Questions like, "Do I feel at times helpless?" (149) may be a source of encouragement for researchers to continue through feelings of helplessness or confusion, rather than abandoning a project as too difficult—or even "unacademic."

Restaino boldly puts her blood on the page in *Surrender* and leaves the reader thinking about the expanded possibilities for academic work and research methodology. By tackling difficult subjects with such care and humanity, Restaino shows us the value in pursuing the personal—of love itself—as a methodology. Thus, Restaino's work is taboo not (or not only) for openly discussing the bodily realities of terminal illness, but for her advocacy of love, loss, and friendship as topics deserving of serious scholarly attention.

+

Mailhot, Terese Marie. *Heart Berries: A Memoir.* **Counterpoint, 2018.**

Tracy Lassiter
University of New Mexico

This was a difficult book to read.

It's not because the book is too long; it's a slender book of only 141 pages, including the transcript of an interview at the end. And it's certainly not because Terese Marie Mailhot's prose style is inaccessible—quite the contrary. With her writing, Mailhot easily draws you in and makes you feel every nuance of emotion she's expressing. What makes this book challenging is the impulse—the need—to stop constantly to make note of lines that hit like a boxer with a one-two punch. Consider these: "I punctured a friend's chest with a fork. He heard me when I said no" (104). "I wanted to know what I looked like to you. A sin committed and a prayer answered, you said" (10). "You were different from the men who made a challenge out of hurting me" (56). "I was the third generation of things we didn't talk about" (110). Even if I hadn't been making notes for this review, I would have been making note of these lines for their sheer intensity and lyricism.

In *Heart Berries*, Mailhot has created a memoir that's part journal, part postmodern expression. It sometimes reads like it's dispelling proverbs ("If transgressions were all bad, people wouldn't do them" [17]), sometimes like stream-of-consciousness, but these impressions are crafted. Her talent was polished by creative writing classes at New Mexico State University and an MFA writing program at the Institute of American Indian Arts. At one point, she signals this intentional crafting to her readers, stating, "I don't like neat narratives or formulas" (22). Hence, the book unfolds loosely in chronological order, interspersed with memories or flashbacks. But more than writing classes, perhaps what shaped Mailhot most was her difficult childhood, one of abusive parents, neglect, and hunger. She indicates this to her readers in the first chapter of the book, saying, "I'm a river widened by misery, and the potency of my language is more than human" (7).

Mailhot grew up in British Columbia on the Seabird Island Indian Reservation. Her father, artist Ken Mailhot, was an abusive alcoholic who was often absent from the home. Her mother, Karen Joyce Bobb, met Mailhot while he was in prison for abducting a young girl. Her mother also was an alcoholic who frequently was absent from the

home, leaving Terese and her brothers to fend for themselves. Eventually during her teens, Mailhot was in and out of foster care (Lederman). She escaped her home environment to live with a man she married in her late teens; later, he would win custody of their first son while leaving her to raise their second son alone.

Heart Berries details these experiences and her on-again, off-again intense relationship with writer Casey Gray. It was after one of her breakups with Gray that Mailhot checked herself into a mental institution where she was later diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, an eating disorder, and bipolar II disorder. At the facility, someone gave her a notebook, and the writing she began there eventually became *Heart Berries*, a New York *Times* bestselling book. It's true that Mailhot is unafraid to depict the difficult events that happened to her, but she also is unabashed about sharing her own behavior during the course of her life. She doesn't shirk, for example, from telling us "I remembered I hit myself until there were bruises on both sides of my head...Those nights, I wasn't convinced I was crazy" (61). Through her story, Mailhot asserts that the raw and the dark stories are no less worthy of being heard in the world than any other, particularly because they reveal the lived experiences of those who endured traumatic experiences.

Scholars of various disciplines—including the humanities—are paying attention to trauma lately as the number of child and adult learners experiencing one or more form of traumatic experience enter our classrooms and workplaces. Trauma often is a factor in poor educational outcomes, work and classroom absenteeism, and the connection to other risky behaviors like drug use. The extreme end of untreated traumas is suicide, and the CDC reports that American Indian/Alaskan Natives (AIAN) are the highest population at risk of suicide in the country. Indeed, statistics from a recent CDC study indicate that, since World War II, AIAN men are 71% more at risk of suicide than any other population. For AIAN women, that increased rate is 139% (Bunker). Mailhot's story, then, becomes one of urgency, something she indicates when she says "Crafting truth to be bare as it feels was important" in an effort for her to feel "redeemed" and proclaim her survival (128, 127). In the interview that follows the memoir, Mailhot explains that one of her impetuses in writing her book was to refute the criticism about the "sentimentality" of trauma writing. Mailhot dives into writing about trauma head-on, saying "I took the voice out of my head that said writing about abuse is too much... by resisting the pushback, I was able to write more fully, and, at times, less artfully about what happened" (131). I was reminded here of the work of Melissa Febos, who also shares her story in gritty realism. Like Mailhot, Febos feels that despite the similarity in stories of abuse and trauma, every survivor's story is different. As Febos explains, "We are telling the stories that no one else can tell, and we are giving this proof of our survival to one another" (Febos 51). But don't call Mailhot's story one of "resilience." "It's an Indian condition to be proud of survival, but reluctant to call it resilience," she states. "Resilience seems ascribed to a human conditioning in white people" (7). Whatever she chooses to call it, *Heart Berries* becomes a powerful declaration: "Words I never knew to be—I am," Mailhot tells us. This sentiment makes me want to run to a dictionary, to discover new words I, too, can aspire to be.

Beyond serving as testimony to her survival, it appears Mailhot has another purpose. She relates the gritty details of her relationships because she feels her story, which

is similar to so many other Indigenous women's stories, needs to be told. She feels her work is an effort against the "continuum of erasure" that tries to silence their voices (111). She makes a similar claim in the opening of the book when she states, "The thing about women from the river is that our currents are endless," and the stories emerging from those currents are a form of women's empowerment. Mailhot additionally remarks, "When I gained the faculty to speak my story, I realized I had given men too much…I stopped answering men's questions or their calls" (3). The theme of empowerment echoes in other comments Mailhot makes that are unapologetic about herself, such as when she says, "I wanted as much of the world as I could take, and I didn't have the conscience to be ashamed" (10). She eventually comes to grips with her past, her parents' treatment, her relationship with Gray, and her relationship with her sons. She currently teaches creative writing at Purdue University where she likely dispenses hard-earned bits of writerly wisdom, like this one: "Nothing is too ugly for this world" (22). Let us commence, then, in being brave, in telling our own tales, sullied and sordid though they may be.

Works Cited

Bunker, Theodore. "CDC: US Suicide Rates Highest Since WWII." *Newsmax*. 30 June 2019. https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/suicide-rates-cdc-report/ 2019/06/20/ id/921269/.

Febos, Melissa. "The Heart-Work: Writing About Trauma as a Subversive Act." *Poets & Writers*, Jan.-Feb 2017, pp. 48-51.

Lederman, Marsha. "Writer Terese Marie Mailhot's Journey from Devastation to Voice of a Generation." *Globe and Mail*, 5 May 2018. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/ books/article-writer-terese-marie-mailhots-journey-from-devastation-to-voice-of-a/