



Theses and Dissertations

2021-06-02

More than Stories: Indigenous Environmental Reciprocity in the Poetry of Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner

Rebecca Purse
Brigham Young University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Purse, Rebecca, "More than Stories: Indigenous Environmental Reciprocity in the Poetry of Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner" (2021). *Theses and Dissertations*. 9528.
<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/9528>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

More than Stories: Indigenous Environmental Reciprocity
in the Poetry of Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner

Rebecca Purse

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Michael Taylor, Chair
Brian Roberts
Jamin Rowan

Department of English
Brigham Young University

Copyright © 2021 Rebecca Purse

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

More than Stories: Indigenous Environmental Reciprocity in the Poetry of Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner

Rebecca Purse
Department of English, BYU
Master of Arts

This thesis brings to the forefront the traditional stories Marshalllese poet, performer, and climate change activist Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner shares in her published poetry. Indigenous studies scholars agree that Indigenous stories have power—power to change, power to inform, and power to heal. The traditional stories in Jetñil-Kijiner’s poetry reveal the power of the environment and the potential relationships that can exist between humans and natural beings.

While these traditional stories work to disrupt the narrative that Indigenous perspectives, knowledges, and cultures are somehow inferior to their colonial neighbors’, they also assert the need for a return to environmental reciprocity—or the establishment of mutually beneficial relationships between humans and the environment. Jetñil-Kijiner invites her audience to develop these relationships with natural beings as a way to combat the destructive effects of climate change. Seeing the environment as more than an inanimate resource to be exploited involves mindful interactions with natural beings—including plant, animal, water, and geologic life—through respecting their power and learning from their wisdom. Ultimately, Jetñil-Kijiner’s invitation to adopt environmental reciprocity encourages global environmental healing by allowing traditional stories to transform the practice of human and natural interactions to allow for mutually restorative and enlightened relationships.

Keywords: climate change, environment, nature, Indigenous, traditional stories, environmental reciprocity, natural beings, natural agency, other-than-human kin, environmental kinship.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
The Enduring Power of Stories.....	6
Marshallese Stories: Where Land and Water Meet	10
Environmental Agency: Recognizing the Life and Spirit of Natural Beings	17
The Transformative Power of Stories	23
Works Cited	30

Introduction

The Marshallese tell a story of two sisters “birthed by fire and sea” who came to the Marshall Islands to establish a home and a people. For generations, the sisters, Liwātuonmour and Lidepdepju, lived with their descendants on the islands in the form of basalt rock pillars, reminding their people of their oceanic origin. Revered and respected, the sisters were considered to hold special powers, even the power to bring back life (Jetñil-Kijiner, “Why”). One day, a Christian missionary visited Liwātuonmour’s atoll and, rejecting the Marshallese’s belief that she and her sister were mothers and goddesses to their people, pushed Liwātuonmour into the ocean, seeking to prove that she was “nothing more. Than rocks. Nothing more. Than stone” (Jetñil-Kijiner, “Liwātuonmour”).¹

Liwātuonmour and Lidepdepju’s story, as retold by contemporary Marshallese poet Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, illustrates the Marshallese’s Indigenous claim to and relationship with their islands and demonstrates the longstanding, Eurocentric disregard for the knowledge embedded in and shared intergenerationally through traditional Indigenous stories. This disregard for Indigenous stories and knowledge has been constant in the centuries of settler-colonialism on—and far beyond—the Marshall Islands. The missionary’s justification that Liwātuonmour was “nothing more. Than rocks” is the same settler-colonial mindset that has led ongoing attempts to eradicate the traditional knowledge and ways of life unique to local and global Indigenous nations (Jetñil-Kijiner, “Liwātuonmour” 8). In his 2018 book, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) describes this ongoing disregard for Indigenous stories as an effect of “Indigenous deficiency,” which is a militarized belief that “Indigenous peoples are in a state of constant lack: in morals, laws, culture, restraint, language, ambition, hygiene, desire,

¹ This narrative is taken from a poem by Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner where she imagined the missionary’s reasoning that Liwātuonmour was “just a rock.” See also Jack A. Tobin’s *Stories from the Marshall Islands* pp. 53–55.

[and] love,” due, in part, to Indigenous communities’ reliance on traditional stories as their source of knowledge, morality, spirituality, and understanding of the natural world (2). This destructive narrative has led to colonial governments’ institutionalized attempts to unilaterally “humanize” and “civilize” Indigenous populations; justify the forced removal of Indigenous peoples from their homelands, home waters, and communities; and exploit Indigenous lands and waters rather than seeking to consider and learn from the vast localized—and global—knowledge that has sustained Indigenous nations, lands, and waters since time immemorial.

Contemporary Indigenous writers, like Jetñil-Kijiner, work to combat this narrative of Indigenous deficiency and raise their voices to declare that, despite settler-colonial attempts to stamp them out, they are still here, maintaining their stories and their storied relationships to their lands and waters. Indigenous studies scholars argue that Indigenous stories have power—power to change, power to inform, power to heal spiritually, temporally, and environmentally. Kanaka ‘Ōiwi (Native Hawaiian) scholar ku’ualoha ho’omanawanui asserts that “cultural enlightenment was dependent upon words of the past . . . recovered, recorded, and remembered, along with the present generations of composers, poets, intellectuals, activists, and scholars, writing new songs, poems, stories, chapters and scholarship” (682). Similarly, environmental studies scholar Summer Harrison argues that “songs and stories have a material force in the world as powerful as bulldozers or hammers” and “can help dismantle a destructive worldview and make a new world possible” (25). Harrison and ho’omanawanui echo Justice’s claim that Indigenous stories are “good medicine” that “can drive out the poison, heal the spirit as well as the body” from narratives and geopolitical assumptions of Indigenous deficiency (5).

Drawing upon the power of traditional Marshallese stories, Jetñil-Kijiner embeds these stories and practices within her poetry to declare Indigenous resilience as well as raise awareness

surrounding the climate change crisis faced by her people and all those who are often outside of global concern—those in the “deficient” or “nothing more” category. She identifies the disregard and misuse of Indigenous knowledge by world powers, recognizing that “Indigenous people are trotted forward as mouthpieces, mined for their wisdom, highlighted for their tragedies, and then shoved to the back of the line” (“Why”). Jetñil-Kijiner, however, refuses to be shoved to the back of the line of global concern. She fights being pushed to the periphery of present-day environmental concerns by showing how essential traditional stories are to the cultural identity, governance, kinship, and lifeblood of Indigenous communities, and what they could contribute to the broader understanding of the environment if welcomed into the climate change conversation. She repurposes traditional Marshallese stories to inform current environmental and climate conversations, not only legitimizing Marshallese traditional knowledge but also demonstrating the potential relationships humans can have with the natural world.

Due to the unique island nature of her home, Jetñil-Kijiner carries a particular relevancy within current conversations surrounding climate change. Unlike the majority of the continental world, the Marshall Islands are facing the immediate effects of climate change-related flooding, which threatens their ability to continue living on their island homes. Jetñil-Kijiner captures this immediate threat in her poem “Dear Matafele Peinam” that she presented at the 2014 United Nations Climate Change Summit. Addressed to her young daughter, “Dear Matafele Peinam” reflects on the impacts the current climate crisis may have on Matafele Peinam’s upbringing on the disappearing Marshall Islands. In this poem, Jetñil-Kijiner declares her intention to fight for a better world “because we deserve / to do more / than just / survive / we deserve / to thrive” (73). Since 2014, this poem, like much of Jetñil-Kijiner’s work, has been featured in various venues

and discussed critically in reference to climate change.² Yet, within this broader climate-change conversation, scholars seem to celebrate Jetñil-Kijiner's poetry-driven activism without acknowledging how many Indigenous responses to present-day environmental realities are linked, as Jetñil-Kijiner demonstrates so clearly in her work, with their long-standing, storied understanding and connection with land, water, and the Earth more generally. These long-term Indigenous understandings and approaches to environmental sustainability shared through Indigenous stories and ongoing embodied practices inform but are not limited to the current climate crisis.³

While the issues stemming from the current climate crisis are a crucial aspect of Jetñil-Kijiner's work, her poetry demands that people recognize that “there's more to [her] islands than the threat of being drowned” due to the effects of climate change (“Few”). She describes her website of poetry, blog posts, and performance videos as her “artist page” and further describes how her environmental activism grows directly out of traditional stories: “My primary creative practice explores my culture's rich storytelling and how they intersect and dialogue with evolving issues threatening our islands and community” (“Background”). As she asserts, Jetñil-Kijiner's work not only brings awareness to the evolving environment but she simultaneously posits the potential of ever-evolving Indigenous stories that offer the centuries-proven knowledge of environmental sustainability necessary to confront and adapt to evolving threats.

Despite her stated effort to position Marshallese stories at the center of a global climate change conversation, these stories are often overlooked to discuss, instead, her climate change

² Beyond her poetry, Jetñil-Kijiner's climate change activism includes founding and directing an educational environmentalism nonprofit for Marshallese youth, Jo-Jikum, and she serves as the Climate Envoy for the Marshall Islands Ministry of Environment (Jetñil-Kijiner, “Background”).

³ Indigenous climate change activism is not unique to Jetñil-Kijiner and the Marshall Islanders. As natural disasters and other climate change related phenomenon have increased in scale and severity, Indigenous voices have risen up to address the dangers facing their communities.

activism and her decolonizing moves, without directly acknowledging how her decolonial, environmental work remains grounded, as she describes, in the ever-adapting stories of her people. For example, Michelle Keown places Jetñil-Kijiner in an anti-colonist conversation, examining the history of militarism experienced in the Marshall Islands. Susan Stanford Friedman and Angela L. Robinson, on the other hand, examine the human and non-human interactions that Jetñil-Kijiner highlights in her work and inform the current understanding of the on-going effects of past nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands.⁴ Additionally, environmental studies scholar Elizabeth DeLoughrey uses Jetñil-Kijiner’s climate change reaction poem, “Tell Them,” to introduce the premise of her book *Allegories of the Anthropocene*. Building upon Keown, Stanford, Friedman, and others, DeLoughrey extends the discussion of Jetñil-Kijiner’s poetry from decolonial work to environmental activism, recognizing Jetñil-Kijiner as one who is “at the periphery of Anthropocene scholarship and [who has a] compelling ‘geostor[y]’ about the complex and disjunctive relationship to place” (32). Contributing to this existing scholarship, this thesis emphasizes the centrality of traditional Indigenous knowledge and experience in Jetñil-Kijiner’s published poetry as not only informing current understandings of the natural world but also of asserting the permanence and transformative power of Indigenous stories.⁵

By foregrounding traditional Marshallese stories in both her climate change and decolonizing poetry, Jetñil-Kijiner demonstrates the longstanding healing and unifying possibilities—and practices—of establishing human and environmental relationships in this time of climate crisis. While Jetñil-Kijiner’s poeticization of these traditional stories works to disrupt the narrative that Indigenous perspectives, knowledges, and cultures are somehow inferior to

⁴ While “non-human” and “other-than-human” are terms some environmental scholars use to describe animal, plant, water, and geologic life, I will be using the term “natural beings” in this thesis to resist creating a hierarchy where natural forms can only be described in relation to human life.

⁵ Poetry published on her website, kathyjetnilkijiner.com, and in *Iep Jaltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter*.

their Euro-Western neighbors’, her emphasis on the enduring, adaptable, and transformative power of these stories also asserts the need to return to an ideological and embodied practice of environmental reciprocity. Environmental reciprocity, as defined in this thesis, involves establishing mutually beneficial relationships between humans and the environment. While reciprocity is a broadly used term, Jetñil-Kijiner explains the importance of reciprocity in the Marshallese community as a way to show mutual gratitude and respect between two people or groups (“IEP” 24). She affirms that reciprocity can be enacted in a variety of tangible and intangible ways in Marshallese culture, including giving gifts or even researching and writing for the benefit of a community, as she does with her work. Through Jetñil-Kijiner’s poetry, reciprocity works to bridge the cultural and political dichotomies—continental and oceanic, traditional and scientific, Indigenous and non-Indigenous—surrounding present-day environmentalism and the current climate crisis. She repurposes traditional Marshallese stories to invite global healing through environmental reciprocity—an invitation for all to participate in the transformative power of the reciprocal environmental relationships exemplified in these stories.

The Enduring Power of Stories

As with Indigenous stories, the stories of other communities have a history of not being taken seriously by outsiders. Among much of the Euro-Western world, fairy or folktales are considered to be juvenile fiction and, therefore, not worth serious literary consideration. This devaluation of folktales is the result of a variety of factors, but the absence of a precise origin or author seems to be a main factor. Angela Carter argues, however, that the indeterminable origin of folktales allows these stories to “be remade again and again by every person who tells them,” allowing for adaptability while still continuing the tale for future generations (1). In his book *Cycles of Influence: Fiction, Folktale, Theory*, Stephen Benson offers a similar definition of

folktales as having a “series of narrators whose relationship to the tales is both intimate and detached; the folktale is ‘extra-individual,’ that is, it exists both within and beyond each individual and personalized telling” (19). While the absence of an author makes it difficult to trace the origin, intention, and even the literality of these stories, it also allows for an adaptability that can highlight and enhance the values of those individuals who pass them on. In this way, these stories become living beings that breathe life into a community’s culture and history, and through their retellings can become permanent enduring features of these communities. While Euro-Western folktale scholars like Carter and Benson work to combat the devaluation of stories in their communities, Indigenous scholars, writers, and performers like Jetñil-Kijiner take this fight to recognize the importance of traditional stories a step further to show how essential traditional stories are to the identity, governance, kinship, spirituality, and lifeblood of Indigenous communities. Indigenous stories can hold a sacred, even scriptural place in their communities as they inform current political and religious systems, while also teaching centuries’ old practices that are vital for sustaining current generations.

One story that reflects this sustaining and adaptable influence of traditional stories is the Marshallese story of the first fire, retold by Jetñil-Kijiner in her poem “Anointed.” This poem is the third and final part of her collection of “Dome” poems, which she wrote after her debut of “Dear Matafele Peinam” at the UN climate summit in 2014. The “Dome” poems are three poems that respond to and reflect on her visit to several islands that were contaminated by U.S. nuclear testing. She begins “Anointed” by reflecting on what stories might still exist in these islands that are now uninhabitable: “I’m coming to meet you / I’m coming to see you / What stories will I find? / Will I find an island / or a tomb? . . . Who knows the stories of the life you led before?” (“Anointed”). In these opening lines, Jetñil-Kijiner is closely connecting the life of the islands to

the stories that still exist there, a move which demonstrates how she is prioritizing stories in how she seeks to understand these natural spaces: “I am looking for more stories. I look and I look.” She then goes on to tell the story of a turtle goddess, who gave her son Letao “a piece of her shell, / anointed / with power. . . . It gave Letao the power to transform / into anything, into trees and houses, the shapes of other men, even kindling for the first fire he almost / burned us / alive” (“Anointed”). In this story, the power Letao received from his mother became dangerous to the Marshallese because Letao did not know how to wield such power, and he “laughed and laughed” as a village was almost destroyed because of his decision to transform into “kindling for the first fire.” After relating the story, Jetñil-Kijiner reflects, “Here is a story of a people on fire—we pretend it is not burning all of us. / Here is a story of the ways we’ve been tricked, of the lies we’ve been told” (“Anointed”).

Through the telling of Letao and his shell anointed with power, Jetñil-Kijiner demonstrates stories’ ability to endure through being understood and connected to present-day realities. In this case, she connects a village almost being destroyed by the first fire with the Islands and their inhabitants almost being destroyed by nuclear testing, questioning, “Who gave them [the United States] this power? Who anointed them with the power to burn?” (“Anointed”). Making these types of connections between stories that have been passed down for centuries and present realities allow Jetñil-Kijiner to comment on the current issues the Marshallese are facing, while still maintaining a connection to the Marshallese’s rich history and culture. Jetñil-Kijiner asserts that stories become a way to see past “the lies” and the “ways we’ve been tricked,” becoming vital instruments for understanding reality (“Anointed”). In this way, Jetñil-Kijiner’s view of stories become very different from the predominant perception of stories, especially in the Euro-Western world where stories are reduced to inconsequential fiction. By connecting the

story of the first fire to the realities of not only the lives of the Marshallese people but also the lives of these Islands, Jetñil-Kijiner argues that these stories are much more real and tangible than some would accept. In fact, she shows how truly essential the enduring power of these stories is to informing current understandings. These stories are not old and outdated, they are living entities that continue to inform communities when permitted to do so.

Another demonstration of how traditional stories inform present-day realities can be found in Jetñil-Kijiner's poem "Utilomar." Published before her "Dome" poems, "Utilomar" is another of Jetñil-Kijiner's climate change reaction poems, as it describes the threat of rising ocean levels. She foregrounds her message with a story that captures her ancestral connection to her home environment, where she recounts her lineage through a story she was told about her ancestors:

My family is a descendant of the RiPako clan, the Shark clan
 known to control the waves with roro, chants
 it was said that they turned the tides with the sound of their voice
 they sang songs to sharks encircling their canoes, we were connected
 to these white tipped slick bodied ancestors carving
 through water. ("Utilomar")

With this story, Jetñil-Kijiner highlights her people's inseparable connection with their surrounding natural environment, including land, water, and animal life. She speaks of her ancestors having the power to control the waves with their voices and even speak to the sharks, but she does so in the past tense—"it was said that they turned the tides . . . we were connected"—which suggests that these are no longer powers that their descendants, like Jetñil-Kijiner, possess. However, while Jetñil-Kijiner's past-tense expression suggests that she may not

have the same powers as her ancestors, this story still informs her present identity as she demonstrates in the context of the surrounding poem. The poem opens with her expressing her discomfort because she dreamt about eating a shark at a family party. She then explains her identity and connection to these creatures through the story of her ancestors, affirming, “We would never / have eaten them [the sharks]” (“Anointed”). Through the telling of this story as well as how she demonstrates the connection between her present fears and her understanding of her ancestors, Jetñil-Kijiner illustrates how informative these stories can be in enlightening peoples’ perceptions of the natural world and the potential for environmental reciprocity. As Jetñil-Kijiner exemplifies, one of the main purposes of Marshallese stories is to allow audience members to “learn, through the successes and failures of the character in the stories about their social environment and the values of their society” (Tobin 8–9). In this case, the story of Jetñil-Kijiner’s ancestors informed her connection to the natural world in such a way that allowed her to reject the idea of harming a natural being, the shark, as such an action would not be in line with her identity.⁶ As Jetñil-Kijiner demonstrates, traditional stories possess an adaptability and relevancy that allow them to inform subsequent generations of both the storytellers, like Jetñil-Kijiner, and audience members, like Jetñil-Kijiner’s audience. Through this adaptability, traditional stories can remain a permanent, enduring part of their communities.

Marshallese Stories: Where Land and Water Meet

As illustrated in the story of the first fire and Jetñil-Kijiner’s ancestral story, traditional Marshallese stories often feature natural surroundings as integral to Marshallese identity. This connection makes sense, seeing that Jetñil-Kijiner’s commentary on climate change is inseparably connected to the environment; however, her commentary simultaneously reveals the

⁶ As I mentioned in a previous footnote, the term “natural beings” refers to animal, plant, water, or geologic life forms—what some may describe as “non-human” life.

power of stories to inform one's identity. In his introduction to *Stories from the Marshall Islands*, anthropologist Jack Tobin summarizes the importance of Marshallese stories in educating community members about not only their history but also their social and environmental relationships. Tobin explains what Jetñil-Kijiner illustrates with her poetry regarding how traditional stories play a role in understanding the natural world as well as supernatural phenomenon, from which can be learned "many essential things necessary for survival, including the techniques for living with and exploiting the environment" (Tobin 8–9). Even those, like Tobin, who seek to legitimize the knowledge contained in Marshallese stories can still present them within a Euro-Western framework of folktales and environmental exploitation. However, Tobin goes on to explain that listeners can learn about their "social environment and the values of their society. In this way, the proper respect relationships, social obligation, avoidance patterns, and other appropriate interpersonal and group behavior and relationships [are] explained, validated, and reinforced" (Tobin 9). Jetñil-Kijiner rejects this idea of environmental exploitation and rather illustrates that establishing "proper respect relationships," as Tobin puts it, is not an exploitative act of taking from the environment, but rather an ongoing act of reciprocity that can and should extend beyond human relationships to include the natural environment, both land and water spaces.

Through her use of traditional Marshallese stories, Jetñil-Kijiner emphasizes the Marshallese's rich heritage, including how their relationships with the natural world are a fundamental aspect of their identity. For the Marshallese, these stories teach "important information about their culture and . . . explain natural phenomena and the origins of geological forms, plants, and animals, they explain aspects of animal and human behavior, and they describe social organization and the supernatural" (Tobin 8–9). This connection to nature can be

seen in Jetñil-Kijiner's poem "Tell Them," where she declares, "We don't want to leave / we've never wanted to leave / . . . we / are nothing / without our islands" (66–67). Jetñil-Kijiner's powerful statement of identity being inseparable from the environment suggests that the Marshall Islanders face not only a loss of home but of identity if they are forced to sever their relationships with their homelands and waters. Jetñil-Kijiner wrote "Tell Them" and "Dear Matafele Peinam" around the same time, so it is unsurprising that "Dear Matafele Peinam" further emphasizes the potential rootlessness and loss of identity if the islanders can no longer live on their islands: "They say you, your daughter / and your granddaughter, too / will wander / rootless / with only / a passport / to call home" ("Dear" 70). By connecting Marshallese identity with their natural environment, Jetñil-Kijiner supports the idea of the environment being "the core of what it means to be human" and demonstrates how both Marshallese land and water spaces sustain the traditional cultural, spiritual, and political identity of the islanders (Lee 57).

Sustaining human relationships with the natural world is a fundamental practice for not only the Marshall Islanders but other global Indigenous populations, who often introduce themselves as related to their homelands and waters to express their ancestral ties and ongoing relationship with their environment. Māori scholar Alice Te Punga Somerville, for example, describes how the Māori perceive their connection with their environment: "When we introduce ourselves to other Māori people, we name the mountains, lakes, rivers, and harbors to which we are related so they can know who we are" (xviii). Te Punga Somerville names "mountains, lakes, rivers, and harbors," which extends an understanding of Indigenous homelands to also include Indigenous home *waters*, purposefully recognizing the Māori's connection to both land and water spaces (xviii). Prioritizing water spaces and waterways in understanding environmental identity may contradict those with more land-centric views, but the Marshallese

stories Jetñil-Kijiner shares demonstrate how equally land and water spaces contribute to informing the Marshallese’s understanding of the natural world. Understanding that water makes up the natural world as well as land is an important part of Islander identity.

The importance of waterways and spaces is demonstrated in the story of the secret sail race, which Jetñil-Kijiner shared before presenting “Dear Matafele Peinam” at the UN Climate Summit. She describes this story as “one of our most beloved legends,” clearly pointing out that it is an integral story in understanding Marshallese identity:

My family and I have traveled a long way to be here today—all the way from the Marshall Islands. The Marshall Islands encompasses more than two million square kilometers of ocean, and so it makes sense that our culture is one of voyaging and navigation. One of our most beloved legends features a canoe race between ten brothers. Their mother, holding a heavy bundle, begged each of her sons for a ride on their canoe, but only the youngest listened and took her along for the ride, not knowing that his mother was carrying the first sail. With the sail he won the race and became chief.

(“Statement”)

In her brief relation of this story, Jetñil-Kijiner touches on two key details in understanding Marshallese identity: their vast oceanic home and the canoe as a symbol of traditional identity. By first emphasizing the expansive nature of her island home as encompassing “two million square kilometers of ocean,” Jetñil-Kijiner responds to diminutive perceptions of island nations. Powerful policymakers have historically dismissed traditional Marshallese knowledge and stories, setting their oceanic home back on the list of priorities held by a traditionally continental-thinking world. Continental thinkers derive the power and worth of a nation from its landmass and proximity to other powerful nations, thus disregarding island nations because they are

perceived as “too small, too poor, and too isolated to develop any meaningful degree of autonomy” (Hau’ofa 30). Expanding one’s perception of these island spaces is one of the first steps in challenging the belittling settler-colonial views of island nations and their Indigenous inhabitants. Jetñil-Kijiner’s purposeful inclusion of the true expanse of the Marshallese’s oceanic home directs her audience’s attention to the wealth of stories and knowledge available from this broader conception of what makes up the Marshallese environment: “If we look at the myths, legends, and oral traditions, indeed the cosmologies of the peoples of Oceania, it becomes evident that they did not conceive of their world in such microscopic proportions. . . . Their world was anything but tiny” (Hau’ofa 31). Through sharing traditional stories, Jetñil-Kijiner challenges readers to recognize island nation spaces as encompassing not only land but also the vast surrounding ocean water, whose currents carry rich traditions and stories linked to those spaces. Expanding one’s perspective in this way mirrors the process of environmental reciprocity that begins with seeing the environment as made up of dynamic natural beings.

In conjunction with the key role the ocean plays in informing Marshallese identity, Jetñil-Kijiner also introduces an important traditional identity marker that appears repeatedly in her poetry and Marshallese stories: the canoe. As she conveys through the story of the secret sail race, voyaging is an important aspect of Marshallese history and ongoing identity. Jetñil-Kijiner identifies her people as “descendants of the finest navigators in the world” (“Tell Them” 64). Navigation and seafaring are important to other Pacific islanders: “People raised in this environment [Oceania] were at home in the sea. . . . they developed great skills for navigating their waters . . . [and] moved and mingled, unhindered by boundaries of the kind erected much later by imperial powers” (Hau’ofa 33). Stories like the canoe race convey the cultural significance of continuing to use the canoe as a mode of transport that has served many

generations of Marshallese to travel between their islands. Through its appearance in these stories, the canoe works as a marker of permanent traditional practice and reflects the origin of the Marshallese with its active presence.⁷ As demonstrated both through Jetñil-Kijiner’s poetry and Marshallese stories, the canoe is a symbol of Pacific Indigenous identity, past and present.

Rather than utilizing the canoe rhetorically as some stereotypical stand-in or metaphor for island identity, Jetñil-Kijiner uses the canoe to allow for and promote embodied practices of ancestral knowledge. As mentioned before, her “Dome” poems recount the canoe voyage Jetñil-Kijiner and her companions embarked on to visit the islands compromised by nuclear testing: “Traveling by canoe meant facing a lot of fears that I didn’t know I had—fear of the open ocean, even fear of the canoe itself” (“The Voyage”). Jetñil-Kijiner’s confession of initially fearing the voyage indicates her choice to travel by canoe, or the reclamation of and reliance on ancestral technology, was not taken lightly. Even the fact that she repeatedly emphasizes this mode of transport in her poems demonstrates her and her companions’ conscious decision to participate in a traditional embodied practice of voyaging.

By making a conscious choice to use a mode of transport featured in Marshallese stories, Jetñil-Kijiner and her companions’ voyage becomes an act of Indigenous cultural resurgence. She chooses to enact the stories and ways of life that are interconnected with Marshallese identity, the literal bringing together of land and water: “I’m coming to meet you / I’m coming to see you / What stories will I find? Will I find an island / or a tomb? / To get to this tomb take a canoe. Take a canoe through miles of scattered sun. Swallow endless swirling sea” (“Anointed”). The canoe works as a connection to an ancestral past, where to get to the stories and to find

⁷ The Māori also reverence the canoe—what they call “the waka”— as a symbol of their identity. According to Māori history, their people traveled to their current home in Aotearoa (New Zealand) on wakas. Since wakas are an important part of Māori past, “They name the waka on which [their] relatives traveled to Aotearoa . . . so they know who [they] are” (Sommerville xviii).

answers, one must “take a canoe.” Jetñil-Kijiner and her companions literally took a canoe voyage, but the implications of this poem are that the traditional markers woven through stories can lead to an enriched understanding of cultural, spiritual, and environmental identity. By poeticizing her fear-inducing choice not to use forms of transportation introduced by destructive imperial powers, Jetñil-Kijiner demonstrates how her people’s cultural roots are alive, well, accessible, and deeply ingrained in the surrounding environment.

By emphasizing the canoe’s important role in Marshallese living culture and identity in the “Dome” poems, Jetñil-Kijiner underscores the balance that should exist between people, land, and water. She uses canoes to represent this balance, where the nature of the vessel and the material from which it is constructed work together for the benefit of the passengers. In part two of the “Dome” poems, she refers to canoes as being “birthed” from the islands’ breadfruit trees that “fed [her] ancestors and built canoes” (“Islands”). Then in the third part of the “Dome” poems, she highlights the loss of these trees and how their absence leaves an empty crater of potential: “You were breadfruit trees heavy with green globes of fruit whispering promises of massive canoes” (“Anointed”). As Jetñil-Kijiner suggests, the materials used to build the canoes come from the land, where they are “birthed,” but they fulfill their purpose by spending their “life” out on the water. Like their Pacific Islander passengers, their maternal roots are in the land, where they are born and where they live, but their spirit and culture are inseparably connected with the ocean. Sommerville describes this cultural connection and call to the ocean as “mobility,” arguing that “mobility is who [Indigenous Pacific people] are rather than a departure from who [they] are” (322). Through the canoe, Jetñil-Kijiner demonstrates that such mobility is the ability to successfully navigate their Indigenous identity, to channel the balance of the canoe and respond to the call of the ocean while remaining connected to land. At the same time, Jetñil-

Kijiner's use of the canoe in her poetry demonstrates the simultaneous mobility of Indigenous stories in their ability to connect the present-day realities of the islanders to their rich cultural past. Stories navigate time and space in their adaptability, which allows them to continually nurture a deeper understanding of identity and connection to the natural world.

Environmental Agency: Recognizing the Life and Spirit of Natural Beings

While Jetñil-Kijiner clearly establishes how Marshallese culture is interconnected with their surrounding land and water spaces, she also uses traditional stories to breathe life into natural beings that might otherwise be perceived as inanimate. The stories she embeds in her work recognize these natural forms as dynamic beings with the potential for life, death, kinship, and power. Traditional stories are a means by which nature continues to breathe life into the perceptions of those who share, embody, and pass on these stories. The relationship is reciprocal and works both ways, however, as natural spaces contain stories and stories also inform understandings of these natural spaces. Cherokee writer Thomas King argues that Indigenous communities embody and offer an alternative view of land and the environment as entities that directly impact and are impacted by people, allowing for environmental reciprocity:

Land has always been a defining element of Aboriginal culture. Land contains the languages, the stories, and the histories of a people. It provides water, air, shelter, and food. Land participates in the ceremonies and the songs. And land is home. Not in an abstract way. . . . For non-Natives, land is primarily a commodity, something that has value for what you can take from it or what you can get from it. (218)

Despite King's land-centric discussion of the environment, his point about stories and land can still be understood within the framework of Marshallese stories, which reflect his assertion that "land contains . . . the stories . . . of a people" and "participates in the ceremonies and the songs."

For example, the basalt rock goddesses Liwātuonmour and Lidepdepju have reminded their people of their story and active presence in the community for generations. As King’s argument suggests, these natural matriarchs “participat[e] in the ceremonies and the songs” of the Marshallese, bringing people back from the dead as well as protecting and blessing the people (Kabua 53). Despite the active presence demonstrated through the stories told of Liwātuonmour and Lidepdepju, the Christian missionary, similar to many Euro-Western thinkers and industries, fell into the trap of being unable to see past his own perception of what a rock can and should be—he failed to see or understand Liwātuonmour and Lidepdepju’s story. He then chose not to consider the ways in which the Marshallese are connected to their environment beyond his limited perception of seemingly lifeless beings. By highlighting the missionary’s flawed perception, Jetñil-Kijiner’s retelling of the story of these two sisters functions as both a critique on and warning against settler-colonial disregard for the Indigenous environmental practices of seeing the environment as more than “just a rock” (“Just” 59).

The active presence Liwātuonmour and Lidepdepju have maintained in the Marshall Islands, suggests that natural beings possess an agency and power that is brought forward through these traditional stories. Jetñil-Kijiner’s recognition of natural beings’ agency and power aligns with how environmental scholars are grappling with the idea of environmental agency during this time of climate instability. In an age where humans have made a staggering geological impact, environmental scientists and theorists have come to recognize and acknowledge humanity’s capacity to cause destructive and lasting changes to the environment.⁸

⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty discusses the human transition from being mere biological agents to geological agents—“force[s] of nature”—arguing that humans have a significant enough environmental impact as to physically alter the geology and physiology of the Earth and its atmosphere, thereby placing humans in an unchallengeable position above other forms of plant and animal life (207). Similarly, Amartya Sen argues that “in the environmental context, . . . since we are enormously more powerful than other species, . . . [this can be a ground for our] taking fiduciary responsibility for other creatures on whose lives we can have a powerful influence” (39).

James Lovelock and Bruno Latour push back against this idea of humans being all-powerful agents, recognizing, as Jetñil-Kijiner does, the agency of the Earth. In his book, *The Revenge of Gaia*, Lovelock complicates the idea of human geologic agency by arguing that the Earth has a self-regulating power through Gaia—“a thin spherical shell of matter that surrounds the incandescent interior” of the Earth (15). Lovelock continues: “I call Gaia a physiological system because it appears to have the unconscious goal of regulating the climate and the chemistry at a comfortable state for life” (15). If the Earth has the power to self-regulate, or react and respond to the actions of humans, some may see this as a convenient way out of accepting human responsibility for the current climate crisis, but Lovelock and Latour argue that this understanding of the Earth does not make them subjects of Earth’s agency in the sense that it absolves humans from their choices: “Being a subject does not mean acting in an autonomous fashion in relation to an objective context; rather, it means sharing agency with other subjects that have also lost their autonomy” (Latour 62). Through her use of traditional stories, Jetñil-Kijiner demonstrates what sharing agency with the Earth can and should look like. While the representations of the natural beings in traditional Marshallese stories align with the reactive, responsive power of the environment of Lovelock’s and Latour’s arguments, Jetñil-Kijiner recognizes a life and spirit in these beings that goes against the “unconscious” agency of Lovelock’s Gaia (15). Rather, Jetñil-Kijiner demonstrates the potential for environmental reciprocity not only because these natural beings can respond to human actions but also because they have a spirit that exists and is maintained through traditional stories.

Natural beings’ spirit and capacity for life can be seen in the second part of the “Dome” poems, “Of Islands and Elders,” where Jetñil-Kijiner compares the lives of the islands to the lives of Marshallese elders. Through making this comparison, Jetñil-Kijiner argues that the

United States not only compromised the lives of the islanders when they tested nuclear weapons on the Marshall Islands but also the lives and intergenerational environmental knowledge of the islands: “What happens when islands / are massacred / murdered / and no one remembers / their names?” (“Islands”). By equating these islands with the revered elders of the Marshallese, Jetñil-Kijiner highlights her islands’ capacity to be sources of wisdom and learning. This connection also emphasizes the very human-like capacity of natural beings to be murdered and die. Such vivid imagery and connections in this poem indicate that these homelands and home waters are much more than convenient inhabitable zones; they are interconnected with the lives of their human inhabitants, further supporting the idea of environmental reciprocity. Jetñil-Kijiner purposefully equates the violence committed against the Marshallese’s home environment to the settler-colonial violence committed against human members of the community, reemphasizing how the environment is much more than just an inanimate setting. She demonstrates how the environment is made up of natural beings with whom humans can and should establish reciprocal relationships.

Kainai First Nation scholar Leroy Little Bear offers a possible explanation for how and why many Indigenous communities see the environment in the way that Jetñil-Kijiner does in her poetry. He explains that some Indigenous languages do not use the “animate/inanimate dichotomy”; without which, he argues that “everything is more or less animate. . . . allow[ing] for talking to trees and rocks, an allowance not accorded in English. If everything is animate, then everything has spirit and knowledge. If everything has spirit and knowledge, then all are like me. If all are like me, then all are my relations” (2). Adopting a perspective of the environment that recognizes its potential for life, death, “spirit and knowledge” posits possibilities for how humans can connect with these natural spaces. Indigenous stories extend

this understanding by articulating the power of these natural beings through their established familial or kinship ties with their human neighbors. Little Bear's elimination of inanimate/animate dichotomies captures the environment's capacity for kinship, a capacity which is also reflected in many Indigenous communities' conceptualization of land as "Mother Earth." While the concept of "Mother Earth" isn't wholly foreign to Euro-Westerners, Jetñil-Kijiner's poetry illustrates that a person's connection to natural beings surpasses solely conceptual and temporal considerations and enters into the realm of genuine care and feeling inspired by a familial relationship. Unlike the land-centric view of "Mother Earth," though, Jetñil-Kijiner uses the term "Mother Ocean" when referring to this all-powerful great matriarch ("Dear" 71). By calling the ocean "Mother," she imbues the ocean with creator powers by recognizing water as an element with the potential to support and take away life.

Returning to the story of Liwātuonmour and Lidepdepju allows for a more complete view of the life that exists within natural beings that may appear inanimate and unconscious. Jetñil-Kijiner's account of the two sisters is set up more like Judeo-Christian scriptural verses than poetic stanzas, as she numbers each sentence and each complete idea: "1. And so it was that Liwātuonmour and Lidepdepju were sisters who were birthed by fire and sea. 2. They came, long, long, ago. 3. From the land of Ep they came, weathered rough by hands of salt" ("Liwātuonmour" 8). This account includes twenty-two similar verses and establishes the story of the sisters as a creation story: "5. Liwātuonmour and Lidepdepju, mothers of the chiefly lineage, mothers of the Irooj [chiefs]. 6. Mothers who shaped the sounds of midday and dusk. 7. They found the words inside their blood inside their pulse inside the stars and the waves" ("Liwātuonmour" 8). The scriptural verse-like stanzas connect this story not only to the Marshallese past but to their religious beliefs and spirituality, a religious origin that is not

inferior to that of the destructive Christian missionary. Liwātuonmour and Lidepdepju become mother creators, truly goddesses to their people, a conception of natural beings that would seem strange to Christians who worship a god that is intangible, and whose doctrine is wholly against worshipping any type of physical image or idol. Understanding the reverence and respect the Marshallese hold for these sisters informs why the Christian missionary felt he was justified in pushing Liwātuonmour into the ocean. Of this Tobin comments, “It is indeed unfortunate, to say the least, that a possible clue [Liwātuonmour’s body] to the origin of the Marshallese people has been lost because of the misguided action of an overly zealous missionary. He was obviously trying to eliminate the competition” (54). Liwātuonmour and Lidepdepju’s story reveal the Marshallese’s spiritual connection to the natural world around them and their recognition of life and spirit of natural beings. In this way, these stories become sacred texts that work to enlighten the teller and listener on how to reconnect with natural beings by recognizing their spirits.

Despite the missionary’s attempt to sever Liwātuonmour’s connection to her people, her story illustrates that her life did not end there. In fact, Jetñil-Kijiner describes how Liwātuonmour “welcomed the earth. That churned and birthed her,” becoming one with the ocean floor (“Liwātuonmour” 8). Though Liwātuonmour is no longer visible to the human eye, “The place of Liwātuonmour remains the same even if sand is still placed on it, it drifts away” (Kabua 53), and this place is still respected by those who know her story because of “the spirit who once dwelled on [that] spot” (Tobin 54). Liwātuonmour’s home is where her powerful presence lives on, even though her basalt body is no longer visible. Liwātuonmour’s story teaches that there exists a spiritual, storied connection to the natural beings that remains alive through the continued relation of these stories and the embodied practices such stories promote. Furthermore, Jetñil-Kijiner captures how Lidepdepju acts as a reminder of Liwātuonmour’s

continued existence: “Lidepdepju, standing / alone deep / in water/ firm / in ocean floor / between our shore / and the next” (“Lidepdepju” 9). Lidepdepju inhabits the spaces above and beneath the water, maintaining her connection to her sister. Lidepdepju’s basalt stones that represent the earth remain above ground, but she is rooted in the water, and in order to see her, one must “follow the roar of the ocean” (9). Liwātuonmour completely returned to the water but chose to also “welcome the earth.” Beyond being birthed from the sea, these sisters remained in a halfway state between land and water, furthering the idea that traditional stories can teach us about the permanence and life of these natural beings. Through the active presence of natural beings in traditional stories, like the story of Liwātuonmour and Lidepdepju, the agency of nature extends beyond an unconscious responsiveness to human actions and recognizes the inherent spirit and lifeforce of these natural beings. It is only when the spirit of natural beings is recognized that humans can comprehend how they may develop reciprocal relationships with the natural world.

The Transformative Power of Stories

Although Jetñil-Kijiner presents nature’s power and the potential reciprocal relationships humans can develop with their natural kin through poetically retelling traditional Marshallese stories, she shares her perspective as an invitation, a perspective and embodied practice that can be learned, developed, and adopted through the telling, retelling, and adapting of traditional stories. Even Jetñil-Kijiner did not come to understand the significance of the two sisters, Liwātuonmour and Lidepdepju, until her adulthood. It was her mother, Jetñil-Kijiner relates in her poem “Just a Rock,” who taught her that Lidepdepju was more than “just a rock”: “My mother says / Go—look. It’s Lidepdepju / the legend, the goddess, the beautiful. / But all I see / is a rock / on the reef” (59). By acknowledging her initial lack of understanding of environmental

ancestry and agency, a knowledge passed down to her orally through her matrilineal ancestry, Jetñil-Kijiner suggests that seeing the environment as more than “just a rock” can be a learned perception and practice, rather than an inherent belief. With this acknowledgement of having to develop her environmental consciousness, Jetñil-Kijiner extends her mother’s invitation to her readers to “go—look.” Like her mother who taught her through traditional stories, Jetñil-Kijiner retells these stories to her readers through poetry so that they, too, may learn how the environment is more than “just a rock,” or just a tree, just the ocean, just an island.

Coming to see natural beings as more than “just a rock” is a type of transformative power traditional stories can enact. These stories can transform individuals through their ability to teach important lessons, especially lessons about the environment. Around the same time Jetñil-Kijiner published her “Dome” poems, she also worked on a collaboration with Inuk (Greenland) writer Aka Niviâna to write “Rise,” a poem that presents two traditional stories from their respective homes, each sharing a lesson about their story in relation to the climate change crisis facing those living in areas affected by rising sea levels. Much like the story of Liwātuonmour and Lidepdepju, Jetñil-Kijiner adapts another Marshallese story of two sisters “frozen in time on the island of Ujae” (“Rise”). In this story, however, the sisters have a juggling competition with each other when inexplicably the older sister turns to stone at the edge of the reef. The younger sister finds her older sister and chooses to turn to stone too, “to be rooted by her sister’s side” (“Process”). In “Rise,” Jetñil-Kijiner concludes her retelling of the story by identifying how the two sisters rooted on the reef are “a lesson in permanence.”

On the 350.org website that features the “Rise” poem and video, Jetñil-Kijiner shares the process behind selecting this specific story. She mentions talking to some Marshallese legends experts about their understanding of this story, and Heynes Jeik, who transcribed this version of

the story that Jetñil-Kijiner adapted, remarked, “I just want to remind you that according to our elders, stone is a part of our culture, and everything becomes stone, it’s something that will never disappear” (qtd. in Jetñil-Kijiner, “Process”). It was thanks to these conversations that Jetñil-Kijiner decided “to focus on – choosing stone to always be a part of our home” (“Process”). Through this story, Jetñil-Kijiner teaches what it means to be rooted, much like a rock is rooted to its reef, a tree to its earth, an island to its ocean. As the sister who chooses to turn to stone, Jetñil-Kijiner suggests that adopting this “lesson in permanence” is a choice, but one that has transformative potential. The lesson of permanence that Jetñil-Kijiner locates in nature is one of reclaiming one’s roots in one’s homeland and home waters and sustaining those roots, weathering the cultural, ecological, and sociopolitical storms that may come their way. As Jetñil-Kijiner demonstrates, traditional stories root Indigenous identities to their home environments, encouraging permanence and the reclamation of reciprocal relationships with the environment.

This lesson in permanence is accompanied by another lesson that Niviâna shares in her portion of “Rise.” Niviâna shares “a story told countless times / a story about Sassuma Arnaa, Mother of the Sea,” from Kalaallit Nunaat and offers what she describes as “a lesson in respect”:

She sees the greed in our hearts,

the disrespect in our eyes.

Every whale, every stream,

every iceberg

are her children.

When we disrespect them

she gives us what we

deserve,

a lesson in respect.

By highlighting the human failings of “greed” and “disrespect” that are transparent under the gaze of an all-seeing and knowing natural mother, Niviâna creates the image of a child being found out by a parent, suggesting that these humans who disrespect their natural kin “deserve, / a lesson in respect” (“Rise”). Sassuma Arnaa is another natural mother that further highlights the power of a creator and the respect humans ought to show to their environmental kin. In his discussion of kinship, Justice argues that “Kinship . . . is about life and living: it’s not about something that *is* in itself so much as something we *do*—actively, thoughtfully, respectfully” (“Go” 350). If human kinship with the environment is about what should be done rather than what is, Niviâna’s choice to use this particular story argues that respect is an essential ingredient for actively cultivating reciprocal relationships with natural beings. In this way, respecting natural beings is an active, conscious endeavor, that moves beyond a feeling or emotion one has.

These lessons in permanence and respect are only two of many lessons that traditional stories can teach audience members; however, simply receiving these stories is only part of the process of transformation. Jetñil-Kijiner shows how these stories not only teach readers about nature’s power but also extend an invitation to permit this new knowledge to transform perceptions as well as actions. Published before her “Dome” poems and “Rise,” Jetñil-Kijiner’s poem “Utilomar” captures this transformative power through the story of a “flowering tree . . . that grew from the reef itself / a utilomar tree.” This tree had magical petals, and when the petals fell into the ocean, they “bloomed into flying fish” (“Utilomar”). After sharing this story, Jetñil-Kijiner goes on to compare the petals’ transformation to the youth in the organization she founded to become more involved in environmental activism:

We dreamed an organization dedicated to young people like us

who leapt
 blind and joyful
 into water
 willing ourselves wings
 to fly
 who dared to dream of a world where both forests and islands
 stay rooted
 who believe that this world
 is worth fighting for. (“Utilomar”)

By using the transforming petals as a metaphor for those wanting to involve themselves in environmental activism—those “who believe that this world / is worth fighting for”—Jetñil-Kijiner paints this magical process as very optimistic. Those participating in this transformative power are leaping into the water, not passively or casually falling in—there is intentionality behind their actions. They are “joyful” and ready to fly in pursuit of the dream to fight for the environment. Jetñil-Kijiner has chosen these descriptive words carefully, and they add to the sense that this transformation does not seem to be just a dream Jetñil-Kijiner has for the youth of her organization. When taken in with the rest of her work, it seems like a dream she has for her audience as well—that they, too, will take up the cause and fight for a better world. After her audience has recognized their connection to the environment, they can then begin cultivating reciprocal relationships that invite them to consider the natural world differently and treat it differently. Like the magic petals falling into the ocean, Jetñil-Kijiner’s audience can transform into new beings—beings who are capable of “turning the tides” through “speak[ing] shark songs and fluent fish” (“Utilomar”). Jetñil-Kijiner argues that this transformation is a process that takes

recognizing both the traditional knowledge that allows for better understanding of the environment and also believing that the earth is “worth fighting for.” Through this transformative path, Jetñil-Kijiner argues that there is hope, joy, and growth—if only one takes the leap.

In this same poem, Jetñil-Kijiner questions, “So what are the legends / we tell ourselves today?” (“Utilomar”). Global communities—Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike—have stories that inform their present-day realities—“legends that we tell ourselves.” Telling stories is a way to communicate messages across cultures, and by sharing traditional Marshallese knowledge and stories, Jetñil-Kijiner works to bridge cultural, political, and geographic divides that exist among her diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous audience members. Just as Indigenous scholars assert the power of Indigenous stories, Jetñil-Kijiner shows how these stories possess healing power through their transformative power, and her invitation to participate in this healing power is the same to her diverse audience members. These stories allow audiences to encounter and be informed of new possibilities in regard to their relationship with the natural world. The young Jetñil-Kijiner once saw the goddess Lidepdepju as no more than “just a rock” before coming to understand the greater significance, life, and spirit that she and her sister, Liwātuonmour, hold in the Marshallese community, demonstrating how healing understandings of the environment can be learned.

Jetñil-Kijiner invites her audience to reexamine the stories they tell themselves about the natural world and learn from Indigenous stories to develop relationships of reciprocity—of mutual sustenance—with their environmental kin. Through an increased sense of mindfulness and active respect for natural beings, humans can learn from natural beings’ spirit and work to heal the destructive human environmental impact of the past and present. While recent scholars have asserted that natural beings have agency, Jetñil-Kijiner shows what that agency looks like

through traditional stories and knowledge, demonstrating not only the power of natural beings to respond to human agency but also their enduring spirit that continues to inform and permeate the identity and lifeblood of their communities. Seeing natural beings as more than “just a rock” involves respecting their power and learning from their wisdom. Ultimately, Jetñil-Kijiner’s invitation to adopt environmental reciprocity encourages global environmental healing by allowing traditional stories to transform the practice of human and natural interactions to allow for mutually restorative and enlightened relationships.

Works Cited

- Benson, Stephen. "Tales in Theory: The Role of the Folktale in the Development of Narratology." *Cycles of Influence: Fiction, Folktale, Theory*, Wayne State UP, 2003, pp. 17–41. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/byu/detail.action?docID=3416507.
- Carter, Angela. "Introduction." *The Old Wives Fairy Tale Book*, edited by Angela Carter, Pantheon Books, 1990.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "The Climate of History: Four Theses." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2009, pp. 197–222. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1086/596640.
- DeLoughrey, Elizabeth. "Introduction: Allegories of the Anthropocene." *Allegories of the Anthropocene*, Duke UP, 2019, pp. 1–32. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv125jk4v.4.
- Friedman, Susan Stanford. "Scaling Planerarity: Spacetime in the New Modernist Studies – Virginia Woolf, H.D., Hilma Af Klint, Alicja Kwade, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner." *Feminist Modernist Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2, 29 Aug. 2020, pp. 118–47. *Taylor & Francis Online*, doi:10.1080/24692921.2020.1794470.
- Grayeyes, Willie. "Bringing Youth Back to the Reality of the Natural World." *Edge of Morning: Native Voices Speak for the Bears Ears*, edited by Jacqueline Keeler, Torrey House Press, 2017, pp. 36–49.
- Hau'ofa, Epeli. "Our Sea of Islands." *We Are the Ocean*, U of Hawaii P, 2008, pp. 27–40.
- Harrison, Summer. "'We Need New Stories': Trauma, Storytelling, and the Mapping of Environmental Injustice in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* and *Standing Rock*." *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 1, Winter 2019, pp. 1–35. *JSTOR*, doi:10.5250/amerindiquar.43.1.0001.

- ho’omanawanui, ku’ualoha. “Afterword: I Ka ‘Olelo Ke Ola, In Words is Life.” *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature*, edited by James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice, Oxford UP, 2014, pp. 675–82.
- Jetñil-Kijiner, Kathy. “Anointed.” *Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner*, 16 Apr. 2018, www.kathyjetnilkijiner.com/dome-poem-iii-anointed-final-poem-and-video/.
- . “Background.” *Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner*, 2021, www.kathyjetnilkijiner.com.
- . “Dear Matafele Peinam.” *Iep Jaltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter*, U of Arizona P, 2017, pp. 70–73.
- . “A Few Thoughts.” *Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner WordPress*, 9 Jan. 2015, jkijiner.wordpress.com/2015/01/09/a-few-thoughts-on-pacific-literature.
- . “IEP Jāltok: A History of Marshallese Literature.” 2017. U of Hawai’i at Manoa, Master of Arts thesis, hdl.handle.net/10125/36868.
- . “Of Islands and Elders.” *Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner*, 2 Mar. 2018, www.kathyjetnilkijiner.com/dome-poem-part-ii-of-islands-and-elders/.
- . “Just a Rock.” *Iep Jaltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter*, U of Arizona P, 2017, p. 59.
- . “Lidepdepju.” *Iep Jaltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter*, U of Arizona P, 2017, p. 9.
- . “Liwātuonmour.” *Iep Jaltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter*, U of Arizona P, 2017, p. 8.
- . “Luerkoklik and the Role of the Land in the Climate Movement.” *Ke Ka’upu Hehi ‘Ale*, 26 June 2015, www.hehiale.wordpress.com/2015/06/26/luerkoklik-and-the-role-of-the-land-in-the-climate-movement/.
- . “The Process of the Poem.” *350.org*, 350.org/rise-from-one-island-to-another/#legend.

- . "Statement and Poem by Kathy Jetnīl-Kijiner, Climate Summit 2014 - Opening Ceremony." *YouTube*, uploaded by United Nations, 23 Sept. 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=mc_IgE7TBSY.
- . "Tell Them." *Iep Jaltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter*, U of Arizona P, 2017, pp. 64–67.
- . "Utilomar." *Kathy Jetnīl-Kijiner*, 8 Dec. 2016, www.kathyjetnilkijiner.com/utilomar/.
- . "The Voyage." *Kathy Jetnīl-Kijiner*, 28 Feb. 2018, www.kathyjetnilkijiner.com/dome-poem-part-i-the-voyage/.
- . "Why Don't Marshallese People Leave Their Climate-Threatened Islands?" *Climate Change News*, 7 June 2015, www.climatechangenews.com/2015/07/06/why-dont-marshallese-people-leave-their-climate-threatened-islands/.
- Jetnīl-Kijiner, Kathy and Aka Niviâna. "Rise: From One Island to Another." 350.org/rise-from-one-island-to-another/.
- Justice, Daniel Heath. "Go Away, Water!" *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature*, edited by James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice, Oxford UP, 2014, pp. 349–71.
- . "Introduction: Stories that Wound, Stories that Heal." *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2018, pp. 1–32.
- Kabua, Litarjikūt. "Liwātuonmour." *Stories from the Marshall Islands*, translated by Jetnīl Felix, edited by Jack A. Tobin, U of Hawai'i P, 2002, p. 53.
- Keown, Michelle. "Waves of Destruction: Nuclear Imperialism and Anti-Nuclear Protest in the Indigenous Literatures of the Pacific." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 54, no. 5, 7 Feb. 2018, pp. 585–600. *Taylor & Francis Online*, doi:10.1080/17449855.2018.1538660.

- King, Thomas. *The Inconvenient Indian*, U of Minnesota P, 2013, p. 218.
- Lamān and Jekkein, *Stories from the Marshall Islands*, edited by Jack A. Tobin, U of Hawai'i P, 2002, pp. 54–55.
- Latour, Bruno. "Second Lecture: How Not to (De-)Animate Nature." *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, 2017, pp. 41–74. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1561614&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
- Lovelock, James. "What is Gaia?" *The Revenge of Gaia : Earth's Climate Crisis & The Fate of Humanity*, 1998, pp. 15–38. ProQuest Ebook Central, ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/byu/detail.action?docID=879540.
- Lee, Lloyd. "Land: 'Níhí Kéyah.'" *Edge of Morning: Native Voices Speak for the Bears Ears*, edited by Jacqueline Keeler, Torrey House Press, 2017, pp. 56–60.
- Leroy Little Bear. "Jagged Worldviews Colliding." *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, edited by Marie Battiste, U British Columbia P, 2000, pp. 77–78.
- Lopez-Whiteskunk, Regina. "Fighting for the Land and Building Healing from Within." *Edge of Morning: Native Voices Speak for the Bears Ears*, edited by Jacqueline Keeler, Torrey House Press, 2017, pp. 22–34.
- Mankiller, Wilma and Michael Wallis. *Mankiller: A Chief and Her People*. St. Martin's Press, 1993.
- Robinson, Angela L. "Of Monsters and Mothers: Affective Climates and Human-Nonhuman Sociality in Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's 'Dear Matafele Peinam.'" *The Contemporary Pacific*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2020, pp. 311–39. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/cp.2020.0032.
- Tobin, Jack A. *Stories from the Marshall Islands*, U of Hawai'i P, 2002.

Sen, Amartya. "Energy, Environment, and Freedom." *New Republic*, vol. 245, no. 14, Aug. 2014, pp. 35–39. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=97381391&site=ehost-live.

Somerville, Alice Te Punga. "Introduction: Māori and the Pacific." *Once Were Pacific: Māori Connections to Oceania*, U of Minnesota P, 2012, pp. xv–xxx. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttt8gw.4.