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“we are this beautiful tendency to stick together”: The Power of Care in Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s *Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies* and Ocean Vuong’s *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous*

In their respective debut novels, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Ocean Vuong explore the impacts of care on language, memory, and wisdom. The forces of positive affirmation and love as demonstrated by the primary characters in Simpson’s *Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies* and Vuong’s *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* ultimately affirm these texts as literary celebrations of Vietnamese American and Nishnaabeg histories, cultures, and identities. The unique demonstrations of care within Simpson’s *Noopiming* and Vuong’s *On Earth* thrive beyond the colonial, heteronormative, and racist expectations enforced by dominant North American society. Utilizing Walter Benjamin’s theory concerning the inadequacies of verbal language, this essay will illuminate how decolonial, queer and other forms of care shape characters’ approaches to verbal and non-verbal expression, intercultural wisdom, and communal experiences of memory.

In both *Noopiming* and *On Earth*, characters share special bonds with humans and other beings within their respective ecosystems. The atmospheres of reciprocal care and acceptance presented by Simpson and Vuong shape individual characters’ positive

experiences of emotional healing. Before examining love's influence upon language, memory, and wisdom, this essay will explicate how care exhilarates and comforts the humans, more-than-humans, and other natural phenomena represented in both novels.

During a 2022 discussion with Billy-Ray Belcourt and Nisha Ramayya, Simpson elaborates on "Nishnaabewin" (qtd. in Ramayya 50), which, in another article, she defines as "all that is meant by the term Nishnaabe intelligence" ("Land as pedagogy" 8). Simpson explains to Belcourt and Ramayya that interspecies relationships essentially shape Nishnaabewin:

There are many organising principles in Nishnaabewin, but one that is often talked about is mino-bimaadiziwin, the good life, the art of living in a good way ... This means living things, whether human or moose, are supposed to live in a way that brings forth more life by being in reciprocal, responsive relationality with all of the life on the planet. (qtd. in Ramayya 50)

Simpson emphasizes how, according to Nishnaabeg wisdom, connections between human beings and more-than-human beings serve to strengthen all forms of Nishnaabeg life. This endorses the idea that Nishnaabeg characters in *Noopiming* are empowered through their respective relationships within their wider interspecies community.

Despite the differences between their respective species and gender identities, Simpson's novel's eight primary characters collectively use they/them pronouns; this exemplifies the climate of reciprocity that is maintained within *Noopiming*. Through their mutual identification by they/them pronouns, Mashkawaji, a shapeless being, Akiwenzii, an elderly man, Ninaatig, a tree, Mindimooyenh, an elderly woman, Adik, a caribou, Sabe, a giant, Lucy, a human person, and Asin, a human person, seemingly prove their

commonality. Characters in *Noopiming* prioritize community over individuality; this is proven in the caring relationship between Akiwenzii, who lives aboveground, and Mashkawaji, who is temporarily living inside a lake. At the beginning of Simpson's novel, Mashkawaji feels supported by their friend, Akiwenzii, who "sprinkle[s] tobacco around [Mashkawaji] and sing[s]" (*Noopiming* 13) for them. As exemplified by Mashkawaji's later declaration that Akiwenzii embodies "[their] will" (*Noopiming* 23), Mashkawaji feels affirmed and invigorated through Akiwenzii's devotion to their well-being. By including Mashkawaji in the Nishnaabeg practices of "sprinkl[ing] tobacco ... and sing[ing]" (*Noopiming* 13), and therefore immersing Mashkawaji in their shared culture, Akiwenzii strengthens both Mashkawaji and their friendship. This moment early in *Noopiming* demonstrates care's central role in the cultural resurgence upheld in Simpson's novel.

Simpson presents another affectionate relationship in Akiwenzii's friendship with their tree friend, Ninaatig. The characters' care for each other is demonstrated as "Akiwenzii ... sit[s] at the base bottom of Ninaatig watching the Tour de France on their phone ... There is a love between these two" (*Noopiming* 52). Akiwenzii's comfort as enabled by Ninaatig is further illustrated as "Ninaatig gently rubs [Akiwenzii's] back" (*Noopiming* 189) to help Akiwenzii sleep. Akiwenzii also alludes to the joy that Ninaatig affects within them by insisting that "Ninaatig can suck the sad out of you and heal you" (*Noopiming* 52). While Mashkawaji is empowered through Akiwenzii's offering of song and tobacco, Akiwenzii is emotionally strengthened through their interspecies friendship with Ninaatig; these scenes exemplify reciprocal care's fundamental place within the

ecosystems presented in *Noopiming*. Further, these caring occasions uplift love as essential to Nishnaabeg empowerment, and resurgence.

Not unlike the primary characters in *Noopiming*, Little Dog and Trevor, a teenage couple living in working-class Hartford, Connecticut, are mutually uplifted by their love for nature in *On Earth*. Through his appreciation of sunflowers, for example, Trevor finds a peaceful refuge from those who have let him down: “[Trevor] told me sunflowers were his favorite because they grew higher than people” (Vuong 120). In direct contrast to the “hate” (Vuong 97) that his abusive, alcoholic father evokes within him, Trevor treasures the precious feeling of satisfaction that he gains from sunflowers. Alternatively, Little Dog demonstrates his own love for Trevor’s fondness for sunflowers by discussing his memories of Trevor and sunflowers at several points throughout *On Earth*: before remembering Trevor’s admiration for sunflowers’ “*big ole head[s] full of seeds*” (Vuong 154), Little Dog acknowledges the “delicate” (Vuong 120) beauty inherent to Trevor’s decision to “stop his truck in the middle of traffic to stare at a six-foot sunflower on the side of the road” (Vuong 120). In addition to providing Trevor with a safe refuge from his aggressive father, who “*love[s] eatin ’ what’s soft*” (Vuong 156), sunflowers evoke feelings of care within both Little Dog and Trevor, serving to strengthen the couple’s romantic connection.

Furthermore, Little Dog and Trevor’s love of sunsets helps them to rise above “[Trevor’s] old man’s drinking” (Vuong 99), and “[Little Dog’s mother’s] loosening mind” (Vuong 99). As the two young men sit on Trevor’s grandfather’s “*toolshed roof*” (Vuong 98) and discuss their familial woes, “*the sky’s end*” (Vuong 99) envelops them like a hug and gifts them a feeling of peace. Trevor admits his appreciation for the

sunset's benevolent and soothing influence, stating, "[n]o wonder people used to think [the sun] was god himself" (Vuong 99). While *Noopiming*'s characters achieve Nishnaabewin through their connections to human and more-than-human beings, Little Dog and Trevor's affinities for the natural world effect happiness and emotional tranquility within both young men. The caring, inclusive communities that are fostered in nature within Simpson and Vuong's narratives are antidotal to the fundamentally anti-relational forces of patriarchy and colonialism that poison characters' lives. The interpersonal connections showcased in *Noopiming* and *On Earth*'s natural settings therefore prove themselves as vital to characters' emotional nourishment.

Alternatively, both Simpson and Vuong's novels demonstrate traditional linguistic structures being interrupted or transformed by care. The non-linguistic, alternative affirmations of love as presented in *Noopiming* and *On Earth* resist dominant North American society's destructive prioritization of the English language over other languages or means of expression. In *Noopiming*, for example, Mindimooyenh aptly demonstrates care's potential to overwhelm the limitations of language. Early in Simpson's novel, Mindimooyenh explains that "'I love you' is just words" (*Noopiming* 60). This passage introduces how Mindimooyenh's care for others fundamentally resists linguistic interpretation; love, to Mindimooyenh, cannot be verbally translated. This insight is further determinable from how "Mindimooyenh cares more about caring for others than protocol" (*Noopiming* 195). One such "protocol" (*Noopiming* 195) that Mindimooyenh deems as less important than "caring about others" (*Noopiming* 195) is the colonial expectation that they should utilize the English language to interpret and

communicate their feelings. Mindimooyenh's transmission of care naturally resists speech, or the "protocol" (*Noopiming* 195) of linguistic performance.

Alternatively, in Vuong's novel, *Little Dog* echoes Mindimooyenh's insistence that love evades speech. In *On Earth*, which is framed as an epistolary novel that Little Dog is writing to his mother, Rose, Little Dog admits that his feelings for his boyfriend defy linguistic interpretation, and instead flood his visual and tactile sense perception: "there were colors I felt when I was with him. Not words—but shades, penumbras" (Vuong 106). According to Little Dog, words fail his and Trevor's relationship for two separate reasons: 1) Neither Little Dog nor Trevor can verbally proclaim their love for each other; 2) Verbal language cannot even begin to encapsulate the depths of Little Dog's affection for Trevor, as Little Dog translates his romantic feelings through his sense experiences. Despite these challenges, Little Dog acknowledges that silence cannot prevent him and Trevor from caring for each other. This can be determined from Little Dog's memory of "[b]oth of [them] lying beneath the slide: two commas with no words, at last, to keep [them] apart" (Vuong 159).

In "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man", Benjamin explains: "The answer to the question 'What does language communicate?' is therefore 'All language communicates itself'" (Benjamin 63). Through his insistence that "language communicates itself" (Benjamin 63), Benjamin implies that language traps, or hides what its speaker is attempting to signify through it. Benjamin is admitting that language is not a holistic medium of expression; this abstractly endorses Mindimooyenh and Little Dog's joint insistence that love evades linguistic translation.

In similar fashion to the care practiced by Mindimooyenh, Little Dog and Trevor's physical care for each other forgoes linguistic interpretation in *On Earth*. Vuong alludes to this idea early in his novel: "the hand, although limited by the borders of skin and cartilage ... animates where the tongue falters" (Vuong 33). This passage foreshadows the physical style of love that Little Dog and Trevor proceed to practice. Throughout *On Earth*, Little Dog and Trevor use physical touch to translate the feelings of love that they cannot verbally admit. Little Dog does not describe a moment when he and Trevor explicitly confess their love for each other in the English language at any point in Vuong's novel. Trevor's unwillingness to admit his feelings stems from his internalized homophobia, as exemplified by his refusal to accept that he'll remain "gay, like, forever" (Vuong 188). Despite this, Little Dog recognizes Trevor's queerness in "what [he and Trevor] [have] *done* to each other" (Vuong 206). The care between Little Dog and Trevor become evident as the couple grow physically closer. This is ascertainable from Little Dog's remembering how "[they] did not speak" (Vuong 114) during the first time they tried to have sex. Through physical love, Little Dog and Trevor express the care otherwise left unexpressed. Silent acts of queer love contrast the deafening homophobia that poisons the young men's lives. Little Dog alludes to his early exposure to homophobic slander in citing the hateful words that kids called him after "a neighborhood boy" (Vuong 14) saw him in a dress.

Little Dog's reflection on love's untranslatability in the English language parallels Mindimooyenh's insistence that care is too powerful to be contained within words. Unlike Little Dog and Trevor, however, Mindimooyenh does not convey their love for others through physical touch. They instead reveal their love for others by choosing not

to speak harmful words that have the potential to corrupt the care radiating within their community. Mindimooyenh effectively translates their care through silence. This is demonstrated as they hide their criticisms of their loved ones “in their do-not-say bin” (*Noopiming* 200). In choosing not to damage their community’s caring atmosphere with their insults, Mindimooyenh preserves their environment’s affective harmony. Further, they essentially convert their silence into a declaration of their love. Mindimooyenh’s quiet care sustains their relations within their wider ecosystem; this echoes how Little Dog and Trevor’s non-verbal demonstrations of physical affection nurture their love affair. When Little Dog, Trevor and Mindimooyenh’s collective refusal to verbally interpret their love is read alongside Benjamin’s insistence that language cannot fully signify the essence of its subject’s intended meaning, the silences and physical acts performed by the three characters are illuminated as ingenious affirmations of care.

Akin to the style of care that Little Dog and Trevor receive from one another in *On Earth*, in *Noopiming*, Sabe receives love through silence, or through the absence of language. This is determinable from their refusal to admit to Ninaatig that “[they] nee[d] ... Ninaatig to hold them while they sleep. It is the only way [Sabe] can sleep more than two hours in a row. Ninaatig holds and sucks the hurt, the pain, the broken right out of them” (*Noopiming* 174). In choosing not to vocally express their desire to be held by Ninaatig, Sabe embraces the quiet “in the dead of night” (*Noopiming* 174) as an opportunity to reflect on their relationship with their tree friend. Moments of absolute silence, when “the rhythm of daylight” (*Noopiming* 174) is not invading, permit Sabe to acknowledge their need for Ninaatig’s love. In nocturnal tranquility, Sabe realizes how Ninaatig’s care protects them from “the hurt, the pain, the broken” (*Noopiming* 174)

effected by the colonial violence that is perpetually inflicting itself upon Indigenous communities. Silence, or the lack of language, reveals to Sabe how Ninaatig's support vitally empowers them. While Mindimooyenh, Little Dog and Trevor's respective silences holistically transmit their feelings of love, Sabe's silence enables them to recognize how Ninaatig's friendship supports their healing from the trauma of colonialism.

Alternatively, thanks to inspiration from his family of Vietnamese refugees, Little Dog overcomes his fears surrounding linguistic expression in *On Earth*. Early in Vuong's novel, Little Dog's performance of the English language transforms as he grows to understand Rose's struggles to speak in English. Little Dog's care for Rose moves him to reform his manner of speaking. This is demonstrated following Rose's failed attempts to translate the Vietnamese word for "oxtail" into English at the butcher counter (Vuong 31). Upon witnessing Rose's failed attempt to communicate in the English language, Little Dog realizes that he must overcome his fears of language for the sake of speaking for her: "So began my career as our family's official interpreter ... I took off our language and wore my English, like a mask, so that others would see my face, and therefore yours" (Vuong 32). Up until this moment, Little Dog had lived a mute existence beyond the confines of his family home. Little Dog's silent nature as a child is exposed through Rose's claim that "[he] did nothing" (Vuong 26) to try and stop the childhood bullies who taunted him due to his refusal to speak English.

As he conquers the English language, Little Dog presents his words as "a mask" (Vuong 32) of the language that Rose longs to speak. He evolves from a shy, quiet child, to become the 'voice' of his family. This marks a pivotal point in Little Dog's

development; he embraces a new English vocabulary inspired by his love for Rose. Little Dog's new English is born from care, as is the silent and physical love performed by him, Trevor, Mindimooyenh, and Sabe. Both Simpson and Vuong's novels reveal how care fuels characters' defiance of or triumph over the linguistic expectations enforced by dominant North American society.

The second epigraph of *On Earth*, a quote from Joan Didion, seemingly introduces the protagonist's standpoint on truth: "*I want to tell you the truth, and already I have told you about the wide rivers.*" In *On Earth*, Little Dog perceives truth as fluid and expansive, like Didion's "*wide rivers*". It is through this inclusive understanding of truth that Little Dog embraces the memories experienced by Rose and his grandmother, Lan, into his everchanging grasp on reality. Through the care that he holds for Rose and Lan, Little Dog finds the power to bear the weight of their memories, or truths, alongside his own.

Similarly, Mindimooyenh, Adik, Sabe, and Akiwenzii demonstrate their devotion to harmonizing contrasting memories and cultural understandings throughout *Noopiming*. While Little Dog empowers himself and his family by uplifting Lan and Rose's memories, Mindimooyenh, Adik, Sabe, and Akiwenzii connect memories and distinctly Nishnaabeg knowledge forms to expand and/or provide joy for their community. According to Mindimooyenh, Adik, Sabe, Akiwenzii, and Little Dog, no perspective on past, present, or future events should be disregarded. They treat all forms of memory and knowledge with love, and incorporate them into their perceptions of themselves, their loved ones, and their respective ecosystems.

In *On Earth*, Little Dog traces the evolution of his childhood comprehension of Lan's schizophrenia: "I came to know ... that madness can sometimes lead to discovery, that the mind, fractured and short-wired, is not entirely wrong" (Vuong 23). Beyond Lan's mental illness, Little Dog also accepts the complexity of Rose's mind, which is plagued by post-traumatic stress from the Vietnam War; this is determinable from how he documents Rose and Lan's most mentally chaotic moments, as well as their calmer, happier moments. In doing so, Little Dog demonstrates his holistic affirmation of his family's lived realities. By framing his letter to Rose as a collection of memory fragments, Little Dog subverts an observation he makes early on in the novel: "To destroy a people ... is to set them back in time" (Vuong 60). Rather than "destroy" (Vuong 60) his loved ones by "set[ting] them back in time" (Vuong 60), Little Dog revitalizes them by carrying their memories into the future.

In their article on Vuong's novel, Quan Manh Ha and Mia Tompkins identify the significance of Little Dog's commemoration of his family's memories: "Had Little Dog not preserved Rose and Lan's narratives, their experiences would have remained unknown, and a piece of history would have vanished with them" (Ha and Tompkins 212). By writing down, or immortalizing the lived experiences of his loved ones in *On Earth*, Little Dog resists dominant American society's dismissal of Vietnamese peoples' suffering during the Vietnam War. Trevor's father, a white American, reflects this inhumanity by bragging about how his brother murdered four Vietnamese people during the Vietnam War (Vuong 143). In remembering his family's history, Little Dog simultaneously combats racism and empowers the women who raised him.

Little Dog's affirmation of his family's lived experiences reflects Mindimooyenh's harmonization of different knowledge forms in *Noopiming*. Both Little Dog and Mindimooyenh endorse and reinforce the wisdoms surrounding them. Mindimooyenh's pursuit of new understandings is demonstrated through their visit to the University of Toronto's Robarts Library. This moment reinforces a crucial idea that Simpson makes explicit while discussing *Noopiming* with Belcourt and Ramayya: "I was interested in making *Noopiming* an immersive, communal engagement in meaning-making" (qtd. in Ramayya 51). A "communal engagement in meaning-making" (qtd. in Ramayya 51) is achieved by Mindimooyenh in their willingness to learn something new at the Robarts Library. In embracing different ideas from the Robarts Library, Mindimooyenh finds purpose by expanding the circle from which they derive wisdom.

As Mindimooyenh researches neuroplasticity in the Robarts Library, readers learn that "Mindimooyenh has always known that the brain is a relational organ, that it is constantly building and rebuilding networked pathways, constantly removing or reconnecting synaptic pathways" (*Noopiming* 105). Despite already harboring a wealth of information on the topic of neuroplasticity, Mindimooyenh keenly incorporates the "zhaganash" (*Noopiming* 105), or white people's insights regarding neuroplasticity into their own knowledge on the topic. However, it is important to note that Mindimooyenh first recognizes the distinctly Nishnaabeg understanding of neuroplasticity, resisting the colonial trend to prioritize settler knowledge forms before Indigenous knowledge forms. Mindimooyenh ultimately accepts new perspectives as opportunities to grow in their love of their surroundings, as does Little Dog. Further, both Mindimooyenh and Little Dog

ground their own world outlook in the care they feel for their families and cultural understandings.

Not unlike Little Dog and Mindimooyenh, Adik, Sabe and Akiwenzii connect past and present truths as an act of love. This is exemplified as Adik remembers the positive influence that their community's practicing of ancestral traditions had upon Akiwenzii's upbringing: "Adik and Sabe ... taught Akiwenzii about old-time ceremony, and when they did this, they went north, deep into the bush ... They built lodges, fasted, sweat, prayed and sang. It was never perfect, but it was always good enough" (*Noopiming* 139). By insisting that their community's devotion to "old-time ceremony ... was always good enough" (*Noopiming* 139), Adik implies that they and Sabe raised Akiwenzii to identify the "good" (*Noopiming* 139) in the present through the practice of historical traditions. The three friends lovingly uplift cultural teachings in the present as an act of Nishnaabeg resurgence.

Adik, Sabe and Akiwenzii's preservation of community traditions emerges from heartfelt care, as does Little Dog's affirmation of his family's memories, and Mindimooyenh's expansion of their neuroplasticity insights. Little Dog, Mindimooyenh, Adik, Sabe and Akiwenzii are moved by love as they transcend the divisions, or gaps between contrasting understandings.

In addition to motivating characters' harmonization of memories and knowledge forms, the care that animates Simpson and Vuong's novels moves characters to use their memories for their loved ones' benefit. Further, the care radiating within characters' communities enables characters to overcome their worst memories, or trauma. In *On Earth*, Little Dog reflects on Rose's attempts to use her terrifying recollections of the

Vietnam War for his benefit. This is demonstrated in his recollection of how Rose taught him to check if clothing is “fireproof” (Vuong 13) before buying it. Rose is seemingly inspired to teach him this “good to know” (Vuong 14) lesson due to the painful memories that she has regarding fire: “As a girl, you watched, from a banana grove, your schoolhouse collapse after an American napalm raid” (Vuong 31). Rose appears to transform this terrifying memory into an opportunity to teach her son how to protect himself. Due to her care for Little Dog, and by extension, her desire that he remain safe, Rose extracts valuable insights from her own trauma, therefore revealing its potential to inspire community.

Alternatively, Lan uses her own memory to enchant Little Dog. This is proven as she explains to Little Dog how she met her second husband. In listening to Lan’s precious memory, Little Dog “los[es] [his] way, willingly” (Vuong 23), until he becomes “engrossed in the film playing across the apartment walls” (Vuong 23). Both Rose and Lan use their memories to strengthen and emotionally enrapture Little Dog.

Resembling Rose and Lan, Adik uses select memories to comfort, and inspire their loved ones in *Noopiming*. This is demonstrated during their visit to the Crowe River’s gorge: “Adik is there to record the sound of water carving out rock. Adik is there to record the language of the past talking to the present. Adik is there to record the sound of hope” (*Noopiming* 161). Through “record[ing] the sound of water carving out rock” (*Noopiming* 161), Adik preserves their memory of the gorge’s audible output in their voice recorder. Adik is therefore ensuring that their sonic memory of the gorge, at a specific moment in time, can transcend the limits of their own mind.

Adik uses their memory, as captured within the voice recorder, to support someone they care about. In leaving their recording of the gorge's sounds playing at Kinomagewapkong, where Akiwenzii sleeps, Adik ensures that their recorded memory will help their friend: "Tonight when Akiwenzii lies down and puts their ear to the rock, things will be as right as they can be ... Akiwenzii will hear the water. Akiwenzii will hear the world" (*Noopiming* 163). Adik's love for Akiwenzii inspires them to expand their memory's capabilities for Akiwenzii's benefit. Adik's creation of a communal memory experience will support Akiwenzii's individual betterment.

Indirectly subverting *Noopiming's* presentation of an individual's improvement through collectivized memory, *On Earth* reveals how communal care endorses individuals' reconciliations with their memories. Throughout his upbringing, Little Dog grows in his recognition that an individual's ascension from painful memories is attainable through the love of a collective. Little Dog's family members cannot shield each other from the traumatic memories they share. Yet, countless moments throughout *On Earth* demonstrate how Little Dog's family shows up for each other when traumatic memories arise. One such moment is exemplified during Lan's reaction to one of Rose's post-traumatic stress flashbacks. Little Dog describes Lan's loving response to Rose's flashback, which concerned Lan's other daughter, Mai: "'But Mai has not lived here for five years,' Lan says with sudden tenderness ... Although I don't see it, I can tell she's brushing [Rose's] hair behind [Rose's] ear" (Vuong 70). Little Dog is recalling how, despite the horror of the situation, Lan physically and emotionally reaches out to Rose to calm her down. The impacts of a collective's love for an individual are further revealed to Little Dog by Lan, when she tells him that "[Rose] want you, she need us" (Vuong 122),

because Rose is “[s]ick ... [i]n the brains” (Vuong 122). Through Lan’s efforts, Little Dog learns that Rose cannot withstand her mind and memories without the love of her family.

Noopiming also demonstrates how characters are inspired to transcend their destructive memories due to their loved ones’ efforts; this is specifically observable in Sections Seven and Eight of the novel. Unlike the earlier sections of *Noopiming*, which explore primary characters’ separate interactions with each other, their environments, and their inner selves, Sections Seven and Eight see most primary characters gather as a collective group. In Section Seven, before they and their friends “continue straight south, towards the zone where the two shades of blue meet” (*Noopiming* 202), Mindimooyenh abandons judgmental recollections that do not serve them. As they prepare to embark on their boat journey with their community, Mindimooyenh observes Sabe’s preparation of the boat and declares, “I guess that old one is paying better attention than I thought” (*Noopiming* 194). This passage reveals Mindimooyenh’s evolution from their historical criticisms of Sabe, which Sabe acknowledges earlier in the novel: “Sabe doesn’t like the run-ins with [Mindimooyenh] ... [Mindimooyenh] tend[s] to be a harsh mirror of things Sabe doesn’t particularly like about themselves” (*Noopiming* 41).

Through their acknowledgment of Sabe’s successful boat preparation efforts, and their declaration that Sabe has indeed been “paying ... attention” (*Noopiming* 194), Mindimooyenh sheds their judgmental perception of Sabe. Further, by approving Sabe’s work, Mindimooyenh transcends their memories of Sabe that previously shaped their negative opinions of them. In indirect reflection of how Little Dog’s family supports each

other through traumatic memory experiences, Mindimooyenh overcomes their critical memories of Sabe thanks to Sabe's efforts.

Section Eight of *Noopiming* also reveals how an individual's community supports their escape from harmful memories. In Section Eight of Simpson's novel, Mashkawaji heals from their painful memories as their community saves them from their place in the lake. As Section Seven ends with Mindimooyenh's declaration that they must direct the boat south in order "to pick up Mashkawaji" (*Noopiming* 202), and Section Eight is entitled "Mashkawaji's Theory of Ice", it can be assumed that Mashkawaji is narrating Section Eight while being rescued by their friends. Mashkawaji's friends' caring decision to fetch them empowers Mashkawaji's emotional healing from their trauma.

Poetry-based Section Eight, which is narrated by Mashkawaji, can be interpreted as fragmentations of Mashkawaji's most tragic memories. Unlike how characters' memories are visually represented on their pages across Simpson's novel, the memories presented throughout "Mashkawaji's Theory of Ice" are split up into several stanzas. Based on this observation, Section Eight can be regarded as a visual representation of how Mashkawaji's trauma starts to disintegrate, or thaw, as their community rescues them from the semi-frozen lake. In the beginning pages of *Noopiming*, Mashkawaji admits that the love offered to them by their friends, Akiwenzii, Ninaatig, Mindimooyenh, Sabe, Adik, Asin, and Lucy, empowers them: "In the absence of my own heart, I will accept the hearts of these seven" (*Noopiming* 33). Through their introductory elucidation of the bonds they share with their collective, Mashkawaji implies that their "own heart" (*Noopiming* 33) is strengthened by the love offered to them by their friends. As Mashkawaji is rescued from the ice by their community (*Noopiming* 205), they are

uplifted by several of the same “hearts” (*Noopiming* 33) that they reference at the beginning of the novel.

The love stemming from “the hearts” (*Noopiming* 33) of Mashkawaji’s friends enables Mashkawaji to break through their traumatic memories. Some devastating memories that Mashkawaji’s community helps them to shatter include Stanza Eight in “the wake”: “injured and certified/ i wish i’d held you/ when you died” (*Noopiming* 215), and Stanza Seven of “cohesion”: “they found her body/ wrapped in a duvet” (*Noopiming* 217). In reuniting with their caring community, Mashkawaji finds the power to collapse their most painful memories.

Both Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Ocean Vuong showcase the exceptional impacts of a collective’s love for each other in *Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies*, and *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous*. The care represented within *Noopiming* and *On Earth* transforms characters’ perspectives in complex, unique ways. Both novels demonstrate how characters’ love for each other surpasses the limitations of any “linguistic being” (Benjamin 63). Silence ultimately emerges as a means for characters to reveal their love to the humans and more-than-humans who are closest to them. Further, as they face destructive memory experiences, Vuong and Simpson’s characters are sustained by the love and knowledge offered to them by different beings within their ecosystems. In affirming several truths simultaneously, and drawing strength from forces that uplift and inspire them, Vuong and Simpson’s characters deconstruct walls of memory, language, and understanding. The heteronormative, colonial, and racist ideals that impose themselves within *Noopiming* and *On Earth*’s narratives are eclipsed by those who wield that which is all-powerful, transcendent, and eternal: love.

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