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DIRECTIONS

HA'NTS:

THE BOOGER DANCE RHETORICS OF LYNN RIGGS'S *THE CHEROKEE NIGHT*

QWO-LI DRISKILL

*The grass is withered,
Where the river was is red sand,
Fire eats the timber:
Night
Has come to our people . . .*

—Lynn Riggs, *The Cherokee Night*

*And dawn arrives, no matter the struggle of the night and how endless that
night might be.*

—Joy Harjo, “the psychology of earth and sky,” *A Map to the
Next World*

PRELUDE

THE REINCORPORATION OF CHEROKEE playwright Lynn Riggs to the Native literary canon has not only introduced readers to Riggs's work, but also has challenged scholars in Native studies

to grapple with what exactly to do with it. Riggs, a mixed-blood Oklahoma Cherokee queer, wrote only one play with explicit Cherokee themes, *The Cherokee Night*.¹ It is a play that remains complicated and troubling. Craig S. Womack's breakthrough essay, "Lynn Riggs as Code Talker: Toward a Queer Oklahomo Theory and the Radicalization of Native American Studies," offers a queer reading of Riggs's work that "brings together Indian and queer concerns . . . that [are] deeply embedded in Riggs's philosophies."² He contends "that all the talk of doomed Cherokees is coded statement that reflects Riggs's own suffering as a result of the closet, a link between his Indian and gay life, albeit a bleak one."³ Daniel Heath Justice, reading the play from a Cherokee-centered perspective, argues that it is an "attempt to travel the Beloved Path of accommodating change while maintaining a coherent sense of Cherokee centrality, but it fails in that mission, ultimately giving way to despair and the doomed fading of Cherokees as deracinated shadows of a once great nation."⁴ Jace Weaver writes that the play "reflect[s] romantic notions of essentialism from a racially pure past" while acknowledging that "such statements reflect Riggs's own inner struggle to live out his Indianness and a firm stance against assimilation and annihilation."⁵ Even the title of the play creates dissonance when coupled with a title such as *Green Grow the Lilacs*, his most famous play and the basis for the Broadway musical *Oklahoma!* No Sooners singing folk ballads here, *The Cherokee Night* is filled with ghosts, ghouls, thieves, and murderers.

The Cherokee Night begs for such readings. Riggs's play is disturbing and downright spooky. So disturbing and spooky, I don't believe that we can leave the play stranded as either a representation of Riggs's melancholia about being an Oklahoma Cherokee in self-imposed exile because of his sexuality or his own racialized anxieties of Cherokees as "an absorbed race."⁶ Such readings are important and valid, and we can't begin to understand Riggs or his work without them. However, looking to the rhetorical work of the Booger Dance as a way of understanding Riggs's play can open up more liberatory and hopeful interpretations of this complicated piece. By utilizing the Booger Dance as an interpretive framework, we can see the play through what Gerald Vizenor calls "a trickster hermeneutics of liberation, the uncertain humor and shimmer of survivance that denies the obscure maneuvers of manifest manners."⁷ Such a hermeneutic enables us to read *The Cherokee Night* as a play that urges resistance to the specters

of colonialism through cultural memory.

The Booger Dance is a haunting force that taps into the most indelible of memories. Leonard Broom's "The Booger" is used by English people as a ghost or frightful being, warning of the harm that evil spirits or ghosts, may bring. It is an additional reason one that sees the Booger as a bring "harmful" to the face. Looking at the Booger to recuperate *The Cherokee Night*.

Call and response is a Cherokee song and dance form. When a Stomp Dance is performed to the fire to pass on the tradition to dance with the Booger watch. Further, the Booger is innate from Stomp Dance. Menstruating women whose body was burned by the Booger. It is our sacred fire. Only to this story. Cherokee performers in the Booger Dance respond to that. Participants in the Booger Dance.

As an actor and dancer, an analysis of the Booger Dance is important. The Booger Dance is to be performed.

of colonialism that manifest through racism, violence, and interruptions of cultural memory.

The Booger Dance is a Cherokee ceremony that caricaturizes invading forces that threaten to disrupt Cherokee nationhood. In what remains the most in-depth account of the Booger Dance, Frank G. Speck and Leonard Broom write, "The term 'Booger,' equivalent to 'bogey' (ghost), is used by English-speaking Cherokee and their white neighbors for any ghost or frightful animal. . . . The dance has the functional value of weakening the harmful powers of alien tribes and races, who, as living beings or ghosts, may be responsible for sickness or misfortune."⁸ I wish to offer an additional reading of *The Cherokee Night* to the current conversation, one that sees the play through Booger Dance rhetorics that intentionally bring "harmful powers" that undermine Cherokee nationhood to the surface. Looking at the Booger Dance as a rhetorical apparatus enables us to recuperate *The Cherokee Night* as a play that can help protect and heal Cherokee communities.

Call and response is a central rhetorical structure to "traditional" Cherokee song and dance. Stomp Dance singing, for instance, is responsorial, and when a Stomp Dance leader calls for shell shakers, women come forward to the fire to participate. Similarly, the Booger Dance calls on those present to dance with the Boogers. One is expected to participate, not passively watch. Further, in Cherokee oral tradition, all of our songs and dances originate from Stonecoat, a flesh-eating giant with stone skin, killed by seven menstruating women in order to protect Cherokee communities. As his body was burned, he sang all of our songs, told us our ceremonies, and gave us our sacred formulas. Performing our songs and dances connects us not only to this story but also to a cultural memory we are asked to continue. Cherokee performance rhetorics call on Cherokees to be active participants in the Cherokee community—it is part of our work as Cherokees to respond to that call. Cherokee performance rhetorics remind us that we are participants in an ongoing story.

As an actor and activist, my intention here is not meant to be an isolated analysis of the play. Reintroducing *The Cherokee Night* to a literary audience is important, to be sure. But a play is not written to remain on paper; it is to be performed. My assertions are also meant to open up possible radical

restagings that can be useful to Cherokee, and other Native, audiences. To reintroduce the play to Native and non-Native audiences, the play must be reimagined so that some of the potentially harmful aspects of the play can be subverted and refashioned into tools useful for what Vizenor terms *survivance*, and Malea Powell expands on to call *rhetorics of survivance*, in the twenty-first century.⁹ Using Booger Dance rhetorics to transform *The Cherokee Night* enables us to dance with the most frightening and disruptive aspects of the play as a way to protect Cherokee communities from colonialism's unbalance, violence, and chaos. The Booger Dance compels its audience-participants to grapple with forces that threaten the Cherokee community, and, through dancing with the Boogers, participants can subdue them and send them back into the night. Likewise, *The Cherokee Night* forces us to dance with and subdue colonial forces that endanger the Cherokee community.

HERE COME THE BOOGERS: *THE CHEROKEE NIGHT* AS GHOST STORY

The Cherokee Night is a two-act play in seven nonchronological scenes that take place in Indian Territory and Oklahoma, spanning from 1895 through the 1930s. The play can be seen as a ghost story. From the outset, Riggs sets the play as the domain of ghosts. It opens with the specter of a teepee on Claremore Mound, "its skeleton poles cross each other at the towering summit," which "vanishes" before the action of the play begins.¹⁰ The sounds of voices and a drum emanate from Claremore Mound.

In order to give more context to readers not familiar with this complicated play, I will provide a brief sketch of the characters and plot. Rather than a traditional plot structure, each scene in the play deals with the manifestations of dislocation and alienation of mixed-blood Cherokees in a post-removal and post-allotment era. Weaver explains that "the only constant presence is the Claremore Mound," a place many of the characters believe to be haunted.¹¹ Riggs describes this place as a "ghostly habitation" as the play begins, introducing us to the central characters: Viney Jones, Bee Newcomb, Hutch Moree, Art Osburn, and Gar Breeden. They are in their late teens and early twenties. Riggs makes clear that "they are all part Cherokee Indian, some a quarter, some a sixteenth or a thirty-second; one

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of them is a half-breed."¹² Throughout the course of the play, Viney becomes a self-hating and selfish person who betrays her Cherokee-ness by allowing her sister to live in poverty, Hutch marries a wealthy Osage woman, and Gar mysteriously survives a near-murder by a fanatic Christian sect. Scene 2 finds Bee and Art in Rogers County jail (Bee for prostitution and Art for murder), where Bee helps the police trick a confession out of Art. We also learn that Gar and Bee, who had a romantic relationship, discover that they are half-siblings through their Cherokee outlaw father, Edgar Breeden/Spench. (Spench is a name he has taken as an outlaw.) These are characters haunted by the trauma inflicted on Cherokee communities. Jaye Darby argues that the play "probes and mourns the social and spiritual imbalance of intense individualism, selfishness, racism, breakdown of kinship values, and violence, interrogating both Cherokee and European American complicity."¹³

The Cherokee Night opens in 1913 with conflict among these central characters—along with Audeal Coombs, whom we never see again throughout the play—during a twilight picnic at the mound. The characters are soon startled by a sound and begin suggesting logical and silly explanations. Gar remarks, "Er maybe a dead Indian—a ha'nt of a dead Indian. . . . Well, you're all part Cherokee, like me! . . . We're settin' on the graves of a lot of dead ones—in case you've forgot" (118). Gar tells them that Claremore Mound is the sight of the last great battle between the Osage and Cherokee nations.

Art finds that the source of the sound is Old Man Talbert, an Indian who lives near the mound, trying to dig out the grave of Claremont, the Osage chief the characters believe is buried there. Talbert enters the play, casting both himself and the central characters as ghosts:

TALBERT. (*With hypnotic fervor*). You didn't see nuthin'. I wasn't robbin' the grave. Not *me!* It's ghouls that does that. *Ghouls!* And white trash and black niggers. Not *me!* (123)

It is obvious that Talbert has been trying to rob—and perhaps unearth?—Claremont's grave. Talbert is thus naming himself as a ghoul, a word Art also uses to refer to him a few moments later. Through Talbert's words, we also begin to see ways in which classism and anti-Black racism have become entrenched into Cherokee communities. Both of these issues resurface later as forces that threaten Cherokee nationhood.

Talbert's confrontation with the assembled mixed-bloods continues by naming them all as ghosts: "I know you! I know you all! . . . (*With strange quiet finality*). You're no use to anybody. You're lost. You might as well be dead." He goes on to curse them simultaneously and, seemingly, to call ghosts into the scene and confess to the gathered crowd an involvement with the misuse of medicine through witchery.

TALBERT. I'll tell you whut I was up to. You'll wish I hadn't! You'll run from the sight of me, the sound of my voice! It'll burn yer ears, you'll stumble and fall down, the briars'll claw deep down into yer bones. (*His voice stranger, madder, possessed.*) And the sperrits—yeah, *them*. (*Softly, as if afraid of being overheard.*) Thick in the air over yer heard. (*He looks up and around.*) Hear the whisper of rawhide? See the streaks of blood on their faces? Look! All over, all around you—! (125)

He continues by telling the story of his own haunting, the ghostly drum rising behind his words. He tells of seeing the ghosts of the last battle between Cherokee and Osage warriors and of a Cherokee ghost that admonishes him for forgetting his place in the world as a Cherokee:

TALBERT. He looked th'ough me like I wasn't there! He was terrible! He started to speak. "Jim Talbert," he said—(*The OLD MAN straightens up, his eyes shut, seeing clearly, as if tranced. His voice becomes something like the voice of the Cherokee brave. His shoulders lift.*) "Now you've saw, you've been showed. *Us*—the Cherokees—in our full pride, our last glory! This is the way we are, the way we was meant to be. (*With passionate fervor, the mysterious drumbeat swelling up through his words.*)

...
We, too, are dead.
We have no bodies,
We are homeless ghosts,
We are made of air.

Who made us that, Jim Talbert? Our children—our children's children! They've forgot who we was, who *they* are!" (127)

The Cherokee ghost, through Talbert, continues by uttering the title lines of the play: "The grass is withered, / Where the river was is red sand, / Fire eats the timber: / Night—*night*—has come to our people" (128). Talbert goes on to tell the Cherokees that he has been searching for arrowheads since his original haunting, which he will give to all Cherokees so that they will remember their history and nation (128–9).

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Talbert closes the scene by, again, calling on ghosts to be present: "I hear 'em now. . . . Look! See the light on their painted arms! They've come back like before! . . . Come down, come down! Show yerselves! Yer people have forgot who you are! . . . You hear me! I see you. You're coming! . . . *This way! This way!*" (129–30).

Ha'nts. Ghouls. Boogers. The play opens with an introduction to Boogers that threaten the well-being of Cherokee nationhood and community. But this time, these Boogers are not outside of the Cherokee community—the threats of colonialism are coming from inside. What, exactly, is Riggs up to here? His play crawls with "ha'nts"; it is filled with problematic implications about race and Cherokee nationhood, portraying a group of mixed-bloods haunted by their Cherokeeeness. Riggs, after coming up with the idea for the play, wrote, "The play will concern itself with that night, that darkness . . . which has come to the Cherokees and their descendents," which he calls an "absorbed race."¹⁴ Justice takes the stance that "the Beloved Path here leads nowhere; a state of balance is impossible, for both defiance and submission bring about the destruction of the self. Whether Indian, White, Black, or somewhere in between, all is struggle and pain. There is no safe state of being for Riggs's Cherokees—the 'vanishing Indian' is invoked again, this time by an Indian."¹⁵ Darby, drawing on Weaver's analysis of the play as a "communitist [community + activist] statement," examines Riggs's "commitment to construct a play about the Cherokees that disrupted and challenged mainstream American theatre conventions and ideological expectations of his day."¹⁶ I draw on these more hopeful interpretations of *The Cherokee Night*, arguing that the play—like the Booger Dance—attempts to halt the haunts of colonialism.¹⁷

Booger Dancers are tricksters. William Douglas Powers explains that "the Booger . . . symbolizes chaos, universally figured as the archetype of the monster."¹⁸ He goes on to argue,

The Booger Dance . . . depicts the cosmological structure as dangerously without order; the dance restructures the cosmos by restoring order and reinforcing the cosmological hierarchy through two crucial actions: abolishing the entities of the Lower World from the Middle World and displaying reverence and a longing for transcendence represented by the Upper World. These actions ensure the physical survival of the Middle World (the world of the Cherokee) by recreating it . . . and restoring the sacred to the universe. Therefore, by performing

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The Cherokee Night portrays a Cherokee world in chaos. The nonlinear, nonordered time structure of the play reflects a world out of balance and utterly disrupted. As readers of the play, it is often difficult to reorder its chronological events. For instance, scene 5, a truly bizarre scene about a fanatic Christian cult, takes place in 1913. At the end of the scene the fanatics have tied Gar to a post where, it is suggested, he will be killed. Although we never see Gar again, in scene 2—which takes place in 1927—Bee says to Art, “You remember Gar Breeden? He won’t look at me no more, won’t give me a tumble. He ain’t even *looked* at me for five year” (137). It would be difficult, without a playbill that listed the year for each scene, for the audience to realize that Gar somehow survived the cult and the “angry repeated sound of a motor Klaxon” that closes scene 5 (186). Although this could simply be an error on Riggs’s part, I believe this is a moment in which he intentionally confuses the audience, employing “a trickster hermeneutics of liberation” as a rhetoric of survivance.²⁰

Riggs hurls the audience into a hermeneutic circle at the end of the play: the last scene is the chronological beginning, and we are left spinning back through the time-space of *The Cherokee Night* in order to try to grasp its meaning. Yet it is hard here to see Riggs as “a comic healer and liberator.”²¹ There is little funny in Riggs’s antics. Tsisdu (Rabbit) in Cherokee oral tradition is a whole different beast than other trickster figures, a character whose trickery eventually gets him trapped in another world. Cherokee Boogers are much closer to the idea of the trickster that Vizenor and others employ: “The trickster is comic nature in a language game, not a real person or ‘being’ in the ontological sense. Tribal tricksters are embodied in imagination and liberate the mind; an androgyny, she would repudiate translations and imposed regulations, as he would bear the contradictions of the striptease.”²² On Riggs as trickster Womack writes,

One of trickster’s primary *modi operandi*, shape-shifting, the power to move fluidly beyond static definitions of cultural boundaries, is an impulse with both positive and destructive possibilities. . . . Riggs’s life demonstrates a form of shape-shifting that employs disguises that cause a split between one’s inner nature and one’s social behavior, not unlike the warrior in *The Cherokee Night* who separates spirit from body, hiding his true self in the top of a tree.²³

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Even with the comic, bawdy intrusion of the Boogers, and their role in helping the community laugh at and dance with them, the Boogers are a disruptive and frightening presence, ghosts of invaders who threaten physical and sexual violence toward the nation. The trickster nature of *The Cherokee Night*, in keeping with a Cherokee sense of Boogers, is one that portrays an invaded and disrupted community. Powers's analysis of the Booger Dance asserts that the Boogers "are . . . not merely political or cultural threats, but they threaten the very existence of the cosmos of the prevailing order."²⁴

Riggs, as playwright, is leader of the Boogers, and he has led them straight into our homes in which they disrupt our lives and well-being. The Boogers, however, have been led to us in order for us to find ways to interact with them, resist them, and send them back into the night.

NAMING THE BOOGERS

The specters of colonialism that haunt *The Cherokee Night* are forces whose powers over us are diminished once they are named. Weaver, Womack, and Justice have done major work in naming the disruptive forces of the play. Weaver points out *The Cherokee Night's* essentialized racial notions; Womack's reading explores the ways in which the play is a coded statement of queerness that Riggs was not able to express as a queer man in the 1930s; and Justice's reading examines the play as a failed attempt to walk the Beloved Path. These readings are all vital to an understanding of Riggs's work, and I want to add to the discussion that the play is also a mirror held up to Cherokee communities that forces us to confront some of the most difficult aspects of contemporary Cherokee nationhood(s), aspects we must continue to name in order to understand who these Boogers are and what they want with us.

In the Booger Dance, the Boogers boast outrageously profane names such as Sooty Anus and Making Pudenda Swell.²⁵ They also portray caricatures of non-Cherokees, including various Euro-Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and non-Cherokee Native people.²⁶ The disruptive and profane names in *The Cherokee Night* are very different: racism, violence, and internalized colonialism.

Many of the problems with *The Cherokee Night* continue to disrupt and threaten Cherokee communities. Issues of blood quantum, race, and citizenship, for instance, are hot-button issues for contemporary Cherokee

audiences, perhaps even more now than when the play was originally performed. Although it is necessary to name the portrayals of "washed-out mixed-bloods," as Womack calls them, it is just as important to mention that Cherokee communities continue to be preoccupied with such discussions.²⁷ Current discussions in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma regarding the status of freedmen descendants (and, no doubt, the place of all Black Cherokees) continue to cause enormous debates about citizenship, race, and identity in Cherokee communities.²⁸ A recuperation of the play forces us to look at issues in Cherokee communities that are often disturbing and frightening. In order to reclaim Riggs, we must name the Boogers in his play and in our communities that threaten unbalance.

"LEAVE US. IT'S OUR DEAD."

In the last scene of *The Cherokee Night*, which would be the first scene of the play if it followed a linear chronology, the Cherokee outlaw Spench is shot by a white posse and breaks into the home a full-blood named John Gray-Wolf in a desperate attempt to escape. A white man in the posse named Tinsley catches up with Spench and shoots him. The scene encapsulates some of the major concerns in the play.

After Spench dies, the two mothers of his children, Marthy Breeden and Florey Newcomb, come to bear witness to his death. Womack reads the play as Riggs's assertion that the Cherokee blood will gradually vanish from their bloodlines.²⁹ He goes on to say that

such an argument makes no sense. Many of the characters in the play have minimal blood quantum, yet they still suffer the same cultural pain; they have not been "blessed" yet with this magic forgetfulness. So when Marthy says, "In our children, yes. [The continued trouble] in our children's children maybe no" . . . this argument is not consistent. The characters in the play with the lesser blood quantum, the same blood quantum that Bee and Gar's children will have, are still problematized.³⁰

I read the final scene in a very different way. I do not think that Riggs is arguing that any redemption will be found through the absorption of Cherokee blood into non-Cherokee bloodlines. Rather, I believe that Riggs is arguing that redemption will come only if Cherokees grapple with the manifestations of historical trauma, accept and honor their heritage, and

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work for the well-being of Cherokee communities. The first scene of the play, after all, calls on the characters to do just that.

Womack says that Spench is a full-blood, and such a reading may lead one to these conclusions, but as Spench lies bleeding on Gray-Wolf's floor, before being killed by Tinsley, he says, "Lost so much blood. Feel my life runnin' out of me, slow. White blood, Indian—it doesn't matter. Its spills out, runs out of me like water" (208). After Tinsley kills Spench, he calls him "a bad half-breed" (209). Further, in the play's preoccupation with blood quantum, Gar is half Cherokee while Bee is one-quarter. We must believe that Bee's mother Florey is white, while Gar's mother Marthy is also half Cherokee. She is described as "a gaunt dark woman." This leads us to a very different reading of the final scene.

Florey, speaking of the "trouble" Spench has started says, "But it goes on, it goes on!" Marthy replies, "In our children, yes. In our children's children, maybe no." It is this line that leads Womack to his reading. However, knowing that Marthy is Indian and Florey is not means that if Bee and Gar both had children with non-Cherokees, those children would have different blood quantum, and the "troubles" would perhaps transmit to Marthy's grandchildren but not to Florey's, so a blood-quantum solution doesn't seem to be what Marthy is talking about here.

Instead, this line reflects a hope for, in contemporary terms, the healing of historical trauma. Although Florey may think of Cherokee blood as "trouble," I think that for Marthy the "trouble" is not Cherokee blood, but the *forgetting* of Cherokee blood, history, and community. Marthy's desire is that Cherokees will remember and continue their obligations to community and the cosmos. In Marthy's speech, it is not only her descendants that are impacted by unbalance, but also all of humanity. Addressing a dead Spench, Marthy says,

Your disgrace, your wickedness, your pain and trouble live on a while longer. In her child, in my child. In all people born now, about to be born. (*Her face becomes luminous, as her mind gropes toward an impersonal truth.*) Someday, the agony will end. Yours has. Ours will. Maybe not in the night of death, the cold dark night, without stars. Maybe in the sun. It's got to! It's what we live for. (210)

The trouble Marthy speaks of is not just the "trouble" of Cherokee blood. She says it lives "in all people born now, about to be born." Marthy is speaking of a deep imbalance that has disrupted the entire cosmos, and as the

end of the Booger Dance of Riggs's play approaches, the audience is called to restore order to the universe. The final scene calls for future generations to rebalance the world, and for future generations of Cherokees to rebalance themselves and their communities after the severe disruptions caused by colonization and invasion. Marthy's closing speech is a call to the audience to confront the legacy of colonization and to find ways to heal from it, a hope that there is a dawn to the night of colonialism. The play has danced with the Boogers of colonization, and it is now time for them to leave.

When Tinsley and the white posse that accompanies him try to take Spench's body, Gray-Wolf orders them, as symbols of white invasion of Cherokee land, to leave. This line, banishing the ha'ants of colonialism, closes the play: "Leave us. It's *our* dead" (211). The closing stage directions describe Gray-Wolf, Florey, and Marthy tending to Spench's body: "It is like a curious and solemn ritual. A drum has begun to beat, low and throbbing and final." The stage directions continue with a description of Gray-Wolf's mourning for Cherokee nationhood: "*A faraway looks is in Gray-Wolf's eyes, a quality of magnificent dignity and despair as if he mourned for his own life, for the life of his son, for his grandson, for SPENCH, for the WOMEN, for a whole race gone down into darkness*" (211). Yet we know as an audience that the Cherokees have *not* "gone down into darkness." This is, after all, the first chronological scene of the play. The end of the play—which we must remember is the chronological beginning—is a call to intervene in the colonial forces that threaten Cherokee well-being. The Booger Dancers are wandering into the darkness, and dawn is on its way.

RESTAGING *THE CHEROKEE NIGHT*

As someone who has been involved with various forms of theater for most of my life, I can't help but read *The Cherokee Night* with attention to the way the play would be staged, and it seems that truly reclaiming Riggs entails the play's revival. Any rhetorical understanding of the play must include the fact that the play was created to be a live performance. In keeping with the Booger Dance as a rhetorical apparatus and rhetorical lens to understanding the play, *The Cherokee Night* could be particularly powerful for Cherokee audiences if restaged as a Booger Dance.³¹ As Jason Baird Jackson points out, "Just as the Cherokee must try to calm the Boogers in defense of their people, property, and propriety, the Cherokee have had

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to struggle for almost 500 years to defend themselves from a hostile world encroaching on their thresholds."³²

Several moments in the play simply would not work as scripted for contemporary audiences. For instance, the closing of act 1 ends with the very distressing scene, "The Place Where the Nigger Was Found." Darby observes that this is "the most difficult scene in the play and a major reason why it is not currently produced."³³ In brief, the scene shows Art, Gar, and Hutch as young boys going to Claremore Mound in order to find the place a Black man's murdered body was found. It is a terrifying scene on a number of levels, not the least of which is seeing Art's ecstatic fantasy of murdering Black men, which culminates with a horrific chant, "'F I seen a nigger, I'd hack him!" (164). Art's murderous fantasy is a precursor to the murder of his Indian wife as an adult, whom he kills with a hatchet, information the audience knows from earlier in the act. Racialized and gendered violence are intentionally drawn to the surface of the play as invading forces that disrupt the Cherokee community.

Justice writes that this scene is a "brutal clash of desire and racism . . . inscribed on the bloodied bodies of Black men, and it reveals in sharp clarity the deep ambivalence that race in all its forms played in Riggs's own life."³⁴ Although I think Riggs's use of race here is problematic, I also believe that such graphic display of racialized violence is present to point out the ways in which Cherokee communities have internalized white supremacy, and the ways in which that internalized violence destroys Cherokee, Black, and Black Cherokee lives.

The scene's end sees a Black man (read as a homoerotic image by Womack) and an Indian man rising from the ground. Both seem to embody distinct racial stereotypes. A restaging of the play as a Booger Dance could intentionally point toward the ways that anti-Black racism is the specter of colonization in Cherokee communities. Booger masks could replace the stereotypical images of the "Negro" and the "Indian" at the end of this scene. Another possibility is that in this scene, and in various strategic locations throughout the play, the characters could wear Booger masks to signify invading threats to Cherokee communities. A third possibility is that Boogers could be a continual haunting presence in the play, witnessing the action on stage and from the peripheries and the audience. Perhaps a revival of the play could incorporate all these suggestions.

"Boogering" the play in a restaging would not make the play less disturbing or more palatable for contemporary audiences. I think it would make it even more distressing. The presence of masked actors in such a violent and upsetting play would take it to an even deeper place of discomfort. I think, however, that pushing the play toward its implications may be what it needs for it to be of use to twenty-first-century Cherokee audiences. A restaging of the play must ask us to confront the Boogers of contemporary Cherokee life.

An additional suggestion for a revival of this piece is to transform the play, or scenes from the play, into a Forum Theatre piece and to use Forum Theatre as part of the rehearsal and development of a production. Forum, part of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed arsenal, intentionally breaks the fourth wall, asking the audience to interrupt the action of the play in order to return power and agency to characters being marginalized. Boal explains that the intention of Forum is "to transform the spectator into the protagonist of the theatrical action and, by this transformation, to try to change society rather than contenting ourselves with merely interpreting it."³⁵

Although Boal might not be an obvious choice for a Cherokee-centered restaging of *The Cherokee Night*, Forum lends itself to a Boogering of the play, as it would require the audience to interact with, and intervene in, the Boogers' actions. Traditional Cherokee performance is not proscenium-based—it requires community participation—and Forum could transform a proscenium play into one that involved audience interaction. Further, Forum is not only the participation of the audience with the action on stage but also includes a discussion following each action that analyzes the choices in terms of their effectiveness in interrupting oppression. Theatre of the Oppressed is used in countless community and cultural contexts throughout the world, and both David Diamond and I have argued for it as a tool that Native communities can use in order to heal historical trauma and fight against colonization and racism.³⁶

The Cherokee Night's nonlinear and disjointed structure lends itself to Forum, as each scene could be performed as its own Forum piece. Briefly, this would entail playing a scene straight through, then playing the scene again. The second time, however, any member of the audience could shout "stop," replace an actor, and replay the scene while trying out different

tactics of resisting being. The audience providing a space for the play's most woeful moments to compel the audience, then using *The Cherokee Night* would enable the audience to confront the fearsome aspects of

DANCING

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tactics of resistance to characters that are antagonistic to Cherokee well-being. The audience would then participate in discussions about the play, providing a space for local communities to interact with and discuss the play's most worrying aspects. If part of the intention of a Booger Dance is to compel the audience to find ways to subdue and extricate the Boogers, then using *The Cherokee Night* as a Forum during the play's development would enable contemporary Cherokee audiences to interact with the most fearsome aspects of the play in order to change them.

DANCING WITH THE BOOGERS

It is not enough simply to name the troubles with *The Cherokee Night* if we are to find it a redemptive play for a contemporary audience. Riggs calls us to dance with what we find most frightening and dangerous about his play. History's ghosts continue to haunt Cherokee communities, the very ghosts that haunt Riggs's play: obsessions with racial purity and blood quantum, anti-Black racism, right-wing Christianity, queer/transphobia, and sexism. Like the invading Boogers who attempt to attack the heartbeat of Cherokeeity—women—these Boogers threaten the center of our community and will not stay put. They jump off the page and the stage, forcing the audience to protect one another and fight off the invaders.

We must dance with these Boogers in order to survive, resist, and flourish as a community. They have raised their masked faces in our communities, and unless we address their deep entrenchment—unless we dance with them—these invasive forces will continue to disrupt the balance.

Riggs has left us with an intensely complicated play. Boogers creep, gyrate, agitate, and disrupt. Understanding the play as a Booger Dance means that we must confront and interact with the most distressing aspects of the play in order to ensure that the play supports our survivance. It is through this interaction that we are able to confront colonization's "haunts," protect our communities from them, and ensure that they leave us.

NOTES

1. Weaver argues in both his foreword to *The Cherokee Night and Other Plays* and in *That the People Might Live* that *Green Grow the Lilacs*, "is not a play devoid of Indian characters at all but is, rather, in some sense, a play about them." Jace Weaver, *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community* (New York: Oxford University, 1997), 99. Joy Harjo, *A Map to the Next World: Poems and Tales* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), 14. Lynn Riggs, *The Cherokee Night and Other Plays* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2003), xiii.

2. Craig S. Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1999), 288.

3. Ibid.

4. Daniel Heath Justice, *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2006), 98.

5. Weaver, *That the People Might Live*, 101.

6. Phyllis Cole Braunlich, *Haunted by Home: The Life and Letters of Lynn Riggs* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1988), 80.

7. Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University, 1994), 66.

8. Frank G. Speck and Leonard Broom, in collaboration with Will West Long, *Cherokee Dance and Drama* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1993), 36–37. Although Speck and Broom's interpretation of the Booger Dance, an account largely aided by Big Cove (an Eastern Cherokee township) resident Will West Long and his family, continues to be the central published authority on the Booger Dance, other interpretations exist. Raymond D. Fogelson and Amelia R. Bell assert that the "Booger Dance [is] an enactment of basic tensions between culturally defined old men and young men." Fogelson and Bell, "The Cherokee Booger Mask Tradition," in *The Power of Symbols: Masks and Masquerade in the Americas*, ed. N. Ross Crumrine and Marjorie Halpin (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1983), 49.

9. See Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*; Malea D. Powell, "Rhetorics of Survivance: How American Indians Use Writing," *College Composition and Communication* 53, no. 3 (2002): 396–434.

10. Riggs, *The Cherokee Night and Other Plays*, 112. Subsequent page references will be inserted parenthetically in the text.

11. Weaver, *That the People Might Live*, 101.

12. Riggs, *The Cherokee Night*, 112.

13. Jaye Darby, "Broadway (Un)bound: Lynn Riggs's *The Cherokee Night*," *Journal of Theatre and Performance* 4, no. 1 (2007): 13.

14. Braunlich, *Haunted by Home*, 80.

15. Justice, *Our Fire Survives the Storm*, 101.

16. Weaver, *That the People Might Live*, 101; Darby, "Broadway (Un)bound," 9.

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18. William D
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19. Ibid., 74–7

20. Vizenor, *M*

21. Ibid., 89.

22. Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1999)

23. Womack, *Red on Red*

24. Powers, *A*

25. Speck and

26. Jason Baird
Journal 5, no. 2

27. Womack, *Red on Red*

28. See Circe

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29. Womack, *Red on Red*

30. Ibid., 293.

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32. Jackson, "The

33. Darby, "Broad

34. Justice, *Our*

35. Augusto B
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36. See David
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2007), 131–64; Q

17. Themes of vanishing in Riggs's work is not limited to *The Cherokee Night*, and although we may be inclined to interpret such romanticism, nostalgia, and despair in relation to his Cherokee identity, this was not confined to notions of Indianness. In reference to *Green Grow the Lilacs*, for instance, Riggs wrote, "It's a play about a vanished era in the Middle West. . . . And in spite of ignorances and darknesses, there was a cool wisdom our radios and autos have banished forever. Even the speech of the people . . . was rich, flavoured, lustrous, and wise. And the songs are now forgotten, except for a few which have gotten into anthologies." Braunlich, *Haunted by Home*, 77.

18. William Douglas Powers, *An Eliadean Interpretation of Frank G. Speck's Account of the Cherokee Booger Dance* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2003), 39.

19. *Ibid.*, 74–75.

20. Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, 66.

21. *Ibid.*, 89.

22. Gerald Vizenor, *The Trickster of Liberty: Tribal Heirs to a Wild Bondage* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988), x.

23. Womack, *Red on Red*, 301.

24. Powers, *An Eliadean Interpretation*, 79.

25. Speck and Broom, *Cherokee Dance and Drama*, 29.

26. Jason Baird Jackson, "Making Faces: Eastern Cherokee Booger Masks," *Gilcrease Journal* 5, no. 2 (1997): 58.

27. Womack, *Red on Red*, 289.

28. See Circe Sturm, *Blood Politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

29. Womack, *Red on Red*, 292–93.

30. *Ibid.*, 293.

31. The use of the Booger Dance for Cherokee-centered proscenium productions is not unprecedented. Hanay Geiogamah's 2006 revision of the outdoor drama *Unto These Hills* (*Unto These Hills . . . A Retelling*), for example, included the Booger Dance as part of the performance. If directors should incorporate the Booger Dance in future performances of *The Cherokee Night*, it is important to consult with Cherokee traditionalists to ensure that traditional protocols are followed. Vicki Rozema, *Footsteps of the Cherokees: A Guide to the Eastern Homelands of the Cherokee Nation*, 2nd ed. (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 2007), 190.

32. Jackson, "Making Faces," 50–61.

33. Darby, "Broadway (Un)bound," 16.

34. Justice, *Our Fire Survives the Storm*, 140–41.

35. Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 253.

36. See David Diamond, "Pivotal First Nations Collaborations," in *Theatre for Living: The Art and Science of Community-Based Dialogue* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2007), 131–64; Qwo-Li Driskill, "Mothersong: Incorporating Theatre of the Oppressed

into Language Restoration Movements," in *Nurturing Native Languages*, ed. Jon Reyhner, Octaviana V. Trujillo, Roberto Luis Carrasco, and Louise Lockard (Flagstaff: Northern Arizona University, 2003), 155–63; Qwo-Li Driskill, "Theatre as Suture: Grassroots Performance Decolonization and Healing," in *Aboriginal Oral Traditions: Theory, Practice, Ethics*, ed. Renate Eigenbrod and Renée Hulan (Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 155–68.

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