Gerald Vizenor’s Transcultural Haiku Dreamscape

Thesis

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December 2018
Abstract

Gerald Vizenor, a Native American writer of poetry, fiction, and criticism, began his writing career in the mid-twentieth century by publishing his own collections of English-language haiku. The Japanese qualities of Vizenor’s haiku have been understudied in favor of other qualities, such as a trickster presence or suggestions of Native survivance, that affirm his writings as a contribution to Native American literature. The responsiveness of Vizenor’s haiku to Native American traditions has been previously examined by literary scholars. Although many of Vizenor’s haiku evoke and respond to the concerns of indigenous Americans, a closer examination of his literary relationship with Japan suggests that his indigenous focus expands beyond the borders of Native America. While many of Vizenor’s haiku speak to Native American tribal values, a strictly Native American reading stifles other cultural qualities present in his haiku dreamscape. My analysis of Vizenor’s haiku in Japanese literary and cultural contexts provides insights into how his poetry specifically relates to a Japanese literary tradition as well as a Native American tradition, opening doors of further inquiry and analysis toward Vizenor’s writings outside of Native American studies. I argue for a transcultural perspective toward Vizenor’s haiku that foregrounds it as a hybrid genre of Native American and Asian subject matter, aesthetics, and spirituality. I find, by closely examining Vizenor’s haiku over the last several decades, that Vizenor’s efforts to build cultural bridges and work in genres not common to other Native American writers must be considered from a more transcultural perspective in order to more fully recognize his contribution to an international literature.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Gerald Vizenor, a Native American writer of poetry, fiction, and criticism, began his writing career in the mid-twentieth century by publishing his own collections of English-language haiku. My thesis examines Vizenor’s haiku within a Japanese literary tradition, while also considering his use of a Native oral tradition. While Vizenor is an English-language poet, he uses Japanese subject matter and aesthetics in composing his haiku dreamscape, which he closely associates with a tribal consciousness. By dreamscape, I refer to Vizenor’s term for the reader’s mental representation of a haiku image or scene. The Japanese-oriented components of Vizenor’s haiku have been understudied in favor of qualities that affirm his writings as a contribution to Native American literature. Although many of Vizenor’s haiku evoke American indigenous ideas, a closer examination of his literary relationship with Japan suggests that his tribal focus expands beyond the borders of Native America previously examined by literary scholars.

My close investigation into Vizenor’s use of Japanese subject material yields an increased understanding of his poetic dreamscape and, by extension, his other writings that share common visions with his haiku. In this thesis, I consider subjects reappearing throughout Vizenor’s haiku with regard to traditional Japanese poetic topics associated with nature and the seasons. Additionally, I read Vizenor’s haiku comparatively with that of Matsuo Basho, Yosa Buson, and Kobayashi Issa, classical Japanese poets whose haiku Vizenor has included in his introductions to his own work, as well as referenced in his haiku. While previous scholars have analyzed Vizenor’s haiku through the lens of Native American literature, primarily concluding that his haiku reflect Native American issues,
concerns, and perspectives in a manner similar to his other writings, I argue for a transcultural perspective toward his haiku that foregrounds it as a hybrid genre of Native American and Asian subject matter, aesthetics, and spirituality.

Although Vizenor has made greater use of Japanese literary traditions in his own work than has been previously acknowledged by scholars, he does not relinquish a tribal perspective in his haiku. Vizenor’s responses to traditional Japanese subject matter and aesthetics emphasize a sense of interconnectivity between different objects in his haiku dreamscape that may be related to both Japanese and Native American beliefs. Additionally, Vizenor approaches Japanese culture with a spirit of crossreading, or an openness to other cultures that celebrates their compatibilities with and distinctions from his own. His writings reveal a rationale for his curiosity toward Japan which emphasizes his interaction with, rather than appropriation of, Japanese culture in a manner similar to theories of crossreading. My approach to Vizenor’s haiku from Japanese cultural contexts clarifies his use of multiple cultures, and perceived commonalities between different indigenous cultures, in a poetry that resists authoritarian or overtly nationalist perspectives. While Vizenor’s haiku uphold Native American tribal values, a strictly Native American reading of Vizenor’s poetry stifles other indigenous qualities present in his haiku dreamscape. My analysis of Vizenor’s poetry in Japanese literary and cultural contexts provides insights into how Vizenor’s haiku specifically relate to a Japanese literary tradition as well as a Native American tradition, opening doors of further inquiry and analysis toward Vizenor’s writings outside of Native American studies.

The following three chapters examine Vizenor’s haiku with regard to their responsiveness to Vizenor’s biographical and other writings about Japan, a Japanese
literary tradition, and both Japanese and Native American animistic beliefs. My second
chapter considers the extensive evidence that Vizenor understands haiku as rooted in
Japanese culture, clarifying the need for previous readings of his haiku through a Native
American lens to be complemented by my readings from a Japanese literary and
transcultural perspective. My third chapter discusses Vizenor’s haiku in relation to
Japanese classical literary topics and aesthetics and the haiku of three Japanese poets
Vizenor has associated with his own poetic vision. My fourth chapter discusses Native
American and Asian animistic beliefs alluded to or suggested by Vizenor’s haiku
dreamscape and in other writings about his haiku.
Chapter 2: Vizenor and Japanese Culture

Although Gerald Vizenor’s considerable body of writings embrace a variety of formal and topical innovations, he began his literary career in haiku, a traditional genre of Japanese poetry typically adhering to strict guidelines in style and subject matter. This seeming gap between Vizenor’s haiku and his more postmodern, Native American-oriented writings is bridged by Vizenor’s biographical and fictional writing about Japan. A survey of Vizenor’s novels, essays, and interviews with an eye to his treatment of Japan brings greater insight to his deep appreciation for and identification with aspects of Japanese culture that lend insight to his initial move toward, and enduring use of, haiku to express his own artistic visions.

Vizenor discovered Japanese haiku early on in his writing career. At age 18, Vizenor landed in Japan as a private in the United States Army, mere months after enlisting in October 1952 (Lee 10). Vizenor had expected to deploy in Korea but instead served in the end of the United States’ military occupation of Japan, until the Korean War was over (Velie 31). Referring to a Japanese island treasured by haiku master Matsuo Basho, Vizenor writes that “Matsushima, by chance of the military, was my first connection with haiku images and scenes” (“Haiku Scenes” x). Vizenor traveled to Hokkaido, a Japanese island inhabited by the Ainu, a non-Japanese indigenous population, and later to a military post near Sendai, locations that awakened him to a new sense of the seasons and “the tease of native reason and memories” (Favor xi). Vizenor’s transformative experiences in Matsushima, which he describes as “forever in my memories and in the book,” connected him with the haibun—prose haiku—visions of Matsuo Basho (Favor x). Vizenor notes that he began writing haiku at the same age as
Basho, after landing on the pine islands which had provided him with a direct sense of Basho’s haiku (Blaeser 6). Vizenor would continue to pursue this interest in and identification with Basho and other Japanese haiku masters and expand his knowledge of Japanese language, literature, and culture even after returning to the United States.

After Vizenor completed his military service in Japan, he invested in a more extensive education in Japanese culture through undergraduate and graduate courses in Japanese arts and literature, but it was not long before he began to use a Japanese style of poetry to express his own outlook. Vizenor studied at New York University and the University of Minnesota, with a child development major and Asian studies minor (“Postindian” 34). In his biographical writings, Vizenor’s activities in a tiny apartment with a young family come across as constrained but lively, much like what he admired in haiku. Vizenor recalls that he and his wife “bathed and washed dishes in the bathtub,” while Vizenor “copied hiragana and wrote haiku on the low slope of the ceiling. Fifty dollars a month included the back porch, a pleasant perch in the maple trees” (“Haiku” 14). In his senior year, under the tutelage of Edward Copeland, Vizenor began to write haiku seriously, an inspiration that may have stemmed from a boredom or dissatisfaction with classical Japanese sentiments. Vizenor recalls a dislike for Takuboku Ishikawa, a haiku poet who wrote from his own tragic life experiences, dying at age twenty-seven (“Haiku” 15). Vizenor “complained that the poet suffered so much to write, ‘and such a small book for so much hardship and death,’” an observation his professor rejoined with a reading of several of Takuboku’s poignant haiku, including,

’O, the sadness of lifeless sand!

Trickling,
It falls through my fingers

When I take it in my hands.’ (“Haiku” 15-16)

Vizenor apparently lapsed into boredom or daydreaming during the lesson, earning a note from Copeland after the lecture reading, “You have been looking out the window during my lectures. What do you see?” (“Haiku” 16). Vizenor responded with a written haiku poem, marking the beginning of a haiku correspondence with his professor, whose encouragement sustained Vizenor’s confidence (“Postindian” 16-17). While Vizenor treasured the condensed, imagistic qualities of haiku, he did not share the classical Japanese taste for poems describing sadness or loneliness. Provoked by Takuboku’s visions of a tragic nature, Vizenor took up the pen to inscribe the vital energies of life.

Vizenor’s first self-published haiku books lean toward a Japanese aesthetic, while later books more clearly reveal both Anishinaabe and Japanese influences, suggesting that his poetry was initially meant to be considered in terms of its Japanese inspirations rather than as a hybrid of multiple cultural traditions. For Vizenor’s first major collection, *Raising the Moon Vines*, Copeland provided four translations of poems by the three haiku masters of pre-modern Japanese literature, Matsuo Basho, Kobayashi Issa and Yosa Buson, to preface each section organized by season. Judith Horns Vizenor created the Japanese-influenced ink paintings in *Two Wings the Butterfly* (“Postindian” 17). The cover of *Empty Swings* includes a photograph by Vizenor himself that suggests Japanese aesthetics with its image of a blooming branch hovering over water. Vizenor’s introduction in his previous haiku book, *Cranes Arise*, makes only a brief mention to similarities between the Anishinaabe and Japanese art forms, without defining or explaining the dream song; all but a few paragraphs of the eight-page introduction are
devoted to Japanese literature and philosophy. In 1999, the same year *Cranes Arise* was published, Vizenor shared in an interview with A. Robert Lee that he developed his “postindian sense of literature” through haiku, also finding it “an obscure introduction to the imagistic pleasures of *anishinaabe* dream songs” (“Postindian” 33). Vizenor’s use of Japanese philosophy or literary tradition contributes to his vision of postindian identity, or the identity of American indigenous people existing after “the colonial invention of the *indian*,” in his haiku by making connections between indigenous cultures on different continents (“Postindian” 84). Vizenor’s more recent haiku book, *Favor of Crows* (2014), features a cover with artwork by Robert Houle, a Saulteaux First Nations artist, and describes Vizenor as “a preeminent native american poet and novelist.” *Favor of Crows*’ design more clearly expresses Vizenor’s indigenous heritage and influences than his previous haiku books, which lean toward a Japanese style. Likewise, Vizenor’s introduction to *Favor of Crows* shares more information about the Anishinaabe dream song and the connections he makes between dream songs and haiku. Over time, Vizenor’s haiku books have evolved aesthetically away from a Japanese style and, by incorporating design and content expressing indigenous ideas, have become more explicitly transcultural by nature.

In addition to communicating an in-depth consciousness of Japanese art and culture through the design and organization of his haiku books, Vizenor has also participated in collaborative haiku projects with similarities to both Japanese traditions and American predecessors. Haiku descends from *hokku*, the first of a series of collaboratively composed linked verses, called *renga* (Carter 1). While renga was traditionally composed by Japanese poets in a spirit of amusement and camaraderie,
American Beat poets Jack Kerouac, Lew Welch, and Albert Saijo composed a series of haiku poems in their project *Trip Trap* (1973) that were more overtly competitive than collaborative by nature, with each poet seeking to improve, or outdo, another poet’s verses (Iadonisi 80). Vizenor’s collaboration with Jerome Downes in *Slight Abrasions* (1966) finds a middle ground between collaboration and competition, the authors teasing one another and other people through poems which connect to, rather than replace, prior poems (Iadonisi 82). While Vizenor has responded to Japanese haiku in a manner similar to other American poets, he reaches more boldly toward the Japanese tradition, demonstrating a poetry similar to classical renga, less represented than haiku in English-language writings.

In addition to my analysis of Vizenor’s autobiographical writings, his novel *Hiroshima Bugi* (2003) furnishes further evidence of Vizenor’s literary interest in Japanese culture and suggests how those interests also work in his haiku. Vizenor’s transcultural poetics—the formal fusion of Anishinaabe dream song and Japanese haiku—connotes a meaningful intimacy between the Anishinaabe and the Japanese. *Hiroshima Bugi* also teases the reader with numerous connections between Japanese and Anishinaabe culture in ways that refer back to Vizenor’s own experience of Japan through his service in the United States army. Through Ronin, the novel’s mixed-blood Japanese and Anishinaabe trickster protagonist, Vizenor speculates on the possibilities of a transcultural identity. Both Ronin and the “Manidoo Envoy,” an otherwise unnamed editor who adds extensive notes to the end of each chapter of Ronin’s prose, make connections between indigenous North American and Japanese cultures that glance backward to previous centuries, exploring similarities and sympathies between the two
cultures. *Hiroshima Bugi*, while a stand-alone fictional work, also serves to clarify and extend the meanings of some images and scenarios in his haiku.

One historical connection *Hiroshima Bugi* makes between Native Americans and the Japanese is through infrequent references of Ranald MacDonald, the first documented English-language teacher and Native emigrant in Japan. While not explicitly mentioned in Vizenor’s haiku, MacDonald’s presence in *Hiroshima Bugi* acknowledges a centuries-old history between North American tribal people and the Japanese. MacDonald was a mixedblood of Chinook and Scottish descent who arrived in Japan in 1848, posing as a shipwrecked sailor to enter the closed country (Wallace). Through the character of the Envoy in *Hiroshima Bugi*, Vizenor presents MacDonald as interested in Japan particularly because he believed that it was the place from which North American Indians had come (140). The Envoy’s description of MacDonald’s arrival in Japan “by chance of nature, adventure, and plucky determination” has parallels to Vizenor’s own encounter with Japan as a private in the U.S. army (*Hiroshima* 140). Like MacDonald, Vizenor was motivated to leave home by an unhappy childhood fraught with problems between Native Americans and whites. He lied about his age in order to enter the Minnesota National Guard at 15 and at 18 enlisted in the army and landed in Japan (Lee 10). In *Hiroshima Bugi*, Ronin traces the path of MacDonald among the Ainu, an indigenous group in northern Japan, experiencing a sense of belonging with the tribe. Multiple characters in *Hiroshima Bugi*—MacDonald, Ronin’s father Nightbreaker, and Ronin himself—convey Vizenor’s cultural and literary affinities with Japan by expressing tribal connections between North American Natives and the Ainu.

*Hiroshima Bugi* also demonstrates how the polytheistic, shamanistic qualities of
Japanese indigenous religions create a strong sympathy, even attraction, between Native American and Japanese people. The union of Ronin’s Anishinaabe father and Japanese mother, Ronin’s own love affair with Miko, a Japanese hostess he likens to a Shinto shrine maiden, and his sense of belonging among the Ainu when encountering them for the first time imply personal compatibilities between the unrelated cultures. Perceiving the hypocrisy of Japanese nationalist sentiment after the bombing of Hiroshima, particularly with regard to the use of Shinto shrines to affirm imperialist ideology, Ronin expresses the idea of kami, or indigenous Japanese spirits, through trickster and shamanistic practices. Vizenor includes Western nationalist practices in his critique by describing the death of Ronin’s father, along with other Native American servicemen, due to nuclear exposure at atomic bomb test sites in the United States. Jeanne Sokolowski argues that in unifying Japanese and Native American identities in the novel, Vizenor requires readers “to think of power, victimization, history, and agency outside of the powerfully naturalized connections between nation and citizen” (719). In so doing, Vizenor explores how cultures outside of the United States can contribute creative energy to Native survival (Sokolowski 729). This move extends to Vizenor’s haiku in which, as Kimberley Blaeser notes, Vizenor celebrates both Japanese and tribal connections (“Interior” 6). Within each haiku book, Vizenor commingles Native American and Japanese subjects throughout, as though tracing a dialogue between the two cultures which expresses not only a Japanese contribution to Native survivance, Vizenor’s term for the power in indigenous storytelling, but also meaningful visions of Japan itself (“Surviving” 71).
Other aspects of *Hiroshima Bugi* express criticism toward imperialist Japanese politics through the subversive actions of the protagonist, Ronin, who evokes Vizenor’s own outlook toward Japan, as well as Vizenor’s identification with the trickster hero. Vizenor was known to pull provocative stunts, subverting and teasing his superiors, during his military service (Velie 31). As a United States serviceman, Vizenor participated in the American occupation of Japan, which not only disarmed the Japanese and revamped the Japanese government, but also supplanted Japanese traditions with American culture. The irony of Vizenor’s military service could not have been lost on him, given the efforts of the United States government in the previous centuries to eradicate American indigenous life, language, and culture. However, Vizenor’s position in Japan was one of critique against the way the Japanese fashioned themselves as victims after World War II and denied responsibility for their actions (Velie 36). Vizenor blamed the suffering of the people of Hiroshima on Emperor Hirohito and Japanese nationalists who fought for imperialist reasons (Velie 30). Vizenor’s treatment of Japanese subjects in *Hiroshima Bugi* lends greater insight to similar subjects in his haiku poems, particularly those which evoke Japanese animistic beliefs and use trickster discourse to subvert imperialist power structures.

Another of Vizenor’s novels, *Griever: An American Monkey King in China* (1987), also defies national boundaries by making connections between Naanabozho, the Anishinaabe trickster, and a Chinese icon, the Monkey King. As with *Hiroshima Bugi*, some aspects of *Griever* overlap with Vizenor’s own experiences living in a foreign country. With his wife, Laura Hall, Vizenor taught English to Chinese students in the People’s Republic of China (“Postindian” 53). Vizenor was inspired by his observations
of the Chinese to articulate connections between indigenous Americans and the Chinese. In an interview with Lee, Vizenor mentions a “stone man” he saw whose “meditation and rituals over round river stones were shamanic… breaking clean wide slivers from the memory of the stone” (“Postindian 53-54). Vizenor’s observations of the shaman’s interaction with the stone resemble ideas from Anishinaabe animistic beliefs that locate personhood through the life- and community-affirming interactivity of diverse objects. In the novel Griever, a trickster protagonist acts in a similar manner to Ronin, of Hiroshima Bugi, defying “conservative, oppressive social and political structures in an Asian location, while highlighting links between that culture and Native American (specifically Anishinaabeg) traditions and myths” (Sokolowski 718). Both works support Vizenor’s view of “identity in a postnational, racially hybridized and hybridizing world” (Sokolowski 718). Vizenor’s haiku poems also support this idea by responding to both Asian classical literary traditions and indigenous qualities which have ideological sympathies with the Anishinaabe. Rather than reinforcing national boundaries through a critique of particular nations, Vizenor’s poems instead focus attention on life-affirming scenarios that subvert centralized power structures and offer a counter to categorical or victim-based thinking.

My review of previous scholarship concerning Vizenor’s haiku points to a need for greater in-depth analysis of his use of Japanese subject matter. Vizenor is well-known for theorizing Native “survivance,” or the survival power of storytelling (“Surviving” 71). Literary scholars have analyzed Vizenor’s haiku poems as his first significant published writings and noted them as thematic and ideological foundations for much of his later work. Many examinations of Vizenor’s haiku, however, have concentrated on
his use of the Native oral tradition without commenting on the extent of Japanese and other Asian cultural traditions to which Vizenor’s poems respond. Blaeser discusses how Vizenor’s haiku contain similar presences to those in his prose, containing “in perhaps the purest form kernels of the wide range of voices and subjects which populate the Vizenor canon” (“‘Interior’” 4). Deborah Madsen describes how Vizenor’s haiku poems allow him to circumvent the limitations of the English language to create an effect closer to tribal language, which connects vision, word, and place (“Gerald” 64). Madsen acknowledges Vizenor’s use of the haiku form to communicate tribal myth, interpreting his poetry as an effort to transcend differences between cultures and historical time periods (69). A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff notes that most of Vizenor’s published poetry is haiku (13). Like Blaeser, Ruoff affirms the relationship between the images found in Vizenor’s haiku and those in his other works (14).

Other scholars have noted that Vizenor draws inspiration from the Ojibway dream song and Japanese poetics to create effects of presence and immediacy in his haiku. Vizenor draws his impressions of dream songs, imagistic songs composed by poet-singers expressing their spiritual connections to natural scenes, from the published translations of anthropologist Frances Densmore. Vizenor notes that Densmore’s translated dream songs came to him already “with a haiku nature” (“Envoy” 26). Haiku, like dream songs, are highly imagistic forms that evoke the reader’s intuitive thinking. Peter Easy notes that the Anishinaabe dream songs translated by Densmore have been described as similar to Japanese poetry (91). Easy explains the efforts on the part of Densmore and other translators to preserve performative elements of Native poetry in addition to the words of the poem. Densmore’s minimalistic translations eliminate
repetition or efforts to reconstruct performance, resulting in a possibly unintentional 
haiku effect. Blaeser notes that Densmore’s “haiku-like” translations of the dream songs 
had aroused notice from scholars prior to the bulk of Vizenor’s haiku poetry and his other 
 writings (“Multiple” 109-110). Thomas Lynch finds that Vizenor’s haiku poems reflect a 
sense of impermanence that responds to a core value of Zen Buddhism as well as the 
changing nature of the Anishinaabe oral tradition. Lynch relates the impermanence of 
Vizenor’s haiku subject matter as well as his tendency to revise the poems for later 
collections as “the comic-compassionate trickster’s habitation,” subversive to a “tragic-
colonial enterprise” (222).

Scholars have also evaluated the use of presences, language, and time in 
Vizenor’s haiku poetry. David L. Moore addresses absence and presence in Vizenor’s 
poetics as “shadows” which affirm Native survivance (107). Moore considers how 
Vizenor’s use of the haiku form’s imagistic nature fills a space in literature created by the 
so-called vanishing Indian trope (107). Linda Lizut Helstern makes connections between 
the moments of evanescence in Vizenor’s haiku poems and the presences in his other 
poems concerning the survivance stories of Native people. Blaeser conceives of 
Vizenor’s poetry as a foundation for many subjects and ideas that have found their way 
into later works, noting the trace of the “four dancers” Vizenor describes in his 
introduction to Matsushima throughout his oeuvre (“Interior’’” 4). Vizenor draws openly 
from the Anishinaabe dream song tradition, while also conceiving of himself as the poet-
heir of Basho (“‘Interior’’” 6). Blaeser interprets some of Vizenor’s haiku poems with 
regard to Zen philosophy and the writings of Basho, demonstrating the Japanese 
influences at work in Vizenor’s poems and his responsiveness to a Japanese literary
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tradition ("Interior" 6). While many scholars have written on how these various aspects of Vizenor’s haiku contribute to his concepts of Native survivance, Vizenor’s literary dialogue with Japan through haiku and identification with Japanese haiku masters have remained largely uninvestigated by scholars, with the exception of Blaeser’s discussion.

In moving toward a Japanese-oriented perspective on Vizenor’s haiku poems, I contrast his use of the haiku form with that of other American poets. Richard A. Iadonisi examines minority American, white American, and traditional Japanese haiku, describing the work of Vizenor and other minority poets as “a ‘hybrid’ form that embrace[s] the Asian other and distance[s] the poets from the dominant culture” (65). Iadonisi also perceives Vizenor’s defamiliarization of American haiku as “a way of voicing anti-colonial concerns” (65). While many scholars have read Vizenor’s haiku poems in terms of their resistance to Western colonialism, my evaluation of Vizenor’s use of Japanese literature, philosophy, and culture considers his haiku in terms of its contribution to a transcultural literature. Vizenor’s prose works Griever and Hiroshima Bugi criticize Chinese and Japanese nationalism; however, his writings also draw on aspects from Chinese and Japanese cultures that tap into fundamental truths different cultures acknowledge, such as the precariousness and serendipity of life, as these qualities are revealed in the figure or actions of a trickster. The Asian-oriented qualities of Vizenor’s haiku indicate them as less a contribution to an American haiku tradition than a response to commonalities he perceives between Native American and Asian cultures.

In my analysis of Vizenor’s haiku poems, I use Native American critical lenses because, like the aforementioned critics, I perceive Vizenor’s poetry as in dialog with American indigenous traditions, such as the Anishinaabe dream song, in order to question
and counter the sovereignty of Western epistemology in English-language literatures.
While I wish to clarify Vizenor’s poetic identity in relation to Basho and other poets with whom he has identified, as well as how his haiku poems consciously invoke Zen philosophy or particular Japanese aesthetics, Native American critical theory remains the most productive framework with which to consider Vizenor’s poetic intentions. Because of certain differences between a classical Japanese treatment of natural phenomena and Vizenor’s, I contextualize Vizenor’s use of Japanese subjects with his prose works about Japan, including his novel *Hiroshima Bugi*, in which similar subjects appear. I find that while Vizenor’s haiku poems delve into ideas found in Japanese and other Asian cultures, as well as that of the Anishinaabe, Vizenor approaches Japanese culture with a deep awareness of indigenous cultures that render a Native American theoretical framework the most appropriate and productive when evaluating his poetry.

I analyze Vizenor’s writings through two Native American critical theories: crossreading and interconnectedness. Crossreading queries one’s attraction or interest in another culture as a starting point for dialogue between cultures. Crossreading is a kind of dialogue both within the self and among people that serves to deepen one’s awareness of the boundaries demarcating different cultural worlds (Pulitano 105). Since developing written forms of an indigenous oral tradition may serve as a kind of cultural appropriation, Elvira Pulitano’s perspective on crossreading as “a significant step toward an affirmation of a syncretic, adaptive, and dynamic identity, a reflection of the dynamic nature of the oral tradition itself” is valuable to my analysis (114). Because crossreading focuses on subjective impressions and not objective, categorical definitions between cultures, this theoretical lens may be applied to Vizenor’s approach of Japanese culture
from a Native American perspective. Vizenor’s use of the Japanese haiku form to convey indigenous subjects and ideas reflects a certain responsiveness to and curiosity about Japanese culture. Like crossreading, interconnectedness serves as an appropriate lens to approach Vizenor’s poems in privileging a non-hierarchical worldview over a Western, linear perspective. Interconnectedness portrays instead an interlocking web “leading toward a holistic conception of the universe” (Pulitano 105). Vizenor’s haiku poems represent a kind of interconnectedness in their representation of cyclical time or timelessness rather than linear history, and in their emphasis of the connections between different beings or objects in a given space. These two theoretical frameworks serve to clarify Vizenor’s approach to a different cultural genre and to provide insight into the question of cultural appropriation that surfaces when his viewpoint, at times, appears to flatten differences between Anishinaabe and indigenous Japanese cultures.

While other scholarship has discussed how Vizenor’s haiku poems combine Native and Japanese traditions to portray his concepts of survivance and dreamscape, or tribal consciousness, my thesis more specifically traces the Japanese subjects and influences that suggest the productiveness of a transcultural perspective toward his poetry. I examine Vizenor’s responsiveness to Japanese religion, politics, and literature, his incorporation of the perspectives of Japanese haiku poets, and the connections he makes between indigenous American and Japanese cultures. Vizenor often writes on traditionally Japanese subjects, such as plum blossoms or the moon, but extends their traditional Japanese implications to describe his vision of Native survivance. While Vizenor’s haiku poems often portray subjects also found in Japanese haiku, his poems tease the traditional Japanese connotations and make associations between these classical
images and indigenous worldviews. My analysis of Vizenor’s haiku suggests that Vizenor’s ideas of survivance and dreamscape, while indigenous-based, are applicable to multiple cultures. In more deeply considering the Japanese or other Asian aspects of Vizenor’s haiku, my analysis clarifies Vizenor’s haiku dreamscape as a worldview composed of multiple similar but distinct cultural strategies.

One may question Vizenor’s use of the haiku, a Japanese form of poetry, as a vehicle to express his own viewpoint, which is in line with an Anishinaabe worldview. To be more specific, why must Vizenor use a Japanese form to express Native American views, rather than writing more exclusively from Native American traditions? Vizenor has taken a hard stance against not only non-native appropriation of indigenous culture but also Native pantribal movements that invent new names for Indians and that, in his words, lack “‘tribal culture, language, religion, or landscape’” (Postindian 6). One might wonder whether Vizenor’s efforts to elucidate similarities between Anishinaabe and Japanese cultures risk perpetuating confusion or misunderstanding about either culture or even represent a kind of cultural appropriation on Vizenor’s part of Japanese traditions, as a writer of Anishinaabe and European descent.

While cultural appropriation is generally understood as a dominant culture using aspects from a minority culture, Vizenor takes a certain artistic license in using the Japanese haiku form and speaking extensively about Japanese poets in English-language publications in the United States, where the Japanese themselves are a minority population. While Vizenor’s use of Japanese culture may be viewed as problematic from this perspective, Vizenor’s introductions to his haiku books and other essays about his haiku-writing make clear his debt to, appreciation of, and academic study of Japanese
language, literature, and culture. Vizenor takes a certain poetic license in lifting images and modes of expression from Japanese culture and re-expressing them in the English language, commingling with Anishinaabe worldviews in a manner that he indicates is highly compatible. I find that Vizenor’s prose writings on Japan, especially his introductions to his haiku books, clarify his intentions toward his use of Japanese culture and make it easy for the reader to distinguish between his own use of the haiku form and how it has been used by the Japanese. Even so, I concede there is room to question the presence of these English-language texts which speak for and about the Japanese even as they make use of Japanese forms to express ideas from a Native American culture.

In this chapter, I have considered Vizenor’s personal history and fictional texts pertaining to Japan as avenues for further insight into his haiku poems. Scholars have approached Vizenor’s relationship with Japan by considering his writings from a Native American literary perspective, noting his critique of Japanese imperialism as analogous to that of the United States. However, this criticism has not accounted for Vizenor’s persistent identification with and responsiveness to Japanese poets and aspects of Japanese indigenous culture in his own writings. Thus, prior readings of Vizenor’s haiku poems are complemented by my analysis, which focuses on Vizenor’s use of Japanese culture. In the next chapter, I will review the history of the Japanese haiku form as it concerns the poets referenced in Vizenor’s writings and consider more closely his responsiveness to these classical haiku poets in order to further clarify the transcultural qualities of his haiku dreamscape.
Chapter 3: Vizenor’s Haiku Responses to Japanese Haiku

My analysis of the way particular Japanese ideals play out in Vizenor’s haiku poems clarifies the role of Japanese aesthetics in Vizenor’s haiku dreamscape. Japanese ideas such as a striving for the absolute in art, and sabi, or eternal loneliness, commingle in Vizenor’s poems with other, indigenous ideas. Vizenor deliberately orient himself within a lineage of Japanese haiku masters in the introduction of his haiku books and in interviews. Thus, in order to place the Japanese haiku tradition in context with Vizenor’s poetry, I analyze his response to poets he has described as a meaningful part of his relationship with the Japanese haiku form: Matsuo Basho (1644-1694), Yosa Buson (1716-1784) and Kobayashi Issa (1763-1828). First, I review the history of the haiku tradition in Japanese literature, analyzing Vizenor in context to this tradition. Then, I place the haiku of Basho, Buson, and Issa in relationship with Vizenor’s, with particular attention to the haiku Vizenor has quoted or referenced in his own writings. Lastly, I discuss the transcultural fusion between the Japanese ideas Vizenor brings to his poems, particularly striving for the absolute and sabi, and indigenous qualities present, such as a trickster-like effect that evokes the Anishinaabe trickster character Nanabozho, and a worldview of interconnectedness.

The concept of striving for the absolute is fundamental to Japanese haiku poetry. Japanese haiku strive toward an absolute minimum of form along with a maximal imagistic potency (the image described and the emotion it creates must be as closely linked as possible). Traditional Japanese art always reaches for the absolute which, as Robert Hall explains, holds “no question of degree; it is either attained or lost” (x). Japanese art is energized by this infinite striving toward a high goal (Hall x). Isao
Tanatini clarifies this drive in Japanese art by relating the country’s arts to its unique geography as an island archipelago (54). Tanatini compares the confines of the archipelago to a stage which limits expression “within a two-dimensional boundary,” compelling the Japanese people to express “as much infinite space as possible within a given finite space, and one must always endeavor to express the specific” (Tanatini 55-56). Though Tanatini refers to Japanese arts in general, his observation is pertinent to the haiku form, which expresses infinite spiritual ideals through a precise image in a highly compact form. Thus, in the haiku there may be multiple forms of absolute striving: striving toward maximal impact of a particular aesthetic, such as sabi; striving toward a minimal description of an image; and striving toward a perfect union between the image and the emotion it creates for the reader.

Japanese haiku evolved from a form whose aim was not to produce highly condensed, poignant images, but to unite poets at social gatherings through fun and camaraderie. Modern Japanese haiku descends from hokku, the first poem or “cap” of a series of linked verses, called renga, a form used since the twelfth century (Carter 1). In its early days, renga-writing was initially a kind of game for Japanese poets and gradually taken more seriously as a form of literature (Ueda 4). A kind of renga called haikai, comic in nature, became popular in the sixteenth century, sometimes parodying earlier courtly work (Ueda 5). During the Edo period, the three-line poem was as often as not the first three lines of a linked verse, referred to as hokku. As the renga form lengthened, the hokku took on the characteristics associated with modern-day haiku, consisting of lines with five, seven and five syllables and a seasonal reference (Ueda 5). Additionally, two rules were applied to hokku which later transferred to the sentiment of haiku poetry: the
hokku should be a complete, independent scene or statement, and it should be composed by a poet of great skill (Carter 2). It is difficult to specify the historical moment in which haiku became independent of hokku; many well-known haiku by poets such as Basho were originally composed as initiating verses (Carter 9-10). During the Edo period (1600-1867), in which Basho, Buson, and Issa lived, Japanese poetry preserved topics from classical poetry such as “cherry blossoms…small cuckoo…moon…bright leaves, and snow,” while also including subjects “taken from everyday commoner life and reflect[ing] popular culture in both the cities and the countryside” (Shirane 175-176). The Edo period was a time of advancement not only for the haiku form, but also for an expansion of subjects of interest to the Japanese and a loosening association between Japanese poetry and elite, courtly verse.

The poetry of the Edo period shares many attributes with Vizenor’s writing style and worldview. The proliferation of Zen Buddhism during this time enriched the Japanese arts with both humor and spiritual contemplation, qualities Vizenor’s own writings often express. Vizenor’s adaptation of the haiku form reflects his consciousness of and response to classical Japanese haiku subjects and the kind of humor used in comic haiku of the Edo period. His own haiku invest natural scenes with humorous or serendipitous qualities that express his concepts of Native survivance and dreamscape. In fact, Vizenor’s poems align more closely to Japanese values than much other English-language haiku by drawing from multiple aspects of Japanese poetry. Two notable Japanese qualities Vizenor’s haiku poems express are his manner of collaborative verbal play with other participating poets and the use of Zen Buddhist notions of compassion.
In addition to their connections to Japanese haiku of the Edo period, some of Vizenor’s haiku poems also suggest his participation in a particularly American iteration of the genre. Vizenor has participated in collaborative haiku writing that responds to both American collaborative haiku projects and Japanese renga from the Edo period. The title of Vizenor and co-author Jerome Downes’ project, *Slight Abrasions*, aptly describes the middle ground the verses occupy between collaboration and competition. An earlier work by Jack Kerouac, Lew Welch and Albert Saijo, called *Trip Trap*, is an overtly competitive project, “with each writer attempting to top the linguistic production of the other participants, as collaboration rapidly gives way to contestation” (Iadonisi 80). The goal of Vizenor and Downes’ project, however, is not to best the opponent, but to tease, “inflicting ‘slight abrasions’” (Iadonisi 80-81). This call-and-response dialogue departs from its American predecessor toward a friendlier collaboration, since the opponents’ verses do not cancel one another out, gesturing instead toward the fourteenth-century Japanese renga-writing sessions, a social activity occurring beneath the spring cherry blossoms with rice wine in abundance (Carter 4). The teasing element that Vizenor and Downes introduces in *Slight Abrasions* suggests a trickster element to the project that distinguishes it from non-indigenous American haiku collaborations. The trickster persona represented by these teasing back-and-forth haiku poems, who evokes Nanabozho, the tricky Anishinaabe hero, is less competitive than the poets of *Trip Trap*, and more playful in pushing the opponent (and reader) to reconsider static or serious views of self and the universe in a manner similar to the lessons in indigenous trickster stories.
Another quality Vizenor’s haiku poems borrow from the Japanese classical tradition is the notion of compassion as it extends from Zen Buddhism. While in the classical poetic tradition, particular Japanese images were invoked in order to provide a sense of beauty that would be refreshing to the reader, poetic subjects during the Edo period evoked a sense of compassion toward other beings. Insects became a popular subject for the Japanese: their sounds in poetry symbolized the passing of the seasons, while their short lives exemplified the Buddhist sense of impermanence (Shirane 180). Poems about insects also “reflect a larger cultural fascination with and sympathy for small creatures… which function as metaphors for the condition of low-level commoners and farmers” (Shirane 181). These sentiments resulted in a shift in haiku subject matter toward spiritual concerns. Zen Buddhism contributed a sense of sabi, or “Eternal Loneliness” to Japanese haiku poetry (Suzuki 284). The sentiment was intended to touch in the reader “an eternal longing for a world beyond this of empirical relativity, where the soul can quietly contemplate its own destiny” (Suzuki 286). The spirit of Zen moved creators to compose with the minimum of brush strokes or words possible in order to express a complete idea (Suzuki 287). The suggestibility of the minimal haiku form incited an experience of sabi and an openness toward and appreciation for natural phenomena beyond the self.

Japanese Edo-period haiku focused on small animals in vulnerable situations to capture a sense of life’s precariousness and delicacy, a sentiment in line with the contemporaneous Zen Buddhist views on compassion. The following haiku poem by Basho exemplifies the manner in which insects were conflated with a sense of impermanence in Edo-period poetry:
Very soon they die—
but of that there is no sign
in the locust-cry. (Anthology 384)

Basho’s poem evokes the fleeting nature of life, pointing to the value of living in the present; his poem treats the topic with a sense of tragedy. Enomoto Kikaku (1661-1707) writes,

Eaten by the cat!
Perhaps the cricket’s widow
is bewailing that. (Anthology 385)

Kikaku’s poem queries the insect’s ability to grieve and by extension, our incomplete knowledge of animal experience. The poem also argues, through the ideas of murder and widowhood, for pity toward commoners whose lives are deeply affected by the mandates of those in higher places. These poignant images are largely unrelieved by humor as they reveal practical truths about life.

Although Vizenor is inspired by the Japanese tradition of representing insects in haiku, he brings a particular sense of levity to his haiku dreamscape that urges others to consider the lives and feelings of nonhumans. Vizenor’s poems continue along lines of similar inquiry toward life’s qualities of suffering and impermanence but takes a lighter tone toward the subjects. Blaeser describes Vizenor’s treatment of animals in his haiku poems as similar to a “trickster street dancer” who offers “illuminating twists on the way we perceive ourselves” or challenges “our overserious or isolationist view of our actions” (“Multiple” 128). Blaeser interprets Vizenor’s image of an accumulating newspaper pile elevating a cat’s window perch as “a wry comment…on our failure to concern ourselves
with the larger relationships and the larger consequences of our actions” (“Multiple” 128). Blaeser also remarks on some of Vizenor’s other poems that point with gentle humor toward human shortcomings and the parts of nature that equalize humans with other animals (“Multiple” 129-130). The trickster in Vizenor’s haiku poems, re-expressed from an indigenous oral tradition, works to subvert the reader’s assumptions about the natural world and open possibilities for compassion through acknowledgement of the perspectives of other beings.

Just as Vizenor’s trickster discourse transforms the Japanese haiku, the trickster’s form in haiku likewise takes on Japanese values. Rather than startling the reader toward a new perspective, the trickster presence in Vizenor’s haiku directs the reader’s attention toward inner contemplation with the haiku moment, or sense of insight arising from acknowledging a different worldview. The trickster character in Native American traditions has “always aimed at liberating people’s minds, forcing them into self-recognition and knowledge, and keeping them alert to their own power to heal” (Pulitano 147). While the trickster qualities of Vizenor’s poems do work to produce this kind of knowledge in the reader, Vizenor’s trickster discourse more clearly reveals opportunities for compassion toward nonhumans by exposing the vulnerability of small animals and plants to natural forces, as with Japanese haiku. Another way to regard the role of the trickster in Vizenor’s poems is through consideration of kyogai, or personal environment, a Zen concept of analyzing the relationship between the self and the external world. Kyogai describes one’s “mode or frame or tone of consciousness from which all [one’s] reactions come and wherein all outside stimulations are absorbed” (Suzuki 249). Kyogai is a subjective experience of life whose analysis facilitates an acknowledgement of
multiple perspectives and approaches toward one’s external world. By calling into question one’s solipsistic viewpoint, Vizenor’s trickster also functions to reveal information about one’s kyogai, pushing the trickster’s identity beyond that of a force of nature or serendipity, associated with many indigenous traditions, and clarifying the trickster’s role as a teacher of natural wisdom.

There are three classical Japanese haiku masters to whom Vizenor gives notable attention in his own haiku books: Kobayashi Issa (1763-1828), Yosa Buson (1716-1784) and Matsuo Basho (1644-1694). Vizenor begins each seasonal section of his book *Raising the Moon Vines* with a poem by Issa, Buson or Basho. In the introduction to *Cranes Arise*, Vizenor describes these poets as having specific characteristics which I find his haiku poems re-interpret according to a more specifically indigenous worldview. A study of Vizenor’s use of personas and images from the authors’ works in his own poems reveals particular qualities preserved from their poetic outlooks and offers further insight into Vizenor’s haiku dreamscape. To summarize these poets in the introduction of *Cranes Arise*, Vizenor quotes Reginald Blyth, who describes Basho as religious, Buson as artistic, and Issa as humanistic in their relative perspectives (para. 8). In an interview with Lee, Vizenor clarifies each of these poets in his own terms, as a kind of frame anticipating his own poetic identity: “Basho is… a teaser of seasons, and an imagistic philosopher of impermanence. Issa … teased the birds and worried insects in his nature…Basho was a water strider. Issa was a sparrow. Buson was a crane in the mirror. I was a crane, a cedar waxwing, a bear” (“Postindian” 33). Vizenor describes these predecessors in terms of what he draws from Japanese poetic traditions, revealing how he interprets the poets from an indigenous perspective. Words like “teaser” and “teased”
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evolve a presence similar to the trickster discourse in Vizenor’s writings which draws
from Anishinaabe and other indigenous traditions. “Imagistic” suggests the aspect of
Japanese haiku poems which impressed the early twentieth-century Imagist poets, also
predecessors of Vizenor’s haiku images. The “impermanence” Vizenor draws from Zen
philosophy provides poignancy and impact to his own haiku moments of survivance. By
looking deeper into the qualities of these classical Japanese poets, the transcultural
qualities of Vizenor’s own perspective toward literary survivance, or literary transmission
of a culture, may be better understood. In my analysis, I consider not only what these
haiku masters mean to Vizenor in terms of his own poetic identity, but I also analyze
their poems comparatively with poems by Vizenor that possess attributes similar to theirs.

Basho, Buson, and Issa are generally known as the three great haiku masters of
the Edo period in Japanese history. Although a fourth, Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902) makes
what are known as the “great four” Japanese haiku masters, Vizenor does not identify
Shiki in his poetic lineage. One reason may be that Shiki is a modern poet, writing after
the Edo period and during a time of strong Western influence on Japanese literature.
After Japan opened itself as a nation to Western culture in 1868, Japanese literary
scholars developed a “new style” of poetry through translating Western works into
Japanese, which became popular among contemporary poets (Ueda 1-2). Shiki’s poetic
influences, Westernized as they are, may not enter into the dialogue between Japanese
and Anishinaabe cultures that Vizenor intends for his poems. This absence of Shiki in
Vizenor’s discussion of Japanese haiku poetry suggests that the work of closed Japan,
when the country evolved a highly unique culture, is of the most concern to Vizenor.
That is not to say that Vizenor is opposed to Western influences in his poems; his haiku also clearly respond to the Beat poets of twentieth-century American literature, as his exchange with Jerome Downes in *Slight Abrasions* exemplifies. Additionally, he cites American haiku poets in the introductions of his haiku books. However, Vizenor’s omission of Shiki suggests that a review of Japanese literary influences on Vizenor should focus on the works of pre-modern Japan.

In the pages that follow, I consider Basho, Buson, and Issa in terms of their historical contexts and with regard for general Japanese literary criticism, reading these assessments comparatively with Vizenor’s creative reinterpretations of these poets’ literary identities. In addition to considering Vizenor’s response to and identification with these haiku masters in terms of their general styles and outlooks, I also read Vizenor’s poems responsively with theirs, focusing on poems which either directly reference or strongly suggest aspects of theirs which he has quoted.

Vizenor’s descriptions of Basho emphasize Basho’s pursuit of religious and philosophical truths through writing nature poetry. Vizenor quotes from Ueda’s *Basho and His Interpreters*, noting that Basho chose fugaku, an artist’s way of life, in pursuit of an eternal truth in nature (*Cranes* para. 10). Basho’s main poetic ideal was sabi, or loneliness, which he believed would elevate and ennoble one’s character if one accepted it as an unavoidable reality of life. In addition to embracing a religious ideal, Basho was a prolific writer of haikai, or comic haiku poetry, and an influencer in Japanese literary circles (Carter 145). Vizenor’s attraction to Basho makes sense given Basho’s embrace of both humor and spiritual truths expressed through nature. Basho extended the range of subjects portrayed in haiku—traditionally, flower, birds, the moon and snow—to include
codfish, fleas, cowsheds and mud (Carter 11). These images captured the experiences of commoners and expressed a sense of compassion for smaller or weaker beings.

The question of Japanese literary influence on Vizenor’s poems becomes one, in this case, of the degree to which Vizenor, who describes himself as a poet-heir of Basho, shares Basho’s perspective toward religious idealism. In response to Basho’s poem which Vizenor translates as,

an ancient pond,
a frog jumps in,
sound of water (“Envoy” 30),

Vizenor composes a poem in a playful homage to Basho,

calm in the storm
master basho soaks his feet
water striders. (“Envoy” 30)

Iadonisi notes that while “Vizenor acknowledges Basho’s greatness by bestowing on him the title ‘master,’ Vizenor audaciously crafts a new narrative, one in which the Japanese master is in the pond while insects skitter on the surface” (71). The tease, as defined within Vizenor’s Anishinaabe background, is not only a jest but also a way of affirming and expressing affection toward others. In Postindian Conversations, Vizenor shares that the tease is “also an embrace. The native art of teasing embraces the obvious with intrigue and irony” (26). While Vizenor complicates the original idea of an incisive break in the silence with the shared solitude of the haiku master and insects, his image teases the reader to acknowledge the extraordinary ability of the insect to walk on water, even compared to the presence of a haiku master, who assumes an ordinary humanity.
In Basho’s poem, the speaker observes an animal’s action objectively, while Vizenor’s portrays both animal and human and connects them through the medium of water. Vizenor provides “envoys” at the end of some of his haiku poems, statements he defines as “prose concentration and discourse on the images and sensations” (“Envoy” 30). These statements provide interpretative strategies for the reader but also may serve to clarify Vizenor’s intentions as poet. The envoy, or prose discourse, that Vizenor provides for this poem responding to Basho’s emphasizes the role of animal experience: “The striders listen to the wind, the creation of sound that is heard and seen in the motion of water; the wind teases the tension and natural balance on the surface of the world. The same wind that moves the spiders teases the poets” (“Envoy” 31). In Vizenor’s prose, it is the insects who listen while the human passively “soaks.” Vizenor humbles the master in his tribute while also favoring the insect’s perspective and pointing to its connectedness to the poet, illustrated by the watery experience they share.

Like Basho, Vizenor concerns himself with the spiritual truths in nature, but Vizenor’s treatment of the natural world in his poems does not privilege humans over other objects to the same extent as Basho’s and other Japanese haiku poems, using aspects of trickster discourse to overturn human-centered worldviews. The haiku moment in Vizenor’s “calm in the storm” poem not only upends assumptions about the relative importance of water striders and the haiku master Basho but also pulls together a scene whose tension is signified by the surface of the water and the differences in buoyancy between the human and spider. Thus, while Basho’s poem finds the sacredness in shattering ancient calm with animal movement, Vizenor’s poem breaks specific assumptions about the human’s relative importance in the natural world in a manner that
reflects on the indigenous idea of interconnectedness. Vizenor’s poem, like Basho’s, finds sacredness in an experience of nature, but Vizenor’s suggests how an Anishinaabe animistic worldview commingles with an embrace of the loneliness of human experience by sharing an image of a lone human surrounded by insects.

Vizenor prefaces the autumn section of Raising the Moon Vines with Basho’s poem:

On a withered branch
A crow is perched
Autumn ending evening. (n.p.)

Basho’s poem creates a symmetry between temporality and animal presence in this moment, the crow’s presence on the branch signifying a broader message about a season, or a life, coming to an end. Yasuda notes that all objects this particular poem mentions have the same feeling of loneliness, intuitively impressing the reader with the same feeling (7). The poem seeks an absolute loneliness, without compromising to any hint of relief. The doubling of autumn—the end of a season and anticipation of the hardship of winter—and the end of a day, add poignancy that further contributes to a sense of infinite loneliness. Vizenor’s choice to preface his autumn section with this poem indicates his appreciation for this absolute feeling of sabi developed in autumn-themed Japanese haiku poetry.

Some of the poems in Raising the Moon Vines’s autumn section also reach for a sense of absolute loneliness through the reinforcement of images similar to Basho’s, while also capturing a sense of interconnectivity and motion between the different elements, as well as how the material objects make the unseen visible. For example, with,
Marigolds and weeds
Along the frosty fence
Wilting together

instead of striving solely to produce a particular effect of impermanence, Vizenor’s poem emphasizes the impetus behind the plants’ death (*Raising* 77). The poem describes the plants’ active wilting, rather than portraying them as aesthetic objects expressing a human sense of life’s brevity. Even though the image suggests the autumn season’s unrelenting drive toward death, it also reminds the reader of death’s undiscriminating nature and implies sympathy between disparate beings—in this case plants, who experience the same conditions. Similarly, Vizenor’s poem,

The old wren house
On a bare broken bough
Creaking in the wind

also captures a similar feeling to Basho’s poem of absolute loneliness (*Raising* 81). While the emptiness of the abandoned wren house, headed toward collapse, is forlorn, the house itself suggests a common need for shelter between animals and humans and evokes empathy with the sight of the wren’s house of the brink of destruction. Another of Vizenor’s poems,

Autumn signs
Poise of a dead dragonfly
Falling off a reed

presents an image with a similar degree of starkness to Basho’s image of the crow on the wintered branch (*Raising* 83). However, instead of pressing toward a feeling of
loneliness, the falling husk of the dragonfly’s body evokes a sense of a cycle’s completion. The dragonfly’s falling body is an active sign that the natural cycle of decay presses on, as it loses its ability to grip the reed. Vizenor’s haiku images evoke loneliness by using a similar placement of objects to Basho’s and also, through revealing the activity of decay, portray seasonal forces acting on material objects through a lens of interrelationships between the seen and unseen.

While Vizenor considers Basho in terms of his spiritual discipline, he identifies with Buson’s sense of artistry. Vizenor quotes Keene’s description of the painting-like quality of Buson’s poems, which portray life in a non-realistic manner (Cranes para. 13). Ueda notes that “Buson brought to his verse a painter’s eye for form and color, along with an expansive imagination and a taste for the exotic, which at times led him to portray people and events remote in time or space” (Ueda 6). Buson’s poem,

winter rain
a mouse runs
over the koto

as translated in the introduction of Vizenor’s Favor of Crows, evokes the musical qualities of sounds not intended to be music when a mouse’s stray feet elicit sounds from the traditional Japanese stringed instrument (xvi). In Buson’s poem, while winter weather forces humans and animals into close confines, the instrument becomes a point of confusion between the sophistication of human art and sounds evoked by animal behavior. Vizenor responds to Buson’s poem as follows:

cold rain
field mice rattle the dishes
buson’s koto. (Favor xvi)

The cold rain evokes the warmth and security of each indoor scene while heightening the tension of animal invasion into human spaces. Vizenor explicitly ties his haiku image to that of Buson’s in the last line, drawing a connection between the questionable sounds on the koto and the sound of mice scrabbling through dishes. Buson’s unsettling sounds of mice in a domestic space are heightened in Vizenor’s poem, in which mice create a sound even more irksome by the knowledge that they are at large in the kitchen, and therefore a threat to the pantry. Vizenor’s poem captures a more overtly threatening invasion of human spaces with mice while also indicating greater sympathy for the mice by gesturing to their search for food in winter scarcity, in a manner similar to the compassionate elements of Japanese Edo-period haiku.

Vizenor prefaces the summer and winter sections of Raising the Moon Vines with Buson’s poems. The summer section begins,

Morning breeze

Fur seems to blow

Caterpillar! (n.p.)

Buson’s poem playfully suggests a human temptation to touch furry caterpillars. The fur’s softness seems doubly alluring as the viewer feels the brush of a gentle breeze, yet the exclamation “Caterpillar!” reminds the reader that appearances can be deceiving, and the touchable-looking caterpillar may sting. In this section of the book, Vizenor offers aesthetically similar images to Buson’s. In,

Long morning sun

A butterfly through silken webs
Vizenor constructs an image of a striking animal revealed by the subtle rays of morning light (Raising 43). The silken nature of the butterfly is echoed by the delicate webs. However, tension emanates from the silken strands as the viewer notices that the vision of motionless beauty is also that of a trapped animal, the magnificence of her wings an irony. Vizenor’s poem, like Buson’s, develops in miniature the sense that appearances can be deceiving. While Buson’s image strives toward an idea of tempting tactile pleasure, Vizenor’s evokes ideas of deception and entrapment. The web that connects the butterfly to the unseen spider suggests a sense of interconnectivity between disparate forms of life, as the death of the butterfly contributes to the life of the spider. The natural image evokes compassion for mortal beings through a visual reminder that life and death are intimately linked.

Another of Vizenor’s poems plays on some qualities of the image of Buson’s furry caterpillar and general notions of artistry. In,

The gypsy winds

Raised the grass like kitten’s fur

Catspaw the sailboats

Vizenor centers the poem’s images around the wind itself, which is only glimpsed indirectly through the visible objects (Raising 63). The image’s objects reveal the wind’s presence in visual and tactile displays that render the grass soft and inviting and gently mobilize the sailboats. The shared connections between the simile of kitten’s fur and the word “catspaw” characterize the wind with cat-like qualities, while the wind’s ability to deliberately create aesthetic effects suggests further agency on the wind’s part. While
Buson composed haiku images from the eye of a human artist, Vizenor conlates the human artist and the wind in a manner similar to the expansive wisdom in Anishinaabe dream songs. The Anishinaabe, Vizenor writes, “created an elusive sense of self and presence in their dream songs, but not the self of nature” (Favor xxiii). According to Vizenor, dream songs such as “‘The sky loves to hear me sing,’ and ‘with a large bird, I am walking in the sky’… are the imagistic and ironic scenes of visionaries… and transformation of the self” (Favor xxiii). In other words, dream songs give human singers and listeners the opportunity to experience life from a different or enlarged perspective than the limits of human body and mind would ordinarily permit. These songs express the interconnections and permeable boundaries between humans, animals and other tangible and intangible aspects of nature. Vizenor responds to the sense of artistry in Buson’s poems by combining qualities of classical Japanese haiku with the nature of dream song expressions.

To begin the winter section of Raising the Moon Vines, Vizenor reproduces Buson’s poem,

Cold moon!

With a monk passing, meeting

On a bridge (n.p.)

Buson’s poem describes a moment of transfer between the seasons. By describing a “cold moon,” Buson combines topics that traditionally indicate autumn and winter in a single image, while the speaker’s passage over the bridge reinforces the sense of crossing between two seasons. While coldness references winter in Japanese haiku poetry, the moon is connected with melancholy and loneliness, and from early times came to
symbolize autumn itself (Shirane 40-41). Buson’s poem portrays a human encounter with the absolute through the speaker’s encounter with another traveler on a bridge on a night in late autumn, an image that further heightens a sense of confrontation with the starkness of advancing winter. A poem of Vizenor’s illustrates his similar use of coldness and the moon to provide a sense of seasonal ambiguity:

blue faces
reflected with the whole moon
cold river. (Favor 92)

The scene is similar to Buson’s in that the moon illuminates the speaker’s encounter with another, but the faces are not characterized beyond the blue cast of light thrown upon them by the moon. Among the many possibilities for interpretation, a reader may visualize the scene as one of humans or animals peering downward into the rushing water, their indistinct reflections connected and transformed by the moonlight illuminating their reflections. While the scene has some similarities to Buson’s in referencing the moon, the cold, and transient presences in the dark, Vizenor’s moonlight is a creative force that changes the appearances of objects. Vizenor’s poem embraces a sense of sabi and pays homage to Buson’s artistry by enveloping the scene in cold tones, but his haiku’s image also suggests interconnections between the objects reflected, revealed in a simple, understated way.

The autumn moon, one of the most prevalent images in Japanese poetry, also often appears in Vizenor’s haiku poems. Vizenor’s moon, however, rather than expressing the object’s Japanese literary connotations, acts as a trickster force, creating or changing the appearance of things with its radiance. While the presence of the moon may
provide a hollow, meditative feeling similar to sabi in Vizenor’s poetry, it primarily works to transform, rather than reflect, the appearance of objects in the scene. The moon’s transforming effect presses the speaker to consider the relationship between different objects’ images in a new way in a manner similar to the trickster, a figure from indigenous oral traditions that provides wisdom through teasing one’s assumptions about reality. In *Empty Swings*, Vizenor writes,

> Under the full moon
> My shadow moves like a stranger
> First Autumn frost. (n.p.)

This poem produces similar impressions of coldness and transience, like the previous poem discussed. The speaker walks alone, yet the moon transforms the speaker’s shadow into something unfamiliar, giving it a life of its own. Like the moonlight’s transforming effect on the speaker’s shadow, the signs of seasonal change have also rendered familiar elements strange. The speaker’s sense of strangeness at watching his shadow’s movement indicates an altered perspective toward himself. The poem combines elements of Japanese haiku and Anishinaabe dream songs: the speaker’s circumstances and the seasonal reference in the poem create a sense of sabi, which in the Japanese tradition, enlarges one’s wisdom, while the speaker’s unfamiliar shadow suggests a transformation of his self-perception through the moonlight’s radiance, which has similarities to the dream song’s portrayal of natural wisdom through changed perspectives.

Vizenor’s poems also respond to those by Kobayashi Issa, whom Vizenor describes as a humanist by nature. Issa has a reputation for his concern with human emotions and, as Ueda writes, “wrote some powerful and intensely personal haiku” (6).
Vizenor explains that Issa included his own human presence in his haiku scenes, a nontraditional move, not out of solipsism, but because Issa was moved by nature and his subjective emotion was part of the scene itself (*Favor* xxii). In the introduction of *Favor of Crows*, Vizenor writes in homage to Issa, “The frogs continue to croak his name, skinny Issa in the secret marsh, and he is celebrated everywhere by crickets, mosquitoes, flies, many insects, and many birds in the voices of nature and survivance” (xxxi). In Vizenor’s view, Issa’s ability to empathize with other beings unites him in spirit with animals, who return his affection. Issa’s sympathy for nonhumans is a quality Vizenor’s poetry shares. Issa’s poem quoted in *Favor of Crows* reads,

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skinny frog
don’t be discouraged
issa is here. (xxii)
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Issa’s poem provides a sense of how the speaker’s compassion evolves from an experience of loneliness. Vizenor responds to Issa’s poem with the following:

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tricky frogs
croak a haiku in the marsh
skinniss. (*Favor* xxiii)
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Vizenor’s poem implies that just as Issa composes poetry for the frogs, their sounds serve equally as poetic homage for him. The sentiment is a humorous reminder that Issa’s expression toward the frog is ultimately a communication in human language, just as the frog’s sounds cannot be interpreted as language by a human. While the poem teases Issa’s sentiment, it also gestures toward animal sounds as not only communication, but artistry, and forms a different kind of connection between Issa and a frog by
incorporating a sense of the frog’s personhood.

Spring as a poetic topic is similarly handled between Issa and Vizenor, who each point to the agonies caused by change as life renews. Vizenor prefaces the spring section of *Raising the Moon Vines* with Issa’s poem,

Beneath each gate
Clogs from the mud
Spring is started. (n.p.)

The poem presents a picture of the disorderly effects of a spring rain or melt, while also revealing the downward cast of the poet’s own feelings. Rather than remarking on the hopeful signs that winter is ebbing, the speaker notices how a sudden spring deluge has blocked up the gates, impeding movement. Rather than noticing the beauty or hope in the air, he is irked by the congestion at the gates. Vizenor’s poem likewise focuses on the catastrophic changes of spring rain. His poem,

The old washing machine
Was a summer home for Mother cat
Until it rained

portrays an animal’s hardship due to an unexpected storm, provoking the reader’s sympathy for a vulnerable animal and her young (*Raising* 21). A few pages later in *Raising the Moon Vines*, another haiku follows the same line of thinking, as

Spring rivulets
Change the course of the kittens
Swelling in the cold sand. (25)
The subject matter of these poems reveal how vigorous spring weather can end as well as sustain life. Vizenor’s poems communicate a sense of sorrow and disappointment that clash with expectations about spring as a seasonal topic in a manner like Issa’s reflections. Vizenor’s images reflect an idea that change is painful, similar to the Buddhist idea that life is suffering. Another of Vizenor’s poems a few pages later in the collection,

Suffering of birth

Soft flowers in wind and rain

This painful beauty makes this idea more explicit, showing the clash between the tenderness of new life and the forces that bring it into being, whether it be the pain of birth or the harshness of storms that also provide sustenance to life (Raising 29). In Vizenor’s springtime haiku poems, speakers compassionately observe nonhuman life, like Issa, departing from the portrayal of aspects of spring in traditional Japanese poetry that provide gratification to the sense, such as the permeating scent of plum blossoms (Shirane 34). Vizenor’s poems follow a similar line of thinking to Issa’s in considering the painful nature of sudden change for living beings but move further in the direction of acknowledging life’s harsh reality for nonhumans.

Many of Vizenor’s poems preserve aspects from the poetry of Basho, Buson, and Issa while also incorporating perspectives and styles from Native American oral traditions to form what Vizenor refers to as dreamscape. Dreamscape, concerning natural wisdom and transformation, manifests in Vizenor’s poems through a transcultural fusion between Japanese artistic qualities of striving for the absolute and sabi and concepts from
the Native oral tradition like trickster moves and interconnectivity. Thus, Vizenor’s haiku dreamscape is partially constructed from the qualities of Japanese haiku masters with whom Vizenor has identified, Basho, the religious, Buson, the artistic, and Issa, the humanist. My analysis of the responsiveness of Vizenor’s poems to that of these three haiku masters brings greater insight to the Japanese origins of Vizenor’s haiku dreamscape, which has been previously discussed more thoroughly in its Native American literary contexts. As I have shown, the Japanese idea of striving for the absolute manifests in Vizenor’s minimalistic, poignant images driving toward a profound feeling. Sabi, the Zen Buddhist ideal of a transformative, eternal loneliness, contributes to the sense of reflective compassion in Vizenor’s haiku, including his humorous haiku.

Vizenor’s dreamscape seeks to provide the reader with natural wisdom by suggesting intuitive connections between objects in his haiku. While both the Buddhist idea of enlightenment and Vizenor’s concept of natural wisdom suggest increased understanding on the part of the supplicant or reader, natural wisdom gives rise to tribal understandings and an increased sense of cohesion between seemingly disparate parts of nature. Vizenor’s poems preserve specific aspects from classical Japanese haiku masters, resulting in a transcultural haiku dreamscape that responds to Japanese traditions with complementary aspects from Native American oral traditions and also responds to Native American literary conversations with non-indigenous beliefs and ideology.

In addition to its relationship to natural wisdom, Vizenor’s haiku dreamscape also contributes to his concept of Native survivance. Vizenor tells Lee, “Poetry, and especially haiku, taught me how to hold an imagistic gaze, and that gaze is my survivance… I learned how to create tension in concise images [in prose], by the mere presence of
nature” (Postindian 69). Blaeser observes that “Vizenor in fact celebrates the connection to Basho and his haiku tradition as clearly as he will later celebrate tribal inspirations,” gesturing to Vizenor’s prose focus on Anishinaabe history and culture (“Interior” 6). Vizenor’s identification with the Japanese haiku tradition affirms his identity as a transcultural poet. Values from the Native American oral tradition fuse with aspects of classical Japanese poetry and are transformed, even as they transform the reader’s perceptions through the effect of haiku dreamscape. Vizenor’s use of non-native influences to transform the Anishinaabe oral tradition has similarities to the concept of interconnectivity, which “[u]nlike a Western articulation of philosophy that depends on linear, sequential reasoning, lead[s] toward a holistic conception of the universe” (Pulitano 105). Rather than valorizing Native survivance, or survival through storytelling, by exclusively using tribal values, Vizenor embraces aesthetics and concepts from very different cultures, ultimately revealing what is compatible between them.

One might question Vizenor’s bold move of placing himself within a lineage of Japanese poets as he has done multiple times in his prose writings. This move could be called ahistorical in the sense that it appears to disregard historical development and tradition if Vizenor considers himself, a twentieth-century indigenous writer in the United States, a kind of poetic descendent of Japanese writers from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Vizenor has discussed the poets in very subjective, personal terms, such when in an interview with Lee, he stated that “Basho was a water strider. Issa was a sparrow. Buson was a crane in the mirror” (Postindian 33). His creative interpretation of the poets’ identities may seem to ignore the historical contexts in which they wrote, particularly the beginnings of the haiku tradition in the Edo period, when Japanese poetry
moved away from strictly classical subjects in favor of using humble topics to express concepts from Buddhist ideology. That literary turning point for Japan is in many ways different from Vizenor’s use of the haiku form to express, among other ideas, Native American ideologies. While I concede that Vizenor’s use of these poets focuses on their characteristics of most importance to his own poetic vision, potentially obscuring their own artistic aims quite different from his own, I point to the background literature Vizenor includes in the introductions of many of his haiku books which provide biographical and contextual information about these poets. Vizenor’s subjective representation of the poets is clearly distinguishable from the background literature he relates about them, making it possible for a reader unfamiliar with Japanese literature to consider the poets in their own contexts, outside of Vizenor’s use of them in his own, transcultural haiku poetry.

Vizenor’s use of Japanese tradition in his own poems is not limited to classical Japanese aesthetics and Zen Buddhist philosophy. His writings also reveal an interest in and identification with Japanese indigenous traditions which also influence the Japanese arts. Shinto, a Japanese indigenous religion, as well as the culture of the Ainu, a separate indigenous group in Japan, are topics Vizenor has compared to Native indigenous traditions, in his writings. Animism, as it manifests in both Japanese and Anishinaabe cultures, is crucial to the formation of Vizenor’s haiku dreamscape, as will be discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter 4: Animism in Vizenor’s Haiku

Vizenor’s haiku dreamscape suggests an animistic worldview that has similarities to both Japanese and Anishinaabe cultures. Vizenor’s prose writings recognize a compatibility between multiple traditions of animism, which may be broadly defined as the idea of all matter having a soul or spirit, and haiku poetry. His own poems draw on animistic ideas to construct a dreamscape that reflects both Anishinaabe and indigenous Japanese worldviews. I consider the way Vizenor uses animistic worldviews in his haiku dreamscape as part of my overall analysis of his use of subjects and beliefs from both Native Americans and Asian cultures. In this chapter, I provide a general description of animism as drawn by scholars, and how this worldview clashes with traditional Western ontologies. I describe qualities of Japanese and Anishinaabe animisms as they are represented in scholarship and clarify the differences between these worldviews in order to point out some particular aspects of these beliefs that contribute to Vizenor’s haiku dreamscape. In my analysis of Vizenor’s haiku poems, there are three perspectives from which I consider his use of animistic worldviews: his portrayal of nature spirits as the true producers of haiku poetry in his prose work Hiroshima Bugi; his use of images of animals such as the raven, which have animistic connotations in multiple cultures; and his orientation toward the Chinese concept of shi, or the living flow or momentum of words, as he defines the concept in his own prose.

To clarify my discussion of animistic worldviews, I contrast qualities of these views with the modern Western worldview, which is largely based on dualistic understandings of the universe. In a Western, dualistic understanding of the cosmos, mind and matter are distinct from another, with a clear divide separating spiritual and
material views of life on earth, ideas most famously clarified by René Descartes (1596-1650). Heesoon Bai explains, “ontology (how we understand the world to be) and ethics (how we relate to and act on the world) are intimately related” (137). According to Bai, to live in a Western way is to embody and act out dualistic practices. By contrast, the animist “would experience all parts of reality to be interconnected and to interpenetrate each other” (Bai 138). Thus, for the purpose of my analysis, it is necessary to distinguish acting and thinking according to animistic beliefs from acting and thinking according to a dualistic perspective, and to recognize qualities of animistic practices and worldviews as they appear in literature.

To more closely relate the animist worldview to a literary analysis of Vizenor’s poems, I point to similarities between animist beliefs and the lenses of interconnectivity and intersubjectivity. Interconnectivity in this context refers to conceiving of life (or a presentation of life in writing) as a non-hierarchical web, as it is described in Native American literary criticism. On the other hand, intersubjectivity references “the space of shared understanding, or common ground, between persons wherein people, as individual subjects, collaboratively create and share meaning” (Lipari 401). These critical lenses serve to clarify how multiple forms of animism are expressed in Vizenor’s poems, reflecting worldviews that, while very different from Western ontologies, share certain similarities between them that Vizenor’s writings emphasize.

In order to clarify how Vizenor’s poems express both Anishinaabe and indigenous Asian qualities of animism, I describe different qualities associated with these beliefs, pointing to their similarities to one another as well as their differences. Animism, the belief that all matter contains a soul or spirit, is loosely related to the term animatism,
which refers to the concept of a power or life force that permeates physical matter yet varies in its concentration between objects (Young, Pompana and Willier 377). These terms distinguish between more or less personalized degrees of spirit manifested in objects; both ways of conceiving of spirit within matter are pertinent to Anishinaabe and Japanese worldviews. Japanese Buddhism may be regarded according to an animatistic worldview, with regard to Buddha Nature: “In Buddhist thought, an individual is only part of Buddha Nature, but Buddha Nature is all of the individual” (Young, Pompana and Willier 380). Shinto, Japan’s indigenous religion, encompasses both animistic and animatistic ideas. The Japanese *kami* may be described as a nature-based deity, such as a fox spirit, in an animistic sense, or perceived as an impersonal force permeating the physical world, according to a more animatistic perspective (Young, Pompana and Willier 380). Japanese Shinto shares qualities with the worldview of the Ainu, an indigenous non-Japanese race who live in northern Japan and preceded the ancestors of the present-day Japanese. The traditions of the Ainu reveal a belief in the *kamui*, “active and observant non-human persons… that interact with humans and directly affect human lives” (Inghilterra 103). Ancestor worship also enters into Ainu beliefs in the sense that the *kamui* serve as communication between the Ainu and their dead ancestors and that the *kamui* are considered the creators and ultimate ancestors of the Ainu (Inghilterra 106). Vizenor’s writings express an interest in making connections between particular qualities in indigenous Japanese forms of animism and the Anishinaabe worldview.

Three aspects of the Anishinaabe animistic worldview relevant to my analysis of Vizenor’s poems are the idea of *manitou* (or, alternatively, “manidoo,” in Vizenor’s writings), the spiritual practice of *bimaadiziwin* and the perception of communication,
particularly stories, as animate. Manitou shares similarities with more animatistic perceptions of kami as an impersonal life force permeating matter in varying degrees, while the Grandfathers and Grandmothers “who exist in us, as well as in things like rocks” are more subjective presences, like the nature spirits of Shinto beliefs (Young, Pompana and Willier 384). One important distinction between Anishinaabe animism and the Japanese worldviews described above is the Anishinaabe view of “the Good Life,” or mino-bimaadiziwin, which consists of “respectful approaches in daily life… a wholistic way of daily living” as a spirit-centered approach (Debassige 16-17). One aspect of mino-bimaadiziwin, bimaadiziwin, is “a spiritual endeavor that involves seeking the aid of superhuman entities” who provide spiritual gifts to people in exchange for maintaining good social relations with others (18). In this way, the Anishinaabe animistic worldview is conceived as a wisdom toward nature that is achieved through learning and life experience. The Ojibwe, an Anishinaabe group, find that “the world is full of people, only some of whom are human,” though this perception does not encompass the idea that all matter is life-like by default (Harvey 18). According to Ojibwe concepts of animism, “[p]ersons are related beings constituted by their many and various interactions with others” and must learn gradually “what it means to ‘act as a person’” (Harvey 18). Therefore, to become more animist in Ojibwe culture means to learn a greater degree of respect toward other persons” (Harvey 18). Additionally, Anishinaabe animism encompasses the idea that verbal transmissions also are persons. According to tribal beliefs, “seasonal stories are bounded by respectful etiquette that shows they are living persons…Seasonal stories are named grandfathers… wilful and powerful persons whose transformative power is part of the relational world of Ojibwe people” (Harvey 41-42).
These qualities of Anishinaabe animism—namely, the concept of learning to be more animist throughout one’s life as a means of acquiring a more respectful attitude toward the universe, and the perception of stories as spiritual beings, or grandfathers, in Anishinaabe culture—are relevant to my analysis of Vizenor’s poems, in which I perceive these beliefs at work along with qualities also identified with Japanese animism, such as the acknowledgement of nature spirits and spirit guides in the physical world.

Vizenor’s poems express ideologies that have similarities to both indigenous American and Japanese animistic worldviews. Vizenor’s statement that “visionary stories, oral or literary, are inspired, imagistic gazers,” affirms his perception in the animate nature of written or oral communication (“Praise” 271). Vizenor describes haiku scenes as containing traces of “animistic associations: the imagistic scenes are more visionary than casuistic, mimetic or solicitous; more descriptive than symbolic” (Cranes para. 4). To this end, Vizenor presents natural scenes in his haiku poetry in a way intended to intuitively awaken a sense of natural wisdom in the reader through particularly animistic scenarios that work against dualistic Western ontologies. While this may also be considered a kind of enlightenment, or satori (a Zen Buddhist concept which may be achieved through relinquishing dualistic thinking) Vizenor’s natural wisdom also directs the reader toward exploring alternative perspectives of the world that may or may not be accurate in service of dislodging deep-seated notions of human sovereignty for the reader. Vizenor describes Native animism as “an artistic union of nature, images, and reason; the chance of visions by renunciation and meditation, and aesthetic sensibilities” (Cranes para. 2). Vizenor’s definition corresponds with an experience of haiku dreamscape in which natural images make themselves understood to the reader directly,
while also acknowledging a web of connections, perspectives, and possibilities that lead to an expanded sense of the natural world. I argue that Vizenor draws from multiple traditions of animism in the formation of his haiku dreamscape and, in so doing, creates meaningful connections between Anishinaabe and indigenous Japanese worldviews.

Vizenor’s haiku poems may be considered as a hybrid of two forms, the Japanese haiku and the Anishinaabe dream song, which Vizenor has connected with animism in his writings. Japanese haiku poetry is more readily associated with Zen Buddhist religion and philosophy than with indigenous animistic worldviews, but Vizenor’s writings make more overt connections between the haiku form and animism, which, as explained above, is a component of both Japanese Shinto and Buddhist beliefs. While Vizenor’s haiku dreamscape may express Zen ideas like loneliness, compassion, and intuitive wisdom, it also reveals nonhuman perspectives and query the spiritual nature of material objects. Vizenor also makes overt connections between haiku poetry and Anishinaabe dream songs, both of which, he claims, “bear similar traces of animism [to each other]” and “are intuitive, meditative perceptions, and aesthetic survivance” (Cranes para. 5). Thus, for Vizenor, haiku poetry may represent natural wisdom, like Anishinaabe dream songs, through their particular formal properties and highly imagistic nature. My examination of Vizenor’s references to animistic ideas in his haiku poems further clarifies the transcultural nature of his haiku dreamscape.

There are parallels in the circumstances of the Ainu and American Indian nations in regard to their states of “paracolonialism, in which indigenous peoples live alongside their colonizers but the colonizer’s history, government, social structure, language and culture remain dominant” (Carson 443). Benjamin Carson notes that in his novel
Hiroshima Bugi Vizenor uses “a cross-cultural approach to literature to contribute to the ongoing survival of Anishinaabe and Ainu culture,” which includes “listening to and learning from their stories” (443-444). In other words, Vizenor’s novel makes a case not only for the similarity in circumstances between present-day Ainu and Anishinaabe people but also for how the exchange of narratives between the two cultures empowers them against dominant, paracolonial cultures. Vizenor’s approach slips beneath a categorial approach of cultural traits to find commonalities in the cultures’ perceptions of self and environment which resist colonial traps of cultural authenticity and clarify resources of strength these indigenous cultures share.

Ainu religious beliefs have similarities to Shinto, a widespread indigenous religion of Japan. Both Ainu and native Japanese traditions have practiced shamanism, or spirit possession (Philippi 84n18). Shinto teaches “that all things, animate and inanimate, have their own kami,” or gods (DeMente 256). Shinto is fundamental to Japanese thinking to an extent that “all Japanese are influenced by and at one time or another follow Shinto precepts” (DeMente 257). In Hiroshima Bugi, a character known as the Manidoo Envoy describes Shinto as “a sense of presence and the real,” quoting Ueda Kenji’s writing in Religion in Japanese Culture, “‘[i]n their origin, human beings and nature are, as it were, blood relatives, common offspring of the kami who brought Japan into existence’” (86). Thus, Vizenor’s writings acknowledge the Japanese perspective of animism, which perceives connections between different material beings because their spiritual aspects are related. In Hiroshima Bugi Vizenor portrays connections between Japanese Shinto beliefs, haiku poetry, and the Anishinaabe, suggesting that the Anishinaabe worldview, while distinct from that of the Japanese, has some compatibility
with Shinto, which renders the cultures’ indigenous aspects responsive to each other. Vizenor’s connections between Shinto and Anishinaabe beliefs shows “that cross-cultural contact does not destroy ‘traditional’ beliefs but rather is essential for survivance in millennial postmodernity” (Carson 445). Thus, the cultural interconnectivity Vizenor portrays reinforces his idea that so-called authenticity is not a prerequisite for cultural survival. By pointing to the similarities between the animistic beliefs of these different traditions, Vizenor is gesturing to multiple indigenous perspectives through which to consider one’s self and surroundings. Vizenor’s cross-cultural writings affirm the ideology of marginalized cultures and resist other perspectives insisting on centralized sources of power and knowledge.

References to indigenous religions in Japan—that of the Ainu, an indigenous Caucasian tribe in northern Japan, and Shinto, a widespread belief throughout Japan—recur in Vizenor’s novel Hiroshima Bugi, which likewise reflects the images presented in his haiku poetry. Just as Vizenor traces his poetic lineage through the works of Basho, Buson, and Issa, his novel Hiroshima Bugi makes the case for the parallels between the Anishinaabe and indigenous Japanese in his writings and even an indirect explanation for his own attraction to Japan’s indigenous roots. The novel’s protagonist, Ronin, remarks that “the anishinaabe and the Ainu share a sense of natural reason and similar stories of animal creation and presence” (Hiroshima 122). Because of the way Hiroshima Bugi comments extensively on connections between Anishinaabe and Japanese indigenous cultures, and Japanese arts and politics, passages from the novel serve to clarify some of the Japanese or transcultural topics and images in Vizenor’s poems with regard to animism.
In *Hiroshima Bugi*, Vizenor shares in occasional commentary the story of Ranald MacDonald, a little-known indigenous American who was the first English-language teacher in Japan. This story is shared by the Manidoo Envoy, an unnamed World War II veteran and friend of the protagonist’s father, whose function in the story is to clarify the discontinuities or unexplained aspects of Ronin’s narrative. In Ojibwe culture, “manidoo,” refers to a spirit or a god (“Manidoo”). Thus, the Envoy’s remarks on MacDonald’s and other backstories may be interpreted as providing a spiritual context for the events of the novel. Ranald MacDonald was a Native mixedblood from British Columbia who, out of a deep interest in the indigenous Ainu of northern Japan, arranged to be left by his ship to the Ainu people’s mercy off the shore of Hokkaido. MacDonald, who felt his culture had much in common with Ainu culture, risked entering Japan in the early nineteenth century, a time when Japan was closed to outsiders and trespassers could be killed or imprisoned. While MacDonald did meet with the Ainu, they turned him over to the Japanese government, after which MacDonald relocated to the Dutch trading post. In time, the Japanese emperor sent his samurai to learn English from MacDonald, causing MacDonald to realize his hoped-for opportunity to learn more about Japanese language and culture. Thus MacDonald, an indigenous North American, became the first known link between Japan and North America, and the first person to teach English to the Japanese. Vizenor quotes William Lewis and Naojiro Murakami’s *Ranald MacDonald*, which states that MacDonald believed North American Indians had originally come from Japan and his belief that he would find better success among them than among the whites in North America (*Hiroshima* 140). The inclusion of MacDonald’s story in parts of *Hiroshima Bugi* foreshadow the arrival of Ronin’s Anishinaabe father, Nightbreaker, and
Ronin’s subsequent experiences with the Ainu in the novel. The Manidoo Envoy’s comments about MacDonald and the Ainu also suggest a precedence for Vizenor’s own attraction to the indigenous aspects of Japanese culture and the resulting transcultural qualities of his haiku poetry.

_Hiroshima Bugi_’s Anishinaabe and Japanese mixedblood protagonist Ronin records his childhood discovery of haiku poetry through an encounter with water spirits called _nanazu_, near Sagami Bay, Japan. The “water tricksters,” described as “curious, moist, miniature humans… nude, bluish at the creases,” tease the seven-year-old Ronin (27). Nori, one of the nanazu, instructs Ronin “to shout out three natural words to create a poem, a new world of perfect memory” (29). However, when Ronin constructs an image of his found wooden sword as an ocean bounty, Nori objects, telling him that the sword was a gift of the _nanazu_, “the tricksters of rivers and ocean waves” (29). Nori’s critique implies that Ronin’s perception of the scene is false because it fails to acknowledge the role of other sentient, but immaterial, beings in the scene. I interpret this narrative of poetic creation as a suggestion, or exercise in imagination, of Vizenor’s that haiku poetry is communicated through nonhuman persons—nature spirits and natural objects—rather than developed single-handedly. If this scene is taken to reflect Vizenor’s own beliefs about creating poetry, it provides a context for understanding Vizenor’s conceptualization of haiku as intimately linked to animistic ideology.

At the end of the chapter, the Manidoo Envoy remarks that “[t]he Kappa are comparable to the _nanazu_ water tricksters by cultural traces and scenes of perky miniatures” and points to the similarity between the names _nanazu_ and “naanabozho, the _anishinaabe_ trickster” (33). The _kappa_, according to Japanese folklore, is “a creature
associated with water—usually slow-moving freshwater rivers and pools, but occasionally salt water” (Foster 3). However, the kappa has similarities to the traditional Anishinaabe trickster in that it holds a dual nature, “with negative and destructive qualities, and… positive regenerative qualities” (Foster 8). Nanabozho is synonymous with “the active quickening power of life… manifested and embodied in the myriad forms of sentient and physical nature” and contains “an unlimited series of diverse personalities which represent various phases and conditions of life” (White). The Manidoo Envoy deliberately draws attention to the hybridization of the nanazu in Vizenor’s text between the indigenous Japanese water tricksters and the Anishinaabe trickster. The scene fuses multiple cultural traditions through the presences of Ronin, a child of both Anishinaabe and Japanese descent, and the nanazu, spirits who represent concepts from both culture’s indigenous traditions. Thus, the nanazu have characteristics of both Japanese animism in that they are the spiritual essence of a physical substance—in this case, bodies of water—and of Anishinaabe animism in their communication of wisdom through succinct phrases and imagistic scenes.

While Ronin’s childhood poem falls short because of his short-sightedness toward the interconnections between objects and spirits, he develops a true understanding of the haiku dreamscape through watching Nori create a haiku poem. Nori shouts “three words into the crotch of a tree… and then, at a great distance, a voice repeated three scenes of an imagistic haiku poem,” whereupon Ronin hears the poem,

ancient pond
the nanazu leap
sound of water. (Hiroshima 29)
The poem that emanates from the tree closely suggests a poem by Basho, which Vizenor translates as,

an ancient pond,

a frog jumps in,

sound of water. (“Envoy” 30)

Nori’s version more readily suggests animistic ideas compared to Basho’s, such as that the nanazu’s leap is the same as the sound of water, just as Naanabozho, the Anishinaabe trickster, is synonymous with the activity of natural bodies. Vizenor’s riff on Basho’s original poem points to the role of nonhumans, particularly nature spirits, in the creation of haiku dreamscape. Vizenor’s portrayal of the nanazu suggest aspects of Japanese animism that enter into the dreamscape, while the tree’s ability to communicate the haiku scene to Ronin acknowledges the natural wisdom acquired through experience with nonhuman persons, a quality of Anishinaabe animism. Nori instructs Ronin to “[t]hrow cucumbers into the water when [his] visions and dance of words are about to vanish in the undertow of a crowd,” referring to a way to attract the nanazu to his aid. The kappa, according to Japanese folklore, have a strong attraction to cucumbers (Foster 5). Thus, the nanazu, rather than humans, are the true experts and teachers of clear, imagistic language. The scene in the novel unites animistic traditions of the Japanese and Anishinaabe closely with haiku poetry, giving insight to recurring images and scenes in Vizenor’s poems that privilege the communications of nonhuman persons.

One of the ways Vizenor’s poems express animistic ideas is through querying animal language and behavior in service of providing natural wisdom. Vizenor’s haiku poems often feature the perspectives of animals in a manner encouraging the reader to
view the world in a manner different from a human-centered worldview. This strategy is similar to Anishinaabe animism in that it resembles a wisdom-seeking strategy by considering the personhood of the objects in the haiku dreamscape. Previously, I discussed Vizenor’s response to Issa,

    tricky frogs
  croak a haiku in the marsh
    skinny issa. (Favor xxiii)

Among other interpretations, this poem suggests a perspective in which animals are creative beings, not objects, who respond intersubjectively not only to one another but to human beings, just as the poet Issa responded with insight to the frog’s presence. The images of this and similar poems of Vizenor’s urge the reader to consider animal behavior and communication with regard to their personhood. To regard them as such makes it possible for the reader to receive messages of natural wisdom from the animal world.

    Vizenor’s poems often favor animal perspectives in service of urging the reader to question preconceptions of animal thinking and behavior. In Seventeen Chirps, Vizenor writes,

    It took seventeen chirps
  For a sparrow to hop across
    My city garden. (n.p.)

The speaker’s precision in counting implies the speaker’s close observation of an ordinary animal behavior. The speaker ties the number of chirps the sparrow makes to its hops across the garden, nudging the reader to consider the potential connection between
them. While to the human world, a sparrow chirping or crossing a garden may be trivial occurrences, the poem presses the reader to tie the two together, providing an acknowledgement of logic and perspective foreign to the reader. Thus, an otherwise common, everyday image suggests the sparrow’s perspective in a manner similar to the idea of considering other beings as persons in Anishinaabe animism. Another poem in *Seventeen Chirps* reads,

The song sparrows

Nested in the choir loft

Six days a week. (n.p.)

The speaker’s observation favors the perspective of the sparrows, pointing to their occupation of a human space six days out of seven. The song sparrows produce music like human singers for a worship service. Human motivations for singing are familiar to us; the sparrows’ are not. The speaker, as in the previous poem discussed about animal perspectives, creates a space to consider the world from the perspective of a different being, also suggesting a sense of sympathy for the ousted sparrows and questioning the humans’ right to invade animal spaces. By considering the song sparrows’ personhood, we acknowledge other animals’ potential ownership of spaces and question our right to dominate other species.

Another of Vizenor’s haiku poems places animals at the end of their natural life cycle, a time which coincides with human activity during a holiday.

The last crickets

Practiced night after night

For Halloween (*Seventeen*, n.p.)
Monteleone 60

presents a view of cricket sounds as deliberate performance for human listeners. The
details presented construct multiple reasons for the crickets’ practice. Halloween is a
holiday in which many people, particularly children, are out-of-doors at night. Do
crickets take satisfaction in being heard by human listeners? Alternatively, as the weather
grows colder, the crickets grow closer to the end of their lives. Thus, the performance
could be crucial to them for their own sake, as a kind of survivance. The speaker urges us
to consider the crickets’ perspective toward time, mortality, and self-expression. While
we cannot fully know the crickets’ reasons for or feelings toward chirping, we
acknowledge that the practice is important to them, and in so doing, acquire a sense of the
crickets’ own nature. Many of Vizenor’s haiku poems present a view of animals acting
in, or toward, a world predefined by human spaces and temporalities. The dreamscapes
presented suggest alternatives to human-centered assumptions and urge the reader to
consider the animal’s life from its own perspective. Just as Ojibwe animism is a wisdom
acquired through considering other objects’ potential to be persons, these poems enlarge
the reader’s perspective by unseating human-centered assumptions about the animal
world. Vizenor’s use of animal perspectives appears to create learning opportunities for
the reader in a manner similar to Anishinaabe teachings on animism toward mino-
bimaadiziwin, or respectful approaches toward life, while also evoking the speaker’s
intention to create conditions for enlightenment, or a holistic concept from the universe
from a Japanese Zen Buddhist perspective. Vizenor’s use of the haiku form to express
animistic ways of relating to the world brings both cultures together through their
ideological similarities, building stronger connections between Native American
perspectives on interconnectivity and Japanese spiritual approaches to life.
In addition to his portrayal of nature spirits as the progenitors of haiku poetry and the use of animal perspectives to heighten a sense of animistic teaching, Vizenor also uses images of animals that have particular animistic connotations in both Anishinaabe and Japanese cultures. Ravens or crows, which are perceived as spiritually meaningful in multiple indigenous cultures, recur in Vizenor’s haiku poetry. *Hiroshima Bugi* and other prose works by Vizenor add clarity to his treatment of the raven, which holds meaning as a guide or messenger in both Japanese and Anishinaabe traditions. A Japanese taboo against driving crows away exists because of beliefs about their importance “in early Japan as messengers of the sun-deity or as sacred birds sent to guide travelers” (Philippi 169n2). In Vizenor’s *Blue Ravens* (2016), a historical novel about Anishinaabe veterans of World War I, the narrator describes ravens as “traces of visions and original abstract totems, the chance associations of native memories in the natural world” (1). In Vizenor’s writings, ravens represent the transmission of natural wisdom through tricky images and stories. In Vizenor’s novel *Hiroshima Bugi* and in his haiku poetry, the presence of ravens suggests messages that are undiscovered, unexamined, or unacknowledged by the human world.

In *Hiroshima Bugi*, the Manidoo Envoy writes, “Nightbreaker… died in his wicker chair near the window. His last gesture was to the raucous ravens perched in the cottonwoods. Ravens inspire natural memories, he told me, and then continued his stories about the tricky imperial ravens in occupied Japan. Ravens create stories of survivance in our perfect memories” (7). In this instance, ravens conserve natural wisdom beyond the length of a human life span. Nightbreaker’s words and gesture unite the ravens near him at the White Earth Reservation with the ravens he glimpsed around the imperial palace.
while serving in the army in Japan. Both ravens represent the survival of native stories in
the presence of authoritarian and paracolonial regimes. In another passage of *Hiroshima
Bugi*, Ronin recalls an experience in which a raven divebombs his lunch near the palace.
The ravens bring another kind of aerial attack to mind as Ronin is reminded of “the
imperial pilots who were trained for only one mission, a kamikaze attack on the United
States Navy. Naturally the ravens were wiser, a theater of coup counts over lunch in the
park” (144). Ronin’s critique of kamikaze pilots serving Japanese imperial interests
uplifts his personification of the ravens, whom he imagines subvert imperial interests.
Ronin writes, “The palace ravens search the restaurant trash at first light, and then, in
smart teams, they raid the parks. By dusk they return to their roosts in the imperial
sanctuary” (144). Unlike humans, the ravens have no political allegiance. Ronin declares
that the ravens “are a tribute to a criminal empire, the great, tricky warriors of Hibiya
Park” (144). The raven is a transcultural trickster presence in Vizenor’s prose that
represents power through provocative expressions and subversion of nationalist
constructs. His poems reflect similar scenes but allow the ravens to assert themselves
without additional commentary. Vizenor’s prose commentary suggests that the ravens in
his haiku poems play a similar role as a trickster and messenger between material and
immaterial realms.

These passages in *Hiroshima Bugi* suggest meanings behind the presence of
ravens in Vizenor’s poems in that both reference images of ravens in cottonwoods and
around the Japanese imperial palace. In *Favor of Crows*, Vizenor’s poem,

haughty ravens

roost in the bare cottonwoods
Monteleone 63

oversee the river (67)

and another of his poems from the same book,

palace ravens

circle the best restaurant trash

imperial manners (52)

together echo the scene of Nightbreaker associating the presence of ravens on the reservation with those of his memories of Japan, while also evoking particular qualities of both the American and Japanese ravens. In addition to portraying the ravens’ engagement in practical behaviors like roosting and scavenging in these haiku scenes, the speaker also describes their hauteur, a self-conscious arrogance. The ravens’ chilling reserve sets them apart from the rest of the natural world, even as they engage in survival behaviors. The suggestion of animism in these images evokes their traditional connotations in indigenous cultures as animals whose presences suggest hidden messages or knowledge. Vizenor invests these haiku dreamscapes with a sense of irony by describing the ravens roosting in the cottonwoods as “haughty” and the scavenging palace ravens with “imperial manners,” teasing the animals’ appearance of hauteur from a human perspective. However, the imposition of the animals themselves in the dreamscape is meaningful in terms of animistic beliefs and suggests that some element of the scene is yet to be uncovered by the human perspective. By describing images of ravens in different cultural and geographical contexts in his haiku dreamscape, Vizenor heightens the role of the raven as a guide and messenger as it is understood in multiple cultures, including Japanese and many Native American traditions, which further contributes to the transcultural nature of his haiku poetry.
While thus far I have examined the role of animals or spirits regarding their animistic contexts in Vizenor’s poems, other elements, such as language, also relate to Vizenor’s use of animism. Vizenor’s suggestion of names as living beings in his haiku poetry relates to Anishinaabe concepts of how stories are discrete spiritual entities, grandfathers, which interact with listeners. In his interview with Lee, Vizenor states that “visionary stories, oral or literary, are inspired, imagistic gazers” (“Praise” 271). By describing stories as “imagistic gazers,” Vizenor suggests that a story, as a living being, gazes at the world, or at a listener, during its transmission, resulting in changes in the telling based on the relationship between the story and its receiver. Like this Anishinaabe view on the animistic potential in communication, Vizenor orients his poems in relationship to the Chinese concept of shi, or the living flow or momentum of words, as he describes the concept in his introduction to Favor of Crows. Referring, with the term manidoo, to the Anishinaabe concept of a nature-based spirit, Vizenor states that “the dispositions of manidoo and shi are perceptive moments of presence in nature, but not the subjective voices of nature,” distinguishing the concepts as animatistic, rather than animistic (Favor xxiv). As he has done with Japanese traditions, Vizenor makes an explicit connection between Native American and Chinese animistic beliefs. In his introduction to Favor of Crows, Vizenor quotes François Jullien, who states that “'[a] surplus of shi’ carries [the text] forward, leading to the point where it will link up with its own continuation. A text exists not only through its ‘order’ and ‘coherence,’ but also through its ‘flow’ and ‘unfolding’” (xx). This concept has similarities to Vizenor’s term surivivance, a kind of survival through storytelling, in which a story has agential power through its formal properties and content. Likewise, “[m]any haiku scenes have shi, and
the disposition, the temperament, inclination, the mood and aesthetic tendencies, or intuitive moments, continue to move in nature and in our memories, and in the book” (Favor xx). Vizenor’s discussion of shi with regard to haiku poetry clarifies his regard for the dreamscape within haiku poetry as animate in a manner similar to Anishinaabe animistic beliefs, which consider stories as living persons.

In order to clarify how Vizenor portrays written language as living, evoking these concepts of shi in Chinese culture and the Anishinaabe idea of stories as grandfathers, I turn to a poem of Vizenor’s that is categorically different than those previously examined in this chapter. This poem represents objects that are human-created, rather than relating explicitly to nature. Despite its lack of overtly natural subject matter, the poem exemplifies Vizenor’s treatment of names as living beings. In Cranes Arise, Vizenor’s poem, preceded by a headnote referencing location, proceeds,

\textit{vietnam veterans memorial}

columns of names

come alive in a snowstorm

sound of children. (n.p.)

In this poem, the names of fallen soldiers in the Vietnam War on a stone memorial are animated by the falling snow. The snow suggests an air strike by U.S. forces, reinforced by the “sound of children,” which commingles the deaths of the soldiers with the violence the war inflicted upon the children of Vietnam. The dreamscape represents both the fallen soldiers and the suffering of children; the stone memorial unites past and present, while snow reenacts the confusion of the war. As with the idea of manidoo, or shi, as Vizenor has described them, the names provide presence similar emanations of
energy, serving, in this poem, to collapse boundaries between the past and present. The sound of children in the dreamscape stems from this perceived influx of energy gathered by the combination of whirling snow and the potentiality of the names to provide stories to a listener.

Other poems of Vizenor’s also find the presence of names in stone meaningful. In *Cranes Arise*, Vizenor writes,

*minneapolis, minnesota*

thirsty sparrows

gather around the new names

sunny gravestones. (n.p.)

As with the previous poem, this image creates a sense of presence surrounding the names of the deceased, rather than the absence with which a recent death is associated. A similar poem from *Seventeen Chirps* reads,

The Winter birds

Gathered on the warm markers

Drinking from the names. (n.p.)

These similar poems provide images of presences in a graveyard, a setting more commonly associated with an absence of life. The names are enlivened with birds who drink water or melted snow from the sun-warmed gravestones. The animals’ thirst is quenched ironically by life-giving water in the indentations in monuments signifying death. The dreamscape portrays the names as life-giving presence, rather than the absence suggested by signs of recent death, while the kinetic nature of the scene portrays an interaction between the names and living beings. The relationship of these names in stone
to surrounding beings suggests concepts from Anishinaabe animism in that their interaction with others contributes to their personhood. Harvey writes that it is stones’ “participation in a community of persons attempting to live well that is most significant” (42). Stones who interact with other persons in these life-affirming ways “are ‘moral agents’ not only in the broad sense that they are alive, but also in the specific sense that they—and all other persons—are expected to engage in good relationships” (Harvey 42).

Vizenor’s poems mention both the names and the stones themselves as engaging in relationships with others. The stones themselves receive the warmth from the sun, which transmits to the moisture surrounding the engraved names. Birds drink from the names, suggesting continuities between material and immaterial and human and animal worlds, heightened by the presence of water transforming between material states.

These haiku images of Vizenor’s that touch on different aspects of forms of animism in multiple cultures contribute to his transcultural haiku dreamscape. Vizenor connects haiku poetry with animism in multiple ways: by suggesting that nature spirits share haiku images with humans; by utilizing images such as the raven, whose religious significance crosses many cultural boundaries, including that of the Anishinaabe and the Japanese; and by relating his haiku dreamscape to concepts of shi, or the living flow or momentum of words. Some of the animistic ideas behind Vizenor’s haiku images cross cultural boundaries or point to commonalities between cultures. For example, the nanazu in a poem from *Hiroshima Bugi* reflects aspects of the kappa, an indigenous Japanese water-based spirit, and Naanabozho, the Anishinaabe trickster whose presence is simultaneous with and inseparable from natural motion and transformation. Other instances of animistic suggestion in Vizenor’s poems connect the ideas of living words
and the status of personhood any participant in a living community attains. Vizenor’s poems, by their formal properties, particularly their minimal words and maximal suggestive power, interact with readers, who complete the haiku dreamscape and create a transient presence through dialogue. Vizenor preserves the intuitive mental activities that Japanese haiku poetry provokes in the reader to communicate his own perceptions of Anishinaabe animism and natural wisdom, or broadened perceptions of the living world, to the reader.

As I addressed near the end of Chapter 1, Vizenor’s use of Japanese culture may be critiqued in the sense that Vizenor, as an English-language writer, is publishing poetry partially derived from Japanese forms, in the United States, where the Japanese constitute a minority population. This is an especially pertinent issue since Vizenor himself has scrutinized and satirized white appropriation of Native American culture in his prose writings (Postindian 4-5). Although Vizenor disdains stereotypical, manufactured concepts of a so-called Indian, does Vizenor himself risk flattening the distinctions between Native American and Asian cultures by bringing them together so often in his poetry and prose? This question is particularly important with regard to the question of animism, and Vizenor’s comparison of indigenous Japanese religious practices to that of the Anishinaabe.

Vizenor’s comparisons are especially noteworthy considering that Native American worldviews have been appropriated by white, new-age practitioners selling books and wares that often confuse or combine the religious practices of Native Americans with those of Eastern cultures. Vizenor has stated that it was haiku poetry that turned him back to “the tease of native reason and memories,” indicating that his
association between Japanese and Native American traditions was immediate and intuitive (Favor xi). There is an opportunity to question Vizenor’s use of specifically Japanese forms to express Native American ideas, just as one might question the associations he affirms between Anishinaabe and Ainu cultures in Hiroshima Bugi, as rather one-sided. Vizenor’s writings thus far have not acknowledged Japanese voices outside of their contribution to understanding the ideas behind his own poems or indicated any reciprocal acknowledgement on the part of the Japanese of the connections Vizenor perceives between the two cultures. While these elements limit Vizenor’s poems as a response to, rather than greater dialogue with, Japanese literary culture, Vizenor’s use of academic scholarship in his discussion of his use of Japanese haiku poetry, and his own history of learning Japanese language, literature, and culture in an academic environment, speak to his serious pursuit of knowledge about and sincere respect for Japanese culture. While Vizenor’s artistic license may leave him open to criticism at times with regard to his conflation of Anishinaabe and indigenous Japanese beliefs, his efforts to educate himself in Japanese culture produce not only informed prose commentary about Japan, but haiku poems which, far from imitations of Japanese haiku, stem from his own worldview, which incorporates aspects of Japanese culture.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Vizenor uses the haiku form with a deep awareness of its Japanese roots. Previous scholarly analysis of Vizenor’s haiku poems have approached them with a consciousness of Vizenor as a Native American author, a strategy which has emphasized Native influences in his poetry such as his use of trickster discourse, his incorporation of the Anishinaabe dream song, or his resistance to Western epistemology. However, Vizenor also writes as a scholar and poet responding to Japanese culture, history, and politics, topics which are clarified by my readings of Vizenor’s haiku poems with regard to their Japanese contexts. I considered Vizenor’s biographical experiences with Japan as well as his novel *Hiroshima Bugi* to clarify Vizenor’s impressions of and perceived connections to Japan. My review of prior literature on Vizenor’s haiku poetry served to contextualize his poetic identity with regard to his other, more overtly Native-oriented writings, and to point to moments when other scholars have noted Vizenor’s interaction with and deep interest in Japanese culture. In considering Vizenor’s responsiveness to Japanese culture, I found Native theoretical lenses such as interconnectivity and crossreading to provide deeper insight into the underlying meaning of his texts. While a worldview of interconnectedness, as it applies to a number of Native cultures, appears in Vizenor’s responsiveness to Japanese haiku masters, Vizenor’s approach to Japanese and other Asian cultures has similarities to the idea of reading across cultures, or what could be described as “pos[ing] significant questions concerning the possibility of looking at other cultures in ways that foster crosscultural communication rather than perpetuating an us/them universe” (Pulitano 116). My study of Vizenor’s haiku poetry affirms the idea, noted by other scholars, that Vizenor’s writings query and resist national boundaries and
categorical modes of considering culture. In addition to this, my analysis suggests that Vizenor has focused on particular aspects of Native and Japanese cultures that provides an alternative, non-hierarchical worldview through the reader’s participation in his haiku dreamscape.

In the introduction to his haiku books and other writings, Vizenor orients himself as a haiku poet with regard to three Japanese haiku masters. Vizenor’s responsiveness to these poets clarifies Japanese traditions as a significant foundation for his haiku dreamscape. Vizenor’s poems draw from Japanese traditions by responding to the seasonal configuration of classical Japanese poetics, the aesthetics used by Japanese haiku masters, and concepts in Zen Buddhist religion. These traditions are complemented by the use of concepts from the Anishinaabe oral tradition in Vizenor’s poetry. In considering his poems with greater regard for his use of Japanese literary tradition, I find that nuances in Vizenor’s poems clearly reflect a relationship with Japanese haiku masters to a larger degree than has been previously recognized by scholars.

In addition to responding to Japanese poets and cultural aesthetics, Vizenor recognizes multiple traditions of animism in his poems. Vizenor’s poems portray Anishinaabe concepts of natural wisdom, or the idea that one might acquire wisdom by becoming more animistic toward the natural world. Vizenor’s writings make connections between Native Americans and the Ainu to express not only similarities between their paracolonized circumstances but also to reveal a history of connections between these two cultures. The similarities to which Vizenor points between Anishinaabe culture and the Ainu in his novel *Hiroshima Bugi* imply a high degree of compatibility between indigenous people who have lived in very different places but practice earth-based
principles and spirituality. While Vizenor distances himself from pan-Indian movements that de-emphasize specific, locally-tied traditions for the sake of resisting Western power, his writings, including his haiku poetry, suggest other ways that disparate, paracolonized cultures can connect without losing aspects of their identities. Vizenor’s idea of survivance, or surviving through storytelling, supports multiple concepts of animism while elevating the oral tradition as viable and accessible through specific formal properties (the dream song and the haiku forms) and the reader’s receptivity to intuitive meanings.

Vizenor’s haiku dreamscape is a complex, transformative space that, like a moment of satori, or enlightenment, reveals a wisdom that is partially constructed from the reader’s own reflective or intuitive thinking processes and subjective associations. Because of the highly personalized experience the haiku dreamscape represents, it is misleading, as well as counterproductive, to attempt to define the meaning of Vizenor’s individual poems too closely. And yet, working from an analytical viewpoint, it becomes apparent that the elements contributing to Vizenor’s imagistic dreamscapes are borrowed from multiple cultures, which in turn, reflects upon the intrinsic meanings of his poems as accessible from a multitude of cultural viewpoints. Vizenor’s haiku poems have been primarily evaluated through a Native American critical lens; yet, my analysis of the multiple resources that contribute to his poetry suggests that his work responds to multiple cultural traditions and may be related to, in many respects, from a Japanese point of view as well as from a Native perspective. His efforts to build cultural bridges and work in genres not common to other Native American writers must be considered from a more transcultural perspective in order to more fully recognize his contribution to an
international literature.

Vizenor’s poetic dreamscape reflects not only the strategies of natural wisdom common to the Anishinaabe, but also similar ideologies drawn from the Ainu, indigenous Japanese beliefs, the Chinese, and a spectrum of unacknowledged compatible traditions. My consideration of the indigenous Japanese aspects of Vizenor’s poems clarifies his haiku dreamscape as a worldview composed of multiple similar but distinct cultural strategies that further distinguish survivance as a theory applicable to different indigenous traditions, and other cultures that possess indigenous values. His inclusion of aspects and ideologies from multiple cultures not only collapses the divisive perceptions of nationalities, but also renders a worldview that does not hinge on notions of cultural authenticity or other kinds of categorical thinking. In short, the natural wisdom in Vizenor’s dreamscape can be located from multiple points of beginning, preserving the value in haiku poetry much-honored by the Japanese: its ability to transcend time and place in communicating the poet’s intended meaning.
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