

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON VIDEO INTERVIEW WITH DANIEL HEATH JUSTICE

“Indigenizing the Wizard of Oz”: Daniel Heath Justice on writing “Tatterborn”

Read, Listen, Tell: Indigenous Stories from Turtle Island (pp. 327-336)

Interviewer: David Gaertner

<https://vimeo.com/304964167>

Outline of Video Interview

0:00 - 3:37	Justice reads from “Tatterborn” (pp. 327-328)
3:38 - 6:20	“Rewriting the Classics”
6:21 - 8:34	“On the Genre of Fantasy”
8:35 - 9:21	“Oz is Somebody's Home”
9:22 - 11:17	“Tending the Fire”
11:18 - 12:56	“Queering Oz”
12:57 - 15:11	“On Genre Fiction”

Summary

L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (G.M. Hill Co., 1900) is an iconic text which inspired a whole series of novels along with the film featuring Judy Garland in 1939. This story of Oz and its many sequels continue to play a role in North American popular and literary culture today. In the short story “Tatterborn,” Cherokee author Daniel Heath Justice has written a prequel to *The Wizard of Oz*, which Indigenizes and queers the original story and its setting. In this interview, Justice explains some of his thoughts on his process and the importance of reimagining genre fiction from different perspectives, including those of Indigenous and queer folks.

Justice cites fantasy authors J. R. R. Tolkien and L. Frank Baum as significant childhood inspirations. Justice relates that as he aged, he came to realize there are problematic aspects to these works, especially those stemming from Baum’s racist political views. As someone heavily influenced by these works—but also someone who wishes to challenge the status quo in genre fiction—Justice asked himself: “What do we do with these kinds of stories that have an influence on us, but as we grow older and learn more, we find out that there is a more grim side to them?” (04:55).

Questions to Consider While Listening

1. Reflecting on some of your favorite artists, authors, actors, etc. have you ever felt disappointed by something they have done or said? How has this impacted the way you read or view their artistic works?
2. In the wake of #MeToo movement and other campaigns to call out celebrities for their actions or positions on political issues, should we continue to support these authors and their works? What role should they play in our lives?
3. When we encounter works which may reinforce stereotypes and tropes rather than challenge them, what should we do? Are there ways of creatively speaking back to problematic aspects of creative texts?
4. How has Justice "indigenized" the Land of Oz in "Tatterborn"? How has "Tatterborn" impacted your understanding of *The Wizard of Oz*?
5. In this prequel Justice is explicitly "queering" Oz by making the Scarecrow and Tinman ex-lovers. However, Justice insists that the Land of Oz in Baum's books was always "a very strange, quirky, queer world" (04:05). How has Justice amplified the "queering" of the Land of Oz?
6. Justice says: "Indigenization is a tricky term" (08:39). What does he mean by that? What does he see as his obligations or responsibilities as a Cherokee author?
7. Justice explains the loss experienced by the narrator in the story: "There is nothing worse for a fire keeper, than to not be able to tend the fire. He loses that relationship because he is not attentive to it, he is not respectful, he focuses only on himself, and his own desires and his interests" (11:00). How does this inattentiveness impact the narrator's relationship to his community?
8. The story is also about "the consequences of shame and disconnection" (12:54). how do these emotions fit into the larger discussion of colonialism and homophobia? How do they connect the story to broader discussions we are having in society today?
9. Justice contemplates the eternal popularity of genre fiction, such as fantasy and romance novels, for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers. While many genre fiction texts are formulaic and follow a template, Justice sees them as an important space for intervention. How do you see Justice reinventing and changing the genres of fantasy and romance? Does he succeed, in your opinion?

10. Justice outlines some of the benefits of genre fiction, such as: "literature that speaks across generations"; "it is fun"; "for Indigenous readers, it reminds us that we have a huge range of stories"; and "literature where the freaks often win" (15:03). How do you see "Tatterborn" taking advantage of some of these benefits?
11. What are some of your favorite works of genre fiction? Think of books, films, or shows that are sci-fi (SF), crime, fantasy, romance, western, horror, etc.
12. What expectations, stereotypes, tropes or problematic themes exist in this genre?
13. Are there any works you have read or seen which seek to shake up or completely break these expectations? What did the author/creator do? Was it successful?