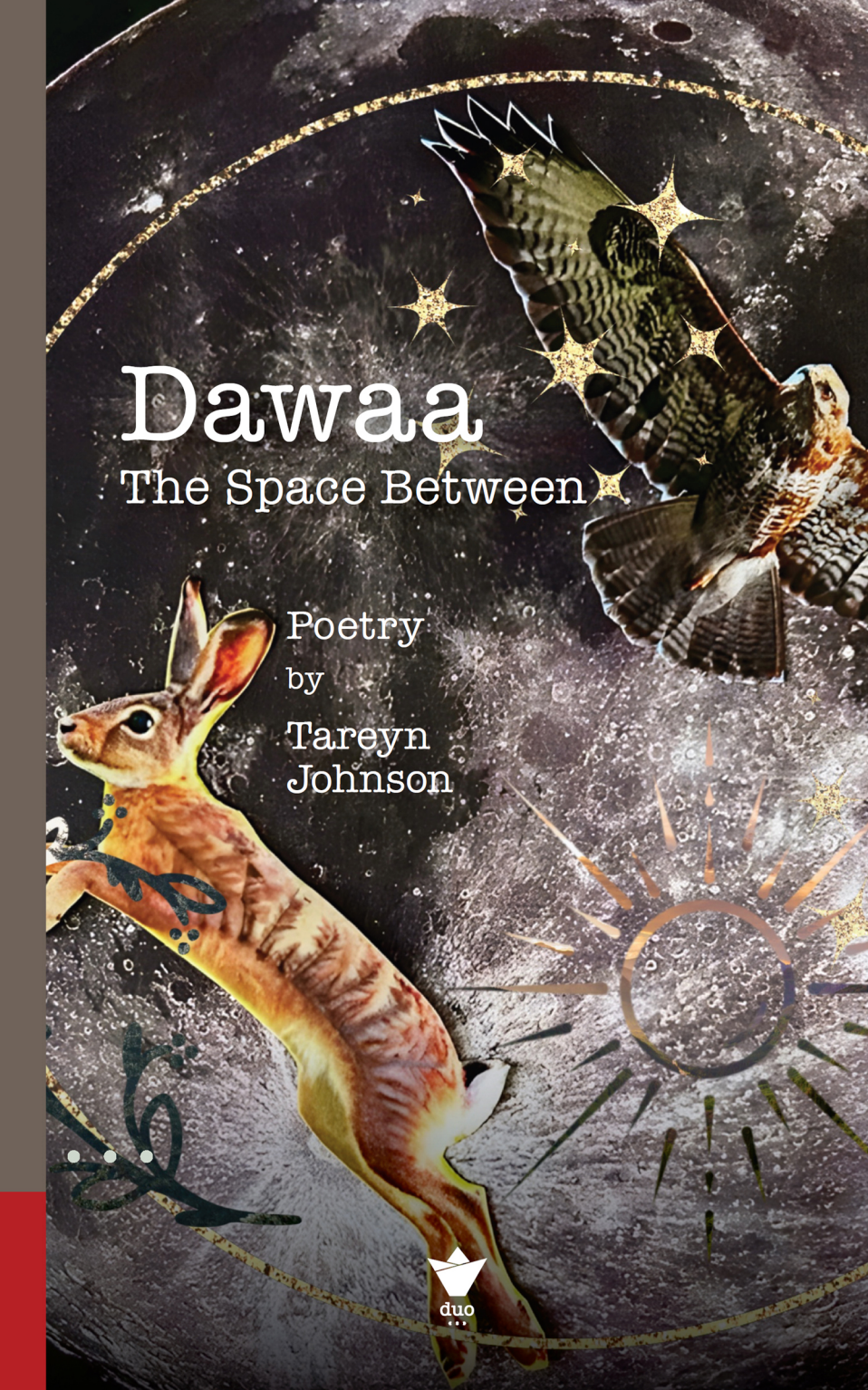




Dawaa

The Space Between

Poetry
by
Tareyn
Johnson



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TAREYN JOHNSON

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The Space Between

Poetry

University of Ottawa Press
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Front Cover Art Description

Tareyn Johnson, *Corporeal Projections*, collage and paint on wood, 18" round wooden plaque.

The cover art depicts a symbolic representation of the author's tattooed body, as she has a thunderbird on her shoulder, a hare on her arm, and a backpiece, including the moon, on her back. As this collection of poems tells of her own experience, the reader may approach it as a metaphor for her life.

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Preface

A Poetic Exploration of the Spaces Between Anishnaabemowin and English

As an Anishnaabekwe raised by my Anishnaabe mother and mixed-Celtic father, I have always felt like I lived in two worlds. I was raised with my Anishnaabe grandma June at home, while my parents worked. She was a survivor of Shingwauk Residential “School” and had married another survivor from the same institution, Ron. He was the man who raised my mother. Even though we never knew each other very well, his impact on my mom’s life affected how I was raised. As a child, we spent a lot of time around my grandma’s friends, at pow wows, in community, and surrounded by Anishnaabe culture and people.

In her fifties, my grandmother married her childhood sweetheart. He had never left his community on Manitoulin Island and spoke Anishnaabemowin as a first language. He could read the weather, hunted, and kept a sugar bush in the old way. My mother had moved onto her biological father’s First Nation, in southern Ontario, so I spent a lot of time in both communities. My biological grandfather, Bud, was half Anishnaabe and half Kanien:keha’ka, but he had learned to speak Ojibwe, growing up in a Chippewa community, and even wrote dictionaries.

I have always loved language. As a child, the recurrent note in my report cards remarked on my fondness for literature and poetry. I ended up earning my undergraduate and graduate degrees in literature, constantly immersing myself in language. I am currently working on my PhD in literature.

When I began my career, I was fortunate to find myself working in Anishnaabemowin immersion classes with fluent speakers, learning alongside beautifully knowledgeable Anishnaabeg.

This idea of poetry came from my attempts to learn this new vocabulary. The way words translate into English was so poetic to me, as they involved an intricately structured worldview through phrases.

I have always felt just around the corner from my ancestors' language. Like every time I thought I was catching up to it, its shadow would slip behind a tree or float too high in the sky, out of reach.

This book of poems is *not* meant to be a didactic tool for language learning. It is meant to encapsulate the way an anglophone with Anishnaabe identity feels as an outsider to the language of her own people. How “walking in two worlds” or “two-eyed seeing” manifests itself when an Anishnaabe person is left with a deep longing to learn a language but has only dictionaries and thesauruses to turn to for knowledge.

The result is a *poetic experiment*, to transmute my lived experience using the literal translations and concepts of Anishnaabemowin into English, and arranged with poetic licence.

The words I found in my ancestral language are lined up on the right, to show how I processed the polysynthetic morphemes into English.

I hope this book provides insight into the tensions of language I have experienced being an Anishnaabekwe in the modern world—the liminal feeling of existing in two worlds and not belonging fully to either language. Many of us inhabit the blank space between the columns in this book.

Tareyn Megis Johnson, *Binesi Waaban Kwe*

Language Notes

Anishnaabemowin is not a gendered language in the third person, therefore she or he is expressed as s/he or h/ to indicate the lack of gender. Instead of gender conjugations in Romantic languages, Anishnaabemowin is conjugated by animacy. People are always animate, but some items and elements of nature are also animate. This is reflected in the s/he or h/ gendering of what would be inanimate objects in English.

As the author, I wanted to retain the lack of gendering and ambiguity of animacy so that the reader may consider alternative worldviews.

The poems ask the reader to acknowledge the unfamiliar forms of gender equality as well as the concept of valorizing non-human elements as being equal to humans.

Lastly, the Anishnaabe calendar is divided into thirteen months, according to a twenty-eight-day cycle, which recognizes the thirteen full moons per year. The names of the months, or moons, differ depending on the location, as they are named for what is abundant or visible during that time. This is why one month may have two or more names.



Spring

Snowcrust Moon
(March)

There is
a basic concept
for ice

mikwam

one could
also form concepts
of ice
using cake
or ideas of ingot

-zigw-

concept of travel
across frozen landscape

-aako

-aadagaako

yet

mashi

act of snow
is a simple sound

-po

the snow itself is another

goon

it could flurry
deepen
heavy, wet
soften

mamaangipon
ishpaagonagaa
zhakipon
nookaagonagaa

two sounds
encapsulate winter

goon/po

Minookami

Onaabadin Giizis

Crow Moon
(March)

Aandeg Giizis

Corvus
in abundance

aandegokaa

black feather

makadewigwan

bright
grey
pale
s/he is affected
by the moon

waabizo

it is abundant
in stars

anangokaa

bird with thought

aandeg

dark as night
carries knowledge
as the moon

gashkii-dibik-ayaa
gikendaaso
nookomis

Maple Sugaring Moon (April)

Iskigamizige Giizis

Wet snow falls
s/he sits, stays in position
the dawn, morning, east
wait expectantly, looking at h/

zhakipon

*waabanabi
akawaabamaan*

milky way
the thunderbird path
it fades
bright, white, grey, pale
it shines, in the light
affected by the sun

binesiwi-miikana

waabaate

the sun rises
emerges
appears acting on it as a song

mooka'am

it is light at dawn
the snake leaves
shine, glitter, reflect light
heated
affected by fire, sun, or moon

*waaseyaaban
ginebigobag*

waaside

s/he arrives
moving in a certain way
held a certain way
by someone

bagami-ayaa

ininigaazo

they love each other
loving-kindness, mercy, compassion
blessed, acted in thought on h/

zaagi'idiwag

zhawenimaan



Suckerfish Moon (April)

Namebin Giizis

My grandmother
she would awaken the children
by touching
with her hand

nookomis

abinoojiinyan
odamadinaan

cause them to go out
into the dark
late in night

ozaagizi'aan

ishpi-dibik

put hands on
burning with a flame
it glows

waazakonebijigan

it shines
for game
or fish

waaswaa

a profusion
catostomus commersoni

namebinikaa

she sets net

bagida'waa

they spawn

aamiwag

threadlike
along in space or time

moose gaa-bimaabiigizid

she called them
night crawlers

izhinikaanaan
gichi-mooseg

lured
consumed from a certain place
the rivers

giigoonyensikaan
ondam
ziibiiwan

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