

Thus, in addition to being fun for both children and adults, *Future Day Saints* may also offer a powerful teaching tool for progressive Mormon parents. Its heartwarming morality tales offer a helpful balance to some of the one-sided tribal authoritarian ideas that children may encounter at church. In this way, the book far exceeded my expectations. Page's vision of a possible Mormon future is achingly beautiful, and not just because of his skillful art.

CHRISTOPHER C. SMITH {chriscarrollsmith@gmail.com} holds a PhD in religion from Claremont Graduate University and works as the books manager for John Whitmer Books. Follow his work at christophercarrollsmith.com.



Poetry as Ceremony

Tacey M. Atsitty. *Rain Scald: Poems*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018. 88 pp. Paperback: \$18.95. ISBN: 978-0-8263-5867-7.

Reviewed by Michael P. Taylor

*O Holy People, show me how I am human,
how I am soon to sliver. Stay please, for woman
or man's sake. Succor me from a telestial state,
where I long to be self-luminous in a slate
of granite. How easily I fall to shards, a hand*

left to wane ungathered.

—Tacey M. Atsitty, “Evensong III”

In August 2018, I had the honor to sit down with Tacey M. Atsitty (Diné) and discuss her debut book of poems, *Rain Scald*. Among other things, we discussed her path to poetry, her poetic process, her imagined

audience, thematic through lines in her work, and her emergence as a poet of note within the ever-expanding field of Native American and Indigenous poetry. Throughout our conversation, she emphasized her responsibilities to her Diné and broader Indigenous communities, her devotion to her faith, and her commitment to her craft. As she described, “Even though I’m a Native writer, I’m a woman writer, I’m a Mormon writer, I’m just a writer. . . . I’m just a poet.” Despite the humility with which Atsitty articulates herself, *Rain Scald* is anything but just another book of poems. “Poetry,” she explained to me, “is language, and language is what was used to form this world.” She continued, “I see poetry as ceremony.”¹ Indeed, *Rain Scald* invites readers into an intricate, simultaneously painful and resiliently beautiful ceremony of creation, of being and becoming human.

Since this initial conversation, I have read and discussed *Rain Scald* alongside undergraduate and graduate students, literary scholars, and Indigenous community members, each experiencing a uniquely individual ceremony, inviting us to reconsider our understandings of language and land, repentance and revelation, sexuality and spirituality. All the while, Atsitty has conducted readings of her poetry across the country, from her alma maters of the Institute of American Indian Arts, Brigham Young University, and Cornell University to an ever-increasing itinerary of COVID-19-induced virtual readings. Alongside her readings, her poems continue to be featured in flagship online and print journals and literary anthologies, including *New Poets of Native Nations* (Graywolf Press, 2018), edited by Heid E. Erdrich (Ojibwe), and *When the Light of the World Was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through: A Norton Anthology of Native Nations Poetry* (Norton, 2020), edited by Joy Harjo (Mvskoke). Atsitty is currently a PhD student in the creative writing program at Florida State University.

1. Interview with author, August 2018.

Rain Scald is organized into three sections: Tséyi' (Deep in the Rock), Gorge Dweller, and Tóhee' (a Navajo ceremony used for calling rain). In each section, Atsitty moves fluidly through poetic forms and languages—English and Diné Bizaad (the Navajo language)—free from didactic agendas or generic limitations. She interlaces allusions to Navajo stories and practices with LDS primary songs and sacred spaces, providing informative notes to guide readers through her intermixing of cultural and religious identities. In each section, Atsitty writes with a certain graceful force that is at the same time both jarring and healing, allowing readers entrance into a self-determining world within which Atsitty's—to some—contradictory identities and worldviews engage in procreative tension and transformation. As she describes, "I don't sit down and say, I'm writing for my people. Not Navajos, not Mormons, not women. . . . Not academics. . . . I write for me. I use the language that is most true to the experiences, or the most beautiful to express the experiences I'm writing about."² In other words, *Rain Scald* is not a decolonial text that focuses heavily on the structures and systems of settler colonialism. As Atsitty described to me, her poetry is perhaps not what academics are looking for to support their decolonial critiques. Instead, *Rain Scald* "is just an Indigenous story. It's a human story." Atsitty's forty-two-poem story delicately sutures together her experiences of being Diné, Mormon, and a woman, but above all, as her concluding poem, "Evensong," so wonderfully attests, of being human.

MICHAEL P. TAYLOR {mike_taylor@byu.edu} is an assistant professor of English and the associate director of American Indian studies at Brigham Young University. His research engages Indigenous archives to expand Indigenous North American literary histories and support community-centered Indigenous resurgence.

2. Interview with author, August 2018.