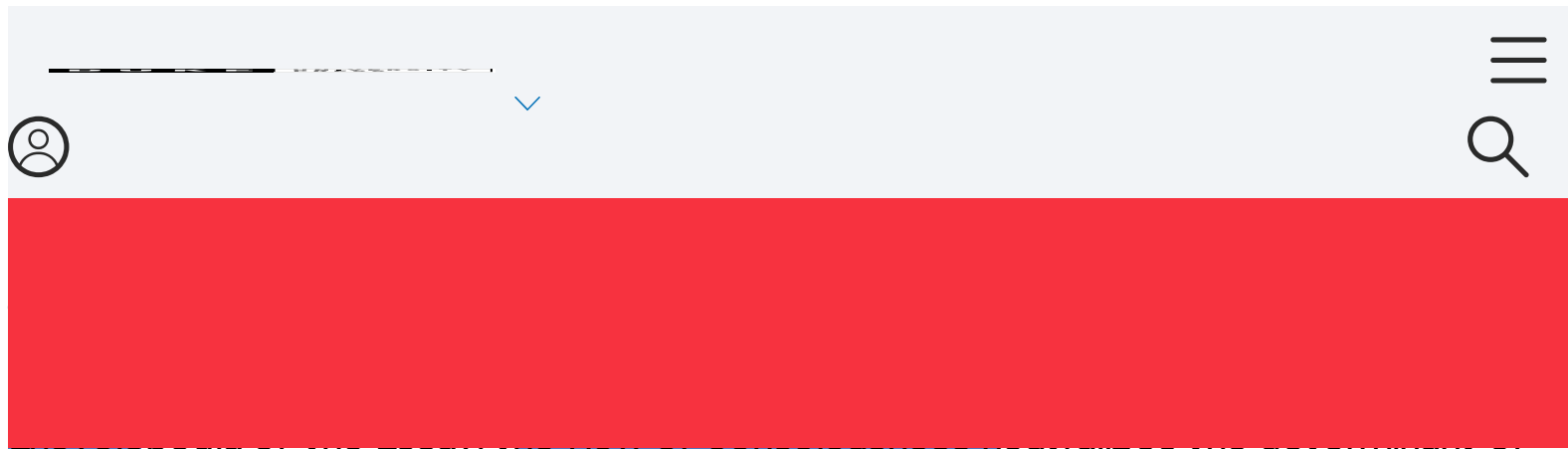


AND THROUGH ITS NAMING BECAME OWNER Translation in James Thomas Stevens's Tokinish.

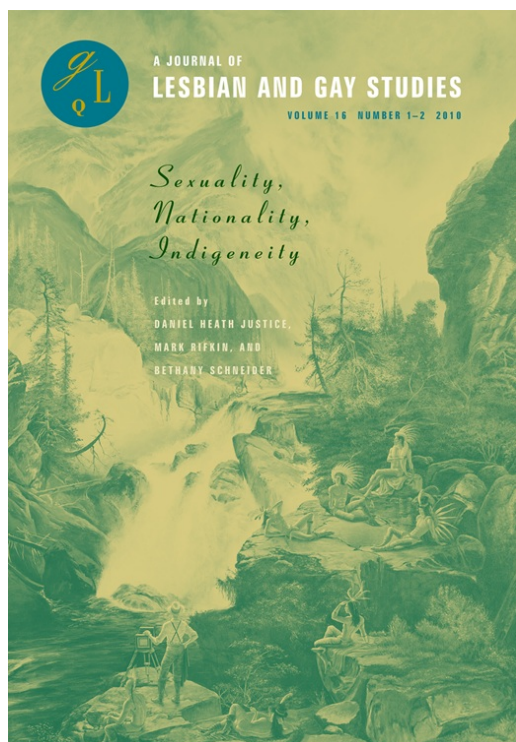


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AND THROUGH ITS NAMING BECAME OWNER": Translation in James Thomas Stevens's *Tokinish*

[Sarah Dowling](#)
GLQ (2010) 16 (1-2): 191-206.



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In this essay I read the long poem *Tokinish* by the Mohawk poet James Thomas Stevens. Stevens borrows passages of prose description from Roger Williams's 1643 Narragansett lexicon, *A Key into the Language of America*, as well as the earlier text's structure of facing columns of English and Narragansett words. Appropriations from Williams's lexicon introduce the figure of translation into the poem and also allow Stevens to create echoes between present and past. The poem concerns two types of contact: contact as historical phenomenon in the Americas and contact as contemporary sexuality. Stevens brings these two types of contact into relationship, so that the speaker's sexual and romantic experiences are echoed in the ethnographic commentary appropriated from Williams's text. I argue that Stevens uses these echoes to describe queer desire in colonial, proprietary terms, but that it is precisely this proprietary feature of desire, being claimed by the lover as "mine," that translates the poem's Native speaker from an unrecognizable status into a fully human subject. I also argue, with Stevens, that the way we unthinkingly speak about our desires using colonial metaphors of contact, conquest, exploration, and possession demonstrates the ongoing impact of the history of colonialism in North America.

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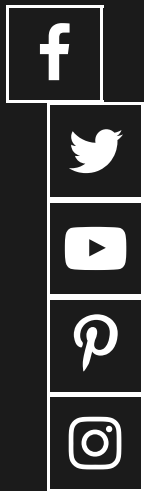
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