

Living Nations, Living Words: A Map of First Peoples Poetry
Poem commentary by b: william bearhart, 2020

Speaker: b: william bearhart

Date of recording: August 10, 2020

Location: Turtle Lake, Wisconsin, poet's home

Length: 4 minutes, 35 seconds

START OF RECORDING

b: william bearhart: My name is b: william bearhart and I will be reading the poem “Transplant: After Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Pelvis IV*, 1944,” and following will be a short commentary.

[b: william bearhart reads “Transplant: After Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Pelvis IV*, 1944”]

bwb: Okay, so, let’s take this way back: an oversimplification of a migration story. The Ojibwe people migrated westward from the eastern shores of this continent. The destination was to settle where food grows on the water.

Of course, this history is more complex, but we carry this history—this movement—with us in our everyday lives. While this is not explicit in the poem I chose for this project, it does exist as a knowledge I carry to the page. In terms of place/displacement, “Transplant” is the migration story of a woman from Wisconsin to New Mexico, as well as a story of a kidney from one body to the next.

What does “place” mean? Is it where we start? Where we end? This poem wonders about the precariousness of life—how forgiving and unforgiving it can be. It’s about the resiliency and delicate nature of our bodies. It’s about how we carry the weight of stories and still have the capacity to build new possibilities.

END OF RECORDING