

Reclaiming the Savage Mind: A Poetic Meditation on The Creative Process

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Exposition

This poem began as a conversation between myself and a colleague around the nature and stages of our respective artistic processes. For me, the most exciting point in the process of creation is when the idea is first born. This moment, which often forcefully demands my attention, is when I am most connected to thought beyond the confines of cognitive imperialism, or the “white-washing [of] the mind [resulting from] forced assimilation, English education, Eurocentric humanities and sciences and living in a Eurocentric context complete with media, books, laws, and values” (Battiste, 2013, p. 26). The more developed an idea becomes, the more I see traces of my own colonization in it.

To describe this moment, I *reclaim* Claude Levi-Strauss’ notion of the savage mind. In *The Savage Mind* (1966), Strauss argues that Indigenous people make sense of reality based on the things they find around them. I don’t disagree with Strauss on this point; rather, it is the character of Indigenous thought where I think he is mistaken. Where Strauss is concerned with structures that underpin thought, I see holistic and open-ended metaphysical understandings of the world. Everything is alive, and everything is a part of us. Strauss’ search for structure tries to place Indigenous ontology into a Eurocentric framework and in so doing misses precisely what is elucidated in the paintings of Alex Janvier. There is an unseen dreamlike flux to our physical reality, often articulated as an embeddedness of the spiritual in everything we do, say, draw,

Freedom.
Like standing on a mountain—
a large hill—
mountainous to me,
ten years old.

At the peak
overlooking my grandparents' home,
Poppy's beach,
the glistening Bay of St. George's
where my ancestors have lived
for generations.

Cool ocean breeze
keeps mind wild;
brilliant thoughts
wash over me in waves.

Wela'lin Gisu'lgw,
for the sleepless nights,
awed by the complexity
of all things.

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Thoughts
once celestial—
a different kind of wild—
now growing
like alders in riverbank soil,
humbly bowing to the wind.

Savage scholarship.
Wild like
words from the heart
speaking to yours.

Wild like paintings
from sacred pipes.
A mind
wild,
savage,
untamed.

Wela'lin Gisu'lgw,
for the sleepless nights
and the bags under my eyes.

References

Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Limited.

Lévi-Strauss, C. (1966). *The savage mind*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

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