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missions to Native peoples. It belongs in every academic library as well. John Steckley has contributed an essential work to the field.

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Evil Corn. By Adrian C. Louis. Granite Falls, MN: Ellis Press, 2004. 126 pages. \$18.00 paper.

What is immediately striking about Adrian C. Louis's latest collection of poetry is its eerie cover and title. The cover artwork, *Scarecrow Skeleton*, depicts an animate corpse with fiery hair and a ghoulish smile amid an endless field of red and gold corn (or wheat) illumed by a setting harvest sun in the background. The eyes, nose, and mouth of the skeleton are clownlike, and its head is tilted as if it knows its viewer, as if it welcomes or waits for her or him. Even the book's title, *Evil Corn*, sets up an interesting confrontation: One term has associations with Judeo-Christian notions of hell and sin, while the other carries implications of an indigenous source of food and nourishment. Juxtaposed, the two words—which ride heavy atop the haunting cover piece—create an oddly caustic framework. The poems that follow embody that same aggregation of seemingly disparate parts, where readers are invited to walk into the scarecrow's field toward the foreboding horizon, but all the while, readers find themselves laughing alongside the speaker despite their uneasiness.

The trip, however wry, is starkly composed of the mundane. Louis's poems reside in the everyday; but amid this, the speaker shoots profoundly acute insights about the world around him. In his signature poem, "Evil Corn," the speaker has moved to the world of rural southwestern Minnesota, where "life is ordered," but "something about the place gives my bones the heebie-jeebies" (15). He is "left to the sun and / rain, this land of quaint squares of dark soil sprouts a / bright uniform green from road to road that murders anything natural" (15). This is the groundwork he lays for a penetrating acumen that follows: "Evil corn and its masters have / murdered this land" (15). The speaker explains how the fields around him do not yield the sacred corn that physically and spiritually nourished his Native ancestors across the continent for millennia; this "green death rises from this bad-heart land," a "mutant flora, a green American Frankenstein born of chemicals and greed" (16). Louis's poem, like so many of his others in the collection, turns quickly from ordinary observation toward unearthing and piercing political criticism of the world in which we all live.

What the collection exposes best, however, is the speaker's humorous, honest, and often self-effacing voice, which is fearless and constant in relaying the most intimate moments. And in these, where the carnal and libidinous are posited next to the religious and proper, Louis is able to subvert the very dichotomy he erects with a voice that is comedic. In Louis's poem "Minnesota Turkey Daze" the speaker—in "trying to decipher the corn and my place in it" (38)—exposes political and social injustices:

But what all the Mexicans are doing now in Morlock,
 Minnesota is a mystery until I ask a janitor at the College of the Corn. ‘So
 what’s the deal with all these Mexicanos, Senor?’ He shakes his weary
 head and
 stares at me like I’m truly stupid. ‘They work at the
 turkey packing plants, you dickhead. Exactly how retarded you gotta be to
 become a college
 professor.’ There are only two sources of knowledge at
 the College of Corn—the secretaries and the
 janitors. (38)

The blunt language of both the speaker and the janitor exposes the ironies that lay in middle America, the ironies the speaker appears to know very well; his voice at times identifies with the migrant workers and janitors of the world and at times completely disconnects from them because of conceptions of class and status. What is more, the pace in the poem is quickened by the internal and external banter that razes stereotypes in the crossfire. The speaker incessantly undermines any sense of predetermination or fixedness about the nature of poetry, about Native people, or about the state of the world because his voice never tragically regresses into convention nor endorses victimization. Louis’s use of irony sustains the comedic through his harsh examination of reality, where no one is safe from the ribbing—not even himself.

The collection comprises seventy-three poems, all of which are prose poems, ordered blocks that resemble the homogenous landscape in which the speaker resides. Within these blocks, however, the long poetic lines move like the undertow of receding waves: unstoppable, crazed, natural. As oxymoronic as that might sound, Louis’s lines thrive on an organic energy that is fierce—like the blood that pulses through a body. His poems, which on the surface may appear negative or woeful, pump survival and are matters of the heart as they connect to creative expression. In his poem “Arse Poetica” the speaker is introduced to an Ivy League “language poet” and immediately is put off: “I discovered / that he had no heart and thus his wail only an aria / for the lack of true love” (43). Later he says, “For me, poetry is poverty” (44). The speaker does not *come to* poetry from a privileged position and therefore cannot simply *play* with language. He writes because he has no other choice. The need is as essential as blood. And when he depicts his lackluster creative writing students in the second section of the poem, he says:

Let them eat corn,
 I thought. Let them fall under the spell of the dead
 white poets who dance and drum in the deep, goofy
 woods of the bloodless mind. (44)

Louis’s poems move by the blood that is his language: He lives his poetry.

For Louis poetry has to be filled with blood and love, not just idle words like the work of the poet he criticizes in “The Obituary”—“She didn’t live

poems, she / constructed them” (113). Correspondingly, like in some of his past collections, Louis addresses his wife, who is suffering from Alzheimer’s disease, with melancholy and deep affection: “Dear love, dear sweet broken love” (13). Throughout the text she, Colleen, enters the poems and leaves them again, mirroring the dementia of her mind and the speaker’s preoccupation and mournfulness for her mental decay. His unrelenting love for her is the only real thing amidst all the manufactured, plastic, amalgamated, degrading, and unfair things he observes around him. He bemoans in “For an Indian Girl I Once Knew in My Stone-Shaded and Tumescant Past”:

Just give me
 your trembling hand to hold. Look there, the mute
 lilacs are budding. The lilacs darling, and my eternal
 blue love for you. (72)

Louis’s poetry is at its best when it conveys these moments. Because the sardonicism is set aside temporarily, the lines become hypergenuine and make one believe (again) with him in “ancient human magic” amid the “dying planet ‘America’” (21). So, when the speaker says, “Circle, circle, we’ll soon be fine, spinning / towards loving oblivion, Elysium, the ghost road, home” (125), in the last poem of the collection, “Ghost Dance Song for Colleen,” one invests in the renewing moment with the speaker. Louis’s words have the ability to mark survival and restore life.

Evil Corn mixes the mundane with the profound, the raunchy with the sacred. The collection takes an honest look at the author’s self-imposed exile to southwestern Minnesota, where the poet and his muse are left to write and teach at a small college, but this position is rendered neither nostalgically nor sexily; rather, it is filled with raw dreams and nightmares of everyday life. *Evil Corn* is packed from beginning to end, mimicking an uninhibited mind that moves ironically through an unduly engineered landscape. The collection leads the speaker and the reader through its cover’s field by putting flesh on the scarecrow-skeleton’s frame, by putting the blood back in poetry. Ultimately Adrian C. Louis, like many contemporary Native American poets, subverts tragedy with humor and finds solace in the spiritual and healing language delivered through creative expression.

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Have You Thought of Leonard Peltier Lately? By Harvey Arden. Houston, TX: HYT Publishing, 2004. 220 pages. \$23.00 paperback.

The name of Leonard Peltier, the subject of this book, is very well known outside the ranks of American Indian studies scholars. Peltier, in fact, is the most famous Native American inmate to be incarcerated in the United States and was the presidential candidate at the 2004 elections for the Peace &