal of countless generations to disappear from the north shore of Lake Ontario.” It is my hope that this work carries the spirit of the editorial collective’s refusal of a Canadian literature that subjects the voices of Indigenous women to erasure.

Kwe is Anishinaabemowin for “woman” and kwewag is its plural form, “women.” In this creative response piece I have gathered material from each poem, story, essay, and report in “Native Women” on the basis of successive queried readings. I queried the texts for references to embodiment, land, colonized experience, traditional knowledge, time, cosmos (dreams, spirit, and sky), as well as first-person and collective (“we”) statements among others. I have recombined the voices of these Indigenous women authors into a dynamic geography of sound—a way of bringing my 2017 dream into our shared reality. Each line or set of lines will contain its author attribution on the right-hand side. The piece begins and ends in the same way as the magazine issue, with poems by Marcie Rendon. The song has three movements and a “Contributor Notes” section which pulls material from the biography of each author (tribal affiliation, location, and a sample line) as well as a quote from their work in the issue. This ensures that each voice is represented.

*

i am woman. i have been
torn from my roots and the seeds
of my being strewn
across the countryside. i
have replanted my soul and
am struggling to break
ground. i have pulled
together my life giving
forces and am nurturing them
in the glow of the first
quarter moon

—*Marcie Rendon*

KWEWAG DREAMING: IN THE SEASONS

We will be roused from our helpless state

Elizabeth Woody

Suppose we had other lives, other names?

Anita Endrezze-Danielson

We invented stories about ourselves

Beth Brant

The fears of failing our future generations

Winona La Duke

We were children from another planet

Beth Brant

Soft as new antlers at the skin

Elizabeth Woody

We walk away

Flying Clouds

Minds sizzling into awareness

Kateri Sardella

Advanced into the marrow	<i>Mary Moran</i>
We're just bones and skin, honey	<i>Beth Brant</i>
Bones and skin	<i>Beth Brant</i>
Pictures unreeling on eyelids	<i>Beth Brant</i>
Dead is dead without the spirit	<i>Elizabeth Woody Ew</i>
We're called by names given to us	<i>Bernice Baya Levchuk</i>
Cloud formations	<i>Beth Brant</i>
Milkweed & monarch	
Sunflowers & grass	<i>Charlotte De Clue</i>
Whisper in the cedar	<i>Bernice Baya Levchuk</i>
The colour between	
Sleep & awakening	<i>Charlotte De Clue</i>
Bear, Wolf, Turtle	<i>Mary Moran</i>
A first class hunter	<i>Barbara Smith</i>
A Native American birth story	
Is the story of generations	<i>Marcie Rendon</i>
The view of time as a continuum	<i>Marilou Awiakta</i>

In this strata, upside down

Rolling over one another

Elizabeth Woody

To work within the visions of our elders

Winona La Duke

Not a boundary marker

On the landscape.

Karen Coody Cooper

We come from the stars

Charlotte De Clue

*

The seemingly ordinary things that women do

Beth Brant

Brown-skinned women

Chrystos

Indian women

Lea Foushée

Indigenous women

Native women

Lea Foushée

Civilian women

Lea Foushée

Older women

Barbara Smith

Giving women

Marilou Awiakta

Beautiful women

Marcie Rendon

Heart sick women

Elizabeth Woody

Imagine women

Beth Brant

The women looking sophisticatedly hostile

In another direction

Chrystos

*

We trust our love

Beth Brant

In the seasons

Anita Endrezze-Danielson

The fall comes

Flying Clouds

In the fall, during wild rice season.

Marcie Rendon

Prayers lifted up in the Fall

Flying Clouds

A promise of autumn and change.

Beth Brant

The eventual coming of winter

Summary of The Gathering

Winter and spring nights

Marcie Rendon

Five summers and five winters

Bernice Baya Levchuk

A baby due come the middle of winter

Charlotte De Clue

Winter sky

Charlotte De Clue

Winter wolves

Doris Seale

A winter spent in town

Barbara Smith

Silent winter dreams	<i>Anita Endrezze-Danielson</i>
In a winter all my own	<i>Janice Gould</i>
Spring child	<i>Gloria Bird</i>
This spring, to carry my share	<i>Bernice Baya Levchuk</i>
Night and full earth in spring	<i>Charlotte De Clue</i>
Return in the spring-time	<i>Flying Clouds</i>
The hottest summer I remember	<i>Marcie Rendon</i>
On a summer afternoon	<i>Bernice Baya Levchuk</i>
Sunflowers & grass under summer sky	<i>Charlotte De Clue</i>
The green of summer	<i>Barbara Smith</i>
Summer passed	<i>Barbara Smith</i>
The long summer twilight	<i>Janice Gould</i>
*	
I've left you twice in two different dreams	<i>A. Sadongei</i>
Suppose we had other lives, other names?	<i>Anita Endrezze-Danielson</i>
We will be roused from our helpless state.	<i>Elizabeth Woody</i>

KWEWAG DREAMING: LIKE WILDFIRE INVADING THE CLEARINGS

I ran away with these other women

Elizabeth Woody

Assimilation separating us from our

ancient and inherited place of home

Beth Brant

I feel the roots unfolding into the mud

Anita Endrezze-Danielson

I am being called

Elizabeth Woody

half-remembering among the reeds

Anita Endrezze-Danielson

[our] laughter falls like shadows

on white stars of dogwood

sends shivers through spruce

into willows and birches along the river

Janice Gould

When I walk I see the shadow

of myself caught

in soft focus

Elizabeth Woody

I cross the meadow

where the sleepy horses drowse

their white faces nodding

curlicues of starry clover

Anita Endrezze-Danielson

Below a herd of caribou

Barbara Smith

waking to half-human cries of coyote

Janice Gould

No one saw them killed by police

Elizabeth Woody

boredom and false teaching

Summary of The Gathering

the poverty of food

Beth Brant

(or 'ownership'

of land already possessed)

Karen Coody Cooper

I tried to push away the thought

Mary Ann Gerard-Hameline

as I travel about

the country

Marilou Awiakta

I ache

and have heard the gravediggers call me

by name.

Linda Hogan

I came by hard roads

to this place

where I don't eat crow

Doris Seale

I have bowls of those myself

I never dissolve them

Elizabeth Woody

I imagine women together

sitting outside the tipis and lodges

carving and scooping

creating bowls for food

Beth Brant

All things of the earth are manifestations of the Creator

sacred vessels

The Elders

function as guides

Summary of The Gathering

To work within the visions of our elders

Winona La Duke

transmitted from our inner soul through dreams

Summary of The Gathering

And how many others felt their finger tips

touch that threshold of Medicine?

Gloria Bird

I am the woman who stirs

Chrystos

the powerful medicine of

the strawberry

Marilou Awiakta

I have too many brains

Chrystos

on the family trap line

Barbara Smith

I am a woman turning you in my arms like air

Chrystos

our lungs expand

Beth Brant

I am the woman who carries arms full

of wood to your fire

in the dark

Chrystos

an intensity of heat

Beth Brant

I am the woman who wets your mouth

Chrystos

red-warming an umbilical pulse between

Mary Moran

I realize

to feel what I feel

is an act of subversion

Janice Gould

Which door do I stand in to leave?

Janice Gould

And us

city Indians

breeds

mongrels of every kind

with simple needs-

to stay alive

Sister rat

Us too.

Doris Seale

If you know

these things

you know the color of indignity

Charlotte De Clue

Those anthropologists

sociologists and

historians who

poke at our bones

Lenore Keeshig-Tobias

broken treaties

the Removal

the "Trail of Tears"

Marilou Awiakta

abused, mistreated, battered, sterilised

victims of institutional racism and poverty

in double doses-as women and as Native Americans	<i>Winona La Duke</i>
The first welfare hand out happened	
at Plymouth Rock!	<i>Elizabeth Woody</i>
Balancing always	
our life among the assimilators	
and our life of memory	<i>Beth Brant</i>
Out of a past where amnesia was the expected	
Out of a past occupied with quiet	
Out of a past, I make truth for a future	<i>Beth Brant</i>
I know this from the full moon	<i>Elizabeth Woody</i>
I can see my face in it	<i>Elizabeth Woody</i>
like a whirlwind	<i>Janice Gould</i>
like wildfire	
invading clearings	<i>Fireweed Magazine</i>
like a shadow caught	<i>Janice Gould</i>
like a turtle	<i>Marcie Rendon</i>
like this	<i>Elizabeth Woody</i>

like ivory	<i>Elizabeth Woody</i>
like a silk scarf	<i>Anita Endrezze-Danielson</i>
Like-a-Haze	<i>Anita Endrezze-Danielson</i>
like two wings	<i>Anita Endrezze-Danielson</i>
like in slow motion	<i>Gloria Bird</i>
just like that	<i>Gloria Bird</i>
like a weathered stone	<i>Esther Tailfeathers: Makweeneski</i>
like an old blouse, too thin and frayed	<i>Beth Brant</i>
like animals who follow the scent of water	<i>Beth Brant</i>
like dark coffee and incense	<i>Beth Brant</i>
like a rainbow dancing against	
the massive canyon wall	<i>Bernice Baya Levchuk</i>
like Mother's soft humming	<i>Bernice Baya Levchuk</i>
like air	<i>Chrystos</i>
like doeskin	<i>Chrystos</i>
like a poem	<i>Beth Brant</i>
like nothin'	<i>Charlotte De Clue</i>

like graceful standards	
hidden in cedar boxes	<i>Charlotte De Clue</i>
like the weeds that grow between	
the iron teeth of railroad tracks	<i>Doris Seale</i>
like an outsider	<i>Barbara Smith</i>
like cut wood	<i>Barbara Smith</i>
like a woman	<i>Barbara Smith</i>
like an Indian	<i>Edna King</i>
like a long-lost prodigal	<i>Falling Blossom</i>
like the Indian on the nickel	<i>Falling Blossom</i>
like myth	<i>Marilou Awiakta</i>
like webs	<i>Mary Ann Gerard-Hameline</i>
like a necklace of river stones.	<i>A. Sadongei</i>
I come circling back	<i>A. Sadongei</i>

KWEWAG DREAMING: COSMOS

When we acknowledge and accept our calling

to act as guardians of the sacred earth

our political work is transformed into

and becomes a gesture of worship

and the burden of political responsibility is lessened

Summary of The Gathering Sum

The spiritual path extends naturally

Summary of The Gathering sum

Women often functioned as intercessor

Marilou Awiakta

They knew that the closer we are to the source

the greater our task to listen

. *Kateri Sardella*

The land itself is a liberating bio-force

Its seasons and cyclical changes illustrate

and mirror the changes which we experience

in our own lives. It provides us with a natural

standard by which we may gage our own growth

The ebb and flow of the tides, the spawning of

the salmon and the eventual coming of winter

teach the secrets of change, birth and our own

inevitable passage into the Spirit world and beyond

Summary of The Gathering

The moon hung full and white

The stars in a crazy design over us

Beth Brant

Cobalt blue star-lit skies

Gloria Bird

A thousand forms, innumerable stars

Elizabeth Woody

I dreamed a tall grass prairie a thousand stars dancing

Charlotte De Clue

whose silence moves you to another world

Chrystos

In the morning

before my soul returns from the lake

I forget I am of this world

Linda Hogan

Haunt me

Midnight Sun

Cosmic signals

Kateri Sardella

Visions preceded flesh

Marcie Rendon

Enclosed in our darkness

we enter other realms

Midnight Sun

Do not look

dreamer, at another: on this old earth

there are many eyes

Some of them are mine.

Anita Endrezze-Danielson

Contributor Notes

Eastern Band Cherokee
Writes while in bedrest

There I was always welcomed like a long-lost prodigal

Falling Blossom

Cherokee
Memphis, Tennessee
My name means “eye of the deer”

Note where the resonance of the words causes your thoughts to vibrate.

Marilou Awiakta

Spokane Indian Reservation
Yakima Valley, Washington
[my] poetry...is a form of prayer...we are a chorus

My morning freedom is a tender commodity

Gloria Bird

Bay of Quinte Mohawk
Deseronto, Ontario
I've been writing since I was 40, and I believe in telling the truth

*The smell of burning leather, paper, flesh; filling the spaces where
memory fails.*

Beth Brant

Peigan Reserve
Brockton, Alberta
Married a Blood Indian and lived in Southern Alberta for most of my life.

*These are tall trees with no
branches and no leaves holding
unlimited power between strands
of polyurethane coated conductors
the beginnings of life and between
deaths.*

Shirley Bruised Head

Cherokee
Oklahoma/Connecticut
I am poetry editor of Eagle Wing Press

*This is how a deer sees
a fence
(or 'ownership'
of land already possessed).*

Karen Coody Cooper

Menominee
Bainbridge Island in Washington State
I come from wild rice people, from sausage and sauerkraut people.

*I am shaken
you cry moan the sun changes*

Chrystos

Osage and German
Born and raised in Oklahoma
Has been writing poetry for six years

*I found out for us, brother
We come from the stars.*

Charlotte De Clue

Yaqui
Washington State
I live in the middle of a pine forest.

*Do not look,
dreamer, at another: on this old earth
there are many eyes.
Some of them are mine.*

Anita Endrezze-Danielson

Chickasaw/Cherokee
Tuskahoma, Oklahoma
I live alone, but wish I didn't at the moment.

*We give birth in strait jackets.
Even our deaths blossom.*

Flying Clouds

Blackfoot
Cut Bank, Montana
Currently attending Hasekell Indian Jr. College here in Lawrence

*I tried to push away the thought
that I was ashes*

Mary Ann Gerard-Hameline

Maidu
California
I work as an office worker, part-time. I am a lesbian.

*They stand quietly at the edge
of the glade, or lie clasping
one another amid moss and matted roots
in the damp, exploded earth.*

Janice Gould

Chickasaw
Minnesota
Perhaps poems carry the deepest language of the self
and all of these currents will be there.

*And I remember the Mandan's song
about how the buffalo left
through a hole in the sky*

Linda Hogan

Ojibway
Toronto
A feminist and skeptic.

*well, coyote,
you ole dog
there you go again,
pulling on your cowboy boots
and walking out*

Lenore Keeshig-Tobias

Ojibwe
Toronto
And part-time in St. Catharines, Ontario.

*(Timmy, when you were a baby I gave you your first
pair of moccasins I punctured a little hole in them
to release evil spirits so that only good spirits
would walk with you ... guide you.)*

Edna King

Navaho

She dedicates these poems to her grandmothers saying, "Shima,
My Mothers, you have taught me and given me my first Navaho words."

*Though I gain in years, I am less than a child,
Everyone carries my decisions,
But I'm denied.
At my father and mother's hooghan
My shoulders would hold equal.*

Berenice B. Levchuk

Anishnawbe Métis

My lover and I live in Toronto,
with three cats and a ferret, where we're coauthoring a thesis on Lesbian mothers.

*(i dreamed
you into flesh
...
my tongue working
up your leg*

Midnight Sun

Métis

California

Born in the upper peninsula of Michigan

*As you recite the words, I begin
to listen to the unraveling in your hands.*

Mary Moran

Santa Clara/Tewa

Nambe, New Mexico

I came from Santa Clara Pueblo thirty years ago
and make my way through life writing and making pottery.

*You know what they say ... "You can dress 'em up
But once a coyote
Always a coyote.*

Nora Naranjo-Moses

Ojibway

Minneapolis, Minnesota

My name, Awanewquay, translates as Fog Woman.

*Three knocks announcing your intention. Birth and death inseparable.
Birth - the coming of the spirit to this world. Death - the going of the
spirit to that world. Fog Woman. The cloud of mystery.*

Marcie Rendon

Kiowa/Papago
Phoenix, Arizona

Previous publications include *A Gathering of Spirit* Sinister Wisdom Books, 1994.

*You can see
through your mother's eyes
things that happened before you were born*

A. Sadongei

Micmac
Northern California

From New Brunswick who grew up with the Mohawk people of Cornwall Island

*The hummingbird moved too fast and was left unheard.
The whale, in its wisdom, became the target,
The lesson.*

Kateri Sardella

Santee/Cree

I am 48 years old and have been writing since I could hold a pencil.

*And us
City Indians
Breeds,
Mongrels of every kind,
With simple needs-
To stay alive
Sister rat,
Us too.*

Doris Seale

Cherokee descent
Tahlequah, Oklahoma

Presently she teaches writing at Northeastern State U.

*Some older part of me wants to paint
myself with ashes, shake gourd rattles
and howl
but dutifully, I place chrysanthemums
on the wet clay, anchor them with
a chunk of sandstone.*

Joan Shaddox Isom

A published author living in
Yellowknife

*This loss of her own language, more than anything else, made her
feel like an outsider.*

Barbara Smith

Blackfoot Nation
Blood Reserve, Alberta/Montana
My pen name is Makweeneski, meaning “Long face wolf Calling.”

*shadows of withered moccasins,
with broken beads hanging
dance upon the canvas*

Ester Tailfeathers (Makweeneski)

Warm Springs, Wasco, Yakima, Pitt River and Navajo
Portland Oregon
One Great-Grandparent was Spanish. Another Great-Grandparent was English.

*Only the picture at my mother's house smiles.
The bones of my teeth gleam.*

Elizabeth Woody

*

I am strength
I have given birth
to
daytime visions
and
nitetime dreams
I am the Keeper
of a Nation
yet to be born

—*Marcie Rendon*

Works Cited

- Grant, Agnes. "Traditional Native Poetry." *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1985, pp. 75-91.
- Manning, Dolleen Tisawii'ashi. "The Murmuration of Birds An Anishinaabe Ontology of Mnidoo-Worlding." *Feminist Phenomenology Futures*, edited by Helen A. Fielding & Dorothea E. Olkowski. Indiana University Press, 2017, pp 155-182.
- Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. "Kwe as Resurgent Method." *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*. University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp. 27-37.
- Sy, Waaseyaa'sin Christine. "Through Iskigamizigan (The Sugar Bush): A Poetics of Decolonization." *Indigenous Poetics in Canada*, edited by Neal McLeod. WLU Press, 2014, pp. 183-202.