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Waiting for Wovoka: Envoys of Good Cheer and Liberty. By Gerald Vizenor. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2023. 120 pages. $55 cloth; $16.95 paper; $13.99 e-book.

Prolific author Gerald Vizenor has recently turned sharply toward lived historical and personal experiences as subject matter. In this book, he chronicles a group of five young puppeteers from White Earth Reservation on their travel to the 1962 World's Fair in Seattle. An elderly mute puppeteer, Dummy Trout, who readers of *Satie on the Seine* and *Native Tributes* will remember, created the puppets and masterminded their interactions. Inspired by a performance of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot,* some books that survived a library fire, and numerous materials during their journey, they devise a puppet show, a postmodern parlay in which the multiple characters of the journey as well as their puppets are waiting not for a nonexistent Godot but for Wovoka, the nineteenth-century prophet of the Ghost Dance.

As a historian, maybe I am not the best person to review this book. Vizenor's books typically either draw in a reader quickly or not. His writing is so variegated, polyphonous, and loaded with referents that most casual readers are unlikely to notice. This book (and the series of Vizenor's books) engages in complex world-building that is sometimes difficult for the uninitiated to follow. I believe that *Waiting for Wovoka*'s strength is that it inscribes the feel of age-old storytelling on paper. Readers get a feel for the cross-cultural settings and the historical conjunctures featured in the book. It simultaneously highlights and confounds numerous contradictions between "traditional" Native experiences and modern dominant culture that the author first wrote about some twelve years after the setting of this book (about five decades ago).

Major world events of the mid–twentieth century are used as signposts for the dream songs and Vizenor's world-building, while the chapters double as a series of short stories building toward the sustained crescendo in the last third of this short book. Readers wade through improbable references to Prometheus, Aristotle, and *Madama Butterfly*, but also to the soldier's Bonus March, the Minneapolis Teamsters Strike of 1934, and the nuclear tests of the Pacific—major events in the United States and the world in which historians have ignored important American Indian contributions or connections.

The Theater of Chance puppet troupe journeys in an old school bus from White Earth to Seattle. They travel through Fort Peck and Browning, visiting Northern Cheyenne and Blackfeet and learning about bows and arrows, horses, and heart stories. While on their drive, they excite children with hand puppets peering out the bus window. Their route takes them just north of the Flathead and Nez Perce reservations. In Sand Point, Idaho, they read and adapt James Baldwin's dialogues and insights into their own lives:

> "[T]he charge has often been made that [N]ative writers . . . do not describe tradition and have no interest in it. They only describe individuals in opposition to it or isolated from it. Of course, what the [N]ative writer is describing is his own creative situation and resistance to the scenes of cultural absence and vicinity" (73).

Those with a ticket to the Theater of Chance are treated to surreal conversations between Aristotle and Baldwin, between marine conservationist Rachel Carson and Migizi (an Anishnaabe Bald Eagle character). The performance references Anglo-American 1950s appropriations of Japanese culture stemming from works like *Zen and the Art of Archery*, tempting readers to leapfrog to later popular fascinations with Asian cultures in the 1970s and 1990s.

Vizenor's interspersed Haiku and machine-gun cacophony of contrasting and complementary couplets leaves the unprepared in overload. By the time the troupe reaches Pioneer Square and is greeted by the Tlingit totem pole, every sentence is a condensed historical analysis. The moment of urban renewal of Seattle during their visit is proxy for the tension in the double-edged sword of technology (epitomized by nuclear power) and a longer-term struggle between technology and nature, the Space Race, the Cold War, and the losing struggle for human survival under capitalism.

I will not be a spoiler by trying to evoke the darker-than-dark imagery within the hypocenter of the last twenty pages, but while diving headfirst into the Wikipedia rabbit hole of people and terms for whom I was unfamiliar, I learned more of the connections between wartime (World War II) capitalism, postwar technology, and the business of anthropology. Vizenor doesn't have to give you the conclusion to his every thought. Using your imagination and incorporating basic research, you will invariably see connections that once were obscured. For instance, I learned that Axel Wenner-Gren, Swedish tycoon and friend of Hermann Göring and Edward VIII, was behind the ALWAC computer, the Disney and Seattle monorails, and the Wenner-Gren Foundation (previously the Viking Fund) that supported vast amounts of anthropological research.

Scholars of mid-twentieth-century Native life, Anishnaabe (and especially White Earth) peoples, and those interested in literary devices, storytelling, and puppeteering are likely to enjoy *Waiting for Wovoka*.

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