
The Physical Presence of Survivance in *The Heirs of Columbus*

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According to A. Robert Lee, Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor is a “Native American renaissance virtually in his own right” (qtd. in Liang 128). The author of over forty books and a plethora of essays, Gerald Vizenor is a self-proclaimed “word warrior” who fights with words, theory, and storytelling, as opposed to fists and weapons. He also claims to be a “postindian.” That is, one who uses storytelling to fight the dominant perception of Indian identity, which he dubs a form of “manifest manners” (*Manifest Manners* viii). His novel *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991) follows the lovers Stone Columbus and Felipa Flowers as they repatriate bones and DNA to tell stories that heal and fight the demon “wiindigoo.” They establish a sovereign tribal nation on international waters called Point Assinika, a place which embodies the importance of physical possession and the healing power of touch based in survivance.

Vizenor’s trickster figures are routinely the vehicle by which he manifests his theories in story form. Bearheart in *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles*, Griever in *Griever: An American Monkey King in China*, and Stone in *The Heirs of Columbus* are all tricksters and healers who tell liberating stories to achieve their goals. As Timothy Fox explains of Vizenor’s specific brand of trickster; “one of its basic tenets is the belief that freedom is an intellectual achievement rather than a simple shedding of physical restraints” (71). For Bearheart and Griever, the intellectual liberation of individuals that they physically liberate is where the buck stops. They offer this kind of liberation, but never establish anything more—no community nor route to physical healing. And,

Vizenor takes flak for this from some quarters. Arnold Krupat calls into question the political relevance of Vizenor's work in *The Turn To The Native*. Vizenor seems to respond in *Heirs*, dedicating a few pages to a discussion in which two characters note that Krupat is "arrogant" and performs "dialogic domination" in his assessments of Native American literature (111). The inclusion of a dialogue about Krupat in this novel indicates that *Heirs* is Vizenor's response to the challenge of his political relevance. I argue that survivance becomes communal and physical in *Heirs* partly because this is Vizenor's response to Krupat's charge. The "liberated" in Vizenor's novels are generally cut loose into a cruel world. In *Griever*, for instance, Griever liberates a truck full of political prisoners who are recaptured or killed shortly after. Stone, however, becomes capable of offering liberation through a physical space in *Heirs*. Stone adds a new function to the Vizenorean trickster as he creates an opportunity for the physical healing of wounds caused by imprisonment via a community of actively resistant survivors. Stone creates a new tribal community in stories, ultimately creating the physical origin for an ongoing ideology. In this way, he furthers the theoretical definition of Vizenor's pre-eminent theory of survivance by not only achieving individual, intellectual liberation, but also by establishing what I call a "tribal" ideology based in physical healing and possession.

Here, it must be noted that Vizenor employs the word "tribal" both intentionally and controversially in *Heirs*. He enters the discussion about what it means to be tribal and posits that anyone can be. This is a hotly debated topic, but for Vizenor "tribal" takes on a theoretical meaning somewhat separate from what it means to be "Indian." Vizenor attempts to make a statement about the difference between terminal and non-terminal cultures, not about what qualifies someone as an "Indian." "Tribal" is used by Vizenor to denote cultures based in survivance, while any non-tribal culture is terminal because it supports terminal creeds. For Vizenor, "tribal" stands as an intellectual

position in *Heirs*; while one must be born a Native American, anyone can become tribal. This distinction is a sub-point of Vizenor's survivance theory.

Scholars from many fields have been using the term survivance for decades. However, defining the term, like defining most of Vizenor's theories, is tricky because he describes it ambiguously. Survivance is "trickster liberation, the uncertain humor...that denies the obscure maneuvers of manifest manners, tragic transvaluations, and the incoherence of cultural representations," according to one of Vizenor's many definitions ("The Ruins of Representation" 1). Sheela Menon recently defined the term as "stories that mediate and undermine the literature of dominance" (163). She borrows this definition straight from another of Vizenor's definitions in *Manifest Manners*. Most critics simply quote various descriptions of survivance they find in Vizenor's theory. These always pertain to oppositional storytelling—some kind of survival and resistance through words—but tend to be vague. While some critics, like David Carlson, have attempted to appropriate the term for political reasons, defining it as "the act of being recognized," most have stuck with defining it in its vague theoretical terms, quoting Vizenor or attempting to pin it down in more direct language (17). John D. Miles summarizes survivance as "a practice that emerges out of individual rhetorical acts... creat[ing] a presence that upsets and unravels discursive control over Native people" (41). Miles draws from specific examples given in Vizenor's theory where individuals speak and survivance manifests. Indeed, this represents most critics' understanding of the term. Miles notes that, in *Manifest Manners*, Vizenor himself claims that theories of survivance are "imprecise by definition" but must include "a sense of Native presence over absence" in people's minds (40). However, *Heirs* provides an example of survivance as potentially more concrete than Native presence in stories and words.

There is a difference between the traditional Anishinaabe trickster, the tricksters in Vizenor's past novels, and those present in *Heirs*. Namely, tricksters in *Heirs* are not

solitary but meet and exchange stories, forming a community and playing communal roles. In order to help Stone offer liberation and healing to the world, his lover Felipa sacrifices her life repatriating Pocahontas's bones in England. Felipa wants to steal them and take them to the headwaters of the Mississippi River where the "heirs"—a group of storytelling tricksters—meet but is killed by a vengeful man named Doric Miched whom she had previously stolen from. The cave at the headwaters—where Pocahontas's bones do eventually end up—is located next to "The House of Life," a graveyard for tricksters. As tricksters are buried in The House of Life their stories are integrated into the stones in the cave and "the vault turn[s] blue" in the cavern, which coincides with new healing stories being added to the heirs' repertoire (*Heirs* 176). Michael Hardin claims that the headwaters are symbolic because the stories there "feed into the entire North American continent" through the Mississippi, distributing their healing (40). But this act is, first and foremost physical, grounded in bones. Pocahontas's bones would provide healing to the nation as her story, one commandeered by the English, could be retold and freed from the "terminal creed" that she, as an Indian, became "civilized" as she merged with Western culture. This is a story which is terminal because it implies that Indians are categorically savages.

Essentially, a "terminal creed" is a story—often represented by an icon such as an image or piece of writing—which does or cannot change. Stories that liberate are "oral" in nature and do change, just like oral tellings of stories do, according to Vizenor. And this allows a concept to adapt and be applicable to any context. But, "terminal creeds" don't change, and so people suffer as a concept is forced on them. They are written in stone, as it were, but not the living kind that Vizenor often envisions. Vizenor argues that the concept of the "Indian" is a terminal creed which needs to be constantly liberated and reimagined. He utilizes the lower-case "indian" or the term "postindian" to expose the absence of a real person in the upper case term "Indian." "indian" or "postindian"

is a deferment of the meaning of "Indian." Billy Stratton provides an insightful discussion of the politics of which term to use (Indian, indian, native, Native) in a footnote from "Come For The Icing, Stay For The Cake," a chapter of his book *The Fictions of Stephen Graham Jones*. Stratton contemplates a discussion he once had with Vizenor in which they discussed his use of "indian." Stratton claims that the lowercase use of "indian" or "native" "overcome[s] the absence in the empty signifier" in the upper case "Indian" (3). Within his own book, Stratton regrets caving in to the demands of editors and the rules of publication by using "Indian," but recognizes the current (regrettable) need to do so, claiming that "we are not yet at a moment where we can write native, and so mark within the word a return of substance and the power of representation carried in and through story, rather than an emptiness of the past, a mockery, a teasing of a presence that is nothing that was not there and nothing that is" (3).

Vizenor, however, attempts to write just such an impossible narrative. *Heirs* is far ahead of its time, and the trickers and trickster bones point to this. Trickster bones, like Pocahontas's, are of the utmost importance to the heirs because they represent and literally contain the stories which shape the terminal creeds of Indian identity. Kenneth Lincoln notes that "[t]rickster's bones preserve a framework inside the culture" by being "artifacts of an ongoing tradition" (128). Bones signify the stories of a person, and so possession of them means possession of storytelling rights. The heirs hold neither the bones of Columbus nor Pocahontas at the beginning of the novel, but they seek to. Bones represent the concrete possession of an abstract idea in *Heirs*. The concrete, the tangible, is always a trace of something—a reference pointing to a story.¹ If Pocahontas's bones are held on display in a museum, then they are representations of terminal creeds. They represent the Indian "other" and are seen as evidence of the truth of that terminal creed. Whatever description is written on the museum's plaque to refer to the bones will become the story those bones represent, held in a glass box as the "other."

In one interview, Vizenor claims that "[o]ral to written is sound to icon, sound to silence in an icon" (Harmsen-Peraino 2). In *Heirs*, Stone refuses to appear on tv or in writing, speaking only on the radio. He claims that "[r]adio is real, television is not," because the radio broadcasts "hurried his sense of adventure, imagination, and the stories in his blood" in a way only oral storytelling could (8). Imagination is active when listening to the radio in a way that it is not when the pictures—the icons—of the television screen purport to represent what an Indian, or something like an Indian, looks like. What is recorded as fact in writing and icons is unreal, because it cannot be reimagined to accommodate the natural change of the world or individual perception like an oral story can. The picture, unless placed alongside pictures which contradict it, establishes a fixed way of seeing something. So, Stone intentionally mixes up dates and facts in his image-driven retellings of stories to emphasize the importance of change, contradiction, and reimagination over "Truth." In one example, Stone changes a date from one telling to the next and then claims that "Columbus is ever on the move in our stories" (11). It doesn't matter which facts are used in a story, but rather what the point of the telling is, and this is an instance of intellectual survivance based in imagination, shaped through stories. However, the heirs cannot possess the right to tell the stories of Pocahontas until they obtain her bones and manipulate her image as well as her story. These tasks go hand in hand.

The heirs at the Headwaters also want Columbus's stories. Fantastically and literally they rebuild his lost bones over the course of centuries by telling stories about him. Stone and the other postindians believe that retelling Columbus's story would cut the very root of the Indian terminal creed. When the heirs speak of Columbus, they refer to him as a "bad shadow" cast over their identity (19). They know they need to tell Columbus's "shadow history," but they do not own Columbus's bones because his bones are lost, "denied the honor and solace of the grave" (29). And so, the harmful

shadow history of Columbus suspends them in the limbo of Indian identity until physical possession of his bones is possible.

The concept of “shadows” and “shadow histories” is another of Vizenor’s theories, one that is integral to destabilizing and reimagining terminal creeds. Shadow “words are intuitive, a concise meditation of sound, motion, memories” which are ever-changing because they are continually intuited (*Manifest Manners* 65). And this is the point: “‘Meaning’ can never be grasped completely; it is in the play, in the trace, in the difference,” says Kerstin Schmidt (70). All that is important is that the trace of something else destabilizes the absolute “Truth” which was previously assumed in the terminal creed. Shadows point to a movement away from static “Truth.” Katalin Nagy proves that shadows are potential zones for creation as they often emanate blue light (248). The silent blue shadows are a space in which the imagination can fill a dead icon of terminal creeds with the life of an ongoing, oppositional story which points out what the terminal story lacks. Vizenor writes:

Postindian consciousness is a rush of shadows in the distance, and the trace of natural reason to a bench of stones; the human silence of shadows, the animate shadows over presence. The shadow is that sense of intransitive motion to the referent; the silence in memories. Shadows are neither the absence of entities or the burden of conceptual references. The shadows are the prenarrative silence that inherits the words; shadows are the motions that mean the silence, but not the presence or absence of entities. (*Manifest Manners* 64)

Vizenor theorizes “shadow history” to refer to the initial sense—literally the intuition—that one has an identity that existed before stories and cannot be contained in them once and for all. These senses, the “shadows” and the “silenced experience,” are not stories to be discovered but are the motivation to keep telling oppositional stories so that one’s identity will never become a terminal creed. So, Hardin claims that as the heirs

pinpoint Columbus's narrative as the origin story of Native Americans as "victims and exotic," they realize that the only way out of that false "Indian" identity is to tell stories from Columbus's shadows histories (26). But, again, the heirs are unable to retell the Columbus story without his bones. And they must retell his story.

The problem the heirs face is that the Columbus story is thought of simply as "history" by the oppressor. This makes liberation difficult. As Homi Bhabha argues, the oppressing force of colonialism "takes power in the name of history, [and] it repeatedly exercises its authority through figures of farce" (126). History, then, is a terminal creed, and the farcical figure in *Heirs* is Christopher Columbus. What people understand to be canonical history is difficult to destabilize. Nevertheless, Vizenor must retell the story, according to Hardin, because his retelling "alters the myth of Christopher Columbus and makes him of Mayan descent." And this is important because "one cannot be a pitiable victim if one is also partially responsible for the atrocity" of colonization and death that Columbus brought with him (26). This is not to say that Vizenor is victim blaming, but that he recognizes the importance of physically possessing and retelling the Columbus story so that Columbus can become a minor character and not the point of origin for the "Indian" story. In this way, Columbus becomes part of Stone's tribal history because he is a blood relation. The idea that the "Indian" is different—an idea founded by Columbus—cannot stand if Columbus himself is an indian. This move cleverly undercuts the difference between Indians and whites which Columbus establishes. Moreover, it allows his story to be retold so that "Indians" can be reimagined as indians. According to Birgit Däwes, Vizenor "creates the potential for the individual to free him- / herself from a binary past"—which has not allowed white and Indian individuals in America to see themselves as anything except "conqueror or conquered"—so that a new relationship can be imagined in which the priority is to prevent such a dichotomy (27). This fits into classical and essential definitions of survivance as a state of mind. However,

in *Heirs* this state of mind is impossible without a physical tie. The heirs must have Columbus's bones so that they can establish the blood connection and thus contradict his fixed and powerful image as a heroic European colonizer. Then they can establish their tribal stories, a fluid tribal history, instead.

As noted before, "tribal" applies to all people who do not own, are not born into, or do not choose to use the dominating stories of terminal creeds which take on life as manifest manners when acted out. A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff claims that "tribal" is a "celebration of communal values" which opens up the possibilities for what anyone can be, unlike the titles "Indian," "Native," or even "American," which are artificial terms created by oppressors ("Gerald Vizenor: Compassionate Trickster" 42). So, tribal ideology links directly with physical reality by way of a physical community no longer separated by ideological barriers.

The postindian heirs tell a story of Columbus, on his first night in the New World, in order to share their tribal ideology. In their story, Columbus is attracted to the shore by the bear and trickster Samana during his first visit. Samana lures Columbus in and makes love to him, liberating the tribal signature he brings with him in his Mayan blood. For that night only, Columbus becomes a bear and his "signature," or "spirit," "returned to the headwaters" where the heirs have met ever since (*Heirs* 41). At the headwaters "the old shamans heated up some stones and put him (Columbus) back together again," building his body around his spirit. As the old stories which Columbus is made up of are terminal,—cancerous to Indians—many shamans over the centuries fight back and "dreamed a new belly for the explorer... called a new leg... got an eye... so you might say that [the heirs] created this great explorer from their own stones" (20). As the novel begins, the heirs tell the stories of Columbus whom they possess "in a silver box." Felipa has repatriated a box with the last bit of Columbus's DNA in it, and that DNA is the final piece needed to complete Columbus's new body. With it, they can bring the bones to

life so that possession of them can be used to create a new Columbus story and the healing nation of Point Assinika. The bones of Columbus and Pocahontas become the physical foundation and scaffolding of survivance in the floating city of Point Assinika.

All of the tribal, postindian heirs—including Columbus on that one fateful night with Samana—have found liberation in animal form, emphasizing the physicality and instinctiveness of survivance. They believe humans have natural, animal identities which are more real than their human ones. They also believe that terminal creeds cover up this reality. Memphis, an heir and a panther, exposes this reality. Perceived as a human by all seeing her, she states that "we are animals disguised as humans," and then proceeds to show her panther self to a courtroom full of non-heirs (70). Memphis purrs and evinces the attributes of a panther, and the postindian heirs see her as such. The non-tribal people in the courtroom, however, cannot imagine that Memphis, speaking as a witness in a court case, may be a panther and so become "worried and strained" in their resistance to seeing her as she is (72). Sean Corbin notes that this is another instance of Vizenor undermining the stranglehold that manifest manners have over identity. He states that "in including stories in the blood and shadow realities as evidence, the illocutionary act is performed, calling the reader to accept this inclusion, which, in doing so, generates the question, 'What is evidence?'" (72). According to Corbin, Vizenor stages a scene in a courtroom so that shadow realities can unveil the weaknesses in Western, legalistic logic which relies on the ontological premises that one divine God has established a natural and knowable—and most importantly, universal—moral hierarchy. So, Vizenor fights that understanding of human nature with his own version that carries the lone goal of destabilizing knowable human nature. The courtroom, a place of ideas and debates, stands in marked contrast to the immediate, instinctual, and physical reality of the human as animal. All of the heirs have recognized their animal selves. Caliban is a mongrel, Truman croaks like a frog, and even the child Miigis dreams

she is a crane. When Columbus and Samana sleep together they both turn into bears and Samana becomes pregnant, later giving birth to the first daughter in a line of heirs with the stories of bears in their blood. A physical line of bear-people carries survivance. Physicality is essential to survivance in *Heirs* as it arises from physical experience, not thought as it primarily had in previous Vizenor novels.

Stone discovers that he is a physical representation of survivance as a bear when he is resurrected after his first death. In this first death and resurrection, Stone returns to life to discover himself as a postindian bear at the headwaters of the Mississippi. Stone is burned to death in a furnace “in the reservation school” during a wind and lightning storm (14). Wind and lightning are both signs of evil spirits, those who antagonize tribal people as “wild demons” of unfortunate chance (15). Stone dies because he “mocked the sounds of the storm for no good reason but fear.” When Stone awakes from death as a bear at the headwaters, he listens to the wind and “laughed at the blue light in the basement” where he had died (15). In discovering his stories of truly being a bear and finding the location of the headwaters, Stone overcomes his fear of the wind (tribal demons) as he laughs at them instead of mocking them. On that day, Stone dies to the oppressive, demonic education responsible for the terminal creed of the “Indian” embodied by the colonial reservation school. He dies to the fear of demons who would threaten tribal ways, and then begins his reality as a fearless postindian bear who instinctively enacts survivance.

Stone is free to live the tension of being thoughtful and instinctual as a bear and a man. When the tribal people silenced the wiindigoo—their ultimate enemy—by freezing his body, they created an imbalance in tribal nature, which relies upon oppositions. Stone claims that the trickster heirs “heal with opposition, we are held together by opposition, not separation, or silence, and the best humor in the world is pinched from opposition” (176). Anthropologist Paul Radin noted that “the concrete

image of the trickster is suppressed" whenever evil becomes the "other" and is no longer recognized to be a part of the self (xiii). The evil that is "other" manifests in the concrete form of other people as the compassionate Vizenorian trickster disappears. In this way, the natural tribal balance is thrown off and the trickster—its physical and intellectual presence—is replaced with bodiless stories falsely claiming to be the truth which are then overlaid on all Indians and become terminal creeds (*Postindian Conversations* 19).

Stone tells oppositional stories grounded in physical humor to combat this fixed identity based in fear and separation of the physical and mental self. Stone and the other heirs of Columbus believe that reality itself is "created in stories" and images and that these stories must ever be actively reimagined as new pictures of people and events being painted in words (*Heirs* 8). People "imagine each other" and even "imagine who we (the heirs) would be" (16). Stone imagines Columbus with a comically "twisted penis" causing him to act in a humorously unpredictable fashion as pleasure and pain war against each other in his body. More fun is poked at Columbus as he is drawn to "blue puppets" in the heir's stories, recognizing something of himself in them because *he* is essentially a puppet fulfilling Mayan dreams (30). Stone's Columbus is a comical dummy, led around like a puppet enacting bodily humor, which strips away his dignity and god-like status as a figure of colonization. Columbus's dignity falters when the reader pictures him as clumsy. Likewise, what Columbus represents as the cornerstone of serious terminal creeds begins to crumble as his image is manipulated by the heirs.

Stone's name also carries both comic and serious meaning. Stones carry special significance in *Heirs*, being the physical containers of stories. A stone is the second being in the tribal creation story that Stone recounts while speaking on Carp Radio. Stone says that "[t]he stone is my totem, my stories are stones, there are tribal stones, and the brother of the first trickster who created the earth was a stone, stone, stone" (9). Vizenor expands on this stone story in *Postindian Conversations*, revealing that in his version of

an Anishinaabe origin story a being named Nanabozho and his brother, a stone, were the first living creatures on earth. Nanabozho would go off and have adventures, but then always came back to where his brother was to recount his travels. Eventually, the stone realized that it was taxing on his brother to always come back and tell him stories, so the stone had his brother heat him up with fire and then pour cold water on him, causing him to explode into many, many pieces which scattered across the earth. This way, stone brother could hear stories from everywhere. As the story goes, pieces of stone brother still exist, holding all of the stories he has heard to this day (*Postindian Conversations* 131).

In Stone's story about stone brother he says that the "first" to create the earth was a trickster. This "first" implies that the physical creation of the earth is an ongoing process; not one that is dead in terminal, unchanging creeds, but one that lives in stories and actions. As the wounded in *Heirs* are literally touched by Stone, they hear his "creation stories" through that touch and are made well as they find that their terminal creeds are not true. They have the opportunity to actively participate in identity creation through resistance by way of a subjective physical connection made with the intent to know the "other" (*Heirs* 142).

Stone's name embodies this, but it is also a metaphor—a slang word for testicles. Testicles, like Stone, contain seeds of life. Stone embodies the kind of serious play his name implies. He often wears masks, like a humorous one of Christopher Columbus with a giant nose, in order to tease the seriousness of terminal creeds and bring his humorous imaginings of Columbus to life. But the truth of Stone's humorous stories is a liberating truth which brings life, not a dead "Truth," a terminal creed which must be literal and unchanging. That would defeat his very purpose. Vizenor writes that "[w]hether the heirs believe their story is not the point, because no culture would last long under the believer test; the point is that humor has political significance and as a scenario" (*Heirs* 166). The

humor of the stories liberates the mind from monologic, humorless terminal creeds, but one must also fight the physical manifestations of those creeds once one is freed. So, Stone provides us with a comical Columbus we will never forget, taking pains to describe his looks. In this way, Columbus's physical presence in places like text books and paintings no longer has a monopoly on shaping our imagination of him as a heroic figure.

The heirs of Christopher Columbus are capable of hearing the stories that the stones located in the cave above the headwaters of the Mississippi River hold. They meet annually here, listening to the stones that glow blue as they reveal stories (14). These are the stories that "heal and remember the blue radiance of creation and resurrections" (13). For the heirs, the color blue is the color of creation, and because creation must be imagined constantly it is also the color of resurrection, the pinch of life from death. Each of Stone's resurrections is accompanied by glowing blue objects and/or Stone glowing blue. As the heirs heat up the stones in the cavern by sitting on them (just as Nanabozho warmed brother stone long ago) and then tell the stories they remember (spreading the stones across the world with their voices like Nanabozho did when he exploded stone brother with water), the stones begin to glow blue. That they turn blue is no coincidence. Blue is the color of water and water is essential to the spread of stone brother's stories. Point Assinika, the healing nation established by Stone, is set on international waters, and these international waters physically connect the world. The cave where the heir's stories come from is located at the headwaters of the Mississippi. This river divides America in two, making it the perfect place to bind America back together and heal its oppressor/oppressed divide. The heirs are so positioned in order to make themselves a physical obstruction which must be nationally and internationally dealt with, since they engage in activities on international waters with national implications and no clear-cut legal frameworks to prevent them from doing so. The physical spaces they inhabit trigger national and international court cases in which the heirs are seen and heard by the world.

As Christopher Columbus was called “the admiral of the ocean sea,” transcending the barrier of the Atlantic to connect Europe and the Americas, so Stone mimics and becomes an “admiral” navigating the divide in identities between peoples across the world through water (*Heirs* 3).

When the ice woman resurrects Stone after his second death, it is out of the clutches of water—which is always associated with the wiindigoo and “water demons” (179). As Stone’s grandmother resurrects him and he sees his family’s place with the heirs and his true identity Stone is shown the history of the ice woman’s interactions with tribal people through ice woman’s touch and her freezing of the wiindigoo. He is also shown the inevitability of a thaw. Stone subsequently meditates on the seasons to “hold back the boreal demons,” and sees that “the ice woman bears a seductive hand of winter.” However, to be “cold and lonesome” (or, to be permanently in the winter) is to be “woundable” (93). A long-lasting winter under the ice woman represents the state of tribal people for hundreds of years. Because of their plea for her help with the wiindigoo, and the resulting winter, they are woundable—physically wounded and historically massacred because of the lack of an ongoing wiindigoo story. And so Stone begins work to build a floating casino to make money in order to fund his project of telling oppositional stories about Columbus on the radio, with the hope of liberating others with a tribal ideology.

But Stone’s floating reservation is destroyed by lightning one fateful night shortly after its opening and Stone dies. This time, after his third death, Stone is resurrected from the by Samana, the bear shaman, an heir of the Samana who slept with Columbus (12). The original Samana leaves a line of daughters who all have the same name and carry the same stories generation to generation. It is said that “[h]er touch would heal the heirs with stories in the blood” (*Heirs* 12). This Samana, a “hand-talker,” touches Stone and he “hears the wild dance of the blue puppets” that silent tribal hand-talkers

use to tell stories. In this resurrection, Stone learns the importance of physical touch and community in survivance. Right before this, Stone makes love to Felipa, his first interest outside of himself in the novel. As they make love they turn into bears and Stone finds that love is a state in which he does not simply liberate minds, but cares for others in physical terms as well. In this instance of resurrection "[Stone] was a hand talker," gaining the ability to communicate as a trickster through touch. Stories alone are not enough; although the healing process began in the intellectual liberation of minds from and through stories, it must evolve and integrate physical healing and relationships. Stone needs the help of a tribe in which different members fulfill different roles in order to accomplish this. He is the intellectual, spiritual guide, but he needs a fitting "body" to act with. The manicurists and scientists who become the bodies through which Stone acts at Point Assinika are the proof that he learns to integrate physical healing into his liberations.

Stone creates Point Assinika by bringing together reappropriated stories, gene therapy, and tribal manicures. The oppositional story of Columbus and the gene therapy, which in this context is kept vague but presumably is the delivery of something into a patient's cells that gives them "tribal" blood, counters the racist notion of blood quantum and is an important factor at Point Assinika. The reappropriation of stories by stealing bones as well as the compassionate work of manicurists manifests these factors. Tribal manicurists are central to success at Point Assinika as they collect the stories and genetic samples which contribute to the healing genome project. Teets Melanos is the head manicurist, "the trusted listener" who takes battered women and children and tenderly cares for their hands—massaging them and clipping their nails—when they arrive at Point Assinika. In this way, she coaxes out stories, which are mostly about abusive, controlling men, and these stories "alter and attune the tribal world" (141). The stories of the traditionally silenced are added to the stories which are already recorded

to create a narrative where everyone can be included. In some ways, Vizenor is responding to Gayatri Spivak's claim that the "subaltern" ("marginalized," possibly, in Vizenor's terms) cannot speak by positing a possible oral ideology in which even writing is an action and not a record of "facts" which constitute an oppressive "Truth." Writing in *Heirs* (as a literally written novel) records things, but it is nearly impossible to pin down meaning, no matter how hard we might try in critical articles. To paraphrase Vizenor, there can only be "more creative misreadings" of his work.

In *Heirs*, "facts" change over time in the heirs' tellings of stories, always indicating the primary importance of action over a Western notion of truth. The nail clippings collected by Teets Melanos are taken and stored, becoming "the source of genetic intromission and retral transformations" at the tribal genome pavilion (141). All of the genetic material collected from the fingernail clippings serves the project of collecting all peoples' genetic material for distribution. Then everyone can be tribal, as the "bits of skin and fingernail... and stories would be the source of genetic intromission and retral transformation" capable of crossing all human genes together (141). In this way, racial divides fall because everyone shares the same blood, as the scientists at Point Assinika craft gene intromission from the manicurists' clippings. Importantly, this process never ends; as each new person in Point Assinika brings with them new stories to be shared and integrated alongside a new set of genes. So, scientists and manicurists become the active body of Stone's liberation, now possible because the heirs own the storytelling rights of Columbus and Pocahontas and therefore the rights to their own identity.

"Stone resists the notion of blood quantum, racial identification, and tribal enrollment" (*Heirs* 162). Instead, he creates a process of gene intromission by which all people can share the same blood and become tribal. Yvette Koepke and Christopher Nelson argue that "[g]enes are metaphors for stories" in *Heirs*, and that the genetic crossing "should not be taken literally" (2). Vizenor is both evoking and opposing the

notion of blood quantum by providing a humorous solution to its inherent discrimination through free tribal gene distribution. This subversion makes everyone who undergoes the process a tribal heir, which is an identity that transgresses the boundaries of race. However, I argue that Vizenor is suggesting that survivance must be thought of as a physical reality in which the segregation caused by blood quantum must be resisted. The physicality is vital because the stories alone are not enough to heal. He acknowledges the limitations of imagining intellectual liberation as the end of survivance. While intellectual liberation may be the beginning of survivance, it also may not be. It may come after the physical care and mixing of bodies and blood which creates trust at Point Assinika.

Members of Point Assinika only find healing when physically caring for each other, solidifying a sense of bodily safety in the fluid nation. This is a tribal identity of "survivance" being lived out. In this context, "tribal" evades definition by signifying the action of resisting terminal creeds and manifest manners. Vine Deloria Jr. notes that "tribal" usually stands "not as a commitment but as a status symbol of 'Indianness'" (28). However, Vizenor employs "tribal" here as an action which must be carried out, not as a set of attributes—the markers of manifest manners. He fights the "tribal" which was born of manifest manners with the "tribal" of survivance.

Pinning down exactly what survivance is remains tricky, if not impossible. Nevertheless, the term has incredible sticking power precisely because it is vague. By centering the term around concepts instead of giving it a precise definition, Vizenor creates a living and adaptable word. But, in *Heirs* we are reminded that survivance must be physical to become real, be pinned down at times in order to actually be effective. *Heirs* reveals the shortcomings of survivance as a solely intellectual exercise. According to Betty Louise Bell, Point Assinika represents a "native subjectivity [that] becomes comparable to Derrida's endless chain of signifiers, with no truth signified, each signified

becoming in turn a signifier, each subject becoming a metasubject, each narrative becoming a metanarrative," until every person in the community is validated in the stories they share (183). Prescriptive identity disappears as all members of Point Assinika immerse into the sea of stories they create collectively, eternally, as a living "tribal" people. Yet they still hold their individual physical bodies, and they recognize that each body validates experiences and needs to be cared for if better stories are to be made and told to sustain tribal reality.

There is a celebration to mark Stone's victory over the wiindigoo, thanks to the people at Point Assinika. Almost Browne, a trickster of simulations, creates a laser show in the night sky to celebrate the tribal victory. "Jesus Christ and Christopher Columbus arose in the south... Crazy Horse, Black Elk, and Louis Riel were eminent laser figures in the north," and "Felipa Flowers and Pocahontas arose in the east" (*Heirs* 182). The old simulations of manifest manners Jesus and Columbus, the old simulations of survivance Crazy Horse, Black Elk, and Louis Riel, and the new simulations of survivance Felipa and Pocahontas, all come together in a new simulation of unity against fear of the wiindigoo. This new ideology of tribal opposition is realizable only as an intellectual and individual achievement that integrates physicality and community. And Stone makes this possible. Stone is both stone, a physical repository for stories, and trickster, one who acts in the world through stories. Stone's "stories are stones," represented by the people of Point Assinika being brought together as if he was a reverse of stone brother (9). Intellectual modes of resistance to terminal creeds and the physical resistance of reclaiming Indian artifacts, establishing a physical nation, combating blood quantum, repainting colonial images, and validating physical existence through loving touch are all realized through Stone. Survivance without these physical factors—such as the survivance deployed in *Griever*—results in the death of those "liberated."

Nevertheless, the ongoing project of survivance does not end with Stone and the addition of physical considerations. Jace Weaver claims that "Vizenor has always been the literary equivalent of a drive-by shooting" (57). He fights evasively, always liberating, with his theory always on the move. In *Heirs*, Vizenor's theory of survivance adapts as it always has and always should—from theory to reality. Vizenor himself began this exploration of the physical side of survivance in the 90s, and he carries it on today in his most recent work, *Native Provenance* (2019). This book is largely concerned with the political ramification of peace treaties, sovereignty, and the representation of "moral imagination" shaped by the "blue shadows" of "sacred objects, stories, art, and literature" (35). These are all continuations of other notions in *Heirs*, and in *Native Provenance* Vizenor correspondingly continues to address the physical reality of survivance.

In the chapter "Visionary Sovereignty," Vizenor compares the military occupation of Japan with the military occupation of Native American lands. Vizenor claims the United States treated Japan—a defeated enemy of WWII—more fairly than Native Americans over the same period of time. In ironic fashion, "constitutional provisions of land reform and labor unions were observed for the first time in Japan, yet native communal land was reduced to allotments on treaty exclaves and reservations" (93). The military of the United States was able—or possibly pressured—to make and carry through more fair decisions concerning the governance of far-away Japan than it was with closer-to-home Native American communities. With the international eye on Japan and the United States after WWII, the military did the right thing if they could. But, the United States' relationship with Native Americans has always been, more or less, internal and hidden to the outside world. Recognizing this, Vizenor chooses to highlight the physical presence of the journalist and political activist William Lawrence in the final chapter of *Native Provenance*. Lawrence persisted in publishing reports of the injustices done to

Native Americans by the United States' government and placed hard-copies of that news in people's hands. In *Heirs*, Vizenor moves the physical contact between Native Americans and the United States' government to the international stage; he places real contacts in plain view at Point Assinika. This is a tactic Vizenor employs in much of his fiction, placing *Griever* in China and crafting relationships between Native Americans and the Japanese in *Hiroshima Bugi: Atomu 57* (2010).

Scholars have a way to go in mapping Vizenor's exploration of physical survivance. But, luckily, Vizenor's fiction welcomes this exploration. Although the intellectual side of survivance has always been Vizenor's primary concern, *Heirs* paves the way for scholars and creative writers to explore the necessary role of physicality in the enactment of survivance so that survivance can transcend the intellectual realm and manifest in real, physical relationships.

Notes

¹ Scholars including Kerstin Schmidt have noted that Vizenor draws from Derrida's theory of "trace." A direct correspondence is not applicable, however, because Vizenor appropriates the word for his own uses.

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