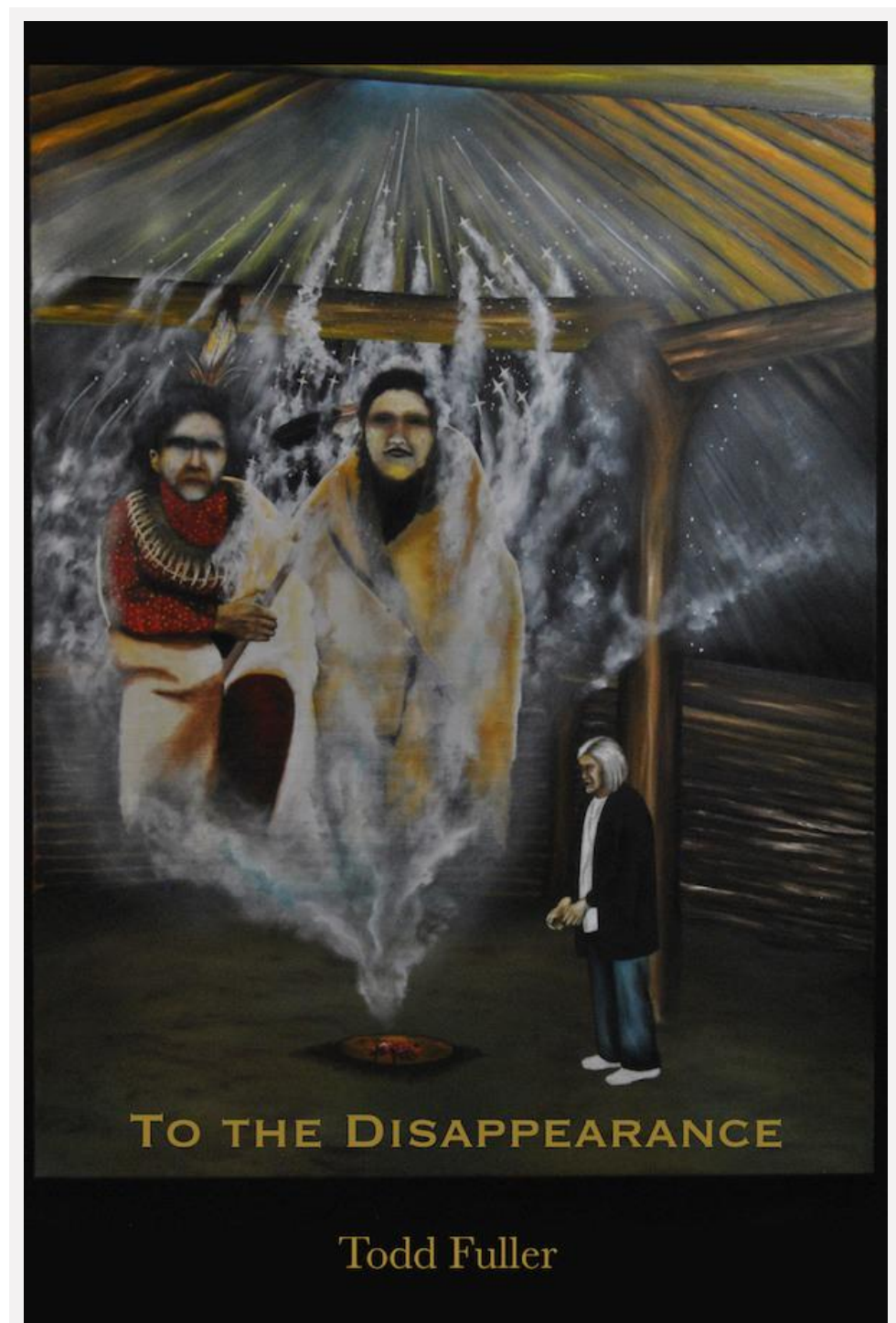


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'To the Disappearance': Poetry Collection Intertwines Birth, Death and Pawnee Cosmology

BRIAN DAFFRON | 4/29/16

Poets through millennia have tackled the subjects of life, death, the vastness of the cosmos and how insignificant human beings are compared to all of

this. Yet **Todd Fuller** finds ways to distinguish himself by focusing on the beauty of what lies between birth and death, with strands of Pawnee history and cosmology woven among life's threads. This is the essence of his poetry collection **To the Disappearance**, a 71-page volume published by Mongrel Empire Press.



Poet Todd Fuller (Photo: Courtesy Mongrel Empire Press)

As the title states, disappearance is a major theme through the entire collection, published in 2015. It is evident through poems such as "Coming and/or Going," where birth and death are similar events. For example, the poem ends with the stanza "...the taking and leaving of first and Last breaths/ is the precise equation of our (Adding and subtracting) flesh."

Although death is the ultimate disappearance, there are other poems in which it may not be as heavy but is equally poignant. In "Seven: Landscapes and Grandpas," the reader learns about a man who lost the deed to his house in a poker

game. "To the Museum of Endangered Sounds" is a poetic collaboration in which the speaker asks relatives, friends and colleagues about sounds that are endangered or even extinct. These range from a grandmother's voice to the scratch of vinyl records, with the conclusion that "Nostalgia will never be/an endangered sound."

Where Fuller takes the traditional poetic subjects of life and death and gives them a fresher perspective is through the use of Native-inspired imagery. Fuller, a past president of Pawnee Nation College and whose wife and children are Pawnee, finds a way to show his Pawnee influences in varying degrees of subtlety or bluntness. For example, "Out of the Stars" shows the comparison of celestial bodies versus the fragility of life on earth. "Off Frame/In Frame" shows the many ways that love begins, mentioning Pawnee leader Petalasharo in the same breath as William Butler Yeats and Martin Luther King, beginning with moonlight and ending with sunlight.

However, Fuller does not shy away from the heavy issues in Indian country, and in this lies much of the strength of this collection. He addresses an Indian murder and speaks of the difference between the State of Oklahoma that everyone knows and the "Indian One" in which "...a brown body is snuffed of its life / with The all-too-eager snap of a trigger." It may also be in a longer format, such as an



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unfiltered description of buffalo slaughter in “A Late-Night, Re-Broadcast of the Buffalo Shooting Championship of the World: (with Pre- and Post-Game Commentary),” with names such as Sherman, Buffalo Bill, Sheridan and Mount Rushmore finding equivalency with genocidal references to historical characters such as Adolf Hitler.

Overall, the strongest voice in the work is the poem from which the book gets its title. “To the Disappearance” features a speaker referring to itself as “the great Colonizer,” doing its best to destroy Native life “One heathen and acre/At a time.” While the poem deals with the known weapons of Colonizers, such as disease and massacre, it also brings attention to those lesser known, such as “Kakistocracies”—inept leadership—to singing in “Languages that have/Started slipping into/Mist.”

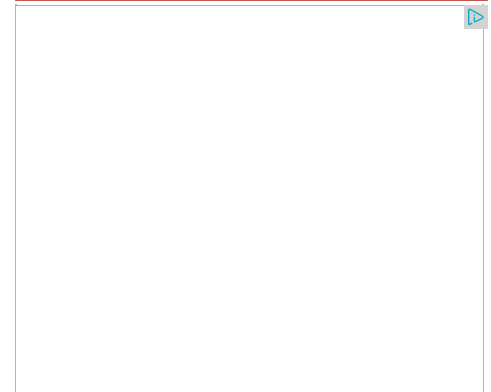
To the Disappearance covers the wide variables between the absolutes of life and death. It can make a reader smile and laugh. At the same time—and sometimes within the same poem—the collection may cause the reader to place the book down and think what it means to exist on humanity’s speck of the cosmos known as Earth.

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