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Oracles: A Novel. By Melissa Tantaquidgeon Zobel. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004. 192 pages. \$24.95 cloth.

In “American Indian Intellectualism and the New Indian Story,” published in *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians* (1998), Elizabeth Cook-Lynn argues that American Indian authors today should write with a concern for First Nationhood preservation and issues. Cook-Lynn’s ideas echo a similar sentiment about sovereignty found in the now-classic text *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty* (1984) by Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford M. Lytle. According to these authors, American Indian authors need to emphasize notions of peoplehood and nation in Indian communities including a tribe’s relationship to the land, which can give the tribe its spiritual anchor. In many respects, Melissa Tantaquidgeon Zobel’s futuristic *Oracles: A Novel* seems to have responded to this call.

Zobel, the tribal historian for the Mohegan Nation in Connecticut and recipient of the Native American Authors Award for her first book of nonfiction, *The Lasting of the Mohegans*, provides a view of the future that concerns the spiritual governing of Zobel’s fictitious Yantuck Tribe. The book holds in opposition numerous ideas on such issues as true spirituality versus false spirituality, the natural world versus the technological world, and oral tradition versus the written word. Zobel wrestles with how her characters can find and perpetuate their true spiritual being and sense of tribe in a world severely compromised by invasive technology, which has separated people from the rhythms and secrets of the natural world that give the tribe its mythological center.

A multigenerational story told with a roving point of view, *Oracles* focuses largely on the medicine woman-in-training, twenty-two-year-old college student Ashneon Quay. To succeed in her training she must learn the mythical history of her tribe as well as the medicine rituals and practices of her grandparents, Tomuck and Winay. Among Ashneon’s many talents—innate and learned—she can mediate between the spiritual and actual worlds. Ashneon and her Yantuck people live on the fictitious Yantuck Mountain in mid-twenty-first-century New England.

The novel has an apocalyptic feel, depicting a time when “the Indian casinos were now all gone” (4) and “the modern Indian world was a fractured jigsaw puzzle” (149). It is a world where spirituality has been co-opted and commodified, where Vatican shares trade on Wall Street along with shares of the quickly globalizing New Light Corporation, which seeks to provide deliverance to the world’s spiritually bereft. The New Light Corporation finds its direction from the misguided Obed Mockko, Ashneon’s cousin and antagonist for the position as future spiritual leader of the Yantuck tribe. In this future time—largely a metaphor for the present—tribal spirituality and the spiritual condition of society in general have been severely eroded, especially by the “cy,” a futuristic, virtual-reality television capable of providing simulations of the five senses.

The book aptly creates a futuristic premise and succeeds largely in the infrequent small moments when Zobel takes time to render the world in fine details: “A great southwest wind rattled the window panes as Ashneon and

Winay hunkered down beside the kitchen table. It was a blustery, turkey vulture day, with those blood-faced buzzards circling in ever-widening rings just about everywhere. The trees were in transition from bud red to mint green and a thick, drippy fog oozed over the mountain. Lichen poked out from the mist like seafoam polka dots on the rocks and trees. Every few minutes, another gust rocked the windows" (29).

Passages like these work and read well because the futuristic world takes on a tangible quality. Although the settings of futuristic novels may not be of this time, a novel about the future—as with the historical novel—must create a convincing sense of place rendered through particularities familiar or otherwise. Since the book is convincing in small measures, Zobel could have used more of these moments to connect her characters to the natural world of Yantuck Mountain, a land important to the people's spiritual centering. In a novel that relies on the importance of the mountain to the Yantuck people, the mountain's environment seems conspicuously absent. The characters do less interacting with Mother Earth and more talking in what is essentially a dialogue-heavy book.

The futuristic novel has a thin presence in Native American literatures. Sherman Alexie has attempted futuristic short fiction, although such work seems somewhat compromised by the limitations of the short-story form. An author working in the tradition of futuristic novels in general would also have to contend with an anxiety of influence created by such literary luminaries as Kurt Vonnegut Jr., Margaret Atwood, and Doris Lessing, to name a few.

The world created by Zobel is certainly ambitious—and commendable for how it seems to reflect Cook-Lynn's call for fiction about First Nationhood—but perhaps *Oracles* is too ambitious for a short novel. The book suffers from a mostly predictable plot, unrealized characters, and didactic dialogue. Rather than reveal the novel's ideas by showing situations, Zobel often tells readers what to think, as in Ashneon's admonitions to a dispirited witch: "Perhaps you can atone for your indiscretions by bringing your colleagues back a better truth. Teach them this: there is no real medicine in books or on the cy. Medicine comes from the earth and sky alone. Mother Earth is the first and only true teacher, the source of real knowledge. Ask Mother Earth directly for your answers and you will find them. She is our key to the rest of the universe. Begin with that before tackling the cosmos" (139). This passage reflects many of the book's central ideas; however, with no exploration of them in situation or through the environment, the ideas rendered so directly have a somewhat hollow ring.

The didactic dialogue aside, Ashneon Quay represents the book's most earnest and developed character. Ashneon succeeds as a well-rounded character because Zobel explores her personal history. It is through the personal, Ashneon's connection to the deceased and to the tribe's mythology, that readers can connect with her. Readers will also sympathize with her struggle to help her tribe pull itself out of its spiritual funk to avoid what might be a greatly misguided future.

Oracles successfully raises the issue of how to maintain a sense of tribe in a fractured and dispirited future. The book also answers these questions, if

too directly, by suggesting that Indian nations must not let those inside or outside the tribe co-opt and commodify their spiritual centers. Zobel's argument that the future stability of the tribe might be jeopardized from within gives her novel strength. Rather than blame the world beyond the tribe as solely responsible for problems tribal people face, Zobel suggests threats can come from within the tribe itself, particularly when those like the deluded Obed Mockko become obsessed with power or find themselves unknowingly used by people outside the tribe.

Although the world may seem in dire need of spiritual direction, Indians like the fictitious Yantuck can be rightly guided by a vital tribal-centeredness that has been with the tribe since its beginnings, if only it can be properly channeled. To achieve a true sense of spirituality, Zobel argues, the tribe and its people must maintain their connection to the natural world and to traditions configured in tribal mythologies. Technology may erode relationships and leave people with decentered lives, but those with a connection to the earth, to each other, and to the past can feel secure and centered in an otherwise fractured world.

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Reassessing Revitalization Movements: Perspectives from North America and the Pacific Islands. Edited by Michael D. Harkin. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. 341 pages. \$45.00 cloth.

Having conceptualized a course back in the early 1980s that I originally called Revitalization Movements (now Visions, Messiahs, and Utopias), I was delighted to discover a book with "revitalization" in the title. I abandoned the original title of my course for a very pragmatic reason: Nobody knew what revitalization movements were anymore. Nobody talked about, wrote about, or thought about them.

So whatever happened to revitalization movements? Did they just disappear? This book's answer is, yes, they have indeed largely disappeared. Only Maria Lopowsky and Paul Roscoe on New Guinea, Ann McMullen on New England tribes, Larry Nesper on the revival of Lac du Flambeau identity through the use of torch fishing as a symbol for treaty rights, Lisa Henry on Tahitian nationalism, and Laurence Marshall Carucci's discussion of returned exiles' invention of a locally culturized equivalent of the Christmas celebration on the infamously nuclear-test-contaminated Enewetak address contemporary situations. Six of the thirteen authors specifically analyze cases from the nineteenth or mid-twentieth centuries.

The approach to and use of Wallace's "revitalization" model varies widely among the thirteen authors. Only four authors approach and discuss events and situations that were conceptualized as revitalization movements by those who first wrote about them: the 1785 Toyupurina uprising at Mission San Gabriel in Spanish California that culminated in the 1824 Chumash revolt