
Crossing Over: Inheritance, Mobility, and Western Idealism in *Getting Mother's Body* and *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne*

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Abstract

Getting Mother's Body by Suzan-Lori Parks transforms the traditional adventure quest narrative into a lyrical trek on the open road. Her characters move between Texas and Arizona in an attempt to recover treasure buried with the body of a transgressive black mother. After the mother's death, the western landscape grants her daughter physical freedom and uninhibited desire borne from the ability to roam even within the confines of American racial injustice. While *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne*, set on the western Canadian prairie, also challenges how black "western" identity is defined and redefined through multiple border crossings across U.S. states and the 49th Parallel. Like Parks' novel, Tyne centers on a death, burial, and material inheritance, however the journey involved is psychologically damaging to the primary characters. Overall, I am interested in how the authors engage in competing conversations about western idealism, capitalism, and the relationship between inherited Black wealth and success. Both novels seem to suggest from the outset that the solution to the social and economic problems can be solved once the inheritance is obtained. However, the quest for "gold" is fraught with obstacles that suggest the seekers will not be able to overcome their fractured existence as members of the black Diaspora, no matter the land settled or the price paid.

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