

I'm Erin Valentino. I'm the Associate Librarian at the Bowdoin College Library.

Today, I'm going to be reading from a book called "Feed" by Tommy Pico. Tommy Pico is a queer indigenous poet, podcaster, and TV writer. He's originally from the Viejas Reservation of the Kumeyaay Nation, which is outside of San Diego, California. "Feed" is the fourth of a series of four books by Pico. The series also includes "IRL", "Nature Poem," and "Junk." I chose this book because of all of the things that the word 'feed' means. This book, it's a book which we think of in the context of libraries maybe as a kind of polite format. And, nominally, this book contains a poem, but this poem feels like so much more to me. All of the things that feeds can be. All of the feeds that come into our lives every day, across multiple devices, with information ranging from the trivial, like how many steps you took, what the weather is, celebrity plastic surgery, to things that are profound and moving like global economic disaster, genocide, and colonialism. "Feed" encompasses all of this.

I'm in my kitchen, which relates to, obviously, another meaning of the word 'feed.' What you can do with actual sustenance in supporting your physical body or someone else's. Cooking, food, materiality, having a frail human body and negotiating all of these feeds. So, I'm going to start. I'm going to be giving you a tasting menu of this poem, which is a book-length poem that feels like a feed. You could start anywhere, stop anywhere. It does feel like entering mid-stream, as it were, into a conversation. With that, I will start. Okay.

Me and Leo yakkity yak yak'd about writer's block and the starchy long stroke of "God" on the Meadow Walk, and he didn't know I was fully head over banana peels. I mean in Kiehl's, I mean in straight up crappy love with him yet and maybe I didn't either. Sand crabs poking their bodies and legs post wave hindsight is good and plenty. I mean, 20/20 clearly the worst American candy. And what is candy, but a crush? Leo said it's tangled up in waves and dreams in therapy. That writer's block (or is it God), comes from being blocked up in other parts of the days of our lives, of our lives of our lives. This is a polysaccharide effective deflection, rejection heavy, that he'd forgotten what the feeling of a good idea is, but I'm standing right in front of you. I thought bubbled, but never troubled the air with my utterance.

Instead, I said, "this is the part where you ask me for my number", because I was committed to being my own damn romantic comedy that year. Our sublime times, the Don Julio margarita mix of our situationship. These are the Doppler blips that ripple resurface. When Leo surfaces among the Chelsea Thicket. Optimal frustration from the Odysseus years, golden Fleece of intimacy for the first time in like what, six months? A year? Two years? Seven years? Has it been seven years? 1492? It was literally 69 billion years BC. Dear reader, white as a bell you whisk me to a fever like the ruby cinnamon.

Hey, let's make a vinegairette. Did you know molasses emulsifies the olive oil and keeps the little fat molecules from stumbling into each other. Thus allowing the oil and vinegar to mix. A sauce is broken when the oil separates like a heart. Sometimes this is inevitable, no matter how hard you shake the mason jar.

SAVE OUR COURTS! SIGN THIS PETITION! Dear reader, a roux I've learned in this mid city dinner party apartment tucked somewhat safely away from the asthmatic LA freeways, is the mixture of butter and flour used to swell sauces and soups and Paul's baked sage mac 'n' cheese that I'm whisking alive, like an al dente Evanescence cheese rock bop. Whistle while you whisk away the rage scrunched in your boulders. I says to them at the table, I says, I don't have a food history. If the dishes subjugate an indigenous population, here's an ingredient of the roux, alienate us from our

traditional ways of gathering and cooking food. Kumeyaays moved around what would be called San Diego County with the seasons. The mountains, the valleys, the coast. Not much arable land or big game, so we followed the food, wherever it would go.

Then the missions. Then isolated reservations on stone mountains where not even a goat could live. Then the starvation. Then the food distribution program on Indian reservations. Whatever the military would throw away came canned in the backs of trucks. The commodities, the powdered milk, worms in the oatmeal, corn syrupy canned peaches, food stripped of its nutrients. Then came the sugar blood, the sickness, the glucose meter goes up and up and up. I says to them around the table, I says, I don't have food stories. With you, I say, I'm cooking new ones. Being protective of your recipes is only natural. Things get stolen.

We're listening to this Neil DeGrasse Tyson podcast, where they talk about the God gene, something cellular that makes us look up and beyond and wonder at our creator and Stephen Hawking talks religion and science saying they both articulate the nature of who we are, where we came from and why. And that though science produces more consistent results, people will always choose religion because it makes them feel less alone, a lone. And the debate turns to whether we're alone in the cosmos and by then the edible is hitting like a GIF of Daffy Duck in pj's pounding his butt against a wall. So I'm thinking about the words, 'cosmos' and 'cosmetic' derivative of the Greek ko'smos meaning order, arrangement.

And the guest hopes were alone because if not? If we encounter another alien civilization, they would likely be faaaaaaar more technologically advanced than us. And look, she says "how that worked out for the native Americans." Imagine you are a circuit. Imagine whirring electricity. Imagine being fed and feeding. Imagine getting what you need. Imagine the fire inside you. Imagine heat. I don't have much of anything figured out, but I do know to be indigenous is not to be a miracle of circumstance, but to be the golden light of relentless cunning. All those disgusting people in the MySpace days with profile headline MUSIC IS MY BOYFRIEND. Yes, I'm mewling into the void and yes, I'm completely alone.

Nations are always outlived by their cities and yes, there is utility in this loneliness. This is how I be with You, dear reader, on the other side of my words, on the other side of my worship, on the other side of my shiver winter, hearing my prayer cupped in covers like a pair of hands. A communion wafer in my yellow heart. The father, the son, and the biblical three-way Smith & Wesson math lesson, XO message in a bottle of Wild Turkey, as their eyes were watching Beyoncé.

These were excerpts from "Feed" by Tommy Pico. Please join us for more in our "Read To Me" series.

Thank you.