

TOMMY PICO

Tommy Pico is from the Viejas Indian reservation of the Kumeyaay Nation. He is a recipient of a Queer/Art/Mentors fellowship and a 2013 Lambda Writers Retreat fellowship in poetry. Pico cocurates the reading series Poets With Attitude (PWA) with poet Morgan Parker and cohosts the podcast Food 4 Thot.

IRL (2016) is Tommy Pico's first book of poems. *Nature Poem* (2017) is his second collection. Pico's third book is *Junk* (2018).

from *Nature Poem*

I can't write a nature poem
bc it's fodder for the noble savage
narrative. I wd slap a tree across the face,
I say to my audience.

Let's say I'm at a pizza parlor
Let's say I'm having a slice at the bar this man walks in to pick up his
to-go order
Let's say his order isn't ready yet and he's chatty
Let's say I'm in Portland bc ppl don't tawlk to me in NYC
Let's say he's like, *meatballs are for the baby, pizza's for the little man*
Caesar salad's for the wife and the beer he points to the beer and then
thumbs at himself, *the beer's for me.*

He has one of those cracked skin summer smiles

He keeps talking like I want to hear him
Like he's so comfortable
Like everybody owes him attention

I'm a weirdo NDN faggot

He puts his hands on the ribs of my chair asks do I want to go into the
bathroom with him

Let's say it doesn't turn me on at all

Let's say I literally hate all men bc literally men are animals—

This is a kind of nature I would write a poem about.

We are the last animal to arrive in the kingdom—even science will tell you that.

My father takes me into the hills we cut sage. He tells me to *thank the plant for its sacrifice, son*. Every time I free a switch of it a burst of prayer for every leaf.

I'm swoll on knowing this? Sharing the pride of plants

My mother waves at oak trees. A doctor delivers her diagnosis.

When she ascends the mountains to pick acorn, my mother motherfucking waves at oak trees. Watching her stand there, her hands behind her back, rocking, grinning into the face of the bark—

They are talking to each other.

I am nothing like that, I say to my audience.

I say, *I went to Sarah Lawrence College*

I make quinoa n shit

Once on campus I see a York Peppermint Pattie wrapper on the ground, pick it up, and throw it away. *Yr such a good Indian* says some dick walking to class. So,

I no longer pick up trash.

I can't write a nature poem bc that conversation happens in the Hall of
South American Peoples in the American Museum of Natural History

btwn two white ladies in buttery shawls as they pass a display case of
"traditional" garb from one tribe or another it doesn't really matter to
anyone

and that word *Natural* in *Natural History* hangs
also *History*
also *Peoples*
hangs as in frames

it's horrible how their culture was destroyed

as if in some reckless storm

*but thank god we were able to save some of these artifacts—history is so
important. Will you look at this metalwork? I could cry—*

Look, I'm sure you really do just want to wear those dream catcher
earrings. They're beautiful. I'm sure you don't mean any harm, I'm sure
you don't really think abt us at all. I'm sure you don't understand the
concept of off-limits. But what if by not wearing a headdress in yr music
video or changing yr damn mascot and perhaps adding .05% of personal
annoyance to your life for the twenty minutes it lasts, the 103 young ppl
who tried to kill themselves on the Pine Ridge Indian reservation over
the past four months wanted to live 50% more

I don't want to be seen, generally, I'm a natural introvert, n I def don't
want to be seen by white ladies in buttery shawls,
but I will literally die if I don't scream

You can't be an NDN person in today's world

and write a nature poem. I swore to myself I would never write a nature poem. Let's be clear, I hate nature—hate its *guts*

I say to my audience. There is something smaller I say to myself:

I don't hate nature at all. Places have thoughts—hills have backs that love being stroked by our eyes. The river gobbles down its tract as a metaphor but also abt its day. The bluffs purr when we put down blankets at the downturn of the sun and laugh at a couple on a obvi OkCupid date

and even more stellar, the jellybean moon sugars at me. She flies and beams and I breathe.

Fuck that. I recant. I slap myself.

Let's say I live in NYC. Let's say I was the first person in my family to graduate college. Let's say UGH I like watching *New Girl* on Hulu.

This is the difference:

Some see objects in the Earth, where I see lungs. Sky mother falls thru a hole, lands on a turtle.

Hole is my favorite band.