

Koffler Centre of the Arts

Books & Ideas: Tenille K. Campbell with Joshua Whitehead

Wednesday, March 10, 2021

Joshua: Thanks for joining us. Hi, my friends. Thanks for joining us on this fabulous Wednesday evening. Tenille and I literally just finished getting glam like 5-10 minutes, 15 minutes, ago, so we worked hard to look good for you all. I think, first things first, I also want to acknowledge that it is Tenille Campbell's birthday month, so happy birthday month, happy early birthday. It's just my absolute pleasure to be introducing Nedi Nezu, this wonderful book that I had the pleasure of blurbing and that I've seen Tenille read from, heard Tenille read from, talked with Tenille about these poems to some extent, and I am just so happy that this nation state that we call Canada is privy to this book of delicious decolonial sexy recipes. So, yeah, I'm very excited to be talking about this. As Mary said, my name is Joshua Whitehead. I'm a two-spirit writer, a storyteller, academic scholar, basically just overall person, from Peguis First Nation, which is in Treaty One Territory. Currently I'm situated in Treaty Seven, Calgary, Mon'kinsstis, the Blackfoot confederacy, and I am staying in this Airbnb cabin. So, this is not my actual home, but I'm living in a little house on the prairie fantasy. For those with visual impairment, I am just wearing a black top, and I'm sure me and Tenille are going to talk about this a little bit but I'm wearing Savage Rose earrings, which are like kind of the size of half of my face, and also a Savage Rose medalia with some horsehair, and, yeah, so I'm situated in this little cabin moment. So, it's my great pleasure, my great honor, to be introducing Tenille K. Campbell to the stage for this lovely event. The first launch of this amazing book from Arsenal Pulp Press.

Tenille: Thank you for having me. I'm so excited. I'm so excited. I either have to learn to say all that in Dene, but I can't yet, but I'll get here, but, like you said, my name is Tenille Campbell. I am Dene from English River First Nation, and I am Metis from [name] area, the big MAT, if we're getting political, as we do, and, for the visually impaired or hard of seeing, I am wearing some amazing earrings, which I don't think we're supposed to start off first, but some beautiful beaded bling by Savage Rose with green feathers, crazy eye makeup to match my earrings, long, dark hair, pale Metis skin, yes, and a black top, and there's just way too many books behind me, but that's okay. I'm a nerd.

Joshua: I was going to say, that intro, like, where' the hotline number? I will call it right now.

Tenille: Exactly. For my birthday month, I would like

Joshua: For just \$2 a minute....

Tenille: Josh, let's not get started that early!

Joshua: Yeah, I'm just so excited to be here with Tenille. I've known Tenille for a while now, and the first thing, so, like, Tenille, you're also an amazing photographer, you've done a lot of headshots for a lot of indigenous author country and indigenous country at large, again, Sweet Moon Photography if you do want to check out her work. I highly suggest it. She's done my headshots. But, yeah, like I want to talk a little bit to you about, like I want to talk about the book but I'm interested to hear first like your kind of maybe, your ideas about stories and storytelling because, you know, like I have a book of poetry, a novel, and I have a book of essays coming out, so like you're a poet, you're a novelist, you're an essayist, but I just consider myself like a storyteller because it all bleeds together, so I'm interested to hear from you, like did you want to maybe talk a little bit about, because I know you have a photography project on the go, as well, like, yeah, like how do you imagine stories existing, or do you imagine your stories existing in other mediums, specifically photography?

Tenille: Yeah. I used to like when I was young I was always like I wanna be a writer when I grow up. I didn't know what that meant. It wasn't until I went to UBC for my MFA that I discovered photography. Once I was done with my MFA there, I kinda just, I remember sitting outside, like the sun on my face and looking at my friends and just being like, I'm a photographer, which seems like super like, no shit, Tenille. Like wow.

Joshua: She had the 35 Polaroids, you know.

Tenille: I mean, it was like such this fundamental shift in identity, and as I kept doing photography and writing and poetry and fiction and all of these other things, essays and photo essays, I just kind of came to understand that I'm a storyteller and I have preferred genres, of course, but at the end of the days, these are stories, these are little bits of us that we leave behind and open for interpretation, and it just, it feels good to say that.

Joshua: Mhmm. No, exactly, and like I remember working with you, too, and I think we've seen this in both of your books that your like importance and your pertinence for seeing not only "Indian bedliness" but also like you have a strong political axes toward thinking about like Indian joy, so, like, yeah, do you want to like maybe talk a little bit about that, like the importance, the political importance of like joy or indigenous books.

Tenille: I think so. I've ranted on this before and it's needed, but I find often that when images, as a photographer, when images are devoured of us by mainstream media it's always of our trauma and our sadness and our anger and our grief, and, granted, yes, I understand like that is, those evoke strong emotions, but so does our joy, and I think our joy should be just as achievable, just as, I don't want to say commercial or devourable, but just as shareable, I guess. You know, I want our joy to effect other people. I want people to look at images of you know our grandma laughing with her granddaughter and be like, oh, and like see the connection between that. We don't always have to have our tragedy up for people to like and click and double heart and make sad faces on

Facebook and then ultimately do nothing. I'd rather us influence each other with joy and action and action-based solutions and, oh, but it's hard. It's hard. It's hard to break those patterns.

Joshua: Well, I think you do it beautifully and powerfully from like a long archival history of like the Edward S. Curtis of the world like photographing us and making pan indigeneity into like we're all into teepees and wear headdresses and we're like in different nations, right, and like the joy that I think you exuberate in your work, in your photography, and then also just your, like you can laugh and fill a room and is so infectious and it's so invitational. I see that in your poetry, too, which I want to move to, but I also know that you started beading recently. I got the behind the scene scoop. We're both fans of like all various different people and I know tonight we're featuring Savage Rose, but, yeah, like what do you think about like beadwork? Do you consider it in your form of wearing of crafting beadwork and it's on the cover of your page or your title page, or cover, oh my god, yeah, like what is the role of beadwork in stories, do you think?

Tenille: Oh my god. I've always loved beadwork, and I like wrote a piece about it, so I won't say too much about it, but I will show off my sad, beautiful little beadwork since you called me on it. Look at it.

Joshua: It's gorgeous.

Tenille: It's like got some crooked beads, and I think that's okay. Well, a little crooked. Beadwork was always one of those things that other people did and that I admired and that I was firmly planted in my I will support you with my money. Here you go. You've seen my collection. I had all these ideas that included beadwork but I was like, okay, like, if you can't do it, you just hire the people who can, and that was great. That's community, that's kinship, that's working with other artists. Beautiful. And then over spring break, February break, I was up north and I was at my cousin's and she was beading, as she does because she is a beadwork artist, and I was like gimme, gimme, like, if we're gonna sit here and talk, like just give me something to do, and like she was kind but in that like aunty way of like I've never seen beads do that before.

Joshua: In Tenille style.

Tenille: By the end of it, she was just like, not bad, and I was like, yes.

Joshua: To translate, not bad is really good.

Tenille: Right? I was just like mmm, mmm. I was posting updates on my Instagram, as you saw, and throughout the week so many like amazing beadwork artists were so supportive, like sending my heart eyes, encouraging me, and I was like, oh my god, I'm one of them, and then I'm like, no, Tenille, not yet. Like my ego was just like, oh, yes.

Joshua: Starting some online orders right now.

Tenille: Yeah, earrings come out next week. But, it was beautiful, and I felt really connected like to my grandmother and to my aunties and to my cousins who already do this and slightly obsessed because, you know me, I get like full into something and I'm like I'm going to do this for the next five years, and I was like, Tenille, finish your other projects.

Joshua: From what I've seen, I'm very excited to place an order, so I want like, five years from now, I want to be like I have some vintage Tenille Campbell, but I agree with you like I think, yeah, at least various different artforms, not that I do any of them, but from the folks I've talked to who engage in this and family members who do, be it tanning or beading, right, it's just like it's a connective history from like basically like time and memorial, right? It is a kind of a connective tissue to the ancestors to have it now in 2021, right? So, I think, yeah, I totally agree with you on that front, and I'm excited for this beading, and I thought the edging was great, and that's a great segue into the next bit I want to ask you about.

Tenille: Oh my god.

Joshua: So, edging. No, just kidding.

Tenille: Yeah, let's talk more about that.

Joshua: You knew I was going to go there. But maybe like I'd like to maybe like if you want to think of one, I'd like you to read one poem, but, yeah, first like I want to ask, too, like so your large kind of project in your writing and in your photography and in your social media is just like thinking about decolonizing sex, right, and I'm like did you, well, maybe let's explain it. So we have a lot of people here tonight who have maybe not ever encountered this idea before. What does a decolonized sex look like for Tenille Campbell in this moment?

Tenille: Oh, in this moment. No doubt. Gees. That's a good question. I don't know. Gosh. Okay, okay, okay. Slight mouth panic. Okay, okay, okay. I think for me like, to break it down very simply, decolonized sex is just this ability as an indigenous person to make love both aware of like social constructs in place, gender constructs, etc., etc., etc., but also having the power and the ability to see it and move around it, so like make love in my own fashion, both physically, emotionally, etc., and being aware of the world around me but also being aware fundamentally of who I am and what I cherish and want to embrace and understanding like a lot of the power comes from my indigenous heritage, you can't separate that, and hopefully just like learning along the way how to be a good partner and what that means because I'm not perfect. So close. No. Sorry, that ego. Stay humble. You know, we're much too close friends.

Joshua: Little bit, but I love it.

Tenille: Yeah, I think that's just it, like learning to accept my flaws and my graces and put that into partnerships and to be a good partner, understanding that culture does play a huge part in how I interact with other people, but giving myself the leeway to let it.

Joshua: Exactly. I love that. I love seeing the work and just like the conversations I've had with you and in your everyday practices and it's just like a beautiful and like inspirational decolonial thing that we need right now and thinking about. Yeah, what does it mean to embody sex decolonially, sex as in, you know, our bodies that we inhabit, but also the practices that we engage in, and I want to invite you to read one poem from this. I don't know if you have one chosen, but it's like, yes, we are close friends, but we also think very kind of parallel, I would say, and I agree with you, too, like me and like my work is also like maybe that's one of the kind of paradigms or models that I try to do is like decolonize sex but also like decolonizing as a contemporary idea of two-spiritedness and thinking about our bodies and our sexualities and our spirits and our genders and our practices in community of like being here and not being kind of boxed in by perhaps contemporary historical markers like things like Stonewall, Booth, Bradley, or various different waves of feminism, like the act of beading we're also connected, I think, historically and an ancestrally through the act of, you know, sex and shape or desire.

Tenille: Hmm. Yes, yes, yes. I'm like processing, and you're like, Tenille, talk. Alright. Now, with all that pressure of how alike we are I'm like, ugh, I've got to pick a good one.

Joshua: To prep everyone, Tenille Campbell has the best, most sultry reading voice ever, so like prepare yourself, like get a tissue if you're going to cry.

Tenille: Oh, the pressure. Okay. You and I would laugh because like our talking, everyday joking voice is like we're cool, of course, but like our reading voice just drops into the bedroom and we're like oh. Like, I've heard you read and I'm just like whatcha doin' later, like what's up? Alright. Page 105. None of the poems are actually titled. The title is just the first line of the poem. Urban indigenous flirting with traditionalists means biting my tongue because asking you to check yourself equals lectures on gender roles. You don't understand matriarchs come from everywhere and this is all native land. Spare me your teaching when I comment about the weather, miss me with the gifts of medicine bearing sweet shame and gentle condemnation. I can't walk with you in a good way. Just recognize the teachings I bring. Do you see the story between humble attitudes and broken hearts left on sidewalks? I don't walk in circles with the sun, don't know how to pray palms up, but that don't mean I don't see the ceremony that my body holds, skirt or no skirt. My feet still touch the ground, connecting me to mine, concrete or glass, latte in hand and lip gloss glittering, still indigenous. If I wore braids tightly plaited in two rows, rocked a skirt, ribbons brightly flashing, would I be more worthy of your attention? I like my hair wild, laughing too loud, flirting too much, can never look you in the eye. Can you admit you like watching me?

Joshua: Oooh! Thank you for sharing. Like, I just love hearing you read. It just brings a different like animation to the story, and like I was giving a talk earlier this week, and like so I'm like in fashion I've really been trying to conceptualize story also as living being because it needs that breath, it needs that morality. I want to give that. It becomes something like we're comfortable to, like we're in relation with the poem, as well, right,

and then when you read in the collective space like this like we all become in relation to this piece like this being that you're animating into the world, and I'm curious, too, like, so, for me, like in thinking about like we were speaking earlier about relations and decolonized sex and also like the very land itself, either urban or res, comes into this, right, and so in a way, also, too, like do you find that yourself writing these poems and speaking these poems is like one, like reveling and being majestic and powerful in the very act of intimacy that is shared with some of these poems, but also like how does like, I guess, like lovemaking or joy making with the land upon which the speaker is situated upon come in, because like the land is like a central figure in both of your books. I don't know, so, like, yeah, have you conceptualized like lovemaking with the res or the urban res or?

Tenille: I find that more often than not when I talk about like land and love and desired erotica that my form embodies the land. I'll bring the land into me. Like, I'll talk about the good muskeg medicine between my thighs. Eh. I'm just like wondering how this live transcript is going, like how do you go like eh?

Joshua: It's a special you know those tongue emojis.

Tenille: I love it. I'm here for you. But, yeah, like I will bring the land into my body, and I find it's really interesting. I'd never really write about losing myself in the land, which is, now that I think about it, really interesting, but it's more about how to learn how the land has shaped me and carved me and grown me and now I carry it with me, so we bring that desire into the bedroom like you're wet like the Churchill River, and this just makes sense to me and I've never questioned it. I'm like of course desire is land embodied. Of course the land carries desire.

Joshua: No, exactly. I mean, I think I do similar things, too, in my writing. It's like the Cypress Hills or like kind of like a sling in some of my intimate writing or like, yeah, like the Red River is a very strong component part of my writing, but here in Treaty Seven, as well, like I think we all know my infamous bear scene. Like, it's interesting to me that you say like you never lose yourself in the land, and I think that's an important thing to think about when we think about maybe Canadian erotica from a nonindigenous perspective and it's like the land is a place to go and get lost and then to find yourself and come back, right, but it's like different for you. A lot of indigenous writers we're like we never get lost in the land, we get lost around the land, and I think that's, I never thought about it in those terms, either. Yeah, the land is so central.

Tenille: Nobody steal that idea. Josh and I are on it.

Joshua: Patent pending.

Tenille: No, I love that. I love that idea. Like, definitely like eat, pray, love. You go onto land, you lose yourself, and I'm like I can't, that doesn't resonate with me. How can you lose yourself on the land? The land is home. Don't get me wrong, a bitch has been lost, but not on the land.

Joshua: Yeah, yeah, it's like, we're like fourth street and fourth avenue. What?

Tenille: Yeah, exactly. Like I'm in the mountains up in the plains.

Joshua: Oh, I love it, and again it's just like again, I think in a lot of indigenous epistemologies, like this body that we inhabit is always intrinsically tied and in relation with the bodies of land and water and the nonhuman and the 4-legged and the winged and we're always in relations with those. Like, why would we ever be lost in those spaces? Interesting, too, like, so, I'm working on a book of nonfiction, making love with the land, which is maybe kind of why I asked the question, I'm very curious, but I also, like you, I write about others that I've ended up being in relationships with or had intimate moments with or just even desire for or with. I'm curious like, as a writer who deploys kind of the second person address, you, like what are your like ethics about writing about others, specifically in very like intimate and desirable ways like this?

Tenille: I have none, apparently. I find that, because in this new collection there's a couple instances where, if the person was known, there would be drama, and that's putting it lightly, so, but I think, you know, as someone who was partnered with them in that intimate moment, I have the right to write about my experience, so I just do what I've always done. When I'm writing about it, I write from my point of view. I don't try and like guess their point of view. I don't name them. I don't put up any identifying marks. When I like tell a story, because on my readings, like if I tell a poem or speak a poem, I'll tell the story connecting to it because I have no chill. When I do that, I often make sure that I tell it in a way where, not where I'm the joke but I'm the one who has learned a lesson through fumbling around because this is my story and this is my experience of it and I don't tell these stories to make my partners look bad or feel bad if they've ever seen these poems, because I've been very blessed to have very like fun lovers, but I still wanna like express it in a way that I can and that other people connect to, and I think that idea of being open to learning and fumbling our way through and not knowing what to do and like why is my foot cramping. People identify with this. We just, you know, we're not all supermodels making classic love with jazz in the background and like an eagle flying overhead, although.

Joshua: The deep powwow is playing.

Tenille: Yeah, exactly. Funny. Good question.

Joshua: But I feel like, and I've also learned so much from you like listening to the readings and how you preface them and in, yeah, like the nondescriptor identifiers and then sometimes you do like give a story, which, you know, people might recognize themselves but so be it if they do, but I've also been thinking, too, about like indigenous erotica, and I know like Eden Robinson is like going to write this like bingo hall like friendship center erotica, and I'm so excited for it, like I missed the Trickster series but I'm excited for that, but I think about, too, like a lot of times like indigenous erotica reminds me or is like akin to like kind of creation stories and it's like specifically with yours it's like earthy and like muddy and has a lot of fluids, mine, too, but it's like it just

keeps reminding me of like in their story, right, like I've really been trying to conceptualize both, in terms of poetics, or poetically, and then also like literally, like thinking about love and lovemaking or even like sex as kind of mini creation stories as like we create these moments, right, and in yours like maybe I see a little bit of that but like when you talk about when you preface these and you have, like you learn a lesson, that's almost like very akin to like, it's like one of these oral stories on creation or Trickster, so like do you think it, like, is that just something that's, that you use to mitigate for you or do you think, I also see lessons in your stories and in your poems. Like do you ever about that that's like a primary part of what I want to have in a poem from Tenille Campbell, like when you leave that room you learn something?

Tenille: No, not at all.

Joshua: Because I do every time.

Tenille: That's good, though. No, I think for me, when I like wrote Indian love poems I was in a place where I truly just wanted indigenous space to talk about sex in a very flippant, like not nonsensical, but a very flippant everyday way because I found that the narrative of indigenous sexuality was either super sacred, creation, healing medicine or like trauma, and I was like can't I just have an orgasm with like the world stopping, without the world stopping? Can I have a one night stand without like the world falling apart and shame upon my head? Turns out you can have many.

Joshua: In the same night. No, just kidding.

Tenille: I just wanted space for that because I truly believe like as indigenous people that, you know, we are healing, we are collectively using our voice, we write our medicine, we write our healing, and where we were in the 60s, 70s is not where we are now. You know, there would be people who would argue of course politically, but emotionally, spiritually, mentally, I feel like we have grown, and I wanted our writing, well, my writing, to reflect that, both this cavalier attitude toward sexuality to show that indigenous women don't have to be, oh, what is the word, judged by our sexuality or put on a pedestal or made a stereotype or an archetype and that we have the ability to make the stupid mistakes and make really great choices and make really sketchy choices and that our lives are just as fun and entertaining as any other sitcom.

Joshua: Mmhmm. Oh, for sure. So like that was like very much my prominence in Johnny is like I really just kinda want to show like the sexiness and the, but the messiness of sex and the awkwardness of it and, yeah, like semen stains, like I don't know if I can say the c word, like semen stained sheets, right, and like we were having a conversation about lubricant types the other day and like these are like real everyday conversations that we have and I really just think that's important that we write these stories and that we talk about these stories and we talk about just the fact of living and joy and like euphoria even when it comes to sex, right? Like, under the large banner of missing indigenous women and girls and two-spirited folks we can also have that joy of being in the body and enjoying the body, and I just like so very much like revel in your

stories when you kind of share these, but I was like yeah I like the messiness, and I was like I don't want it to be sacred, like two-spirit sex is not sacred, but I was like I'm just gonna go like full on like where the penis detaches and runs away like I would like that messiness, and I wanted it to be like that. Yeah, so, like, I guess, too, like I've never asked you this question, actually, and you don't have to share.

Tenille: Uh oh.

Joshua: But, like, what was, like, one of the first poems that you wrote, like Indian love poems, like how did it begin?

Tenille: I don't even remember. I don't even remember. It's been so long. So many men.

Joshua: Get out the Rolodex.

Tenille: They were all beautiful, but I do remember one of the first times that I read was at an event at the university, US, and my best friend, Charlotte was there, and Charlotte's a blonde, blue-eyed Ukrainian girl, just like fair AF, and her brother was there, Everett, who was just like wuh-wuh, but he's also like six years younger than me and I've seen him grow up so I'm just like, how old are you, and I'm like once he hit 25 I was just like we did it, we fine, but he has a beautiful girlfriend who I absolutely love and adore. She has like such strong self-confidence. She has no problem with me, but at this event I remember there being a poem about fucking John Smith for the first time, and I was like I read it, that line, I read that line about fucking John Smith, and I looked at him and I was like what's up, and like he just went red and his girlfriend lost it. She laughed so hard at him.

Joshua: Oh my god. Alright. Well, I want to hear the full story. Interesting. I think one of the first times you and I crossed paths, maybe without knowing, was it teepee confessions? Were we there at the same time?

Tenille: I don't even remember when you and I started hanging out. It feels like you've always been there.

Joshua: I know. It's a love connection.

Tenille: Exactly.

Joshua: I want to invite folks, too. I'll open up the Q&A, but toss them in there. There's a couple there now, but, yeah, if you have your questions pop them in there and I'll get to as many as I can.

Tenille: We love questions.

Joshua: We love Q&A. So, also, just like thinking about craft because like I was talking a lot about this in like my interviews and when not when like specifically like nonindigenous like white folks interview you they just like want to like tell me about the trauma and the story, like what was the real life inspiration for this, but I'm like tell me

like what is your craft like, like how do you approach poetry or like, yeah, what are your overall kind of thoughts around how to write poetry, how to craft poetry?

Tenille: Oh, these are good questions. Um, um, um. I've found for books one and two, Indian Love Poems and Nedi Nezu, that it was very like embodied work, like is that the nicest way to say it?

Joshua: I mean, it resonates with me.

Tenille: Yeah, this is fun, but it came from a place of, you know, physically going out and like having these flirtations, having the sex, having the courtships, experiencing dating for the first time, what the hell is that, experiencing, what is that, dating people not of indigenous culture, dating a man who had hair shoulders, and I've never really experienced that before. That was interesting. And then just like being mindful of like my thoughts and coming home and just like writing, just writing, reflections, reactions, memories. It didn't all have to make sense, not everything obviously made it into the books, but it was, for me writing was this act of processing, this thing that I was working through because, yay, sex, but also being aware of who I was and where I grew up and working through my own, what's that word, my own prejudice against, you know, free sexuality, like what is that?

Joshua: Definitely.

Tenille: Yeah, and like understanding that a one night stand does not make me a whore. Huh! What? But, that's kind of where I started with this very small mentality and how all these different sexual experiences, and not everything, I shouldn't say sexual, sensual. Not everything was about sex. All of these very sensual and erotic experiences would change me and help me grow and challenge me and sometimes, for the most part, they were like great, I learned something, but other times I'd get into situations where I was like this is not for me.

Joshua: We get there sometimes.

Tenille: Right? I'm like I misstepped on that one.

Joshua: Oops. I'm gonna go.

Tenille: Exactly. Like Uber? Hmm, don't call me. We've all been there, and it was a lot of growing and a lot of like laughs and a lot of like late night phone calls but also a lot of tears. A lot of working through the emotions because change isn't comfortable. We know that.

Joshua. Exactly. Exactly. We're meant to be challenged and shattered like that but then brought together like a collage, and every single moment, at least that's how I try to like move through the world when I end up making mistakes or I get something wrong or I'm just presented with another viewpoint that's not my own. Like continually shattering but not like to the point of breaking but just repair and in collage fashion. That's just for me overall growing. I do want to get to questions. We've got a whole bunch now. Okay. So,

oh, okay, so we've got Chief Ladybird here. So, I'll just read it aloud. Do you see your work as a catalyst or changing perceptions of how the colonized eye views desire, sex, and land as conquests, or do you prefer that your work be less politicized despite the fact that we are often automatically politicized LOL and connected with more on a personal level. Curious to hear your thoughts on this because I know your work often comes from such an intimate and special place, especially because we are accessing cosmologies and personal narratives of culture. Also, I love you both. Thanks for the good medicine. We love you, too, Ladybird.

Tenille: Oh, we love you. Oh, do you see your work as a catalyst for changing perceptions of how the colonized eye views desire, sex, and land as conquests?

Joshua: Yeah, or do you prefer to be less politicized and connected on a more personal intimate level?

Tenille: I think it depends on who reads it. I can't control who reads my work and how they connect to it, but I think that sex is political. I think sex as indigenous women and as indigenous people is political. As long as live under a colonized state it is what it is. But, I'm not going to sit there and, you know, bemoan Justin Trudeau while I'm coming.

Joshua: Well, it gets me off.

Tenille: But, I mean, you know, we are political beings whether we want to or not. Whether we want to engage in politics or not we still exist in Canada. But, I find for me, like when I'm making love or making art or making poetry or I'm making photography with other indigenous people that I can breathe a lot easier. I don't have to watch my tongue as much, and that there is more of an open back and forth, and I think it's in those moments that I can be, but that doesn't mean like we are still not two indigenous people living under colonized Canada.

Joshua: Yeah, we're automatically politicized as a person in all of our various identities under being indigenous. Being a woman or like queer or being glam, right? No, I totally agree with that. Yeah. Yeah, you can't differentiate that, but also the work that you're doing does that automatically.

Tenille: Yeah, I definitely think people will connect to it in a mindset that works for them. In book two like it's definitely more overt political, but I feel like it's like what, what's the second movie called, the second book called?

Joshua: The sequel?

Tenille: Yeah, there we go. English major and I'm like what's that word? I think Indian Love Poems really was just like a welcome like a come in like a come to the table and it's us cracking jokes and it's us telling stories around a kitchen table, and I feel like Nedi Nezu is when the lights get low and the kids have gone to bed and the aunties and uncles are pulling out the crib board and the cards and the homemade wine or the beer or the tea for those who don't drink and that's when the stories come out about the community, that's when the names are dropped of who to avoid, that's when we catch

up on the tea around like the kin and I hope that people see that. I hope they still come along for this journey in number two.

Joshua: Yeah, exactly, and yeah, you like don't shy away from a lot of more what we'd call more "serious" topics, but like you're interrogating like academia in this book, too, which is a huge shift after your first book, so I totally see that as a late night smoke sesh, everyone's like talking and like names are dropped. You know who they are. You should be scared. I want to make sure we get through a couple. So, we've got one, so, Tenille, I'm teaching your poetry at a Banff residency and a student is drawing heavily on your work and its form. What advice would you have for emerging poets as someone with a prolific practice for deciding what goes in the manuscript and editing yourself or being edited by others?

Tenille: What advice, emerging poets, someone, oh. I didn't edit myself very much because I have too big of an ego and I know that about myself. I'm like this is perfect. I know, but let's be honest. I was just like, no, it's flawless. What I had is I had two of my friends take very critical read throughs of my work. I like composed a hundred poems that I thought were pretty strong. I knew not all of them would make it in and just kind of let the second eyes, like neutral eyes, take a look at these stories and read them and come back to me with like their honest critique, and it really helped shape it up. It really helped fine tune it. It helped me see the patterns that were already emerging and helped me see how important placement of poems is in how you read the book start to finish, especially with poetry, and, honestly, the most important thing I did for this book was to take the criticism, was like to step back and let someone tell me that I wasn't, like, you're lovely but you need work, and I'm like, oh.

Joshua: Oh, I didn't know that.

Tenille: Like, damn, we're fighting, okay? So, for the emerging poets it's understanding that, you know, we will get it wrong and we will have to rewrite that poem and that's okay. That's okay. Even if it's been published and you're like this isn't quite right, going back to a poem is just like coming back home, you know. It has to happen.

Joshua: I love that.

Tenille: I do, too.

Joshua: And another note.

Tenille: Yeah, texting myself.

Joshua: No, I love that. Yeah, like I also like to think even when it is published, even with Johnny, I wish I would have had more time to work on that. I notice mistakes and also like perfection in bodily form or in textual form is also not achievable. So, I have a question from Janelle, and I think you're going to like this one, Tenille. Have you ever written something about desiring someone that you hoped they would read and know it was about them? Have you ever written a poetic thirst trap?

Tenille: Yes! Okay. Yes, I have, and he was an idiot and he didn't get it, and I'll tell the story. I don't know if he's watching. Whatever. He deserves to be shamed. But, it's with a person that I have been intimate with and he was in town for the holidays, and you remember like my thirsty like ho ho ho holiday poetry?

Joshua: I do.

Tenille: I know. I wrote one about like it was the last holiday poetry because it was just before New Year's blah blah blah, I was in town, I knew he was in town, and I knew he was reading my stuff, and I literally put in this poem like come to me, like come to me, and he hearts it, and I was like wow, but the other time I wrote specifically, and it wasn't a thirst trap but I have to tell the story because it's so funny. Real quick. I wrote about a person up north who was legendary for their penis size. He's Metis, but I wrote like this Metis love poem to his penis because it had pleased so much women in the north. I posted it, and I never gave any location, I never gave any town, any, I just said Metis, and the amount of women who messaged me naming him, I was like, he really gets around. Yes! So funny.

Joshua: Okay. I'm like let's talk later. I'll get a number or at least an Instagram name. We're going to move on. We have a couple more minutes. Okay, so this person, do you still find sexuality and erotica a taboo in our indigenous community or communities, and do you hope your poetry book breaks standards or inspires awareness? Also, this is signed LOL.

Tenille: Um, yes. I think sexuality, erotica, I do think, I don't want to say taboo, but I think it's still frowned upon to freely discuss it. I think there's still a lot of parameters of discussion on sexuality like we don't do it when the other sex is around, you don't do it, you know, around the kitchen table, like you only do it at appropriate times, and there's never really an appropriate time to discuss sex, honestly, like, appropriate. That being said, I also think it differs from location to location. I find that smaller isolated communities have very strong feelings. I'm not going to say they're wrong or that whatever, they're on their own journey, but if they've been influenced by outside western forces like religion, they have very strong feelings on sexuality, however that may be, and I find in bigger locations like bigger cities where there's more of a mix from different cultures and different peoples that we're a lot more experimental and a lot more open to making these decisions and not as influenced by others around us, but I still think everyone's on their, like everyone's on their own journey, and I've said that since the beginning. I can't tell someone that their feelings about sex are wrong or colonial, although sometimes I do, or, you know, to open their minds up. I can't because sex is so personal and how we feel that our sensuality is so personal and just the fact that they have either heard of me or read some of my stuff and had a feeling, either good or bad, like I've done my work, you know. I've opened that discussion and I've opened that portal and they've thought about it.

Joshua: Oh, exactly. That is the highest honor that I think that we can have as storytellers is someone saying I read your poem, I read this, and I sat with it and I thought about it, like that's all we can really do. We might have time for one more, and I think I'm interested in this one, so this one was from Morgan Little for Tenille, the poem in which you reference "the sacred space of unsure" was a bit of a stark revelation for me, the jarring recognition of someone else's thoughts as your own. What poetry did that for you during your own artistic development or maybe made you feel that sacred space of unsure?

Tenille: Oh, man. I don't know. I don't know. I think one of the first times, and it wasn't erotica, I know that. Was it erotica? You know, years later like, was it? Rita Bouvier is a poet out of Saskatchewan and she wrote this book called *Blueberry Clouds*, poetry book, and I referenced the title in one of my poems where I want to kiss loose lips and blueberry cloud lips and like, and it's a reference to her book, and she had this one poem and I read it when I was 18 and I was at St. Peter's College, which is like a religious college, and I was the only First Nation person in the entire little tiny college and Rita Bouvier was on the reading list for English and I read this poem of hers about skinning a fox and like pulling the flesh away and cleaning the flesh off the fur and patching up the holes in the fur, and I like read this and the revolution wasn't the poem it was the fact that I saw my life in this. It like, I was like I can write about, I can write about my like my bush life? Again I was like mind blown, like what? I can write about plucking ducks? What? It honestly just like I constantly go back to the book and I constantly go back to rounding myself and reminding myself that it is okay or amazing or fun and fine to go back to things that we know and not everything has to be like a push against barriers because sometimes it's not about barriers but it's about coming home.

Joshua: Yeah, exactly, and I think your poetry and sometimes indigenous poets at large are about a calling and returning to home. Yeah, I love that. We're almost out of time, but Tenille I want to ask you one last short question. So, maybe could you like recommend like one or maybe like two or three books or indigenous erotica or indigenous maybe like women written texts or trans written texts or whatever like you're vibing with right now for folks that may be interested and just meeting this field for the first time.

Tenille: I know. I can't really pick them up because the whole stack will fall, but you have to read *Without Reservation: Indigenous Erotica*. It's a classic. It's really hard to find, so go to the used bookstore. That changed my life. *Why Indigenous Literature Matters* by Daniel Heath Justice. It's not necessarily erotica, but he talks about kinship and the kinship of sexuality in it. Whoo! Whoo! I don't want to be friends with my lovers but maybe now I do. Oh my god, Tanya Tagaq's *Split Tooth*. That comes with a warning. Do not read it if you're not in a happy space because this is, you know, we talk about trauma, but, you know, sometimes we just write our healing. As much as I would not advocate it for like an everyday like Sunday reading, it's an important book.

Joshua: Oh, for sure, no, I love all those books. Daniel's like writing about badgers right now but it's like he like led us so well into why they matter. And then obviously Tanya. Like, I will just say there's like the fox scene with spitting out a garden. Golden. Well, Tenille, I just want to thank you so much for like spending this evening with me and with us and taking the time to like share your beautiful stories with us, and Nedi Nezu out with Arsenal Pulp Press. Check it out, support your local bookstores or order from Arsenal themselves. Yeah, I just want to say thank you so much for this beautiful conversation tonight. I'm leaving full in my heart, my stomach, and my spirits, so thank you. Thank you so much, yeah, and thank you to the Kofler, Mary Anderson, for having us and for all of those who joined us tonight. Until next time.