

Jennifer Grenz. *Medicine Wheel for the Planet: A Journey Toward Personal and Ecological Healing*, University of Minnesota Press, 2024. 280pp. ISBN: 9781517916466.

<https://www.upress.umn.edu/9781517916466/medicine-wheel-for-the-planet/>

Within our current era of planetary emergencies, we are increasingly seeing Euro-Western climatic discussions incorporating Indigenous knowledges in attempts to forge a way out of these crises. As such, the relationship between Western and Indigenous science is of critical importance. For instance, Potawatomi scholar Robin Wall Kimmerer's 2013 book *Braiding Sweetgrass* grapples with her personal experiences as an Indigenous woman working within Western science. Equally important is how Indigenous scholars continue to critique the appropriation and misuse of Indigenous knowledges within Euro-Western academia; within her 2016 essay "An Indigenous Feminist's Take On The Ontological Turn: 'Ontology' Is Just Another Word For Colonialism," Métis scholar Zoe Todd exposes the colonial closeness of Euro-Western academia and reflects upon ways to decolonise the academy so that silenced voices are heard. Given my own positionality as a non-Indigenous scholar working within the Environmental Humanities in imperial and colonial institutions across UK academia, questions surrounding *how* Indigenous knowledges are deployed within Western contexts are pertinent to my own work and approach. Nlaka'pamux scholar Jennifer Grenz offers a thoughtful contribution to discussions of the relationality between Indigenous knowledges and Western science in her 2024 book *Medicine Wheel for the Planet: A Journey Toward Personal and Ecological Healing*. Grenz invites her readers into a deeply personal account of, in Grenz's words, her "journey to connect my head (Western science) and my heart (my Indigenous worldview)" (11). Firmly grounded in storytelling, *Medicine Wheel for the Planet* draws from Grenz's experiences as a restoration ecologist and her personal values as an Indigenous woman, to argue that both Western and Indigenous science are essential to restore and heal our planet. In so doing, Grenz encourages readers to "see beyond the confines of a singular worldview" (12).

Medicine Wheel for the Planet is divided into four sections: each representing a direction on the medicine wheel: North, East, South, and West. The symbolism of the medicine wheel is effectively woven throughout the book in both physical and theoretical ways. The medicine wheel is grounded in a sense of balance and is therefore integral to healing the planet. The cyclical nature of this book takes the reader on a journey beginning in the North in which Grenz focuses on the Indigenous knowledges and wisdoms from her Elders, which is "missing from modern ecology" (15). Part two, the East, represents the start of a new journey connecting people to the land. The South, in part three, reflects upon times of change and preparing for a hopeful future. And, finally, we conclude our journey around the medicine wheel in the West, which marks the implementation of the knowledges and wisdoms carefully shared and interpreted throughout the journey. The cyclical quality of this book encourages personal journeys around the medicine wheel to continue long after the last page has been read.

The central argument within *Medicine Wheel for the Planet* is the power and value of deploying multiple worldviews. Throughout her journey around the medicine wheel, Grenz advocates for greater diversity in the stories that inform ecology and human relationships with the natural world more broadly. Opposing the limitations of a singular worldview, Grenz suggests that not only is there space for both Western and Indigenous worldviews, but further, multiplicity is vital to healing the planet. Drawing attention to the power and influence that stories can have, Grenz offers examples from her own life of how to balance these two worldviews. When

describing her personal experience of parenting her children with her non-Indigenous partner, Grenz emphasizes that “the real work is in providing space for both worldviews” (87). Instead of looking to prove which worldview is superior, *Medicine Wheel for the Planet* focuses on the ways in which Indigenous and Western worldviews can work together to heal the planet collaboratively. Within this discussion, Grenz joins many other Indigenous scholars in calling for a widening of Western understandings of what constitutes an expert or teacher. Grenz writes, “experts don’t always work in universities; they don’t necessarily have university educations. They don’t even have to be adults” (92). This feels reminiscent of Matthew Wildcat (Plains Cree), Mande McDonald (Swampy Cree), Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, and Glen Coulthard’s (Yellowknives Dene) decolonial approach to the peer-review process, whereby they assert, “We should not assume that ‘peers’ in these circumstances are university professors, nor demand that the review process require submitting papers for anonymous feedback. It is a challenge to think about how we create review processes that involve people from the communities that support and foster these land-based initiatives” (Wildcat et al., v). The colonial processes of Euro-Western academia attempt to prohibit the inclusion of Indigenous worldviews and discredit Indigenous knowledges. For those of us working within Euro-Western academia, these insights encourage a reevaluation of *who* is considered knowledgeable.

Relatedly, Grenz draws heavily from her work within ecology and invasive species management to present valuable and thought-provoking discussions of Western ecology (which Grenz coins “Eden ecology”) and Indigenous ecology. According to Grenz, Eden ecology is “an ecology where perfection was broken by the introduction of humans as they fell from grace, and humans are blamed for the resulting imbalance of the once-perfect world” (20-21). Seeking to return to an Eden ecology in which the land is perceived as perfect creates an ecological approach dependent upon chasing perfectionism and is inherently hierarchical. Additionally, and critically, Eden ecologies present human relations with the natural world as “harmful to both plants and people” (31). Conversely, Grenz identifies Indigenous ecology as an antithetical approach to Eden ecology. Firmly grounded within notions of relationality, Indigenous ecology is a “lived stewardship” (72). As such, relationality emerges as a critical concept within *Medicine Wheel for the Planet*. Drawing on the work of Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson, Grenz elucidates that the three Rs of Indigenous research methodology are “respect, relationality, reciprocity” (46). From the first page, *Medicine Wheel for the Planet* is steeped in relationality and embodies an intimate and personal relationship with the land. Grenz commences the book by stating, “My original sense of connection to the land began in my great-grandmother's garden when I was very little” (1), and then offering, “Or perhaps it began long before that, as caring for plants and growing food may very well be part of my DNA” (1). As highlighted, stories of relationality are ubiquitous within this book. Through such stories, Grenz shows her readers that science can be intimate, personal and that it can – and should – honour individual kinships with the land. Grenz advocates for relational balance and harmony to heal the planet, mirrored by the cyclical quality of the medicine wheel and the very structure of this book: “The circle symbolizes our connection to the cyclical nature of life. [...] Circles symbolize harmony, balance, and peaceful interaction among all living beings” (161). Posing a direct threat to this harmony and balance, settler colonialism has, as Cree and Métis scholar Wendy Makoons Geniusz states, forced many Indigenous peoples “into a state of unbalance” (Geniusz 160). Therefore, decolonial approaches must seek to re-prioritise balance and harmony.

For non-Indigenous readers *Medicine Wheel for the Planet* offers many valuable insights on terminology, language, and engagement with Indigenous knowledges. Grenz simultaneously

calls for the inclusion of Indigenous worldviews whilst cautioning against improper use and deployment of sacred traditional knowledges. Importantly, Grenz connects settler scholars with capitalist processes of extraction and exploitation: “settler researchers only want to take what we have to offer without understanding exactly what it is they are taking and who they may be leaving behind. Our Indigenous knowledges are being sought with the detachment of a consumer coveting the latest fad” (41-2). *Medicine Wheel for the Planet* is therefore essential reading for all scholars in Euro-Western colonial contexts. Building on Todd’s critical interrogation into the use (and misuse) of Indigenous knowledges, Grenz makes an important distinction between knowing a worldview and knowing traditional knowledges: “To know our worldview is to know our hearts and minds. To know only our traditional ecological knowledge is to have only a superficial relationship, leaving our knowledges vulnerable to misuse and misunderstanding” (43). Warning against decontextualising Indigenous worldviews, Grenz emphasises that these knowledges cannot be removed from their foundations.

“To know someone’s story is to really know them” (238). As these words from part four, The West, of *Medicine Wheel for the Planet* suggest, this book is an intimate insight into Grenz’s personal stories. Grenz generously shares with the reader both scientific and Indigenous wisdom. Reflecting Robin Wall Kimmerer’s approach in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Grenz advocates for engaging with the stories of all living beings: “To ask ‘What is your story?’ is to honour the now by acknowledging the relations as they currently are and the web of relationships they currently have. We then must ask, What will your story be in the future?” (235). As Grenz’s personal storytelling exemplifies, stories help us to make sense of the world: “Stories are a sacred and integral part of our Indigenous way of life. They provide a way for us to understand our place in the world” (17). This book offers a complex web of stories, speaking to both Indigenous and Western science and brimming with wisdom. *Medicine Wheel for the Planet* advocates for a relational balance and harmony with all living things in order to heal the planet. To be invited on this journey around the medicine wheel is a generous gift, an intimate insight into Grenz’s worldview and her emotive stories. Ultimately, I see within this book a call to action: what we do with these beautiful stories is up to us. For the sake of our planet, I hope we use them well.

Works Cited:

Geniusz, Wendy Makoons. *Our Knowledge Is Not Primitive: Decolonizing Botanical Anishinaabe Teachings*. 1st ed. The Iroquois and Their Neighbors Series. Syracuse University Press, 2009.

Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants*. Milkweed Editions, 2013.

Todd, Zoe. ‘An Indigenous Feminist’s Take On The Ontological Turn: “Ontology” Is Just Another Word For Colonialism’. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol. 29, no. 1 (1 March 2016): 4–22. <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1111/johs.12124>.

Wildcat, Matthew, Mande McDonald, Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, and Glen Coulthard. ‘Learning from the Land: Indigenous Land Based Pedagogy and Decolonization’. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1 December 2014). <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/22248>.