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See table of contents

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Come Together: Oral Sex as Oral History in Gregory Scofield's *Love Medicine and One Song*

Janice Niemann

Mouths do all sorts of amazing things in Cree-Métis poet Gregory Scofield's book of erotic poetry, *Love Medicine and One Song* (1997). They speak Cree, they share stories, they explore bodies, they give pleasure, and they become metaphors. Scofield's third book of poetry explores the male speaker's romantic and erotic relationships with two lovers, one man and one woman. Using images from nature and from Cree culture, the collection primarily negotiates Scofield's love, in its various iterations, for Dean, a past lover whose presence is manifest throughout *Love Medicine*. Although it is a queer text (I use "queer" to refer to non-heteronormative relationships, and my argument focuses on *Love Medicine*'s relationship between the speaker and his male lover[1]), Scofield is not writing solely for a queer audience. He says in an interview with Tanis MacDonald that he hopes "people would curl up together — two men, two women, a man and a woman, twelve women and one man — and they would read the book to each other as though they had written the poems themselves" ("Sitting" 295). This remark is one of the reasons that I, a white settler scholar, undertook this project, and it is with gratitude, respect, intention, and openness and commitment to continue learning that I engage with Scofield's poetry.

Although much of his poetry touches on themes of queerness, *Love Medicine* is an outlier as his only fully erotic collection. Scofield's early work, such as *The Gathering: Stones for the Medicine Wheel* (1993) and *Native Canadiana/Songs from the Urban Rez* (1996), explores the relationships between urbanity and his Indigeneity. His autobiographical works pick up themes similar to those in his first two collections and bring to the forefront the stories of important women in his life, and in doing so they highlight a feminism that continues through his later works. *Witness, I Am* (2016), for example, uses âtayôhkêwina (a Cree

sacred story) to bring attention to missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada. In *Louis: The Heretic Poems* (2011), Scofield draws on Métis history to paint a fuller picture of Louis Riel than we usually see in Canadian history books. *Love Medicine* picks up threads of Cree and Métis histories, Cree language, autobiography, oral histories, activism, and relationships with nature that run through much of Scofield's work, but the collection stands out as uniquely erotic and makes a significant contribution to the growing body of queer Cree literature. Despite rich scholarly offerings on queer Indigeneities and queer Indigenous literature, little criticism exists on specifically queer Cree literature, with the notable exception of June Scudeler's work on Scofield's poetry. In this essay, I take one step toward addressing that gap. *Love Medicine*'s queer Cree legacy, however, flourishes in literary texts such as Joshua Whitehead's book of Two-Spirit sex-positive poetry, *full-metal indigiqueer* (2017); Billy-Ray Belcourt's collection of queer poems, *NDN Coping Mechanisms: Notes from the Field* (2018); Lindsay Nixon's queer memoir, *nîtisânak* (2019); and Theola Ross's film about her and her partner's experience with in vitro fertilization and subsequent pregnancy, *êmîcêtôcêt: Many Bloodlines* (2020).

In *Love Medicine and One Song*, Scofield focuses on the mouth as a point of departure into history, into territoriality, and into sex. Three poems from "Earth and Textures," the opening section of *Love Medicine* — "More Rainberries (The Hand Game)," "Offerings," and "He Is" — focus on the mouths of both the speaker and his lover, blurring the distinctions between sensation and perception and, in doing so, creating the foundation for blurring the boundaries between body and land. Physical mapping of the body through the oral act of naming then binds orality with Cree and Métis histories, and the equation of oral sex with the healing properties of traditional ceremonial practices solidifies the bond between sex and history. Song becomes a metaphor for both oral history and oral sex, without compromising the distinction between the two activities. Oral history and oral sex do not collapse into a single venture; rather, their similarities are emphasized in order to present the two actions as parallel — Scofield is able to discuss simultaneously oral sex and oral history largely because of Cree and Métis ideas about a text's ability to have multiple meanings. Scofield positions orality as a means of incorporating Cree and Métis histories into erotic moments and, in doing so, ultimately positions oral sex as a speech act.[2]

Orality plays such a pivotal role in Scofield's poetry because it is integral to storytelling in both Cree and Métis cultures. Oral histories and narratives have an experiential aspect that many written histories do not, privileging the process of sharing over the content shared and foregrounding the relationships between listener and teller (McLeod, *Cree Narrative* 71; Srigley and Sutherland 13; Van Essen 47; Wheeler, "Cree Intellectual" 51; Wheeler; "Reflections" 191, 196) — or, in the case of Scofield's poetry, between giver and receiver of oral sex. As Winona Wheeler emphasizes, oral histories are something that you "do" within their specific contexts, not just something that any academic or hobby historian can take on and fully grasp ("Reflections" 194). Oral histories are often intrinsically linked to tribally specific songs, dances, ceremonies, and rituals (Newhouse 50), enabling these histories to "act as the vehicles of cultural transmission by linking one generation to the next" (McLeod, "Coming Home" 31). Of course, oral histories are not limited to intergenerational sharing. Maria Campbell tells Jennifer David in an interview that much of her childhood education was story based, in large part because "Métis people are storytellers," and Campbell grew up surrounded by Métis family members (92). Wheeler explains that "Nêhiyawîhckikêwin, *the Cree way/culture*, is an oral culture, a listening culture" ("Reflections" 190), and that memory and oral history often evoke strong resonant sensory associations (191), once again reiterating the inherently experiential nature of orality.

Orality in Scofield's Poetry

The first four couplets of "He Is" in *Love Medicine and One Song* reference different aspects of the mouth, ranging from interactions with "my lips" and "my teeth" to the mouth actually acting by "kissing dew" (8). The poem ends in the same fashion but shifts in the opposite direction, from oral actions such as "nipping," "chewing," and "tasting" to naming explicitly the "berry tongue" (9). By repeatedly referencing the mouth, the speaker emphasizes its poetic presence, but it is not until the mouth acts as a framing device for the poem as a whole that the speaker establishes its overall importance. In beginning with the mouth, the speaker asks the reader to recall instances of orality from the opening of the collection, such as the lover in "Earth and Textures" "softly calling" (7), while the ending similarly primes the reader to see moments of orality in the following sections, such as "your precious mouth / where

I'd come to plant / my most sacred seed" (52) in "Wâstêpakâwi-pîsim (September the Autumn Moon)" from "Twelve Moons and the Dream," the third section of *Love Medicine*. "More Rainberries" singles out the mouth by hyperbolically describing its abilities in a three-line stanza, about half the length of all previous stanzas. The compactness of the stanza stands in stark contrast to its content: "scented rainberries / fat as frogs / explode in my mouth" (21). Here the mouth contains multiple explosions, speaking to both its literal and its figurative strength. The mouth is literally strong in its ability to house sizable explosions, for the rainberries (plural) are the size of frogs; it is also figuratively strong as a synecdoche for the speaker as recipient of the lover's affections, represented physically in the rainberries, a metaphor for semen that erupts from the ejaculating penis as a result of receiving oral sex from the speaker.

Stanza length in "Offerings" similarly establishes orality as a prominent theme. The first and second stanzas deal with scent and touch, respectively, but the longer third and fourth stanzas are dedicated to the mouth, emphasizing orality through the number of lines dedicated to each sensory experience (almost as though the poem itself is building toward climax). Each stanza begins with a parallel line, but the final stanza shifts away from this pattern. Where the speaker begins by claiming "I lie over him," with "lie" becoming "move" and "glide" in later stanzas, he "drinks from," not drinks over, in the final stanza (23). This shift to oral interaction with the subject, instead of mere physical placement in relation to the subject, privileges the mouth and its actions over other parts of the body.

Although orality plays myriad roles in *Love Medicine*, many of which are explicit in the poetry, I read oral sex specifically as the subject of Scofield's poems that focus on the mouth and orality more broadly. "Offerings" suggests oral sex in the logistics of the speaker's movements. The speaker begins by lying over the lover, then "move[s] over him," and finally "drink[s] from [the lover's] moonlit pools," which causes "sweet water" to run out of the speaker's mouth (23). I read the "sweet water" here as semen, overflowing from the speaker's mouth upon the lover's ejaculation. By positioning himself *over* the lover instead of *on* the lover, which initially suggests a lack of physical intimacy, the speaker actually signals his mobility as a means of providing pleasure to his lover through oral sex, which, when penetrative, is a remarkably intimate act. And, though sex between men is sometimes associated with anonymity

(an association that we see exemplified, for instance, in the practice of cruising — walking or driving around a public area in search of a sexual partner, most often associated with men seeking male partners — such as when Belcourt's speaker announces, "Find me cruising in the back alleys of Google Earth" [74]), the sex in *Love Medicine* is not. First, the poems deal primarily with oral sex, not anal sex, intimately personal in its often front-to-front positioning and in the intense vulnerability associated with silencing oneself with a lover's penis, thus preventing coherent speech. Second, *Love Medicine* is about Scofield's past partner Dean, so the collection as a whole portrays an intimate relationship. The lover in "He Is" spends his time "chewing bones, tasting marrow" (9), where "bone" should be read as a metaphor for penis and "marrow," in continuing the metaphor, as semen. The downward movement in the poem charts the speaker's lips, his neck, his nipples, and his belly (8) and ends with the lover between the speaker's legs (9). In "More Rainberries," the metaphor for semen is berries instead of marrow, but a similar downward movement carries the same implication of performing oral sex. The speaker's lips take "momentary rest" between the lover's shoulders, suggesting that the mouth will soon move elsewhere on the body. Twenty lines later, the speaker moves "down, down / to the muskeg" (20). By repeating "down," the speaker signals that he is bypassing the body markers mentioned in "Offerings" and, instead, heading right to "the muskeg." In keeping with Scofield's metaphorical style, the muskeg stands in for the penis, with the implication that once there the speaker will encounter moisture and fertility in the form of semen — wetlands, after all, are fertile areas.

Extending Orality beyond the Mouth

Neal McLeod emphasizes the "constant play among different layers of understanding" in oral traditions and cultures (*Cree Narrative* 72), noting elsewhere that "Cree poetic consciousness rests on the notion that a narrative can never exhaust its possibilities" ("Cree Poetic" 115). In *Love Medicine and One Song*, we see the multitudes that one narrative can contain through the constant interplay of myriad iterations of orality — the mouth, for instance, taking on senses beyond taste and orality encompassing both history and sex. In "He Is" and "Offerings," this potential for multiplicity becomes apparent in the blurring of distinctions between speaker and lover and between sensation and perception.

The fourth stanza of "He Is" reads "he is snail kissing dew / from the shell of my ears" (8); here the lover is likened to a "snail," while part of the speaker makes up its "shell." By separating the snail from its shell in order to split the metaphor between the speaker and the lover, Scofield suggests that the two men, as entities, are discrete. A snail's shell is an integral part of its physical being, so the equation of each man with only a portion of the snail implies that the speaker and the lover are actually one, at least metaphorically. As Warren Cariou argues, the "idea of boundary-crossing and reinvention is something that Gregory Scofield has been committed to throughout his entire career" (vii). Whereas the snail metaphor in "He Is" exemplifies the reinvention of two men as one vulnerable and erotic (and molluskan) unit, "Offerings" falls more into the realm of boundary crossing. The speaker in "Offerings" jumps between senses with little regard for the biological limit of each sensory organ. In describing a black bear that "sniffs / for songs" (23), the speaker ties scent and the nose to music, regularly linked with the ears for listening. Although the songs are metaphorical on one level, the alliteration of the lines lends a musical quality to the phrase that reinforces a literal interpretation of the songs as well. The speaker's complete acceptance of the implausible phenomenon of smelling songs creates opportunities for other unlikely pairings to emerge throughout the collection.

"More Rainberries" presents multiplicity with the same theme of sensation and perception, but mostly limited to the mouth and its various uses. In the poem, senses are mixed in much the same way that they are in "Offerings" in that the speaker describes "my hands, delirious with song" (20), once again equating music with non-musical senses. Hands sometimes produce music and thus can be associated with songs. In this case, though, the speaker's hands "sway to [the lover's] drumming" in the following line, establishing that the speaker's hands are not responsible for creating this music but, as such, are capable of filling dual roles. By extension, the mouth can also play overlapping roles. Grammatically both a subject — "my lips / take momentary rest, where / breathing becomes ritual" — and an object — "rainberries form and glisten, / finding my tongue" — the speaker establishes the mouth's propensity for multiplicity. The mouth also shares some of its qualities with other body parts as the speaker describes "each mole, every fine hair / speaking the soul's language" (20). Speaking is generally attributed to the mouth and occasionally to the hands or eyes but rarely, if ever, to moles.

Given that this vehicle for speech is somewhat unconventional, it follows that the mouth can similarly perform some unconventional tasks. Breathing, for instance, "becomes ritual / transcends into ceremony" (20). As a function of the mouth (or nose), the act of breathing does not merely shift to another organ but becomes an act in which tradition is implicit, an act necessary for spiritual health, instead of just physical survival.

In Scofield's poetry, the body and the land (another multiplicity) are often linked by naming parts of the body as if naming things on a map. Scudeler suggests that in "Offerings" Scofield "brings together the land and the body in an intoxicating weaving of gay Native erotica" ("The Song" 138), but I posit that his poetry goes beyond that. He does not bring body and land together solely for erotic purposes. Rather, he allows the concept of the body to blend with aspects of landscape, drawing on connections between the body and the cultural history of a physical place. The speaker in "Offerings" narrates,

> I glide over hills
> float through valleys,
> my tongue
> kissed by moon (23)

His conflation of land and body is more than merely a metaphor for erotic physicality. By imagining the lover's body as a landscape rich in hills and valleys, the speaker simultaneously expresses an intimate knowledge of the shape of the lover's physical body and a thorough understanding of the ups and downs of the lover's emotional body. Elsewhere, Scudeler explains that storytelling "is *maskihkîy*, medicine that is rooted in [Scofield's] lived experiences of Cree Métis stories, both new and old, on the land and in the city" ("Gifts" 196). By actively naming parts of the lover's body, the speaker orally validates his own experiences with the lover; in this context, the speaker's experience would not be possible to articulate *without* interpreting and speaking the body as landscape because, as Étienne Rivard points out, place "names were also textual expressions of Métis experiences" (158). Additionally, the blurring of the boundary between land and body, coupled with the body's firm association with the physical landscape, emphasizes for the reader the sheer enormity of being "kissed by moon." Even if the moon serves merely as a metonym for moonlight, that experience has significantly more weight from a purely practical stance: the moon is far away

from the Earth, and the distance that the moon has to travel to kiss the speaker's tongue is remarkable. I suggest that the moon represents a presence overseeing, and thus validating with its kiss, the equation of land and body.

Furthermore, the act of naming the body as one names places on a map contributes to the historical side of orality. In discussing Cree performance culture, Geraldine Manossa explains that storytelling "is about sharing the history and knowledge of the land, by recounting how beings since the beginning of time have interacted with it" (178). Her claim also offers an emphasis on ongoing and historical relationships between a land and its inhabitants that serves to complement the sexuality of Scofield's poetry. The term "oral geography" is helpful here, which Rivard defines as twofold: "First, it can be defined as oral history — the historical and critical analysis of oral material — mediated through space or, more specifically, territory or landscape. Second, it represents the connection between spatial structures . . . and social structures (e.g., cultural practices, norms, or institutions) inherent to oral cultures" (156). Oral geography thus works from the same premise of an inherent relationship between land and the beings that engage with it. When placed in the context that I have established for the relationship between land and body, oral geography speaks to the ability of orality to establish connections between spatial (bodily) structures and, in the process, to address a culture's oral histories. The speaker's lips in "More Rainberries" in *Love Medicine and One Song* rest "between [the lover's] shoulders" (20), echoing the implications of the hills and valleys of the lover's body in "Offerings." By referring to the lover's genitals as "the muskeg" in "More Rainberries" (20), the speaker explicitly names regions of the body as if they were regions on a map, invoking the history inherent in oral geography and tying that history to sexual encounters by choosing to name the lover's sex organs. The speaker maps himself in "He Is" when he refers to the lover as "weasel digging eggs / between my legs" (8). The phrase "between my legs" shifts from common relational descriptor to a marker of geographical place when we read the space between the speaker's legs in the context of the "weasel." In order for the weasel to dig eggs, it needs some sort of dirt, and since the weasel digs for eggs between the speaker's legs it follows that the area between the speaker's legs is earth. Thus, the speaker's genitals, like the lover's genitals in "More Rainberries," are mapped onto a geographic

plane in order to place the act of oral sex in line with the oral history inherent in oral geography.

Oral Sex as Oral History

Scofield's poetry often presents oral sex as an interaction similar to a ceremony, effectively placing sex alongside other cultural forms of orality, and we see this link between sex and ceremony well documented in criticism. Chantal Fiola's work positions "Indigenous conceptions of gender and sexuality as inextricable from spirituality" (137) and offers excerpts from an interview with Alex Wilson, who, as a queer Cree person, notes that there was "room for me to be grounded in the ceremonial life. . . . Body sovereignty and the ethic of non-interference is a really central principle in Cree daily life [and] led me to being confident in knowing that I'm okay [with] who I am in sexuality" (143). Richard Van Camp says that, when "you read Gregory Scofield, you've entered into ceremony" (*Singing Home*). I would specify for *Love Medicine* that, when you read Gregory Scofield, you experience sexuality as ceremony. Scudeler is more precise than Van Camp in her claim that "Scofield posits the body, especially the male body, as a sacred space" ("The Song" 139). This sacredness appears in "More Rainberries" when the speaker says that his breathing, representing the mouth and orality, "transcends into ceremony" (8). Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm also recognizes this link between sexuality and the often sacred nature of ceremony, noting that "in a broad sense Indigenous erotica speaks about the healing nature of love, about love that celebrates us as whole people, about love that is openly sexual, sensual, emotional, and spiritual" ("Erotica" 149). Love is both "sexual" and "spiritual."

The fact that oral sex and oral history are carried out simultaneously, then, is not merely an unexplored aspect of Scofield's poetry but also a positive reading of his collection. Similar to Fiola's emphasis on the interconnectedness of Indigenous sexualities and spiritualities, Qwo-Li Driskill argues that "Scofield's erotic imagery in these lyric poems often draws upon Native spirituality and traditions. 'My Drum, His Hands' [another poem in *Love Medicine*] links the erotic with Native song, dance, and spirituality. . . . The erotic becomes ceremony, prayer, and celebration" (229). Beyond even the poems discussed in this essay, the sentiment still applies — oral sex becomes a sort of ceremony. The final couplet of "He Is," "his berry tongue quick, / sweet from the feasting"

(9), marks, with implied ejaculation, the completion of a ceremonious act of oral sex. The feast as a marker of ceremony fittingly implies a parallel between the use of the mouth for consumption of food and the use of the mouth for oral sex. In "More Rainberries," berries are a metaphor for semen, and parts of that metaphor extend to "He Is." The sweetness on the lover's tongue results from feasting; since feasting stands in for the ceremony of oral sex, the sweetness must be semen, or berry juice, especially because the speaker states that the lover has a "berry tongue" (a tongue coated with semen). The ceremony of feasting is completed, as is the poem, upon orgasm.

Song is a recurring metaphor for storytelling as a type of oral history that goes beyond mere ceremony. Manossa, discussing creation stories, says that for "centuries Cree storytellers retained and passed on this knowledge to their community" (176). Although she is not addressing Scofield's poetry, her comment raises two important points: first, that storytelling (and, by extension, poetry and song) has an enduring legacy rooted in Cree history; second, that this storytelling is a type of interpersonal knowledge sharing. "Offerings" in *Love Medicine* marks songs as historical by having black bear sniff for them on "a sacred mountain" (23), with the mountain embodying history in its geological and geographical past and the sacredness suggesting that the mountain's history is culturally specific because understandings of sacredness are not universal. Later the speaker likens his mouth to "the ancient canyon" (23), which serves the same purpose as the mountain, and the speaker reiterates its implied history by describing the canyon as ancient. A similar technique marks the mouth as a historical entity since the mouth gives history to song, solidifying the relationship between the mouth and a song. In "More Rainberries," song is the result of traditional ritual and ceremony:

> breathing becomes ritual
> transcends into ceremony
>
> pushing the song up and out
> of his skin
> so lowly he sings (20)

Literally, the speaker's breathing causes the song (the sound of orgasm) to be released, a song laden with the history of rituals and ceremonies. In "pushing the song up and out," the speaker then prompts the lover

to sing, which plays into the notion that telling oral histories and stories is an interpersonal activity. Scofield's poetry positions history as something that the mouth propagates, if not creates, and emphasizes song as one vehicle through which this history can be shared by directly equating song with history.

In keeping with the theme of multiplicity, song simultaneously serves as a metaphor for ejaculation, effectively connecting history with oral sex. Scudeler writes that Scofield's work "illustrates the importance of situating himself in his spiritual traditions in order to accept both his Cree Métis heritage and his sexuality" ("Gifts" 190), in line with McLeod's argument that stories "are not abstract and cut off from the living world around but rather are completely enmeshed in the concrete world of sensations and physical connections" ("Cree Poetic" 113). Scudeler, like Fiola, directly links tradition to sexuality, reinforced by McLeod's claim that stories, and narratives more broadly, are "enmeshed in the concrete work of sensations and physical connections," such as those associated with oral sex. I have established that songs are metaphors for history, and I argue further that they are metaphors for ejaculation; importantly, these metaphors are not incompatible, a stance supported by the work of Scudeler and McLeod and the multiplicity of meanings that we see throughout *Love Medicine*. I read rainberries as semen, so when the speaker in "More Rainberries" describes the lover's actions — "so lowly he sings / rainberries form and glisten" (20) — he declares rainberries to be the product of singing. Because song is actually the product of singing, it follows that both songs and rainberries refer to semen. The act of singing here should be read to mean any sound resulting from sexual pleasure. This song calls to mind the passage quoted in the previous paragraph, in which breathing pushes a song out of the lover's skin. Breathing is an action of the mouth, as is giving oral sex. This instance of orality causes the song, or semen, to ejaculate from the lover's skin, a synecdoche for his penis. When coupled with the act of singing and the formation of rainberries that find the speaker's mouth, the opening two stanzas of the poem describe the lover's orgasm, or song, as a result of receiving oral sex from the speaker.

It is not merely these dual metaphors that align oral sex with oral history. As Wheeler notes, there "is more to Indigenous oral history than just stories. . . . For example, body language in the telling is vested with meaning that presumes a shared cultural repertoire with the listeners" ("Cree Intellectual" 54). Here the lover plays the role of listener as

he hears the speaker's song; that is, receives the speaker's erotic attentions. Wheeler's emphasis on body language in the dissemination of oral histories speaks to the bodily physicality that comes with sharing narratives, and Scofield's erotics are ripe with body language and language of the body. The speaker communicates, as we have seen, with his mouth, his hands, his tongue, his lips, his ears, his teeth, and his legs. Furthermore, the "sweet water" that becomes "poetry" in the final stanza of "Offerings" (23) takes a bodily product, semen, and gives it form as poetry or recorded narrative ready to be shared. Scofield's language of oral history becomes, figuratively through metaphor, the body language of erotic encounters; simultaneously, the "sweet water" turns into poetry, ending the poem with a formal nod toward the body language that creates narratives, stories, and histories. It is worth noting as well that "Offerings" does not end with any punctuation, leaving the poem grammatically open to further additions, such as a voice to the written word to make it oral or whichever experiences the listener brings to this exchange. Wheeler goes on to explain the "great power" of words "because when words are spoken, they are manitôkiwin — the act of speech is tantamount to doing something in a holy manner, making something sacred, making ceremony" ("Cree Intellectual" 55). These are the types of ritual and ceremony that run throughout *Love Medicine* and feature so prominently in "More Rainberries." In "speaking the soul's language, / tossing up / the body's ancient rhythm" (20), the speaker brings together the ceremony of the poem as a whole with the implied history of "ancient rhythm," the physicality of language, and non-verbal communication through the soul. This act of speech is ceremony in and of itself.

Orality as a Speech Act

A main implication of the connection between oral history and oral sex is that each instance of orality links people together. In line with the nature of Cree oral histories, McLeod comments on the tendency of Cree poetics to "link human beings to the rest of the world through the process of mamâhtâwisiwin, the process of tapping into the Great Mystery, which, in turn, is mediated by historicity and wâhkôhtowin (kinship)" ("Cree Poetic" 109). Whereas McLeod extends the interpersonal bonds fostered by poetry (and orality), Cariou specifically suggests that Scofield's poetry connects individuals because erotics "is

about connections, about what binds people together" (ii), again much like Cree and Métis oral histories. McLeod's attribution of the inherent connectedness of poetry in part to history and Cariou's attribution of the same connectedness to erotica suggest that a single poetic effect could be brought about by historical or erotic elements, or a combination of them, as in *Love Medicine*.

This notion of orality creating stronger interpersonal relations is perhaps most prominent in "He Is," which, though written in the first person, intimately describes the erotic experiences and adventures of the lover. By referring to the lover as a "grouse building his nest" (8), the speaker implies that he has a thorough understanding not just of his lover but also of his lover's motivations and intentions. To gain such an understanding, the speaker must draw on the history of their relationship, often communicated in Scofield's collection via oral sex. As Akiwenzie-Damm says, Scofield's "poems reminded me that although love affairs may begin and thrive in beauty and may, sometimes, end in tumult, to express love opens us in a way that can never be completely closed again" ("Red Hot" 117). The simultaneous expressing of love and opening of self that Akiwenzie-Damm points to in love affairs manifests in Scofield's poetry as orality — the speaker expresses love physically through oral sex and opens up literally, in that his mouth opens to facilitate oral sex, and figuratively through the sharing of histories, stories, and poetics that forms the foundation of many intimate relationships. The image in "Offerings" of "wild horses / gallop[ing] the sky" creates a space, the sky, where there is no limit to movement (23); the speaker invokes the kinship that McLeod mentions by referring to horses in the plural, invoking an image of beings moving and existing together even when the horses' individual movements are as infinite as the sky itself. "More Rainberries" features "hand game bones" and "painted sticks" (20), which invoke the history of the Hand Game, always interpersonal and often played between tribes.[3] Although orality does not always directly cause the various moments and types of kinship in Scofield's poetry, it is always related to that kinship through its associations with telling histories and performing sexual acts.

Oral sex, then, is ultimately a speech act. In the same way that a speech act necessitates an effect, oral sex is both given and received as an act of orality that cannot be separated from the intended (and unintended) effects of sharing oral histories or narratives. McLeod argues that "the way in which we do oral history is more important than what we

find out" (*Cree Narrative* 71). It is the *process* of orality as a means of improving or establishing personal relationships, not the *result*, that is central to Scofield's poetry. Instances of orality in *Love Medicine* draw on aspects of sex and history because the two concepts are so closely intertwined; oral sex necessarily parallels a speech act (as yet another type of orality) since it connotes oral history and the cultural weight that comes with telling oral histories. The final stanza of "Offerings" encompasses my argument:

> so always
> sweet water
> runs from my mouth
> and becomes poetry (23)

Here semen ("sweet water"), the product of oral sex, runs out of the speaker's mouth and becomes poetry, literally entering the realm of oral history. The speaker prefaces this transformation with "always," so the phenomenon of oral sex as a producer of cultural and historical narratives is not an isolated event. This stanza does not end with a period, implying not only that "always" refers to the time up to the present but also that oral sex will continue to serve as a speech act in its inherent ability to create history. In the last line of each poem, oral sex, particularly ejaculation, relates to historical and cultural narratives and practices, through poetry in "Offerings" (23), through painting in "More Rainberries" (21), and through feasting in "He Is" (9). The subject of Scofield's poetry is oral sex, and the poems close with simultaneous references to history and to orgasm, firmly constructing oral sex as a type of speech act able to invoke historical narratives.

Love Medicine and One Song is a collection about romantic love, and two significant aspects of romantic love are history and sex. Scofield addresses both issues simultaneously and can do so because sex and history are so intimately entwined in his particular portrayal of orality. By blurring the boundaries between senses and between body and land, Scofield allows his poetry to blur the lines between oral sex and oral history, especially through the metaphor of song. He ties all of these facets of orality together in an interview with Sam McKegney: "When you think of these sacred ceremonies — of give-aways, naming ceremonies, fasting — sex and sexuality is all a part of that. You name things on someone's body. You fast those things, you hunger them, you crave them, you sing those things, you dance those things, you taste

those things, you feast them" ("Liberation" 220). By linking ceremonies to sex, and then sex to various oral activities, Scofield here supports my reading of "He Is," "Offerings," and "More Rainberries" as poems that link sex to history through shared orality. The richness of his metaphors adds layers of meaning to his poetry that must be unpacked in order to understand the impetus behind his erotica, and his intrinsic linking of queer sexuality with ceremony and oral histories offers an alternative to what Fiola calls "colonial homophobia," which implies "the false belief that only heterosexual people should carry ceremony" (147). Scofield's poetry celebrates sexuality, and queer sexuality, as culturally, historically, and personally necessary. When we consider the poems' queer sexuality in the context of oral histories, oral sex takes on layers of meaning. In *Love Medicine and One Song*, oral sex is a speech act that invites readers to experience sex as culturally and historically meaningful, that foregrounds the experiential and communal nature of oral histories, and that creates a space for history, sexuality, and poetry to come together.

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Notes

[1] Although I use the term "queer" in a narrow sense, I recognize that queerness carries with it a more radical politics of dismantling oppressive hierarchies. My argument uses a queer studies lens in that it explores how a speaker and his lover are queer, rather than a queer theory lens, which would entail examining queerness as a concept (see McCallum and Bradway 4). Of course, one cannot easily separate queer studies from queer theory, for on some level they are inherently linked, but my reading of *Love Medicine* sets out intentionally on a course of primarily queer studies.

[2] A speech act occurs when speech performs an action. One of the most common examples of a speech act is someone who performs a marriage ceremony — upon the verbal declaration of "I now pronounce you married," the act of marriage is performed. For more on speech acts, see Austin; and Searle.

[3] The Hand Game involves two teams that alternate hiding bones and guessing at their arrangements. Teams start with approximately five sticks each, with the guessing team giving up a stick for each wrong guess. The hiding team gives up the bones for correct guesses, and then the game play switches. This pattern continues until one team has all of the sticks.

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