The Politics of Plant Life: Transatlantic Animisms in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes*

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IN an interview anticipating the publication of her 1999 novel *Gardens in the Dunes,* Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Marmon Silko laughed over her initial belief that she could write a "nonpolitical" book about plants. "[I]t wasn't too long before I realized how very political gardens are," she explains: "You have the Conquistadors, the missionaries, and right with them were the plant collectors. When I started reading about the orchid trade, then suddenly I realized."[1] Silko's attentiveness to the historical imbrication of plant collecting with imperialism and settler colonialism forms one piece of what makes *Gardens* worth examination in the context of Victorian studies. A sprawling work of historical fiction set at the turn to the twentieth century, with a multiplot structure uniting the far-flung settings of the American Southwest, Latin America, and western Europe, *Gardens* probes the material and epistemological links between the global trafficking of plant matter and the cultivation of exotic plants in England. At one level, this essay's goal is to read *Gardens* for its intervention into Victorian gardening and plant collecting, cultural practices structured by settler-colonial ways of understanding and interacting with the natural world. Building on recent scholarship exploring the political implications of the Victorian craze for exotic plants,[2] my reading of Silko also adds to a longer lineage of work on environment and empire, affirming Sukanya Banerjee's observation that "colonialism is irreducibly ecological in practice and effect."[3] In *Gardens,* Silko brings an Indigenous-centered perspective to bear on this historical reality—a perspective that has long been underrepresented in Victorianist ecocriticism—in part by contrasting colonial and Native American understandings of nonhuman life, wherein the former views natural objects as inert, lifeless matter and the latter as living, feeling beings.

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At another level, however, the project of *Gardens*—and, accordingly, the project of this essay—does not limit itself to reinscribing a familiar settler-Native binary. As the novel's narrative gaze turns from desert gardens in Arizona and southern California to cultivated landscapes surrounding Bath, I follow Silko's efforts to tease out a subtler complex of attitudes toward nature that informed British metropolitan culture, and especially horticulture, in the late nineteenth century. Even as gardening discourses and practices drew from colonial and capitalist logics dictating the control and commodification of nature, these same practices and discourses were also run through with animistic ways of seeing and representing plant life: tendencies to assign spirit, agency, and affective capacity to plants.[4] In *Gardens,* Silko draws out these animistic tendencies through fictional figurations of British gardening practices, which I take as an invitation to more closely examine their historical corollaries. Reading a selection of Victorian garden books with an eye toward their provocative descriptions of agentic plants and permissive gardeners, I reinforce Grace Kehler's observation that many of these books "cumulatively suggest a complex understanding of matter as dynamic and even purposeful"—and, I would add, a theory of gardening as gentle stewardship.[5] Crucially, Silko prompts us to recognize parallels between such approaches to gardening and the animistic view of nature integral to Native American cosmology. Further, her novel implicitly situates the animistic Victorian gardener within a larger current of Euro-Western animism in the twilight years of the nineteenth century, which witnessed the rise of new paganism, mysticism, and related cultural movements that breathed new life into pre-Christian, anti-Cartesian formulations of the relationships among matter, spirit, and mind.

The portrait of transatlantic animisms that emerges from *Gardens in the Dunes* might appear to suggest an ideological reconciliation between Native American and European cultures. Yet the idea of plants as agentic gave rise to conflicting sentiments in Victorian literature and culture—namely, a dual fascination with and dread of plant vitality, particularly in nonnative plants.[6] Hence the late-century rise of the genre of plant horror, neatly exemplified by H. G. Wells's short story "The Flowering of the Strange Orchid" (1894), which conjures an animate, vampiric orchid that murders both the collector who purchased it in London and the plant hunter who removed it from its native habitat. Scholars have offered a number of explanations for British anxieties around plant agency; for Cheryl Blake Price and Elizabeth Hope Chang, these

representational trends emblematize "the threat of an unconquered and highly evolved natural world" and, more pointedly, the specter of "a hostile colonial environment as deliberately resistant and in need of broadly intrusive management or even destruction."[7] In *Gardens,* Silko prompts us to go a step further and locate among those apprehensions a fear of contact with Indigeneity, and specifically a fear of epistemological contact: an aversion to the possibility of resonances between Anglo-European and Indigenous ways of knowing. To think of plant life as inherently agentic, as possessing vitality and spirit, was to verge on inhabiting an Indigenous view of nature—an epistemic proximity disavowed by a number of Silko's white characters, who perceive the conjunction of Native and European knowledge structures as both impossible and intolerable.

From the vantage point of Victorian studies, I take Silko's dramatization of this disavowal as an occasion to examine our field's inherited attitudes toward animism. Revisiting late Victorian anthropology as the cultural arena where animism was influentially defined as the crude first step in cultural evolution toward true religious belief, I suggest that the enduring stigma stemming from this racist definition accounts for hesitancy among scholars in Victorian studies to embrace both the term *animism* and certain forms of animistic thinking in our objects of study.[8] Further, I link the Victorian-era stigmatization of animism with a critical juncture in ecocriticism around the turn to the twenty-first century—importantly, the very period when Silko was writing *Gardens* —when scholars in search of anti-anthropocentric formulations of nonhuman agency carefully distanced themselves from animism and similar "discredited philosophies of nature."[9] Such acts of critical dissociation have contributed to ecocriticism's long-fraught relationship with Indigenous traditions of thought: traditions to which ecocriticism is indebted for their rich theories of nonhuman agency, but which ecocritical scholars and environmental activists do not always acknowledge or affirm.[10] As scholarship at the intersection of Victorian studies and ecocriticism continues to proliferate, the ongoing work of interrogating inherited skepticism of animism represents an urgent obligation for scholars in our field, particularly in light of the recent movement to "undiscipline" Victorian studies by newly centering race.[11] If we take animism seriously, we better position ourselves for conscientious engagement with Indigenous traditions of thought in our studies of plant life, the environment, and the nonhuman in Victorian literature and culture.

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This essay reads *Gardens in the Dunes* as a road map to the forms that this engagement can take among white scholars employing ecocritical approaches to Victorian studies—a group that includes myself. By reminding us of not only the rise in animistic thinking at the end of the nineteenth century but also animism's deep roots in European religion and culture, Silko prompts Anglo-European settlers to affirm our own animistic heritage as well as its resonances with Indigenous animism, at the same time that *Gardens* also offers an injunction against the appropriation of Native religious and cultural beliefs. In so doing, I argue, Silko makes available a rubric for white ecocritical engagement with Indigenous structures of knowledge: a blueprint for thinking with and alongside without perpetuating colonial violence. The novel's most powerful symbolic register for this mode of engagement obtains in its multiplicity of gardens, tilled by gardeners geographically removed from one another but powerfully linked in coextensive approaches to stewarding nonhuman life. Rather than spaces of colonial hybridization or imperial exchange, Silko's transatlantic gardens become sites for realizing discrete yet parallel and mutually cognizant formations of animistic thought, thus promoting Native Americans' sovereignty over their ways of knowing and being in the world.

1. Enspirited Plants in Native American Cosmologies

Like much of Silko's fiction to date, *Gardens* centers the lives of Indigenous peoples entangled in the forces of settler colonialism. The novel's main characters are two young Native American sisters who belong to the fictional Sand Lizard tribe: a population that, by the conclusion of the nineteenth century, has been almost entirely eradicated through direct and indirect forms of settler violence. Indigo and Sister Salt live in a remote region of the Mojave Desert with their grandmother, who teaches them to maintain the Sand Lizards' eponymous gardens in the dunes. The novel opens onto the sisters' early education in Native practices of subsistence farming: a set of habits and attitudes grounded in principles of environmental sustainability. Under Grandma Fleet's tutelage, they practice gardening as "stewardship," in Chi-Szu Chen's phrasing—an agricultural mode that "emphasizes sharing resources and responsibilities to the environment."[12] Indigo and Sister Salt learn not to be "greedy" in their gardening, but to grow and consume only what they need to survive, and to disperse the fruits of harvest among all deserving bodies, human and nonhuman alike:

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> The first ripe fruit of each harvest belongs to the spirits of our beloved ancestors, who come to us as rain; the second ripe fruit should go to the birds and wild animals, in gratitude for their restraint in sparing the seeds and sprouts earlier in the season. Give the third ripe fruit to the bees, ants, mantises, and others who cared for the plants. A few choice pumpkins, squash, and bean plants were simply left on the sand beneath the mother plants to shrivel dry and return to the earth. Next season, after the arrival of the rain, beans, squash, and pumpkins sprouted up between the dry stalks and leaves of the previous year. Old Sand Lizard insisted her gardens be reseeded in that way because human beings are undependable; they might forget to plant at the right time or they might not be alive next year.[13]

This catalog of agricultural approaches inaugurates the novel's broader thematics of ecological interconnection. Grandma Fleet's free indirect discourse decenters the "undependable" human farmer as merely one node in a network of natural production, consumption, and exchange within which nonhuman animals are featured as active participants and benefactors. "Birds and wild animals" are thanked for the "restraint" that leaves other beings with sufficient food, while "bees, ants, mantises," and similar creatures are recognized as caretakers of the plants. The plants themselves are treated like children: Indigo and Sister Salt "had plants they cared for as if the plants were babies," raising pumpkins, squash, and bush beans much as mothers raise their living, breathing young (14). Rather than a hierarchical model of producer and produced, Sand Lizard gardening functions as a system of mutual, familial attentiveness and care.

Such enlivening descriptions of the garden's nonhuman and especially its plant inhabitants point to the intimate connection between the Sand Lizard tribe's agricultural praxes and spiritual beliefs: a connection also present in the real Native American cultures on which the Sand Lizards are based. Although Silko appears to have most closely modeled this fictional tribe on the Hia C-eḍ O'odham or "Sand Dune People,"[14] the Sand Lizards also share characteristics with Silko's father's tribe, the Laguna Pueblo. In the essay "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination," Silko elaborates Pueblo spirituality with emphasis on her people's long-standing views regarding nature and nonhuman things. "[F]or the ancient people," Silko explains, everything "had spirit and being," from "animals and plants" to "the clay and the stones."[15] While the "being or spirit" of a rock "may differ from the spirit we known in animals or plants or in ourselves," these distinctions are seen as insignificant: "we all originate from the depths of the earth," she asserts, and "all beings share in the spirit of the Creator."[16] The belief that "all beings"

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are divinely inspirited in turn underlies the Pueblo view that all plants and nonhuman animals must be "treated with respect,"[17] a perspective that Silko also attributes to the Sand Lizard people. "The plants listen," Grandma Fleet tells Indigo and Sister Salt: "Always greet each plant respectfully. Don't argue or fight around the plants—hard feelings cause the plants to wither" (14). In this account, plants possess being as well as the ability to sense and understand the "feelings" of other creatures, suggesting that plants have feelings of their own. The late Laguna Pueblo writer Paula Gunn Allen would characterize this affective capacity as the plants' "intelligence": their consciousness, their sensibility, their "awareness of being."[18] For all American Indians, Allen writes, plants have intelligence just as humans and nonhuman animals do because intelligence "arise[s] out of the very nature of being, which is of necessity intelligent in and of itself, as an attribute of being."[19] In sum, with being comes spirit, and with spirit a basic awareness of the world, of others in it, and of one's relationships thereto.

The idea that all things are fundamentally, intelligently inspirited is not the exclusive provenance of American Indian cosmology: it is often, although not always, associated with Indigenous populations more broadly; and it is often, although not always, described as animism. Environmentalist scholar and activist Christopher Manes defines animism according to two axioms: "(1) that all the phenomenal world is alive in the sense of being inspirited—including humans, cultural artifacts, and natural entities, both biological and 'inert,' and (2) that not only is the nonhuman world alive, but it is filled with articulate subjects, able to communicate with humans."[20] Both positions inform Silko's characterization of nonhuman beings as well as the ways her Native American characters interact with those beings. The world of the American Southwest in *Gardens* is noisy with the expressions of plant and animal life—"slithering, rustling, rattling, stirring, chirping, whistling, barking"—and Indigo cultivates a keen attentiveness to the communications of both its loudest and its quietest inhabitants (42). Tellingly, the verb *listen* recurs throughout the novel as an index for Indigo's receptive orientation to the many beings in her environment, and to the earth itself, which "announced her labor" (30). During the Ghost Dance, a prophetic ceremony believed to heal the wounded environment, Indigo senses nature's power so strongly that she hears the voices of the mountains and feels "the Earth's breathing through the soles of her feet" (30). For animistic cultures, Manes writes, to learn "the language of birds, the wind, earthworms, wolves, and waterfalls" is to become acquainted

with all "the secrets of nature."[21] This animistic way of thinking harbors a practical dimension: for hunter-gatherers, attunement to nonhuman communications represents a survival strategy.[22] But animism should also be understood as a sophisticated ontological and ethical framework. Anishinaabe and Mohawk scholar Vanessa Watts writes that "if, as Indigenous peoples, we are extensions of the very land we walk upon, [then] we have an obligation to maintain communication with it. A familiar warning is echoed through many communities, that if we do not care for the land we run the risk of losing who we are as Indigenous peoples."[23]

In *Gardens,* as in reality, Indigenous communication with the land is indeed disrupted by the forces of settler colonialism, to which Silko links a Western view of nature that represents animism's antithesis. In keeping with a critique that Silko has elaborated elsewhere in her oeuvre, including in *Ceremony, Gardens* draws a sharp contrast between the Native beliefs that I am calling animistic and the colonial treatment of nature as lifeless matter to be conquered. This distinction finds expression in the oppressive activities of white settlers in the Colorado River setting where *Gardens'* first chapters take place: a site that served historically as the staging ground for ongoing colonial violence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[24] In one instructive episode, Sister Salt and Indigo discover that a white Mormon neighbor's home and garden have been razed to the ground by an army patrol; as Sister Salt kneels amid the remains and finds "a tiny shriveled apricot," she becomes "overwhelmed by the loss" of the fruit trees that once filled the garden and seized with horror at the wide compass of settler violence (61). "If this was what the white people did to one another," she reflects, "then truly she and the Sand Lizard people and all other Indians were lucky to survive at all. These destroyers were out to kill every living being" (61). Sister Salt's commentary spotlights the mutual imbrication of Western colonialism and environmental oppression evinced by the settlers' brutal commitment to wipe out all life-forms representing obstacles to white supremacy. More subtly, however, the demolition of the peach and apricot trees encapsulates not only colonialism's destruction but also its denial of both Indigenous and nonhuman life. Where Sister Salt recognizes the fruit trees as "living beings" whose lives deserve respect and their deaths, accordingly, grief, the razing of the gardens suggests the settlers' failure or refusal to see the trees in such terms.

The dichotomy inscribed by this episode represents familiar territory in scholarship on the Cartesian logics that undergird Western colonial practices. Watts characterizes settler colonialism as a disruption of

Indigenous ontologies emphasizing "the animate nature of land": against the Native American understanding of the land and its nonhuman inhabitants as "full of thought, desire, contemplation, and will," these attributes are exclusively reserved for human beings in the Western Enlightenment tradition.[25] Similarly, Mel Y. Chen locates in modern Western thought the fashioning of hierarchies of "animacy"—or "agency, awareness, mobility and liveness"—wherein humans are granted the highest form of animacy, while minerals and plants are understood as entirely "nonliving" or possessing a categorically distinct and diminished form of life.[26] Moreover, within the category of human life, different races of people are assigned different degrees of animacy: whiteness becomes ranked above nonwhiteness, placing Black and Brown life nearer the bottom of the animacy hierarchy. In short, the colonial infrastructure enacting Western ontology can be thought of as a technology of anti-animism, insofar as colonialism works to contest Indigenous and nonhuman capacities for life as well as to sever Indigenous peoples' sense of living relationship with their nonhuman environment.[27]

Yet Euro-Western ways of thinking about nature and the nonhuman at the turn to the twentieth century were not always dictated by such rigid anthropocentric hierarchies. While the opposition that *Gardens* establishes between Indigenous and Western colonial ontology is stark, the picture becomes blurred as the novel attempts to disentangle the Western from the colonial. In what follows, I examine Silko's depictions of two divergent gardening approaches characteristic of late Victorian horticulture, wherein colonizing attitudes toward the environment intermingled in often contradictory ways with descriptions of plants as willful, feeling beings. *Gardens* makes possible new interventions into those messy contradictions by reframing the landscape of Victorian-era horticulture, and particularly its more animistic tendencies, in relation to Indigenous-centered formulations of nonhuman agency.

2. Dual Constructions of Plant Life in Victorian Horticulture

Silko's readers first see the southwestern gardens of white-settler botanist Edward Palmer through the eyes of Indigo. Forcibly separated from Sister Salt and incarcerated at the Sherman Institute, an off-reservation "Indian boarding school," Indigo escapes the school and seeks shelter beneath a lilac bush on the Palmers' property, where she is discovered and taken in by Edward's wife, Hattie. The lilacs serve as entry point to an extensively cultivated landscape: Edward maintains "acres of lemon

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and orange trees" (73), a garden filled with "blood red dianthus, red peonies, red dahlias, and red poppies" (73), and the real treasure of the botanist's collection: an orchid house. Here, Edward hybridizes the expensive plants that became a cultural obsession for many Victorians after English zoologist William John Swainson shipped the first box of *Cattleya labiate* from Rio de Janeiro to London in 1818. Edward is not only an orchid collector but an orchid hunter, a fictional representation of the many European and Anglo-American plant hunters who were paid to retrieve the coveted specimens from around the world and ship them home by the thousands for sale at special auctions and cultivation in English greenhouses and gardens. These well-funded trips were typically prohibited by local laws, which protected the orchids from outside poaching without expensive permits. They were also dangerous, rendering the orchid hunter a figure of glamor and fascination in Victorian culture. In English adventure-fiction writer H. Rider Haggard's 1915 novel *The Holy Flower,* for example, serial protagonist Allen Quatermain turns to the sport of orchid hunting in Africa, battling slave traders, cannibal tribes, and a deific gorilla in pursuit of a mythical species of *Cypripedium*, or "lady's slipper": heroized exploits that fittingly encapsulate the romantic image of this pastime for Haggard's metropolitan readership.

As a characteristically *imperial* romance, Haggard's novel also indexes the place of orchid hunting within the transimperial networks that supported the transit and trade of plant matter throughout the nineteenth century. The expansion of Euro-Western empire during this period involved "the transportation, both intentional and unintentional," of countless "animals, plants and pathogens that in many cases dramatically reshaped the ecologies they entered" as well as the native ecosystems from which they were removed.[28] In *Gardens,* Silko emphasizes orchid hunting's disruption of Latin American ecologies through a narrative flashback sequence that details Edward's recent trip to Brazil in search of *Laelia cinnabarina*. During a jungle expedition, the other members of Edward's team set fire to the forest and destroy the rare orchid's habitat, a ploy to "make certain they possessed the only specimens" (142). A narrative parallel to the destruction of the peach and apricot trees along the Colorado River, the jungle fire in Brazil also finds antecedents in historical accounts. As British antiquarian Albert Millican recorded in his 1891 orchid hunting travelogue, plant hunters often cleared massive regions of woodland to extract the epiphytic flowers from the roots, branches, and trunks of trees: "In those immense forests [of Colombia] . . . cutting down a few thousands of trees is no serious injury; so I provided my natives

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with axes and started them out on the work of cutting down all trees containing valuable orchids. . . . After about two months' work we had secured about ten thousand plants, cutting down to obtain these some four thousand trees, moving our camp as the plants became exhausted in the vicinity."[29] Millican's account neatly if unreflectively distills the colonial and capitalist logics that underwrote the Victorian plant trade by dictating which forms of plant life were "valuable" and thus worth extraction for commodification, and which plants were unrecognized as commodities and thus permissible to destroy on staggering scales.

These same logics found their way into discourses and practices of horticulture in the English metropole, where rare plants extracted from foreign soils were favored specimens for many Victorian gardening enthusiasts. Chang tells us that "in 1830 at least five thousand new exotics had recently been imported into England," a figure that would grow exponentially as the century progressed.[30] Orchids and other exotic plants, however, were not the sole object of horticultural attention. Gardening in general was an enormously popular pastime in Victorian Britain, leading to a profusion of not only different kinds of gardens—from "large estate parklands [and] botanical gardens" to "miniature plantings in Wardian cases [and] the backyard gardens of suburban villas"[31]—but also horticulture magazines and handbooks prescribing the proper practices of gardening as well as the cultural valuation of certain plants over others. A plant was deemed worthy of cultivation if it was aesthetically appealing or, as one writer put it in the *Magazine of Botany,* if it presented a sufficiently interesting "field of research to the botanical student and the enquiring cultivator."[32] Conversely, the horticultural fate of plants seen as lacking either "useful" or "ornamental character" is outlined in the preface to the 1882 edition of the popular illustrated gardening handbook *Paxton's Flower Garden.*[33] Many plant specimens recently shipped to Britain, the authors complain, "are not worthy of the cultivator's care, and cannot claim notice in a work of this description, the object of which is to act as a guide in what are the best and most deserving of cultivation amongst the new introductions."[34] Through alternating dynamics of adulation and exclusion, Victorian garden books "attempted to aestheticize and manage nature," as Kehler argues, and thus worked to "consolidate nature's status as a commodity in Western culture as a site designed to regenerate, sooth [e], instruct, or sustain" the human consumer.[35]

In *Gardens,* Edward Palmer epitomizes the commodifying bent of Victorian horticulture, both as an orchid hunter and more broadly in his collection and study of plants. His travel to Europe with Indigo and

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Hattie—a trip that comprises a significant stretch of the novel's plot—is motivated by Edward's enthusiasm for citrus horticulture, and namely *Citrus medica* or "pome-citron," a Mediterranean parent of lemon with medicinal properties. This seemingly scientific interest turns out to be monetary, as Edward hopes to "cash in on the growing popularity of candied citron rind" (230): an illegal ploy, unknown even to Hattie, that concludes with Edward's humiliating arrest in Corsica. In the intervening chapters, as the trio tours a miscellany of gardens first in England and then in Italy, Edward's thoughts about plant matter repeatedly turn to questions of profit. Entering a garden in Lucca, Edward's attention is seized by "dozens of potted lemon trees," whose fruits he examines in hopes that "he might see the thick scaly rind indicative of *Citrus medica*, though at a glance they all appeared to be lemons" (284). Later, beholding flower beds filled with an unusual hybrid of gladiolus, Edward reflects that "[a] display like this cost a great deal, though at least in Lucca's mild climate the bulbs did not have to be lifted in the winter" (295). Such thinking unites two pillars of Victorian horticulture, the commercialization and the correct management of nature; when Edward is not speculating about the financial value of gardens, he is appraising the methods and expertise of their gardeners. During their stay outside of Bath in the old cloister that Hattie's Aunt Bronwyn has made her home, while Hattie and Indigo explore the grounds, Edward declines interest in Bronwyn's gardens out of distaste, Silko implies, for Bronwyn's indulgent attitude toward the cloister's plant and animal inhabitants. Bronwyn shows Hattie and Indigo "her 'wild grove' of silver firs, Scots pines, and yews with black walnut, hazel, and oak," a profusion of trees that she has allowed to grow freely for fifty years (242). She exhibits similar leniency in managing her cattle, "thin, wild-eyed, rangy creatures" that are allowed "to roam at will" (236). When the trio first arrives at the cloister, a small herd encircles their coach and prevents it from fully ascending the driveway: "this meant a difference of only seven or eight feet farther to walk," the narrator explains, "but Edward felt impatient with the old woman" (236). We can trace Edward's exasperation to the divergence between Bronwyn's complaisant management of her nonhuman property—beings, indeed, that she does not view as property—and Edward's more possessive, domineering approach.

Bronwyn's primary function in *Gardens,* I venture, is not merely to serve as a character foil to Edward but, moreover, to highlight a different side of Victorian horticulture than the one that Edward personifies. As Kehler and Lindsay Wells have each demonstrated, colonizing and commodifying tendencies in Victorian gardening were complicated by the

work of certain horticulturalists—Gertrude Jekyll for Kehler, John Ruskin for Wells—who attributed significant, sometimes startling degrees of vitality and agency to plants.[36] This tension can be observed in garden books such as William Robinson's *The Wild Garden; or Our Groves and Gardens Made Beautiful by the Naturalization of Hardy Exotic Plants* (1883), whose title captures the work's countervailing representations of nature as a locus for human domination and aestheticization ("Our Groves and Gardens Made Beautiful") and as an agentic force in its own right ("Hardy," "Wild"). While acknowledging the appeal of gardening as beautification and controlled "communion with nature,"[37] Robinson contends that a gardener's first objective should be to promote near-total self-sufficiency in the plants they cultivate (vii). The wild garden that Robinson advocates is precisely the kind of "wild grove" that Bronwyn exhibits for Hattie and Indigo: it emerges from a horticultural practice that "studiously avoids meddling with the garden proper at all" by growing hardy plants that require little human intervention and thus largely "take care of themselves" (vii). Variations of the phrase "take care of themselves" recur across *The Wild Garden*, endowing the trees, shrubs, and grasses that Robinson describes with marked autonomy. And this is not the independence of the automaton, as plants in Robinson's garden book are lively, motile, and full of will; they "run[] about quite freely" or "crawl about unobserved" when left to their own devices by gardeners willing to practice the studied permissiveness that Robinson champions (10).

Themes of agentic plants and passive gardeners are carried further in Shirley Hibberd's 1875 handbook *The Fern Garden,* an artifact of Victorian pteridomania or fern fever. Hibberd's enthusiastic descriptions of the eponymous plants imbue them with active will and, what's more, with affective capacity:

> [M]uch as they love moisture, it is a most rare thing to see a fern growing with its roots naturally in water. When they congregate, as it were, to drink of the brook that passes by, they keep their feet clear away from the current, and lodge safely on the slopes that dip towards the water; or stand proudly upon little islets that compel the stream to sing as it passes them; or on banks and hummocks round about where they can enjoy the tiny splashes the trout make when they leap for flies, and the soft nourishing vapour that rises day and night amongst their shining fronds. Yes, it is upon slopes mostly that ferns love to grow; in places where water rarely lodges, but where moisture is abundant, and there is some shade against the noonday summer sun.[38]

The descriptive choices on display in this passage are common to the tradition of Victorian natural history, whose joint inheritance of Romantic

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poetry and science lent itself to ardent, enlivening depictions of objects in nature.[39] Yet this is not to suggest that Hibberd's attributions of movement and feeling to plants—their ability to "congregate," their "love" for moisture and sloping terrain, their experiences of enjoyment and pride—should be taken as mere aesthetic flourishes. For Hibberd, ferns are complex organisms with habits, needs, and desires meriting careful and respectful consideration from collectors; in the cases of more robust ferns, such consideration involves recognizing the plant's inherent self-sufficiency: "Pretty well the best you can do for them is to leave them alone" (18). Hibberd insists that ferns be permitted to grow with minimal human intervention; in a striking bit of paradox, he urges cultivators to "[a]im at wildness and apparent neglect in the arrangements" of their fernery, which should strategically bring together walls, arches, and stones in "the imitation of a ruin" (17, 16). While Hibberd's advice is in one sense purely practical—ferns tend to thrive in the rocky, shaded conditions that a ruin provides—his description of the ideal fern garden is also provocatively symbolic, conjuring a mode of natural stewardship that replicates the absence and even the death of the steward. The ruling ego of the gardener has been virtually eliminated from this approach to gardening: rather than impose order through the hierarchical management of objectified nature, Hibberd's methodology invites the gardener to empower the fern by allowing it to flourish in the posthuman disorder it prefers.

The garden books of Hibberd and Robinson, I argue, illustrate a strain of thought in Victorian horticulture that resonates with Indigenous attitudes toward plants as willful, feeling beings. Through the character of Bronwyn, as the next section will detail, Silko presses on this sonority in order to amplify the animistic undertones of nineteenth-century British horticulture. Silko expressly attributes to Bronwyn the belief that plants are not only agentic but also ensouled, a belief that accords with Native American spirituality while emerging more directly from a tradition of animistic phenomenology in Western religion and philosophy. We can thus read Bronwyn as a buttonhole between Native American and Euro-Western animisms, allowing these traditions and their resonances to be seen together with newly illuminating clarity.

3. Euro-Western Animisms in Fin de Siècle Britain

Both Aunt Bronwyn's animism and its consonance with Native American animism are presaged by her relationship with the cattle whose unruly freedom aggravates Edward. The evening after Edward, Hattie, and

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Indigo arrive at the old Norman abbey, Indigo listens as Bronwyn summons a group of cows that have escaped an enclosure "to browse the willows along the river" (238). Indigo is arrested by Bronwyn's "lovely" calls to the cattle, which form "tones that might have been a song" and "made Indigo think of the old gardens and Grandma Fleet and Mama and Sister Salt" (238). Silko does not name the quality that renders the calls reminiscent of Indigo's old life, but readers can infer that Indigo has at least partly responded to Bronwyn's gentle, loving ways with the animals in her care—an orientation to the nonhuman that marks a significant departure from the attitudes Indigo has witnessed in Hattie and especially in Edward. Bronwyn's respect for nonhuman life extends from animals to plants and even to rocks: she asserts her beliefs that "plants have souls" and that she lives in "the land of the stones that dance and walk after midnight" (240, 237). These beliefs motivate Bronwyn's membership in the Antiquity Rescue Community, a local group that helps "protect an ancient grove of oaks and yews on a hilltop near a small stone circle. Old churches and old buildings had defenders," she explains to Hattie and Indigo, "but few people cared about clumps of old trees or old stones on hilltops" (240–41). While Hattie listens with skepticism, Indigo thrills to Bronwyn's words, hearing in the old woman's stories echoes of the animistic teachings that defined her childhood and continue to inform her engagement with the natural world.

At the same time that Silko prompts readers to recognize affinities between Brownyn's and Indigo's understanding of nonhuman being, she also calls attention to Bronwyn's source material, which is not Native American but European. Bronwyn describes herself to Indigo and Hattie as "an avid follower of the theories of Gustav Fechner, who believed plants have souls" (240). Silko's contemporary readers are more likely to recognize Fechner as the founder of psychophysics, which studies the influence of physical stimuli on psychic and physiological responses. Fechner's work in psychophysics revolved around the mind-body problem, which he proposed to solve in his *Elemente der Psychophysic* (1860) by dissolving the perceived distinction between body and mind;[40] alongside a number of other prominent nineteenth-century German thinkers, Fechner elaborated a monistic theory wherein mind and matter were seen as expressions of the same unified reality.[41] The foundations of Fechner's monism were laid in an earlier and more controversial publication, *Nanna, oder über das Seelenleben der Pflanzen* (*or About the Inner Life of Plants,* 1848), a work that characterizes matter as not only minded but divinely enspirited. "If," Fechner begins, "one concedes a God who is at once omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent (not only

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alongside of nature and above it, as the common opinion prefers to conceive it), then in a certain sense the universal animation of the world by God is already admitted, and nothing in the world, neither stone, nor plant, will be an exception to this."[42] From this premise, Fechner argues that all life is an extension of God's omnipresence and that where there is the presence of a life, there must also be a soul. "After all," he muses, "what sense does it make to talk of life without soul? If the decaying plant seems to us dead, what then distinguishes it from the living plant? . . . Is not the contrast between living and dead plants exactly like that between living and dead animals?"[43] For Fechner, in other words, to live is to have spirit, and if animals, plants, and stones are all understood as living, then all possess a form of spirit no greater or lesser than one another's.

Although my purpose is not to reduce *Gardens* to a literal history of ideas, I want to consider, from the perspective of historical realism, the implications of Bronwyn's familiarity with Fechner's writing on the soul-life of plants. Fechner was indeed well known to the Victorians, and the cultural influence of his work on psychophysics has been demonstrated by scholarship exploring the British reception of Fechner's theories of consciousness and aesthetics.[44] As for Fechner's animism—or, alternatively, what scholars have sometimes characterized as his panpsychism—Anthony Enns has linked Fechner's thinking as detailed in *On Life after Death* (1836) to the popularity of British spiritualism toward the end of the nineteenth century. "Fechner's notion of the ether as a connecting bridge between the realms of matter and spirit," Enns suggests, helped shape late Victorian fascination with ether theory, psychic phenomena, and related ways of rethinking the relationship between matter, mind, and soul.[45]

Silko implies a similar cross-cultural lineage for Fechner by connecting Bronwyn's interest in Fechner's theories of plant ensoulment to her immersion in new paganism. The latter trend took hold in fin de siècle Britain as part of a burgeoning interest in spiritualism, mysticism, and the occult; titles such as Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan* (1894) and William Sharp's *Pagan Review* (1892) bespeak the prominence of pagan themes in late-century literature and culture. Bronwyn's activities in the "Antiquity Rescue Committee" are decidedly pagan, grounded in the idea that the spirits inhabiting England's ancient stone circles and groves are the souls of "the good folk," or fairies, who will retaliate against humankind if their dwelling places are disturbed (252). The concept of fairies and the question of their real existence, past or present, experienced a surge of cultural fascination in the nineteenth century, fueled by the British and Celtic folk revivals and drawing engagement from

prominent writers such as Charlotte Brontë, William Butler Yeats, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.[46] In pagan spirituality, fairies were figured as animistic entities that inhabited and protected natural objects; as Lynn White Jr. explains, "In Antiquity every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill had its own *genius loci*, its guardian spirit."[47] The spread of Christianity during and after the Middle Ages involved the destruction of pagan cultures and suppression of animistic religious belief—a violent history to which Bronwyn alludes by invoking the "terrible famine in Ireland" and the "wars of Europe" as "the terrible consequences of centuries of crimes against the old stones and the sacred groves of hazel and oak" (252). Yet as *Gardens* suggests, the spirit of Old European animism was not wholly rooted out from European soil. Silko's integration of new paganism and Fechner's philosophy into a joint seedbed for Bronwyn's ideas about nonhuman life encapsulates a notable current of animistic thinking that persisted in western European culture at the end of the nineteenth century.

And that current, according to Silko, still persists. In a 1998 interview, Silko discussed the degree to which *Gardens* was inspired by her impression, solidified during a trip to Europe in the 1990s, that the "pagan heart" of Old Europe beats on beneath the surface of contemporary European culture.[48] "As hard as Christianity tried to wipe it out," Silko declared, "and tried to break that connection between the Europeans and the earth, and the plants and the animals . . . that connection won't break completely."[49] Suzanne Ferguson has suggested that Silko's efforts to reify that spiritual connection in *Gardens* contribute to the novel's project of forging a "reconciliation between Native America and Europe."[50] Ferguson's assessment represents a common motif in criticism on *Gardens,* which is often read as a literary exercise in "dialogism" between Native American and Anglo-European cultures.[51] And to an extent, this is how I, too, am reading *Gardens*; part of the aim of this essay thus far has been to deepen our understanding of Indigenous-European "dialogism" in the novel by attending to its rendering of transatlantic animisms.

I hesitate, however, to propose that the novel pursues or achieves a complete cross-cultural "reconciliation," whether through animistic affinities or otherwise. To argue as much would be to sidestep the fraught responses of Hattie and Edward as they are confronted with evidence of consequential parallels between Indigo's spiritual beliefs and those embedded in their own European ancestry. In contrast with Indigo's fast-blooming friendship with Bronwyn, which is grounded in their shared

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ways of looking at the nonhuman world, Hattie's reluctance and Edward's refusal to embrace those continuities represent larger obstacles to cosmological harmony and cultural healing. I read Hattie and Edward not only as representatives of a late Victorian backlash against animism—concurrent with and antithetical to animism's cultural revitalization—but also as allegorical figures for the long afterlife of animism's stigmatization in contemporary scholarship. In the remainder of this essay, I elaborate this reading with an eye toward its significance for scholars of Victorian literature and culture drawing on ecocritical frameworks: a disciplinary intersection where lingering ambivalence toward animism reinscribes colonialist logics that other and diminish Indigenous forms of knowledge.

4. Discourses on Animism in Ecocriticism and Victorian Studies

Throughout her journey with Hattie and Edward, Indigo's Indigenous epistemology remains firmly grounded in the practice of gardening. Indigo collects the seeds of the many plants that she encounters during their travels, intending to plant them on her return home. She is encouraged in this activity by Bronwyn, who gifts Indigo "dozens of waxed paper packets of seeds wrapped in white tissue paper," along with a silk-bound notebook in which Indigo can draw plants and record their names as well as "the best conditions and methods to grow them" (267). Indigo's seed collection grows further when the trio visit Bronwyn's friend Laura in Lucca, where Indigo enthusiastically receives a box of colored pencils and "generous gifts of packets of seeds and corms from [Laura's] hybrids" (303). Observing their interactions, Edward

> found himself a bit irritated at the *professoressa*'s attention to the child . . . although he could see that she made an identical bundle for him and Hattie. It seemed a bit ludicrous for Laura to pretend the Indian child would ever plant the corms or seeds, much less perform the pollination process for hybrids, even if she did take notes on all the necessary steps. Of course Laura could not be expected to know anything about American Indians. (303)

The free indirect discourse with which Silko reports Edward's thoughts, rarely a comfortable inner monologue for the reader to inhabit, becomes newly unbearable during the trio's time in Italy, as the long-implicit racism underlying the botanist's consciousness of Indigo emerges in full force. Here Silko names Edward's contempt for Native American ways of knowing, a contempt so pronounced that he fails to recognize

Indigo's seed collecting as a way of knowing at all. The failure is especially "ludicrous" given what we know about Edward's own reliance on the knowledge structures that he dismisses out of hand: exotic plant collecting, including orchid hunting, required Indigenous knowledge and labor. We might recall Millican's account of clearing some "four thousand trees" for the sake of extracting "ten thousand plants" from a Colombian forest. As Millican puts it, "I provided my natives with axes and started them out on the work of cutting down all trees containing valuable orchids," an oblique reference to the Indigenous workers and guides whose exploitation by orchid collectors is indexed by the brevity of the acknowledgment as well as its grammatical possessiveness: "my natives," Millican writes.[52] In the fictional Edward's case, not only were Indigenous laborers crucial to his expedition to Brazil, but it was a group of natives who saved his life when his European colleagues abandoned him for dead in the Brazilian jungle fire. Nevertheless, he refuses to think of Indigo as a fellow gardener.

The irony limning Edward's rejection of Indigo's horticultural expertise intensifies when the trio tour Laura's Mediterranean gardens, where, in addition to wonderful botanicals, Laura has also assembled a collection of Old European artifacts. As they rove among pagan statues and terra-cotta fashioned to resemble plants, animals, mythical creatures, and (to the married couple's horror) the human vulva, Edward and Hattie's initial interest gives way to nagging disquiet, an anxiety fomented partly by puritanical modesty and even more so by the figures' impact on Indigo. Beholding a sandstone statue of a "snake-headed mother" with "human arms" that hold "her snake baby to human breasts," Indigo excitedly informs the group that "Grandma Fleet used to talk to the big snake that lived at the spring above the old gardens; she always asked after the snake's grandchildren and relatives and sent her best regards" (297). Laura, unperturbed by the suggestion of an affinity between Sand Lizard and European folklore, responds by describing "the remnants of snake devotion still found in rural villages of the Black and Adriatic Seas" (297–98). Edward and Hattie, meanwhile, privately decide that Indigo should not be exposed to any additional serpent figures. "The child was from a culture of snake worshipers," Edward sneers, "and there was no sense in confusing her with the impression the old Europeans were no better than red Indians or black Africans who prayed to snakes" (302). The confusion, of course, is not Indigo's: faced with material proof of their animistic ancestry, Edward and Hattie choose to disavow the inheritance, a knee-

jerk repudiation prompted by the desire to keep a firm wedge between Native American culture and their own.

In addition to dramatizing the broader pattern of bigotry that has characterized Anglo-European treatment of Indigeneity for centuries, Edward and Hattie's reactions to the pagan statues point to a more specific site of Western discrimination against pagan animism in the late nineteenth century. Even as this historical moment saw the rise of new paganism as a cultural fad in Britain, it also witnessed the emergence of an anti-animistic strain in the field of anthropology. In his widely influential work *Primitive Culture* (1871), Edward Burnett Tylor dedicates a sizable chapter to the topic of animism—a term, it's worth noting, that Tylor himself coined—in which the author purports to offer a fuller account of "the lower phases of religious belief" than had been made available by previous studies.[53] Yet as Tylor's language suggests, the chapter (and the book as a whole) begins from the reductive premise that both religion and culture should be evaluatively ranked from lower to higher orders of complexity. Positioning animism at the bottom of this evolutionary ladder, Tylor also mischaracterizes animistic belief as dualistic, describing it as the stage at which spiritualism divorces itself from brute materialism.[54] His flawed and diminishing account became the received word on animism for decades, both in the field of anthropology and more broadly in Western cultural discourses; as Sinéad Garrigan Mattar has discussed at length, the inaccuracy of Tylor's assessment as well as the link his work cemented between animism and "primitivism" contributed to a long-standing "stigma of belatedness" around the term.[55]

This stigma persisted to the end of the subsequent century, when Silko was writing *Gardens*—a period, it's worth emphasizing, that also and conversely witnessed the rise of the so-called "new animism." As the field of ecocriticism came into formation in the late twentieth century, and as animistic ways of thinking about nature and the nonhuman gained increasing popularity, the term *animism* became a bugbear in the very circles where these ways of thinking were on the rise. While for certain ecocritical scholars, such as Bruno Latour, the moniker of *new* animism was meant to renounce Tylor's definitional work while affirming the actual principles of the cosmological systems to which animism refers, other critics have been less precise, and less generous, when outlining the relationship of their work to animistic thought.[56] In her much-cited book *Vibrant Matter* (2010), Jane Bennett refers to animism as a "discredited philosoph[y] of nature" that we should "revisit and become

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temporarily infected by" in "moments of methodological naiveté" in order to attune ourselves to what she describes as the "thing-power" of the natural world.[57] If such comments appear tongue-in-cheek in intention, they nonetheless work to distance Bennett's brand of ecocriticism from animism in name, if not also in kind. These acts of distancing become consequential, not least given the lasting traction of *Vibrant Matter,* when we consider that Bennett's framing risks inadvertently categorizing Indigenous spirituality as a discredited philosophy of nature, one to be picked up and played with by (white) ecocritics as an intellectual exercise.

My point is not exclusively to take issue with Bennett's work but to raise the larger question of ecocriticism's relationship to Indigenous thought: a relationship long characterized, on the side of ecocriticism, by a mix of fetishization and negligence. In *Ecofeminist Natures* (1997), Noël Sturgeon observes that much of ecofeminism—and, I would add, ecocriticism—has essentialized Indigenous peoples as "the 'ultimate ecofeminists'" while simultaneously excluding Indigenous scholars from participation in the field's discursive construction.[58] More recently, in a 2020 study assessing new materialist engagement with Indigenous scholarship, Jerry Lee Rosiek et al. conclude that this engagement remains limited despite "shared interest in the topic of non-human agency," a topic on which "Indigenous thinkers and scholars developed ideas . . . thousands of years earlier than contemporary philosophers of science."[59] As both an Indigenous contributor to ecocritical scholarship and a writer whose fiction is often read through ecocritical frameworks, Silko is well positioned to notice and comment on those tensions and omissions, and part of her project in *Gardens,* I argue, is precisely to offer that commentary. A crucial facet of Silko's intervention into contemporary ecocriticism involves the novel's historical setting in the twilight years of the Victorian era, a fin de siècle moment with startling parallels to the moment when *Gardens* was written, inasmuch as both centuries concluded with animism's concurrent popularization and stigmatization in Western cultural spheres. The contrast between Bronwyn's enthusiastic new paganism and Hattie and Edward's charged encounter with the animistic statues in Laura's garden can thus be read as a critical-historical palimpsest, with Silko's dramatization of factious late Victorian views on animism overlaying a subtler appraisal of contemporary ecocriticism's troubled relationship with Indigenous ways of knowing.

At both levels, this reading of *Gardens* directly bears on past and future scholarship in Victorian studies. First, given that lingering skepticism of animism can be traced to the Victorian period, I take Silko's

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work in *Gardens* as an invitation to interrogate the influence of Tylor and his like-minded contemporaries on Victorian thinking about animism, and to also reflect on the lingering impact of late Victorian anthropology on our inherited thinking about animism. Here I build on arguments by Mattar, whose essay "Yeats, Fairies, and the New Animism" draws a through line from Tylor to long-standing tendencies in scholarship on Yeats, where critics have been inclined either to "create a historicist critique that can address [Yeats's] enthusiasm [for fairies] without seeming to succumb to it" or to "sidestep[] the embarrassment of his beliefs about fairies altogether."[60] Treating animism as an "embarrassment" in our Victorian objects of study closes off doors for illuminating inquiry; further, in light of the contiguity I have been demonstrating between European and Indigenous animisms, a refusal or failure to take animism seriously comes into conflict with antiracist commitments in our scholarship. And given, second, the ever-increasing popularity of ecocritical approaches to studies of Victorian literature and culture, I read *Gardens* as a prompt to take account of whether and how these approaches engage and cite Indigenous scholarship. Recent years have seen a proliferation of wonderful work in Victorian studies on plants, gardens, and horticulture, with much of it situating the Victorian gardening craze within larger colonial and imperial contexts; yet where this work has leveraged ecocritical and new materialist frameworks, it has repeatedly turned to the vocabularies of Bennett, Deleuze, or Latour to describe and theorize nonhuman agency. Plants and gardening thus represent a crucial site for "undisciplining" our field: I join Ryan Fong in the call to take up "Indigenous-centered frameworks" as part of an effort to confront our field's "role in perpetuating the ideologies of settler colonialism" and "our responsibility to undertake the work of dismantling them."[61]

5. A Concluding Reflection on Methodology

How, then, can white scholars employing ecocritical approaches to Victorian studies incorporate Indigenous-centered frameworks without appropriating them? To answer this question, I briefly return to the character of Hattie, whose arc is defined by a slow, imperfect, but unmistakable progression toward an animistic worldview akin to Indigo's. Prior to marrying Edward, Hattie pursued a master's degree in theology at the Harvard Divinity School, where her research was unpopularly concerned with Gnosticism and the female spiritual principle in early Christianity. Rejected by the thesis committee as heretical and unsubstantiated,

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Hattie's project proposal was inspired by her access to Coptic translations suggesting "the equal status accorded the feminine principle in Gnostic Christian tradition" (99). Notably, the origins of this "feminine principle" are pagan, deriving from the myth of Sophia, a Hellenistic deity that Gnosticism represented as the embodied Wisdom of God (100). These interests should position Hattie to embrace the new paganism she encounters in Bronwyn as well as the old European paganism on display in Laura's terra-cotta collection; complicity with Edward, however, and with the violent reductivism of settler ideology at first blocks Hattie's animistic awakening. Yet Silko repeatedly hints at Hattie's movement toward epistemological breakthrough, communicated by her visions of a mystical light in Bronwyn's gardens and, later, in recurring dreams, as well as her increasing sexual and ideological discomfort in her marriage. This gradual evolution in Hattie's worldview constitutes one of the novel's most ethically momentous plotlines: bringing her into closer epistemic alignment with Indigo, Hattie's transformation harbors the potential to newly empower both Indigo and herself. As Elizabeth McNeil suggests, Indigo helps open Hattie's eyes to how Euro-Western ways of thinking serve to oppress (white) women as well as Indigenous peoples, inspiring Hattie to eventually reject "negative Western norms" by separating from Edward and helping Indigo reunite with her family.[62]

But new complications materialize on Hattie and Indigo's return to the American Southwest. Hattie discovers that she is an object of suspicion not only for Sister Salt, who is mistrustful of white settlers, but also among the white residents of Needles, California, who disapprove of her association with the Native Americans forced to live on the outskirts of town. In an act presumably motivated by Hattie's friendship with Indigo, and in the novel's most vivid depiction of interpersonal violence, Hattie is raped and left for dead by a white carriage driver; barely surviving, with significant physical and emotional trauma, Hattie discovers that the townspeople of Needles are unwilling to name or prosecute her attacker. She rejoins Indigo and Sister Salt and feels bolstered by their company as they prepare for a new cycle of the Ghost Dance; in the midst of the ceremony, Hattie perceives a "beautiful glow" reminiscent of the light she saw in Bath and remarks on the coincidence to Sister Salt, who affirms that the phenomena are coextensive in a moment of rapport that also cements Hattie's belief in an animistic reality (469). The moment is interrupted, however, by the arrival of white soldiers who disperse the ceremony, and Hattie learns that she is to blame for the disruption: her mother and father accompany the soldiers, having traveled

to Needles in search of her. Hattie flees and sets fire to the stable where her rapist is employed, burning down the building and half of Needles overnight. We subsequently learn that Hattie has decided to live with Bronwyn in England: "Next week they would take the train to Scotland to visit the old stones," a postcard reads, and later they will "spend the autumn with Laura in Lucca," implying that Hattie has returned to Europe to explore her animistic heritage (475).

While the novel's final chapters thus bring Hattie and Indigo into epistemological congruity, Silko is careful to deny Hattie a complete convergence with Indigo's ways of knowing and being, leaving Hattie instead to pursue a discrete pathway of animistic inquiry. Here, my interpretation parts ways with that of scholars interested in locating a purely redemptive message in the conclusion to Hattie's character arc: McNeil, for instance, suggests that the novel's ending and the "trope" of the Ghost Dance allow Silko to "create intimate relationships between Indigenous and white women in *Gardens*, and offer a way through which her female characters can maintain or recover the personal power to reject colonization and patriarchy and live their own authentic lives."[63] Although I share McNeil's interest in the (eco)feminist implications of the novel's ending, I am also mindful of how the dance's interruption forces Hattie to confront the danger she poses to Indigo and Sister Salt, a danger that complicates, if it does not attenuate, the "intimate relationships" she has forged with them. Hattie registers her unshakable association with settler colonialism and the violent structures whereby it manages all forms of life—a violence, as Hattie recognizes, that she has helped to perpetuate. It is a violence to which Hattie, too, is personally subjected in the novel's final chapters, with the rape recalling Sister Salt's salient observation upon discovering her Mormon neighbor's decimated home: "If this was what the white people did to one another, then truly . . . Indians were lucky to survive at all." Newly cognizant that remaining in Needles would risk not merely additional harm to herself but "more trouble" for the precarious Indian population, Hattie chooses to abandon settler living altogether, sealing the renunciation by literally dismantling the architectures of colonialism (472). Put another way, Hattie's departure is not incidental to but a crucial feature of her white allyship.

In the resolution to Hattie's character arc, *Gardens* offers a warning against Western dispossession of Native American ways of knowing—a cautionary word that speaks to Silko's scholarly readership both then and now, reminding us that even well-intended engagements with Native knowledge can enact and extend the violent logics of settler

colonialism.[64] Yet the warning is given in tandem with signposts toward powerful, underexamined resonances between Indigenous and European intellectual and cultural traditions. Hattie's return to Europe, an acknowledgment of settler violence and a gesture of deference to Native American sovereignty, also initiates the convalescence of a relationship that was always already damaged for Hattie: her relationship, that is, with the land, and namely the land of her ancestry. Her healing occurs synchronously with Indigo's reclamation of her own relationship with the land, the gardens in the dunes, which she and Sister Salt revitalize with the addition of the seeds that Indigo gathered during her global travels. In these reparative gardening projects, unfolding in reciprocally aware simultaneity but at an ethical remove, Silko lays down the contours of a critical methodology, one wherein Victorianist scholars might take up Indigenous-centered frameworks with minimized risk of appropriation. I have worked to elucidate and to emulate this method in these pages, thinking with and alongside Silko's efforts to delineate transatlantic animisms past and present, and striving for critical consciousness of where we can prevent further epistemic harm.

Notes

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1. Arnold and Silko, "Listening to the Spirits," 3.
2. See, for example, Wells, "*Proserpina* Unbound"; and Voskuil, "Victorian Plants."
3. Banerjee, "Ecologies of Cotton," 495–96. See also Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*; Beinart and Hughes, *Environment and Empire*; DeLoughrey and Handley, *Postcolonial Ecologies;* Beattie, Melillo, and O'Gorman, *Eco-Cultural Networks;* and Chang, *Novel Cultivations.*
4. My reading of animistic language in Victorian garden books complements Chang's study of nineteenth-century British genre fiction as another cultural site where the Victorians explored "an idea of consciousness that does not explicitly exclude the possibility of plants" ("Killer Plants," 83).

5. Kehler, "Gertrude Jekyll," 617.
6. Recent readings of plant horror in Victorian literature and culture include McCausland, "From the Plant of Life"; and Wells, "Vegetal Bedfellows."
7. Respectively, Price, "Vegetable Monsters," 312–13; Chang, "Killer Plants," 84. Cf. Endersby, who reads plant horror as staging "broader shifts in the relationships between the sexes" ("Deceived by Orchids," 207); and Wells, "Vegetal Bedfellows," 14.
8. Mattar discusses Victorian anthropology's definitions of animism, and the influence of these writings on inherited thinking about animism in Victorian studies, in "Yeats, Fairies, and the New Animism."
9. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter,* 18.
10. The historical and ongoing influence of Indigenous thinking on ecocriticism is extensively explored in Monani and Adamson, *Ecocriticism and Indigenous Studies.* Sturgeon critiques ecofeminism's appropriative relationship with Indigenous knowledge and femininity in *Ecofeminist Natures.*
11. Proposed principles for "undisciplining Victorian studies" are outlined in Chatterjee, Christoff, and Wong's "Introduction."
12. Chen, "Gardening Ideas across Borders," 178.
13. Silko, *Gardens in the Dunes,* 15. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
14. Tillett, "The Necessity of Lived Resistance," 191.
15. Silko, "Landscape," 265.
16. Silko, "Landscape," 265.
17. Silko, "Landscape," 264.
18. Allen, "The Sacred Hoop," 247.
19. Allen, "The Sacred Hoop," 247.
20. Manes, "Nature and Silence," 17–18.
21. Manes, "Nature and Silence," 15.
22. Manes, "Nature and Silence," 15.
23. Watts, "Indigenous Place-Thought."
24. As Young points out, the Colorado River setting of *Gardens* "is less a historic setting than a spatiotemporal composite" merging "the human violence involved in the creation of the Colorado River Indian Tribes Reservation (established in 1865), the ecological violence of the construction of the Parker Dam (built between 1934 and 1938), and the Ghost Dances that actually occurred outside of nearby Kingman, Arizona in 1889 and 1891" ("Indigenous Cosmopolitanism," 238).

25. Watts, "Indigenous Place-Thought."
26. Chen, *Animacies,* 13.
27. For more on colonialism as disrupting Indigenous communication and relationships with the land, see Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor"; and Whyte, "Settler Colonialism."
28. Miller, "Postcolonial Ecocriticism," 480.
29. Millican, *Travels and Adventures,* 150.
30. Chang, *Novel Cultivations,* 1.
31. Voskuil, Review, 139.
32. *The Magazine of Botany,* qtd. in "A Selection of the Most Beautiful of the Orchidaceous Epiphytes," 265.
33. Lindley and Paxton, *Paxton's Flower Garden,* i.
34. Lindley and Paxton, *Paxton's Flower Garden,* i.
35. Kehler, "Gertrude Jekyll," 617.
36. Kehler, "Gertrude Jekyll"; Wells, "*Proserpina* Unbound."
37. Robinson, *The Wild Garden,* vii. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
38. Hibberd, *The Fern Garden,* 10. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
39. Gates characterizes Victorian natural history as both romantic and Romantic in "Introduction: Why Victorian Natural History?"
40. Heidelberger, *Nature from Within,* 73.
41. For a fuller account of monistic thought in nineteenth-century German philosophy and science, see Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life.*
42. Fechner, "The Soul Life of Plants," 163–64.
43. Fechner, "The Soul Life of Plants," 168.
44. See, for example, Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel;* and Lanzoni, *Empathy.*
45. Enns, "Psychic Radio," 148.
46. For discussions of fairies in Victorian literature and culture, see Silver, "On the Origin of Fairies"; and Mattar, "Yeats, Fairies, and the New Animism."
47. White, "Historical Roots," 10.
48. Arnold and Silko, "Listening to the Spirits," 5.
49. Arnold and Silko, "Listening to the Spirits," 6.
50. Ferguson, "Europe and the Quest for Home," 34.
51. Mohamed uses the term *dialogism* in "Dialogism and Native American Literature." Similarly, Regier argues that *Gardens* "resists

binary polarizations of culture" in order to present "a kind of doubled recovery of syncretism and hybridity . . . for both the Native American and Anglo-European topographies" ("Revolutionary Enunciatory Spaces," 136). See also Murray, "Old Comparisons"; and McNeil, "Indigenous and Ecofeminist Reclamation."

52. Millican, *Travels and Adventures,* 150.
53. Tylor, *Primitive Culture,* 420.
54. Tylor defines animism as "the deep-lying doctrine of Spiritual Beings, which embodies the very essence of Spiritualistic as opposed to Materialistic philosophy" (*Primitive Culture,* 425).
55. Mattar, "Yeats, Fairies, and the New Animism," 139.
56. See Latour's "An Attempt at a 'Compositionist Manifesto'" for his defense of both the term *animism* and the monistic, "immanent" cosmology that he understands the term to denote (484).
57. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter,* 18, 17.
58. Sturgeon, *Ecofeminist Natures,* 115.
59. Rosiek, Snyder, and Pratt, "The New Materialisms and Indigenous Theories," 332. The authors ask why scholars exploring "agential realism" in the qualitative social sciences "reach for Deleuze (2004) instead of Deloria (1999b), Bennett (2010) rather than Bungee (1984), Guattari (2005) rather than Garroutte (2003), Massumi (2002) rather than Marker (2018), Alaimo (2016) rather than Atleo (2007), and so on" (332).
60. Mattar, "Yeats, Fairies, and the New Animism," 137.
61. Fong, "The Stories Outside," 422.
62. McNeil, "Indigenous and Ecofeminist Reclamation."
63. McNeil, "Indigenous and Ecofeminist Reclamation."
64. Here I echo Calderón's point that "[e]ven scholars who claim to use decolonial practices through their work end up inadvertently perpetuating colonial approaches" by, for instance, "mov[ing] forward in their research without fully acknowledging local expertise in their work and without returning any knowledge back to the communities who were at the center of their work" ("Reimagining Our Citational Practices," 46).

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