

## *She Walks For Days Inside A Thousand Eyes* Transcript

Welcome to Reading the Rainbow, brought to you by the Dauphin County Library System. For the book curious looking for their next good LGBTQ+ read. Listen in as queer library staff discuss the Own Voice stories they've been reading.



Jamie: Hi, my name is Jamie. My pronouns are she/her.

Emily: My name is Emily. My pronouns are they/them.

Lizzie: My name is Lizzie. My pronouns are she/her.

J: This episode we're discussing *She Walks for Days Inside a Thousand Eyes*, a two-spirit story by Sharron Proulx-Turner, a two-spirit Métis author. Told in poetry, this is a work of historical fiction. Proulx-Turner wrote in response to the erasure of two-spirit history in the wake of colonization. In it, a contemporary two-spirit Métis woman, aided by three animals, undergoes a ceremony where she learns from various two-spirit indigenous women spanning hundreds of years. The novel is told from the point of view of the woman and the three animals. The book opens up with this woman, as she describes it, going through a rainbow. What we later find out is her passing into the spiritual realm for the purposes of going through the ceremony, although she's unaware of it at the time. Did you guys catch on to that right away? It doesn't spell things out for you.

L: Poetry is an interesting genre for me to read because I'm not great at it. I apologize to my college poetry professor, Monica Prince. You're fabulous. I'm not good at reading it. But, I mean, when you say that now, that makes a lot more sense to me to actually think back on it.

E: Yeah. Within the context, I think, of what's to come, it does make a lot more sense if you're thinking about a lot of the things that are described as this journey that's happening in the spirit world, especially because a lot of what happens to the fleshy woman, as she is called, is not physically possible, right? And a lot of it is very... There are a lot of visual metaphors in this, which I think make more sense, again, when you're thinking about it in terms of the spirit world.

L: Mm-hmm. The scope of the book instead of the page.

E: Yeah.

J: Yeah, for me, when I read this, it helped a lot for me to think of it as a book of mythology of two-spirits, even though it did have historical figures rather than just a book that was historical fiction, especially when it describes her going through the ceremony.

E: I think, too, it helps that a lot of the stories are told to the woman in the form of dreams and people appearing to her in dreams so that she is relaying these stories, but they're being told in the first-person by these other people. So it's her experience of learning about these things and acquiring this wisdom through the lives of other people who come to her in a metaphysical way.

J: I did find it really interesting that the Métis coloring for the rainbow, the two-spirits, is so different than rainbows that I've seen or heard described before, where it's just violet, red, yellow, and a two-tone blue. And that's a motif that repeats throughout the book in reference to two-spirits.

E: I really like the cadence of reading that. I found that as I made it through the book, I was like, ah, yes, this is this familiar cadence. And I think, too, this book being told in a poetic form, I appreciated, again, that repeated cadence and that kind of imagery that just keeps coming back.

J: This book is told in four different points of view. Germaine, the fleshly woman, as she's referred to, and the three different animals. And they each have a very distinctive voice.

E: I loved the crow. I loved the crow. I thought it was so funny that you kept saying, hey, it's me, young crow, talking. And I thought that was really funny, just like the kind of juvenile manner in which the young crow spoke, but while also conveying a lot of wisdom at the same time, like the wisdom of children, almost.

L: And talked a lot about facing your fears. I liked crow. I also really liked gopher with one F. They were probably my two favorites.

J: Gopher was so sweet because it missed Germaine so much. And for so long, it really thought that she had passed away because it described her journey as four months that she was gone.

E: Yeah.

J: It was only four days. And so this poor little gopher is thinking that his friend is dead. And then he realizes that, you know, after he gets a message that Germaine is just on a spiritual journey, she's going through a ceremony. The animals in their assistance with Germaine's ceremony really reminded me of the fairy tales where whoever is on the quest assists different animals along the way. Like if a fox gets its foot caught in a snare or something, it sets it free. Those animals later go ahead and pay it back by, like, helping them with their quest.

L: Yeah. I mean, now that you say that, that really makes a lot of sense of, like, the helping animals. Maybe not so much in, like, the animals making Cinderella's dress kind of way, but, like, being lessons along the way almost.

E: Leaving little notes to help aid in the journey. I really like that part of it. Just, like, the crow leaving— And that's very true to how crows are, you know, just in general. I think that there's a lot of interesting things to be said about the intellect of crows and leaving gifts and people that have befriended crows. I really liked the connection that was made here. Personifying the animals as these, like, helpful little critters.

J: Germaine does have these direct connections to these animals. For the crow, she rescued it when it was a little baby. So it was a little chick and it was covered in tree sap. She went ahead and cleaned it off and it was able to go ahead and survive. That we had mentioned before, Gopher with one F. Ended up being a little survivor of a massacre, as she called it, by city boys that Germaine ended up rescuing and taking to her home. And so it ended up being nice and safe. Both of those animals owed their lives to Germaine's actions. And then this small spotted eagle, that's also one of the three helpers in the quest, is closely associated with Two-Spirits. The eagle holds the history of Two-Spirit women.

E: In fact, that connection was the only one where, even as we were just talking about the animals, I was a little unclear on. For me, I just kind of understood the eagle as the spirit guide, facilitator of the ceremony. But that does make sense if the eagle has the history of the Two-Spirit women.

J: And it's interesting because even the way that the animals are distributed, the gopher is part of our physical realm. And the crow, as you find out later, had already passed away. And so he's very much now part of the spirit realm. And then the eagle had always been in the spirit realm. So you have like this little balance of where the different animals are and how they're able to help Germaine.

E: I also kind of saw them as aspects of Germaine, in a way. Because my understanding was that the gopher uncovered this box of things that Germaine had buried from an ex that they were heartbroken over. And the gopher unearthed them to save Germaine some of that heartbreak and also save Mother Earth from the toxicity of Germaine having buried those things. Gopher With 1 F talks very much about how much they love Germaine and how much they care about them. I think having, I don't

know, maybe in part been exposed to this, you know, the depths of Germaine's sadness, like heart-sadness. And then the crow I kind of saw as, I don't know, for some reason, seemed to me very much like an inner monologue of Germaine's a little bit. Partially because of how much it talks about fear. And maybe that's just what I, my interpretation of these, maybe I was just relating, finding ways to relate the animals to Germaine. And then I saw the spotted eagle as, again, more of that like spiritual. So, you know, different aspects of the woman taking physical form in these animals.

J: And I think that's really interesting. The one thing that I kept getting from this is, I'm not really sure how to read this. Because besides being a really interesting format of historical fiction told in poetry form, I'm just kind of cognizant of the fact that this does not really seem to be written for a white audience. She's very much writing to Two-Spirit, Indigenous, North American women. And so I'm not sure how much I'm really going to be able to fully understand the whole story.

L: Yeah, I was trying to be at least very cognizant of that while I was reading that like this isn't for me. And I needed to get comfortable with being uncomfortable with it. A whole culture that I'm just unfamiliar with. To go back to what you both were saying, I try not to read the description of a book so I can just like go in fresh with it. I'm not having like notions about it. So I didn't like read the description. And so when I went in, I thought that Gopher with 1 F and Young Crow were like the different parts of her gender identity. I was aware of this as it was happening. I think I was relating it to a very like Eurocentric American view of gender because I'm not really that familiar with Two-Spirit. And I'm like, oh, it's like gender fluidity, I guess. Like that's the like easiest equivalent I could make. So I was like, I guess the one side is like her masculine side and the one side is her feminine side. And they're like reconciling with each other. And then the eagle was, this makes more sense now. But again, it's not written for me.

J: The task that all of these animals are helping Germaine on the ceremony to understand the history that's not told very often of Two-Spirit women in indigenous North American tribal communities. What they call Turtle Island, which I had not heard of previously, but it's like what they refer to as all North America. Because if you look at it, it does look like a turtle, like with the tail being like Mexico and Central America.

E: I did not know that. That is really cool. I had no idea that I'm about to look at a map right now.

L: Yeah, I know.

J: Before reading this book, one thing I did not fully appreciate was the colonization impact on Two-Spirits in indigenous North American communities. I hadn't really thought about Judo-Christianity norms as how that would impact. Hearing that from the stories that Proulx-Turner included of how people were persecuted and made to give up their positions of stature, their roles in the community that were very important, that they had held from time immemorial, just because of colonization, it's devastating.

E: The last we see of Crow, or Crow has come to the realization or has been told the information like, oh, you've been dead this whole time, by the way. He says, "am I preaching? Am I? For those of you who don't know, the rainbow colors, violet, red, yellow, two-tone blue represent the pride colors. You know, lesbian and gay folk, transgendered, transsexual, bisexual, the many genders of the olden days on this here Turtle Island. Things have finally started to change since Cartier slipped into the St. Lawrence looking for gold. Heck, in Canada, the Two-Spirits can get married all legal-like. Just a few years back, by law, they were considered bona fidedly crazy. Truth is, those old ones who created us all, they don't make mistakes. It's all about balance, plain and simple." So yeah, people have existed in a queer landscape for a very long time. It's just a matter of retelling those stories, I guess, unearthing those stories. And we see it a lot historically, I think with—

L: Good friends, just gals being gals.

E: Just kind of this idea of the umbrella of queerness from my current Americanized understanding of gender and the gender spectrum. And seeing these representations of people born as women who are living their lives as men. And in telling the stories, they're referred to as men until the last story that we're told where the secret sex is revealed. And the wording specifically is like the well-kept secret of her sex and the woman telling the story who was a wife. This tall woman living as a man. "This mysterious woman whose need to be a man far outweighs my understanding." My understanding of gender as a spectrum and vocabulary in particular and the way we refer to people, I think, is a very big topic of conversation right now in the queer world. And so I found pause with the way that some of these people are described who I would read their stories and say like, oh, that's a trans man, right? As opposed to that's a two-spirit woman. But again, that speaks very much to this is not written with a white audience in mind. And vocabulary is different across cultures. I think it's important that we read as many stories as possible to get as much of an understanding of, especially the queer experience, as possible because it is so different across experience and particularly cultural experience. That was something that I struggled with in reading this was what two-spirit is really, right? And like it seems to be a very broad term, at least from my interpretation of this text.

J: And two-spirit is a fairly new term. It was just in 1990 at a national conference. I think you're right. I mean, a lot of it has to do with intersectionality, whereas just they identify as LGBTQ or maybe not even, but like as having both male and female spirit. But then also they have their culture, too. And then all the cultures are going to see identities and gender a little bit differently.

E: See, it is important for us to acknowledge that we don't understand this text entirely. And there are going to be parts of this that don't relate to us. And there are parts of this that we had to research. There are things that we probably got wrong, right? In our interpretation of this text, too.

L: I mean, you know, the fact that we had to do any research at all when normally, you know, we can just pick up books because they're written for us and for our audience and for our culture. We can just pick it up and understand it. And then just. But like this, we had to work at.

E: In an interview in 2011 with Black Coffee Poet dot com, Sharon says, "My fourth book, *She Walks For days Inside A Thousand Eyes*, a two-spirit story, though called poetry, is a story, as the title indicates. It's a historical fiction written in an unconventional way. And often the line is used as the breath rather than as punctuation." All of it told in a very epic story kind of format. So I really love the way this was written in that regard, because you get these chunks of narration from the different perspectives of the different characters in the story. And then you also get these brief moments that really make you consider what you're reading because of the halted nature of the way that they're written, the spacing. It's beautiful. Hard to read. It's hard to read.

L: Yeah, it makes me think of the oral tradition of language and how quite a few indigenous languages exist or existed only in the oral tradition. I was listening to a podcast the other day called Wild, Wild West and it was talking about Sacagawea. And we actually don't know how to pronounce Sacagawea's name because that language was oral only and it was not written down. And so the American men that were writing her name down just like wrote it phonetically as best as they could. But we actually don't know how to pronounce Sacagawea's name correctly. And that's what made it made me think of and going through because it says gopher with one F, but F is spelled E-F-F. And at some point it said lesbian with a capital L, but it was spelled E-L-L and not like the letter L. And I thought that was very interesting because that's how you say it. And if you don't like a written language, you're not going to have the letters for it. And so when you're reading it, like you said, Emily, in her interview, there's not a lot of punctuation. And the lines are breaths that like makes a lot of sense. And maybe I'm like reading into it too much, but that's like what it made me think of is— And then sometimes it's not because sometimes I think the spacing of the words on the page means something. Like there's one a few pages in that looks like a rib cage in the way that the words are oriented, but in a lot of it, it's not. And so— the poem that we're talking about, too, talks about everything is dying, everything's dying and crying. Because it's I mean, shaped like, you know, lungs,

rib cage, you know, where we hold our heart and our breath and our lungs in. And then it's talking about life and bringing life and that kind of circle. And I think that that is probably very intentional.

E: So the poem being this on the one side talking about the death of the earth, I think in part as a result of human involvement. Maybe not, but I think within the context of our conversation of colonization being really to the earth and to the indigenous people. And then the crow on the other side being this writer, poet, dancer, singer, relating Mother Crow's words. It's kind of this idea of in the middle of the poem, you have the caw, caw, caw, making a sort of the spinal column. You know, the caw, caw, caw being the words that join together the maybe the spiritual understanding of the crow and the physical pain of the earth.

J: I think that's a great connection. Good job, Emily.

E: Thanks, guys. I think I may have over interpreted that, but that's OK. That wraps up our discussion on *She Walks for Days Inside a Thousand Eyes* by Sharon Proulx-Turner. Join us next time for a discussion of *Nature Poem* by Tommy Pico.



This has been Reading the Rainbow, a Dauphin County Library System podcast for books by and about the LGBTQ+ community. If you enjoyed this podcast, please follow us for new book discussions. And if you're interested in this episode's selection, consider borrowing from your local library. Thanks for listening!