

Currents. By Bojan Louis. Kansas City: BkMk Press/University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2017. 66 pages. \$13.95 paper.

Joining fellow Diné poet Sherwin Bitsui's *Flood Song* (2009) as an American Book Award winner, Bojan Louis's debut collection *Currents* is a fresh streak of lightning in the legacy of Diné literature. Walking quietly and fearlessly among the pantheon of contemporary Diné poets, Louis takes his place in a distinguished lineage. Stepping lightly in the tracks of his elders, the masters of Diné oral tradition, Louis's *Currents* spark. Electric, the signals in *Currents* mix the channels of Luci Tapahonso's direct narrative with the unapologetic obscurity of Orlando White's *LETTERS* (2015) and amplify images like Sherwin Bitsui's *Shapeshift* (2003) into a brooding drone of minimalist purity. As Louis patches into the vast "Dinétic" of noise and social critique, *Currents* becomes a circuit charging the flow of contemporary Dinétics (Diné aesthetics, a term coined by poet Jake Skeets).

Though subdued politically in comparison to Demian Dinéyazhi's *Ancestral Memories* (2016), *Currents* is similarly punk, a mixing console of biting commentary. *Currents* is a lean poetic wire and the loop in the circuit is noise, metal, and drone as the tonic chord of comparison. Referencing the band Sunn 0))) in the extensive annotations, *Currents* zaps like a sparse work of noise art. Raven Chacon, the Nizhóní Girls, and Ryan Dennison are but a few of the Diné artists creating an aesthetic around noise and sonic experimentation on the Navajo Rez, inviting readers to approach his masterpiece like one would listen to a work of noise or drone. Apprehending the depth of drone and noise requires repeated observation. Looping observation takes the perceiver ever more deep into layers of beauty, image, and meaning. When examining the drone of *Currents* in repetition, the poems blossom into a secret text.

Reminiscent of the early work of Juan Felipe Herrera, Louis includes Diné, Spanish, and Nahuatl within the text. Where many poets inclusive of multiple languages would seek to evade defining non-English words, Louis is generous and includes translations. Rife with linguistic multiplicity, *Currents* is a tour de force that requires disciplined reading and rereading to apprehend the sensitivity and academic rigor of the author, a monolith whose gravity is an array of rangy annotations, translations, and reading suggestions. The secret code of the annotations are references to anarchist, gnostic, linguistic, and cosmological texts. Louis suggests that a careful examination of these texts might be useful to the reader. Certainly, any young Diné or Indigenous person exploring these notes will take Louis's reading suggestions to heart. They will discover that decolonizing the illusions of modern empire and postcolonial religion are an imperative. In this way, *Currents* crosses streams with contemporary musicians who hide references to political movements and occult symbolism within the footnotes or lyrics of their albums. The book has the potential for becoming a cult classic for those who choose to do the homework.

Analogous to the thick muscularity of noise music, *Currents* is dark and masculine. The turmoil of contemporary Indigenous masculinity reveals itself in sparse poetic forms that are at once elliptical and narrative. In *Currents* we are woven into the serape of Louis's journey through childhood and early adulthood, in which themes of abuse, resistance to colonial authority, solidarity with Indigenous workers from the south,

stormy uncertainty in relations with the feminine, and life in the hypermasculine world of electricians glitch into nebulous landscapes where lyric confessions are a disguise for the spiritual underpinnings of the text. *Currents* is a pulse flowing from the negative charge of ancestral memory and intergenerational trauma towards the positive terminal of story, adaptation, and integration. Within this electricity, multiple languages arc across the ohm of imaginary borders and a young Nakai Diné encounters the post-apocalyptic landscapes of modern America.

In the context of 2018 and its political upheaval and topsy-turvy gender politics, the text reveals a Native male addressing the inner struggles of manhood, their roots in genocide, and his prayer for healing. In the first poem we enter the belly of the beast. The allegory of Jonah and the Whale lies encrypted in the sparse text of “Breach,” set in Sitka, Alaska, where in his youth Louis worked in construction. Sunken in this leviathan we are cast into a sea where Louis leaves the high desert of his Diné people for a territory haunted by his past, subaqueous and alien. “Breach” hums an oceanic whalesong of drunken encounters with women, childhood memories of domestic abuse, and a young Native man trying to rectify himself with the world. Upon first and second readings, one might wonder what Louis’s current stance is—until you sit with the line “Rare are dads shouted/ at by moms, Get—Don’t feed/ us—Sink, be eaten (12).”

There is also joy here and unconditional solidarity with both his Diné and Nakai ancestries. Louis seeks healing and protection from traditional healers while chastising invasive ideologies like that of the Church of Latter-Day Saints. He beckons the Indigenous reader to become intersectional with the struggles of Native people from the south who face persecution at the border. He does so in poems that, when read aloud, scroll across the tongue like midnight jpegs. Voltaic and evocative, the poems are humble, plainspoken, and luminous.

One of two books by Indigenous poets chosen for an American Book Award in 2018, *Currents* is dense and deserves multiple readings. Standing alongside queer Kumeyaay poet Tommy Pico’s *Nature Poem* (2017), *Currents* is multidimensional in a way that is uniquely Diné. Perhaps it will be one of many collections of Diné poetry chosen for this distinguished award, opening the way for major American institutions to recognize and acknowledge Diné diversity. The Navajo Nation is truly rich with poets, musicians, visual artists, and multidisciplinary artists, of all genders and orientations, paving the way for a rich Diné experience. *Currents* is a rich source of power that any of these fine artists can plug into as they pursue deserved recognition. *Currents* amplifies Diné aesthetics. The distortion is sublime.

tanner menard, poet