

## "After All This Becomes Lit": Becoming and Performativity in Contemporary English-Language Native Poetry

### Presenter

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### Mentor

- Dian Million, American Indian Studies

### Session

- [Session 2D: Communicating an Interdisciplinary Language: Zen Literacy, Performance Poetry, Technology, and Mortality \(an Honors Interdisciplinary Panel\)](#)
- 231 MGH
- 3:30 PM to 5:15 PM

Contemporary Native poetry often takes colonial history as its subject matter in an attempt to unsettle accepted narratives about Indigeneity and Indigenous peoples, but sometimes it must do so in the language of the settlers. In this project, I focus on three English-language poems—"Simple Four Part Directions for Making Indian Lit" by Gordon D. Henry, "Lean Cuisine" by Sherman Alexie, and "The Devil's Language" by Marilyn Dumont—written by Indigenous North American poets who actively rework conventions of the "enemy's language" to make poetry viable for participation in decolonizing processes. I argue that one way in which we can understand these Native poems to be subversive in their use of a non-Native language is by reading them not only as describing and reiterating facts but also as making "counter-texts" and enacting their own histories and epistemologies—that is, as texts that are in the process of becoming. I engage with the theoretical apparatuses of "becoming" proposed by the three different poems in conjunction with J.L. Austin's formulation of performativity in order to highlight the world-making potentials of poetic language. Through this analysis, I explore the ways in which poetry can be mobilized to repurpose the settlers' language and, in turn, interrogate the textual basis of colonial realities.