

# NOTES TOWARD A THEORY OF ANOMALY

**Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee Nation)**

This is no good — this  
metamorphosis  
into humankind,  
with divided mind.

—Lynn Riggs, “Hamlet Not the Only One”

I would speculate that a queer Indian presence . . . *fundamentally* challenges the American mythos about Indians in a manner the public will not accept. Deeply embedded in the romanticism about Indians are ideas regarding gender, specifically the brave warrior willing to stake himself down while crying out “It’s a good day to die,” and his woman or women back at the camp whose idea of a good day is scraping on a buffalo hide all day long. The queer Indian fits none of these popular imaginings. Further, identifying an Indian as lesbian or gay makes the Native radically resistant to the popular tendency to make Indians artifacts from the past, since no one associates such terms with the warrior days when men were men and buffalo were scared.

—Craig S. Womack, *Red on Red:*

*Native American Literary Separatism*

## **Let’s Talk about Sex**

When a queer Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, or other Southeastern Native person looks to interpret the interplay between identity and desire in a supportive tribal context, they often have a lot of searching to do. Sadly, the sexphobic, anti-queer,

and patriarchal bigotry of many Christian denominations has penetrated quite deeply into the values and concerns of Indian Territory. As a result, queerness — when represented or discussed at all — is often pathologized, demonized, ridiculed, or silenced as an unspeakable abomination. Queer difference is seen as deviance, something to be shrouded in shame and self-recrimination or denial, something outside the apparently fixed boundaries of “real” Indianness.

Yet queer Indians are sons, daughters, nephews, nieces, parents, grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, friends, teachers, students, elders, youth, medicine people, ministers, political leaders, activists, coworkers, employees — queer Indians are everywhere, and just as concerned with issues of Native rights, sovereignty, self-determination, responsible kinship, community health, traditional ways of being, language use, ceremonial practices, and dignified survival as any other Native people. Given these everyday realities and sober reflection on them, the cultural weight affixed to queer difference seems rather extreme, especially considering the quite mundane sexual practices and visual markers of gender under consideration. And none of these practices or markers are the exclusive purview of queer folks — after all, there’s little if anything that queer folks do in bed or out of it that straight folks don’t.

This essay is a cautious first critical step into deep and turbid interpretive waters about individual (and collective) anxieties about what it means to be a hungry, sexual(ized) body in relation to others. It’s about Native sex and Native identities. It’s about the ideas we have about bodies, minds, spirits, and their supposedly appropriate relationships — particularly the policing of the boundaries of those relationships. More specifically, the essay at hand is a case study, a manifesto, a call to arms, a call *to love* in Indian Country.

Beginning with an analysis of the Cherokee Nation’s banning of same-sex marriage, the essay surveys the difficult rhetorical and ideological constellation of queerphobia, the exclusivist and often very selective notions of “tradition” that are used to exclude queer Indians from the supposedly tribally “real,” and the complexity of rhetorical (self-)representations of queer Native desire.<sup>1</sup> It takes as its driving force the insistence that a place of legitimized queerness *matters* to Native cultures and that it matters to both tribal politics of sovereignty and a sovereignty of aesthetic (and erotic) expression. It matters that our cultural histories and traditions, even at their most sexually opaque, offer significant opportunities for queer Native people to affirm a powerful contemporary alternative of tribal value *as Native people*, irrespective of the self-defeating desires of some of our kinfolk to conform to the reactionary politics of a pathologically sexphobic settler regime.

While it’s easy to critique the stupidity of queerphobia, critics too often fall

into rejectionist cynicism that mirrors the very reactionary attitudes it's intended to challenge; such cynicism is an easy but ultimately limiting refuge for those who think smug irony is an adequate substitute for sustained intellectual and ethical engagement. This essay instead proposes an offering—a giveaway—that explores a different way of thinking about sex, sexuality, and gendered relations within specific Native historical, iconographic, and cosmosocial contexts. Specific to the case of Cherokee same-sex marriage addressed above, these contexts are those of the Mississippians, the mound-building, martial ceremonialists who are the historical predecessors of Southeastern tribal peoples.<sup>2</sup> In particular, I propose that the Mississippian category of *anomaly*—a specific articulation of difference drawn from Mississippian cosmology and iconography—might offer readers, critics, and both queer- and straight-identified Native folks a way to understand queerness and tribal belonging in ways that affirm the most inclusive ideals of our shared dignity and kinship while also explicitly addressing the lived realities of queer Native people. Especially among Cherokees and other Southeastern Native nations, a theory of anomaly might offer us ways to understand queerness that extend the concerns of more broadly conceived work in queer studies and to move beyond the trap of the “traditional” in exclusivist and reactionary ideologies in Indian Country.

This essay closes with a textual application of the interpretive possibilities of such a theory, attending specifically to the poetry of the queer Cherokee writer Rollie Lynn Riggs. A major force in American theater in the first half of the twentieth century, Riggs was most famous for his work as a playwright, but what has remained less recognized (and almost entirely unaddressed by critics) is his poetry, which offers a striking archive of anomaly that further complicates our understanding of Riggs, his work, and the queer possibilities of a Cherokee literary aesthetic.

This essay's title explicitly reflects its provisional nature; these are notes *toward* a more substantial theory of anomaly, not the entirety of that theory itself. There simply isn't room in this essay to explore fully the issues raised herein, so these introductory thoughts will have to suffice for now. It is my hope that, whatever gaps, false starts, or stumbles there may be in this analysis, the questions posed—along with some of the tentative responses—will encourage a more intellectually and emotionally generous understanding of queer desire and identities within tribal communities. Despite the divisions and disagreements, angry words and rejections, intentional or otherwise, we are still kin. It is our responsibility to take care of one another, to find love for one another.

There has been far too much wounding already.

### **"A Black Eye on the Cherokee Nation"**

On May 13, 2004, two Cherokee Nation citizens, Dawn L. McKinley and Kathy E. Reynolds, received an application from a Cherokee Nation District Court clerk for a tribal marriage certificate, on the grounds that Cherokee law had no provision for gender in determining eligibility for marriage; rather, the relevant legal codes the women cited distinguished the respective marriage partners as "provider" and "companion" or "companion" and "cooker." On May 18 the women were married in Tulsa, Oklahoma, by the Reverend Leslie Penrose, a Tulsa minister who was sanctioned by the Nation to perform weddings and had a well-publicized history of LGBT advocacy.<sup>3</sup> When McKinley and Reynolds attempted to certify the tribal marriage application, they were refused by the court administrator Lisa Fields, who informed them that Darrel Dowty, chief justice of the Cherokee Nation Judicial Appeals Tribunal (now the Cherokee Nation Supreme Court), had placed a moratorium on the acceptance of marriage applications the day after theirs was issued (the moratorium was extended to include all applications regardless of sex until the tribal council could respond to the issue).<sup>4</sup>

In the months (and years) that followed, McKinley and Reynolds continued to fight for the recognition of their marriage from the political representatives of their tribal community, and those representatives of the Cherokee Nation continued to resist.<sup>5</sup> In the meantime, following the moratorium, the tribal council voted unanimously to ban same-sex marriage and define marriage as a civil contract between one man and one woman, thus effectively surrendering Cherokee sovereignty on this issue to the authority of the state of Oklahoma—a troubling move, given Oklahoma's historical and continuing hostility to Native sovereignty and geopolitical autonomy.<sup>6</sup>

While same-sex marriage is currently the most publicized and among the most controversial issues in LGBT politics, its support in the queer community is far from unanimous; indeed, while equity arguments for extending the definition and rights of marriage are often quite compelling, arguments on the opposite side of the debate offer some sobering insight into the unspoken presumptions and problematic implications of the issue.<sup>7</sup> I cite the case here not to highlight the significance of extending same-sex marriage as either a sociopolitical good or evil (for the record, having legally married my husband under Canadian law in September 2008, at our home in Ontario, I certainly lean toward the former); rather, what interests me for the purposes of this essay is the rhetoric around the opposition to the couple's quest for tribal recognition of their relationship *as a married couple*.

Todd Hembree, attorney of the Cherokee Nation tribal council, led the legal charge against the pair, first as an individual tribal citizen objecting to the marriage, then as a representative of nine members of the council who sought standing before the Cherokee courts in the case by claiming the possibility of harm emerging from the recognition of the marriage. (Both petitions were denied.) There were consistent patterns in the queerphobic responses by Hembree and other governmental representatives. Hembree argued that “it’s my firm belief that it’s [the marriage statute] not gender neutral, its [*sic*] gender specific and I do not want the laws of the Cherokee Nation and my tribe to be made a mockery of.”<sup>8</sup> In a subsequent statement, he also wove into his argument the theme of public service with an ahistorical claim to cultural insularity: “My clients took an oath to always promote the heritage, culture and language of the Cherokee Nation and same-sex marriage has never been a part of the Cherokee culture.”<sup>9</sup> Cherokee Nation communications officer Mike Miller was particularly strident in following Hembree’s second line of attack: “Regrettably, the Cherokee Nation has been dragged into a nationwide controversy by people promoting their own agenda.” Ignoring the tribal citizenship status of McKinley and Reynolds, Miller baldly stated that “someone has seized the power of our sovereignty and brought their controversy into our platform” — thus locating the couple outside the body politic explicitly because of their sexuality and relationship.<sup>10</sup>

Bill John Baker, councillor of District 1, made a similar argument, adding a bit of elder pandering for good measure: “I think it’s something the Cherokee Nation doesn’t need to be involved in. . . . The Cherokee grandmothers out there are very concerned we’ll be the only government to have same-sex marriage, and we’re trying to protect our constituents.”<sup>11</sup> The presumptuous implications here — that there wouldn’t *also* be Cherokee grandmothers with more concern for their queer grandkids’ happiness than with divisive and reactionary politics and that same-sex marriage is so innately corrosive that even grandmothers have to be “protected” — offer insight into a strategy that, for all its emotional power, is bankrupt of nuance or substance. Yet, sadly, the strategy was all too successful in inventing a false moral panic for a nonexistent threat.

District 5 councillor Linda Hughes O’Leary was the most outspoken on the issue: “The licensing is an abomination,” she declared. “I don’t believe the license should have been issued. . . . The (Cherokee) constitution doesn’t allow for that, as far as I know.”<sup>12</sup> Seemingly more certain of her legal standing as a councillor than of the particularities of the Cherokee constitution, she asserted: “We don’t want gay marriages in the Cherokee Nation. It’s that simple. . . . We do have standing

in this case because we're the ones who make the laws."<sup>13</sup> The *we* here is unambiguous; it is, quite explicitly, the council *as policing agent* affirming its power to pathologize same-sex relationships through legislative means.

Yet the potential for hypocrisy was difficult to avoid, as in O'Leary's hysterical claims that "if we don't do something we are going to have a flood of same-sex marriage applications coming through the door. It's imperative that we pass this legislation, or this will be a black eye on the Cherokee Nation."<sup>14</sup> The irony in this statement is, of course, that this "flood" of applications could possibly have come only from recognized and enfranchised Cherokee citizens—the only ones eligible to petition the Nation for a tribal marriage certificate—and thus O'Leary is both contradicting Miller's and Baker's inference that queerness is beyond the boundaries of Cherokee subjectivity and tacitly acknowledging a significant (and apparently quite politicized) queer presence in the Nation.

Yet, ironic contradiction or not, the pattern shared by these various assertions by representatives of the Cherokee Nation is nevertheless clear: same-sex marriage—and, by extension, same-sex desire—is an "abomination," a "mockery," a shameful "black eye" on the Nation's reputation, a threat to the grandmothers, to tribal sovereignty, to Cherokee "heritage, culture and language"—indeed, to the very integrity of the Cherokees as a tribal polity. Though not explicitly discussed in the news articles quoted here, the tenor of the reaction to the same-sex marriage issue suggests there's also an anxiety about the masculine reputation of the Cherokee Nation among other Indian Nations. It risks making the Nation look effeminate in the masculinist world of tribal machismo.<sup>15</sup> It's something brought by scheming outsiders, something that all good Cherokees should be ashamed of, something to be denied, something to be erased.

Certainly there were and are voices raised in protest. Certainly there are those, like McKinley and Reynolds, who understand Cherokee heritage, culture, and language to be more resilient and embracing than the queerphobic statements from Cherokee Nation representatives recognize. Some people, such as the Cherokee nationalist David Cornsilk (whose continuing gay-rights activism prompted the case, and who initially was the couple's lay advocate), see far more openness in Cherokee tradition and language for an expansive sense of sexuality and gender identity. The presence of such dissenting voices and alternate understandings of the significance of same-sex desire among Cherokees is heartening, and it puts the lie to the idea that queerness is alien to Cherokee history and contemporary life.

Yet panic, hostility, and no small measure of fear were the general response by the Cherokee Nation government to the passage of the same-sex marriage ban on July 14, 2004. The vote circumvented standard tribal council procedures,

which include passage through committee before a vote and a standard ten-day notice of changes in agenda. The resolution to amend the Cherokee marriage laws was presented by Councillor O’Leary as an urgent addition to the agenda and included an emergency clause to make it effective immediately on Principal Chief Chad Smith’s signature. There were only token objections from a few members, and aside from a concern about civil liberties raised by Cara Cowan (now Cowan Watts), these were more procedural than substantive. The ban passed by a unanimous vote of the fifteen members.

Given this challenging atmosphere—governmental and, as the anthropologist Brian Joseph Gilley makes clear in his study of gay and two-spirit Native men, in the community itself—there is seemingly little room for a viable intervention that draws on Cherokee cultural values to confront Cherokee queerphobia.<sup>16</sup> The idea of queer desire as a significant tribal reality is increasingly rare in the public sphere of Indian Country, especially Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). Gilley’s words are worth noting here: “As they grew up, the men I talked to were made distinctly aware that homosexuality was not an acceptable human characteristic and especially not an acceptable part of Indianness. . . . [They] feel that their tribal communities and Native society as a whole remain hostile to their sexual orientation and gender difference, so for reasons of self-preservation they must keep their racial identity separated from their sexual identity among Indians.”<sup>17</sup> Given that hostile community and governmental responses to same-sex desire and same-sex relationships are justified via claims to “tradition,” it’s fair to ask whether any recourse to the traditional could have much efficacy or value.

### **(Re)defining Tradition**

*Tradition* is too often an empty word, devoid of intelligible meaning, though incredibly powerful as a speech act. It’s generally employed without being defined, as though everyone understands what it’s intended to mean or what values it’s supposed to convey. Yet the meaning of *tradition* to non-Christian Cherokee ceremonialists is often very different from those of churchgoing Cherokee Baptists or syncretic stomp dance Baptists.

To the Cherokee opponents of same-sex desire, tradition seems to affirm a heterocentric version of Judeo-Christian propriety, an oppositional and antagonistic understanding of gendered relationship, procreative-specific sexuality, and a hierarchical value system that pathologizes queer desire and exiles it from the body politic.<sup>18</sup> Their arguments also demonstrate a transparent fear of the perception of male effeminacy and, as a result, the fear that the Nation as a whole

will be judged by other Native peoples to be diminished or degenerate if same-sex relationships are affirmed. Yet to simply abandon the concept of tradition is, quite explicitly, to surrender to the assimilationist directives of colonialism and its agents, for tradition, at its best, is also about maintaining responsibilities, relationships, and affinities with distinctive worlds of meaning and ways of being that connect us to this land and its histories. It also ties us to both the best and the worst legacies of those who came before and honors those who struggled by deed, word, and vision to ensure that their peoples' distinctive worldviews, languages, kinship connections, and lineages would endure.

Rather than surrender the concept entirely—and given the contrary voices and cautions noted above—it seems useful to offer instead a *different* understanding of tradition and traditionalism, one that speaks to the best of our ways of being in the world, not those that fuel the conservative politics of fear and resentment. This alternative (quite explicitly, *alter-Native*) understanding, drawn from our various intellectual and social histories, is one that values adaptation, not stasis or assimilation; inclusivity of the strengths of our differences, not rejectionist claims to false purity; a generous engagement of expansive kinship values, rather than a simple-minded adoption of the miserly “family values” of division; and unflinching honesty in its attention to both historical and contemporary tribal realities, not a naive adherence to ahistorical visions of some pure, unchanging, uncomplicated past or present that neither did nor does exist.

Craig Womack offers perhaps the best definition of this understanding of tradition and traditionalism, one that will be the template for my subsequent discussion in this essay. In *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, Womack argues for “an alternative definition of traditionalism as anything that is useful to Indian people in retaining their values and worldviews, no matter how much it deviates from what people did one or two hundred years ago.”<sup>19</sup> With this pragmatic definition, we avoid the trap of requiring an absolute pre-Columbian precedent for the continued existence of Native peoples and Native cultural expression today while leaving open the important practice of drawing on history for useful inspiration and continuity without fetishizing it as a deadening, taxidermic standard for contemporary authenticity.<sup>20</sup>

Offering both a *historicized* and *contextualized* approach to tradition is a necessarily interventionist goal, for two important reasons. First, the ahistorical claim that queerness was honored in all tribal communities before the arrival of Europeans is common among many LGBT/queer/two-spirit Native people; I've heard such assertions many times in many venues, both by queer Native folks and by our supportive allies. Yet such sweeping assumptions, while comforting, don't

always stand up to scrutiny; they assume the universality of an ironically Edenic tolerance and lack of complex concepts for issues of sexuality and gender that aren't paralleled in *any* other facet of Indigenous cultural expression. In other words, why wouldn't Native peoples be as diverse in our traditions of sexuality and gender as we are culturally, linguistically and politically?<sup>21</sup> While many communities (such as Navajos, Lakotas, Zunis, Mohaves, and Cheyennes) have well-documented examples in both oral histories and written texts of gender-variant people who might also be considered sexually variant in today's vocabulary, comparative evidence for hundreds of other tribes (Cherokees among them) is scant, nonexistent, or mixed at best.

Second, regarding those tribes for whom little if anything is explicitly available in the historical record, the argument for a universal tribal precedent for queer-friendly traditions — or an honored role for queer folks in all tribes — can be easily dismissed as wishful thinking or politicized historical revisionism by those with no such investment, especially when the affirmative claims assume (and, to some degree, require) a rich historical archive that is most certainly *not* universal. For those motivated to pathologize queerness in these tribal nations, the *absence of evidence* in such cases can thus be asserted as an *evidence of absence*, to devastating effect for those Native folks (and allies) struggling against tribal queerphobia. As an alternative to this ostensibly empowering but ultimately counterproductive strategy, Jennifer Terry's theorization of a "deviant historiography" seems both more attentive to cultural and historical specificities and more useful to a truly empowering politic.<sup>22</sup> I'm not particularly interested here in trying to "correct the historical record through locating great homosexuals in the past in order to reconstruct their effaced histories," whatever those histories might be in these varied contexts, preferring instead to "look for the conditions which make possible, and those which constrain, the emergence and vitality of 'lesbians' and 'gay men' who populate our present."<sup>23</sup>

Rather than require a clear historical precedent for a queer social role or for a recognized status for same-sex relationships, there are other ways we can attend to the intersections of our present with our sociopolitical history and cultural traditions, one that satisfies Womack's standard of usefulness and still very much privileges the best of our tribal values and principles. We can acknowledge the lived reality of queer Native folks who are contributing their many skills to the continuity of their communities, ceremonial practices, tribal worldviews, languages, politics, sciences, and arts. We can acknowledge that there are many activities and practices that have become important to the sovereignties and endurance of many tribal nations that have no necessary pre-Columbian starting

point—the transformation of Great Plains/Prairie nations’ economic and political structures through the technology of the horse is an ideal example.

And we can draw on a more expansive understanding of tradition to affirm the significance of same-sex desire as a tribal good. As one of many evocative possibilities, we might look to the iconographic archive of a significant ancestral stream of the Cherokees and other Southeastern nations—the Mississippians—and the powerful Mississippian category of “anomaly.”

### **Mississippianism and Anomaly**

For a historical reference point for a queer analysis, why look to the research on Mississippianism, and why choose that particular anthropological/archaeological model in such a study? There are many equally useful and compelling arguments for an ethic of queer tribal inclusivity, including heterodox Christianities or heterodox traditionalisms. Not being a Christian myself—and, indeed, being quite antagonistic to the militant universal claims and bloody self-justifications in the practice of all monotheisms—the former option was unlikely to result in a productive discussion; while certainly oriented toward the latter, my experience with Cherokee traditionalism has been limited to my occasional participation in ceremonies as an adult—hardly adequate involvement to legitimate such an argument.

As for the question about the heavy dependence on the ethnographic in this analysis, there are two primary responses: first, though both anthropology and archaeology have a long and troubled history in their relations with Native peoples, there has been much valuable work done in these fields on the early history of Southeastern peoples—and often by Native anthropologists and archaeologists. To dismiss the good work does little to diminish the bad; what we need to be doing is encouraging the former, which has, in the past thirty years or more, demonstrated a deeper appreciation for and dependence on Native participation in the research goals, methods, and results.

Second, and most importantly, until the Native folks familiar with queer tribal knowledge are less reluctant to talk about that information, we simply don’t have a lot of community resources to draw on. The inevitable results of this lack of information are continuing silence—which clearly hasn’t been a particularly productive strategy in this area for our communities generally or for queer Native folks in particular—or turning back to the extant ethnographic record and applying our own analytic lenses to them to the best of our ability, fully acknowledging the fact that any answers we come back with will always be partial and, to some degree, unsatisfying.

So, with those caveats firmly in place, I'll draw on my training as a literary historian and critic, and look to the available archive for the stories, symbols, and texts that speak to Southeastern Native experience and imagination. As Cherokees share a number of substantive cosmological and ceremonial roots with other Southeastern nations, a helpful place to start is with Mississippianism—or, more recently (and perhaps more accurately), the Mississippian Ideological Interaction Sphere (MIIS)—the cosmosocial matrix through which most of the contemporary tribal nations of Oklahoma (and other Eastern Woodlands people) are linked.

The MIIS offers a rich iconographic archive that extends across time, space, and cultures, and its significance lies in both its generality (being a rather broad interpretive category) and its specificity (having quite specific ties to both historical and contemporary communities).<sup>24</sup> Thus, if we want to find a way to theorize alternative possibilities for sexually inclusive tribal values that aren't dominated by certain sexphobic understandings of Christianity, the Mississippians are an intriguing alternative. While sharing many philosophical, ceremonial, and symbolic practices and beliefs, linguistically the Mississippians were, as their descendants remain today, quite diverse, incorporating at least thirty distinct peoples of no fewer than fourteen language groups.<sup>25</sup> Though specific tribal variations differ according to geography, language, economy, and political structure, there remains a shared cosmovision from which to draw some theoretical claims relevant to this alternative/alter-Native theory of sexuality.<sup>26</sup>

Historically, too, the MIIS offers a useful contact point for the subsequent discussion, as the period of Mississippianism encompasses a wide swath of time that ends with the catastrophic ascendance of the Christian cosmovision that accompanied European invasion, namely, in the military devastation of the Natchez in 1731 by the French. The rapid increase of fragmentation resulting from the geographic, political, social, and demographic upheavals of colonialism, and the radical intrusions of Christianity and its associated sexual and gender values into tribal value and governance systems, offers a useful end bracket for the period. The fact that “among surviving Native American traditional communities, rituals are performed and beliefs are held that are analogous to those of their Mississippian-period ancestors” evidences the permeability of this closing bracket, and thus a line of continuity that endures despite substantial social change.<sup>27</sup>

Yet what exactly is shared in this “interaction sphere”? Architecture, weaponry, personal decoration, pottery and basketry designs, and even social structure have recognizable patterns of consistency across dozens of sites as varied as Etowah in modern-day Georgia, Serpent Mound in Ohio, Cahokia Mounds in Illinois, Shiloh in Tennessee, and Spiro in Oklahoma. In her study of Cherokee

artistic traditions, Susan Power writes that “the designs of Mississippian temples and objects within them were similar across the Southeast; they contained sacred fire, special art, and the burials of chiefs and members of the paramount family.”<sup>28</sup> George E. Lankford concurs, arguing that the MHS represents the “sharing of a visual system,” which in turn “suggests the sharing of some sort of belief system which lies behind and is manifest in the iconography. Such a belief system, like the iconography, must be beyond the boundaries of a culture and the particulars of environmental adaptations.”<sup>29</sup> Charles Hudson observes that certain common motifs include “the cross in a circle, the forked eye, the barred oval . . . the bi-lobed arrow, . . . In addition it included sprightly line drawings of animals . . . , men, and beings with mixed human and animal features.”<sup>30</sup>

The broadly conceived Mississippian cosmivision that emerges from studies of this iconography—and associated analyses of Eastern Woodlands/Southeastern art, anthropology, archaeology, history, religious expression, and sociopolitical traditions—is one characterized by flux, conflict, and an unending struggle for balance (not supremacy) between worlds of order, balance, and chaos.<sup>31</sup> Humans share this dynamic cosmos with a diverse community of other-than-human beings, all of whom have their own subjectivities and powers, and each of whom has a particular set of relationships with all other entities, some more intimate than others.<sup>32</sup> For our purposes here, relationship is clearly more important than any essential quality, for if these beings—including, but not exclusively, humans—can change their shapes, move between worlds, and harness transformative powers through various transgressive acts and proper ceremonies, then it’s in the *ways* that these various beings relate that matters the most. (Indeed, the contextual concerns of Butlerian performativity could certainly be seen to share an affinity with these and other dynamics of a Mississippian cosmivision. Butler’s argument that there are no identities apart from their performative expression offers interesting parallels to Indigenous models of context- and relationship-dependent identities.)

In Mississippian cosmology and many of its descendant traditions, the cosmos, and most creatures within it, are separated from one another by their differences, but such differences are more amorphous than fixed, especially in accounts of the beginning days when various animals, plants, and other beings came into existence. Thus the differences are more often a matter of degree rather than kind. The world in which humans function is the Middle World, paralleled vertically by the Above and Below worlds. These different worlds are generally separated by virtue of their various distinctive oppositional qualities and features—the Above World was often a place of order, the Below World a place of chaos—but they existed in an intimate relationship of enforced balance, and could be traversed

or connected at certain geographic locations or moments in time, or through prescribed ritual acts, events, or behaviors.<sup>33</sup> (It's important to note here that the order and chaos mentioned above are not synonymous with the moral absolutes of good and evil—an excess of order can be tyrannical, just as an excess of chaos can be anarchic, but neither category, at its balanced best, is marked by an essential moral significance.)

These various categories of being are also in constant change, with “Southeastern Indians liv[ing] between two worlds that were neither friendly nor hostile toward them,” each acting according to its nature but within the orbit and influence of its opposite as a necessary precondition for its own existence.<sup>34</sup> In this understanding of the universe, nothing exists independently; all things are known by their relationships with things to which they are similar, and those from which they differ.

Among various Mississippian images that collectively articulate this complex cosmovision, some of the most intriguing (and important) figures are in the category of what the anthropologist Charles Hudson has termed “anomalies.”<sup>35</sup> Anomalies are those beings *and states of being* which fall into “two or more of their categories,” and which are “singled out for special symbolic values.”<sup>36</sup> Historically, the most numerous anomalous entities were rather conventional creatures whose habits, appearance, or behaviors marked them as deviating from categorical clarity. For example, though both bats and flying squirrels have many of the features of mammals, they also have wings, which place them in an anomalous position between the four-footed animals and birds, and in the Cherokee account of the ball game between the birds and the animals, both the bat and the flying squirrel were honored for their skillful use of their anomalous features on behalf of the birds. Among the most powerful anomalies are bears, who share some features of humans, including the ability to stand and walk upright, yet they also resemble other quadrupeds in numerous ways; in some Cherokee stories, today's bears are the descendants of a human clan that gradually surrendered the travails of town life and human subsistence struggles for the ostensibly more leisurely life afforded by a bearish existence in the wilderness.

Similarly, as Hudson explains, the “boundary between the animal and plant domains was overlapped by two odd plants, the Venus flytrap . . . and the pitcher plant . . . , both of which are anomalous because they trap and ‘digest’ insects. Hence they are plants which, like men, subsist by ‘hunting.’ The Cherokees . . . imputed extraordinary powers to them.”<sup>37</sup> Some creatures were anomalous by their ability to move between worlds—the kingfisher as a diving bird, the turtle as both an aquatic and terrestrial four-footed animal, for example—or their

special abilities or strength (such as the night vision of the owl and cougar and the unshed foliage of various evergreens, given in reward by the Provider for maintaining a requested vigil for seven consecutive nights). As becomes evident quite quickly, although there are certainly fixed categories of definition—four-footed, winged, swimming people, plant people, and so on—there are numerous ways in which these categories are both permeated and permeable.

The other category of anomaly that Hudson addresses, which is taken up with significant energy by scholars of Mississippian iconography, is that of incongruous hybrid beings who combine features of animals from opposing worlds, thus embodying the interconnections of the worlds. The most fearsome and powerful of these was a serpentine creature of the waters and chaos of the Below World, variously called Tie-snake (among the Creeks), Uktena/Ukten' (among Cherokees), water panther, water snake, or *piasa*. Whether perceived as a singular being or one of many, this creature was often horned and winged, sometimes represented with a cougar's head and claws, sometimes with human features, and sometimes with a deer's antlers. In all cases, it's both dangerous and potentially helpful to human beings, depending on the situation and the degree of courage and cleverness demonstrated by the humans who encounter it.<sup>38</sup> As an anomalous creature of the Below World, a being of primordial chaos and fury, it is often represented in conflict with beings of the Above World, such as the Thunder(ers) and raptors, who embody the order of that plane of existence. Humans, as inhabitants of the Middle World, are often engaged in negotiations, struggles, or relationships with these various beings, and their actions often ensure balance in this world or determine the outcome of various conflicts as a result of either fighting or aiding these creatures.<sup>39</sup>

Neither good nor evil, potentially helpful or harmful to established social categories and hierarchies, the anomalous body in pre- (and sometimes post-) Christian Southeastern traditions represents profound powers and transformative possibility. These bodies are, quite literally, the embodiment of difference—a difference that can be physical as well as functional. (Queer bodies would, in various contexts, fit both categories.) As Rosemary Garland Thomson notes in a related discussion of the differently formed human body defined by narratives of “enfreakment,” the anomalous body—as a *body*, as well as a category of behavior (performance) and relationship—is “always an interpretive occasion.”<sup>40</sup> Further, in her Butler-influenced analysis of American sideshows and the performativity of freakishness, Rachel Adams points out that by “encountering freaks, we contemplate the dissolution of our own corporeal and psychic boundaries, the terror and excitement of monstrous fusion with the surrounding world. If identity formation, whether individual or collective, involves a dual gesture of incorporation

and repudiation, freaks remind us of the unbearable excess that has been shed to confer entry into the realm of normalcy.”<sup>41</sup> The anomalous body, then, functions as both a personal and a communal “interpretive occasion,” placing into an ever-contextualized relationship all that we assume to be “traditional,” “human,” “other-than-human,” and “natural.” Thus, shifting both the focus and the conditions of the interpretive perspective we use on these occasions seems a worthwhile task, especially when arguing for a Native lens that attends to both history and contemporary lived experience without surrendering the complexities of Native specificity.

Drawing on the “purity and danger” work of the anthropologist Mary Douglas, Hudson argues that it’s in the mutable boundary between more sharply delineated categories of identification that anomalies are understood; indeed, anomalies were both inevitable and *necessary* for the conventional categories to exist:

[the Southeastern Indians] necessarily encountered things which did not neatly fit [into their classification system], things which fell into two or more categories. Thus anomalies and abominations were inevitable. But instead of throwing their classification system asunder, the Southeastern Indians held up the bear, the owl, the cougar, and so on, as special animals, investing them with special meaning in their world view. Moreover, they created the Uktena and the Water Cougar, creatures even more anomalous than the bear, the owl, and the cougar, making them at the same time objects of fear and power. And so by deliberately holding these anomalies up to public view, they shored up the integrity of the classification system.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, the anomaly isn’t just in a conditional or circumstantial relationship to the normative body/category—the anomaly is absolutely *essential* to its ostensible opposite. In other words, the anomaly is constitutive of the norm, not outside it or insignificant to it. By constituting the normative, anomaly is essential to its functioning and, indeed, its very existence. Straight folks *need* queers; without both, neither exists. Womack, drawing on Hudson’s analysis quoted above, opens up the queer significance of Mississippian anomaly in his reading of Joy Harjo’s poetry in *Red on Red*. He writes: “Rather than disrupting society, anomalies actually reify the existing social order. Anomalous beings can also be powerful; queerness has an important place. Phenomena that do not fit ‘normal’ categories are ascribed special powers. For instance, the Lower World is a world of monsters but also of water, fertility, and a means of coping with evil. That which is anomalous is also an important source of power. The Southeastern belief system is not an opposi-

tional world of good and evil.” Further, Womack argues that “queerness actually reinforces straightness . . . because it can be explained as extraordinary exceptions with special powers that do not cancel out the belief in the categories.”<sup>43</sup>

Certainly, the idea that queerness “reinforces straightness” may seem counter to a theory of anomaly that places same-sex desire as a tribal good, and it certainly may chafe for those who have been deeply wounded by the violence of heterosexism (which is, to some degree, all of us, queer and straight alike). Yet the Southeastern tribal values descended from Mississippianism privilege complementarity over opposition; queerness as a complement to straightness is odd or problematic only if we see “queer” and “straight” in an entirely oppositional relationship, with one necessarily more politically and ethically righteous than the other. If, however, we understand them to be in a relationship of complementary duality, with straightness as the normalizing category and queerness as the constitutive anomaly without which the norm (and the entire categorization system) ceases to exist, then the relationship is much more complicated and mutually interdependent—and thus more fully embedded in the widespread Indigenous values of kinship, community, and reciprocity, without eliminating the specificities of individual lives, loves, and experiences.

Even then, however, the privileging of this relationship between normalizing categories of sexuality and the anomalous as their queer counterpart is not without its problems. As the responses by Cherokee Nation authorities to the marriage application of McKinley and Reynolds make clear, the effort to assert one’s sexual truths in a queerphobic public sphere is fraught with dangers, not the least being a rejection of one’s *tribal* as well as one’s *sexual* belonging. For tribal peoples, the threat of exclusion is one of the most powerful, effective, and sometimes punishing forms of social control; by rhetorically locating the women outside Cherokee nationhood by virtue of their same-sex relationship, the queerphobic administration worked actively to do violence against the women *as tribal beings*, as well as political citizens of the Cherokee Nation.

We can’t ignore the lived reality that “the normal”—and the antiques rhetoric spawned in instances of its threatened violation—is always embedded in the threat of violence. Michael Warner’s words in advocating the value of the term *queer* are worth heeding: “Normal sexuality and the machinery of enforcing it do not bear down equally on everyone, as we are constantly reminded by pervasive forms of terror, coercion, violence, and devastation. The insistence on ‘queer’—a term initially generated in the context of terror—has the effect of pointing out a wide field of normalization, rather than simple intolerance, as the site of violence.”<sup>44</sup> No matter how much we might argue for the constitutive value of anomaly

in relation to the normative category of straightness, we can't ignore the fact that the weight of coercive and punitive power heavily favors the latter.<sup>45</sup>

I don't believe that this danger undermines the strength of a theory of anomaly, even if it does give us a reality check about the social realities we face as sexualized minorities in what remains a largely queerphobic public sphere. As a matter of pragmatic reality, the fact is that, at least in the public sphere of Cherokee (and other Southeastern Indian) politics, religion, and social constitution, queer/two-spirit/LGBT folks are anomalous; there's a pretty firmly entrenched "regime of the normal" that relegates queer desire to the periphery of acceptability.<sup>46</sup>

Yet arguing for our "normalcy" clearly doesn't work. No matter how much McKinley and Reynolds might rightly argue for the integrity of their relationship, no matter how much they might rightly insist that their marriage hurts no one and simply reflects their great and abiding love for one another, that they just want "the same thing everyone else has—a legal marriage," they are not a "normal" Cherokee couple, because the normative category for such a couple is, by categorical definition, staunchly heterosexual.<sup>47</sup>

Yet we might point out that the "normal" definition of a "traditional" married couple is itself, in historical terms, anomalous, as alternative forms of relationship, such as polygamy, were respectable and culturally embedded Cherokee cultural practices well into the nineteenth century.<sup>48</sup> So, too, was divorce, which was so common that it merited significant outrage in missionary reports and journals.<sup>49</sup> Even adultery was apparently relatively common. None of these transgressions of patriarchal, heteronormative marriage were particularly pathologized until significant Euro-Western missionary and social values became influential in the early 1800s. All were quite clearly "traditional" until the adopted value system of converted Cherokees came to dominate Cherokee politics and cultural institutions during the rise of the Cherokee Republic, and following the reconstruction efforts before and after the U.S. Civil War. The simplistic formula of one man + one woman = traditional marriage is, quite simply, historical revisionism, and one that is, in essence, more than a little bit queer and anomalous in its own right in the broad sweep of Cherokee history, nationhood, and social identity.<sup>50</sup>

### **The Value of Anomaly**

So, what does a theory of anomaly offer queer Southeastern Indians and discussions of our social belonging, our histories, our literary and artistic expressions—

in life and in critical analysis—that differs from queer theoretical analyses of identity and sexual politics, or arguments for marriage equality and equal civil rights?

First, I'd argue that, while offering something distinctive to the analysis of queer desire and identities, a theory of anomaly doesn't reject queer theory or the valuable insights of its varied practitioners. Rather, it participates in an ongoing conversation with queer theory that engages the contexts and power politics of heteropatriarchy, queerphobia, and social constructions of gender and sexual identities while still very much privileging tribal communities and the vexed concerns of belonging inherent in tribal cosmovisions. A theory of anomaly roots the discussion in Indian Country, with queer Native people at the center of concern and interpretive significance.<sup>51</sup>

Second, a theory of anomaly doesn't pretend that queer, two-spirit, and LGBT folks are just like those whose identities and relationships are legitimized by the "regime of the normal." By being embedded in a queerphobic culture, the self-identifications, behaviors, activities, desires, and sexual orientations we experience, perform, and embody quite clearly distinguish us from straight folks. It doesn't matter that straight couples can be vanilla or kinky, use sex toys, have anal or oral sex, and transgress gender boundaries, too, because they're still enfranchised by the regime of the normal. What is normal for queer folks is anomalous to the heteropatriarchy, and anomaly—whether sexual, biological, physical, or mental—is always a cultural construction that operates within particular regimes of normalizing power and ideology. Yet those constructed as anomalous aren't only victims of such constructions—just as "queers" have reclaimed the particular semantic category of "queer," we can effect change in this one, too, and reclaim "anomaly" as a tribal good with extraordinary transformative potential.

Understanding this, we can move to the second benefit of a theory of anomaly: it affirms the existence of queer Native people as exceptional necessities. As anomalies in the tribal body politic, our existence makes it possible for the normative category to exist; without us, as Hudson made clear, the entire classification system collapses. While some may celebrate this possibility and the potential of eradicating the regime of the normal embedded in heterocentric extremes—in other words, overthrowing straight folks to privilege queer belonging—it's worth remembering that our respective tribal cosmovisions are *also* part of that system. It's an interdependent web; if we try to dismantle one part, we run the risk of destroying those things that make our cultures distinctive in this world.

This isn't to say that we can't or shouldn't work toward more equitable, just, and loving ways of relating to one another when certain actions, beliefs, and behaviors diminish our collective and individual dignities. We should always chal-

lenge bigotry and support the kindness and generosity of our tribal values, but we should always look to the larger effect as well as the immediate. Rather than tear apart the classification system with the (rather naive and idealistic) hope of something good coming together from the remnants — and thus possibly destroying part of the epistemological foundation for the tribal ways that we claim to value — we might instead look to that system itself for intervention strategies. The constitutive significance of anomaly provides one such strategy, as Womack reminds us: “The queer world is as necessary toward the all-important function of balance as the normal world. A Muskogean world opens up a circle of inclusion that lets queerness in rather than driving it out.”<sup>52</sup>

Inclusivity is not the exclusive domain of the liberal or ostensibly politically progressive. Tribal peoples are generally conservative, though not necessarily in the red state–blue state model. To maintain one’s own way of living in the world, one’s own cosmovision and ceremonial traditions, is to conserve values that may not follow those of a domineering commodity culture that privileges rights over responsibilities, novelty over convention, consumption over creation, and individualized accomplishments over communal commitments. Yet those “conservative” values are often quite inclusive, accepting, flexible, and adaptive; that’s why they survive despite strenuous colonialist efforts to destroy them, from missionary and administrative “civilization” policies to Removal and allotment, residential and boarding school educations, state-sponsored kidnapping and forced adoption, termination, and relocation. It’s been the supposedly “progressive” Euro-Western values of individualistic capitalism, commodity culture, and patriarchal authority that have been among the most destructive to tribal communities. In advocating a theory of anomaly as a way to name same-sex desire as a legitimate reality for a good number of Native folks, we place it within the network of humane, life-affirming values that have maintained the best of our people’s ways of living in the world *as tribal peoples*. This is far from being non-Indian; if anything, inclusivity and embracing one another’s distinctive gifts and perspectives adds to our dignity as strong, whole, and compassionate Native peoples.

By arguing for the particularity of anomaly embedded in a broadly Mississippian context, articulated in the light of who we are today while being mindful of who we’ve been in the past, we advocate queer belonging as among the best possibilities of our values, the most hopeful, the most inclusive, rather than the fearful, reactionary, and bigoted. We can’t say without a doubt that Mississippians were tolerant of same-sex relationships; both in the iconographic archive and in Southeastern oral traditions, we can find images and accounts of both inclusive and exclusivist possibilities; the gruesome martial emphasis of much of the ico-

nography should give us pause in too readily adopting a romantic idea of peace and harmony as the primary social value among these ancestors.<sup>53</sup> What we can say, however, is that a queer theory that draws inspiration from Mississippianism offers intriguing and tribally oriented interpretive possibilities for understanding diverse sexualities and genders among Southeastern Indians of today, and it provides a tribal challenge to the category of toxic queer to which we've too long been subjected.

### Reading for Anomaly

By way of extending that challenge, I'd like to end these notes by reading for anomaly in some of the writings of a queer Cherokee forefather, Rollie Lynn Riggs. If the category of anomaly offers us ways to understand and locate queerness in contemporary life, then it surely provides useful possibilities for understanding the literature of Southeastern Native peoples.

Born in Claremore, Cherokee Nation, in the Indian Territory, before the creation of Oklahoma, Lynn Riggs was a celebrated playwright, the author of at least thirty plays (including *Green Grow the Lilacs*, the 1929 stage play that became the foundation for Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*), ten film scripts, numerous poems, at least one published short story, and a novel that was unfinished at the time of his death. A delicate man of deeply felt convictions and passions—yet who was also quite circumspect in public about his sexuality—his work is largely concerned with the struggles and conflicted psyches of the people of Oklahoma and its Native territorial predecessor, with Indians featuring heavily in the corpus, especially in *The Cherokee Night* (1930). His own struggles with his sexuality and mixed-blood heritage can be (and have been) a focus of scholarly attention, as these issues, though often sublimated, are a steady and meaningful undercurrent throughout his plays.<sup>54</sup>

Yet Riggs's remarkable poetry has received scant attention, despite its interpretatively rich character. This is partly due to its general unavailability, as well as to its sparseness in comparison to his larger theatrical corpus. Only one collection was published in his lifetime—*The Iron Dish* (1930)—while a second, *This Book, This Hill, These People: Poems by Lynn Riggs* (1982), was collected and edited by Phyllis Cole Braunlich and published in celebration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the state of Oklahoma (an occasion not particularly celebratory for the Native nations of Indian Territory, for whom Oklahoma statehood meant extraordinary geographic and political devastation). Together, these volumes con-

tain under a hundred poems, and most of these are quite short, between ten and thirty lines on average.

Yet the small body of work that Riggs's poetry provides for analysis is in no way an obstacle, especially when reading for anomaly, as the poems are concerned with the challenges of belonging, of articulating one's deepest desires to a world that too often offers scant hope of acceptance, of secret, driving loves and the kindling of connection between and among those deemed different, of the greater possibilities of community despite bigotry and ignorant prejudice. Braunlich captures the tenor of Riggs's work in her introductory notes to *This Book, This Hill, These People*: "His poetry moves among shadows of disappointment, loneliness and rejection, but there's an occasional sunburst of pleasure in the rocky, timbered hills and wide skies of his home country. . . . Part Cherokee, part pioneer, and part cosmopolitan, this sensitive, naturalistic, sometimes moody poet-playwright often expresses the frustration of a person who from early childhood has been understood least by those who affected his life most."<sup>55</sup> Loneliness, longing, hunger, rejection—these are hardly the exclusive experiences of queer folks. But an anomalous reading looks to the place and purpose of those experiences, to the constitutive significance of queerness, of the world-crossing powers of the anomalous being whose embodied experience reflects the search for a Middle balance between the ordered structure of the Above World and the restless flux of the Below World.

*The Iron Dish* is the primary text of interest to this analysis, as it was Riggs who, we can safely assume, determined the volume's contents. While also quite evocative, the poems in *This Book, This Hill, These People* were originally published in various venues (including the *New Republic* and *Harper's*) over a long period, and Braunlich provided the structuring apparatus, with such descriptions as "On Location: Oaks and Earth-Sounds," "Gothic Plots," "Battle Themes," and "Dramatic Monologues." *The Iron Dish*, on the other hand, offers a structural integrity, focus, and geographic specificity not found in the Braunlich collection.

*The Iron Dish* "often reflects the quaint charms and contemplative literary atmosphere of Santa Fe," a community in which Riggs came to embrace fully his passions for both the literary arts and men.<sup>56</sup> The book is a crossroads of geography and desire, celebration, and doubt; many of the poems were written during his sexual awakening, though collectively published six years later. While early on "Santa Fe's free acceptance buoyed his spirit, stifled from a youth spent in a home filled with rejection and criticism," the poems struggle for balance between freedom and restraint, often lingering in melancholic reflection on the brief flicker of desire and mortality.<sup>57</sup>

Mineral invocations of the Below World abound throughout the poems, with stone, clay, sand, and dirt marking the swift, transitory flow of human life; bodies are transformed into marble, flesh fossilized, stones “riven, intact” by the forces of frost and time—“Terrible / To have known / The intimate cleavage / Of stone!”<sup>58</sup> Bodies also disintegrate; featured faces become sentinel skulls that remind the speaker “Inhabiting / Gardens given over / To Spring / Can never flower / Again, or be / In their death / Sap for a tree.”<sup>59</sup> Dark currents flow through this world, currents that the speaker seeks to fight or surrender to, sometimes at the same time. Even in hoping for an earthly surrender, the Above World intrudes: “Keeping a painful dream / Alive, keeping a stilted / And decorous desire, he came / To a place where rocks tilted. / The sun stream / Smote him from that cliff / So that he wallowed in pain / And at last cold and stiff, / Unable to go back / Or to rise.” Blinded by “that golden fluid / On his eyes,” the speaker transcends, “aris[ing] from that triumphal stair / With feather-light and fathom-weighted wings,” seeking to be “mountain-calm and wise empirically, / Without desire” and “beyond the most outrageous sea, / The racked land” of embodied, earth-bound passions.<sup>60</sup>

The Above World is a place removed from the chaos of the Below World, a sanctuary and sometimes prison of brilliant dawns and drought-making suns, of frigid clouds and solitary mountain heights, of powerful “Summer storm, lightning / And the crack of thunder” that are, for all their bluster, impotent to injure or dismay a golden weathercock.<sup>61</sup> The moon, the cold and brilliant sentinel of night, is eternal in its frozen triumph: “I, A SHADOW, thinking as I go, / Feel the need of a mimicry / To say this in music: how the moon is one / With the snow, and the snow warmer than I shall ever be — / I, a shadow, moving across the snow.”<sup>62</sup>

Surrender to the transforming desires and drives from Below is tempting but dangerous and all-consuming; the cold, dispassionate distance of Above offers little comfort to those caught in the swift flow of mortality. The Middle World is a place of hunger and warmth, of human life and the daily passing of time (“Spring Morning—Santa Fe”), of hunting beasts (“The Wolves”), song and ceremony (“Santo Domingo Corn Dance”), and the surrender of desire into beauty (“The Perfect Tree”). There is danger here, true, but the spirit of the land rests gently on humanity, for a time, at any rate. The speaker observes and mourns the swift passing of a bumblebee, “gone—gold, lace, and all—for the flowers’ yield,” yet, in walking “along the acequia / Over patches of red, over squares of magenta earth,” longs for “apples sweetening under the fruit trees / Where the bees hum.”<sup>63</sup>

Belonging entirely to no world, touched by the griefs and longings of each, the anomalous speaker is moved by desire but untrusting of that hunger. While many of the pieces in the book offer clear (and queer) evocations of the tangled

physical and emotional experiences of this Middle World, two poems seem here particularly relevant to this analysis, both quoted below in full.

The speaker in “Angry Sea” begins with the hope of static comfort, a freedom from the unpredictable eruptions of life between the idealized order of the Above World and the elemental chaos of the Below World:

“Now I shall be at peace,” I said,  
 Accepting you,  
 “For after love there is a calm place.”  
 I thought I knew.

But now, in this noisy dawn, through my window  
 The hot sun leaps, and I have not been sleeping;  
 But tossing and crying out in my pain I have had  
 Not even the peace of weeping.

Love is no wave, but a crested and angry sea  
 To be taken and taken forever, billow on billow,  
 Though the mind break with the body’s senseless breaking.  
 This I know, on my pillow.<sup>64</sup>

The sudden wave of relief after surrender, the long-harbored but clearly naive dream that giving in to “love” (read “sex”) will bring a lasting contentment and freedom from fear and uncertainty: with the despairing line “I thought I knew,” the speaker realizes now, “tossing and crying out,” that there is no “calm place” of “peace” but an eternal “crested and angry sea” that offers no respite from the “senseless breaking” of accepting this moment of sexual intimacy. He anticipated certainty, yet the certainty he’s experienced is the irrevocable realization that his desires have only temporarily been quenched, that this is not a simple “wave” he could control but an elemental force that will take him again and again, “forever.” His is the fearful cry of queer awakening, what we might sensibly read as the realization by a young man on the morning after his first gay sexual experience that his sexual self is fully anomalous to the respectable social order around him (in this case, the United States in the late 1920s). Despite all his desire for “a calm place,” his queer desire can’t be suppressed or constrained, and it defines his relationship to the worlds and beings of creation as nothing else can. By entering the Below World waters, he’s sacrificed even “the peace of weeping,” for such peace can be found only within the boundaries of the normal, and his new recognition of self has rendered him forever adrift, far from that false comfort.

“Angry Sea” is one of the most poignant and discomfiting of the poems in *The Iron Dish*. Taken individually, it’s a rather grim piece, the unhappy wail of the closeted queer who fears what he overwhelmingly desires. Though the book isn’t organized along a progressive arc of coming out of shame and into pride, taken as a whole—and in consideration of other queer-inflected pieces in the collection—the volume offers a complex and quite nuanced sense of the multilayered context of anomalous sexual desire in a decidedly homophobic social milieu.

As an intriguing example to close this study, here is a poem that comes later in the volume, “Those Who Speak in Whispers.” Marked both by fear and by fire, this piece articulates a furtive defiance against the regimes of the normal, which demand silence and self-recrimination to guard against their own insecurities and uncertainties:

THEY must be taut, hard, sibilant —  
 They who speak  
 In whispers, they must form words for reluctant ears only  
 And not soft sounds, as two cheek to cheek.

Knowing no ease, they know too  
 They are the quarried things  
 Fingers will crook at slightly, at which eyebrows are always lifted  
 Because of their whisperings.

See them—their white faces, their frenzy—  
 And how they scurry  
 Down the unfriendly alleys  
 On feet not furry.<sup>65</sup>

This is not the reflection of one to whom the world offers normalized reflections of one’s belonging, but neither is it the silence of the broken and defeated. The mingled power and danger of the Below World serpent, Ukten’, is invoked at the start—“They must be taut, hard, sibilant”; “They who speak / In whispers” are hunted, “quarried” things, the objects of judgmental gossip and surveillance “because of their whisperings,” but they’re not simply passive objects of observation. By opening with an insistence on their “hard,” snakelike qualities, the speaker acknowledges the threatening power possessed by these furtive figures. The choice of *sibilant* is particularly pointed. While these figures may whisper for “reluctant ears” of those around them, they start by hissing—a sound made by snakes in warning, or defiance. Their public words spoken for others are not the soft, “cheek

to cheek” words of private passion but a knowing hiss to those observers “whose eyebrows are always lifted.” And though they may “scurry / Down the unfriendly alleys,” they’re decidedly not passive “furry” and helpless prey but hard, secretive hunters seeking the comforting shadows with others of their own kind.

This last point is particularly important: these hissing whisperers are marginalized, but they’re not *alone*—we don’t know numbers, but we do know that there’s more than one, and they whisper, run, and suffer suspicion *together*. The anomalous state isn’t necessarily a solitary one. Even the story of the Ukten’ is instructive in this way; while there was one great Ukten’ in the primal myth-times, in Cherokee accounts there are numerous descendant Ukten’ who share much of their predecessor’s great power and ferociousness. Multiplicity is vital in anomaly, though somewhat ironically so: one anomalous figure is dismissible as an isolated exception, but an entire category of beings sharing the same anomalous features creates an insistently meaningful difference that inherently confronts the regimes of the normal.

Throughout *The Iron Dish*, the speaker is in conversation with himself or another (often an intimate other); even when seemingly alone, he acknowledges other, sometimes nearly personified animals, plants, weather phenomenon, and even stones and tree stumps. Anomaly is interpenetrated with relationships to many beings and personalities in the other-than-human worlds; by necessity, the speaker is inextricably woven throughout the relationships that determine this existence.

Not much of a hopeful model of queer belonging for many fortunate folks today, perhaps, but perhaps we don’t always need hopeful models; perhaps what we need is simply to hear the words, the voices, the poems, the songs of anomaly and uncertain belonging, to know that we have a present as well as a past. It’s not “those who speak in whispers” who merit critique here, not the whispering, scurrying, fearful figures who rush down “unfriendly alleys,” but rather the gossips, the judges, the powerful, the proud. Yet their judgment can’t mute the whispers; all the condemnation in the world can’t stop those feet from running through the alleys, faces pale and frenzied, but nevertheless together.

### **Decolonizing Difference**

In the end, what does this theory offer us in terms of pragmatic, lived experience and understanding for queer Native folks? Does it matter *how* we articulate the desire of people having sex with those of the same biological gender, or living their genders in ways that challenge domineering norms? Absolutely, but not in the way

queerphobic folks would like to suggest. Quite simply, can today's tribal nations afford to lose these powerful spirits, these queer men and women and transfolk and two-spirits who have so many wondrous gifts to share, who want to share these gifts *as tribal people* and within tribal value systems? Can our communities risk tossing away so much knowledge about not just how to survive pain but how to thrive despite it? Can a colonized people risk such a loss, especially when the neoliberal emphases on assimilation and globalized commodification continue to threaten the distinctive cultural integrity and even survival of Indigenous peoples throughout the world?

Imperialism and colonialism function, in large part, by imposing efficient means of exploiting resources through eliminating complexity and diversity; complexity makes exploitation both difficult and inefficient, so the solution is to simplify, either by co-opting those values and peoples that can be rendered absorbable, or to entirely isolate and/or eliminate those that are less amenable to simplification. Complexity is the enemy of the colonial enterprise; as such, it's an absolutely necessary attribute of any viable mode of decolonization.

By articulating the complex realities of Indigenous sexualities and genders, a theory of anomaly honors both the historical diversity and the geographic and cultural specificity of tribal knowledges. It asserts that although our differences are important, difference is not synonymous with deficiency; it affirms the inclusive bonds of kinship and values of respect and responsibility. We would do well to acknowledge that the health of any community is necessarily reflective of some degree of constitutive difference; the unattainable quest for "purity," by any measure, is poisonous and, ultimately, self-defeating. By drawing on the strength of the diverse knowledges experienced by various tribal constituencies, a theory of anomaly reminds us that our complicated, historically contextualized, and often conflict-ridden bonds of inclusive kinship are ultimately far more important to Indigenous survival and continuity than the divisive politics of colonialist exclusivism and paranoia.

### Notes

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1. The term *queerphobia* is used in lieu of the more common *homophobia* to reflect more accurately the phobic response of reactionaries to perceptions of sex/gender violations of a heteropatriarchal moral order. It's inclusive of gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, pansexuals, transgendered people, and straight folks with nonconformist sexual and gender behaviors and identities. Similarly, while I prefer the mercurial and transgressive resonance of the term *queer* in my own self-identification and throughout this essay, I also include *two-spirit* and *LGBT* when relevant.
2. There is some controversy over the degree to which the Cherokees, as the only Iroquoian-speaking peoples in the Southeast, can be considered a Mississippian people. While some Cherokee oral traditions affirm origination in Appalachia, there are other traditions that describe at least one, possibly multiple migrations, from both the south (Central and South America) and the north (confirmed by Huron-Wendat, Mohawk, and Lenape histories), which ended in what is now the Southeastern homeland of the Cherokee people. Given the available evidence, Robert Conley's assessment seems most likely: "Combining the evidence of several of these [traditional] tales and theories, it seems reasonable to say that the Cherokees likely came from South America and migrated north through Central America and Mexico, eventually stopping for a time in the northeast along with the other Iroquoian-speaking tribes there. . . . Then following a long period of warfare with those people and with the Delawares, they moved southward again, settling in the 'old southeast'" (*The Cherokee Nation: A History* [Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005], 6). Even if the Cherokees were late arrivals to the "old southeast" in comparison with their Muskogee-speaking neighbors who were unarguably Mississippian in origin, they quickly adapted to the regional ceremonial, political, and cosmological culture while maintaining their Iroquoian language. As a result, their linguistic distinctiveness was inflected by Mississippian cultural ways and cosmovisions, but not displaced by them.
3. Tulsa sits within the historical political boundaries of the Cherokee Nation, so the ceremony quite literally (and symbolically) took place in Cherokee territory. Penrose, retired pastor of Tulsa's Community of Hope Church, was censured during her time as pastor by the United Methodist Church for performing religious unions for same-sex couples. The charges led the Community of Hope congregation to withdraw from Methodist affiliation and join the United Church of Christ. The Cherokee Nation same-sex marriage controversy wasn't the first Penrose had faced: her church had drawn zoning complaints about the decline of property values from members of the Gracemont Neighborhood Association because of the church's advocacy on behalf of HIV/AIDS patients and for permitting free HIV testing in a mobile clinic on its property. Critics of the popular and free testing service argued that such work was beyond the church's mandate, even though Community of Hope was founded primarily to serve HIV and AIDS patients and their families (Susan Hylton, "Church's Fine for Clinic Is Voided," *Tulsa World*, July 13, 2005, [www.religionandsocialpolicy.org/news/article.cfm?id=3019](http://www.religionandsocialpolicy.org/news/article.cfm?id=3019)).

4. While the degree of opposition and media attention seems to have surprised the couple, the fact that they were engaged in a controversial and potentially explosive political act couldn't have been entirely unexpected, as they brought both Penrose and members of the local press with them in their attempt to certify the application. See Travis Snell, "Tribal Court Refuses Same-Sex Marriage Certificate," *Cherokee Phoenix* 28 (2004): 4.
5. Although most early coverage of the case by the LGBT press gave significant attention to the impetus for the couple's marriage, the *Cherokee Phoenix* addressed the issue much later, after the Tribal Council had sought standing in the case:
 

An incident in September 2003 made the couple realize they needed legal recognition of their relationship. Reynolds was hospitalized with a debilitating back injury and McKinley was forbidden entry while Reynolds was being treated. McKinley was also barred from Reynolds' hotel room.

"I was the person who lived with her. I was the person who knew about her pain, knew what was happening with her. But as far as the state of Oklahoma was concerned, I was a stranger," McKinley said. "As Kathy's spouse, I wouldn't have been shut out that way. It's a very sickening feeling to know you have no rights, no say so." (Lisa Hicks, "JAT Dismisses Same-Sex Marriage Injunction," *Cherokee Phoenix* 30 [2006]: 3)
6. The subjection of Cherokee marriage law to the authority of Oklahoma is more than an inference, as Attorney General Drew Edmondson explicitly cited the tribe's relationship with Oklahoma as a consideration for challenging recognition of the couple's marriage. See Snell, "Tribal Court Refuses," 4.
7. See, for example, work by Michael Warner, especially *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: Free Press, 1999), and Shannon Winnubst's *Queering Freedom* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), especially the epilogue, "A Political Note against Same-Sex Marriage," where, among other objections, she notes that "marriage is too white, too reliant on sexual identity, and too immersed in the class structure for us to look upon the extension of its domains as an unqualified success" (202).
8. "Lesbian Couple Seeking Recognition of Their Marriage by Tribe's JAT," *Cherokee Phoenix* 29 (2005): 4.
9. Associated Press, "Tribunal Reviews Same-Sex Marriage Case," *Cherokee Phoenix* 30 (2006): 8.
10. Snell, "Tribal Court Refuses," 4.
11. Will Chavez, "Council Bans Same-Sex Marriages," *Cherokee Phoenix* 28 (2004): 6.
12. Snell, "Tribal Court Refuses," 4.
13. Associated Press, "Council Sues to Prevent Same-Sex Marriages," *Cherokee Phoenix* 30 (2006): 8.
14. Chavez, "Council Bans Same-Sex Marriages," 6.

15. This is not a particularly new development. In her autobiography, Wilma Mankiller, former principal chief, writes about her election as deputy chief in the 1980s (and later, her election as principal chief), and the vocal concern that some Cherokees had that “having a female run our tribe would make the Cherokees the laughing-stock of the tribal world” (*Mankiller: A Chief and Her People* [New York: St. Martin’s, 1993], 241). Brian Joseph Gilley’s comments offer insight into the masculinist pressures affecting tribal communities today—pressures that have more of a foundation in colonialist constructions of race and gender than in tribal epistemologies:

Indian community conceptions about masculinity are assumed to be fixed, historically determined characteristics firmly grounded in popular and tribal notions of the “warrior.” Emphasizing the image of the warrior as the quintessential Indian male relies on the decline of the actual social role of the warrior and on the romanticization of the warrior tradition, fixing it in space and time. . . . Accordingly, Two-Spirits, when reflecting on themselves, see these interpretations as more about what a contemporary Indian male is not than what he represents. They know, for instance, that the community associates feminine behavior and dress for men as explicitly not Indian. Two-Spirit men assume that they will be judged according to these masculinized community standards. The naturalization of racial difference into an essentialized category of male-embodied persons brings about an ideological framework against which Two-Spirits compare themselves. (*Becoming Two-Spirit: Gay Identity and Social Acceptance in Indian Country* [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006], 77)

16. It would be a mistake to assume, however, that Cherokees as a whole are queerphobic. Just as with any sweeping statement about Cherokees, there are as many contrary opinions about queerness as there is anything else. While the political leadership certainly endorses queerphobic policy, there are many in the community (or communities, which is probably more accurate) who take a live-and-let-live approach to others’ consensual sexual behaviors, while others are active advocates for queer equity. For example, in a section called “Narrative of a Cherokee Childhood,” a piece written by the Cherokee nationalist, traditionalist, and anthropologist Robert K. Thomas as part of a larger project (cowritten by Robert D. Cooter), note the following: “Cherokees are very tolerant unless a person makes social trouble. We usually just accept others as they are. . . . If someone is eccentric, that is his way—perhaps the spiritual world has told him something that we don’t know about. If a boy is ‘sissified’ and would rather be around women, that’s up to him. It is his business. Who are we to say? We are all relatives, and God decreed that we should live together in harmony” (Robert Cooter, “Individuals and Relatives,” in *A Good Cherokee, A Good Anthropologist: Papers in Honor of Robert K. Thomas*, ed. Steve Pavlik [Los Angeles: American Indian Studies Center, 1998], 72).

17. Gilley, *Becoming Two-Spirit*, 53.
18. This is not to say that the concept of binary (or, rather, dualistic) oppositions doesn't exist; rather, as I've argued elsewhere, "understanding Cherokee dualism is to understand its necessary complementarity; it is a dynamic and relational perspective, not an assumption of unitary supremacy" (Daniel Heath Justice, *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006], 28).
19. Craig S. Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 42.
20. Pauline Wakeham's *Taxidermic Signs: Reconstructing Aboriginality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) offers a stunning (and quite chilling) analysis of the semiotic relationship between Indigenous representation and the practice of taxidermy. As she writes, "When the affiliation between literalized forms of taxidermy and figures of aboriginality is hinged together with other examples in which native and wildlife bodies are frozen in uncanny poses of liveness, it becomes possible to reconsider taxidermy as a mode of representation, a way of reconstructing corporeal forms, that is intimately bound up with the colonial disciplining of both animal and aboriginal bodies" (5).
21. It's almost impossible to make a convincing argument of shared affinity or belief among the thousands of distinctive cultures throughout the Americas before the arrival of Europeans. After 1492, of course, the shared circumstance of colonization and devastation linked all Native peoples in the Americas, but even then the lived realities of that experience were incredibly diverse.
22. *Empowerment*, here, is something of a loaded concept, especially given Jennifer Terry's important caution, quoted at length: "To demand of lesbians and gay men unmitigated and uncomplicated self-understandings historically or in the present is to ignore our agony of living in the margins of a deeply homophobic culture. What I have tried to propose here is not only a way of reading and understanding history against the grain of heterosexual hegemony, but a way of conceptualizing and enacting subjectivities forged in process through multiple resistances to systematized homophobia. These subjectivities are neither static nor contained; they are effects in the history of the perilous present" (Jennifer Terry, "Theorizing Deviant Historiography," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3, no. 2 [1991], 71). My aim in arguing for an empowering reading of history and text is not, I hope, to assert "unmitigated and uncomplicated self-understandings," as such a goal would indeed do violence to lives lived and lost in battle against queerphobia. Rather, empowerment here is *dependent* on understanding the conditional, contextual, and complicated contradictions of our subjectivities; in other words, that the only way we can experience the empowerment of what Qwo-Li Driskill calls a "sovereign erotic" — "an erotic wholeness healed and/or healing from the historical trauma that First Nations people continue to survive, rooted within the histories, traditions, and resistance struggles of our

- nations”—is by refusing simplistic stereotypes and fully embracing the complicated truths of our lives, loves, and longings (Qwo-Li Driskill, “Stolen from Our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic,” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 16 [2004]: 51).
23. Terry, “Theorizing Deviant Historiography,” 55. Terry’s rich analysis is quite attentive to the context-heavy intersections of various identity categories, in all their historical and contemporary complexities. This is particularly relevant to queer Native identities: “The idea of a coherent, full identity which is marked only by homosexuality is unsettled by the cultural productions of lesbians and gay men of color, whose work enacts the multiplicities and contradictions of living at the intersection of many different marginal subjectivities” (69).
  24. The MIIS has been offered by scholars as a more accurate alternative to the earlier descriptors for the shared cultural expressions of Mississippian peoples, the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex (SECC), or “Southern Cult.” In their introduction to the groundbreaking scholarly collection *Ancient Objects and Sacred Realms: Interpretations of Mississippian Iconography* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), the volume’s editors, F. Kent Reilly III and James F. Garber, argue that “MIIS appears better suited as an organizational phenomenon for this large corpus of art and symbols currently classified as the SECC. Certainly the interaction sphere model more accurately describes a Mississippian Period ideologically derived symbolic system and its accompanying artistic output” (3).
  25. Garrick Bailey, “Continuity and Change in Mississippian Civilization,” in *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand: American Indian Art of the Ancient Midwest and South*, ed. Richard F. Townsend (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2004), 88.
  26. The term *cosmovision* comes from the Mesoamerican religious scholar David Carrasco, who describes it thus: “Scholars of Aztec religions use the term *cosmovision* to refer to the ‘worldview,’ or coherent and rational arrangement of space and time communicated through religion and mythology. I have found this term and the discourse around it to be useful for describing the indigenous models of space and time as represented in rites, architecture, and mythology” (*City of Sacrifice: The Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization* [Boston: Beacon, 1999], 191). Carrasco extends the definition in the endnotes to his book, where he quotes Alfredo López Austin’s definition of *cosmovision* as “a concept of the world sufficiently organized and coherent . . . present in all of the facts of social life, chiefly in those that include the different kinds of production, family life, care of the body, community relationships, and relations with authorities” (267). This seems to me a term more purposeful and descriptive than the more watered-down concept of worldview.
  27. F. Kent Reilly III, “People of Earth, People of Sky: Visualizing the Sacred in Native American Art of the Mississippian Period,” in Townsend, *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand*, 137.

28. Susan Power, *Art of the Cherokee: Prehistory to the Present* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 14.
29. George E. Lankford, "Some Cosmological Motifs in the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex," in Reilly and Garber, *Ancient Objects and Sacred Realms*, 8.
30. Charles Hudson, *The Southeastern Indians* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 378. The hybrid animal/human entities will be of particular importance to the discussion of anomaly below.
31. While some may be uncomfortable with the heavy military emphases of Mississippianism, queer struggle has certainly involved some measure of militant refusal to be erased from, absorbed into, or co-opted by the values, structures, and priorities of Christian heteropatriarchy, such as the explicit war rhetoric and civil disobedience in the protest strategies of ACT UP.
32. A more complete description of this system can be found in Reilly, "People of Earth, People of Sky," 127.
33. Mooney provides an explanation of some of the necessary conditions for movement across these worlds: "The streams that come down from the mountains are the trails by which we reach [the] underworld, and the springs at their heads are the doorways by which we enter it, but to do this one must fast and go to water and have one of the underground people for a guide" (James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee* [1888; New York: Barnes and Noble, 2007], 254).
34. Hudson, *Southeastern Indians*, 136. It's worth pointing out, too, that the cosmovision template of a three-tiered universe of order above, struggle on this plane, and chaos below is not structurally that much different from the Christian model of the universe, brought by missionaries, of saints above, sinners on earth, and the damned below. The idea of "sin" and associated gender and cultural values, however, were much more difficult concepts to inculcate in Cherokees before Removal in 1838, when "only about 10 percent of Cherokees had joined Christian churches" (Theda Perdue and Michael Green, *The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears* [New York: Viking Penguin, 2007], 33). Following the Trail of Tears—the devastating, thousand-mile forced expulsion of the Cherokees from their mountainous homelands in the Southeast to the Indian Territory of what is now Oklahoma—Christian missionary efforts achieved greater success.
35. Another term Hudson used interchangeably with (and to less success than) *anomaly* was *abomination*, for which he was strongly criticized by Mary Churchill in her essay "The Oppositional Paradigm of Purity versus Pollution in Charles Hudson's *The Southeastern Indians*," *American Indian Quarterly* 20 (1996): 563–93. In his clarifying response, Hudson notes: "I have always been in agreement with E. E. Evans-Pritchard that the most basic interpretive act in social anthropology is properly characterized as a kind of translation. Just as one translates from one language to another, more or less accurately, the social anthropologist translates from one culture

to another, more or less accurately. This is one of the reasons I used the term ‘abominations,’ assuming that Jews and Christians familiar with the Book of Leviticus would thus possess enhanced access to a framework for thinking about Southeastern Indian conceptualizations. I now regret having used ‘abomination’ as a kind of synonym for anomaly, but nowhere do I say that all anomalies are ‘detested and loathsome,’ as Churchill claims I do, and I surely never thought that they were” (“Reply to Mary Churchill,” *American Indian Quarterly* 24 [2000]: 495–96).

36. Hudson, *Southeastern Indians*, 139.
37. Hudson, *Southeastern Indians*, 139–40.
38. According to Cherokee stories, the Uktena (Ukten’) was originally one of two humans who were transformed into snakes and sent to kill the Sun. Having been offended by the grimaces of humans when they looked at her, the Sun had increased the heat of her rays to such a degree that people were dying in great numbers, so as a last resort the Little Men (great medicine workers and spirit beings) agreed to help and prevent the complete extinction of humanity. The second man was turned into Rattlesnake, and he was too hasty, killing the Sun’s daughter instead, and leaving Ukten’ to return in frustrated fury. As Mooney reports, “The Uktena grew angrier all the time and very dangerous, so that if he even looked at a man, that man’s family would die. After a long time the people held a council and decided that he was too dangerous to be with them, so they sent him up to Galûñ’lati [the Above World], and he is there now” (*Myths of the Cherokee*, 268). Further, “He left others behind him . . . nearly as large and dangerous as himself, and they hide now in deep pools in the river and about lonely passes in the high mountains, the places which the Cherokee call ‘Where the Uktena stays’” (316). The Ukten’ is distinguished from other Mississippian water snakes by a “bright, blazing crest like a diamond on its forehead . . . called *Ulûñsû’î*, ‘Transparent,’ and he who can win it may become the greatest wonder worker of the tribe” (316). Thus, though the very gaze of the Ukten’ can be fatal to a human being, the creature also offers a powerful tool for medicine and transformation, thus offering a positive balance to its otherwise often hostile relationship with humanity.
39. See, for example, “The Red Man and the Uktena,” in Mooney’s *Myths of the Cherokee* (319–20), and “The King of the Tie-Snakes,” in John R. Swanton’s *Myths and Tales of the Southeastern Indians* (1929; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 34–36.
40. Rosemary Garland Thomson, “Introduction: From Wonder to Error—a Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity,” in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemary Garland Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 1. There’s more than a circumstantial connection between anomaly and freak discourses, especially given the long and sordid relationship between the exploitative cultural rhetorics of freak shows and colonialist productions of racialized Indigenous others from around the world. See, for example, Thomson’s collection above,

- especially the chapters in “Part IV: Exhibiting Cultural Freaks,” as well as Linda Frost’s *Never One Nation: Freaks, Savages, and Whiteness in U.S. Popular Culture, 1850–1877* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).
41. Rachel Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 7.
  42. Hudson, *Southeastern Indians*, 148.
  43. Womack, *Red on Red*, 244.
  44. Michael Warner, introduction to *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xxvi.
  45. The full cost of such power, and the transformative (and protective) power of our storied experiences, is movingly recounted by Driskill, who writes: “It is in our stories, including our written literatures, that I search for meaning and reflection of my Two-Spirit body in order to survive a world in which people like me are routinely killed. How do I make sense of the murder of F. C. Martinez Jr., a Diné/Cheyenne Nádleeh youth killed in June 2001 in Cortez, Colorado? How do I make sense of the February 2002 murder of Amy/Raymond Soos, a Two-Spirit of the Pima Nation whose naked body was found in Phoenix, Arizona? How do I make sense of the strangled and beaten body of Alejandro Lucero, Hopi Nation, whose body was found on March 4, 2002, also in Phoenix? How do I make sense of the slaughter of ‘Brandon Teena,’ always spoken of as white, who was actually of mixed ‘Sioux’ and white ancestry, his life erased by transphobic murderers and his Nativeness erased by white Queer and Trans folks? How do we as Two-Spirits remain whole and confident in our bodies and in our traditions when loss attempts to smother us? I return to our stories” (“Stolen from Our Bodies,” 56).
  46. Warner, introduction, xxvii.
  47. Hicks, “JAT Dismisses Same-Sex Marriage Injunction,” 3.
  48. One of my lineal ancestors, a Scots trader named Anthony Foreman, was likely married to two Cherokee women at the same time: Susie Gourd (or, according to some sources, Susie Rattling-Gourd) and her niece, Elizabeth Watee Gurdaygle (or Gurydaygle). Each woman had six children with Foreman, and the Spears line of my family is descended from Elizabeth’s daughter Elsie, sister to the Reverend Stephen Foreman, an early Cherokee missionary convert and famous Cherokee minister. (There’s some debate whether Anthony had divorced Susie before marrying Elizabeth, but either way, the relationships between these three would not meet the standard of “traditional family values” so popular at the pulpit today, even if they were quite within respectable Cherokee social mores of the time.)
  49. Theda Perdue’s *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700–1835* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998) offers extensive commentary on marriage, divorce, adultery, and polygamy among Cherokee people during this time, espe-

cially the social changes that came as a result of shifting emphasis from matrilineal/matrilocal clan law to patrilineal/patrilocal common law. See also Rennard Strickland, *Fire and the Spirits: Cherokee Law from Clan to Court* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975).

The only clear and consistent marriage laws that were, by all accounts, rigidly enforced were those that prohibited incestuous sexual relations or marriage between members of the same maternal clan (or one's father's clan). As a result, exogamy held high social significance and merited far more attention than marital fidelity, lifetime marriage, or, according to the historical record at least, the gender of one's sexual partner.

50. That said, the inherently anomalous nature of the term *spouse* (as opposed to ostensibly more gender-specific terms) might give us some useful direction for future consideration here, as it is, by its very nature, "something that falls into two or more categories. This is, historically and today, exactly what a spouse is: a lover, a co-worker, a business partner, a caregiver, and so on. A spouse *is* an anomaly, in a way that a boyfriend or a girlfriend maybe isn't" (Kyle Wyatt, pers. comm., November 3, 2008).
51. There is an increasing body of work relating to queer/two-spirit Native subjectivities. Some of the better texts that deal primarily with articulating the existence and dignified tribal significance of queer Native peoples (with significant first-person content or testimony by queer Native folks themselves) include Sue-Ellen Jacobs, Wesley Thomas, and Sabine Lang, eds., *Two-Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Beatrice Medicine, "Changing Native American Roles in an Urban Context *and* Changing Native American Sex Roles in an Urban Context" and "Warrior Women: Sex Role Alternatives for Plains Indian Women," in *Learning to Be an Anthropologist and Remaining "Native": Selected Writings* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); and Gilley's aforementioned *Becoming Two-Spirit*. Creative and critical work by queer and two-spirit Native writers, among them Womack, Driskill, Deborah Miranda, Gregory Scofield, and Chrystos, offer further insight into these concerns. Of the more problematic (but still significant) texts, those of Walter L. Williams and Will Roscoe stand out as being limited in their usefulness and unhelpful in some of the essentializing, exoticizing excesses of their arguments.
52. Womack, *Red on Red*, 245.
53. Even this emphasis on military prowess might provide metaphors and inspiration for responding to various forms of oppression today (although the decapitation imagery is best limited to the realm of metaphor only!).
54. See, in particular, Jace Weaver, *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), esp. 95–103; and Womack's "Lynn Riggs as Code Talker: Toward a Queer Oklahoma Theory and the Radicalization of Native American Studies," in *Red on Red*, 271–303.

55. Phyllis Braunlich, "Oklahoma's Outstanding Poet-Playwright," in Lynn Riggs, *This Book, This Hill, These People: Poems*, ed. Phyllis Braunlich (Tulsa, OK: Lynn Chase, 1982), 7.
56. Braunlich, "Oklahoma's Outstanding Poet-Playwright," 7. Elsewhere, Braunlich writes: "Except for a regressive visit home to Claremore in February, 1924, Riggs found the courage to accept the unconventional self he had discovered in Santa Fe"—an "unconventional self" that, as she earlier makes clear (and in one of the very few instances in the biography where she actually names queerness), was in large part Riggs's "recognition of his own homosexual orientation" (Phyllis Braunlich, *Haunted by Home: The Life and Letters of Lynn Riggs* [Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988], 13).
57. Braunlich, "Oklahoma's Outstanding Poet-Playwright," 8.
58. Lynn Riggs, *The Iron Dish* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1930), 21.
59. Riggs, *Iron Dish*, 33.
60. Riggs, *Iron Dish*, 52–53.
61. Riggs, *Iron Dish*, 32.
62. Riggs, *Iron Dish*, 49.
63. Riggs, *Iron Dish*, 19, 34.
64. Riggs, *Iron Dish*, 22.
65. Riggs, *Iron Dish*, 39.