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FROM THE EDITOR

Han mitakuyepi (Greetings, my relatives),

It is an honor for me to guide the publication of *SAIL* as its new editor. Along with new interventions and insights, the articles in this issue represent a stylistic change as we are now asking authors to submit abstracts, keywords, and to follow the *Chicago Manual of Style's* guidelines using endnotes. These changes reflect some of the best practices used by other leading journals that publish work primarily within Native American and Indigenous studies. The addition of abstracts and keywords will also make it easier for other researchers to connect with the work that is being published by *SAIL*.

The articles in this issue represent topics and interdisciplinary methods that scholars of Indigenous literatures, broadly conceived, are using in arguments that engage deeply with Indigenous women's writings, politics, and performance as well as bodies, lands, and topics that have transnational and hemispheric dimensions. From public art, to theater, to place-based storytellers and stories that include Abiyala and Canada as well as Turtle Island, many of the authors featured in this issue are engaging with questions and theories that concern experiences of trauma due to resource extraction, violence against women, and other forms of exploitation and oppression that are linked to ongoing colonial policies and practices. Despite this range and diversity, the arrangement of the articles in this issue aims to showcase powerful moments of intersection where these authors speak to one another, in relation to land and bodies, gender and performance, and also home and sovereignty. This curated constellation of scholarship offers readers an opportunity to appreciate each article on its own while also connecting these contributors to one another in new and impactful ways as they read the issue in its entirety.

The interdisciplinary methods that many of these authors use are worth highlighting as readers are tasked with thinking about literature in relation to art installations, in the case of Isabella Huberman’s “From the Floodland: Stories of Hydro in Eeyou Istchee,” which brings together two stories about water and land. These stories highlight the “hydro-colonial dispossession” that Huberman contends enable us to focus on the ongoing relationships with the dead. Bringing together literature and public art, Huberman’s analysis emphasizes the power of place-based connections to those who have been lost while attending to what these works share in regard to the histories and persistence of colonial resource extraction. Another powerful work that brings together law and drama through interpretations of two plays, by lawyer-dramatist Mary Kathryn Nagle, is Cathy Waegner’s “Performing Justice in Recent Native American Women’s Theater: Mary Kathryn Nagle’s *Sovereignty* and *Manahatta*.” Waegner theorizes performative sovereignty and the power of restorative justice, noting how Nagle’s plays transform received modes of perceiving and staging Native America in the twenty-first century. Focusing on examples of Indigenous women’s theater, Waegner argues that Nagle’s *Sovereignty* and *Manahatta* provide experimental representations of time, focusing on the strength of women and the pain of Western-based hegemonic practices.

Shelli Rottschafer’s analytical framework centers place-based *querencia* as a means to reclaim what was lost due to trauma caused by displacement, in her reading of Kali Fajardo-Anstine’s short stories “Sugar Babies” and “Ghost Sickness.” Reclamations of traditional knowledges are made possible despite experiences of poverty and displacement, and as such, craft new spaces for healing and revitalization. Rottschafer’s work emphasizes the overlaps and productive edges of Indigenous and Chicax community formations and identities with regard to how writers, like Fajardo-Anstine, are able to speak out against prejudice, institutionalized racism, and use their ‘*querencia*’ as a tool for social justice. Ultimately, Rottschafer’s article highlights reconciliation through storytelling and argues that both “Sugar Babies” and “Ghost Sickness” provide readers with traditional ecological knowledge and a more inclusive approach to understanding the past as well as the present of nation building.

Like Rottschafer, Tiffany Miller’s “Decolonial Ch’owen across Abiyala and Turtle Island: Calixta Gabriel Xiquín’s Poetic Invocations of

Kaqchikel Spirituality, the Cardinal Points, and Trans-Indigenous Grandmothers” enables readers to engage with Indigenous knowledges, distinct spaces, and cultures through an examination of Kaqchikel intellectual and ajq’ij (spiritual guide, daykeeper) in Calixta Gabriel Xiquín’s work, in relation to Indigenous activist initiatives. Miller points to the ways that Xiquín’s work is a decolonial project that incorporates Pan-Maya references from the *Popol Wuj* along with female Indigenous spiritual beliefs from other communities, such as the Lakota/Dakota story of White Buffalo Calf Woman. Poetry, spirituality, and activism converge in this article that honors Native voices participating in cross-cultural exchanges across the hemisphere.

Jenny Kerber’s “Lands, Bodies, and the Meaning(s) of Consent in Recent Writing by Indigenous Women” thoughtfully interrogates ‘consent’ based upon both colonial and Indigenous epistemologies, in the context of Canada, to challenge whether or not current practices within settler-colonial society concerning recognition, reconciliation, and acknowledgement can go beyond the discursive formations that are currently circulating in public, academic, and media sites as outward signs of respect, and often without on-the-ground actions to back them up. Put another way, Kerber’s article questions the vocabulary of consent in order to lay bare which Indigenous rights are actually available to be exercised, especially when Indigenous people oppose the development of large-scale industrial projects ranging from oil and gas pipelines to hydroelectric dams and mining operations. The question Kerber asks readers to consider is: will settler-colonial society come to respect Indigenous articulations of ‘No’ and defend the right to express them when it comes to the integrity of earthly bodies?

Michele Lacombe’s “Rogarou Choreographies in Cherie Dimaline’s *Empire of Wild*” uses the Métis werewolf Rogarou as a template for reading Cherie Dimaline’s novel *Empire of Wild* (2019). Lacombe argues that Rogarou stories reflect ontologies, epistemologies, and aesthetics consistent with other beliefs from Indigenous nations that bring together sex and spirit, darkness and light, dreaming with wakefulness, and those enable Rogarou to challenge the binary logic of body-mind dualism as understood within Christian and Cartesian thought and story. Readings of Dimaline’s work enable Lacombe to highlight links between patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, and a coercive state-sanctioned religion that Indigenous peoples have experienced since colonization began.

This article embraces the struggles and insights that come with Métis identity and how Dimaline's poetic narrative bridges the perceived chasm separating fact from fiction.

Thomas Krause reimagines "home" within James Welch's novel *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* (2000) to move the reader away from "where" (and geographies of place) and more towards "who" and "how" by considering the ways Charging Elk builds a sense of home through relationships with others. Bringing together Scott Richard Lyons's notion of the "X-Mark" with Amy Kaplan's "manifest domesticity," Krause's article queries the domestic as a space and process that Charging Elk must manage, while living abroad in France during the assimilation era. US imperialism emerges in this analysis in ways that resonate with claims for sovereignty that are performed in several of the other articles in this issue.

The final article, "Claiming Oral Sovereignty Over Literariness: The Arrowmaker According to N. Scott Momaday," by Kyle Garton-Grundling, proposes to center orality as a tradition of literariness, which not only preceded written literature—as defined through Western frameworks—but because it has remained a consistent presence within Indigenous storytelling as an expression of sovereignty. Engaging with a canonical writer like Momaday enables Garton-Grundling not only to challenge Western views of oral traditions, but also to chronicle the approaches that scholars of Indigenous literary studies have used over the past several decades in ways that acknowledge past practices and reconsider the terms by which literature is defined.

Wophida tanka (many thanks) for reading,

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Land Acknowledgement

Surviving Displacement through Reclamation of Querencia in Kali Fajardo-Anstine's Short Stories "Sugar Babies" and "Ghost Sickness" published in her collection *Sabrina & Corina* (2019)

SHELLI ROTTSCHAFFER

Abstract: Kali Fajardo-Anstine's writing affirms her Land Acknowledgement because she honors her querencia, place of origin, and elders. Her collection of short stories *Sabrina & Corina* (2019) gives voice to Chicana-Amerindian women and girls whose lives are affected by displacement, cyclical poverty, and the challenge to reclaim traditional knowledges. Fajardo-Anstine confronts her people's trauma through writing strong female characters who inspire others and create a path for seven generations to come. Specifically in her inaugural story "Sugar Babies," it is the younger generation who reconnects with their multicultural heritages where their parents' generation suffers the *susto* of displacement. Whereas "Ghost Sickness," the closing story of the collection, addresses the consequences of displacement but chooses to lift up life rather than fall into the abyss caused by multigenerational trauma.

The analysis herein considers place-based querencia as a means to reclaim what was lost due to trauma caused by displacement. I use querencia as defined in the anthology *Querencia: Reflections on the New Mexico Homeland* (2020), as well as Raúl Homero Villa's *Barrio-Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture* on the effects of displacement, and Priscilla Solis Ybarra's *Writing the Good Life: Mexican American Literature and the Environment* (2016), which explains the importance of Chicana-Amerindian writing as a means of emphasizing multicultural heritages and connection to the land. Hence, Fajardo-Anstine's work embodies the intent of stressing Land Acknowledgement as a means to honor traditional teachings, one's elders, and origin.

Keywords: Chicana-Amerindian Writing, Displacement, Multigenerational Trauma, Reclamation, Querencia

WHO IS KALI FAJARDO-ANSTINE?

Kali Fajardo-Anstine gives voice to Chicana–Amerindian protagonists who learn to engage their cultural heritage, embrace a sense of origin, and therefore actualize traditions that had once been abandoned within their modern lives. Similar to her female characters, Fajardo-Anstine identifies as multicultural. In “Keeping the Stories” she explains, “I am a Chicana of Indigenous and mixed ancestry, and the story of who I am is inextricably tied to this country.”¹ Throughout her life she has learned from her ancestors’ storytelling and has come to embrace all the ingredients that make her who she is:

We were American, we were Mexican, we were Filipino and Spanish and Jewish. . . . My Picuris Pueblo ancestors lived [there in New Mexico] since the beginning of time . . . [Yet] I grew up one of seven children in both the suburbs and an older section of Denver called Northside.²

Understanding where her people come from grounds Fajardo-Anstine’s fiction. She details the places of her *querencia*, and she writes her characters within these spaces as well. Because Kali Fajardo-Anstine grew up in metro-Denver, many of the pieces in *Sabrina & Corina* as well as her latest novel, *Woman of Light* (2022), are focused within this perimeter. Yet, her prose is relatable to the larger Chicana–Amerindian diaspora because it reconciles losses felt by displacement, and demonstrates how her characters reconstruct a cultural practice for themselves through traditional ecological knowledges.

Fajardo-Anstine explains that the stories we tell to and about ourselves are key to how we understand and interpret the world. In an interview with the online magazine *Hip Latina* she states, “I was inspired to write fiction that honored my cultural group, making us more visible in the mainstream.” Virginia Isaad, the interviewer, notes that Fajardo-Anstine’s writing is

a thread that connects her to her ancestors, that brings their stories to life on these pages, brimming with magical elements and allusions to nature as an entity itself. The women are portrayed with strength as enduring as the Colorado mountains, their spirits rooted in their [I]ndigenous heritage, their beings blossoming in the deserts of the American West, in this case the northern New

Mexico/ southern Colorado region. These are not just 11 stories of fiction, they are odes to the generations of women that laid the foundation upon which the resilient and *poderosa* Latinx women of today built their lives.³

Kali Fajardo-Anstine's characters walk a tightrope between frontiers, juggling the pieces of their cultural heritage yet learning to hold firmly to all the parts that make them unique. *Sabrina & Corina* adds a new narrative to the American canon which tests the confines of dominant Anglo cultural expressions and demonstrates that all forms of cultural representation matter.

PUTTING QUERENCIA ON THE MAP: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE TERM'S USE IN LITERATURE

Querencia is a concept threaded throughout Fajardo-Anstine's narrative, and although her works have been recently published, this cultural idea connected to nature and place has a long history. In 1992, environmentalist, nature writer, and ecocritic Barry López republished his essay "The Rediscovery of North America" in *Orion Magazine*, which explained his understanding of the term querencia:

In Spanish, *la querencia* refers to a place on the ground where one feels secure, a place from which one's strength of character is drawn. It comes from the verb *querer*, to desire, but this verb also carries the sense of accepting a challenge, as in a game.

In Spain, *querencia* is most often used to describe the spot in a bullring where a wounded bull goes to gather himself, the place he returns to after his painful encounters with the picadors and the banderilleros. It is unfortunate that the word is compromised in this way, for the idea itself is quite beautiful—a place in which we know exactly who we are. The place from which we speak our deepest beliefs. *Querencia* conveys more than "hearth." And it carries this sense of being challenged—in the case of a bullfight, by something lethal, which one may want no part of.

[López takes] this word *querencia* beyond its ordinary meaning and suggests that it applies to our challenge in the modern world, that our search for a *querencia* is both a response to a threat and

a desire to find out who we are. And the discovery of a *querencia*, hinges on the perfection of a sense of place. [López attests that a] sense of place must include, at the very least, knowledge of what is inviolate about the relationship between a people and the place they occupy, and certainly, too, how the destruction of this relationship, or the failure to attend to it, wounds people.⁴

López's interpretation of *querencia* draws upon its connection with a place, a culture, and relationship to community.

Similarly, *nuevomexicano* cultural activist Juan Estevan Arellano in his piece, "La Querencia: La Raza Bioregionalism" (1997) articulates that place-based *querencia* is "a walking diversity of bloods, cultures, and languages."⁵ He explains that, "we [*nuevomexicanos/as*] have now become as natural in this landscape as the piñón tree. [And,] whether it is acknowledged or not, most of 'us' have Native American blood running through our veins . . . [whose] communion with the landscape ties us to the enduring code of *hermandad* just as the poet makes the landscape itself the carrier of memory." Therefore, if we lose our language, . . . if we lose our memory, if we lose our sense of where we come from, we lose our *querencia*. *El que pierde su tierra pierde su memoria* [paraphrasing mine].⁶

DISPLACEMENT AND RETURNING TO A LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Sociocultural loss which is caused by grief is a direct effect of physical displacement. Raúl Homero Villa, in the introduction to *Barrio-Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture* (2000) speaks of "the consequences of geographic displacement [which] loom large in Chicano [as well as Amerindian] historical memory."⁷ These affects are determined by land loss, shifting and porous national borders, coerced and voluntary migrations, and disparate impacts of urban development.⁸ For Chicanx, much of this subordination and prejudice resulted out of the Mexican-American War in 1848. However, for Native Americans, these discriminations began centuries prior upon their first encounters with European explorers in what are now called the Americas.

These encounters led to the complex history that has constructed Chicanx and Amerindian peoples to a racialized second-order citizen-

ship in which their displacement from a perceived homeland within the Aztlán of the American Southwest marks their identity. As such, this “deterritorialization” is an important theme in Chicanx and Native American cultural expressions like using imagery and rhetoric of lost land, displacement, and therefore the need to regain one’s connection and revitalize knowledges tied to the land.

Although Villa’s *Barrio-Logos* focuses on Mexicano neighborhoods in Los Angeles, California, his study is a representative case of historical urban spatial formation for the entire Southwest,⁹ of which Colorado and New Mexico are included, and therefore pertain to Fajardo-Anstine’s place-based fiction, both her collection of stories and her novel. Villa explains that “geography has indeed proven to be destiny for many Chicanos”¹⁰ and Native Americans because the hierarchy of spatial practices put Anglo-Americans in position to benefit from a Capitalist economy. Dominating social processes through land loss, racial conflicts, cultural denigration, economic disenfranchisement, and political disempowerment led to the continued subordination and marginalization of Chicanx and Amerindian peoples.

Consequently a “barrioization” of Brown People occurred wherein Chicanx-Amerindians were relegated to a life of displacement, made to live elsewhere, and thus lost their cultural identity, i.e. *querencia*. This severing transpired threefold. First, the *landscape effect* regards the physical regulation of a space and who has the decision-making powers over its built environment. Second, the *law effect* concerns who has social control of the space such as community authority figures. Lastly, the *media effect* relates to who has ideological control of space through education and informational resources.¹¹ All of these effects are exemplified in Fajardo-Anstine’s fiction.

WRITING AS A METHOD TO COMBAT TRAUMA

Chicana-Amerindian voices in literature like Kali Fajardo-Anstine’s are important because her narrative is sourced from a place of difference which resists dominant white American patriarchal cultural norms. Narrative strategies that demystify relations between minority cultures and dominant cultures are supported by the praxis found in *Writing the Goodlife: Mexican American Literature and the Environment* (2016),

Latinx Environmentalism: Place, Justice, and The Decolonial (2019), as well as *Querencia: Reflections on the New Mexico Homeland* (2020).

In the introduction to *Latinx Environmentalism*, the editors Sarah D. Wald, David J. Vázquez, Priscilla Solis Ybarra, and Sarah Jaquette Ray suggest “good life writing” advocates that racial capital, production of place, expansion of justice, and engagement with alternative kinships are crucial to giving voice to those on the margin.¹² Levi Romero’s introduction “Mi Querencia A Connection between Place and Identity” reiterates this point in question form: “What is the connection between place and identity?. . . [People] have pondered for millennia how these ways of being in the world influence who we are and who we might become. Origin stories the world over feature accounts of where a people came *from* as a way of telling how they came to *be*” (1).¹³

Kali Fajardo-Anstine’s stories are an example of “good life writing” because she seeks to reconcile loss due to multigenerational displacement traumas. Likewise, her characters desire to learn about past traditional knowledges in order to reconstruct lost cultural practices, so that by learning about where they came *from*, they can understand who they are *now*. Fajardo-Anstine speaks to this directly. Even as an adolescent, “she began to crave more from literature; she wanted to see herself and others like her in novels [and short stories. She explains]: I wanted to make sure that someone like me could open a book and see themselves in that space.”¹⁴ Thus Fajardo-Anstine began writing, and her method to storytelling recovers her *querencia* and acknowledges the influence of land upon multicultural identity.

RECONCILING PAST DISPLACEMENTS BY MOVING FORWARD IN A PLACE-BASED QUERENCIA

Kali Fajardo-Anstine’s “Sugar Babies”

Kali Fajardo-Anstine begins her short story “Sugar Babies” with a discovery in Sagarita, Colorado. Sagarita is a small agrarian village that invokes bucolic nostalgia. The fictional town could be modeled after the real life villages of Antonito or San Luis, Colorado, which are in the San Luis Valley. This agrarian mountainous region lies on the border with New Mexico. Centuries ago it was populated by Indigenous peoples as well as Spanish heritage colonialists who established small settlements

under the Spanish Crown. When Spain lost its colony, control was ceded to Mexico and then again in 1848 to the United States. This area has always been influenced multiculturally and continues to be today.

Fajardo-Anstine writes of this region in her short story and in her novel *Woman of Light* (2022) because she wants to preserve “certain knowledge about the people who inhabited this land and who continue to have ties to the land despite dramatic shifts in its demographic[s].”¹⁵ During the Great Depression, economic need forced many in the rural Southwest like southern Colorado and northern New Mexico, to move toward urban spaces such as metro-Denver. This story has an underlying theme of displacement because ancestral Native Americans were eradicated or assimilated, and Chicanx headed toward the call of modern city life.

As the narration begins, a group of middle school-aged kids led by Roberto “Robbie” Martínez, find a Native burial cache on the outskirts of town. Speckled with pottery shards, the Ancient Ones’ ceremonial gravesite grounds the historic origins of Saguarita, demonstrating that the town once was populated by Indigenous people and is now home to a Chicanx community.

Because of this discovery, the story immediately dives in to question the uneasy historical relationship with settler-colonialism regarding Amerindian displacement and Chicanx deterritorialization. The children’s find provides evidence that, “dates as far back as the big migration of the Aztecs from the old mythical Aztlán to the area where Cortés met and subjugated them in the sixteenth century. . . . As a result . . . the original inhabitants were relegated . . . into aliens . . . [within] their own land, from their own environment, and have been mostly ignored by official history.” This previous erasure is where authors like Kali Fajardo-Anstine are beginning to rectify past omissions within contemporary literature.¹⁶

As Sarah D. Wald et al. explain in the Introduction to *Latinx Environmentalisms: Place, Justice, and the Decolonial* (2019), “Latinxs share an uneasy relationship with settler colonialism as both perpetrators of colonial violence and objects of settler-colonial dispossession.”¹⁷ In “Sugar Babies,” the town of Saguarita is evidence of these complex relationships where the land once was the Aztlán to the “Ancient Ones” and is now populated by Chicanx families, some of whom are choosing to deterritorialize for bigger environs such as Denver. Historically, “It is

without question that Spanish conquistadors and mestizos were part of the forces that appropriated [I]ndigenous lands during the conquest of the Americas. . . . [Yet too,] Latinxs have experienced the theft of lands by settlers. As a group that also claims historical ties to [I]ndigenous communities from what is now the United States and other parts of the Americas, Latinxs share complicated relationships with the decolonial that can neither be encapsulated by [I]ndigeneity nor be easily dismissed.”¹⁸

It is this shared relationship to land that Priscilla Solis Ybarra, one of the editors of *Latinx Environmentalisms* (2019) in her earlier work *Writing The Goodlife: Mexican American Literature and the Environment* (2016), defines as Aztlán. She explains it as an imaginary homeland yet one that exists, “wherever a Chicana/o individual or community dwells and embraces the ideals of dignity, sovereignty, freedom from prejudice, and opportunities for self-determination. Aztlán has helped many Chicanas/os feel a sense of belonging, if not to a particular territory or nation, then at least to a cultural imaginary.”¹⁹ Therefore the metaphorical Aztlán represented in the town of Saguarita shares a social history that ties interethnic communities of Native, Latinx, and Chicanx peoples with a sense of place in order to understand their multiculturalism.

One of the most impressionable of the youngsters amongst the group of middle schoolers is thirteen-year-old Sierra Córdova. As the story unfolds about the “Ancient Ones,” Sierra discovers a sense of place in her origin as she comes to terms with the return of her absentee mother. Sierra re-establishes a connection with her ancestry represented in the “Ancient Ones” which links her multi-generationally, yet not through her own nuclear family but through an alternative concept of family. One that is created in her middle school class where she and her partner Robbie must care for a sack of sugar they name Miranda and adopt as their own infant child. This alternative project is Sierra’s artificially constructed rite of passage. In attempting an adult role, Sierra ponders her responsibilities, her mother’s irresponsible behavior, and her own connectedness to the land.

Here, Priscilla Solis Ybarra’s scholarship in *Writing the Goodlife: Mexican American Literature and the Environment* (2016), is used to analyze Sierra’s transformation. Through her rite of passage, Sierra unearths a “genealogy of values and practices maintained in Mexican American and Chicana/o culture” as well as the Amerindian “Ancient

Ones" legacy which are tied to the environment, react to injustices, and address identity crisis. Sierra's learning process begins to unravel the connections between the colonization of Chicana–Amerindian bodies and minds in comparison to the colonization of land and therefore, one's lost *querencia*.²⁰

What is interesting is that it is the youth of Sagarita that reconnect to their *querencia* whereas the elder generations within the village seemingly have lost their bond. This loss is voiced by Sierra Córdova's father: "Things like this [the unearthing of the burial ground] have always happened around here. It's nothing special."²¹ Although Sierra doesn't have the words to vocalize that the history of the burial site and its connection to her family are paramount, she intuitively understands the importance.

The idea of "the lost land" and deterritorialization of both Chicanx and Amerindians in Sagarita reflects Raúl Homero Villa's observations in *Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture* (2000). Sierra Córdova's father's lack of connection to "the Ancient Ones," their community's collective forgetting of their identity, and Josie's *susto* from her past is a direct result of the "law effect" or the lack of social control of space²² where Chicanx and Amerindians did not have control over territorial and cultural integrity.²³

Fajardo-Anstine also comments on this aspect in her narratives: "I became fascinated by the generation that had to reinvent itself and deal with a difficult adjustment in the cities."²⁴ In "Sugar Babies," Sierra's father has lost his connection to his past yet remains in his place of origin. Whereas Sierra's mother Josie has tried to cut her ties but is called back to her origin, only to time and time again reject it. Instead, it is Sierra who over the course of the story begins to heal the severed ties to her family's past, her multicultural present, and the potentiality of her future.

Like author Helena María Viramontes explains in an interview for *Latinx Environmentalisms*, we, "us—the colonized" need to decolonize the imagination. "We . . . have to question our assumptions and realities [in order to] break our chains of colonization and to decolonize ourselves into another form of thinking about who and what we are."²⁵ And it is Sierra who begins to question. At thirteen years old, she feels a disconnect, not only from the "Ancient Ones," but also from her mother Josefina, or "Josie," who abandoned her family three years prior.

Yet what Sierra cannot articulate but feels is the importance of la

familia, even if it is one comprised of her single parent father and the fading memories of her mother. Sierra grapples with how things are “supposed to be” rather than “how things are” as she participates in Mrs. Sharply’s eighth grade project in which students are paired as “committed partners” to care for their very own, “sugar baby.”

For the project, each pair of students receives a swaddled package of sugar which they are to nurture as if it were their own child. In this case, Sierra and Robbie are the parents to their newly christened packet of sweetness, Miranda Martínez-Córdova.²⁶ The metaphor of their “sugar baby” is not lost on Sierra. In defiance of her artificial condition as mother, she gives up the opportunity to name the child and opts for Robbie to choose. Robbie blesses their “sugar baby” by calling her Miranda after his grandmother who has passed on, and hyphenates her last name to honor both of their families. Here, Robbie does not take on the role of a machista patriarch; instead, he respects his matriarch and those hispano families who came before him.

Robbie’s ability to recognize the past, and those elders who have influenced him, *and* to carry that *querencia* into the future in a new way is unique. He doesn’t realize it but Robbie challenges current relations of power and the logics that structure them. He subverts the colonial-patriarchal way of being. Robbie sets aside inherited assumptions of man/woman, father/mother binaries in order to envision new social possibilities.²⁷ Robbie’s words and actions are his own manifestations of “the media effect” in which he takes ideological control of space²⁸ and interpolates a new way of being that doesn’t perpetuate lost land and lost identity but instead reclaims *querencia*.

At this point, the story’s complexity intensifies as an estranged Josie returns to Sagarita.²⁹ This is how Sierra refers to her mother, Josie, as if she is still an irresponsible teenager, ill-equipped to care for a newborn. Sierra both resents her mom’s return and longs for it. This is apparent as she seeks answers from her father who explains her mother’s departure with these words: “Sometimes a person’s unhappiness can make them forget they are a part of something bigger, something like a family, a people, even a tribe.”³⁰ Sierra’s father acknowledges his daughter’s need for connection. However, he doesn’t know where to begin because unearthing those ties are too painful for him to do anything about as he is reeling from his own abandonment.

The return of her mother, the newly-found burial site, and the school

project all intertwine with Sierra's Chicana–Amerindian roots which she, up until this time, has not learned to embrace. Each of these aspects touch on her personal disconnect to a sense of place, a concept of origin, and her identity; in other words, her *querencia*.

Sierra slowly and begrudgingly learns to accept wisdoms imparted by her absentee mother, the hint of her Indigenous ancestry, and how she fits into her familia. Josie tries to interject herself into Sierra's life, but Sierra is not receptive. Josie tries to show she cares for her daughter, first through her reappearance, and second through advice: "You're becoming a woman. Women need vitamins and nutrients."³¹ This comment clearly demonstrates that as a young woman, Josie did not receive sufficient nurturing to grow healthily or emotionally. She did not have guidance to make her own wise choices. Yet, Josie now has learned the importance of these things, and hopes to impart them upon her own daughter although it is too late for Sierra to take her mother seriously.

Josie's attempts do affect Sierra emotionally because the next day at school, she tells Robbie how "Miranda" behaved. Sierra explains that their baby, "cried all night,"³² Yet, the reader can infer that it wasn't the "sugar baby," but Sierra trying to come to terms with her mother, the lack of connection she feels for her, and how this will impact Sierra's connection with her own future children, if she chooses to have them.

Once again, Sierra doesn't have the words to articulate all that she feels, but she rejects the passive femininity Josie tried to adopt as a teenage mother. Sierra recognizes that her mother's *susto* was inspired by generational trauma. Rather than confront her *susto* by embracing her *querencia*, Josie chose to abandon the family altogether. Although Sierra begins to understand the motive behind her mother's abandonment, she rejects Josie's choice. Sierra doesn't empathize with Josie and rejects her mother's trauma-laden abyss because subconsciously Sierra, like any middle school child would, prefers to have her mother present.

Sierra scratches the surface of this understanding in her conversations with Robbie but can't emotionally handle these realizations. Therefore, she tries to change the subject by asking Robbie how he felt when he found the remains of the ancient ones. Robbie explains, it was "[not] scary. . . . But it was weird, you know? We've lived here our whole lives and no one knew about all this old stuff in the ground."³³ Robbie's statement isn't completely accurate. The "Ancient Ones" chose Saguarita because it was their Aztlán. It was a sacred place. Saguarita was their

homeland, and it grounded their *querencia* until they were displaced and dispossessed by settler colonialism.³⁴

Robbie's lack of knowledge mirrors others' ignorance within their community. His words demonstrate a disconnect of subsequent generations to past traditions, yet he is a character that is willing to learn more. Although his words represent an alienation with the land, and a lost sense of place because of colonizer displacement of the colonized, his ability to wonder and have empathy shows a desire to recover lost knowledge.

Sasha Savoian in her essay "Querencia: Summit to Salish Sea" (2018) comments on the disconnect of knowing who once inhabited the lands where we now live and how that affects us all:

Indigenous People lived and continue to live on lands we inhabit since time immemorial, deeply embedded in relationship with the earth. Our acquisition of these lands is a story that needs to be told again and again until we understand the history and can work towards healing a people, a culture, and the land. A great disservice of our education system, communities, and institutions is this oft forgotten dimension of place that is the cultural layer, thick with history and story of being" which is one's *querencia*.³⁵

This type of alienation is apparent in both Sierra and Robbie as they begin to unravel the mystery behind those who lived in Sagarita before them, and how their Chicana–Amerindian heritage affects their relationship with their "sugar baby."

The children's naivety regarding their project is juxtaposed with Josie's attempt to reconnect with her daughter and her community, but sadly she doesn't know where to begin. Here, Josie's hope for a relationship with her daughter parallels what Priscilla Solis Ybarra states in general regarding those who have been marginalized and exploited. In particular, Chicana and Amerindian people's original trauma of alienation from their homeland, i.e. *querencia* is the inspiration for why many now work toward reclaiming their own dignity as individuals and within community.³⁶ Josie attempts to reconnect with her daughter by excavating the past and tries to teach Sierra truths from trauma-laden rites of passage. As a result, when Josie learns of the unearthed burial ground, she decides to take Sierra there one afternoon after school. Once there, the two observe archaeological workers on the dig, exca-

vating the remains. Josie tries to excavate her lost relationship with her daughter and asks, “Ever feel like the land is swallowing you whole, Sierra? . . . You will someday.”³⁷ This is Josie’s attempt to confess her emotions to her daughter, but she stops short.

Josie seems to want to recover a relationship, not only with her daughter but with her community of origin, and thus her *querencia*. In bringing her to the burial ground, Josie acknowledges the people she has come from, and she is trying to lift up the daughter she helped create. This particular scene alludes to the fact that Josie had hoped for something more when she was younger but had to learn to be an adult too quickly once her baby was on the way. It is Josie’s inability to articulate life lessons to Sierra which demonstrates her disconnection to her past and displays her immaturity. Although Josie tries to impart her learned trauma-laden knowledges upon her daughter, it is too late for Sierra to take her mother’s advice seriously. It is Josie’s hope that the “Sugar Baby” experiment will reach Sierra instead. Both Josie and Mrs. Sharply do not want Sierra to face tough decisions when she is not ready. Yet, complexities continue that affect both Sierra and the metaphorical Miranda Martínez-Córdova’s lives.

Back at school, Mrs. Sharply talks to her eighth grade class about childhood communicable diseases, and then assigns each partnership an issue they need to deal with in order to hopefully prepare them for potential future problems. Their teacher explains, “It’s the luck of the draw.”³⁸ Her comment infers that bad things happen to good people, and life is not fair.

To cope with what may come, Sierra keeps emphasizing that Miranda is only sugar. She establishes this emotional disconnect with her “sugar baby” because it is a tactic she has learned with her own mother.³⁹ Unlike Sierra, Robbie is able to open up about his emotions instead of burying them. Although he hesitates to do this, he admits the last time he cried was when he found the ancient burial ground.⁴⁰ Robbie’s admission is endearing. And because of it, Fajardo-Anstine creates a unique character out of Robbie. He is one that rejects toxic masculinity. He is demonstrative, he is equipped to express his feelings, and he honors the women and elders in his life. He has a budding connection to a nurtured place-based *querencia*. He acknowledges his ancestors and community.

Sierra gradually learns to do this as well, but through her own initiative and without maternal guidance. For example, she tries to

be a role model to Miranda while “showing” her the contents within her box of memories.⁴¹ Josie overhears this and confesses to Sierra that she observes that Sierra is good to Miranda, and therefore will be a good mother whenever that may come. Sierra’s artificial rite of passage, her project becoming a mother to her “sugar baby,” is a healthy transformation for her rather than Josie’s rite of passage when she became Sierra’s mother. Both characters learned from this experience, but hopefully Sierra gains insight into her *querencia* with less trauma than her mother.

In an intimate and confessional tone, Josie confides that the “Sugar Baby” project is a good one for Sierra to participate in because one never knows when having a child might become a reality.⁴² At sixteen, Josie was only three years older than what Sierra is when she gave birth. In order to keep the words flowing, Josie busies her hands because she is both embarrassed by her confession, yet also wants to mother her daughter with whom she has little connection. Josie braids Sierra’s hair, stating “I can do a tight one that will last for a few days.”⁴³ With these words, Josie inadvertently foreshadows her departure because she knowingly won’t be around to redo Sierra’s hair when it comes undone.

The day Josie leaves Saguaguita to go back to Denver, Sierra’s dad tells his daughter that the archeological site is being closed due to protests from Indigenous groups.⁴⁴ In effect, her mother’s departure parallels the closure of the Native grave site. Josie chooses displacement; she *barrioizes* herself through social segregation.⁴⁵ She exiles herself from her daughter, her community, and her *querencia*. As cause and effect, Sierra metaphorically buries her ruined relationship with her mother with the reinterment of the ruins.

To grieve her losses, Sierra stays home in bed for the day. That afternoon after school, Robbie comes over to tell her news of Miranda.⁴⁶ Robbie and Sierra had a hard “luck of the draw”; their “sugar baby” was diagnosed with SIDS. Miranda “died” the day that Sierra chose to not show up to school. Was this the consequence of bad things happening to good people or because Sierra abandoned her metaphorical child? Was she repeating in her mother’s footsteps, or would she be able to change course? Is she continuing multigenerational traumas due to disconnection with *familia*, or will she recover and reclaim her *querencia*?

Rather than depart without a word like Josie had done to Sierra, Robbie and Sierra take Miranda to the ancient burial site. Instead of

merely throwing her away, they launch her over the excavation pit and her “sugar blew with the wind, sprinkling the dirt with bits of white.”⁴⁷ Miranda’s sugar, like Sierra’s memory, disperses over the land. Her grains act like seeds and hopefully will fertilize the cultivation of what will come.

This is the perfect burial for Miranda because it symbolically ties her to a sense of place, an Indigenous origin, and a strong Chicana–Amerindian identity that will continue to grow in her “mother” as Sierra furthers her passage into adulthood. The material realities that Sierra faces like the departure of her mother and the death of her “sugar baby” add another layer to the closing of the wound, that which was the gravesite. These events help shape Sierra’s relationship to the earth, which offers other Chicana–Amerindians like her a powerful opportunity to show a differential consciousness in action.⁴⁸ Meaning, Sierra doesn’t have to reject her *querencia* like her mother has. She can be different and committed to practicing her *querencia* in a healthy way. Through this conclusion Sierra creates a path of her own which embraces strength in her femininity, pride in her lineage, and a path toward regaining a place-based *querencia*.

Kali Fajardo-Anstine begins her collection *Sabrina & Corina* with this inspiring story about Sierra Córdova because she sets the stage for what is to come. Her anthology is what Imelda Martín-Junquera would call, “a tool of resistance against the abuses of dominant Anglo culture.”⁴⁹ In so doing, “Sugar Babies” brings “awareness about the [I]ndigenous ties to the Southwestern landscape” and reinforces representation of other kinds of resistance against assimilation,⁵⁰ such as rejection of passive femininity and acceptance of alternative family structures. This type of Chicana–Amerindian literature relates “to the concept of home, contemplated in many narratives as a landscape of loss,”⁵¹ but which this analysis demonstrates as surviving physical and familial displacement, emphasizing Sierra’s reclamation of her *querencia*.

SURVIVING DISPLACEMENT: MULTIGENERATIONAL
TRAUMA SURVIVORS RECLAIM THEIR QUERENCIA IN
KALI FAJARDO-ANSTINE’S “GHOST SICKNESS”

Kali Fajardo-Anstine’s conclusionary story to her collection begins with a character that could have been her. In “Ghost Sickness,” Ana

Garcia is a university student at an unnamed college but which could be the Metropolitan State University of Denver where Fajardo-Anstine received her undergraduate degree. Ana is struggling in school for no apparent reason except for a general soulful unrest; in other words, she has *el susto*.

A suggestion to why Ana Garcia and other minority students, like her Navajo boyfriend, Clifton, feel unrest is through what Raúl Homero Villa identifies as a struggle over social space.⁵² Both Ana and Clifton seem to be living peripherally. Ana Garcia feels like she lives on the margins because her people have been displaced from not only the *barrio* in which multiple generations of her family had lived, but also because of a disconnect with her *querencia*.

Jenny Shank in her article, “Grounding and Grandmothers in Gentrifying Denver” published in *High Country News*, explains the gentrification of Latinx neighborhoods in the greater Denver Metropolis and its multigenerational effects upon those who once lived in those communities. Although “Wealthy newcomers may keep coming to Colorado . . . their money can’t buy the sense of heritage and interconnectedness shared by the Latinx and Indigenous residents they’re displacing.”⁵³ In Fajardo-Anstine’s “Ghost Sickness,” Ana Garcia is directly affected by this displacement as she is a grandchild “of Denver residents, mostly Hispano, who once occupied the Westside neighborhood before it was plowed to make way for an urban campus.”⁵⁴ This fact is representative in the Denver of today for it “is currently going through another dramatic shift: gentrification. It’s becoming wealthier and whiter and getting too expensive”; however, Fajardo-Anstine takes hope in people like herself who are “still trying to preserve history and culture, even if it’s through the act of memory and storytelling.”⁵⁵ Fajardo-Anstine writes stories like “Ghost Sickness” because she wants to represent protagonists who are like her family members in order to reflect upon historic demographic injustices. Her narrative observes institutional discrimination and feelings of exclusion despite the fact that as Chicanx–Amerindians they too are “citizen-subjects” of the United States of America.⁵⁶

Villa explains, “The consequences of geographic displacement loom large in [Chicanx and Amerindian] historical memory, characterized, among other things by the determining effects of land loss, shifting and porous national borders, coerced and voluntary migrations, and disparate impacts of urban development.”⁵⁷ Villa’s study focuses

on the Mexicano neighborhoods of California, specifically in Los Angeles. However, his study is a representative case of historical urban spatial formation for the entire Southwest,⁵⁸ of which Colorado and New Mexico are included, and therefore pertain to Fajardo-Anstine's upbringing and her place-based fiction.

Villa's study further explains that "barrioization" occurs due to three elements. First, *the landscape effect* is the physical regulation of a space and who has the decision-making powers over its built environment. Second, *the law effect* concerns who has social control of the space, such as community authority figures. Lastly, *the media effect* regards who has ideological control of space through education and informational resources.⁵⁹

All of these effects are notable as the protagonist, Ana Garcia, sits in her US History class. Dr. Brown, her Anglo professor who teaches Manifest Destiny, intentionally omits marginalized people's participation in the history of the Américas.⁶⁰ Her professor controls the educational space by not providing examples of historic figures that reflect her student body. Ana feels overlooked through her professor's comments that, "this [his] story demonstrates . . . [an] absolute depravity of the West."⁶¹ It seems like this scholar only sees value in the construction of a nation within the geography of the first thirteen colonies. Seemingly, the nation-building within the West, and its peoples, like Ana and her boyfriend Clifton, are of little consequence. Ana Garcia feels this judgement because her professor never gets her name right and calls her Erika, not Ana.⁶²

This specific example within the story reflects Kali Fajardo-Anstine's own life when "her English teacher callously suggested that [she] wasn't cut out for school" and so, just weeks into her senior year, she became a high school drop-out.⁶³ Ana is nearly at the point of this rupture as well because she chooses silence rather than gain her professor's misguided attentions. As one of few Chicana students enrolled in the class, Ana notes her professor's perceived preference to have well-meaning *gabachas* like "Colleen from Vermont" participate in discussion even when her comments are inane. Dr. Brown allows her class period to be filled with misguided comments rather than listen to marginalized perspectives.⁶⁴

Meanwhile, Clifton, Ana's boyfriend, has taken leave from school and his life without notice. "Clifton often disappears"⁶⁵ to internalize

his emotional fatigue caused by generational trauma, alcoholism addictions within his family, and his personal depression. Clifton has known Ana and her mother since he was eleven when he moved in next door with his uncle Virgil after his parents were killed in an altercation on the Rez.⁶⁶ Ever since then, he has lived an urban NDN existence, separated from his origins. Clifton's displacement from his place of origin clearly plagues him. His disconnection with his querencia makes him yearn for reclamation. Yet his escape of the urban appears to be in vain, for what he seeks seems forever lost.

Although Ana worries for Clifton, she has her own problems as she teeters on the verge of probation, or worse yet, expulsion because of her grades.⁶⁷ It seems she is predestined to fail, knowing “history was never [her] favorite subject.”⁶⁸ Ana doesn't agree with what is taught or how it is taught. And, like Clifton, she wants to move beyond the histories that box Chicana–Amerindians in as a marginalized other. The problem is neither of them can break down those walls because they struggle with inclusion. As students from marginalized communities, they are entering into an “order of things” where their communities did not determine who's voice should be heard; those in control did it for them.⁶⁹

Like Clifton who was made to leave his community behind as a child, Ana also lacks a connection with her querencia. However, throughout the narrative, Ana begins to search for those connections in her own way. When asked by her classmate Colleen, “Are you from Colorado, like a Native American?” Ana replies, “I don't know, really. It's complicated.”⁷⁰ Ana's comment is not entirely true, but it also demonstrates that she doesn't want to share this personal information with someone who “others” her. Rather, Ana knows some pieces to the puzzle that make her who she is. Her maternal grandparents used to live in an old Victorian home near campus, which historically was the Latinx neighborhood:

[Once] occupied by families like Garcia, Santos, Rios. . . the block was alive with sounds of screeching children, running sleek in leather booties. . . *Come wash up*, their young mothers would say, waving aprons like cotton flares. *Your papás will be home soon.*⁷¹

This knowledge frustrates Ana, for in order for her to become college-educated, her place-based querencia was wiped out for a “higher good.”⁷² This pattern of redlining and appropriation of marginalized communities' land is another form of Manifest Destiny or what Villa

calls *the media effect* and ideological control of Chicana spaces.⁷³ As Ana unravels this fact, it also parallels why she has a problem with her history class.

“Ghost Sickness” continues as Clifton’s disappearance becomes more foreboding with the fact he leaves behind stacked bills, enough for a full month’s rent.⁷⁴ Ana realizes their relationship is over in his refusal to respond to her calls or texts, but she questions is his *susto* more than the usual. Does his disappearance foreshadow another type of erasure?

In her solitude, Ana returns to the comfort of her mother’s house in the Denver suburbs. It is not the home of her grandparents, but it is filled with their things which reassure her lineage.⁷⁵ The old family home on the Hispanic block of town no longer exists. It has been gentrified, painted over, “marking it unrecognizable to anyone from the past.”⁷⁶ The family home has been lost to the *landscape effect* of displacement as land-use decisions have been turned over to the University so that the built environment can be gentrified into condos or campus use.⁷⁷

Despite the consequences of “deterritorialization,” Ana’s mother is a storyteller who holds her family memories dear, and retells them to her daughter. Ana’s mother asks her if she remembers her great-grandfather Desiderio who smelled of “tobacco and Old Spice, the lullaby sounds of his languages, Spanish and something else.”⁷⁸ Grandpa Desi, is part hispano but is also “something else” because he carried a small pouch filled with tobacco for ceremony. Clifton had seen Grandpa Desi’s “medicine bag” etched with four mountains in white, blue, yellow, and black. He explained to Ana’s mother that in Diné culture, the “purse depicts the emergence, the place where our people crawled out of the earth. It’s down south, near the San Juan Mountains.”⁷⁹ Ana’s mother affirms to her daughter, “You come from this land, *jita*”⁸⁰ because she wants Ana to understand her Chicana–Amerindian multiculturality. Ana’s mother hopes these stories will inspire Ana’s *herstories* where she can fill in the gaps that her history class leaves out.

Back in class, Dr. Brown speaks of the term “ghost sickness,” which is how this story earns its name. According to Ana’s professor, it “is a culture-bound syndrome of the Navajo and other southwestern tribes . . . Taken out of context, the illness doesn’t exist.”⁸¹ Brown speaks of “ghost sickness” as superstition, but what she is not recognizing are the long-term effects of generational trauma and struggles over social space. In other words, “ghost sickness” or what is known in *nuevomexicano*

Spanish as “susto,” is one’s emotional trauma internalized through a loss of *querencia*. And Clifton’s mindbodyspirit is clearly suffering from “ghost sickness.” Ana also feels her own *susto* out of love for Clifton, through the loss of her own cultural heritage, and her family’s subsequent assimilation into dominant culture.

Later, Ana begins to take the steps to recover from her own “ghost sickness” and tries to reclaim part of her *querencia*. Ana does this by interjecting in Dr. Brown’s lecture regarding cultural references to the New Mexican Pueblo Revolt of 1680. Ana’s professor dismisses her answers saying, “no not quite” and reminds her “to follow along.”⁸² Dr. Brown only recognizes the official history, that of the winners who have recorded their version of the facts. She does not give merit to lived history and cultural knowledge passed from generation to generation through oral tradition. Because of her dismissiveness, Dr. Brown has lost Ana completely.

At home in her frustration, Ana takes a bath to calm herself, and in her meditation she “sees” Clifton. He is on the Million Dollar Highway between Silverton and Ouray in the Southwest corner of Colorado at the heart of the San Juan Mountains. Before he can brake his vehicle, a black bear emerges from the roadside. Clifton plunges in his truck thousands of feet to the dark river below, “into the beginning world of darkness.”⁸³ The vision played out before her eyes intuits that “Ana knows—as certain as she is alive—that Clifton is dead.”⁸⁴

Shortly thereafter, Ana takes Dr. Brown’s history test. The extra credit option asks to detail “the origin myth of the Navajo people.”⁸⁵ Ana isn’t about to tell Brown’s interpretation; instead, she remembers Clifton’s which he told her as he removed a tick from the back of her neck. (His) story provided her an escape from pain, a way to “pay attention to something else.”⁸⁶ Clifton explained,

The Diné story . . . has twists. Only in the end is there love. . . . First Man and First Woman . . . were born of stardust and earth, scrambled out of the underground land of darkness and travelled through many worlds, leaving behind the blackness of their beginnings for a life of sunlight and air. . . . And that, is our story of everything.⁸⁷

Unlike, Brown’s version recalling superstitions that should be forgotten for a more “civilized” official story, Ana chooses the Diné version

because it ends with light and new beginnings for life. Although Clifton dies, whether to avoid a bear-relative or in suicide, she prefers to remember his origin story where in the end there is love, rather than the erasure of *querencia* supported by institutionalized racism.

It is the author of this analysis's opinion that Kali Fajardo-Anstine ends her collection with "Ghost Sickness" because she wants a finale that really is a beginning: a start to a new understanding of one's *querencia* and a desire to unravel one's multiculturality. By ending this way, Fajardo-Anstine is remembering a cultural heritage that mainstream society has tried to eradicate through its belief in Manifest Destiny and promotion of settler colonization based history. Rather than this philosophy of erasure, Fajardo-Anstine tries to demonstrate through her character Ana Garcia a love for her Chicana–Amerindian origins; and if not a complete understanding, then at least a desire to unpeel the layers so that she comes closer to the heart of her own *querencia*.

CONCLUSION

Kali Fajardo-Anstine's fiction is framed by *querencia* and acknowledges ancestral ties to land and traditional ecological knowledges that enforce cultural identity. This is apparent as her female characters transform into confident Chicana–Amerindians who reevaluate past oppressions and reconstruct cultural practices based on shared memory connected to a sense of place which is the *Aztlán* of the American Southwest.

In many ways, Sierra Córdova and Ana García's experiences and subsequent gaining of knowledge parallel Kali Fajardo-Anstine's own acknowledgement of how she learned to access who she is by understanding where she comes from. Her lived experience is an important influence in the creation of her strong and defiant female characters.⁸⁸ When interviewed by Virginia Isaad in *Hip Latina*, Fajardo-Anstine reiterated her intended message within her story collection:

"I am interested in the ways we are able to heal ourselves from the earth and how that is a form of ancient wisdom." Fajardo-Anstine stressed that it is her hope her stories, "offer an account of the American West, both urban and rural, from an [I]ndigenous Latinx perspective. I wrote this collection to represent the Ameri-

can West as I know it, a populated urban center with skyscrapers, universities, homelessness, gentrification, a legacy of racism, and an on-going historic cycle of boom and bust . . . my region is one of great beauty, but it is also a place of destruction where violence cuts into the landscape as much as the people. Still, the West survives and that endurance informs my work.”⁸⁹

Therefore, her writing helps reclaim space on the page as well as revitalizing cultural heritages connected to the place-scapes of the American Southwest. Her writing mines the stories of her ancestors, those whose shared experiences reside in the Amerindian and Chicanx community. She speaks against prejudice, institutionalized racism, and how understanding one’s *querencia* and writing about it is a tool for social justice.

Authentic stories like hers give voice to marginalized communities, and they need to be written down. Kali Fajardo-Anstine’s work takes on this call to reconcile loss and reconstruct cultural practices through storytelling. Her creative process is enriched because of the trail that leads to where she comes from. In so doing, she excavates the truths of the “Ancient Ones” as represented in “Sugar Babies” and honors oral traditions as exemplified by the Diné origin myth in “Ghost Sickness.” These examples teach that traditional ecological knowledges should be remembered as significant contributions to a more inclusive historical understanding of nation building. Fajardo-Anstine’s hope is to retain these stories so that her people’s narratives are kept alive in spoken and written word. Therefore, we as the readers, observe that Kali Fajardo-Anstine’s writing inks nature into her narrative, as well as honors our human interconnectedness with past, present, and future.

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From the Floodland

Countering Extraction, Remembering Relations in Eeyou Istchee

ISABELLA HUBERMAN

Abstract: In this article, I attend to two stories from the floodland of Eeyou Istchee/James Bay, where in the mid-2000s the massive infrastructure of Hydro-Québec's Eastmain-Rupert project flooded a portion of Eeyouch ancestral lands, submerging Eeyouch grave sites and places of meaning and memory. Reading across literature and public art, and engaging with ghosts and other-than-human presences, I analyse two works rooted in Eeyouch territory and this shared event of colonial resource extraction. The novel *Ourse bleue* (2007) by Cree-Métis writer Virginia Pésémapéo Bordeleau and the large-scale sculpture *Iiyiyiu-linuu* (2008) by Cree artist Tim Whiskeychan conjure place-based connections to the departed that contend with the recent history of Hydro in Eeyou Istchee. Both pieces model a form of storying in the wake that refuses the smooth passage of Hydro over the dead and suggests that these are relationships to nourish in the present.

Keywords: Indigenous literature; Indigenous public art; hydroelectric development; extractivism; relationality; afterlives; Eastmain-Rupert Project

"The poem flows like water in a river set free from winter's grip."

—Virginia Pésémapéo Bordeleau, *Ourse bleue*

In her mixed-media collage *Bonne Nuit Eastmain River*, Anishnaabe artist Glenna Matoush placed driftwood, animal bones, and skulls on a beaded river to bear witness to the lifeforms, gravesites, and places of meaning and memory now submerged under a Hydro-made reservoir.¹ Matoush created this work in 2006, in the wake of the inauguration of Hydro-Québec's Eastmain-Rupert project that resulted in the flooding of Eeyou ancestral territory.² Her evocative piece is at once a political statement about the violence of hydro development and a lullaby that

bids “goodnight” to the transformed watershed. Matoush lived for many years in Mistissini, in Eeyou territory, and witnessed firsthand the destruction wrought by Hydro in Northern Quebec (Rice 2009, 142). She created a poignant body of work that critiques this mode of resource extraction. Her painting *Not An Act of God* (1998) commemorates the ten thousand caribou that drowned while crossing the Caniapiscau River on their migration route when the floodgates of one of Hydro-Québec’s dams were opened. In *A River Disappeared, And That’s A Fact* (2006), blood-red paint strokes spill into a river, and crosses speckled over the canvas mark the gravesites disappeared under the water. Though the violent afterlives of colonial extractivism haunt Matoush’s Hydro-related work, so too does a reverence for the land. The blue-beaded river in *Bonne Nuit Eastmain River* is an animate being that holds memory. As such, it is a witness to its own transformation, from source of life to place of death by damming. Traces of life—skulls, driftwood, twigs—laid out on the beaded riverbed capture the complex layers of Eeyou relationality that link human and nonhuman, living and dead.

Matoush’s art prompted my reflection here on stories of Hydro flooding in Eeyou Istchee. One particular consequence of Hydro, the flooding of graves, illustrates how resource extraction and the death-drive of colonialism intertwine. Gravesites are material proof of life and occupation in Eeyou Istchee by the Eeyouch and of their inherent right to govern their land. Hydro’s narrative, I contend, attempts to transform *land*—territory that is culturally and physically life-sustaining—into *floodland*, a submerged landscape, and as a result, a place devoid of stories. Hydro seeks to make the land “vacant” not only of life but also, of death, in its erasure of the places where families gather to care for their deceased. Yet the representation of Hydro’s shadow-life in art and literature offers perspectives on hydrocolonial dispossession that draw our attention to ongoing relationships with the dead and to ways of storying in the floodland.

I situate my interpretation of floodland in alignment with decolonial queer scholar Macarena Gómez-Barris’s theory of the “extractive zone,” which describes “the colonial paradigm, worldview, and technologies that mark out regions of ‘high biodiversity’ in order to reduce life to capitalist resource conversion” (Gómez-Barris 2017, xvi). Extractivism, within the context of natural resource industries, treats land as a commodity and incurs dramatic material change to social and eco-

logical life. Yet, as Gómez-Barris argues, extractive zones also contain “submerged perspectives” that put forward local knowledges which can “pierce through the entanglements of power to differently organise the meanings of social and political life [and] challenge obliteration” (12). In dialogue with the possibilities for countering extraction, I attend to ongoing relations with the disappeared in Hydro’s extractive zone—the floodland. Eeyou Istchee, or James Bay, is a prime example of an extractive zone in Canada, and more specifically within the Quebec context, where, as I will show, it has been the site of friction between Quebec nationalism and Indigenous sovereignty since the 1970s.

In this essay, I work across genres and bring into conversation a novel and a large-scale work of public art that grapple with the consequences of Hydro damming in Eeyou Istchee. Both works engage with Hydro-Québec’s megaproject on the Eastmain and Rupert Rivers that embodies how extractive practices in Northern Quebec are continuing into the twenty-first century without regard for environmental devastation, displacement of peoples, and decades of Indigenous land defense. The literary work *Ourse bleue* by Virginia Pésémapéo Bordeleau, a Cree-Métis artist and writer from Abitibi, just south of James Bay, and the visual work *Iiyiyiu-Inuu* by Cree artist Tim Whiskeychan, from Waskaganish, at the mouth of the Rupert River, remember relations in the shadow of Hydro. *Ourse bleue*, published in 2007, the same year that the Eastmain-1 generating station went into operation, takes place during the last summer before the flooding. Called by the spirit of her great-uncle who disappeared decades ago on his trapline, the protagonist takes a road trip through Eeyou Istchee to seek resolution for her kin. The fictional protagonist seeks a personal reparation for her family, while a collective form of justice is sought in Whiskeychan’s commemorative sculpture which sits at the site of the Eastmain reservoir and was inaugurated in the fall of 2008, after the flooding. The large-scale sculpture memorializes the dead lost under the waters and creates a place for community members to gather and remember. While the novel offers a fictional testimony of the events, the sculpture offers a physical one. Both pieces model a form of storying in the wake that refuses the smooth passage of Hydro over the dead and suggests that these are relationships to nourish in the present. But before turning our attention to *Ourse bleue* and *Iiyiyiu-Inuu*, there’s another story to tell: Hydro’s story.

HYDRO'S STORY: FROM RIVER TO RESERVOIR

Promoted as a form of sustainable energy, Hydro development continues to be an ever-growing industry across Canada. In recent years, new megadams such as Muskrat Falls in Labrador, Keeyask Dam in Manitoba, and Site-C Dam in British Columbia are all underway. Shiri Pasternak has wondered why the story of hydro power “isn't one of the more common means of illustrating the history of colonialism in Canada. Infrastructure development in general is often hived off, for example, from treaty history and Indian Residential Schools, though all of these issues are deeply intertwined” (Pasternak 2021, 38). While critical Hydro researchers may view the century-long regime of Hydro in Canada as further entrenchment of colonial power in Indigenous communities, broader public discourse presents Hydro as clean energy and not as an actor in settler colonialism (Cariou 2021; Kulchyski 2020; Luby 2020; Neckoway 2018).

In Eeyou Istchee, a region where the ongoing encroachment of mining, forestry and hydro industries strategically removes the Eeyouch from their territory, the history of Hydro offers a clear case of how resource extraction operates as a structure of power. When Quebec's boundaries were first extended in 1898 (from the St-Lawrence Valley up to the Eastmain River) and then again in 1912 (north to the Hudson Strait), jurisdictional authority of these regions, formerly Rupert's Land, was transferred from anglophone federal powers to the francophone Quebec provincial government (Desbiens 2013, 20). Yet it wasn't until the 1960s, when Robert Bourassa's government chose hydroelectricity as the symbol of Quebec's nascent nationalist movement, that the province sought administrative control over the North, which it subsequently called “Nouveau-Québec.” Zebedee Nungak (Inuk) notes the irony of this name, writing, “The only thing ‘nouveau’ in the nationalism-charged atmosphere was Quebec's delightful infatuation with this land, *which they only discovered now!*” (Nungak 2017, 17, emphasis in original). In his account of the heated climate in which Quebec, the Cree, and the Inuit negotiated the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (signed in 1976), Nungak describes the intersection of Québécois nationalism and hydro development as “colonialism on steroids” (2017).

The destructive force of hydrocolonialism is seen in the scope of the James Bay megaproject, which began construction on the La Grande

complex in 1972 (before any agreement was signed) and sprouted multiple stages along the La Grande River watershed until the end of the 1980s. With its six reservoirs, each one the size of an inland ocean, the first phase of the megaproject flooded an area of 13,000 square kilometers of Eeyouch land (Denton and Izaguirre 2018, 59). In 2002, by the time construction began on the interconnected system of dams and reservoirs on the Eastmain and Rupert Rivers, extensive flooding had already taken place in Eeyou Istchee.³ The Eastmain-1-A/Sarcelle/Rupert project was approved at the signing of the “Agreement concerning a new relationship between le gouvernement du Québec and the Crees of Quebec,” more commonly referred to as the Paix des Braves, ratified in February 2002 by Bernard Landry, then premier of Quebec, and Ted Moses, Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees of Quebec.⁴ This agreement was meant to resolve longstanding legal conflicts over the James Bay Agreement by including detailed provisions for “co-management” of resources between Hydro-Québec and the Eeyouch, suggesting equal partnership and the latter’s “right to economic development.”⁵ The signatories described the agreement as a “nation-to-nation relationship,” a phrase deployed for the first time in Quebec’s negotiations with First Nations (Trudel et al. 2002, 120). Yet the Paix des Braves redefined Cree land tenure to fit corporate interests. Hydro-Québec hired tallymen, traditional heads of traplines chosen by their families who oversee the well-being of the land’s various offerings, as consultants and project-managers (Chapelier 2018, 61). Within this tangled and contradictory history of hydro development in James Bay, the flooding of ancestral Eeyou land and life must be understood.

In industry literature, hydro reservoirs are described in terms of their capacity to “control water supply” and to “effectively store water” (Hydro-Québec, “Reservoirs”). Just as the floodwaters bury the dead, these bureaucratic euphemisms work to submerge the truth. The material and symbolic erasure caused by the flooding figuratively *clears the way* for Hydro. Large reservoirs made to store vast quantities of water allow the utility company to meet the energy demands of primarily settler populations who live far from the source of the energy.⁶ This process models Métis scholar Warren Cariou’s description of how the “contemporary Western corporate logic of energy extraction . . . by its very definition is about taking energy out of its context, turning it into a commodity that can be circulated in a global economy” (Cariou 2017, 9).

The flooding required to create reservoirs exemplifies how twenty-first century resource extraction continues to be fueled by colonial processes that erase Indigenous people—and Indigenous bodies. In this way, hydrocolonialism is a form of necropolitics as formulated by Achille Mbembe (2003), and taken up by Billy-Ray Belcourt (Cree) in the context of Canadian statecraft as a “decades-long biological warfare against Indigenous life” (Belcourt 2018, 3). Yet, as the case of Hydro-Québec’s flooding of gravesites on the Eastmain and Rupert River watersheds illustrates, even *after* death, the state (here the state corporation) finds ways to manage and determine what happens to Indigenous bodies. Even after death, Indigenous life can’t escape colonial interference.⁷

With an event of such violence, I find myself once more facing the question of how to write about the damage of colonialism without producing criticism that instrumentalizes the pain of others, as cautioned against, notably, by Unanga scholar Eve Tuck (2009). The terms of my engagement are informed by my position as a settler scholar of Indigenous literatures and an Anglophone Quebecer, raised in a province whose national identity is fueled by hydroelectric currents that continue to undermine the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples. I turn to Tuck’s oft-cited “desire-based criticism,” an approach that redirects the research focus from a damage-centered framework to one “concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived-lives” (Tuck 2009, 416). In writing about representations of relations to the dead in a territory transformed by hydro development, I want to resist reading the connections between resource extraction and the erasure and commodification of Indigenous peoples; rather, these stories draw our attention to ongoing forms of relationality with land and life. Moreover, in a work of criticism on resource extraction, I believe it is especially crucial that this study does not engage with the stories of hydro flooding in a way that would perpetuate a form of intellectual extraction, a gesture that transforms lived experience into “mere data serving the interests of the academy [that] mirrors the exploitative practices of current colonial regimes” (Robinson and Martin 2016, 4). This paper is part of an effort to contend with this story, to do something with it, by foregrounding two aesthetic interventions that engage with the human—and other-than-human—consequences of the Eastmain and Rupert Rivers hydro project.

BEFORE THE FLOOD: BRINGING SPIRITS TO REST

The legacy of hydro damming in Eeyou Istchee forms the backdrop of the novel *Ourse bleue*, recognized as one of the foundational works of contemporary Indigenous literature in Quebec (see Jeannotte 2010; Laporte 2016; Nadeau-Lavigne 2012; Papillon 2016; Sioui 2010). Originally published in French in 2007, more than a decade passed before it was translated into English in 2019, under the title *Blue Bear Woman*, indicative of the slow crossover between English language and Francophone Indigenous literatures and the intricacies of colonial language politics in the Canadian context.⁸

Part healing journey, part spiritual awakening, *Ourse bleue* tells of a homecoming. When Pésémapéo Bordeleau's Cree-Métis protagonist Victoria returns to her homeland in the summer of 2004, she finds the place where she grew up in the 1960s transformed by resource extraction. Travelling along the James Bay Road and visiting extended family in communities, recollections of her childhood in Eeyou Istchee come back to her. The narrative alternates between present-day travels and early memories. As Victoria attempts to make sense of this new Eeyou Istchee, she describes Hydro-Québec's latest expansion into her family's territory as "[a]ll for the good of the white majority and Americans who will likely offer to purchase the province's electricity surplus" (Pésémapéo Bordeleau 2019, 100). The novel integrates true events, bolstered by real place names and political agreements; in so doing, Pésémapéo Bordeleau melds fictional and non-fictional registers. The novel further blurs this line as the protagonist's identity closely resembles the author's: both are descended of Cree mothers and Québécois-Métis fathers, both are from the same village on the southern border of Eeyou Istchee, and both are visual artists. These biographical elements, along with factual details surrounding the Eastmain and Rupert project of the mid 2000s, produce a form of what Michelle Coupal calls "fictional testimony." Indeed, the novel comes to serve as a means for the author to "testify to the complexities, ambivalences, and contradiction of [her] experiences and their legacies in an imaginative strategy to speak the truth in ways that fact-based [systems] would not permit" (Coupal 2016, 477). A meeting place of truth and fiction, *Ourse bleue* is at once an archive where Pésémapéo Bordeleau can

document her lived experience in Eeyou Istchee before the flood, and an empowering outlet for reimagining this same experience.

Early on in her journey, Victoria becomes aware of how the stories of her family are imbricated in the region's history of resource extraction. Upon arriving at the first stopover on her road trip, the mining town of Matagami, she recalls how

Some forty years ago, before the city was built, my mother's cousin Jos Domind, his wife Allaisy, and their many children had their trapping grounds here. Before the James Bay Agreement. Trees were felled and foundations dug, and that was that. An Algonquin reserve father south welcomed Jos and Allaisy. No more trapping or hunting. They grew old. (Pésémapéo Bordeleau 2019, 3)

Before the signing of the James Bay Agreement, Victoria's family was forcibly removed from their territory and relocated to a reserve. When Victoria arrives in Matagami, she reads in the local paper that "Matagami is dying" (3): the mine has closed and logging companies find the forest more and more diminished. Yet in this quasi-ghost town, she senses that "Jos and Allaisy's spirits still roam this vast territory, as do their parents' and grandparents' roots. Forty years have passed and new inhabitants quake at the thought of their precarious toehold. They hope for a diamond mine" (3). Two deaths circulate in Victoria's description of Matagami: that of the industrial town and that of her relatives. In her study of literary representations of mining towns in Abitibi, Isabelle Kirouac Massicotte describes how "the birth of mono-industrial towns and cities contains the embryo of the disappearance of these particularly precarious places . . . Ghost mining towns, their traces and remains, resemble in a way a [grave's] headstone that materializes the ephemerality and fragility of frontier towns, once the frontier is fully consumed" (Kirouac Massicotte 2018, 118–120, my translation). The temporality of boom-and-bust resource industries is short-lived: in Victoria's description, Matagami's impending death caused by the exhaustion of resources signals a definitive end to the town's existence. This unsustainable cycle of exploitation/exhaustion, which informs the logics of extraction used by mono-industries and megaprojects, is at the heart of the Eeyouch's loss of land.

Victoria's allusion to her relative's hunting and trapping activity within this same passage models a different approach to land use,

one that is rooted in relationship to the other-than-human beings that share the territory. While the settler town's aspirations rest on the "hope for a diamond mine," Jos and Allaisy's hunting and trapping differ from extractivism's commodification of the land's offerings. As Cariou explains, hunting, when understood as a "gathering of energy-yielding resources," is "not an activity of taking but one of respectful receiving" (Cariou 2017, 18). Cariou describes Indigenous resource relationships as a practice of "energy intimacy," a mode of engaging with natural resources that sees the land "not as a reservoir of resources to be exploited but as a source of gifts that humans must accept with gratitude. The reciprocity of the gift relationship results in a conception of energy fundamentally different from today's prevailing Western ideologies of energy extraction, commodification, and ownership" (18). Seeing the land as a "reservoir of resources" is quite literal in the case of Hydro infrastructure where reservoirs are a mechanism that exert control over water levels for electricity. In contrast to this logic of extraction and commodification, Victoria's relations "still roam this vast territory," indicating that their relationship with the land is made otherwise. Their ongoing presence illustrates how the gift relationship allows for long-lasting relationships, unlike the unsustainable temporality of the boom-and-bust model.

Contrary to the precarious toehold of the ghost mining town, Indigenous presence in *Ourse bleue* extends beyond death. Having been forcibly relocated during their lifetime by the mining industry, the ghosts of Victoria's grandparents and great-grandparents come to claim their roots in the afterlife. In the original French text, Pésémapéo Bordeleau invokes the spirits of Victoria's relations who "roam" the region in the shadow of industry by writing that they "*marchent encore ce territoire*," that they still walk this territory, conveying a clear sense of the spirits physically travelling on the land. The language of walking, of taking steps, performs an embodied action and a practice of reterritorialization by which those who are no longer of this earth are still present on their former territory, though it has been transformed by industry. The disruption of colonial time and place resonates with Cariou's conception of hauntology whereby Indigenous revenants haunt "the very project of colonialism which has displaced native people from their land" (Cariou 2006, 727). Cariou suggests that if these spirits "address the transgressions of the colonial past, they usually do so as

part of a call for some kind of redress or change in the present” (730). Victoria’s departed relatives haunt the mining town to reclaim their land. Their spirits interrupt linear and colonial modes of temporality: by carrying forward the past and the injustice of their expropriation into the present moment, they destabilize settler certainty—the deep-seated expectations held by settler populations of their entitlement to land.⁹

Victoria’s own relationship to the land is deeply personal and relational. Eeyou Istchee is peopled by her extended family, both living and deceased, with whom she has a connection through family stories. On each stop along her road trip, Victoria reconnects with relatives and uncovers the kinship ties that link her to the land and resituate her in an intergenerational network of Cree family. The renewal of these relations is part of her healing journey and helps her understand different pieces of her family story, including the lives of her Cree mother and Québécois-Métis father, allowing her to “heal both parts” of herself (Pésémapéo Bordeleau 2019, 77). In addition to living relations, a number of spiritual and spectral relations also guide her. She develops an awareness that “humans both living and dead need help” and that she, in turn, has a responsibility to these kin (58). Though wary of communing with the spirit world at first, noting how her “Sherlock Holmes mentality kept [her] from interpreting the dream,” she comes to understand her gift of sight: “I will be the instrument; I will follow the signs” (24). One death in particular remains unresolved—that of her great-uncle George, who disappeared decades ago on his trapline and whose body was never found whole:

One day in the spring of 1970, during a dig, white prospectors looking for ore unearthed some bones. With surprise tinged with horror, they realized they had come upon a human foot and tibia. The rest of the body was missing . . . those bones lay far from George’s territory. In vain, people from his clan excavated the soil around where the discovery had been made, but the rest of his skeleton never surfaced. (23)

The presence of industry in Eeyou Istchee intervenes in her great-uncle’s afterlife. And, just as the spirits of Jos and Allaisy walk the land upon which a mining town was built, George’s remains, disturbed by prospectors, call for redress. The need to find his remains and unite them transforms Victoria’s homecoming visit into a quest to rematriate

the bones.¹⁰ Camping one night on the banks of the Rupert River, the former hunting territory of her great-uncle, Victoria dreams of his collapse from exhaustion on a winter hunt: “It’s an unusual dream, as though confused with reality. Suddenly, I’m the man. I’m aching and afraid” (23). The shift in perspective in the dream from observer to subject allows Victoria to embody her ancestor’s experience. Her sense of accountability to her relative is amplified when she learns from Humbert Mistenapéo, an Elder in Waskaganish, that she has entered “a spiritual contract” with her uncle and that “the time has come to honour it” (58). The Elder informs her that her relative’s spirit “is still roaming” (24) and “stagnates waiting for an opening to the Light” (58). He explains that her great-uncle’s spirit “needs freeing” and finding his remains will “bring peace to his family members. So they can be freed of grief” (68). Victoria resolves to find the disappeared bones and to remember them, in a gesture that would perform care for her relative, as well as bring resolution to her extended family.

Yet Hydro construction threatens the success of Victoria’s quest to find the remains. While looking at a map of the area of George’s trapping grounds, a cousin warns her: “that land’s soon to be flooded by Hydro-Québec’s dams. The Rupert River is to be rerouted. Afterward, it may be too hard to navigate” (50). When Hydro harnesses the river to generate energy (my use of industry rhetoric is intentional here),¹¹ the bones of Victoria’s relative will be swallowed up, and, in Hydro’s wake, her family’s history risks being erased. In a figurative sense, industry will consume these bones to produce energy for the use of the settler population in southern Quebec. In a material sense, the disappearance of Indigenous bodies is more than a side effect of Hydro’s infrastructure: the remains are transformed into commodities of resource extraction that fuel electric circuits of power. It is telling that the protagonist of *Ourse bleue* uses her dreams to refuse the commodification of her ancestor’s remains in the face of the state corporation’s death-drive to consume them. Through her dreams and visions, she gathers knowledge of Eeyou spirituality and traditions, and grounds herself in the land. At the end of her journey, she chooses the path of becoming the knowledge keeper of her family, taking her place as “Blue Bear Woman.”¹²

Her dreams are also a portal that allows her to enact kinship responsibilities toward her departed kin: in one of her visions, she “feel[s] the bones’ presence” and locates the area of her great-uncle’s

final resting place (133). In a culminating moment in the narrative, Victoria and an entourage made up of her brothers, a cousin, and a guide, travel to an island on the Rupert River to uncover the remains. There, the dreamworld and the physical one coincide. When the group uncovers the body, her cousin, George's grandson, "falls to his knees before the mildewed bones, laughing through his tears. He whispers, 'Noumouhoum . . . Noumouhoum'" (149). As the remains are unearthed, Victoria helps her great-uncle's specter pass on to the spirit world: "In this space where the absence of time holds him forever in this moment I say, 'Noumouhoum, George, I've come to you just as you asked. I'm not alone . . . now you can leave'" (147). With the lost remains found, a resolution is accomplished. Through this act of care, Victoria upholds her responsibility to her kin, in a relationship that surpasses the line between life and death and the passage of time.

Eve Tuck asserts that in Indigenous contexts, rematriation often "refers to the returning of the human remains of our relations, but it also regularly refers to the reclaiming of sovereignty, land, subsistence rights, cultural knowledge and artifacts, theories, epistemologies and axiologies" (Tuck 2011, 35). Beyond commemoration then, bringing home the bones allows Victoria to rebuild her family's connection to Eeyou Istchee; in this way, she protects not only her ancestor's physical remains, but also kinship practices and embodied action from being lost in the floodland. While in *Ourse bleue*, both Eeyou spirits and Eeyou bones contend with ongoing histories of resource extraction under the imminent shadow of Hydro, Victoria refuses the commodification and erasure of Eeyou land, life, and death. In this way, Pésémapéo Bordeleau brings readers into the intimate relationships of care that persist in the submerged landscape of the floodland.

AFTER THE FLOOD: PUBLIC ART, PRIVATE CEREMONY

In a scene in *Ourse bleue*, Victoria is invited to the Eastmain River as part of a call to Cree artists to create a commemorative artwork "to honour the 'memory' of the Eastmain and Rupert rivers" and provide a place where "the Cree could gather around in the future" (Pésémapéo Bordeleau 2019, 100). She travels to the banks of the Eastmain with a team of archeologists and community members and spends several days drawing sketches in her notebook, a process she describes as the

preliminary stages of a larger creative work: “the time to create and write will come later” (141). This experience is based on the author’s, one of the many moments when the novel blurs the line between fiction and non-fiction. Pésémapéo Bordeleau, whose career as a painter spans over forty years, ultimately chose a novel as her means to commemorate her departed relatives in the floodland.¹³ Cree artist Tim Whiskeychan was commissioned to design the sculpture *Iiyiyiu-linuu* for the Eastmain-1 reservoir site in 2008 and a second sculpture for the Rupert River commemorative site in 2014. I see Pésémapéo Bordeleau’s novel and Whiskeychan’s artwork as related attempts to grapple with the ghostly remnants of hydrocolonialism. On the one hand, *Ourse bleue* preserves the memory of Eeyou Istchee before Hydro. As fictional testimony, the novel “give[s] evidence to the experiences of individuals or communities, often with pedagogical, therapeutic, or activist impulses for a broad, that is, both Native and non-Native, reading public” (Coupal 2016, 477). Whiskeychan’s monument, on the other hand, constitutes a physical testimony of the erasure of the gravesites: it creates a place for Eeyouch families to gather after Hydro. Moreover, the sculpture complicates pedagogical, therapeutic, and activist impulses as it is addressed to a very specific public.

The symbolic power of *Iiyiyiu-linuu* (see figure 1) comes from its location: rising above the massive Eastmain-1 Reservoir, the artwork conjures the passage of Hydro and the scars it has left on Eeyou land and life. While the title pays tribute to the Iiyiyiu/Eeyou/Cree inhabitants, the sculpture displays the visual topoi of a monument to the dead and acts as a collective tomb for a group of deceased. A plaque placed at the site reads “Forever remembered and honored” and dedicates the sculpture to “Elders of a long time ago who were in this area—this is for you who sleep on the land.” The plaque also lists of names of known people whose remains lie under the reservoir, as well as “the unknown Iiyiyiu/línuu buried here over the millennia.” These visual signifiers produce a commemorative monument insofar as commemoration is “an action taken to honour the dead, [a] way to emphasize the significance of events, create a national narrative for the future” (Couture and Davis-Fisch 2018, 5). The sculpture makes tangible the work of memory in the face of physical erasure and allows for families to nourish intangible relations with their dead. *Iiyiyiu-linuu* connects the past to the way forward for future generations; indeed, this is the message of the words of



Fig. 1. *Iiyiyiu-linuu*. Tim Whiskeychan. Image courtesy of Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute and the Cree Nation Government.

Eastmain Elder Harry Moses, whose phrase “Remember this . . . and you will live a good life” became the title of a travelling exhibit that included images of the sculpture. This larger heritage project toured Eeyouch communities in 2011 and 2012 and collected the stories of Elders who grew up on the Eastmain River, today Hydro-Québec’s EM-1 region.¹⁴ Beyond representing the heritage of an expropriation, the sculpture carries forward the knowledge that the floodland is filled with stories.

The sculpture’s form and materials are inscribed with meaning. Comprised of a set of metal panels arranged in a circle, it evokes a shelter or the gathering of a group. The panels are anchored to the ground by metal poles rooted to a concrete base, conjuring the solidity of Eeyouch ties to the land. Illustrations carved into the panels depict the land (the water, the sun); objects from habitation sites (hearths, shaapuhtuwaan [shelters], and stone tools collected in the Eastmain River watershed); and signs of the human and other-than-human occupants (Elders, youth, and animals). Images of gravesites marked by crosses—that which the sculpture stands in for in its most fundamental sense—are also etched into the metal. Because these images are carved out, creating negative space, the light, the wind, and the color of the sky pass through the open lines. Affected by everyday weather changes to the land around it, the artwork is brought into relation with its environment and becomes animated. The sculpture is ever-changing, yet also highly durable due to the materials—steel and concrete. Its permanence on the land responds directly to the brutalist infrastructure of Hydro, whose dams and generating stations (also in steel and concrete) loom over Eeyou Istchee. If, as Rob Nixon argues, “big dams themselves are (beyond any possible utility) a kind of national performance art” (Nixon 2011, 156), the presence of a permanent large-scale sculpture that signifies loss in the heart of the flood zone produces a counter-spectacle to the monumentalism of the industry that is the beacon of Québécois nationalism. Massive dam infrastructure in Eeyou Istchee is a reminder of Quebec’s hold

over the North, of the government's re-branding of "natural" resources as 'national' ones" (Desbiens 2004, 352). In the face of the mechanisms of monumental nationalism, the sculpture presents a contrasting kind of monument and makes visible the history of settler-colonial resource extraction.

As Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson has asserted, the impact of Indigenous public art and song is more-than-aesthetic. These artforms are aesthetic actions that have an "effect upon relations, both kin and non-human;" as such, public art "has a role, an instrumental capacity to do things in the world" (Robinson 2017, 212). The sculpture on the very lands with which the artwork is concerned and in view of Hydro's scars, carries an embodied knowledge. It is made living by its iconography, both in the images of life that are depicted on the metal panels and through the way the images interact with their environment. The literal depictions show that this is not only an homage to the dead, but to the land and a way of life as well, which are also to be "forever remembered and honored." The work urges us to see that to commemorate in the colonial contact zone--what Gómez-Barris refers to as the extractive zone--is to commemorate a way of life and a way of relating to the land. In the face of the disappearance of the Eastmain River's "life-sustaining features," the "very characteristics that made it inhabitable" (Nixon 2011, 19), the sculpture is a reminder to remember the land and waters the Eeyouch depended upon to survive, physically and culturally.

Iiyiyiu-linuu is a community-led project. A consultation committee of Eastmain River Elders and tallymen chose the site.¹⁵ However, funding came from an endowment for cultural heritage projects laid out in the Paix des Braves. While the community had agency in determining the form the commemoration would take, the memorial was paid for by Hydro money, and Hydro-Québec posted videos of the inauguration ceremonies on *Hydro and Friends*, the cutesy paternalistic name of the state corporation's website dedicated to the Eastmain-1-A/Sarcelle/Rupert project. Hydro-Québec's cooptation of the piece generates a return for the state corporation: it can check a box on its corporate responsibility agenda and claim a public pedagogy strategy. This resembles the power dynamics of state-commissioned art whereby the "burden of education" is placed on Indigenous artists to educate a largely non-Indigenous public (Cornellier 2012, 4). However, while commissioned public art is often placed in areas of high visibility such

as densely-populated urban settings, *Iiyiyiu-linuu* is not a memorial to educate general audiences about the impacts of Hydro. The artwork stands in Eeyouch territory, away from the gaze of the majority of the Québécois population. In this way, private pain is inaccessible to public consumption. The sculpture corresponds to what David Garneau (Métis) calls “an irreconcilable space of Aboriginality.” It creates a “sovereign display territory,” as Garneau describes in the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the need to provide alternate spaces for Survivors to testify (Garneau 2016, 23). The artwork is directed inwards, at family members who lost memorial sites in the flood. At the same time, it is a future-building project for next generations of Eeyouch through its assertion of continued Indigenous presence and affirmation of belonging to the land.

In the context of ongoing hydrocolonialism, the resolution sought by *Iiyiyiu-linuu* is but partial. In the documentary film *La nouvelle Rupert*, which examines the social and environmental effects of the diversion of the Rupert River, an Eeyou hunter describes how he cannot sleep at night, thinking about the flood and wondering whether or not water seeps into the graves of his ancestors. The hunter’s grief is a reminder of how the commodifying logic of capitalist resource extraction “disassociates harm from structured forms of inequality” (Henderson 2013, 63). The Eeyouch participated in the decision-making process that informed the construction of *Iiyiyiu-linuu*, as they participated in the Paix des Braves agreement that approved the construction of the Eastmain-1-A/Sarcelle/Rupert complex. But co-management agreements, financial compensation, and endowments for cultural heritage projects cannot compensate the loss of animal life, land and rivers, the disappearance of the resting places of family members, and the erosion of a way of life. The long-term cost is borne by the Eeyouch. Amidst ongoing loss, certain things are not fungible; the transfer of money or the inauguration of a piece of public art do not bury the dead and all that they mean.

GOODNIGHT, GHOST RIVER

I have illustrated how a literary text and a visual artwork, *Ourse bleue* and *Iiyiyiu-linuu*, conjure place-based connections to the departed that contend with the recent history of Hydro in Eeyou Istchee. While the novel is deeply personal, telling a story of rematriation and of kinship

ties with spirits, the sculpture addresses the collective, a whole generation of a community whose ancestors' remains have disappeared and whose way of using the land has been transformed. Through fictional testimony and physical commemoration, respectively, both works refuse erasure by Hydro. Instead, they layer the floodland--the extractive zone claimed by Hydro--with stories of the dead. The departed are living presences who move among past, present, and future on lands transformed by Hydro. As Pésémapéo Bordeleau's narrator describes, her ancestors continue to "walk the land," unrecognizable though it now is from the territory they once trapped in and the waters they once fished. The sculpture shows how a place of loss can also be a place where connections to the land are re-established, where knowledge is shared, and where art is made. In this vein, *Ourse bleue* and *Iiyiyiu-linuu* present strategies of embodied action and reterritorialization that assert ongoing Indigenous presence in the floodland.

I have engaged with two cases from a regional Hydro story by attending to works that are rooted in Eeyou territory and history and a shared event of colonial resource extraction--the Eastmain-Rupert project, a downstream consequence of the "nation-to-nation" Paix des Braves agreement. In examining Hydro from a local perspective, I seek to show how extraction is a tangible process for the communities who live close to the resource. When hydroelectricity is piped through transmission lines and sent to southern metropolises and across provincial and national borders, it is transformed into a global commodity, and the stories and sacrifices of its place of origin are erased. In this context, the viewpoints of artists such as Virginia Pésémapéo Bordeleau, Tim Whiskeychan, and Glenna Matoush, whose moving collage inspired me to write this essay, create aesthetic and sensorial interventions. These creative works remind us of, and offer us ways to understand, what is in fact lost when land is transformed into a commodity. Their literary and visual recountings assert modes of interdependence between humans and nonhumans, rather than the logics of dependence and extraction that underpin the functioning of the hydro process.

If relationality and extractive regimes are incommensurable modes of understanding land and water, attending to human and nonhuman relations in the extractive zone is a gesture that counters the silencing of these very relations. These relations extend beyond those between the living and the dead to the river itself; indeed, in the aftermath of Hydro

events, the Eeyouch mourn the lives and personhood of their rivers.¹⁶ As the Elder Harry Moses says in the *Remember this . . . and you will live a good life* exhibition catalogue, “What is happening on the river really affects me. I feel like a person who is sad about losing something they had so much passion for in their lives. It’s like losing a loved one” (Moses qtd. in Marshall 2011, 7). Harry Moses reminds us that the river is one of the ghosts of Hydro, and as such, one of the relations to continue to care for. With this, goodnight, Eastmain River; sleep well, and bon voyage.

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NOTES

1. Glenna Matoush is from the Chippewas of Rama First Nation. She is the sister of painter Arthur Shilling. In 1972, she relocated to Mistissini, Eeyou Istchee, where she raised her family and lived for nearly two decades, before relocating to Montreal. *Bonne Nuit Eastmain River* can be viewed here: www.nativelynx.qc.ca/arts-visuels/patrimoine/glenna-matoush.

2. Eeyou Istchee refers to the traditional territories of the Cree of Eastern James Bay and corresponds to the Quebec government’s administrative region “Eeyou Istchee Baie-James.” Eeyou/ Eeyouch (sing./plur.), meaning “the people,” is the term in Northern Cree dialect the Cree of Eastern James Bay use to refer to themselves. In

Southern Cree dialect, the term is Eenu/Eenouch (sing./plur.), also spelled Iiyiyuu/Iiyiyuuch or Innuu/linuch. Hydro, capital “H,” refers to hydro development as a structure of power in Eeyouch territory.

3. The Eastmain-1-A/Sarcelle/Rupert project is an expansion of the James Bay megaproject, in order to increase the megawatt production of the La Grande complex. This complex is made up of eight power-generating stations; the Eastmain-Rupert project added three more power stations to the megaproject. The entire complex has a capacity of 10,800 megawatts, a volume that surpasses Quebec’s energy demands. Critics have noted that the James Bay hydro infrastructure produces excess energy with the goal of selling the surplus to the eastern United States (Desbiens 2013). First Nations across Quebec continue to seek the means to prevent the state corporation from making a profit on energy that comes from their traditional territories and for which they receive no compensation.

4. Quebec’s current premier, François Legault, renamed the Eastmain Reservoir “Reservoir de la Paix des Braves” in November 2019. He also renamed the Eastmain-1 dam and Eastmain-1-A generating station after Bernard Landry, signatory of the Paix des Braves. The renaming of the dam after a former premier (the second Hydro-Québec dam to be named after a Quebec premier) was seen by some as adding insult to injury. In an interview, Jamie Moses, cultural coordinator in his home community of Eastmain, said, “There were many, many Cree hunters that struggled on these lands and to name it after a premier? It’s something I don’t really support” (Bell et al. 2019, n.p.).

5. By placing “right to economic development” in quotation marks, I’m thinking with Jennifer Henderson, who asks “what it means for compensation for historical injustice to take the form of individual and community development programs, or for injured groups to assert a ‘right to development.’ What does it mean when ‘development’ . . . becomes a right to be claimed?” (Henderson 2013, 68).

6. The largest Hydro-Québec reservoir, the Caniapiscau Reservoir in the La Grande complex, stores 52.6 billion meters cubed of water and has a surface area of 4,359 square kilometers. On their website, Hydro-Québec describes the purpose of reservoirs: “storing water for future use allows utilities to meet the demand for electric power . . . demand that varies considerably according to the time of day and the season. We store wood in a dry place for the same reason: so we can burn logs when we need them . . . Hydro-Québec owns 27 large reservoirs. Together, these huge man-made lakes have a maximum storage capacity of 176 billion kWh--the equivalent of Quebec’s electricity needs for an entire year” (Hydro-Québec, “Reservoirs”). The industry rhetoric employed here is one of ownership and control, drowning out Indigenous ways of relating to the land and water.

7. The finding in the Spring of 2021 of mass graves and unmarked graves of Indigenous children who attended residential schools in Canada presents another case of Belcourt’s formulation of the necropolitics of colonialism.

8. I refer to *Ourse bleue* by its original title to remind readers that the author has written the story as a Francophone Indigenous writer on Turtle Island. In this article I quote from the English translation, *Blue Bear Woman*.

9. Eva Mackey takes up settler certainty and settler futurity in *Unsettled Expectations: Uncertainty, Land and Settler Decolonization* (2016).

10. Following Tuck (2011), I note the heteropatriarchal connotations of the word “repatriate” and choose instead the term “rematriate,” especially considering the novel’s protagonist enacts care for her ancestors from her position as an Indigenous woman.

11. The expression “harnessing rivers,” rhetoric that suggests technological domination over the land and a process of bringing order to an irrational entity (nature), has become a catchphrase in Quebec. The expression is used in industry literature and beyond. For example, in the play *J’aime Hydro*, a piece of documentary theater on the relationship of Quebecers to Hydro-Québec, which received great public acclaim in 2018, playwright Christine Beaulieu uses the term without reflecting on its commodifying connotations.

12. The blue bear symbolizes Victoria’s Cree-Métis identity: the bear comes from her kinship with this animal, her maternal family’s emblem (Pésémapéo Bordeleau 2019, 10), while the blue is from the Virgin Mary’s robe, a figure she grew attached to as a child in Catholic school when she took to wearing the color to model herself in the Virgin Mary’s image (135).

13. Personal communication via email with Virginia Pésémapéo Bordeleau, December 18, 2020.

14. The “Remember this . . . and you will live a good life” exhibit was a community-run archeology project funded by the Nadoshtin Agreement, under the terms negotiated in the Paix des Braves (see Denton and Izaguirre 2018).

15. The site of the Em-1-A-Rupert Memorial overlooks even more Hydro infrastructure, including the reservoir, the dam, and a stretch of the diverted river. The tallyman Walter Jolly, who proposed this site, says that “from here you can see the whole story” (Denton and Izaguirre 2018, 71).

16. In the winter of 2021, the Magpie River in the Nitassinan, the homeland of the Innu on Quebec’s North Shore, was granted “legal personhood,” after a long advocacy battle led by the Muteshekau-shipu Alliance against Hydro-Québec.

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Decolonial Ch'owen Across Abiyala and Turtle Island

Calixta Gabriel Xiquín's Poetic Invocations of Kaqchikel Spirituality,
the Cardinal Points, and Trans-Indigenous Grandmothers

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Abstract: Kaqchikel intellectual and ajq'ij (spiritual guide, daykeeper) Calixta Gabriel Xiquín connects Kaqchikel Mayas with other Indigenous activist initiatives throughout the hemisphere through her explicit references to the cardinal points in *La cosmovisión maya y las mujeres* (2008). As Gabriel Xiquín engages other Indigenous women in Turtle Island and Abiyala, she incorporates Pan-Maya references from the *Popol Wuj* and invokes female Indigenous spiritual beliefs from other Native American communities, namely the Sioux legend of the White Buffalo Calf Woman. Grounding her work in Kaqchikel Maya spirituality, Gabriel Xiquín denounces the oppression of Indigenous peoples and their cultures throughout Abiyala and Turtle Island in this decolonial project. The Kaqchikel poet and ajq'ij joins other Native voices in cross-cultural exchanges across the hemisphere, as she looks to the cardinal points to reimagine trans-Indigenous possibilities for ch'owen (dialogue).

Keywords: Kaqchikel Maya, spirituality, Sioux, Native, cardinal points, trans-Indigenous, Abiyala, Turtle Island, activism

En ese contexto he tratado de ubicarme en el mapa geográfico del mundo maya, como mujer y como parte de un pueblo que tiene una historia, pasado, presente y futuro Un pueblo que no ha sido vencido sino que ha luchado en el proceso del cumplimiento de los katunes (período de tiempo desde la cronología maya) hasta el Oxlajuj B'aqtun (idem), el cierre de una era difícil de y para los pueblos indígenas de Abya yala.

—Calixta Gabriel Xiquín, *La cosmovisión maya y las mujeres*

(In this context, I have tried to place myself on the geographical map of the Maya world, as a woman and as part of a people that has a history, past, present and future A people that has not been defeated but has fought in the process of fulfilling the katuns (period of time from the Maya chronology) for the Oxlajuj B'aqtun (idem), the closing of a difficult era of and for Indigenous peoples of Abya yala.)¹

Calixta Gabriel Xiquín (1956–) was born in Hacienda Vieja, San José Poaquil, Chimaltenango, and is one of the most well-known contemporary Maya authors in Guatemala. She is also an *ajq'ij*, or daykeeper, a community spiritual leader who keeps track of the 260-day *Cholq'ij* sacred calendar. The poet and *ajq'ij* began writing in Guatemala, but she continued her work while living in exile in California. As Arturo Arias (2017, 70) details, Gabriel Xiquín “had been writing since the mid-1970s, when she was a student of Guatemalan Ladino novelist Méndez Vides (born in Antigua in 1956) at the Instituto Indígena Nuestra Señora del Socorro in Antigua. Méndez Vides, then still a young man, was a critical mentor in helping Xiquín improve her writing in Castilian and in Kaqchikel.” Gabriel Xiquín first published poetry denouncing the Guatemalan armed conflict (1960–1996) and political situation in Guatemala in newspapers and anthologies under the pseudonym Caly Domitila Canek (Chacón 2018, 97).² To date, Calixta Gabriel Xiquín has published three poetry collections that include poems in Spanish, with varying degrees of Kaqchikel. She wrote her first poetry collection, *El hueso de la tierra* (1996), while living in the United States, but she published it in Guatemala. There was a limited printing of this collection, and copies are currently treated as artist book objects and housed in special collections or museums (Chacon 2018, 95). In 2002, Gabriel Xiquín released a Spanish-language poetry collection with English translations—*Tejiendo los sucesos en el tiempo / Weaving Events in Time*. She is also the author of *La cosmovisión maya y las mujeres* (2008), which details the role of women in Maya spiritual beliefs and features three isolated poems interspersed throughout the prose chapters of the text: “B’eleje’ B’atz’ (Día de las mujeres en el calendario maya)” (B’eleje’ B’atz’ (Women’s Day in the Maya Calendar)), (13–14), “La cena antes de mi viaje a . . .” (Dinner before my trip to . . .) (37), and “Los diferentes momentos” (The Different Moments) (75–76). Calixta Gabriel Xiquín’s spiritual training arguably informs all of the poems that she has written since becoming an *ajq'ij*. In this essay, I focus on *La cosmovisión* because the book’s poetry draws from the ideas that Gabriel Xiquín details in the nonfiction prose sections concerning Kaqchikel spirituality. The poet and *ajq'ij* weaves references to the cardinal points, the *Cholq'ij* (ritual Maya calendar), and the *Popol Wuj*, creating a rich dialogue between the prose and poetry in the text.³ I specifically analyze *La cosmovisión* because of the interplay between Kaqchikel Maya spirituality, Pan-Maya references

to the *Popol Wuj*, Indigenous women's accounts from other regions of Abiyala, and another foundational Indigenous female icon from Turtle Island (North America): the Sioux White Buffalo Calf Woman.

Speaking from a gendered locus of enunciation, in *La cosmovisión* Calixta Gabriel Xiquín connects Kaqchikel Mayas with other Indigenous activist initiatives throughout the hemisphere through her explicit references to the cardinal points. Gabriel Xiquín works through the cardinal points in her poetry, linking contemporary Mayas to their pre-Hispanic past by invoking traditional Kaqchikel Maya religious beliefs deriving from the *Cholq'ij* calendar. While these references to Kaqchikel spirituality locate her work in the Guatemalan Highlands and Maya diasporas abroad, the images that draw from the cardinal points also geographically deterritorialize her poetry, moving her verses beyond Guatemala to dialogue with other Indigenous cultures and communities across Abiyala and Turtle Island. As Gabriel Xiquín engages other Indigenous women in the hemisphere, she simultaneously incorporates Pan-Maya references from the *Popol Wuj* while she invokes female Indigenous spiritual beliefs from other Native American communities, namely the Sioux legend of the White Buffalo Calf Woman. Gabriel Xiquín's use of the cardinal points in combination with this Sioux cultural reference situates Kaqchikel Maya women and their Indigenous traditions beyond Guatemala in cross-cultural exchanges across the hemisphere with other Indigenous women, whom she refers to as "abuelas" (grandmothers). In her invocation of "la búfalo blanco del Norte," she contributes another voice to the telling and retelling of the story of the White Buffalo Calf Woman across forms of recorded knowledge (tz'ib') and geopolitical borders. Grounding her work in Kaqchikel Maya spirituality, Gabriel Xiquín denounces the oppression of Indigenous peoples and their cultures throughout Abiyala and Turtle Island in this decolonial project. The Kaqchikel poet and ajq'ij joins other Native voices from the North as she looks to the cardinal points to reimagine trans-Indigenous possibilities for ch'owen (dialogue).⁴

Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's conceptualization of "ethnoscapes" speaks to how authors like Calixta Gabriel Xiquín deterritorialize their work across geopolitical borders. According to Appadurai (1996, 48), the term encapsulates the contradictions in the perspectives and the representations in ethnography: "[t]he landscapes of group identity—the ethnoscapes—around the world are no longer familiar anthropo-

logical objects, insofar as groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogeneous.” In the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries, Gabriel Xiquín and other Indigenous people of Guatemala have contributed to the creation of Maya ethnoscaples by migrating to other countries and living in exile as well as publishing their work in translation for international audiences, among other options. Mayas like Gabriel Xiquín have increased their participation in global flows of production, and thus, their potential visibility as well, deconstructing the familiar dichotomy separating tradition from modernity in the process.

Engaging readers in Guatemala and abroad, Calixta Gabriel Xiquín’s poetry lays bare the harsh sociopolitical realities that Guatemalan Maya women face. Cultural and literary critics Paul M. Worley and Rita M. Palacios (2019, 61) observe that “the work of Kaqchikel Maya Calixta Gabriel Xiquín can be read as a direct response to segregating efforts in the cultural, political, social, and economic realms in Guatemalan society.” Alicia Ivonne Estrada (2011, 146) notes that “Gabriel Xiquín’s poetry situates Maya women as active historical subjects and demonstrates the different ways Maya women participate in denouncing global and local systems of oppression.” Connecting the persecution that Mayas experience in Guatemala to trends in migration, Estrada (2011, 137) writes, “the poems root this violence and historical marginalization in colonial legacies that continue to exist in the country. These legacies also forcibly displace thousands of Guatemalans, including Gabriel Xiquín, to the United States.” Thematically, then, Gabriel Xiquín’s poetry weaves her individual, lived experiences as a Maya woman with the collective struggles of Indigenous peoples in Guatemala and their diasporas abroad.

CALIXTA GABRIEL XIQUÍN, KAQCHIKEL SPIRITUALITY, AND THE CARDINAL POINTS

In Guatemala, Gabriel Xiquín was heavily influenced by liberation theology and the teachings of Catholicism, recognizing that poverty and suffering were not unavoidable conditions for Mayas like her, but the consequences of structural political and social conditions that could be changed. By the early 1980s, which marked the height of the violence during the armed conflict (1960–1996), Calixta Gabriel Xiquín, along with many other Catholic Mayas who advocated for change, found

themselves the targets of Fernando Romeo Lucas García's and Efraín Ríos Montt's *mano dura*. In this context, thousands of Mayas fled the country to avoid falling victim to this State-sponsored violence ravaging the country. Before leaving for California, where she lived in exile (1981–1988), Gabriel Xiquín buried in her backyard in Guatemala what the State deemed subversive materials: photographs, lesson plans, and a Bible (McConahay 2021). When she returned to Guatemala in 1988, only a few years before the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996, she left Catholicism behind and became an *ajq'ij* (spiritual guide, daykeeper).⁵

Gabriel Xiquín draws from her lived experiences as a Maya woman and *ajq'ij* as well as academic studies to inform her poetry and research in *La cosmovisión*. She also has formal academic training as a graduate with a Master's degree in Sociology from the Universidad Rafael Landívar in 1999. In the introductory pages to *La cosmovisión*, Gabriel Xiquín (2008, 9–11) informs readers that she speaks from the perspective of a Maya woman and develops her gender theories based on Kaqchikel and K'iche' language concepts, many of which she discusses in her earlier work from 2000 and 2003. In her conceptualization of the cardinal points, for example, Gabriel Xiquín uses academic conventions to cite the *Códice de Madrid*, and she includes information from her lived experiences as an *ajq'ij*. She notes that the *nawals* from the *Cholq'ij* appear in a section of the *Códice de Madrid*. Gabriel Xiquín (2008, 48) explains that they begin with Imox, and follow the order that researchers have approved, citing the *Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala* from 1964. In *La cosmovisión* and her other published work, Gabriel Xiquín draws from her expertise in Western and non-Western epistemologies.

Focusing on the cardinal points, Gabriel Xiquín includes a diagram that situates each of the *nawals* in the Cruz Cósmica, or Cosmic Cross, which she attributes to her 2003 MA thesis and the *Códice de Madrid*. Similarly, Kaqchikel Maya *ajq'ij* and social scientist Baldomero Cuma Chávez (2008, 59) also describes the typical iconographic representation of the cardinal points as a quadrant schema, or a “brújula.” In Kaqchikel Maya traditional spiritual beliefs, the cardinal points have geographic importance as well as corresponding symbolic colors: red, black, white, and yellow (Cuma Chávez 2005, 48–9). Q'anjob'al intellectual Gaspar Pedro González (2006, 83) explains that these four colors correspond to the different types of corn in the region. The number four

is also significant because it is associated with the four elements: earth (ulew), wind (kaq'iq'), water (ya'), and fire (q'aq'). Guarcax González, et al. (2002), a group of Maya intellectuals working with Kaqchikel Chol-chi', summarize the understandings of thirty-one daykeepers regarding their Kaqchikel spirituality and the corresponding ceremonies. They explain the relationship between the earth and wind: "Ri kaq'iq' man tz'etël ta, chuqa' man tikirel ta nachäp, xa xe nana', we manaq ta, man ta k'o k'aslem. Ri ulew, tz'etël, chuqa' tikirel nachäp, man ta k'o, man ta k'o qaway, manaq ta chuqa' chöj pa ruwí' öj paäl wi" (The wind is not visible, and you cannot touch it, you only feel it, if it is not there, there is no life. The land, is visible, and you can touch it, if it is not there, there is no food, there is no place for us to stand) (Guarcax González, et al. 2002, 120). Guarcax González, et al. continue, elaborating on the complementary relationship between fire and water. They write, "Ri q'aq' ja re' nya'on ruk'aslem re rewach'ulew ruma ri' k'äs, nb'i'yn nsutin, ruma öj ruchapon. Janila k'i'y ya' k'o chuwäch re ulew, ruma ri' töq k'o k'aslem" (Fire gives life to the land, so it is alive, it moves and twirls, so it unites, cares, and supports us. There is a lot of water on Earth, for that reason there is life) (Guarcax González, et al. 2002, 120). Earth and wind, along with fire and water, complement one another in a dualistic relationship, balancing life energies for humans and animals alike on the planet. Returning our attention to *La cosmovisión*, Gabriel Xiquín (2008, 48–49) also underscores the balance and harmony: "se observan los cuatro puntos del universo, en los que se aprecia la relación equitativa de los nawales, pues, según la cosmovisión maya, ese es el punto de partida de la complementariedad y la equidad" (the four points of the universe are observed, in which the equitable relationship of the nawales is appreciated, because, according to the Maya worldview, that is the starting point of complementarity and equity).

As ajq'ija' like Calixta Gabriel Xiquín hold ceremonies to maintain harmony and balance in the community, they serve as a medium through which people communicate with the ancestors and Ajaw. When Kaqchikel ajq'ija' prepare for a kotz'i'j or xukulem (spiritual ceremony), they mark the four cardinal directions in a circle, dividing it into distinct sacred portals which represent infinity: the space that is above and below, which has a beginning but no end. This provides ajq'ija' with a vehicle through which to communicate on behalf of the participants in the ceremony with Ajaw, or God (Cuma Chávez 2005, 48).⁶ Gabriel

Xiquín (2008, 30) notes that *ajq'ija'* “interpretan, indican y orientan a la humanidad por medio de la observación, aplicación y cumplimiento de las normas de la naturaleza, de la relación familiar y social” (interpret, indicate and guide humanity through observation, application and compliance with the norms of nature, family and social relationships). Guarcax González, et al. (2002, 78) explain that through the *kotz'i'j*, or *xukulem*, “*tikirel nb'an wi ri ch'owen rik'in ri Ajaw, chuqa' ch'owen kik'in ri qate' qatata', qati't qamama' ri xetzolin yan, ja k'a ri' ri qanimab'al k'u'x röj maya' winaqi'*” (you can have a conversation with God, and a conversation with the ancestors, the elders who have already returned [died], that is our spirituality for us Maya peoples). There is a *ch'owen* (conversation, dialogue) that occurs between the *ajq'ij*, Ajaw, and the ancestors (*qate' qatata', qati't qamama'*). In the *ch'owen*, the *q'aq'*, or fire, is also an active participant, communicating with Ajaw and the *ajq'ij*.

Though there is not a physical fire in Gabriel Xiquín's poems, the Kaqchikel author's reference to the cardinal points fosters a similar channel of communication between the poet, her readers, and Ajaw. Instead of the physical markings of the quadrant schema on the ground, Gabriel Xiquín invokes the cardinal points in her poetry; she establishes her poetry as the primary medium of communication, instead of the sacred fire: “*Ri kotz'i'j rub'eyal richin nqaq'ejela' chuqa' richin yojch'o rik'in ri Ajaw. Ri q'aq' nch'o töq ri ajq'ij nch'o rik'in*” (The ceremony provides a way for us to greet and speak with God. The fire speaks with the daykeeper when they speak with it) (Guarcax González, et al. 2002, 78). Moving the cardinal points to the printed page, Gabriel Xiquín relocates the ceremony, and the ensuing *ch'owen* (dialogue), to the published book. She renegotiates the participants in the ceremony to include her readers in the conversation, rather than people standing physically around a sacred fire. In this process, readers participate, contributing their energies to the decolonial project that Gabriel Xiquín mounts through her poetry.

As readers—from Guatemala and abroad—are interpellated into the *ch'owen*, or dialogue, there are unique possibilities for the poetic voice to sow the seeds for allyship and engaged activism. Though “*ch'owen*” refers to a conversation or dialogue that is specific to the Kaqchikel linguistic and cultural context, there are similar terms and concepts in other Maya languages. In the Yucatan, for example, Paul M. Worley (2013) notes a similar dialogue and oral exchange in Yucatec Maya sto-

rytelling that he refers to as “tsikbal.” Worley draws from the *Diccionario maya* (1980), which defines the noun form of tsikbal as “conversación” ‘conversation,’ “plática” ‘chat,’ “cuento” ‘story,’ and the verb form as “estar en conversación” ‘to be in conversation,’ and “decir cuentos o gracias” ‘to tell stories or jokes’ (860–61). He notes that “Tsikbal by their nature are dialogic, implying the participation of both storyteller/author and listener/reader in the performative act” (Worley 2013, 20). Although Gabriel Xiquín writes from a different context in Guatemala and Kaqchikel diasporas abroad, using published poetry instead of oral storytelling, there are similarities between the Kaqchikel concept “ch’owen” and the Yucatec “tsikbal.” Namely, the engaged participation of everyone involved in the artistic process—the creator of the stories/poems, the oral interlocutors, and readers of published books. In this way, Gabriel Xiquín’s renegotiation of the participants surrounding the cardinal points signals a methodological approach that further promotes allyship as a critical component of this collective activism in solidarity with her readers.

More broadly, the image of the cardinal points in Calixta Gabriel Xiquín’s poetry has two primary effects. It connects contemporary Mayas to their pre-Hispanic past by referencing Kaqchikel Maya religious beliefs deriving from the *Cholq’ij* calendar, and it geographically deterritorializes her poetry, moving her verses beyond Guatemala to dialogue with other Indigenous cultures and communities in other parts of the Americas. The cardinal points are an Indigenous epistemology that connects many Indigenous communities including Kaqchikel Mayas across the hemisphere, as cultural and literary critic Juan Guillermo Sánchez Martínez (2016) has observed. To that end, Sánchez references the work of numerous Indigenous scholars and intellectuals, including K’iche’ poet Humberto Ak’abal and Quechua author Fredy Amílcar Roncalla, as he underscores that the cardinal points do not just signal the four cardinal directions or the four elements. Rather, Sánchez (2016, 3) affirms that the cardinal points refer to other ways of understanding space, time, and the word that includes the ideas of travel, displacement, migration, and geographic mobility. As Sánchez (2016, 3) notes, Indigenous intellectuals work through the fifth cardinal point to dialogue inside/outside their own territories in these literary migrations and cultural exchanges. Gloria Chacón (2019, 119), for example, observes an increase in trans-Indigenous dialogue among authors at international

poetry events, such as the Medellín poetry festival in Colombia, which has attracted Indigenous and non-Indigenous poets from Canada, the United States, Mexico, Australia, and New Zealand. Gabriel Xiquín has participated in similar literary festivals, exchanging ideas with other authors from around the globe. The poet and *ajq'ij* has engaged this fifth cardinal point as she participates in global flows of production and exchange by publishing in translation and looking beyond Guatemala to disseminate her work. Returning to Appadurai's expression, in this process she contributes to the Maya ethnoscapas that are connected to other Indigenous activists and their struggles in a trans-Indigenous global network of solidarity and exchange.

Though Gabriel Xiquín is a contemporary Maya poet who works through the fifth cardinal point to facilitate communication across borders and cultures, Chacón (2016, 5) reminds us that this is not a new phenomenon: "Historically, the invocation and imbrication of the five elements and five directions appear recorded across many pre-Columbian sources, including ornaments, codices, and other surfaces. Their use in ceremony, prayer, song, nourishes indigenous poets in building of knowledge that seeks to invigorate an indigenous poetics." For instance, in the poem "Los diferentes momentos" in *La cosmovisión*, Gabriel Xiquín explicitly references the four cardinal points to establish a dialogue between the past, present, and future:

Pero no olvido tiempos,
 Hay buenos tiempos, hay los malos tiempos.
 Uno no puede retroceder la historia, ¡imposible!
 El compromiso es estar con el pueblo
 ya amanecerá el siguiente SOL,
 hay que prepararse, mirar en los cuatro puntos del Universo:
 arriba, abajo, a los lados, en todos los puntos y dimensiones.

(But I don't forget times
 There are good times, there are bad times.
 One cannot go back in history, impossible!
 The commitment is to be with the people
 the next SUN will dawn,
 you have to prepare, look at the four points of the Universe:
 up, down, to the sides, in all points and dimensions.)

The poetic speaker urges Mayas to not forget the past and the historical moments of physical and cultural violence against Indigenous peoples

in Guatemala, like the armed conflict and the Spanish Conquest led by Pedro de Alvarado. Following this logic of circular conceptualizations of time, Mayas cannot exclusively look to the past, but they must also keep their eye on the future.

Mayas are to look toward the four cardinal points to invoke the wisdom and council of their ancestors and Ajaw, who traditionally gather around the large, universal straw mat known as a Pop. Gaspar Pedro González (2006, 39) underscores the centrality of the Pop to mark the four cardinal points, explaining that human beings are located within a great Cartesian plane of the Ajaw with its coordinates, on the great mat of the universe, the Pop. González elaborates that the Pop is situated in relation to the ruk'u'x kaj, ruk'u'x ulew (The Heart of the Sky, The Heart of the Earth), which is a great energy that balances and unifies. This representation of the four cardinal points first appears in the *Popol Wuj*, a text which recounts the story of creation and foundational narratives of the Maya K'iche'. As Maya religious studies scholar Jean Molesky-Poz (2006, 120) describes, "the word *Pop* signifies *petate* (a square woven mat). In [the] *Popol Wuj*, the Aj Pop (authorities, those with great consciousness) sat upon the woven mat to do consultations, gathering the [advice] of the four cardinal points, the rising [of] the sun, the setting of the sun, the side of the earth, the side of the sky. The four cardinal points also consulted with one another." The cardinal points are not simply inanimate geographic directions. In their capacity to provide council to community leaders and communicate with one another, the cardinal points have agency and influence authoritative decisions of the past, present, and future.

In the postwar context, Guatemalan Mayas like Calixta Gabriel Xiquín have strategically borrowed from their pre-Hispanic past as they negotiate their ethnic identities and their sociopolitical goals in the twenty-first century. Maya intellectual Raxche' Demetrio Rodríguez Guaján (1996, 74) underscores a historical continuity between pre-Hispanic and contemporary Mayas: "Maya culture has been shaped by the favorable and unfavorable circumstances under which we Maya have lived throughout our history, yet it remains the same culture developed over thousands of years by our ancestors in the territory that is today Guatemala. The form of our culture has changed, but not its essence." To advance contemporary Maya initiatives, Mayas draw from their pre-Hispanic past. This synergy of the past and present is not unique to Calixta Gabriel Xiquín's poetry, but is common in the

work of many Maya authors and artists in contemporary Guatemala. To that end, the meaning of what is “Maya” has changed over time—it is a marker of Indigenous identity that is constantly in transformation. As anthropologist Diane Nelson (1999, 5) explains, Maya-ness is “part of this practice of *formando*, making or forming this new, pan-indigenous identification.” Mayas like Calixta Gabriel Xiquín constantly negotiate their Indigenous identities with respect to their own ethnic past, as well as outside influences from beyond the geopolitical borders of their native Guatemala.

PAN-MAYA WOMEN IN MESOAMERICA

As Calixta Gabriel Xiquín looks beyond Guatemala in *La cosmovisión*, she invokes Pan-Maya female traditions of weaving. In the initial verses of the poem “B’eleje’ B’atz,” for example, Gabriel Xiquín uses the image of weaving to position her locus of enunciation as a Maya woman: “Mujeres tejedoras de energías. / Mujeres herederas de la abuela Luna” (Women weavers of energies. / Women heirs of Grandmother Luna). The poetic voice calls upon abuela Luna, Qat’it Ik’ (Grandmother Moon), who is associated with weaving in Maya communities across Mesoamerica. This reference to weaving is coupled with an anaphora repeating “mujeres,” or women, which underscores the poem’s overarching feminine discourse:

mujeres que con sus palabras transforman pensamientos y vidas,
mujeres escritoras, artistas, tejedoras, músicas de todas las
dimensiones,
mujeres todas.

(Calixta Gabriel Xiquín, “B’eleje’ B’atz”)

(women who with their words transform thoughts and lives,
women writers, artists, weavers, musicians of all
dimensions,
all women.)

After the reference to the creation of “palabras,” or words, the following line situates weaving and writing as culturally similar activities by identifying women as writers, artists, weavers, and musicians. Later, the poetic voice proclaims: “Mujeres de hoy que están *trenzando* pens-

amientos en forma / colectiva para transformar sociedades” (Women of today who are *braiding* thoughts in a way / collectively to transform societies) (my emphasis). In this, the weaving of ideas denotes the collective exchange and dialogue of ideas among Maya women across Mesoamerica, yet it also refers to the very creation of poetry.

In the Kaqchikel Maya language, one of the terms for “poetry” is “pach'un tzij,” which literally means the weaving of words (Miller 2019, 287). According to the Kaqchikel scholar Irma Otzoy (1996, 149), “the language codified in Maya weavings ‘speaks’ of the Maya as a people, of their roots, of their lives, and of their causes.” The conceptualization of textiles as recorded knowledge is not limited to Kaqchikel contexts. Providing examples from Guatemala and Mexico, Worley and Palacios (2019) examine textiles as ts'ib (or tz'ib' in Kaqchikel), which is broadly understood as writing not limited to Greco-Latin script. Citing work by Gloria Chacón (2007), Alicia Ivonne Estrada (2011), and Rita Palacios (2016), they note that in Maya literary studies, “this lens has been used for the analysis of poetry,” which “acknowledge[s] the importance of weaving” (Worley and Palacios 2019, 35). Specifically analyzing Calixta Gabriel Xiquín's poetry, Worley and Palacios (2019, 61) observe that the Kaqchikel poet's work “operat[es] across multiple textualities.” As Gloria Chacón (2007, 99) notes, writing and poetry are a way of weaving, so many Maya women claim writing as an act of weaving.⁷ In her analysis of Calixta Gabriel Xiquín's work, Chacón (2018, 97) notes that the “cover of her book *Tejiendo los sucesos en el tiempo / Weaving Events in Time* . . . alludes to writing/weaving as a practice inherited from the goddess Ixchel. On her book cover, the poet sits in front of a loom.” The cover of *Tejiendo los sucesos* and the explicit references to Maya weaving throughout Gabriel Xiquín's other publications including *La cosmovisión*, further underscore this Pan-Maya connection between Maya women and weaving as a creative process that blurs the boundaries between writing and textiles.

The poem “B'eleje' B'atz,” for example, explicitly references Ixchel and other Maya goddesses from Mesoamerica. As the poetic voice draws attention to textiles and other forms of recording knowledge such as “huellas selladas sobre piedras y / en códices (footprints stamped on stones and / in codices), the speaker reverentially calls upon Maya “abuelas,” or grandmothers, from across the region:

Abuelas:
 Ixmukane
 Ixkakaw,
 Ixchel,
 Ixq'anil

Beyond the explicit references in Spanish in the poem—"mujeres" and "abuelas"—that describe them as female, the goddess names linguistically gender the deities. Drawing from the K'iche' roots for ixoq (woman), ixoqil (wife), and ixnam (the sister-in-law of a male relative), Pakal B'alam Rodríguez Guaján (2007, 10) explains that the prefix "Ix" is used to mark all female names. In the poem "Be'leje' B'atz," the repetition of the prefix "Ix" in the Maya names that begins each of the poem's lines reaffirms the overarching female discourse, as the speaker invokes Maya goddesses from across the region.

According to Pan-Maya beliefs from the *Popol Wuj*, the names Ixmukane, Ixkakaw, Ixchel, and Ixq'anil are particularly significant. Ixmukane, for example, is the grandmother to the Hero Twins in the *Popol Wuj*. Allen Christenson (2007, 52) explains that "the name Xmucane may be derived from x- (feminine marker, diminutive) plus muqik (to bury, to cover, plant in the ground), thus giving a possible reading of "She Who Buries or She Who Plants," referring to the planting of a seed in the earth or a developing child in the womb." Similarly, in his early documentation of the *Popol Wuj*, Francisco Ximénez (1666–1729) notes that Indigenous priests called upon Xmucane and Xpiyacoc for inspiration, especially when matters involved midwifery or childbirth (Ximénez 1929–31, I.i.6). Moving geographically to the Yucatan Peninsula, Guarcax González, et al. (2002, 137) note that Ixchel is the equivalent of Ixmukane in Yucatec Maya: "Pa yucateco ch'ab'al ja ri' rub'i' ri qati't, pa k'iche' ch'ab'al Ixmukane' nb'ix chi re" (In the Yucatec Maya language that is the name of our grandmother, in the K'iche' language she is called Ixmukane). Given the thematic similarities between Ixmukane and Ixchel, Christenson (2007) draws similar conclusions, explaining that "the grandmother goddess Xmucane was apparently the Quiché equivalent of Ixchel, associated with the powers of creation (pp. 60–62; line 35), divination (pp. 79–82; lines 569–599), midwifery (p. 62; lines 32, 38), medicine (p. 99; lines 1112–1119), childbirth (p. 113; lines 1736–1742), and now the leaking water jug" (140). Christenson (2007, 140) observes

that the ancient Mayas of this region “worshipped an aged female deity named Ixchel (Goddess O of the codices), who is often depicted with a jug from which she pours out water in the form of rain. Ixchel was also a patroness of medicine, fertility, childbirth, midwifery, and the art of divination.” The juxtaposition of Ixchel and Ixmukane in Gabriel Xiquín’s poem brings the female goddesses of creation and childbearing into a Pan-Maya dialogue, connecting the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico and the K’iche’ regions of Guatemala.

Continuing with themes of fertility in the poem, Ixq’anil and Ixkakaw are goddesses who Ixkik’ invokes to collect a netful of maize for Ixmukane (Multepal Project; Tedlock 1996, 264–65). Christenson (2007, 123) connects Ixq’anil’s name to the 260-day *Cholq’ij* calendar, and Sam Colop (2008, 79) affirms that Ixq’anil and Ixkakaw are female deities who care for the planting of the corn. Colop (2008, 79) further explains that Ixq’anil is associated with maturity, in reference to the corn that is ready to be harvested, and Ixkakaw directly invokes cacao, which serves as currency and an offering in religious ceremonies. Returning our attention to Calixta Gabriel Xiquín’s poem “B’eleje’ B’atz,” through the references to Ixmukane, Ixkakaw, Ixchel, and Ixq’anil, the poetic voice appeals to culturally significant references deriving from religious beliefs and female deities that are not specific to K’iche’, or Kaqchikel, spirituality. Rather, Mayas across Mesoamerica deem them sacred. In this way, the pan-Maya references to foundational Maya female deities in Gabriel Xiquín’s poem connect Kaqchikels to other Mayas throughout the region; they gender the poem in terms of Maya spirituality more broadly, instead of specifically focusing on what is Kaqchikel. Working through the cardinal points, the speaker of Gabriel Xiquín’s poetry looks beyond Kaqchikel territories and traditions to establish trans-Indigenous connections with female Indigenous icons not just in Maya regions of Abiayala, but also in Turtle Island.

TRANS-INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN ABIAYALA AND TURTLE ISLAND

Scholars in Native American and Indigenous Studies, including Calixta Gabriel Xiquín, increasingly have advocated for analyses that bring different literatures, cultures, and sociopolitical contexts into dialogue. In Gabriel Xiquín’s epigraph to this essay, for example, she con-

nects the struggles of Mayas to other Indigenous peoples in Abiyala. She explains that Mayas have not been defeated, but have fought back as they approached the fulfilling of the *katunes* with *Oxlajuj B'aqtun*, the closing of an era that has been difficult for Indigenous communities across Abiyala. Such comparative approaches prioritize the development of methodologies that recognize similar Indigenous experiences with colonial violence and the increased connectivity of cultures, texts, and peoples across the globe. Chadwick Allen (2012, xvii), for instance, has argued for “focused juxtapositions of distinct Indigenous texts, performances, and contexts.” He proposes a “trans-Indigenous” methodology “to acknowledge the mobility and multiple interactions of Indigenous peoples, cultures, histories, and texts” (Allen 2012, xiv). By inviting distinct fields of study into conversation, he pushes for taking global Indigenous studies a step further through the use of the prefix “trans-” to underscore the productively complex relationships and tensions when Indigenous literatures are considered alongside cultural production from other Indigenous traditions.⁸

In Gabriel Xiquín’s analysis of the role of Indigenous women in Kaqchikel Maya spirituality, she turns to studies by Indigenous women from other regions of Abiyala, an expression that the poet and *ajq’ij* defines in a footnote: “Nombre original del continente, antes de la invasión española, que comprende desde Alaska hasta la Tierra del Fuego. La denominación Abya Yala se deriva de voces Kunas de Panamá” (Original name of the continent, before the Spanish invasion, which includes from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. The name Abya Yala is derived from Kuna voices from Panama) (Gabriel Xiquín 2008, 39). In addition to Gabriel Xiquín’s use of the Guna (Kuna) expression from the epigraph of this essay, she deploys the expression “Abya Yala” throughout *La cosmovisión*. This discursively makes explicit reference to the Americas in their totality, as she draws from the knowledge and experiences of Indigenous women from other parts of the hemisphere. Referencing Aída Hernández Castillo’s work on Indigenous women in Mexico, Gabriel Xiquín (2008, 31) writes, “La mujer indígena no tiene una reivindicación propia como mujer, porque no estamos separados del pueblo. Nuestro pueblo indígena está explotado y discriminado y junto con él tenemos esa misma discriminación” (Indigenous women do not have their own claim as a woman, because we are not separated from the people. Our Indigenous people are exploited and discriminated against

and together with them we have that same discrimination). Highlighting shared experiences of oppression, Gabriel Xiquín then connects the situation of Guatemalan Maya women to Indigenous women in Bolivia, another country where the majority of the population is Indigenous. She argues that in both countries “el sistema patriarcal está impregnado de racismo y explotación, como continuidad del colonialismo, contra las mujeres indígenas, quienes sufren profundamente, a pesar de los instrumentos legales que deberían operarse oficialmente para contrarrestar la violencia” (the patriarchal system is impregnated with racism and exploitation, as a continuity of colonialism, against Indigenous women, who suffer deeply, despite the legal instruments that should be officially operated to counteract violence) (Gabriel Xiquín 2008, 31). Providing another example from the Andes, Gabriel Xiquín turns her attention to *Mujeres indígenas del Ecuador* (1995), which was mentioned by the Organización Panamericana de la Salud (OPS): “De hecho, las mujeres indígenas señalan de forma reiterativa que antes de la invasión española, se consideraba que las mujeres tenían los mismos derechos que los hombres, y su carga de trabajo era igual que la de ellos” (In fact, Indigenous women repeatedly point out that before the Spanish invasion, women were considered to have the same rights as men, and their workload was the same as men’s) (Gabriel Xiquín 2008, 40). The Kaqchikel poet and ajq’ij underscores the similar experiences of marginalization that Maya and Indigenous women from other parts of Abiyala face. The systemic oppression against Maya women is not unique to Guatemala.

In this, Gabriel Xiquín joins other scholars and intellectuals of Native American or Indigenous descent who have observed shared experiences of colonial legacies of exploitation and racism among their peoples. Jodi A. Byrd (2011, xxi), a citizen of the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma, for example, uses the term “transit” to note the similarities and shared experiences of colonial violence and genocide between different Indigenous groups. Similarly, Daniel Heath Justice (2011, 344), a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, signals an emerging dialogue among Indigenous writers from across the globe:

Whether in Turtle Island, Kanata/Canada, Samiland, Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, the United States, or other homelands, territories, and nation-states, scholars of Indigenous literatures are

reaching out, learning about themselves and one another, looking for points of connection that reflect and respect both specificity and shared concern, localized contexts and broader concerns, rooted perspectives and global viewpoints.

His multiperspectivist approach evidences an awareness of the shared experiences of struggle and oppression that are common across multiple groups of Native peoples in far-reaching geographic locations. While Justice (2011, 337) specifically promotes the exchange of ideas between Native literature scholars and authors in the “Land of Eh” (Canada) and the United States, Indigenous activists from Abiyala like Calixta Gabriel Xiquín also contribute to such dialogues. Gabriel Xiquín has positioned herself at the crux of debates on Indigenous literatures and social activism, recognizing the intersectionality and connections between her experiences as a Guatemalan Maya woman and those of Native women from other parts of the hemisphere with pronounced colonial histories of physical and symbolic violence.

Beyond Mexico, Bolivia, and Ecuador in Abiyala, Gabriel Xiquín also finds commonalities with Native women from Turtle Island in *La cosmovisión*. In the poem “B’eleje’ B’atz’ (Día de las mujeres en el calendario maya),” Calixta Gabriel Xiquín (2008) invokes “[l]a búfalo blanco del Norte” (the white buffalo of the North), which calls to mind the Sioux legend of the White Buffalo Calf Woman. The speaker of the poem introduces this reference as an example of the “abuelas de otras culturas” (grandmothers from other cultures), uniting Sioux and Maya women—Ixmukane, Ixkakaw, Ixchel, and Ixq’anil—as “abuelas,” or grandmothers. In this, the poetic voice not only connects the two geographically distant Indigenous groups, but they also underscore their inherently gendered connection as “abuelas.” As such, it is not surprising that the Sioux legend features a female figure of religious importance, building on the poetic voice’s emphasis on the role of women in foundational Indigenous cosmovisions and traditions.

The Legend of the White Buffalo Calf Woman has circulated orally among the Sioux, and in the context of the twenty-first century, the story is widely available online. Chief Arvol Looking Horse (2005, 37–43), the Nineteenth Generation Keeper of the Sacred White Buffalo Calf Pipe of the Sioux Nation, shares the story in *White Buffalo Teachings from Chief Arvol Looking Horse*, a collection that features the teachings that the

Sioux received from the White Buffalo Calf Woman. Chief Arvol Looking Horse also disseminates the story on websites and online YouTube videos (Jaguar Bird 2017), and another Sioux spiritual leader, Joseph Chasing Horse, has shared the legend online. The story also appears in the published words of Black Elk in *Black Elk Speaks* (1932), which was co-published by Nicholas Black Elk and poet John G. Neihardt (whom Black Elk later named Flaming Rainbow).⁹ Here, I reference the opening pages to *Black Elk Speaks*, which feature a synopsis of the legend:

A very long time ago, they say, two scouts were out looking for bison; and when they came to the top of a hill and looked north, they saw something coming a long way off, and when it came closer they cried out, "It is a woman" and it was. Then one of the scouts, being foolish, had bad thoughts and spoke them, but the other said: "that is a sacred woman; throw all bad thoughts away." When she came still closer, they saw that she wore a fine white buckskin dress, that her hair was very long and that she was young and very beautiful. And she knew their thoughts and said in a voice that was like singing: "You do not know me, but if you want to do as you think, you may come." And the foolish one went; but just as he stood before her, there was a white cloud that came and covered them. And the beautiful woman came out of the cloud, and when it blew away the foolish man was a skeleton covered with worms. (Neihardt 2000, 2–3)

After she punished the disrespectful scout, she told his deferential companion to return to his people and warn them that she was going to bring a sacred bundle to the chief, which Black Elk describes as "a pipe with a bison calf carved on one side to mean the earth that bears and feeds us, and with twelve eagle feathers hanging from the stem to mean the sky and the twelve moons, and these were tied with a grass that never breaks" (Neihardt 2000, 3). While the woman was with the nation's chief and people, she taught them special music, dances, and rituals (Chasing Horse par. 10; Smith 1970, 88; Looking Horse 2004; Looking Horse 2005, 37–43).¹⁰ The woman left singing and dancing, and "as the people watched her going, suddenly it was a white bison galloping away and snorting, and soon it was gone" (Neihardt 2000, 3). Her transformation into a buffalo earned her the name, Ptesan Wi, or Pte-san win-yan (which translates as "White Buffalo Calf Woman"), and

she is a messenger of Wakan Tanka, The Great Spirit (Looking Horse 2005, 37–8; Looking Horse 2004; Smith 1970, 87).¹¹ The woman/calf's prominent role in the foundation of their nation reinforces the sacred nature of buffalo for the Sioux. Although the inclusion of buffalo in Calixta Gabriel Xiquín's poem may at first glance seem out of place ecologically and geographically, it thematically builds on the gendered Indigenous references in the poem "B'eleje' B'atz," and *La cosmovisión* more broadly, to construct a decolonial, trans-Indigenous framework that incorporates ancestral female Indigenous icons from across Abiyala and Turtle Island.

The Legend of the Buffalo Calf Woman also directly connects to the references to the cardinal points in Calixta Gabriel Xiquín's poetry. Anthropologist Marla N. Powers (1980, 60) explains that the White Buffalo Calf Woman "turns into three different kinds of buffalo: red and yellow (red, north where woman comes from; yellow, east-surprise), white (south, at the center), and black (west); then she disappears over the hill (sunset). This represents the path of the Sun, which at midday is directly over the fireplace (in the center) representing creation." Gary Null (1998, v) offers a similar account of the legend, noting that as the woman taught the people about the pipe ceremony, she made the "offerings . . . to the four directions while drums played and sacred songs sung." Then, as she was leaving, "she walked off into the West, she stopped, kneeled to the Earth, and rolled over four times. She turned into a buffalo, changing color with each turn. First a black one, then brown, red, and finally, a white female buffalo calf." Perhaps due to the natural fluidity and dynamism in storytelling, there is a discrepancy in terms of the number of color transformations that the Buffalo Woman makes in Powers and Null's versions of the legend.¹² In each account, however, the colors that the Buffalo Woman turns into directly correspond to the four cardinal points in Sioux cosmology. In this, the Sioux beliefs are similar to Kaqchikel Maya understandings of the cardinal points invoked in Calixta Gabriel Xiquín's poem "Los diferentes momentos" since the symbolic colors for the cardinal directions are the same. Not only does Gabriel Xiquín explicitly invoke the cardinal points in the poem, and throughout *La cosmovisión*, but the reference to the Sioux White Buffalo Calf Woman implicitly draws attention to the cardinal points, given their role in the foundational account.

The fulfillment of the prophesy announcing the Buffalo Woman's return further connects her to the four cardinal points. As the Buffalo

Woman left, she announced that she would come back at some point “to purify the world” and “bring back harmony . . . and balance, spiritually,” and she told the people that a sign of her return would be the birth of a white buffalo calf (Chasing Horse 1995, par. 14). Many believe that this momentous event occurred on August 20, 1994, when “a white buffalo calf was born on the farm of Dave and Val Heider in Jamesville, Wisconsin” (Patent 2006, 65). The birth of white buffalos is rare, but this was particularly exceptional: “[a]s prophesied, it changed color several times after birth, going from white to black, to red, to yellow, then again to white. Each color represents one of the four directions” (Null 1998, v). The four cardinal points not only marked the Buffalo Woman’s initial interactions with the Lakota Sioux peoples following her encounter with the two scouts, but the coloring of the 1994 white buffalo calf’s coat also had sacred connections to the cardinal points. The speaker’s invocation of “la búfalo blanco del Norte,” then, not only connects Calixta Gabriel Xiquín’s poetry to other foundational Indigenous women across the Americas. The reference also weaves an implicit thread through the poem concerning the centrality of the cardinal points for trans-Indigenous spiritual beliefs across temporalities, invoking the past, present, and future.

As the poems “B’eleje’ B’atz” and “Los diferentes momentos” call upon the four cardinal points and female Indigenous references from Abiyala and Turtle Island, Gabriel Xiquín reworks Kaqchikel spiritual traditions to invoke not just Pan-Maya elders and sacred beings, like Ixmukane, Ixkakaw, Ixchel, and Ixq’anil, but also foundational Indigenous women from other regions of the Americas, such as the Sioux White Buffalo Calf Woman. In this process, the poet and *ajq’ij* renegotiates the Indigenous ancestors that the *kotz’i’j*, or *xukulem*, engages in the *ch’owen*, as she deterritorializes her Kaqchikel Maya spirituality to engage in trans-Indigenous, decolonial dialogues across the Americas. These dialogues are necessarily trans-hemispheric and span across geopolitical borders, uniting Native women in a pan-Indigenous call to action as “Grandmothers.”

CONCLUSION

More broadly, the speaker of Calixta Gabriel Xiquín’s poetry becomes another voice that contributes to the storytelling of the White Buffalo Calf Woman. As we have seen, there are numerous iterations of the

White Buffalo Calf Woman. For many orally preserved foundational accounts, it is typical for the tellings and retellings of these stories to be fluid and dynamic, subject to change from one performance to the next. Leslie Marmon Silko ([1981] 2012) explains that stories, and storytelling, are a crucial component of Indigenous cultures. She writes, “Old stories and new stories are essential: They tell us who we are, and they enable us to survive. We thank all the ancestors, and we thank all those people who keep on telling stories generation after generation, because if you don’t have stories, you don’t have anything” (Silko [1981] 2012, xxvi). As Calixta Gabriel Xiquín’s poem reveals, the storytellers keeping these traditions alive, passing the stories down to future generations, do not necessarily pertain to the communities from which the stories originate. In the context of the twenty-first century and heightened connectivity, it is possible for a Kaqchikel poet and *ajq’ij* like Gabriel Xiquín to draw from Sioux and Pan-Maya sacred references, as she launches a trans-Indigenous decolonial poetic project at the service of revindicating female Indigenous icons across the hemisphere.

Authors like Calixta Gabriel Xiquín demonstrate that Indigenous peoples are not at odds with modernity and globalization. As Juan Guillermo Sánchez Martínez notes, contemporary Indigenous authors and artists are destabilizing these old, familiar stereotypes associated with Indigeneity, which historically have relegated Indigenous peoples and their creative production to an ancient, often oral, past. He writes, “Como era de esperarse, los coordenadas que señalan estos textos están desbaratando los puntos cardinales de la mirada imperial, desnudando la ingenuidad de los estereotipos coloniales que asociaban la creación indígena a lo autóctono, local, tradicional, aislado, a lo exclusivamente oral. ¿Cuáles son las coordenadas hoy? ¿Cuáles los caminos en estos tiempos en que antiguas rutas de intercambio se están recobrando y re-creando?” (As expected, the coordinates indicated by these texts are disrupting the cardinal points of the imperial gaze, exposing the naivety of colonial stereotypes that associated Indigenous creation with the autochthonous, local, traditional, isolated, exclusively oral. What are the coordinates today? What are the paths in these times when ancient routes of exchange are being recovered and re-created?) (Sánchez Martínez 2016, 4). As Sánchez suggests, it is up to us to look at the cardinal points and pay attention to the myriad ways that Indigenous authors and artists negotiate their past to rearticulate their present-day subjectivities across

geopolitical borders, as they bring distinct Indigenous communities and Native activist initiatives into dialogue.

Though there are sociohistorical differences, the Guatemalan Mayas and the Sioux peoples in the United States share a similar colonial legacy of State-sponsored symbolic and physical violence against their respective Indigenous communities. In Guatemala, Mayas were the victims of torture and massacres during the armed conflict; similarly, the Sioux were victims of the Battle of Wounded Knee in the present-day state of South Dakota on December 29, 1890. Moreover, both have been subjects of lasting State-led efforts to dismantle them as entities through legislative and non-legislative action. Though the historical particularities are distinct, the Sioux peoples and Mayas like Calixta Gabriel Xiquín must grapple with similar experiences with oppressive policies and physical violence from their respective governments. In this, the Kaqchikel poet's emphasis on the gendered dimensions of these historical legacies speaks to the fundamental role of women in negotiating the future of their respective Indigenous communities. In her analysis of Gabriel Xiquín's poetry, Alicia Ivonne Estrada (2011, 143) notes that poetry "not only provide[s] an artistic and cultural space of struggle but it is also a mechanism used to (re)articulate the history of a people, to simultaneously record the injustices committed against them." Though Gabriel Xiquín (2008, 36) recognizes that the past was a time that was difficult for Indigenous peoples of Abiyala, as we have seen in the epigraph to this essay, the emphasis on women in the Kaqchikel poet's work highlights the unique potential of women in the future to negotiate these histories of marginalization with their respective decolonial projects of the present. As Leslie Marmon Silko reminds us, "One of the things . . . that could happen in the future is . . . this fierce anger that all of us women are feeling. Push us a little bit further and they just haven't seen trouble yet. . . . We just don't want to think about how mad we are, how really angry, and how, when you finally have nothing to lose, what you'll do. By God, they're about to find out" (Pett 2000, 111–12). In both Guatemala and the Plains regions of the United States, Indigenous peoples continue to face institutionalized forms of oppression and inequality, and it remains to be seen how Calixta Gabriel Xiquín, Leslie Marmon Silko, and other Indigenous women activists across Abiyala and Turtle Island will respond in the future.

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NOTES

1. There is variability in the orthography of the expression, “Abya yala” or “Abiayala.” Though “Abya yala” is prevalent, in this essay I use “Abiayala” to respect Guna linguistic sovereignty. As Indigenous studies scholar Hannah Burdette (2019, xi) explains, “Abiayala” is the spelling that the Guna General Congress voted on and adapted in 2010 in line with their local language standardization efforts. In 2017, the Abiayala Working Group of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) adopted this spelling, at the suggestion of Guna scholar Sue Hagland. Maya K’iche’ Emil Keme (2018, 62) also notes the orthographic variability of this term; he uses “Abiayala,” which is the “spelling used and suggested by the Dule (Guna) historian Aiban Wagua in his book *Así lo vi y así me lo contaron* (Thus I saw it and thus they told me).” Keme (2018, 42) situates the term according to Guna cosmogony, noting that it is “the name that the Guna use to refer to what for others is the American continent as a whole.” Throughout this essay, all translations from Spanish into English, and from Kaqchikel Maya into English, are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

2. Given the trans-hemispheric approach to this essay, it is worth noting that this pseudonym includes references to two Indigenous historical figures from across the Americas—Quichua Domitila Barrios de Chungara and the Maya hero Canek—that mark a continental resistance and solidarity (Chacón 2018, 97, 187).

3. According to Judith M. Maxwell and Ajpub’ Pablo García Ixmata (2008, 26), “Cholq’ij is the Kaqchikel word for the 260-day ritual calendar. It is cognate with Yucatec Maya tzolk’in.”

4. Kaqchikel linguist Filiberto Patal Majzul (2007, 160) defines “ch’owen” as a “Conversación. Plática (importante)” ‘Conversation. Important Talk.’ Ch’owen, then, is not by definition transnational, or trans-Indigenous. In Kaqchikel, it refers to dialogue or conversation more generally.

5. As Maxwell and García Ixmata (2008, 29) note, Kaqchikel Cholchi’ published *Maya nimab’äl K’u’x pa kaqchikel tinamüt*, a volume that lists the names of prominent ajq’ija’ (daykeepers) and summarizes “the understandings of 31 daykeepers with regard to the days and their attendant ceremonies.” In the section that lists the names of ajq’ija’, titled “Kib’i ri winaqi’ ri xkiya’ kina’oj chupam re samaj re” (The Names of the People Who Do this Work [The Names of the People who Give their Ideas in this Work]), the poet and ajq’ij is listed as “Calixta Gabriel Sirin” (Guarcax et al. 2002, 122).

6. According to Gaspar Pedro González (2006, 67), the term Ajaw is a deity of the Tzolq’in calendar, which means “Master, Lord, Owner.” He affirms that it is equivalent to God in Western culture.

7. Other authors have also discussed weaving as a significant form of recorded knowledge in Maya cultural production: Dulfano 2015, González 1997, and Boone and Mignolo 1994.

8. Steven Salaita (2016, ix–x) advocates for a similar approach; he uses the term “inter/nationalism” to describe the similarities in decolonial thought processes and methodologies in his comparative study on Native American and Palestinian social activism.

9. I would be remiss if I did not note that the colonial gaze inflects texts told to outsiders, which read differently than texts or oral performances that are practiced and circulated among Indigenous communities.

10. As Arvol Looking Horse (2004; 2005, 39–42) details, Pte-san win-yan gifted the Lakota Sioux with the Seven Sacred Rites that sustain their People today: the I-ni-pi (Purification Ceremony), the Wi-wanyang wa-c'i-pi (Sun Dance Ceremony), the Han-ble-c'i-ya (Vision Quest Ceremony), the Hun-ka ka-g'a (Making of a relative, or adoption ceremony), the Ta-pa kah'-g'o-ya (Throwing of the sacred ball), the Wi-yan Is'na ti (Womanhood Ceremony), and the Na-g'i glu-ha (Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony).

11. The narrative details in this account are consistent across other versions of the legend, such as the YouTube video recording and print publications by Arvol Looking Horse, the Nineteenth Generation Keeper of the Sacred White Buffalo Calf Pipe (Jaguar Bird), and Joseph Chasing Horse's account available online.

12. For more information about the variability and dynamism in Maya orality, storytelling, and performance, see Burns 1983, Miller 2020, and Worley 2013.

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Lands, Bodies, and the Meaning(s) of Consent in Recent Writing by Indigenous Women and Two-Spirit Authors

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Abstract: This article examines the concept of consent and its uses in global contexts such as the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, and in local contexts specific to contemporary Canada. It examines how consent has often been wielded to serve settler interests to the detriment of Indigenous people, particularly concerning resource extraction and land theft. It then considers some of the ways discourses of consent related to environmental and sexual violence overlap in Indigenous writing. I argue that taking a closer look at fiction, nonfiction, and poetry by Indigenous Women and Two-Spirit authors Helen Knott, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and Tunchai (T'áńcháy) Redvers reveals useful ways to challenge settler ideas of consent premised on capitalist accumulation. In turn, these writers' works present reformulations of consent that might better protect Indigenous lives and lands through strengthening kinship and governance, and by entrenching resistance to external encroachment when necessary.

Keywords: consent; extraction; resource industries; UNDRIP; sexual violence; environmental justice; sovereignty; literature

INTRODUCTION

This article examines the concept and significance of consent for understanding relations among Indigenous peoples, settler colonists, and land in twenty-first century Canada. Over the past decade, discourses of consent have come to circulate widely in public conversation, academia, and the media when it comes to the subject of navigating sexual relations; but the vocabulary of consent as something freely offered and attained in order to carry out an agreed-upon action has also risen to prominence in global discussions of Indigenous rights. In light of oppo-

sition to the development of large-scale industrial projects across Turtle Island that range from oil and gas pipelines to hydroelectric dams to mining operations, it is worth taking a closer look at how the language of consent is used (and by whom), the terms with which it is sometimes conflated, and how conceptualizations of consent are developed within Indigenous knowledge frameworks.

Insights into the development of specifically Indigenous understandings of consent might offer helpful alternatives to extractive models that view consent primarily as a route to achieving capitalist-accumulative ends. Indeed, scholars have called for more analysis of the ways that land encroachment and the exploitation of natural resources without Indigenous consent works in tandem with the violence that is committed against Indigenous bodies, and the bodies of Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, and non-binary individuals in-particular.¹ I argue that by looking at recent poetry, creative nonfiction, and fiction by women and Two-Spirit writers from different parts of Indigenous North America, a multilayered understanding of consent emerges that connects bodies to earth, and refuses the coercion of either.

In particular, the writings of Helen Knott, Tunchai (T'ánchez) Redvers, and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson help illuminate the overlapping ways that settler colonialism and patriarchal structures have harmed (and continue to harm) Indigenous lands, waters, and bodies, especially the bodies of women, girls, and LGBTQ2S+ people. My discussion of some of their works builds on research by scholars such as Mishuana Goeman, who has shown how colonialism has historically relied not just on conquering Indigenous lands by claiming new ownership, but also on “the conquest of bodies, particularly women’s bodies through sexual violence” and restructuring gendered relationships.² The act of reclaiming and reconstructing literary visions of sexual autonomy and agency for Indigenous women and LGBTQ2S+ peoples, then, is thus also intimately connected to the assertion of Indigenous sovereignty and care of bodies of water and land at other scales. These authors simultaneously endorse ideas of consent in interpersonal and human-environment relations as a way of rejecting inter- and intra-communal / lateral violence, while also maintaining a healthy suspicion of how the settler state wields manufactured consent to further dispossess Indigenous people from their lands. In Simpson’s case, we also see a possible model for how Indigenous artists might

shrewdly redeploy settler presumptions about consent to aid Indigenous resurgence. In so doing, what Audra Simpson has called the “ruse of consent” might occasionally be caught out and called to account, thereby furthering the continuation of Indigenous life on Indigenous lands.³ To begin, I want to offer three different “snapshots” concerning Indigenous peoples and consent related to land, each of which operates at a different scale, starting with the international level, then moving to a national/provincial context, and finally to a local register.

SNAPSHOT 1: UNDRIP’S UNCERTAIN IMPLEMENTATION

One of the most often-cited articulations of Indigenous consent is outlined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), where Article 32.2 outlines expectations relating to resource projects:

States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources.⁴

The concept of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) emerged out of the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention of 1989, negotiated under the auspices of the International Labour Organization. It was later incorporated into the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007.⁵ Notably, Canada was one of four nations to vote against UNDRIP’s adoption at the UN in 2007, likely because the federal government at the time realized that as a resource-wealthy settler state, Canada’s endorsement of the Declaration might have significant material costs if fully implemented. In 2015, Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission included FPIC in its Calls to Action, specifically calling upon the Canadian corporate sector to adopt UNDRIP as a reconciliation framework and to apply its principles, norms, and standards to corporate policy and operational activities involving Indigenous peoples and their lands and resources before proceeding with economic development projects.⁶ Finally, after formally endorsing UNDRIP in 2016 but doing little to implement it,

the Canadian federal government passed Bill C-15 in 2021 to formally align federal laws with UNDRIP. The full ramifications of this decision continue to be debated, especially concerning whether its implementation means that Indigenous peoples have veto power over resource development projects. The federal government has taken the position that implementation of UNDRIP does not necessarily signal Indigenous veto power, with the Minister of Justice viewing it rather as a “process” that depends on contextual circumstances.⁷

While the full significance of UNDRIP’s implementation remains to be worked out, the concept of “free, prior, and informed consent” is now a key phrase in negotiations among governments, corporate interests, and sovereign Indigenous nations when it comes to projects like dams, pipelines, and roadways. Seen by some Indigenous leaders as a powerful articulation of Indigenous rights with the potential to change the dynamics of negotiations among Indigenous nations, settler governments, and corporate institutions (for instance, see the perspectives of former AFN Chief Perry Bellegarde and NDP MP Romeo Saganash), the concept of consent is also viewed with skepticism by other Indigenous thinkers, some of whom see it as little more than the latest settler-colonial maneuver to secure the cession of Indigenous lands.

Part of the challenge in interpreting FPIC within UNDRIP is rooted in the fact that the meaning of consent became murkier as the document went through the revision process on its way to final adoption. In the 1994 draft of Article 32, states were required to “obtain” the free and informed consent of the Indigenous peoples concerned before approving any project affecting their lands, territories, and other resources; however, in the final version—a version pushed for by several states’ representatives—states are required to “consult and cooperate” with Indigenous peoples to obtain their consent.⁸ The language that was finally adopted was the product of a difficult compromise among states, and while it does not say that mere “seeking” of consent is sufficient, neither does it offer unambiguous clarity about what consultation in order to obtain consent really means in practice.⁹ As I will discuss further on, there is thus ample reason for suspicion on the part of Indigenous peoples about the current, flexible “spectrum of consent” practiced in Canada given the ways in which what might initially seem like the promise of greater self-determination, autonomy and control over lands and waters can devolve into tedious consultative processes that little benefit communities on the ground.¹⁰

SNAPSHOT 2: PIPELINE POLITICS

The second snapshot illustrates the realities of how consent is often discussed in public relations discourse, especially when that discourse is directed towards settler audiences. In a televised address given amidst a sharp economic downturn in Alberta in 2016, then-Premier Rachel Notley sought to reassure citizens anxious about the province's petroleum industry: "I can promise you this," Notley declared, "[W]e must get to 'yes' on a pipeline."¹¹ Subsequently the Canadian federal government purchased and approved the Trans-Mountain Expansion (TMX) project with the goal of building a new link to the Pacific coast for Alberta's fossil fuel output, despite persistent opposition from environmental groups and Indigenous land defenders standing in the pipeline's path. The rhetoric used by both federal and provincial levels of government surrounding TMX suggests a scenario wherein the eventual completion of the pipeline is never fundamentally doubted, and where opposition is gradually managed out of existence.¹²

This kind of approach is deployed in other resource extraction contexts as well, such as in Northern British Columbia where the hereditary chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en Nation have been opposing construction of the Coastal Gas Link pipeline. The appointed spokesperson of the Unist'ot'en Chiefs, Freda Huson, frames the matter this way: "Their idea of consent is that they send you a letter and give you 30 days to respond and if you don't respond then they consider that consent."¹³ In such a model, a sense of settler urgency threatens to trump more deliberative processes, while also presuming that settler time is the only time that matters; as Haudenosaunee scholar Audra Simpson observes, Indigenous refusal is therefore jarring to lawmakers because it calls into question the legitimacy of a liberal state whose very existence is born of "cruel and dispossessive time," despite the state's insistence that it has moved beyond past discrimination and expects Indigenous people to do so as well.¹⁴

SNAPSHOT 3: MANAGING INDIGENOUS

OBJECTION AT THE GRADE SCHOOL LEVEL

My third "snapshot" occurs at a more local level. While in scalar terms it may seem incommensurate with the previous two illustrations, I suggest it is significant for showing how narratives about overcoming Indigenous objection to colonial incursion can be perpetuated by default and

embedded in the training of youth. In June 2020 a controversy erupted when a Hamilton, Ontario, Catholic school teacher assigned a Grade 7 history project wherein students were required to imagine themselves as early French colonists who had “just discovered North America.”¹⁵ The students were then tasked with writing a speech designed to overcome Indigenous opposition to the colonists staying on their land. The instructions noted that the more convincing the speaker was in achieving their goal, the better their grade would be. A copy of the assignment reiterates the key steps to effective speech writing, beginning with “Know your audience.”¹⁶ Yet in this case, presumptions about what such knowledge entails seem startlingly incomplete: not only did the assignment parameters offer little room for the possibility of Indigenous welcome, but they also ignored the possibility that Indigenous people might have different ideas about what it means to share land—namely, seeing treaties and other agreements as about *relationship*, rather than viewing them primarily as contracts or documents of expediency.¹⁷ The assignment thus encouraged development of politically persuasive skills divorced from a true understanding of the addressees or their values. It implied that anything other than securing consent in a manner favorable to the colonizer was unlikely to be the correct answer.

In the latter two cases I’ve cited, the settler state’s approach to consent might reflect what Thomas King had in mind upon writing his short aphoristic poem “Directive for Entrenching Indigenous Rights.” King’s text offers just two lines of pointed instruction on what’s necessary to entrench Indigenous Rights: “Soft ground. / A shovel.”¹⁸ If entrenchment is a way to bury something one would rather not confront, then the digging of a pipeline may be read by settlers as an outwardly reassuring sign that consent has been secured. Once opposition has been successfully buried beneath rhetorical shovels-full of engagement, accommodation, and consultation, any anxieties about protests to the contrary can be laid to rest. This presumption of consent as *fait accompli* may be the ‘polite,’ latter-day Canadian version of “get[ting] rid of the Indian problem,” yet King’s imagery in the poem also recalls earlier attempts to bury Indigenous opposition to colonization, often through brutal means.¹⁹ Especially in the wake of widespread (and still emerging) evidence of what are likely to be many thousands of unmarked graves of Indigenous children at residential schools across the country, it becomes ever more difficult for settler society to deny the deadly costs of entrenchment and

the conspiracies of silence that surround them, even in this age of so-called reconciliation.

What the above examples suggest is that for consent to have any meaning, it must also involve the freedom to say no. In her writing and activist work, Dane-Za and Nehiyaw social worker and author Helen Knott suggests that another way to think about consent when it comes to resource projects is to connect the concept to ideas of bodily consent in Indigenous communities still dealing with the legacies of residential schools and other colonially-generated forms of trauma, including the tendency to view Indigenous lands as dispensable.²⁰ For Knott, the spheres of domestic violence, colonial violence, and environmental damage are not discrete but profoundly interlinked, affecting many aspects of daily experience. Her 2019 memoir, *In My Own Moccasins*, recounts personal experiences of violence and links them to the ongoing social and economic dynamics of the territory in which she lives—an area of intensive petroleum resource development near Fort St. John, BC, which is now also threatened by the construction of the Site C dam, a massive hydro project on the Peace River marketed as a clean energy producer needed to power future population growth, the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) sector, and electric vehicles.²¹ Knott recounts learning early in life that there are consequences for saying “no” to what whites want, and that these consequences have a long and durable history in her ancestral territories. In her Grade 8 social studies class, for example, she learns alongside her white friend Amanda about treaty-making processes and the Cree:

The textbook we were learning from said that a specific tribe of Cree was offered so many acres of land for each family. The Cree turned down the offer and were upset. The Cree demanded more land. For me, this was supposed to be a time where I could learn about my history too. It was as if I was reading about my great-great-grandfathers and grandmothers. I was excited. Then, to my utter and complete horror, I heard Amanda say angrily, ‘Greedy bastards. I wouldn’t have gave [sic] them any land.’²²

Knott recalls that her initial reaction in this moment was a feeling of intense rage, a desire “to pull out a few strands of [Amanda’s] blonde hair,” to “gouge the blue right out of her eyes,” and to “yell at the teacher and tell him there’s got to be more to the story.”²³ Instead, though, she

bottles her anger, becoming what she describes as “the other” in her class, the “wild Indian,” and the “Merciless Indian savage.” An incapacity to call out her friend’s racist sentiments in that youthful moment, within a larger context of cultural silencing and repressed anger, soon leads Knott down the road to self-harm. “This is the year I start drinking and smoking pot,” she notes, and this is followed not long after by an experience of being raped and left on the outskirts of town.²⁴ It takes many years before she can embrace the truth that her counsellor says to her: “No one, and I mean no one, has the right to harm you. You have the right to be safe from harm at all times.”²⁵

When dispossession of land is a story that gets reinforced instead of challenged, it can lead to a sense of powerlessness, and, in some cases, fosters increased vulnerability to physical harm. Eventually, Knott confronts and rewrites this story, and it is partly through the power of poetry that she finds the means to say *no* to colonial narratives of who deserves what, and why. This reclamation of agency begins at the level of personal, familial, and communal healing, but the rejection of disempowerment extends in Knott’s writing to encompass issues of environmental connection and sovereignty as well; this is because it is the land that holds the language, food, stories, and medicines that she and her child need to heal and reclaim their culture. By engaging in traditional harvesting, land claims might also be strengthened, thereby making Knott’s community more formidable negotiators when it comes to asserting Indigenous title and the right to their own land management.²⁶ Unfortunately, the number of places where traditional harvesting activities have been interrupted by private property and increased development of roadways and pipelines leads Knott’s Asu (grandmother) to wonder if the saskatoon berries they’ve just picked together are safe to eat.²⁷

Knott further points out how intensive industrial development imperils Indigenous women and girls in particular ways—for instance, by driving up housing costs which trap women in dangerous living situations, or by bringing an influx of men into work camps where substance abuse and toxic masculinity are often high.²⁸ She insists that a full understanding of the relationship between violence and extraction cannot be achieved without a gender-based analysis, for women and girls bear some of the highest stresses associated with overtaxed local services, sexual violence, and the curbing of access to lands where traditional foods and medicines are gathered. Knott’s analysis is

supported by research examining gendered experiences of work in other Western Canadian resource communities, wherein challenges that are already present for women in extractive industries are amplified for Indigenous women in industry and related communities.²⁹ This is not to say that there are no benefits for Indigenous people employed by industry, but rather that many Indigenous workers view their employment as a double-edged sword. It provides good income, the ability to provide for recreational opportunities for youth and funding for post-secondary education, but it can also erode a sense of community wherein the welfare of the whole takes precedence over individual gain. In some contexts, the demands of extractive industry also make it more difficult to achieve a life of health and balance within the individual, families, and the community as a whole—whether that is articulated in concepts such as the Ojibwe formulation of *mino-bimaadiziwin* or “The Good Life” that shapes ways of thinking, being, and living; the Haudenosaunee concept of *kanikonhri:io* or “The Good Mind”; the Cree understanding of *miyo-pimatisiwin*, or other culturally specific Indigenous understandings of life based on teachings about how to live well in a place for a long time.³⁰

REJECTING VIOLENCE WITHOUT AND WITHIN

In the face of such threats to well-being in their ancestral territory, writers like Knott, Simpson, and Redvers issue a dual challenge: first, they call on those who are knowledgeable about land protection to *also* address the connection between industrial megaprojects and increased susceptibility of Indigenous women and youth to violence; and second, they implore Indigenous communities not to accept violence as “just something that happens”—a phenomenon that these writers have experienced in their own communities in the wake of residential schools and a lack of protection by police. Only once this mentality and the cycles it feeds are confronted and broken, Knott argues, can girls and boys in her community “grow up to be strong Indigenous people who do not accept the role of violence in their lives.”³¹ Similarly, Simpson calls on her generation to encourage youth of all genders—but especially boys—to express their emotions in an appropriate way, for without this skill and its accompanying practice of empathy, the harms of patriarchy and the injustices of colonialism get perpetuated.³² Physical violence and consent

thus cannot be extricated from sovereignty or the dynamics of resource extraction: self-determination over one's own body is inseparable from what it means to have a truly self-determining nation.³³ When it comes to projects like dams and pipelines, Knott notes that racism isn't always overt; rather, it can look "like not being thought of. It looks like making people feel invisible within their territory and not hearing [them] when they're saying 'No,' whether that 'No' is over body or whether that 'No' is over land with projects like Site C."³⁴

I would suggest that the idea of "making people feel invisible within their territory" is part of a longstanding colonial strategy for dealing with what Elizabeth Povinelli has termed the "governance of the prior."³⁵ The prior existence (and hence priority in law) of Indigenous modes of sovereignty and governance presents settler colonialism with a challenge to be overcome lest the legitimacy of the settler's claim be undermined. This challenge has undoubtedly been met with strategies of outright physical violence, but it is also handled more subtly via the construction of narratives that seek to accommodate and eliminate Indigenous presence at the same time. For instance, settler-colonial rhetoric might resign the prior to the past tense, or appeal to a doctrine of *terra nullius* that either folds Indigenous people into natural landscape or excises them outright, or otherwise annul the priority of the prior via treaty, land encroachment, or legislation like the Indian Act. But perhaps the tactic that best aligns with my argument here is that of operationalizing consent in such a way that Indigenous people can be said to agree to their own subjugation under the guise of asserting agency via consultation. Such a tactic is deployed even as the colonist "knows perfectly well that no jargon is a substitute for reality," to quote Fanon.³⁶ Further, because the prior has descendants, the settler state must figure out ever new means of handling these individuals and what they represent. Thus the state can be described as simultaneously possessed by the need for Indigenous descendants to periodically shore up the modern western form of sovereignty (for instance, witness the celebration of Indigenous mascots, logos, or artworks to boost nationalist identity), and also by the need to delegitimize the sovereignty claims of those descendants at the same time.

This kind of rhetorical doublespeak also filters down into corporate rhetoric used to push industrial megaprojects, as evidenced by some of TC Energy's promotional materials associated with the Coastal

Gaslink that is proposed to run through Wet'suwet'en territory in British Columbia. The company's promotional statement of guiding principles on Indigenous Relations states that "we understand that our business activities have the potential to affect these groups in tangible ways," but also emphasizes that it "engages early with potentially affected Indigenous groups to understand their interests, identify opportunities, respond to their concerns and facilitate participation on our projects."³⁷ The "tangibility" of a megaproject is left deliberately vague, while the second half of the statement outlines an indeterminate series of actions taken by the company designed to anticipate, deflect, and redirect any potential opposition. Meanwhile, the company's Indigenous Relations Commitment Statement explains that its policies and practices "respect the spirit and intent of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples" while also noting that the company "works collaboratively with Indigenous Groups . . . to achieve regulatory certainty and maintain access to land" using a "pragmatic approach."³⁸ There is some notable slippage in the language about achieving regulatory certainty and maintaining access to land, however, since the statement fails to clarify the subject that accompanies these verbs: does "maintain[ing] access to land" suggest access in lieu of real control over land for Indigenous peoples, or is it a corporate goal for TC Energy, or both? Does a "pragmatic approach" encourage the dilution of consent into consultation to achieve the kind of certainty desired by governments or shareholders?³⁹ And further, can one respect the spirit and intent of UNDRIP without upholding its tenets of "free, prior, and informed consent" in *practice*? What does "no" mean for lands and bodies when one side feels they must "get to yes"?

Part of what we have seen over the past several years is a growing sense of how saying "no," simply and directly, helps to expose not only the profound impatience that resides at the heart of settler extractivism, but also the artful language used by government and industry that masquerades as consent—for instance, words like "transparency," "consultation," "recognition," "partnership," "engagement," and "inclusion" (and there are likely others).⁴⁰ Indeed, some Indigenous scholars even question whether Indigenous 'consent' within the colonial context can ever elude the traps the liberal state has set, wherein the very institutions that gained power via force and violence now seek to capture Indigenous people within those institutions' own definitions of citizenship, gover-

nance, justice, and recognition.⁴¹ Such efforts on the part of the state systematically deny that settler colonialism remains an ongoing, acquisitive set of structures and processes, rather than a discrete event of the past.⁴² Further, extractivist timelines tend to be built around things like shareholder meeting schedules and election cycles, which in turns pushes the accelerated timelines and limited space for generating genuine consent according to the UNDRIP understanding. Legal scholar Dayna Scott notes how the negotiation and signing of private contractual agreements like impact-benefit agreements, resource revenue sharing deals, and early exploration agreements and MOUs have thus become common stand-ins for consent within neoliberal frameworks, despite the fact that they cannot be evidence of free, prior, and informed consent as it is understood in the UNDRIP.⁴³

In a bleak turn of events, an increasingly urgent sense of the global climate crisis and the need to reduce emissions is also leading to increased pressure on some Indigenous groups to draft agreements with mining companies seeking to extract rare minerals for clean tech, or hydrogen projects that process natural gas, or hydroelectric projects whose “clean energy” floods thousands of acres of ancestral territory. Indigenous people (or more accurately, Indigenous lands) are thus strategically positioned as key to climate solutions, yet such positioning is predicated on their environmental sacrifice, while generally ignoring how Indigenous systems of belief and conduct would likely have averted such a dire situation in the first place. It thus hardly seems fair that communities who have contributed least to climate breakdown should now be expected to shoulder a disproportionate burden for securing a green future. Presentist discourses of urgency around climate change and the confrontation of it using intellectual frameworks that Kyle Whyte groups under “crisis epistemology” can once more legitimize oppression of Indigenous peoples, and in turn invalidate or ignore their own ways of narrating history and understandings of “newness” in environmental phenomena.⁴⁴

In cases where there is internal disagreement in Indigenous communities about whether to proceed with resource projects, such divisions ought to be considered within a wider context, rather than simply taking the position that a lack of consensus means industry and government can pursue actions most favorable to their interests. For instance, Clifford Atleo calls for greater understanding of the fact that

Within the constraints of settler colonialism, environmental politics, and neoliberal capitalism, options for Indigenous communities are often tremendously limited. . . . If well-meaning Canadians truly seek environmental justice and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, they must better understand the socio-political economic realities faced by those communities as well as their rightful assertions for self-determination.⁴⁵

Such realities sometimes put Indigenous nations into positions that Jane Elliott describes as “suffering agency”—that is, with a capacity to act or choose, but amidst unsatisfactory alternatives.⁴⁶ Within the Canadian context, industry and government push Indigenous nations to make decisions, but the choices on offer tend to waver between poverty on the one hand and the permanent degradation or loss of a land base in exchange for short-term economic prosperity on the other. In such cases, the capacity for agency remains intact, but it does not necessarily lead to long-term empowerment.⁴⁷ Even so, Indigenous self-determination does not entail the obligation to make decisions merely on the basis of whether they might please or displease environmentalists or other settler-run organizations. Finally, instead of seeing the tension between band councils and hereditary governance structures as yet another excuse to write off Indigenous self-determination, or as an opportunity for settler capital to divide and conquer, Canadian governments and industry leaders could choose to operate in good faith by respecting traditional Indigenous political-economic governance, and thereby refusing to discredit Indigenous livelihoods and ways of knowing simply because it might be more economically expedient to deal with band councils and managers.⁴⁸

DISRUPTING COLONIAL LOGICS THROUGH CREATIVE INTERVENTION

In the midst of circumstances wherein Indigenous communities often find themselves contending with complex internal needs and external colonial pressures, how can Indigenous literature map a set of relationships attentive to building and maintaining healthy relationships? How can it challenge the abstraction of places and the objectification of bodies by colonial maneuvers that privilege dispossession, extraction,

and accumulation at the expense of deep relationality and responsibility? Indigenous literature demonstrates sophisticated knowledge of the games settlers play when it comes to consent, and also suggests some astute means of navigating these relationships. For instance, in Leanne Simpson's story "plight," a group of Nishnaabekwewag strategize how best to carry out late winter maple sap gathering on their traditional land, land which now also happens to be a predominantly middle-class Canadian settler neighborhood. The narrator explains that the population of this neighborhood "mostly votes NDP or Liberal in provincial and federal elections, and they feel relief when they do. They have perennials instead of grass. They get organic, local vegetables delivered to their doors twice weekly, *in addition* to going to the farmer's market on Saturday"⁴⁹ (5, *emph. in original*). This is a place where outwardly progressive environmental politics sit alongside a general obliviousness about the pragmatics of social class, and wherein reconciliation is often more about performing one's politics for other settlers than it is about engaging with actual Indigenous people. The Nishnaabekwewag know this and use it to their advantage, creating flyers that announce the sap-collecting in advance, and that pre-emptively thank the residents for their "*support in our urban sugar-making adventure*."⁵⁰ The narrator and her comrades thus adopt some of the very same rhetorical tools that have been employed by colonial authorities to carry out activities on Indigenous lands and use those tools to anticipate and deflect settler objection, casting it as unreasonable and mean-spirited. The narrator explains,

We've had several meetings about the forty-eight words on the flyer in order to get the proper balance of telling, not asking, while side-stepping suspicion. No one feels good about hiding the fact that we are Mississaugas and that this is us acting on our land, but no one wants to end up a dinner-party conversation either. I fought hard for the word 'adventure' because it is such a signifier with these people. It makes them part of it; they can be part of the solution without doing anything. . . . No need to call the cops or the city; it's sustainable. *Help the Indians and their plight*.⁵¹

Beneath the official rhetoric of the flyer lurks another, italicized rhetoric, one that perhaps tells the greater and more lingering truth about reconciliation. Although this exercise of treaty rights on settler land is

not something that should require consent, and the Mississauga characters pointedly do not *ask* for consent, they also recognize that whether or not their venture will succeed with a minimum of hassle depends on the settler belief that consent has been sought and secured. Settlers want to be involved (or to see themselves as being involved) in Indigenous resurgence, but only insofar as that involvement remains paternalistic and doesn't really make any material demands on them. This is thus a story that simultaneously exploits and undermines the idea that Indigenous people wait upon white recognition.

At the same time, the action of resurgence, even when that action is not disruptive to settler "business as usual," even when it is simply about Indigenous people living and carrying out their culture on their land, is not without some risk. After performing ceremony, the group in Simpson's story heads to their sugar bush, and the narrator takes out their drill to create a tap hole in the tree to insert a spile. The narrator's concluding words in the story are "I hope this doesn't hurt."⁵² This conclusion is deliberately ambiguous: it might refer to the tree and the narrator's hope that their technique is sound and will not harm the sugar maple or its surroundings; however, it might also remind the reader that settler notions of consent can be capricious, and that the narrator and their friends are not free from risks of harassment. Even when one has played the game well, the sense of having had to play it at all is exhausting.

For Dene and Métis writer Tunchai (T'ánc'háy) Redvers, holding onto the possibility of refusal to offer consent is crucial, for it constitutes a form of agency that links the individual body with the larger environment and sovereignty. Redvers's 2019 poetry collection *Fireweed* charts the speaker's movement from a place of feeling powerless, victimized, and misunderstood as a young Two-Spirit person, to a place of strength that derives from finding solace on the land and in relationship with northern species like fireweed. The emergence of renewed strength is further conveyed in the alignment of the speaker's refusal to accept bodily violation as "just the way things are" with Mother Earth's refusal of violence wrought by ecocide. In the poem "don't apologize," the speaker declares,

Like Mother Earth
I am done staying quiet
This body wasn't created
For exploitation

To be assaulted
 and used for your pleasure
 I will raise tides
 I will flood cities
 I will throw flames
 Until this body
 can be used as intended
 Free from constraint.⁵³

This is not ultimately a portrait of planetary or individual vengeance, however, for the speaker suggests that freedom from constraint is what allows them

To hold others up
 To be beautiful
 To be tender
 To give life
 For generations after me
 To know hands
 Only where they have consent to be.⁵⁴

Here, Redvers's linkage of bodily freedom to the capacity to nurture future generations is empowering, even as it also resonates with the concept of "environmental violence" articulated by the Native Youth Sexual Health Network, which considers the impacts of extractive industries as matters of reproductive justice, given the costs to sexual and reproductive health in the regions where they are intensively carried out.⁵⁵ To reclaim consent thus strengthens the individual, but in Redvers's poetry it *also* serves as a decolonizing act of solidarity with the common ground of intergenerational connection: "Your body is sacred / Like the land / Our ancestors prayed on / Nobody can tell you how to use it."⁵⁶ The speaker here addresses earth, but also their younger self, as well as Indigenous youth who might find themselves in positions of uncertainty about how to respond to unwanted pressures on their lands and bodies. There is an emphasis on bodily autonomy, certainly, but that sense of autonomy also is nurtured in conjunction with a mindfulness that it exists *within* a context of communal responsibility.⁵⁷ Redvers's reclamation of agency articulates in poetic form what Gregory D. Smithers has elsewhere described as "sexual sovereignty," a concept that seeks to empower Indigenous individuals to pursue healthy relationships free of colonial tropes, while also calling for Indigenous nations to develop and

assert the necessary social and legal frameworks to protect their citizens from sexual violence, especially those predatory forms of violence directed at them by individuals from settler society.⁵⁸

Similarly, Knott also reclaims her voice out of the persistent silence around domestic and sexual violence during her own youth in Fort St. John, a silence she writes about in the poem “The Things We Taught Our Daughters.” The poem’s speaker talks in two directions: first, she speaks backwards to the mothers in the community who downplayed the violence they and their daughters were experiencing, borne in part of a reluctance to expose the men in the community to external discipline. This process of hushing and silencing backfires, the speaker argues, for it “create[d] an asylum / for the very things / that plague our dreams.”⁵⁹ Second, the poem speaks forward to the young women and girls of the community in the present and future, attesting to their value and right to be free from harm. Notably, it does not privilege community solidarity if such solidarity demands acquiescence to gendered violence: “any man who would violate these treaties between bodies / would be dealt with by the women. Because we protect our own, / even if this means calling the police on our own.”⁶⁰ Here we see a calling back to the idea of treaties—whether between nations or between individuals—as not to be regarded lightly, but with respect and embodied in action. Further, like Redvers, Knott’s speaker portrays speaking out as a power that emerges from being grounded in place, emerging from spiritual and material connection with land figured as a body in its own right. Her poem concludes, “It is time to remember. / Time to summon our voices from the belly of the earth. / Time to feel, cry, rage, heal, and to truly live life instead. / It is time to tell ourselves and our daughters, / the things that should have been said.”⁶¹ Knott’s words are thus concerned with relearning and passing along the vocabulary of consent that colonial legacies eroded.

CONSENT AND/AS STRENGTHENING KINSHIP

While I have mostly focused on the idea of reclaiming consent in human relationships, some Indigenous authors remind us that consent is a concept that runs deep within wider networks of kinship. In her book *As We Have Always Done*, Leanne Simpson explains that in her context, Nishnaabeg intelligence is generated “through deep reciprocal engagement with Aki [ie. Mother Earth],” and when engagement

is carried out within proper ethical, embodied frameworks, this “continually generate[s] consent.”⁶² Within Nishnaabeg intelligence, refusal is an entirely appropriate response to oppression, whether it takes the form of deer refusing to re-enter a territory because of over-harvesting, or Nishnaabeg women refusing the idea that they were not status Indians because of who they married.⁶³ In both cases, Simpson explains that refusal is *generative*: it is the life-promoting alternative to oppression. The only way to rebuild relationships that have become strained is to seek, listen, and commit to better honoring relationships and the bodies of others that give and sustain life.⁶⁴ Another way to think about this is to reflect on the fact that consent does not revolve around *taking*; it involves being in deep moral relationship with a place and its beings, and honoring responsibilities to care for those relationships via protection and stewardship for generations to come. It means living according to “epistemologies of coordination [that] emphasize coming to know the world through kin relationships” involving “moral bonds that are often expressed as mutual responsibilities.”⁶⁵ Consent is key to these kinship relationships, as are acts of care and reciprocity.

Simpson has recently further theorized this view of consent in her 2020 Kreisel Lecture, delivered at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and in the context of numerous blockades created in solidarity with the Wet’suwet’en Hereditary Chiefs’ resistance to the Coastal Gas Link construction in their traditional territories. Whereas a lot of media coverage of these mobilizations tended to frame them as unduly disruptive, underhanded, or illegitimate, Simpson suggests they might instead be seen as expressions of Indigenous international diplomacy that are teaching the Canadian public and the world a crucial lesson about consent: namely, that “no means no” with respect to Indigenous bodies and Indigenous lands.⁶⁶ Simpson reads the blockades in relation to the activities of the beaver (Amik), whose dam-building redirects water and mud and plants to foster more life, creating shared worlds with other beings. As wildfires become an increasing problem fueled by climate change and ill-considered settler land-use practices, the activities of the beaver become even more important for helping to construct and expand wetlands in forested areas. Similarly, behind the blockades at places like Standing Rock, Grassy Narrows, and the Uni’stoten camp, Simpson notes there is a great deal of world building going on. There is language teaching, communal food preparation, the tending of sacred fires, and storytelling, to name but a few activities.⁶⁷ In sum, these places

help to show how saying “no” in strategic situations can foster living as a creative act based on freedom, self-determination, kindness, and the practice of consent among all one’s relations.

Along similar lines, Dene Yellowknives theorist Glen Coulthard views the act of saying “no” as a potential form of Indigenous affirmation rather than just a form of negation. While it is true that acts of resistance such as blockades are disruptive to some interests, Coulthard contends that

[Acts of resistance] also have ingrained within them a resounding “yes”: they are the affirmative *enactment* of another modality of being, a different way of relating to and with the world. . . . They embody through praxis our ancestral obligations to protect the lands that are core to who we are as Indigenous peoples.⁶⁸

Such actions, then, offer another vision of community—one that that does not necessarily put the “investment climate” or settler ideals of certainty front of mind, but which instead tries to implement an understanding of life expressed in Indigenous concepts rooted in nurturing health and balance in individuals, families, and communities. Within such a framework, all aspects of life stand in proper relation to one another and people attend to the whole.⁶⁹ The increasing severity of climate change suggests that these kinds of understandings of the human place in relation to creation will need to be more widely adopted by settler communities too, and that there must be genuine opportunities for Indigenous people to directly participate in decision-making on climate issues. This is especially important given the fact that Indigenous communities are already in some cases acutely experiencing climate change-induced infrastructure failures and other impacts. Indigenous peoples have also long been at the forefront of challenging the logic and practice of extraction and have been developing innovative practices and solutions in responding to the climate crisis.⁷⁰ Instead of thinking of Indigenous cultures as static, there is a presumption of change and a rooting of response in fostering kinship relationships.⁷¹ Environmental justice for these communities is thus about more than addressing gender inequities or environmental contamination in isolation; it also demands nurturing forms of governance and kinship structures that challenge those patriarchal models that have been enshrined by the Indian Act, and responding to neocolonial state and corporate violence with direct land defense and Land Back movements.⁷²

CONCLUSION: DIGGING IN AND RESPONSIBLE RELATIONS

These are very different views of consent than those offered in settler-colonial insinuations on “getting to yes”: the authors discussed in this article propose ideas of consent that involve being on the land, nurturing good relations with kin, and when necessary, digging in to defend those relationships when they are threatened. Their work also shows how literature can serve as a means through which to experiment with different strategies and scenarios for saying “no” with creativity and conviction. Reading poems and stories can further help readers—Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike—to cultivate interpretive practices that better equip them to see through the charms and manipulations of words used by governments and industries to secure Indigenous consent via the diluted terms of “consultation.” The stories Knott, Simpson, and Redvers tell and the images they create are in some respects innovative and speak to current critical discussions around environmental and gender-based violence, but they also express ways of knowing and relating to place that are long enduring. They are determined *not* to let colonial mappings of Indigenous lands and bodies tell the whole story.

Indigenous bodies—whether of humans, lands, or waters—are agentic, dynamic, and shaped by relationships that refuse to simply cede to colonial authority and its cultural, political, economic, and legal codes. These authors and their works thus practice the other meaning of Thomas King’s directive about entrenching Indigenous rights using “soft ground [and] / a shovel.” This gesture of digging in may be literal, such as in the seasonal act of digging up medicines (a traditional use that might strengthen land claims) or setting up a blockade; or it may involve the refusal to be silent about lateral violence. Above all, though, it involves *responsibilities* that accompany persisting relationships to one’s environment, something that much of settler culture still has not learned.⁷³ The larger question is, will settler-colonial society come to respect Indigenous articulations of “No” and defend the right to express them when it comes to the integrity of earthly bodies?

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NOTES

1. Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez, "Communitality as Everyday Indigenous Sovereignty in Oaxaca, Mexico," in *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Indigenous Studies*, ed. Brendan Hokowhitu, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, Chris Andersen, and Steve Larkin (New York: Routledge, 2021), 344; Helen Knott, "Violence and Extraction: Stories from the Oil Fields," in *Keetsahnak / Our Missing and Murdered Indigenous Sisters*, ed. Maria Campbell, Kim Anderson, and Christi Belcourt (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2018), 154.
2. Mishuana Goeman, *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 33.
3. Audra Simpson, "The Ruse of Consent and the Anatomy of 'Refusal': Cases from Indigenous North America and Australia," *Postcolonial Studies* 20, no. 1 (2017): 20.
4. *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, accessed January 3, 2019, 24, https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf.
5. Jessie Hohmann and Marc Weller, *The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: A Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 247–49.
6. *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* (Winnipeg, 2015), 92.i, www.trc.ca.
7. Editorial Board, "The Liberals are about to pass an UNDRIP bill, and they'd rather not say what it means," *The Globe and Mail*, May 24, 2021, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/editorials/article-the-liberals-are-about-to-pass-an-undrip-bill-and-theyd-rather-not-say/?symbol=print-msg>.
8. Mauro Barelli, "Free, Prior, and Informed Consent in the UNDRIP: Articles 10, 19, 29(2), and 32(2)," in *The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: A Commentary*, eds. Jessie Hohmann and Marc Weller (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 252–253.
9. The language of Articles 19 and 32(2) that settles on the need to "consult in order to obtain consent" differs from the more straightforward language of Articles 10 and 29, both of which declare that states must obtain FPIC from Indigenous peoples before they can be relocated from their lands and territories (Article 10) or before any storage or disposal of hazardous materials shall take place on their lands and territories (Article 29[2]). See Barelli, "Free," 254–255.
10. On the "spectrum of consent" that includes positions ranging from denial, to recognition, to reclamation, see the Yellowhead Institute, *Land Back: A Yellowhead Institute Red Paper*, main authors Shiri Pasternak and Hayden King, October 2019, Creative Commons PDF, 9–12.
11. Phil Heidenreich, "I won't let up. We must get to 'yes' on a pipeline': Tough words for Ottawa in Notley TV address," *Global News*, April 12, 2016, <https://globalnews.ca/news/2625882/i-wont-let-up-we-must-get-to-yes-on-a-pipeline-tough-words-for-ottawa-in-notley-tv-address/>.

12. Government of Canada, “Transmountain Expansion Project: Indigenous Engagement,” October 27, 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/campaign/trans-mountain/indigenous-engagement.html>.

13. Freda Huson, *Voices: Indigenous Women on the Front Lines Speak*, eds. beyon wren moor and Wulfgang Zapf, 7 (2016), 17.

14. Simpson, “The Ruse of Consent,” 22.

15. Allana McDougall, “Teacher, School Board Apologize to Ontario Family for Inappropriate Assignment,” *APTN News*, June 18, 2020, <https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/teacher-school-board-apologize-to-ontario-family-for-inappropriate-assignment/>.

16. McDougall, “Teacher, School Board Apologize.”

17. See the observations of nineteenth-century US General Tecumseh Sherman, who is quoted as having said, “We have made more than one thousand treaties with the various Indian tribes, and have not kept one of them.” In his commentary on Sherman’s statement in 1886, critic of US Indian Policy C. C. Painter commented that treaties “were never made to be kept, but to serve a present purpose, to settle a present difficulty in the easiest manner possible, to acquire a desired good with the least possible compensation, and then to be disregarded as soon as this purpose was tainted and we were strong enough to enforce a new and more profitable arrangement.” Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth* (2015), 45, fn.53. See also Audra Simpson’s circumspect view of treaties in “The Ruse of Consent,” 27.

18. Thomas King, *77 Fragments of a Familiar Ruin* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2019), 80, Kindle.

19. The phrase quoted here is from Duncan Campbell Scott. See John Leslie, *The Historical Development of the Indian Act*, 2nd ed. (Ottawa: Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Treaties and Historical Research Branch, 1978), 114.

20. Knott, “Violence,” 149–50.

21. “Project Need,” *Site C Energy Project* (BC Hydro, 2021), <https://www.sitecproject.com/why-site-c/project-need>. Daub et al. point to reasons for skepticism about BC Hydro’s push for “clean electricity” given its interlinkages with the LNG industry. How climate policy unfolds in the province will depend in part on public pressure to protect Indigenous rights and energy democracy on the one hand and on industry’s willingness to push for control of the climate policy conversation to protect their bottom line on the other. See Shannon Daub, Chuka Ejeckam, Nicolas Graham, and Zoë Yunker, “‘Doing Things Better Together’: Industry Capture of Climate Policy in British Columbia,” in *Regime of Obstruction: How Corporate Power Blocks Energy Democracy*, ed. William Carroll (Athabasca, AB: Athabasca University Press, 2021), 249–271.

22. Helen Knott, *In My Moccasins* (Regina SK: University of Regina Press, 2019), 201.

23. Knott, *In My Moccasins*, 201.

24. Knott, *In My Moccasins*, 202–203.

25. Knott, *In My Moccasins*, 215.

26. On this latter point, see also Arthur Manuel, *Unsettling Canada: A National Wake-Up Call* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2015), LOC 1861, Kindle.

27. Knott, "Violence," 151.

28. Knott, "Violence," 150–52.

29. Angele Alook, Ian Hussey, and Nicole Hill, "Indigenous Gendered Experiences of Work in an Oil-Dependent, Rural Alberta Community," in *Regime of Obstruction: How Corporate Power Blocks Energy Democracy*, ed. William Carroll (Athabasca AB: Athabasca University Press, 2021), 334.

30. Edward Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway* (Hayward WI: Red School House Press, 1988); John C. Mohawk and Oren Lyons, eds., *Exiled in the Land of the Free* (Santa Fe NM: Clear Light Publishers, 1992); Alook, Hussey, and Hill, "Indigenous Gendered Experiences," 247.

31. Knott, "Violence," 157.

32. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, ed., *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence, and Protection of Indigenous Nations* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 2008), 209–11.

33. See Tracey Deer, qtd. in Knott, "Violence," 153.

34. "Helen Knott on Violence Against Indigenous Women and Lands," *Upstream Media*, December 27, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/ThinkUpstreamMedia/videos/1794119904187015/>.

35. Elizabeth Povinelli, "The Governance of the Prior," *Interventions* 13, no. 1 (2011): 14.

36. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Atlantic, 2007), 10.

37. TC Energy, "Indigenous Relations at TC Energy: Guiding Principles—Digital Postcard," TC Energy, accessed January 2, 2021, <https://www.tcenergy.com/siteassets/pdfs/commitment/indigenous/tc-guiding-principles-indigenous-relations-postcard.pdf>.

38. TC Energy, *Indigenous Relations Commitment Statement*, February 20, 2019, <https://www.tcenergy.com/siteassets/pdfs/about/governance/tc-indigenous-relations-commitment-statement.pdf>.

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40. On the "tricks of transparency" engineered by government to espouse openness while shoring up its own interests, see Jasmine Rault, "Window Walls and Other Tricks of Transparency: Digital, Colonial, and Architectural Modernity," *American Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (2020): 939, 950; on the rhetoric of "partnership" as a means for

the Canadian state and capitalist class to effectively win “permanent consent” to capitalist development on Indigenous lands, see William Carroll, “Conclusion: Prospects for Energy Democracy in the Face of Passive Revolution,” in *Regime of Obstruction*, ed. W. Carroll (Athabasca AB: Athabasca University Press, 2021), 483; on how the language of “civic friendship” depends on a combination of recognition politics and reconciliation discourse, see Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 106; and on the “spectre of relationship” that stands in for meaningful material change that might actually reconcile past state actions, see Dallas Hunt, “Reconciliation’s Afterlife,” Indigenous Literary Studies Association Keynote Address, June 11, 2021, accessed via Zoom.

41. Simpson, “Ruse,” 20.

42. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 125.

43. Governments thus download the responsibility for the duty to consult onto the private sector. See Dayna Nadine Scott, “‘Critical’ Minerals and the Politics of Refusal,” *Toxic News*, April 30, 2021, <https://toxicnews.org/2021/04/30/critical-minerals-and-the-politics-of-refusal/>; Yellowhead Institute, *Land Back*, 10.

44. See Kyle Whyte, “Against Crisis Epistemology,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Indigenous Studies*, eds. B. Hokowhitu et al. (New York: Routledge, 2021), 55.

45. Cliff Atleo, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Canada’s Carbon Economy and Indigenous Ambivalence,” in *Regime of Obstruction: How Corporate Power Blocks Energy Democracy*, ed. William Carroll (Athabasca AB: Athabasca University Press, 2021), 362–63. Along similar lines, Arthur Manuel signals the need for any social movement to begin by listening to the people before prescribing remedies (LOC 598). He emphasizes that “[p]rograms and organizations that don’t serve the people’s most basic needs are less than useless—they are hindrances to development” See Manuel, *Unsettling Canada*, LOC 598, 616, Kindle.

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47. Elliott, “Suffering Agency,” 87, 89.

48. Atleo, “Between a Rock,” 362–363; Manuel, *Unsettling Canada*, LOC 769, 1744–46, 2868–2871, Kindle.

49. Leanne Simpson, *This Accident of Being Lost* (Toronto: Anansi, 2017), 5 (emphasis in original).

50. Simpson, *This Accident of Being Lost*, 6 (emphasis in original).

51. Simpson, *This Accident of Being Lost*, 6.

52. Simpson, *This Accident of Being Lost*, 8.

53. Tunchai Redvers, *Fireweed* (Neyaashiinigmiing ON: Kagedonce Press, 2019), 160.

54. Redvers, *Fireweed*, 160.

55. Native Youth Sexual Health Network and the Women’s Earth Alliance, “Violence on the Land, Violence on our Bodies: Building and Indigenous Response to Environmental Violence,” 2016, <http://landbodydefense.org/uploads/files>

/VLVBReportToolkit2016.pdf. See also Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (Boston: South End Press, 1999), 19.

56. Redvers, *Fireweed*, 98.

57. On this point, see also Sandrina de Finney, "Indigenous Girls' Resilience in Settler States," *Agenda* 31, no. 2 (2017): 17–18.

58. Gregory D. Smithers, "Predatory Colonialism: Indigenous Women and the Violence of Sexual Objectification in the United States," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 30, no. 2 (2021): 254.

59. Knott, *In My Own Moccasins*, 276.

60. Knott, *In My Own Moccasins*, 278.

61. Knott, *In My Own Moccasins*, 278.

62. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 28.

63. Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 33.

64. Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 58–61. See also Robin Wall Kimmerer on consent and Potawatomi and Haudenosaunee practices of harvesting black ash in *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2015), 144.

65. Whyte, "Against Crisis Epistemology," 58.

66. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *A Short History of the Blockade: Giant Beavers, Diplomacy, and Regeneration in Nishnaabewin* (Edmonton: Canadian Literature Centre and University of Alberta Press, 2021), 7.

67. Simpson, *A Short History of the Blockade*, 10.

68. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 169.

69. Alook, Hussey, and Hill, "Indigenous Gendered Experiences of Work," 347.

70. Eriel Deranger, "Climate Emergency and the Colonial Response," *Yellowhead Institute*, July 2, 2021, <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/2021/07/02/climate-emergency-colonial-response/>.

71. Whyte, "Against Crisis Epistemology," 59; Daniel Heath Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (Waterloo ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018), 7–8.

72. See Lindsay Nixon's critique of settler-led ecofeminist and environmentalist movements that appropriate Indigenous environmental knowledges without a full acknowledgement of their depth or Indigenous people's capacity to lead. Lindsay Nixon, "Eco-feminist Appropriations of Indigenous Feminisms and Environmental Violence," *The Feminist Wire*, April 30, 2015, <https://thefeministwire.com/2015/04/eco-feminist-appropriations-of-indigenous-feminisms-and-environmental-violence/#comments>.

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Rogarou Genealogies in Cherie Dimaline's *Empire of Wild*

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Abstract: Cherie Dimaline's *Empire of Wild* critiques colonialism and celebrates Georgian Bay, Ontario, Métis identity through a narrative that uses the figure of the Rogarou as the Métis trickster and template for addressing these realities. Subtexts alluding to related stories in prairie sources edited by Maria Campbell; allusions to a French-Catholic local legend referred to as "the wolf of Lafontaine"; and the relevance of Anishinaabe cosmologies, traditional teachings, and other-than-human beings also dramatize, deepen, and support the reader's understanding of Métis resistance and resurgence. Dimaline's poetic narrative reflects Leanne Simpson's approach to decolonial love and connects the novel's themes and subtexts.

Keywords: Rogarou, *Empire of Wild*, Cherie Dimaline, intertextuality, genealogy, resistance, resurgence, decolonial love, intertext, trickster

"Well people change for different reasons . . . The rougarou comes to give you a chance to change your ways. He comes from the dark to bring you to the light. Once you can find somebody that will be your friend when he knows you are a rogarou, then you will be changed."

—Marjorie Beaucage, *Rougarou*

"He wanted to keep you for good. / His arms cracked at the shoulders / And fell off like branches. / You threw them in a ditch / You threw them behind the house. / They tangled around you and grew."

—Louise Erdrich, "Rugaroo"

"Our genealogies of bones / Are stacked in the graveyards, and live / In the stories . . ."

—Joy Harjo, "An Ordinary Morning"

INTRODUCTION

This article uses Rogarou as a template for reading Cherie Dimaline's novel *Empire of Wild* (2019), given that Rogarou is a central trope that aligns Dimaline's celebration of her Métis ancestry, homelands, and cultural identity with a critique of neocolonial appropriation of Indigenous lands, stories, and spirits. Traditionally, the ambiguous and ambivalent figure of the Rogarou shares a lineage with more benign Anishinaabe figures—cultural heroes, teachers, helpers, and tricksters such as Nanabozho—as well as with darker Anishinaabe ones such as the cannibal-monster, once human, known as the windigo. My title “Rogarou Genealogies” invokes both western and Indigenous understandings of “Rogarou” and of “genealogies” in my reading of this novel. More accessible western literary methodologies indebted to post-structuralism pay attention to “intertexts” (the relation of text to world and to earlier literature); intertextuality is useful in considering the historical, literary, and cultural antecedents of this trickster alongside the narrative's references to Georgian Bay Métis history in Ontario. Indigenous research methodologies influenced by IK, for their part, recognize the Rogarou's ancestry as a family member, a troublesome one calling for Métis matriarchs' unorthodox Rogarou medicine, and as a spirit being occupying a unique place in the Anishinaabe night sky. Further complicating matters, Dimaline's Rogarou is enlisted by corporate developers disguised as Christian missionaries, generating new kinds of Rogarou moves and forms of Métis resistance.

A short article such as this one cannot hope to address all the above aspects of the novel, although *Empire of Wild's* poetic richness and narrative depths allow for a diversity of interpretive stances. Following a brief overview of Rogarou manifestations in the novel, I limit myself to a consideration of three subtexts and sets of allusions in the novel that illustrate Rogarou genealogies. In my reading, these subterranean stories reflect Rogarou survivance as indebted to the concept of decolonial love in the work of Anishinaabe artist and intellectual Leanne Simpson. The first two parts of my article address intertextual aspects focused on history and literature: the link between Rogarou and cultural memory in prairie literature to which the author is indebted and within which she situates herself, and her veiled references to the historical erasure of the Georgian Bay Rogarou in the French-Catholic legend and current

annual festival of the Lafontaine wolf. My third and concluding section speaks to aspects of Rogarou genealogies linked to other Anishinaabe beings, and to Dimaline's realigning of Greek, Christian, and Anishinaabe cosmologies associated with the sky world. Together these three dimensions of *Empire* engage Métis aesthetics and belief systems dramatized in Rogarou stories that reflect the author's own statements about the novel as a Métis love story and story of resistance.

Dimaline observes that her novel is about "Indigenous love, about the way we are part of the resistance, the ways in which we love each other, the ways in which we demand to be loved, and the ways in which we, especially the women, can have autonomy over our sexuality" (quoted in Carter). She integrates a woman's celebration of the body and female sexuality with romantic love between life-partners; the love of Elders, family, and children; the love of her Georgian Bay Métis community; the love of the earth as one's spiritual home; and the virtue of love as a central component of the seven grandmother teachings. Dimaline emphasizes that in *Empire of Wild*, "more than anything," she wanted "to talk about the heaviest weight that we carry, the absolute heft of beauty and joy. The burden we can't put down for even a moment because it's so intimately tied to our struggle" ("Walrus"). It is the matriarchs who assume the mantle of carrying and transmitting this burden and struggle as ceremonialists and community leaders; Rogarou, for his part, is associated with danger but also with resilience and resurgence. Leanne Simpson, in *As We Have Always Done*, similarly speaks of "the intense love of land, of family, and of our nations that has always been the spine of Indigenous resistance" (9). The imaginative and narrative strategies of *Empire of Wild* associated with the three intertextual aspects of the novel that I discuss illustrate this notion of decolonial love, fleshing out the teeth, bones, spine, and spirit of Rogarou as Métis trickster and teacher.

ROGAROU MANIFESTATIONS

How does the Métis Rogarou stand out in the world of other Anishinaabe tricksters? Born in the prairies of the marriage of Anishinaabeg and Nêhiyawak encounters with Europeans, Dimaline's Rogarou is not to be confused with European legends, French-Canadian folklore, or stock figures in North American popular culture and horror movies. Rather,

Rogarou stories, not unlike other creation or origin stories in “Indian country,” reflect Indigenous beliefs concerning the interpenetration of sex with spirit, dreaming with waking, and darkness with light, realities that tend to occupy distinct and separate realms in Judeo-Christian worldviews. Rogarou flies beneath the radar in Dimaline’s earlier novel *The Marrow Thieves* (2017), nonetheless playing an important role in Elder Minerva’s marriage, life-story, and sabotage of machinery designed to steal the dreams and original instructions she and her people carry in their bone marrow. Minerva’s Rogarou husband, like the darker “Rugaru” in Louise Erdrich’s early volume of poems *Jacklight* (1984) and the lighter “rugaroo” lover in her recent novel *The Sentence* (2021), is a family member. According to Warren Carriou, he is both a “mixed blood shapeshifter” and a “compassionate trickster,” as well as a roguish relative who “runs in the family” (Carriou 157–61 *passim*). As a more-than-human or other-than-human being, Rogarou belies the binary logic and hierarchies of Christian and Cartesian mind–body dualisms, heteropatriarchal gender constructions, and western concepts of time as linear. As filmmaker and storyteller Marjorie Beaucage puts it, “Let’s say you were bad, maybe your life went off track. How do you get back on [track]? Sometimes it takes drastic measures. The Rougarou has to come” (qtd. in Bell and Williamson 154). Dimaline has stated that she still believes in Rogarou as “something quite spooky, beautiful and brutal” (qtd. in Carter).

Rogarou assumes many different and sometimes contradictory guises in *Empire of Wild* no less than in prairie Métis literature. Erdrich’s ghost story *The Sentence*, explicitly referencing Dimaline, humorously describes him as “a loathsomely attractive Rugaroo” (318). He is not the emblem of a conflicted, mixed, hybrid, or dispersed people but rather of vibrant Métis communities in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and (for Erdrich) in Minnesota. In *Empire of Wild*, there is *the* Rogarou and there are common garden-variety rogarous; in general, I use the proper name to refer to specific manifestations and the uncapped noun to refer to more general characteristics, although there is considerable slippage between them.¹ Rogarous are unpredictable: they kill some, eat others, and at times merely bite. Scary rogarou stories serve to keep children and teens out of harm’s way; he is the one who deters youth from wandering the roads at night, standing both for danger and for protection from that danger. You can be taken by a rogarou simply by

being in the wrong place at the wrong time, by youthful insouciance, or by an all-too-human temporary lapse in mindfulness. Among many other “wolves” in the novel, there is the dog-like rogarou Joan encounters as an adolescent, the newly created hungry wolf who attacks her grandmother Mere, and the sinister Robe, a vampire-like sexual predator who takes both Joan’s husband Victor and her beloved young nephew, Zeus. Rogarou attacks Mere because she defends the land, Victor because he betrays it, and Zeus—Joan’s helper in her successful attempt to rescue Victor—as his next victim in this family. Mere is killed in the process, Victor brought back to the land of the living, and Zeus left to face an uncertain future. Inevitably, there is a steep price to pay for both Rogarou memory in the lives of those who survive his attacks, such as Victor, and Rogarou amnesia for those who remain lost, such as Robitaille, now known as Robe.

The rogarou comes for those who skip fasting at Lent, talk back to their parents, hit women, hunt too many deer, or refuse to share—in short, those who do not honour Métis ways. When Joan asks Elder Ajean whether “it is just halfbreeds who have a rogarou,” she answers that “we don’t just have one, and there’s lots of ways to become one . . . being attacked by a rogarou, mistreating women, betraying your people . . . that’s the ones we know around here, anyways” (69). Trapped in a cage partly of his own making, when Victor asks the rogarou “what is this place?” Robe replies that “you are wherever the betrayal happened” (258). Rogarou remains unpredictable as well as enigmatic. When Joan queries Ajean about why the rogarou came for Victor and for Mere, she replies “who knows why they do what they do?” (70). The Métis rogarou “was a dog, a man, a wolf. He was clothed, he was naked in his fur, he wore moccasins to jig . . . [he was] whatever made you shiver but he was always there, standing by the road, whistling to the stars so that they pulsed bright in the navy sky, as close and as distant as ancestors” (4). In all his enigmatic motives and moves, for better and for worse Rogarou remains uniquely and distinctly Métis.

ROGAROU GENEALOGIES I: RED RIVER STORIES,
CULTURAL MEMORY, AND *EMPIRE OF WILD*

Empire of Wild’s prologue “A New Hunt” explains how both Rogarou and rogarou stories followed Métis refugees from the Red River area of

Manitoba to the Georgian Bay town of Lafontaine, renamed Arcand in the novel. Some of the stories that weave their way into Dimaline's novel are indebted to "rou garous" tales from Maria Campbell's *Stories of the Road Allowance People* (2010), an anthology of edited and translated Michif oral stories. While western literary studies might consider Dimaline's multilayered narrative metafictional as well as intertextual (with the "new hunt" suggesting the relation to older stories and forms of story), Anishinaabe literary studies would view it as trickster discourse signalling the transmigration and survivance of Métis stories and cultural memory in contemporary art forms. (Erdrich's own mimicry of "rugaroo" tales in *The Sentence* is also consistent with such Anishinaabe forms of survivance.)² It is likely that Dimaline also wanted to pay tribute to Campbell as "a great Métis writer who has adopted me as her granddaughter," and who, like Dimaline's grandmother Mere, encouraged her to honour her storytelling gift (Porter). Dimaline was given the name She Listens to Her People, "so that I can remember who I am and what my job is, and that is to carry stories" (qtd. in Talbot).

Dimaline's earlier novel *The Marrow Thieves* alluded to "old-timey" stories shared by Elders in which Anishinaabe teachings transmit cultural memory counterbalancing youth's difficult "coming-to" stories of colonial trauma; in that novel, cultural memory survives first and foremost in dreams, in the Anishinaabe language, and in bone marrow. In *Empire of Wild*, it is stories of Rogarou that fulfill this function, together with Métis matriarchs like Mere, Ajean, and Joan who bear the ancestral knowledge that some consider blood memory located in people's DNA. These female Elders, "Catholic by habit," carry and pass on unorthodox bundles that include scrapings of "bone salt . . . from the actual bones of one particular Red River family" (2), medicine serving to protect the community from the ravages of rogarous gone rogue.³ In *The Marrow Thieves*, settlers attempt to steal the dreams and the very capacity for dreaming found in Indigenous bone marrow; in *Empire of Wild*, they attempt to appropriate Rogarou and rogarou stories to legitimize their acquisition of Indigenous lands.

Empire narrates how Georgian Bay Métis, like Saskatchewan Métis, became road allowance people. In her renaming of Lafontaine township as Arcand, Dimaline has chosen a common surname on the prairies and in Maria Campbell's own community. In *Empire*, Joan of Arcand's father gradually buys back land taken by encroaching settlers in Georgian Bay

cottage country; Joan, who inherits that land, must now defend it from developers interested in subsurface mining and fossil fuel extraction. The story of “Joan of Arcand,” who is far from Catholic and far from a saint, parallels and breathes new life into that of Jonas Arcand, a legendary Métis leader in *Stories of the Allowance People*. Jonas, presumed dead, brings back songs and stories from his visit with his friends in Métis “heaven.” Other details of Joan’s and Ajean’s stories parallel tales from *Stories of the Road Allowance People* in which medicine women are condemned as “rou garous” by clergy and patriarchs and defended by other family members. The surface or “macro” narrative of *Empire* narrates Joan of Arcand’s love of her husband, a Métis man from the prairies, and her determination to rescue him from the Rogarou Robe and Heiser, the European wolf-master who has abducted him; in the process, we witness her growing understanding of herself, her family, and her community. In keeping with this, the novel’s subterranean or “micro” narratives resurge stories of strong Métis women variously deemed reprobrates, rogarous, or renegades in several stories edited by Campbell.

The most explicit allusion to Campbell’s anthology in Dimaline’s novel, the story “La Beau Sha Shoo,” links its hero Jonas Arcand with the heroine Joan of Arcand in *Empire*. “Ole Arcand,” after a lengthy illness, brings the fiddle song “La Beau Sha Shoo” back from a visit to the Métis afterworld, where he shared many glasses of wine with Jesus and Gabriel. Larger than life and older than time, Jonas carries many memories of Riel, “Gabe” and “Batosh.” The story of Jonas’s adventures and reluctant return to earth parallels Joan’s travels to the east coast in the wake of her father’s death, during which she meets her future husband Victor, a Métis man from the prairies. Returning to her home community, she must now rescue Victor from those who, in league with the Rogarou, have transformed him into the preacher Reverend Eugene Wolff; in the process, she comes into her own as a Métis matriarch who inherits the medicinal knowledge of her female forebears. Ole Arcand is proud of his own bundle, the fiddle and sash that “*was* our culture” [emphasis mine], although according to the storyteller “we never understand dat word culture,” but we all “love him so much dat ole man” because he “make us feel like we got something” (52). Joan’s nephew Zeus feels the same way about her as Joan does about Mere. There is no explicit discussion of Métis cultural identity in this family’s talk, but their

speech rhythms, ways of being, and sense of humor all reflect how, like Campbell's narrator, "we got something."

If "La Beau Sha Shoo" revives "Ole Arcand as "young Joan," it is Elder Ajean who most resembles old "Joséphine Jug of Wine" in the story "Rou Garous." Joséphine and her partner Harry T'saymow ("tobacco in our language"), like Ajean and her aged lover Rickard, are sexual as well as spiritual beings who remain true to themselves in the face of colonialist and Christian attempts to repress their values and culture. According to the storyteller's uncle Tommy in Campbell's book, Joséphine is a Rou Garou; according to the storyteller's mother, she is a good woman subjected to name-calling because she is not a Christian. For Campbell, "Rou Garous" reminds us "that women are strong, and this woman, accused of being a rou garou, was very strong and independent, so much so that it seems to be her biggest sin" ("One Small" 196). In a village setting dominated by priests who fear and repress female sexual and spiritual power, the narrator "just never know who hees right my Mudder or dah mans and dah Prees" (50)—but the storyteller makes it clear that his mother is kind, knows to feed "Chi Kaw Chee" (tobacco), and has "dah seeing" (50). Like his mother, Ajean also has "dah seeing." Mere's bone salt occupies a prominent place in the hodgepodge of articles in her shifting, improvised, and unorthodox medicine bundle, one that includes her lover's false teeth as well as Catholic items. In "Rou Garous," Joséphine Jug of Wine "was never a Catlic" but rather "jus preten . . . and dat way dah Prees he don know dat some of dah peoples dey was fooling aroun wit dah ole way" (36). Ajean calls upon tactics reminiscent of those "ole time ones . . . our relations dah Indians . . . [who] could turn demselves into animals even birds" (34), as when she makes "clucking noises like she was calling a stray" (298) to try and bring home the young rogarou Zeus and restore him to full humanity.

According to Campbell, some "say [ChiJean] is a name used for Wesakachak [the Cree trickster] by the Michif because his name was never spoken in the spring and summer"; certain stories, according to "Michif elders," are the same as "the Cree and Saulteaux, but others are a combination of European and Native, just like the rou garou kind of halfbreed story" ("One Small" 197). As a female member of the werewolf family, as an Elder whose medicine can turn wolves back into humans, and as a sexy Michif-speaking Catholic grandmother, Ajean embod-

ies the complex, fluid boundaries and identities of modern-day Métis shapeshifters. Dimaline, Ajean, and Joan sustain Métis stories both old and new. The novel's allusions to "La Beau Sha Shoo" and "Rou garous" acknowledge its ties to Dimaline's Red River ancestors, reflecting continuity with older Métis storytelling traditions. Her narrative does not represent these traditions as linear so much as a series of concentric circles, a story cycle at the heart of which lies Rogarou.

ROGAROU GENEALOGIES II: ROGAROU, FOUNDING FATHERS,
AND THE WOLF OF LAFONTAINE

If *Stories of the Road Allowance People* provides a template for my reading of Joan and Ajean, Reverend Thomas Marchildon's *Le Loup de Lafontaine* (1955) provides a template for my reading of Thomas Eiser. As the wolfmaster, Eiser is the businessman who enlists the Rogarou Robe to transform Joan's husband Victor into the preacher Eugene Wolff; Victor's new role is to convert local Indigenous folk to the belief that selling their lands for mining and oil projects would be beneficial. It is no accident that Eiser enlists the Rogarou Robe to transform Victor into the Reverend Eugene Wolff to preach this gospel of progress and profit. The idea for *Empire of Wild* initially came to Dimaline when she read a newspaper article about American evangelicals engaged in converting Indigenous Canadians; one of their tactics was to recruit an Indigenous preacher. Asking herself "what kind of person would deceive their own people," Dimaline concluded that the rogarou would (qtd. in Porter). Perhaps Dimaline was also inspired by reading about Marchildon. Her novel's narrative parallels, inverts, and parodies *Le Loup de Lafontaine* in its alignment of Thomas Eiser and Thomas Marchildon, while the Reverend Eugene Wolff's homilies flesh out sermons by the fictional priest in Marchildon's story. Eiser and Wolff's activities amplify and accelerate the process by which settlers acquired Lafontaine lands in the nineteenth century as described in Marchildon's pamphlet, a thinly fictionalized history of the township written to commemorate the centenary of the founding of St. Croix de Lafontaine Parish. *Le Loup de Lafontaine* allegorizes a settlement process that entails the ritual killing of a wolf who preyed on farmers' sheep; its celebration of the settler community illustrates the theft of land in the Euro-Canadian process of becoming native to place, a process that also entails the theft

of the Indigenous stories and spirits that traditionally sustained that land. *Empire of Wild* critiques that historical process; reterritorializes Rogarou; and reclaims Métis lands, stories, and spirits.

Children's author and novelist Daniel Marchildon (not to be confused with the author Father Thomas Marchildon) observes that "the story of the Lafontaine wolf has been both distorted and appropriated many times," but his commentaries overlook Indigenous people to focus on conflicts between different groups of settlers in the community's history. Like *Empire of Wild*, *Le Loup de Lafontaine* mentions "the mostly French-speaking Métis from voyageur families who came as early as 1828 to the Penetanguishene region" from Drummond Island on Lake Huron, founding Lafontaine, but its focus is on two waves of French farmers from different regions of Québec who emigrated to Lafontaine in 1840 and who did not get along. The first group "grabbed" and cleared the best land, leaving the others to make do "with what was left," forced to become "lumberjacks and fishermen" (Marchildon).⁴ Some farmers prospered at the expense of others, and access to preferred lands fed feuds between rival French factions. By contrast, *Empire* acknowledges the presence of French settlers, but its focus is on the Métis community, and it foregrounds conflicts between Métis and settlers over the question of land ownership. In both Heisler's vision of Arcand and Marchildon's vision of Lafontaine, however, trees are meant to be felled, land cleared, wild animals dispatched, and Indigenous people dispersed so that Euro-Canadian communities can take over and thrive.

Dimaline offers a very different interpretation of local history than does Marchildon in the opening pages of her novel:

Eventually, inevitably the shore belonged to the newcomers who put up boathouses and painted gazebos and built docks where sun-burnt grandchildren would cannonball into June water, calling for someone to watch what they could do. And the halfbreeds? They got the small settlement up a dirt road. They got Arcand . . . Some of the people managed to hold on to the less desirable patches of waterfront . . . these were the older people, who refused to head up the road . . . They kept rickety docks where the fishermen tied their rusted boats in exchange for some of the catch. (2–3)

It is on such lands, "in both the occupied places and those left to grow wild, alongside the community and the dwindling wildlife," that

Rogarou lived (3). Eiser, like Marchildon's parish priest, puts the Métis wolf into the service of a Christian allegory of settlement that displaces Indigenous people and renders them invisible in the Euro-Canadian immigrant project. Thomas Heiser's development plans are an extension of Thomas Marchildon's agricultural mission, meant to convert hunter-gatherers into farmers and Indigenous people into white Canadians. The Lafontaine tourism industry and its economic dependence upon the annual "Wolf Festival of Lafontaine," a summer food and music fest complete with wolf-howl contest, can be read as an ecotourist sort of coda to the deforestation and redevelopment of local lands by both Marchildon's farmers and Eiser's Ministry of New Redemption (whose initials happen to be the same as Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources).⁵

The best farming land taken by the first wave of immigrants in *Le Loup de Lafontaine* can be compared to the land that Joan's father buys back one acre at a time, leaves as a legacy to his family, and that Eiser hopes to profit from. This uncultivated land, to which Joan is deeply attached, is described by Dimaline in lovingly lyrical language:

Her land made her happier than she could have imagined. Her plot was less densely wooded than her brothers,' with a central small, open field greened by ostrich ferns. Black birch trees peeled and perfumed the shaded undergrowth. The Chicken of the Woods fungus climbed trunks and fallen logs like fleshy scaffolding for industrious squirrels. Reddish soil underfoot was knocked loose in spring by the new growth of fiddleheads and later by morels, like sweet brittle claws. Walking there in summer was to be surrounded by the tiny flutter and flicks of insects that fed the birds, who in turn sang into the soft down of their nests. The place reminded her who she was. (72)

This forest glade, replete with food and medicines and where animals make their beds at night, is associated with the small circular clearing occupied by "Victor, In A Twenty-Six Acre Cell" (42), in which the Rogarou Reverend Eugene Wolff sleeps in a green velvet armchair after preaching sermons reflecting white understandings of Indigenous people's edification. Wolff can just barely remember Joan's name and memories of life with her before his transformation. In *Le Loup de Lafontaine*, "the wolf was the enemy of all lovers," terrorizing them with its "blood-

curling howl" (Daniel Marchildon) when they try to go courting after church on Sunday evenings. In *Empire*, Joan and Victor have their first lovers' quarrel over the question of whether to sell her father's land, and that is the moment at which Victor falls prey to the Rogarou.

Dimaline allows that "at one point my family was responsible for culling the wolf population when it got out of control; they hunted with dogs, even when I was young" ("Keynote"). For some Métis people, participating in local music festivals generates income, while hunting, like fishing, also feeds their families and sustains their cultural traditions. When Mere's family mistakenly assumes that it was an ordinary wolf who attacked her, Ajean instructs the men to bring it down in the traditional way, and the young Métis hunters who volunteer "play out the role handed down to them by blood memory." In *Empire of Wild*, "[t]his was one way in which they pushed back against the jobs that took them into town, into the city . . . how they healed from the humiliation of tags and fines and charges levelled by agents of the Ministry of Natural Resources . . . these were the men who carried tobacco with them to offer to the animals' spirits" (51). Whether hunting for a wolf whose territory has been encroached upon by "civilization," or for a werewolf who strays a little too close to home, there is a ritual and ceremonial aspect to keeping the community as safe as possible and restoring the sense of balance challenged by certain elements in settler culture. As Mere reminded these young men when they sought jobs in the mines, "[h]ow bad do you need that pay? . . . The companies are out to take it all" (21).

Marchildon's brief observations about Métis and First Nations represent them as noble savages and victims in a portrait that serves to reinforce superior Christian values meant to civilize both bloodthirsty settlers and vanishing Indians. One farmer blames the death of local sheep on two dogs belonging to a Métis fisherman, shooting these dogs without verifying the truth or falsehood of the rumour, but the wolf continues to attack the sheep. "Ojibways from Christian Island were recruited to track down the beast," but it "remained invisible, both day and night." Finally, a French farmer offers to sponsor a Thanksgiving mass if God lets him kill the wolf; his shot only wounds it, "stretched out lifeless on the ground," so he "raised up the wolf on a sort of makeshift gallows" on his democrat buggy and brought it to the village square for all to see. The parish priest's sermon the next day offered a peculiarly Christ-like allegory of the wolf's death: when it "discovered this divided

world . . . [it] felt right at home and settled in”; once it was killed, “the walls came tumbling down,” peace was established, and marriages between warring French factions could take place. Thus a “new day has dawned here in [the Lafontaine Catholic parish of] St. Croix . . . [t]he wolf has marked this community with a sign, making it a real parish.” The Lafontaine wolf “is not just the author of evil but also of a very great good: he has brought you all together” (Marchildon).

The Reverend Eugene Wolff’s sermon to First Nations and Métis community members in *Empire* mimics the priest’s sermon in *Le Loup* in a passage worth unpacking for its double-voiced discourse. Both clergymen stress that wild beasts and pagan souls must be domesticated or eliminated, making way for a pastoral portrait of perfect unity and future prosperity for all. In rhetoric that invokes a peaceable kingdom where demons, beasts, and wild savages are tamed, Wolff denounces evil spirits, arguing that pagan beliefs, false gods, and untrustworthy leaders have brought “our people, our *good* people, to waste” (120). Wolff simultaneously negates, denounces, and promotes Indigenous spirituality. Invoking the importance of heart-based knowledge, he travesties syncretism in his version of Gchi Manitou (the Great Mystery) and the Christian Creator, arguing that “[a] drum is not a heartbeat—only the heart God gave you can beat the right way” (121). In a passage that explains the significance of Dimaline’s title for her novel, he blends the logic of *terra nullius*, the doctrine of discovery, and John Locke’s ideas about the right and duty to develop “empty” land into profitable property:

These lands were given to us by the Lord Himself . . . They are ours to live on and prosper from. This entire wilderness is ours for the very purpose of celebrating and honouring the glory of God. He is the answer to our poverty . . . *This entire empire of wild is ours in order that we may rejoice in His name . . . We must build churches, new homes, better schools, thriving businesses—all in His name. This is how we move forward. This is how we heal.* (120–22, emphasis mine)

In this new world order, greed masquerades as redemption, the Bible as universal truth, and the King’s English as a neutral and transparent language. While Marchildon’s francophone Catholic priest might take

issue with Wolff's English-Protestant assumptions, they share the same general outlook on the future.

In *The Wolf of Lafontaine*, there are, significantly, no female characters to counter the priests' and the farmers' actions and words; indeed, there are virtually no references to women at all in Marchildon's story, contrasting with Dimaline's novel. In *Empire*, Heiser loses control over the Rogarou Robe and cannot keep Wolff permanently tethered in part because he underestimates the determination and intelligence of Métis matriarchs such as Joan and Ajean, and because he overestimates the sheep-like docility of the missionary women in his camp. In his arrogance he assumes that he controls the Rogarou rather than the reverse. He considers himself in command of the situation when he arranges for Joan to be sent to a hospital emergency ward that would confirm his characterization of her as drunk and deficient if not insane. He sexually abuses, exploits, and mistakenly counts upon the loyalty of vulnerable young women who turn to his Ministry for guidance. In this he resembles Robe, whose transformation into a rogarou occurred the first time that he sexually abused a child: he was once human before he left "good old Robitaille," his former Métis self, "buried in the field where he forced himself on his little cousin."

Eiser is drawn to Robe because both think of themselves, in the rogarou's words, as a "kind of a free agent" and "self-made man" who does not "need help from anyone" (286). As a sociopath, perhaps even a psychopath, Eiser cannot fathom the depths of Joan's love for her husband Victor, for the land, and for her people. By contrast, in *Empire*, Métis women's success in fighting Eiser's Ministry and in promoting their families' and community's health and well-being depends upon their traditional medicinal knowledge, their superior knowledge and understanding of the colonizer's mindset, and their understanding of Rogarou's ways. Ajean's vigilance, together with Joan's determination, has allowed her to keep the enemy at bay, at least for the moment. Sharing some of her knowledge with Joan, Ajean comments that Viking men who "were considered the best fighters, the most fearless—the ones who couldn't be killed"—wore wolfskins. "There is a [l]ots of power in that wolf. Maybe because he's everywhere" (142). This "everywhere" includes the French-Canadian, German-Canadian, and Métis stories associated with Thomas Marchildon's priest, Thomas Eiser, and Joan of

Arcand. In this scenario, it is the Métis, who understand rogarou hunger and can mimic rogarou ways, that have the best chance of living with him rather than being destroyed by him.

ROGAROU GENEALOGIES III: ZEUS, ROBE, AND MIISAABE

If Maria Campbell's and Thomas Marchildon's books work their way into the stories of Joan and Eiser, the template for Zeus is less obvious but still detectable beneath the surface of Dimaline's macro-narrative. Allusions to Greek myths can be detected in this intertext, and help make sense of Zeus's story, as do oral traditions linked to Anishinaabe more-than-human beings, creation stories, and Leanne Simpson's chapter "Constellations of Coresistance" in *As We Have Always Done*. In keeping with protocols about sacred knowledge, some of these stories are restricted to appropriate community contexts, but there are enough published sources about them to warrant a respectful reading. In teasing out some of Zeus's characteristics as well as his character, I propose that the forest man Misaabe (the sasquatch), traditionally not a monster but a helper, clarifies aspects of Zeus's being and his relationship to Joan. The darker aspects of Rogarou, aligned with the windigo, are countered by windigo-fighters, which include Misaabe among others. In interviews about her stance as a writer and specifically about her perspective on *Empire*, Dimaline asks the following questions:

What happens when they're done with our land? What happens when they're done with our language? . . . When colonization comes for our gods, for our spirits . . . what are the ways in which those spirits will resist and how can we help them, if indeed they need our help? ("Walrus")

These questions, explicitly addressing Eiser's abduction of the rogarou, also implicitly describe what happens to Zeus.

Ajean encourages the childless Joan to bring along Zeus when she heads out to rescue Victor, because "a child makes you think before you go acting out all crazy," adding that "[t]he boy will remind you to come home" (147). Joan does not always obey Ajean, while Zeus, for his part, carries his own unique bundle of gifts. When the rogarou kills Mere, Ajean sends Zeus to assist Joan in her grief and to serve as oskaabewis (helper) at Mere's funeral: "She needs you, boy . . . No one else can reach

her . . . She probably can't even see the rest of us . . . We're just ghosts to her" (51–52). Zeus is also extremely tall and very large for a twelve-year-old; he combines the insight of an old soul with child-like insouciance, and is also very shy, preferring to avoid the limelight—all traits associated with Misaabe. Zeus is a gifted, sensitive, lonely child, not interested in hunting or other “manly” activities so much as in surfing the web and riding his bike, reading books, and knitting. Zeus's biological parents are divorced, held back by their own baggage, and not close to him; his beloved auntie Joan is the main mentor and point of reference in his life. Zeus is Robe's most poignant prey, blaming himself for not loving his parents enough and believing that Rogarou has come to punish him for his failings. It would be easy to consider him a sacrificial victim, but the novel's open-ended narrative, the love between Joan and Zeus, and Zeus's own resilience and determination leave enough room for a possible if uncertain homecoming.

Zeus's name might be his proper name, a nickname, self-styled, or a spirit name—albeit unorthodox in all possible instances. He proudly identifies with the Greek god of werewolves, one of the manifestations of the sky-god Zeus, king of the Greek pantheon of gods. In an apocryphal story about Zeus, Lycaeus tells of an annual festival and ritual sacrifice that entails the feeding of flesh from adolescent boys mixed with that of dogs to the god; those fed to Zeus in this way were turned into wolves and could not become human again until they abstained from human flesh for a certain number of years. Several websites reproduce popular versions of the myth of King Lycaon who, in a story dramatized in Greek literature and mentioned in Plato's *Republic*, sacrificed his sons in this way (Britannica). In the novel, Zeus's deadbeat father, who had hoped to produce a champion powwow dancer, one even greater than himself, similarly sacrifices his son to the temple of ambition. When Joan realizes that Robe has taken Zeus, the novel's narrator points to stars and constellations “named for pagan deities” (291) in a crucial passage that hints at the ascendancy of the Métis rogarou, calling into question Christian descriptions of both the Greeks and Indigenous peoples as “pagan.” The passage leaves room for secularism and a sense of loss as one impact of colonialism. However, it also underscores the rogarou's power, while leaving open the possibility that Zeus might be able to come back home. For Leanne Simpson, “the sky world in the peopled cosmos of the Nishnaabeg holds the present because it carries the events

and beings of the past, and the events and beings of the future.” She sees constellations of stars as not just “physical doorways to other worlds” but also as “conceptual doorways that return us to our core essence within Nishnaabeg thought” and thus “work together to reveal theory, story, and knowledge” (*As We Have Always Done*, 211–12).

When Joan and Victor are reunited and proceed to pick up Zeus, the Bible propped up on the motel room door and the Miata parked in her spot—both previously encountered on an earlier trip with Zeus to the New Star Motel—are ominous. So are the two crows who appear at the wrong time of day. In this penultimate passage of *Empire*, the narrator draws the reader’s attention to Orion’s Belt and the Pleiades, respectively known as the Wintermaker and Hole in the Sky in Anishinaabe skymaps. Wintermaker reminds us of the possibility of hunger on the horizon, while Hole in the Sky points to a creation story about our origins as star beings and our spirit home in the skyworld. Such stories serve as signposts, guides, and teachings, but they also underscore the challenges facing Métis families and communities: “Hymns only work if you can sing past the constellations named for pagan deities . . . to reach a Creator willing to listen. And what is prayer when your own god has been plucked out of the wing-dark sky?” (291). While this wording makes clear the depth of Joan’s sense of sorrow and guilt about her nephew’s disappearance, the Rogarou’s attack might be mitigated. What kind of knowledge will Zeus bring back if he survives these various attacks on his being, and what stories might he live to share? Once again, the reader is left in the dark, pondering the mystery of the Rogarou as he “jigged out of the light . . . only the stars knew which direction he took once under cover, and they weren’t talking” (286–87).

Zeus’s connection to the Greek god and the star world is more easily teased out than his relationship to Misaabe, but this aspect of his being can be explained by way of the sasquatch’s traditional relationship to the seven grandfather teachings as well as his relationship to the windigo. In both western and Indigenous literary studies, the cannibal windigo, traditionally representing greed, stands in for the triumvirate of capitalism, colonialism, and a Christianity that attacks Indigenous spirituality. Heiser is the character associated with greed, Robe with the aspect of rogarou closest to the windigo. According to Basil Johnston “[Weendigoes] were assimilated and reincarnated as corporations, conglomerates, and multinationals” (*The Manitou* 235), and

“Weendigo’s hunger superceded everything else, even his family and village” (*Heritage* 166–67). According to Leanne Simpson “Wiindigo is often used to refer to colonialism and its capitalist manifestations, particularly around natural resources”; the modern consumer state “will eventually destroy itself through [this] over-exploitation” (*Dancing* 70). According to Robin Kimmerer, “a world made of gifts cannot coexist with a world made of commodities” (374). Rene Meshake sees Windigo at work in polluted water, missing and murdered women, and the indifference of police, which he collectively refers to as “the Windigo spirit in the system” (70). The windigo’s enemies include Gezhizhwazh and Miisaabe. Cherie Dimaline’s novel aligns with this contemporary understanding of the windigo.

Leanne Simpson identifies the woman Gezhizhwazh as a windigo-killer whose name means “to try to cut” (*Dancing* 71), and as someone who provides “a theoretical foundation for resistance that places strategy and intelligence at the core . . . she was not physically stronger than the Wiindigo, but she was smarter, more cunning, strategic and committed to achieving her goal” (72). Like Gezhizhwazh, Joan carries a knife, the multipurpose knife that Mere kept in her apron pocket for gathering medicines in the woods, but she needs more and stronger medicine in her bundle, as well as the right kind of helpers. In discussing clans and their traditional responsibilities, Rene Meshake mentions those who police spirits as well as community members; he includes the sasquatch as one of those clans alongside the more familiar bear and its association with healing, medicinal knowledge, and the role of protector. Both Windigo and Missaabe are giants, but for Meshake the resemblance stops there:

Missaabe is Bigfoot . . . Missi means grand . . . Then there’s “aabe,” like Anishinaabe—so it’s a being . . . put them together—missaabe—and he’s just as real as anybody else. I think it’s more respectful that he stays in the periphery of the camp or lodges. *Missaabe is not like Windigo—it’s the opposite* [emphasis mine]. He’s the spirit that represents honesty. One of the seven grandfathers. So my grandmothers knew about Missaabe. (69)

Métis poet and novelist Katherena Vermette, like Meshake, identifies the sasquatch with the teaching of honesty, one of the seven grandfather teachings alluded to by Meshake, in her children’s book *Misaabe’s*

Stories: A Story of Honesty (2015). Dimaline's own children's book, *Seven Gifts for Cedar* (2020), culminates with an emphasis on love as the seventh of these teachings. It is Zeus's love for Joan, and their mutual loathing for Eiser's dishonesty, that inspires Zeus to come to her assistance. Like her, he can see that the Reverend Eugene Wolff is really Victor, although both Joan and Zeus mistakenly assume that Eiser, and not Robe, is the rogarou. In fighting and defeating the windigo-like Eiser, they do not anticipate the consequence of giving the rogarou Robe free reign to roam their community. Zeus's youthful vulnerability, together with Joan's neglect to heed Ajean's advice to keep him by her side, make it possible for Robe to attack the boy. The love between Zeus and Joan seems stronger than the rogarou's hunger, however: it inspires Zeus to call out to her from his ghost-like state and makes it possible for her to hear his call for help.

Like Leanne Simpson, Tomson Highway outlines a framework for Indigenous art that helps make sense of Zeus. In an interview entitled "Repairing the Circle" for an anthology of conversations about Indigenous masculinities, Highway contrasts the classical Greek gods with Judeo-Christian monotheism and Cree spirituality. For him, the linear, phallic superstructure of Christianity's authoritarian male God, together with its concepts of heaven and hell, contrasts with the more benign and better balanced if incomplete semi-circle of Greek polytheism, comprising twelve deities of six gods and six goddesses atop Mount Olympus, one of whom was Zeus. In Highway's own Cree language and culture, the full circle represents pantheism, and he outlines two concentric circles of animate and inanimate rather than gendered beings in this Indigenous cosmology, beings which have equal status within the circles (Highway 22–24). Clearly Heiser represents monotheism. Zeus's well-developed "feminine" side and unusual gifts, sometimes associated with two-spirit roles and identities, is consistent with the gender balance of polytheism in the third circle and the cosmology described by Highway. Some of Joan's most vivid dreams, including the nightmares that like more positive dreams on occasion offer insight, warnings, and roadmaps for dealing with rogarous, visit her when she sleeps under the sky-like "uneven blue blanket" that Zeus had knitted for her as a Christmas present (134). The gift of medicines hidden in his larger-than-life frame reflects the function of the sasquatch as helper, one whose role is to communicate with spirits.

CONCLUSION

Dimaline reveals an intersectional understanding of colonialism, capitalism, and coercive state-sanctioned religion that is supported by her novel's intertextuality. Like Leanne Simpson, she foregrounds women's resistance, resilience, and resurgence. Rogarou genealogies offer a telling example not only of why but also of how such stories matter in diasporic Indigenous communities, including the Georgian Bay Métis Nation. Readers of Dimaline's work are led to contend with difficult questions of what it means to be Métis, to be a woman, to be human, and to be connected to spirit. They are also given an opportunity to experience the unique humor, strength, and determination with which her Métis characters confront and overcome many of the challenges they face. Bridging the gap between fact and fiction, the deep layers of various subtexts and allusions in her poetic narrative confer upon *Empire of Wild* a place of honor within Métis literary traditions, Métis forms of resistance to dispossession, and Métis culture's dialogue with other aspects of Anishinaabe being related to Ojibway and Cree First Nations. It also reminds us of the important contributions made by Métis artists to Indigenous literature as an artform and to Indigenous literary studies as a discipline. *Empire of Wild* resonates with readers in its treatment of grief and guilt, uncompromising love, persistent struggle, and the mystery and beauty of the cosmos. As for Rogarou, while he is firmly ensconced in the Métis worldview, he also circulates beyond these particular literary and cultural contexts.

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NOTES

1. The various spellings for rogarou, windigo, Nanabozho, Misaabe, etc. are legion; I use the ones found in my secondary sources. Much discussion and debate by scholars such as Olive Dickason, Brenda MacDougall, Chris Anderson, and Adam Gaudry among others has occurred around the spelling, definition, implications, usage, and misuse of the term "Métis" and its variants; Macdougall, Podruchny, and St-Onge offer a useful summary-overview of this topic in their introduction to *Contours of a People*. I use the spelling employed by the Métis Nation of Ontario and the Georgian Bay Métis Nation as invoked by Dimaline.

2. My understanding of survivance is influenced by the various books of Gerald Vizenor.

3. Animal bone marrow is medicine for some Anishinaabe people, such as Innu. So far, I have not encountered any references to scrapings from bony protuberances used as medicine in Anishinaabe literature. Wabanaki literature indebted to the oral tradition references medicinal scrapings obtained (not always with good intent) from the bone-like horns of the giant land snail, sometimes referred to as a monster, called the wiwilomeq (spelled in a variety of ways depending on the language and orthography of the writer).

4. I have not been able to access Thomas Marchildon's thirty-nine-page publication. My information is from Daniel Marchildon's article about it.

5. The annual festival, launched in 2002 as a fundraising activity meant to create a museum paying homage to Lafontaine's francophone pioneers, is held in July. Organized by a "meute culturelle" or wolf pack of volunteers, it brings together local performers and musicians alongside artists from Québec and other francophone regions of Canada. A local road has been renamed "Chemin du Loup," and there is a sculpture of the famous wolf. For more information, see http://www.ameriquefrancaise.org/en/article-348/legend_of_loup_lafontaine.html.

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Performing Justice in Recent Native American Women's Theater

Mary Kathryn Nagle's *Sovereignty* and *Manahatta*

CATHY C. WAEGNER

Abstract: Lawyer-dramatist Mary Kathryn Nagle's plays and engagement are significant in the twenty-first century movement to transform received modes of perceiving and staging Native America, particularly through Indigenous women's theater emphasizing the continuing capitalistic "rape culture" of colonization and the resurgence of Indigenous approaches. This article analyzes Nagle's plays *Sovereignty* and *Manahatta*, with their experimental past/present dialectic, focus on strong women, and unblinking treatment of painful intratribal clashes arising from the imposition of Western-based hegemonic postulates. Chronological and geo-cultural telescoping, crossfading between scenes, character twinning, dialogic immediacy, parallel or cross-language, and enactment of judicial documents or treaties are among the dramatic techniques Nagle employs. This article examines theories of active, performative sovereignty from the individual body to the political that support linkage among the "restored acts" of performance theory, performing (in)justice on stage, and the participatory audience's virtual experience of collusion and reparation.

Keywords: Mary Kathryn Nagle, *Sovereignty*, *Manahatta*, performative sovereignty, restorative justice, audience collusion

Particularly important work regarding Indigenous justice is currently appearing in the genre of Native American women's drama. When stage plays with a strong past/present dialectic such as Mary Kathryn Nagle's *Sovereignty* or *Manahatta* depict historical and contemporary injustices, the spectators become "collusive"—in unsettling and salutary ways—to the insights into those injustices. "Performing justice" thus means more than simply a performance by actors on stage; to a certain extent, dramatic techniques such as chronological and geo-cultural telescoping, crossfading between scenes, dialogic immediacy, parallel or cross-

language, and enacting judicial documents or treaties call forth a virtual experience of complicity and reparation.¹

As a playwriting lawyer, Nagle is in a unique position to encourage performance of complex entanglements between escalating settler-state reduction of Indigenous rights in earlier centuries and today's violations. In *Sovereignty* (written 2015, premiered at Washington DC's Arena Stage 2018) Nagle portrays the connections of governmental provocations that led to the controversial Treaty of New Echota in 1835—the legal foundation for the removal of Cherokee people to “Indian Territory” in the infamous Trail of Tears—to current issues of jurisdiction in violence committed on Native women. In *Manahatta* (written 2013, full staging at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival 2018), unjust acquisition of Manhattan Island by European commercial powers in the seventeenth century is linked to financial manipulation on present-day Wall Street, which resulted in a plethora of lower-income families, including Indigenes, losing their homes through unsound mortgages in 2008.

“It's a revolutionary act to put Native women on stage sharing their own stories,”² Nagle notes with a touch of self-astonished irony in pointing out the relative rarity of Native women gaining the opportunity to produce their playscripts on influential stages and the theaters' claim to have difficulty in casting Native female roles without “redface” solutions. “Their own stories” emerge in plays that prove to be, as Mohegan director-performer Madeline Sayet phrases it, “powerful acts of defiance against the silencing of Native voices.”³ In *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Daniel Heath Justice distinguishes “good” stories that “are our [Indigenous people's] own” though “not always happy, not always gentle,” from the mistold, “toxic” stories “imposed upon us from outside,” which encode a paradigm of “Indigenous deficiency.” Such a “toxic” narrative reveals the “the externalization of settler colonial guilt and shame, all the more powerful because of the broader society's refusal to take real responsibility for the story's devastating effects.”⁴ Nagle tells “her own stories” depicting scenes of hegemonic exploitation and betrayal as well as “not always gentle” intratribal clashes, especially as they affect women. In this article, I will place Nagle's plays in contexts relevant for recent Native American women's drama and the embodiment of (in)justice. Aspects of contemporary drama, Indigenous theater, performance studies, cultural and postcolonial politics are epitomized

in section one: “‘Performative Sovereignty’: Indigenous Theater in the Twenty-First Century.” Notions of political and body sovereignty are considered in section two: “‘Messy, Multiple, Conflicted’: Sovereignty in Action.” Forms of justice and complicity/collusion are addressed in section three: “‘Restorative Justice’ and Audience Collusion.” In dealing with these contexts, and in subsequently analyzing the plays themselves in sections four and five, I explore linkage among the “restored acts” of performance theory, performing justice on stage, restorative justice, and the participatory audience’s experience of reparation.

Born in Oklahoma City, Mary Kathryn Nagle is an enrolled citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. She entered law school with the goal of supporting her Nation’s strivings toward fuller self-determination, inspired by her Ridge ancestors who “fought to save an entire Nation not with a gun in a battlefield—but with a petition in a court of law.”⁵ She relates in numerous interviews and presentations how she came to realize that legal progress relies on public perception; only by changing fixed narratives, too often firmly based on “redface” portrayals, could fresh and contemporarily germane “stories” emerge. She finds literary and cultural production, in this case theater, to be the vehicle for Americans of all ethnicities “to know our stories . . . and they aren’t going to learn that from a brief or from a rally . . . those things are important, but they’re going to learn [the stories] through art. That’s where they consume stories and that’s where they gain understandings of cultures maybe other than theirs.”⁶ Nagle began her playwriting in 2008 and now has a corpus of at least fourteen plays that bear her trademark of intertwining dramatic Native experiences with the violation of and attempts to redress Indigenous rights. Pertinent for this mix is her professional combination of juridical work as a partner in the law firm Pipestem and Nagle—that specializes in representing tribal governments in constitutional cases—with engagement for drama organizations that encourage Native participation, foremost in her position as executive director of the Yale Indigenous Performing Arts Program. Her involvement with “Native Voices at the Autry,” which encourages Indigenous theater work, and with the campaign “#InsteadOfRedface,” which calls for Native peoples’ performance, are part of a larger twenty-first century movement to replace received modes of perceiving and staging Native America.⁷

“PERFORMATIVE SOVEREIGNTY”:

INDIGENOUS THEATER IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Drama has long been viewed as the “bastard” of American literature, per Susan Harris Smith, especially in contrast to prose fiction. Despite postmodernism’s emphasis on performativity in constructing cultural concepts rather than essentializing truths and its opening up of the notion of literature to include cultural narratives of all types, theater plays remain a stepchild in literary analysis. But they have taken on new accents and importance as “postdramatic theatre” (Hans-Thies Lehmann), which announces alternative forms of the staples of character and plot and a varied integration of the spectators in the meaning-making process generated by shared experiences. Although millennial applications retain the “profound postmodern, poststructuralist doubt” of the Theater of the Absurd, they are labeled theater of the real or verbatim theater, distinguished from “more traditional documentary predecessors” through their deep, still-postmodern uncertainty and the “uneasy awareness that reality is a performative construction and therefore is always open to questioning, which renders it essentially unstable.”⁸ This can have ameliorating effects, as when even the wide-reaching Court decisions in *Sovereignty* can be challenged and transformed by (future) legal protest. Further uncertainty in *Sovereignty* is contained in its relation to “speculative theater,” with a near-future setting of 2020–2021 for one strand of the play’s original composition and staging. Lehmann asserts that the “postdramatic theatre” is the first to turn the level of the real explicitly into a “co-player,”⁹ which is what Nagle accomplishes in fashioning the Supreme Court decisions into virtual “characters” that propel action.

Indigenous theater is developing beyond Birgit Däwes’s presentation in her influential scholarly work, *Native North American Theater in a Global Age: Sites of Identity Construction and Transdifference* (2007). She describes Native theater with its reappropriation of stereotypes, interplay of local and global orientations, as well as subversive representational agenda as “Native trickster theater”; a “new sincerity” in twenty-first literature, including drama, can be posited, however.¹⁰ In Nagle’s work, the lawyer is a novel kind of performing “trickster” with a real-life agenda of strengthening sovereignty. There are not many women’s names in Däwes’s grand appendix list of Indigenous playwrights.¹¹ Justice’s analysis of plays in his 2018 survey demonstrates how, in more

and more cases, “it’s no longer the colonial imaginary that determines the story, it’s Indigenous artists’ imaginations—and, in particular, those of Indigenous *women* artists—that are now fully centred on the stage.”¹² In her widely referenced article for *American Theatre*, Sayet points out that Native women’s productions in high-profile venues did not experience an upswing until 2018, emphasizing the trio of Nagle, Larissa FastHorse, and DeLanna Studi as committed Indigenous women playwrights who produced plays in that year to wide public acclaim.¹³ All three women successfully fought against the *idée fixe* that Indigenous concerns focused on long-gone events and could not appeal to mainstream audiences: “Artistic directors told Nagle they were only interested in telling contemporary stories, and that Native stories take place in the past, to which she responded: ‘If you think our stories from the past are not relevant to what is happening today, let me show you how the past is the present.’”¹⁴

A 2020 book, *Critical Companion to Native American and First Nations Theatre and Performance: Indigenous Spaces*, written by three experts on Native American drama (Jaye T. Darby, Elkin Mohler, and Christy Stanlake), stresses the importance of Native playwrights for Native survivance, culturally and politically: “By connecting the act of making Native theatre to the enactment of Native presence, world-views, and self-governance, Native artists make a bold, significant statement: Native theatre is performative sovereignty.”¹⁵ The “performative sovereignty” arises from continuing the important role of the oral storyteller in Indigenous cultures with every contemporary Native play telling a story about the renewal of Indigenous self-understanding that “colonization vigorously worked to eradicate with violence, shame, and silencing.”¹⁶ *Critical Companion* assigns itself the difficult task of isolating features of Native drama, especially current performances. Some of these features are communal orientation, including an emphasis on unity through recollection or what the author-editors name “remembering”¹⁷; traditional epistemologies or “honoring traditional ways of knowing and being in the world”¹⁸; and the circularity of Native performance and *weltanschauung*. The author-editors analyze Nagle’s *Manahatta* at relative length (chapter 9), along with Studi’s *And So We Walked*, FastHorse’s *The Thanksgiving Play*, and Randy Reinholz’s *Off the Rails* as examples of contemporary fulfillment of such criteria. As I will show, Nagle’s drama technique of enacting a radical past/present

dialectic serves all of *Current Companion's* indicators, supporting the concept of “performative sovereignty” particularly with regard to historical and contemporary material not readily accessible and “not always gentle.”

In considering the context of performance studies, I must cite guru Richard Schechner (*Performance Studies*, 2013, 3rd edition). For Schechner, the basic unit of performance is “restored behavior” or “twice-behaved behavior,” consisting in “physical, verbal, or virtual actions that are not-for-the-first time,”¹⁹ that are socially or theatrically learned. No two performances are identical, however, since “fixed bits of behavior” are constantly “recombined in endless variations” and, more abstractly, “performances exist only as actions, interactions, and relationships.”²⁰ The malleability of the restored behavior leads to performance always being different from past performances despite the commonalities: “Because it is marked, framed, and separate, restored behavior can be worked on, stored and recalled, played with, made into something else, transmitted, and transformed.”²¹ In the historical/present dialectic of Nagle’s two plays, the repetition of paradigms of actions is a meso-level form of “restored behavior” and dovetails with an onstage form of restorative justice.

Elin Diamond extends such a meso-level of restored behavior to a macro one in cultural and postcolonial politics: “Every performance . . . embeds features of previous performances: gender conventions, racial histories, aesthetic traditions—political and cultural pressures that are consciously and unconsciously acknowledged.”²² The underlying economic foundation of repeated actions of hegemonic power, which extend throughout colonization history up to current undertakings such as the Dakota Access Pipeline, is succinctly stated by nineteenth-century President Andrew Jackson in *Sovereignty*: “Copper, gold, silver, furs, salt, tobacco, sugarcane—all of our industries want to expand but can’t because of the Indians. This isn’t about Georgia and the Cherokee, or Mississippi and the Choctaw, or Florida and the Seminole. This is about the economy of the entire United States. . . . until we’ve moved them all, the progress of the entire Nation will be blocked.”²³ The embedded/“restored” conventions and histories serve “negotiations with regimes of power,” those “transformations” of performance promising a readjustment of perceptions of that power: “Viewing performance within a complex matrix of power, serving diverse cultural desires, encourages

a permeable understanding of history and change.”²⁴ Encouraging that change through reinscription of performance and legal progress is playwright and attorney Nagle’s committed aim.

“MESSY, MULTIPLE, AND CONFLICTED”:
SOVEREIGNTY IN ACTION

Clearly, “sovereignty” tends to distinguish the history and rights-endeavors of Native Americans from those of other ethnic groups in North America. The vexed relationship between the Indigenous nations and the United States government resulted in treaties giving lip service to Native groups as nations self-governed and thus theoretically equal in status to the USA, treaties that disguised outright colonization. Antony Anghie’s fruitful approach in the edited volume *Sovereignty: Frontiers of Possibility* (2012) sees the dynamics of the colonial encounter as the basis for jurisdiction on sovereignty, rather than the outright imposition of a Western “sovereignty” concept on Indigenous peoples.²⁵ John R. Wunder’s benchmark volume, *Native American Sovereignty* (1996), carefully considers the meshing of governmental sovereignty with varied forms of legal self-determination, constantly evolving.²⁶ The *process* orientation of sovereignty discourse is usefully epitomized in Amanda Cobb’s 2005–2006 article ambitiously titled “Understanding Tribal Sovereignty.” Although Indigenous sovereignty is in need of “vigilant protection” and “careful maintenance,” she eschews any static concepts: “Because sovereignty has meaning only in the context of lived experiences, it is by definition culturally specific and dynamic.”²⁷ Concentration on the ‘how’ of sovereignty has led to activation of agency through Native “acts of creation, . . . through reinvention or transformation,” indeed to “a resurgence and revitalization of culture, which encompasses all of our practices and ways.”²⁸ Activist and theorist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson crafts “resurgence” into an ongoing initiative of self-determination; “we must exercise the ability to make decisions about our lands, our bodies, and our minds,” dynamically rooting “sovereignty in good relationships [among people(s), to the land and environment, and to animal nations], responsibilities, a deep respect for individual and collective self-determination, and honoring diversity”—not in power or “coercion.”²⁹ In the realm of Native theater, the phrase “performing sovereignty” links in with the dynamic,

process-orientation of recent discourse on and efforts to bolster Native self-determination.

Picking up furthermore on John Hoffman's proposal in his book titled *Sovereignty* to base conversation about national sovereignty on a rethinking of *individual* action, here I will deal mainly with active, performative sovereignty from the individual body to the political, encapsulated in a key statement by Cherokee lawyer Sarah Polson in Nagle's play *Sovereignty*: "If [my white fiancé Ben, who raped me,] can erase my sovereignty over my body, he can erase the sovereignty of my nation."³⁰ Similarly, in *Manahatta*, the superior force of the Dutch mercantilists erases the independent sovereignty of the Lenape people by grotesquely and ironically offering a reward of "ten fathoms of wampum" to Dutch militiamen for every piece of so-called "redskin" cut out of murdered Natives (scene 21), including women, whose skin Governor Peter Minuit has already called particularly "tempting" (scene 7). Horrified, defiant Native woman Le-le-wa'-you points out the economic basis of the violent hegemonic act: "They're trading our skin for wampum" (scene 24).³¹ Thus the establishment of colonial-national sovereignty and a hegemonic form of justice is often carried out on the Indigenous (woman's) body. In *Sovereignty*, a Georgia militiaman confesses, "You know, we've been instructed to violate Cherokee women who do not obey our commands."³² The dominion through violation of land and cultures is inseparable from rape of Native women by conquerors, as Annette Kolodny demonstrated in her still important book, *The Lay of the Land*, 1975 (reissued as eBook 2017).³³

More recent theorists on the enlacing of colonial settler violation of land and Indigenous (female) bodies emphasize the deep and continuing heteropatriarchal postulates of Western-based sovereignty and justice, and advocate the resurgence of Indigenous approaches to counter "rape culture." As a decades-long counsellor for Native rape survivors and a law professor, Sarah Deer provides empirical and theoretical background for the character Sarah Polson's dramatic and personal proclamation (quoted in the preceding paragraph) about heteropatriarchal erasure in Nagle's *Sovereignty*. For Deer, "the crisis of rape in tribal communities is inextricably linked to the way in which the United States developed and sustained a legal system that has usurped the sovereign authority of tribal nations," and, more strongly, that "crisis of rape" is basic in addressing issues of sovereignty: "[R]ape should be the num-

ber one priority for tribal nations. All other challenges faced by tribal nations are linked to the history and trauma of rape.”³⁴ Deer finds support in Dian Million’s account of (post)colonial relations of power and economy as rooted in “gender violence that marks the evisceration of Indigenous nations,” eroding traditional matrilineal structures and other female strengths. According to Million, we must “understand the increasing gender violence perpetrated against Indigenous women as more than an attack on individuals, and as a mobile but durable feature of colonial power relations,”³⁵ which have a “white, heteronormative male figure as logos” who brutally developed a “capitalism [that] is a vampire on our cultures.”³⁶ Million’s image of the present-day preying, extractive “male” settler-capitalism seeded in the past is dramatized in, for instance, the monetary awards for pieces of “redskin” in *Manahatta* and the legalized rape by militiamen to further Indigenous removal from resource-rich Native land in *Sovereignty*. Simpson warns her people against “buying into” the axioms of hegemonic settler heteropatriarchy: “[T]he more that heterosexual cisgendered Native men and women buy into the hierarchy and choose to reproduce and enforce violence, exclusion, and erasure, the better it works to divide and destroy the fabric of relationships that make up our nations.”³⁷

Nagle’s radical past/present dialectic as a dramatic technique for revealing individual and collective intersection is supported by Mark Rifkin’s apposite theory of “temporal sovereignty.” Rifkin points out the theoretical violence and deleterious effects of imposing settler time onto Indigenous concepts, history, ritual, and storying; he aspires “to pluralize temporality so as to open possibilities for engaging with Indigenous self-articulation, forms of collective life, and modes of self-determination beyond their incorporation or translation into settler frames of reference.”³⁸ Rifkin admits, however, that an honest deliberation of the interweaving of the “chronogeopolitics of settler policy” with “ongoing Indigenous legacies of landedness, mobility, governance, ritual periodicities, social networks, and intergenerational stories” creates perceptions that can be “messy, multiple, and conflicted.”³⁹ This very messiness and multiplicity is conveyed in Nagle’s plays in, for example, the relative contingency of laws as shown by the varying Supreme Court rulings and their effects on Native American forms of sovereignty (details below). The conflictedness Rifkin points to is perhaps best seen in Nagle’s presentation in *Sovereignty* of the continuing reverberations

of the intratribal clash between the adherents of the “Ridge” faction that signed the Treaty of New Echota and the opposing “Ross” followers. The transection of “temporal sovereignty” with settler policies moves into ethical dimensions, with the intratribal feud poignantly reflecting the difficulty of assigning “right vs. wrong” labels of moral and legal justice in postcolonial ramifications of imperialism. As a Ridge descendant, Nagle seeks to moderate the branding of her murdered Ridge ancestors as “traitors.”⁴⁰ Although, as I will show in my analysis, Nagle projects a reconciliation between the Ridge and the Ross descendants in *Sovereignty*, the pain of the schism is significant for current Cherokee dialogues and for the dynamics of the play; as Nagle summarizes in a personal email, “yes the debate continues! and it’s important to point that out!”⁴¹

“RESTORATIVE JUSTICE” AND AUDIENCE COLLUSION

Despite the “messiness” and “multiplicity” of the shifting Supreme Court rulings that Nagle activates in *Sovereignty*, as a lawyer she would probably not heed Kevin Bruyneel’s advice to embrace a productive “fuzziness” in Indigenous sovereignty. Bruyneel avers that the settler-state’s historical attempts to isolate and control Native American nations on sharply determined reservations can be opposed by contemporary Native Americans’ implementation of practices of sovereignty that work against strict binary distinctions on both spatial and temporal axes: “In resistance, indigenous postcolonial politics seeks to resignify settler-state boundaries as the domain of subaltern, anticolonial activity rather than as sites of connection and separation between seamlessly bounded states, people, structures, and histories.”⁴² Nagle certainly shows “anti-colonial activity” in her characters’ engagement, but as an activist-playwright she strives for salient legal victories.

The “restored behavior” units of performance echo in the concept of “restorative justice” with its requirement of active participation by all parties to achieve some type of reparation, in contrast to “retributive justice,” which requires punishment. The line between these two forms of justice can be as fuzzy as Bruyneel’s sovereignty, however. Resistant Cherokee justice is dramatized in Ruth Muskrat Bronson’s allotment-era short story “The Serpent” (1925), in which the protagonist Nancy arranges for a bestial Indian Agent, who rapes and impregnates young

women in the community, to be bitten by a poisonous snake she finds in the Cherokee Nation's swamp. In his detailed analysis of the story, Alex Cavanaugh concludes that "Nancy's assertion of juridical agency enacts a return to the clan systems of her ancestors, which held retribution as the primary recourse for criminal offenses. In clan justice systems, retributive punishment was coded as 'revenge,' though such action was understood in a Cherokee context as preserving social balance rather than pursuing bloodlust."⁴³ Nancy's daring action to prevent further offenses by the powerful Indian Agent aims for "social balance" more clearly than the 1839 brutal intratribal assassinations, presumably by Ross supporters, of the Treaty Party faction in Oklahoma, which take place offstage in the climactic final scene of Nagle's play in the family cemetery (discussed in more detail below); onstage, John Ridge is being buried by his mourning wife, joined by the twenty-first-century Ridges and Rosses in a dramatic moment of transgenerational restoration. In their essay titled "What Justice Wants," Eva Tuck and K. Wayne Wang use the term "re-member" consonantly—but with a bodily component in the image as verb—with the Indigenous theater scholars discussed above, who found unity through recollection a feature of Native plays. According to Tuck and Wang, "[j]ustice re-members . . . [in a twofold way, as a] kind of ghosting that refuses to forget abduction, violation, displacement, dispossession, and death . . . [just as it] re-member[s] the fragmented social body back together."⁴⁴

In an online interview, Nagle stresses her agenda of "restoring tribal jurisdiction and sovereignty as much as possible" after centuries of gradual "loss" and "trauma," to promote "healing."⁴⁵ The active participation in a theater setting takes the form of audience complicity. For texts about hegemonic genocidal acts, Gabriele Schwab has formulated the kind of participation she sees as possible and beneficial: "I am interested in the collective process instigated by texts that penetrate the 'psychic skin' of readers in order to enlist them in the collective work not only of mourning but also of 'reparation,' however limited it must remain in the face of catastrophic atrocities."⁴⁶ For stage plays, the theory of audience collusion goes as far back as Aristotle's *Poetics*; Aristotle maintains that archaic theater in which one speaker directly addressed the audience changed to actors speaking to each other on stage, rhetorically involving the audience through "collaboration or collusion with the dramatic enterprise," as formulated by Jaś Elsner.⁴⁷ The spectators

evaluate the ethics of the characters' actions. In Nagle's plays, the audience's ethical choices are directed through the onstage, affective performance and juxtaposition of events and facts that the spectators might not previously have been aware of.

The individual and collective "reparation" and transformation that Schwab advocates in connection with societal trauma is at least modestly possible, Nagle indicates, and cites, as Sayet reports, the protest at Standing Rock. Sayet presents Nagle's confidence in theater as a political tool for changing attitudes toward Native issues, for raising awareness of injustice toward Indigenous people, and for rallying aid on occasions of acute need, as with the projected oil pipeline through sacred Dakota territory. Nagle "believes that the 2016 standoff between federal authorities and Native peoples and their supporters over the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock was a game changer in the conversation [about justice for Native people], because its story affected people so deeply. Suddenly the conversation moved from people assuming that Native stories weren't relevant to people wanting to know what they could do to help. Playwright Nagle's advice: 'Produce a Native play.'"⁴⁸

CROSSFADING AND TWINNING IN *SOVEREIGNTY*: DELINEATING BETWEEN JUST AND UNJUST?

Sovereignty's double plot consists in the echoing of the Federal government's 1830s encroachment on the sovereignty of the Cherokee Nation in the Southeastern US, leading to the Removal to the Oklahoma "Indian Territory," in the modern battle for Native jurisdiction over non-Natives committing crimes on reservations. The twinning of most of the characters supports the link between past and present injustices. For instance, the betrayer Andrew Jackson is also played by the actor embodying rapist fiancé Ben. However, the resolute and talented protagonist Sarah Ridge Polson, a young lawyer who seeks employment in the Cherokee Nation, Oklahoma, has no historical "twin" and serves as a mediator.

At least three court decisions become "players" in *Sovereignty*. *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), *Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe* (1978), and *Dollar General Corporation v. Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians* (2016). In 1832 the Supreme Court decided that individual States did not have the right to regulate Native lands and commerce on them—a triumph for the Cherokee Nation! But President Jackson refused to imple-

ment this law, and Cherokees were forced to move (via the Treaty of New Echota) to territory west of the Mississippi, during which up to a third of the Nation perished. A cluster of strategies contributes to the dramaturgical staging of the *Worcester v. Georgia* court ruling: Native-friendly Samuel Worcester and unscrupulous Andrew Jackson appear as characters; Cherokee towns in Georgia and in Oklahoma as sites of dramatic action are propinquitous; the Cherokee Phoenix newspaper, originally published in Cherokee and English beginning in 1828 by the Ridge relative and ally Elias Boudinot, is read onstage in both the nineteenth- and twenty-first centuries in a crossfade between scenes, a cinematic device.⁴⁹ The crossfading between the two eras is intensified when present-day lawyer Sarah actually speaks to nineteenth-century John Ross before he melds into her supervisor Jim Ross.⁵⁰

In *Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe*, the Supreme Court decided that tribal courts did not have criminal jurisdiction over non-Natives, largely a reversal of *Worcester v. Georgia*⁵¹; Congress partially abrogated this reversal, however, when it enacted the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 (VAWA), which recognizes tribes' criminal jurisdiction over non-Native perpetrators of domestic violence occurring in "Indian Country" when the victim is Native. In her legal activism, Nagle is working on many fronts to complete the abrogation of the 1978 Court judgment; in fact, she has publicly announced that this is her unequivocal professional target: "Everything I want to achieve as a lawyer, to be very clear, is overturning the Supreme Court's decision in *Oliphant*."⁵² The histrionic staging of this stand emerges in a surprisingly and deliberately comic exchange among Sarah, her brother Watie, and her fiancé-to-be Ben:

SARAH: Just six years ago, Congress re-authorized the Violence Against Women Act with a tribal jurisdiction provision in it.

WATIE: You lost me at authorized. Can I make a suggestion? Skip anything above two syllables.

BEN: VA-WA, that works.

SARAH: In VAWA, Congress restored a piece of our criminal jurisdiction. The criminal jurisdiction that *Oliphant* took away.

WATIE: Jur-is-dic-shun. You lost me at dick.⁵³

For *Dollar General Corporation v. Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians*, a 4-to-4 split decision in the Supreme Court (June 2016) allows tribal courts to hear civil suits when violence has been committed on tribal lands by non-Indians or corporations against Indian victims.⁵⁴ Nagle sought ways—such as the dialogic immediacy through humorous interchange of the passage just quoted—to make court proclamations comprehensible and involving in her “theater of the real” to bolster her intuition that “Dollar General is using a lot of arguments that corporations routinely use, but somehow when they’re put into an Indian context, most people lose the ability to follow the line.”⁵⁵ In her original playscript, Nagle staged Sarah’s successful counter-plea before the Supreme Court when her white fiancé in a “future” setting of 2021 challenges the right for a tribal court to deal with her accusation of his having battered and raped her. The published play (2020) does away with this future indication, including “present” in the stage directions, although, to my knowledge, VAWA has not yet been tested in the Supreme Court. An updated VAWA was reauthorized by the House of Representatives in 2019 but at my time of writing this article, it has not yet received the approval of the Senate.

The “stories” of the various legal decisions are plaited with at least two other story strands in *Sovereignty*. Along with his sister Flora, Sarah’s father Roger relates the traditional Cherokee creation story, partially in the Cherokee language,⁵⁶ to his infant grandson. The activation of dynamic and communal, intergenerational oral storytelling, which Rifkin specifically includes in his concept of “temporal sovereignty,” parallels another oral narrative reiterated and passed down in many Cherokee communities: the Ridge faction’s signing of the Treaty of New Echota as treason that broke Cherokee law and deservedly reaped the death penalty for the leading signatories. Roger repeatedly refers to the rejection he met as a contemporary Ridge descendant, being warned by his mother never to return to the Oklahoma reservation: “I told you [, daughter Sarah], don’t go back [to the Nation]. If you do, they’ll kill you. That’s what my mom told me. It’s what her dad told her.”⁵⁷ The one time Roger did return, he was laughed at and humiliated when he applied for a job. In fact, even before he tells his grandson the Creation story, he emotionally recounts his inherited Ridge version of the “betrayal” and the still-real danger:

Your mom named you Ridge. Ridge, John Ridge, was my mom's great grandfather. That's something to be proud of, he was a brilliant man, a fighter, his blood runs through your veins. Never forget that. Just don't tell anyone you're named after him. It's like, between you and me. Our little secret.

The day they find out you're a Ridge is the day they kill you.⁵⁸

When Sarah arrives at the Nation to work as an activist lawyer, she is careful to avoid informing her boss, the tribal Attorney General Jim Ross, that she is a Ridge descendant. The dramatic irony intensifies when he articulates his disparaging attitude toward the Ridges' acquiescence to Removal. The Treaty of New Echota as a player is reinforced when Sarah's fiancé Ben grows irritatedly jealous of it: "The treaty, the treaty, the treaty, yes I know, all you talk about is the treaty."⁵⁹ In focusing on a controversial counternarrative concerning the Treaty, Nagle is reinforcing the "performative sovereignty" acclaimed by Darby, Mohler, and Stanlake with that counternarrative's potential function to "re-member" and unify the Cherokee people. Early scenes show the deep friendship among the four who led the Cherokee Nation (John Ross, Major Ridge, John Ridge, Elias Boudinot). But the ensuing division between the John Ross followers who refused to cede their sovereign lands in the Southeast, and the Ridge camp, which believed that removal to "Indian Territory" in the west was hegemonically inevitable and should be negotiated as advantageously as possible, echoes through the generations and provides the dramatic backbone of the play.

As a Ridge descendant, Nagle steers to draw the viewer into a (re) consideration of the inherited feud. She stages an imagined resolution by circling back to the beginning of the play in the Ridge family cemetery;⁶⁰ in the final transhistorical scene in the same setting, a Ross descendant (Jim) holds the new Ridge baby in his arms near the Ridge gravesites, while John Ridge's non-Native wife Sarah Bird Northrup and Samuel Worcester are about to bury the assassinated leader, with the characters of the two different eras cross-talking. In theorist Diamond's sense of power negotiation in performance, it is the Treaty and its aftermath, not John Ridge as a Cherokee lawyer and leader, that the Ross supporters stabbed. The insights and reunion or "re-membling" in the cemetery was prepared for by an earlier dialogue between Jim Ross and

his lawyer-employee Sarah Polson, in which Jim asks her to plead at the Supreme Court for criminal jurisdiction on Native lands:

JIM ROSS: John Ridge betrayed our Nation. You think he saved it. We won't resolve this in a day, or a month or even a year. But we have something now, something just as, if not more, pressing before us. So could we, maybe just this once, leave all that behind us and fight for what both of our grandfathers fought for, and that is, the sovereignty of Cherokee Nation?⁶¹

Thus, in addition to the court decisions and the Treaty becoming players in *Sovereignty*, the Ross/Ridge enmity is personalized as a case study of how difficult it is to delineate between just and unjust within the subaltern struggle against hegemonic domination, even with historical hindsight, and how the reverberations of this difficulty can harden into resentments and preconceived notions that create a chain of follow-up injustices affecting later generations. Native stage performance can provide palpable insights into the painful evolution and contradictory involution of that historical chain.

STAGING OF PALIMPSESTS IN MANAHATTA:

INDIVIDUAL SOVEREIGNTY AND RE-MEMBERING "WE"

Like *Sovereignty*, the play *Manahatta* boasts two entangled plot lines: the seventeenth-century takeover of Manhattan Island by Dutch traders and the subsequent persecution and displacement of the Lenape/Delaware people from their homelands melds with the 2008 crash on Wall Street that leads to a Lenape/Delaware widow losing her home in Anadarko, Oklahoma, the destination of the step-by-step removal to the west. Nagle even sees a direct causal relation between original displacement and the economic crash separated by four hundred years, a relation obfuscated by deliberate historic amnesia: "You don't get a housing crisis on Wall Street unless you've purposely, as a nation, erased the origin story of Wall Street, which was the taking of the Lenape's home. And forced removal."⁶² The following short exchange between Peter Minuit, the governor of New Amsterdam, and his lieutenant Jakob reveals the three crucial geographical points in the 1600s setting and the colonizing dynamics that reverberate into subsequent centuries:

PETER MINUIT: . . . I need you to build a wall.

JAKOB: On your farm?

PETER MINUIT: On the island. To keep the rest of them out. You know, on the north side, where they usually come down to trade, along the Broad Way.

JAKOB: We don't have the resources to build a wall.

PETER MINUIT: It'll run east to west, starting at that street where they always dump their shells—

JAKOB: We have no capital.

PETER MINUIT: We have Negroes. (scene 25)

Wall Street, of later financial fame, is thus the site of a literal wooden wall from east to west on Manhattan Island, built by the labor of enslaved black persons and originally erected to displace the Lenape/Delaware people. Wall Street is roughly perpendicular to Pearl Street that ran on the original eastern shoreline of the lower part of Manhattan Island and is the Lenape homeland's ceremonial heart called *helape chen kwaelas* ("the place where the sun is born") by all generations of the Lenape/Delaware people, where oysters were plentiful and hence sacred wampum shells were located. The role of wampum as a binder among the centuries will be indicated in later analysis. In the passage just quoted, Dutch governor Peter Minuit disrespectfully calls *helape chen kwaelas* "that street where they always dump their shells." Broad Way was the Lenape north-south trading path, approximately parallel to Pearl Street, the way to the Lenapes' "relatives up north" (scene 16), which became a space for Lenape-Dutch trade ("JAKOB: . . . [Le-le-wa'-you is the Lenape woman] who I trade with now, along the Broad Way," scene 11) and then was refunctionalized as a killing path by the militiamen. In addition to the genocide committed on the Native Lenape, a further settler-society evil is hinted at when Minuit responds to the realization that his Dutch West India Company no longer has the monetary resources to build the protecting wall: "We have Negroes." The lack of capital arises from the bursting of the Company's "tulip bubble" and ensuing bankruptcy in the seventeenth century; the bubble of the speculative home loans bursts similarly in the twenty-first.

The two strong and smart female figures (the same actress), Le-le-wa'-you in the seventeenth century and Jane Snake in the twenty-first,

both seek to enter a (proto)capitalist ‘man’s world’: trading furs at the Dutch-Lenape marketplace and investment banking at Lehman Brothers on Wall Street, respectively, in the same geographic space. In Oklahoma, Father Snake, dying after a heart operation, asks for a Lenape phrase to be passed on to his daughter Jane, who is at her job interview in New York City, “Machi Manahatta,” or “go home to Manahatta” (scene six), thus reinforcing Manahatta/New York as the ur-homeland. The staging of the palimpsests of character, space, and time is accomplished by, among other tactics, overlapping setting and costume changes, inducing crossfading. This basically cinematic technique of the crossfade already introduced in the discussion of *Sovereignty* grows more extreme as *Manahatta* progresses until climactic scene 26 has the actors from both centuries onstage, with bizarre effectiveness; Le-le-wa’-you’s husband Se-ke-tu-may-quaa dances in wild rhythm (on Jane’s desk, in the Oregon Shakespeare Festival production) to dodge the barrage of Dutch militia’s bullets while Jane and her colleagues frantically work phones and computers, struggling to avert the 2008 financial crash.

Moreover, the “capitalocene” bases of the dominant societies (and their paternalistic attitudes) in both the seventeenth and twenty-first centuries appear in strikingly parallel dialogue, an onstage realization of performance theory’s “twice-behaved behavior”:

PETER MINUIT [seventeenth c.]: “Very few of them [the Delaware Natives] speak, and the ones that do have no grasp of basic concepts like capital, commerce, *ownership*. They have no idea how an economy actually works” (scene 7, emphasis in original).

MICHAEL [loan shark in Oklahoma, twenty-first c.] “Folks like her [i.e. Jane’s mother], they have no grasp of basic concepts like capital, commerce, *ownership*. They have no idea how an economy actually works.” (scene 10, emphasis in original)

Governor Minuit informs the Dutch missionary Jonas about the economic reality of New Amsterdam: “PETER MINUIT: You can quote Jesus all you want, Jonas, but at the end of the day, do you know who pays for your Church? Fur and tulips. Not Indians sitting in pews. Fur and tulips” (scene 19). In the twenty-first century, the religious leaders are depicted as exploiting the Native people, complicitous with the risky banks: for example, in encouraging Jane’s mother Bobbie to take out a

devastating loan on her home in order to pay medical bills. Minuit's pronouncement becomes a leitmotif for capitalist dealings in the Americas: "There's no such thing as enough in the New World" (scene 7), echoed in the twenty-first century when broker Dick pronounces "There's no such thing as enough on Wall Street" (scene 15).

The setting of Wall Street provides a kind of objective correlative for the diverse walls in both plays. Depending on the perspective, the walls are meant to protect and preserve—or to shut out and contain. We have seen that with his ominous wall Peter Minuit sought to keep the Lenape people out of the colonized part of their homeland, and their removal to the impoverished reservation in Oklahoma can be viewed as a hegemonic containment, creating a type of Foucauldian heterotopia with limited exit and access.⁶³ The fence of the Ridge family cemetery in *Sovereignty* serves the purpose of protecting the gravesites; this sacred venue is at first humorously violated by Sarah's non-Indigenous fiancé when he urinates on the fence, only to discover that it is painfully electric. But his physical violation of Sarah in the rape scene is a criminal act linking the early settler defilement of land, Indigenous bodies, and lifeways with later disrespect, containment, and violence. In the two plays, the colonizer not only creates walled-in heterotopias for his own purposes, but enters them, as well as revered subaltern spaces, at will and by force.

The use (and misuse) of Indigenous language overcomes or creates other forms of walls, and, in the staging strategies of *Manahatta*, connects scenes and centuries. The boarding school violence of severe beatings when the Native pupils used their Lenape language, recapitulated by Bobbie, who attended Riverside Indian School in Anadarko along with her future husband (scene 27), continues the thread of violence toward Indigenes that began in the early scenes in the Manhattan homeland.⁶⁴ In a touchstone colonial encounter, Nagle cleverly imagines how the infelicities of translation—both linguistic and cultural, hinging specifically on the meanings of "trade"—result in the fateful "trade" of Manahatta and thus pave the way for the colonizing violence that replaced peaceful fur "trade":

PETER MINUIT: Look, let's not overly complicate things. This is all very simple. The Dutch, my people, would like to trade with you and your people for Manahatta. You own Manahatta because it is your home.

MOTHER: What is he saying?

LE-LE-WA'-YOU (to MOTHER): They wish to continue to trade with us here on Manahatta, our home. . . .

PETER MINUIT: We give this wampum now to show our thanks. If it had not been for the food that your people gave us during our first winter here, we would have starved to death. . . .

SE-KET-TU-MAY-QUA: This is real wampum.

PETER MINUIT: Wonderful, now tell me, will you agree to trade Manahatta?

MOTHER (to PETER MINUIT): To the Lenape, when we give a gift wampum, that makes us family. Now we're related. We share the same home.

MOTHER extends her hand to PETER MINUIT.

PETER MINUIT quickly grabs her hand and gives it a hearty shake.

PETER MINUIT (looks to JAKOB with shock and amazement, and then laughs): We own Manahatta!

JAKOB: Incredible! (scene 11)⁶⁵

Moreover, the Lenape women naively teach the missionaries their language so that Protestant hymns can be sung in the Native language, thus assisting in destroying their own religious culture. Scenes 16 and 17 show Jane's family applying for a federal grant to teach Lenape on the reservation, but no fluent speakers can be found to serve as teachers.

Using a different tack with the complex transactions on the stock market than she does with the legal complications in *Sovereignty*, Nagle deliberately convolutes the financial terms, jargon, and acronyms in *Manahatta*. They are humorously undercut when Luke, Jane's childhood friend visiting from Oklahoma, picks up Jane's office phone and mocks her language of security investment with drum-like rhythm: "ABS. CDO. ABS. CDO. Tranche. Tranche. ABS. CDO. Tranche. Tranche. ABS. CDO. Tranche. Tranche. Tranche. Tranche. Tranche. Tranche. Tranche. Tranche" (scene 13). The humor is bittersweet for the viewer, however, who knows that Jane's career-climbing on Wall Street, her questionable business ethics, and her trading, as it were, of her mother's Lenape language for financial jargon has left her mother back in Oklahoma vulner-

able to the acronyms of the unconscionable local banker (and religious leader) Michael, as in this example:

BOBBIE: DTI?

MICHAEL: It's a ratio.

BOBBIE: Of what?

MICHAEL: Debt to income. To apply for a loan you have to tell the bank how much debt you have in comparison to your income.

BOBBIE: That's easy. I got a lot of debt. Hardly no income. (scene 10)

Bobbie indeed loses the family home after naively signing a form for an ARM (adjustable rate mortgage). Jane's professional achievement, even hubris ["I'm the first Native, ever, that I know of, that you know of, that anyone knows to work on Wall Street" (scene 13)] and her "million dollar bonus" (scene 18) do not give her the power or sovereignty to redress the injustice her people have been subjected to, not even the few minutes or the interest to seek out the Lenape's ceremonial center near her workplace: Luke has said, "It's kinda sad, don't you think? The only Lenape here doesn't have time to walk down Pearl Street" (scene 13). Is Jane a "sellout"? Nagle herself suggests this possibility in an interview.⁶⁶ Bobbie firmly rejects a bailout with her daughter Jane's tainted wealth, which Bobbie sees as made up of money earned by Wall Street financiers from desperate people who could not repay the unsolid mortgages on their houses.

The play invites the spectators to "buy into" the notion that the key to restoration lies in wampum—not in wampum as currency, however, but rather as the repository of cultural value, made of the "shells that hold the prayers of our people," which have the "right balance" of color and quality, as Le-le-wa'-you's mother puts it (scene 9). In the penultimate scene Bobbie recites the Lenape/Delaware creation story, and then passes her priceless wampum necklace on to Jane:

This is wampum. Someone in your family carried this necklace all the way from the *helape chen kwaelas* to here, where we are now, in Oklahoma. So they can try [to evict us]. But they'll never really take our home. Every time they make us leave, like the turtle [in the creation story], we carry our home with us. (scene 29)

Jane returns to Wall Street, only to discover that her firm is bankrupt. Her boss suggests that she “go home,” but her response is a version of theorists Schechner’s and Diamond’s reinscribed performance. Instead of repeating her previous acts of allegiance to the world of capitalist finance, Jane reorients her values and sights. As she gazes out the skyscraper window toward Pearl Street—the *helape chen kwaelas*—and clasps her wampum necklace, her loyalty spirals back to pre-colonial Manahatta. She links her individual sovereignty (“my home”) to a remembering “we” and to her people’s survivance: “This is my home. . . . We are still here” (scene 30).

CONCLUSION: INTERTWINING JUSTICE AND THEATER

For Nagle, performing justice necessarily involves the synergetic intertwining of judicial and theatrical work in order to confront both the legal or financial institutions and the American public with its preconceptions: “I see the connection between the legal framework we live in and the narrative that has yet to change.”⁶⁷ She passionately believes that Native activism and discourse can counter injustice: “As a lawyer, and as a direct descendant of a survivor of genocide, I have committed my life’s work to eradicating the harmful stereotypes and false stories this [US] Nation created to justify the ‘legal’ extermination of my people.”⁶⁸ The distinction between “justifying” and “justice” emerges in the performative sovereignty that restores silenced or erased Native versions of stories and activates the spectators’ sense of disturbing as well as salubrious collusion: “Theater is powerful,” Nagle tells us, “Stories are powerful. The stories we tell ourselves have the power to heal, open hearts and minds, educate, and transform prejudice.”⁶⁹ The stakes are high: As Sayet claims, “the narratives we put onstage . . . have direct consequences in shaping our world,” and *Critical Companion* reminds us that “every time a Storyteller shares their stories, it is a powerful act of decolonization” and “an antidote to the spirit of dehumanization sweeping our planet.”⁷⁰ The imaginatively engaging genre of the Native stage play offers an experiential lens of immediacy through which the audience can reflect on—and act on—the complex and continuing, urgent injustices of our time.

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NOTES

1. Mary Kathryn Nagle kindly supplied me with copies of the playscripts for *Sovereignty* and *Manahatta*, before the former appeared in published form (Northwestern UP, 2020). *Manahatta* was printed in 2018 by Tudor Guild, a volunteer organization that supports the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

2. “Creative Time: Summit DC: Under Siege—Mary Kathryn Nagle.” November 3, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yG0qqcwffJM>, 06:50.

3. Madeline Sayet, “Native Women Rising,” *American Theatre*, April 2018, <https://www.americantheatre.org/2018/03/20/native-women-rising/>. In a fine essay that did not come to my attention until the copyediting phase of the article at hand, Miriam Hahn Thomas also cites Sayet and points out the “interconnectedness of erasure and injustice” in *Sovereignty* (46). See Miriam Hahn Thomas, “Past is Precedent: Native Survivance and Cross-Generational Storytelling in Mary Kathryn Nagle’s *Sovereignty*,” *Theatre Symposium* 29 (2022): 35–48.

4. Daniel Heath Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (Waterloo ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018), 2–4.

5. Mary Kathryn Nagle, “Native Voices on the American Stage: A Constitutional Crisis,” *HowlRound*, February 22, 2015, <https://howlround.com/native-voices-american-stage>.

6. “Why Theatre? Mary Kathryn Nagle Responds.” Oregon Shakespeare Festival, January 11, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRMT0p4tZbo>, 01:22–01:41.

7. The Native media specialist Jen Shook rightly calls attention to Nagle’s awareness that she is challenging a twofold body of theater-goers: “Nagle’s plays, in keeping with Native Voice’s mission and her own Cherokee mixed-blood heritage, address both Native and non-Native audiences, and call both audiences to action” (177). See Jen Shook, “Unghosting Bones: Resistant Play(s) versus the Legacy of Carlisle Indian Industrial School,” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 32, nos. 1 & 2 (Spring/Summer 2020): 159–87.

8. For further reading on drama as the “bastard” of literature, see Susan Harris Smith, *American Drama: The Bastard Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For the “Theater of the Real,” see Jenn Stephenson, *Insecurity: Perils and Products of Theatres of the Real* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 10; and Carol Martin, *Theatre of the Real* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

9. Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2006), 100. (This text was translated from the 1999 German original.)

10. See Birgit Däwes, *Native North American Theater in a Global Age: Sites of Identity Construction and Transdifference* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2007). Daniel O’Gorman and Robert Eaglestone concentrate on sincerity in prose fiction in their *Routledge Companion to Twenty-First Century Literary Fiction*. See Daniel O’Gorman and Robert Eaglestone, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Twenty-First Century Literary Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2019). James Phelan takes the drastic step of inserting “real” rather than “implied” audience in revising Seymour Chatman’s standard model of discourse vs. story (69). See James Phelan, “Rhetoric, Ethnicity, and Narrative Communication: Or, from Story and Discourse to Authors, Resources, and Audiences.” *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 94, nos. 1 & 2 (Spring/Summer 2011): 55–75.

11. Däwes updates her 2007 study in a contribution to *The Routledge Companion to Native American Literature* (2016). The book chapter includes a perceptive analysis of *Manahatta*, although she was obviously working with a playscript predating the 2018 version I received from Nagle. Among the significant differences is the ending; in the older version Jane Snake becomes the CEO of JP Morgan and discovers that she is a role model for younger Natives entering the field of investment banking; in the current version Jane appears to turn away from her questionable capitalist endeavors and embrace the “we” of her Native nation (scene 30). See Birgit Däwes, “A New Legacy for Future Generations’: Native North American Performance and Drama,” in *The Routledge Companion to Native American Literature*, ed. Deborah L. Madsen (London: Routledge, 2016), 423–34.

12. Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, 179, emphasis in original.

13. “Each of these women had been told countless times, in countless ways, that there was no room for Native stories in the American theatre. So these plays emerged not only from the writers’ storytelling impulse but also out of their drive to create Native plays that would make it to the stage” (Sayet, “Native Women Rising”). FastHorse has written *The Thanksgiving Play* and Studi stars in her own play about the Trail of Tears called *And So We Walked*. Their approaches fit into the strategies of twenty-first century “theatre of the real” that involves the spectators in alternative ways: “FastHorse describes her style as a kind of hyper-realism designed to get you to buy into a world, but where the entire play is a metaphor. Studi believes in the power of play, of modes of storytelling where things become other things and the audience jumps on board, not knowing where the journey will take them” (Sayet, “Native Women Rising”).

14. Sayet, “Native Women Rising,” emphasis in original.

15. Jaye Darby, Courtney Elkin Mohler, and Christy Stanlake, *Critical Companion to Native American and First Nations Theatre and Performance: Indigenous Spaces* (London: Methuen Drama, 2020), 155.

16. Darby et al., *Critical Companion*, 192.

17. Darby et al., *Critical Companion*, 164.

18. Darby et al., *Critical Companion*, 176.

19. Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*; media editor Sara Brady, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), 29. (The newest edition was released in 2017.)
20. Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 30.
21. Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 35. Even in discussions of “theater of the real,” it is important to acknowledge the metalevel of onstage performance, with double restoration: “Performances are marked, framed, or heightened behavior separated out from just ‘living life’—restored restored behavior, if you will” (35).
22. Elin Diamond, ed. *Performance and Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996), 1.
23. Mary Kathryn Nagle, *Sovereignty* (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 2020): 1.7. Electronic playbook, 2020.
24. Diamond, *Performance and Cultural Politics*, 2.
25. “It was precisely because of this encounter, between European law and non-European societies, that sovereignty doctrine developed techniques for differentiating between and subordinating certain societies and designating them non-sovereign, while affirming and reinforcing the powers of other, usually Western societies” (Anghie 23). See Antony Anghie, “Western Discourses of Sovereignty,” in *Sovereignty: Frontiers of Possibility*, ed. Julie Evans, Ann Genovese, Alexander Reilly, and Patrick Wolfe (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012), 19–36.
26. See John R. Wunder, ed. *Native American Sovereignty* (New York: Garland, 1996). The contributions by Vine Deloria Jr., Emma R. Gross, and Russel L. Barsh particularly deal with this meshing. Valuable work by contemporary experts such as David Carlson (2016) update and refine this overlap, not least in relation to literary applications. See David J. Carlson, *Imagining Sovereignty: Self-Determination in American Indian Law and Literature* (Tulsa: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016). Kirby Brown provides a succinct overview of twenty-first century approaches to sovereignty in his 2018 article. See Kirby Brown, “Sovereignty.” *Western American Literature* 53, no.1 (Spring 2018): 81–89.
27. Amanda Cobb, “Understanding Tribal Sovereignty.” *American Studies* 46, nos. 3 & 4 (2005–2006): 115–32, 120–24.
28. Cobb, “Understanding Tribal Sovereignty,” 126–30.
29. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “The Place Where We All Live and Work Together: A Gendered Analysis of ‘Sovereignty,’” in *Native Studies Keywords*, ed. Stephanie Nohelani Teves, Andrea Smith, and Michelle Raheja (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015), 18–24. See pp. 19–20 for quoted material.
30. See John Hoffman, *Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998). Nagle, *Sovereignty*, 2.11.
31. See Mary Kathryn Nagle, *Manahatta* (Ashland OR: Tudor Guild Publishing, 2018). The original version of the play was written 2013, and a revised version of the play was staged in 2018 at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Furthermore, *Manahatta* fits in thematically with the economic sovereignty that has, particularly since the Indian Regulatory Gaming Act of 1988, focused on tribal income from commercial activities not permitted according to some states’ laws outside Native reservations,

most spectacularly casino gambling and sale of marijuana for medicinal purposes. Casinos have proven to be extremely lucrative for the Native nations, often arousing envy and protests from non-reservation citizens, although most of the income is generated by non-Native visitors to the casinos. It is not coincidental that in *Sovereignty* Sarah Polson meets Ben, her white fiancé-to-be, at the Cherokee Nation Hard Rock Casino, Catoosa, Oklahoma. Issues of authority over the transgressive behavior of a drunken white visitor to the Casino emerge in the second scene of the play.

32. Nagle, *Sovereignty*, 1.8.

33. Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975; re-issued as eBook 2017). For the explicit term "rape culture," see Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 93.

34. Sarah Deer, *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), xiv–xv.

35. Dian Million, *Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013), 7.

36. Million, *Therapeutic Nations*, 179.

37. Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 123.

38. Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2017), ix.

39. Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 45, 33, 46.

40. In *Why Indigenous Studies Matter*, D. H. Justice, descendant of Ross ally James Spears as well as of Treaty Party members, seems to defend the Ross supporters (187–90).

41. Email to me from Nagle, December 14, 2018, quoted with Nagle's permission. By examining Elias Boudinot's publications, the first section of Rifkin's knowledgeable book *Speaking for the People* (2021) analyzes the Treaty Party's claim to represent the interests of the Cherokee Nation. See Mark Rifkin, *Speaking for the People: Native Writing and the Question of Political Form* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2021).

42. Kevin Bruyneel, *The Third Space of Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 20.

43. Alex Cavanaugh, "Re-Membering Cherokee Justice in Ruth Muskrat Bronson's 'The Serpent,'" *American Indian Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Winter 2020): 36–58; 50.

44. Eva Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "What Justice Wants." *Critical Ethnic Studies* 2, no. 2 (2019): 1–15; 7.

45. "Words on Air: Mary Kathryn Nagle." Interview by Lindsey Smith, Oklahoma State University–Tulsa, September 4, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I4tVwgXuq2A>, 09:36–10:32.

46. Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 11.

47. Jaś Elsner, “Reflections on the ‘Greek Revolution’ in Art: From Changes in Viewing to the Transformation of Subjectivity,” in *Rethinking Revolutions through Ancient Greece*, ed. Simon Goldhill and Robin Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 68–95; 88.

48. Sayet, “Native Women Rising.” *Sneaky*, written in 2009 by renowned Native playwright the late William S. Yellow Robe Jr., was produced in open-air performance in 2016 (among other venues) at the main Oceti Sakowin water protector camp during the protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline.

49. Nagle, *Sovereignty*, 2.6–2.7.

50. Nagle, *Sovereignty*, 2.4.

51. Lawyer Alexandra Harmon has written a detailed, book-length examination of *Oliphant* emerging largely from her professional work with the Suquamish. See Alexandra Harmon, *Reclaiming the Reservation: Histories of Indian Sovereignty Suppressed and Renewed* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019).

52. “Why Theatre?,” 5:53–59. A glimpse of the strength required of Indigenous advocates is afforded by this quotation from one of them who worked hard to have VAWA become a statute and continued to campaign for victory in the Dollar General case: “‘I’m just tired of being under attack. We’re constantly under attack. Systemically, spiritually, and physically,’ says Lisa Brunner [legal activist and survivor of sexual assault]. ‘We are here to stay no matter what they do and no matter what they decide’” (Epstein). Andrew Bard Epstein, “Dollar General Takes Its Case Against Indigenous Sovereignty to the Supreme Court.” *The Nation*, December 7, 2015, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/dollar-general-takes-its-case-against-indigenous-sovereignty-to-the-supreme-court/>.

53. Nagle, *Sovereignty*, 1.2.

54. For a complex discussion of the legal implications of the *Dollar General* case, including the ramifications of the split decision, see Sarah Deer and Mary Kathryn Nagle, “Return to Worcester: Dollar General and the Restoration of Tribal Jurisdiction to Protect Native Women and Children,” in *Race, Racism, and the Law: On the Web Since 1995*, September 18, 2018, <https://racism.org/index.php/en/articles/law-and-justice/citizenship-rights/223-rights-of-indigenous-peoples/tribal-sovereignty/2248-return-to-worcester-dollar-general>. As attorney for the National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center, Nagle was successful in filing an *amicus* brief to the Supreme Court for this case. Since my original time of writing, the Supreme Court has issued a ruling in *McGirt v. Oklahoma* (9 July 2020) that strengthened Native sovereignty; since Native American reservations in most of eastern Oklahoma were never disestablished, prosecution of crimes by Native Americans on these lands falls under the jurisdiction of the tribal courts and federal judiciary (Major Crimes Act), rather than Oklahoma state courts.

55. Nagle, quoted in Epstein, “Dollar General Takes Its Case.”

56. In the published version of *Sovereignty*, a number of Major Ridge’s statements are written in Cherokee, with a parenthetical English translation and a subsequent oral translation by John Ridge or John Ross, especially as the nineteenth-century strand of the play nears its climax with the difficult decision to sign the Treaty. The

appendix to the play contains the statements written in Cherokee syllabary and in Latin-alphabet transliteration. This underscores Major Ridge's proclamation that "Sovereignty is when I speak my language" (1.11).

57. Nagle, *Sovereignty*, 2.10.

58. Nagle, *Sovereignty*, 2.7.

59. Nagle, *Sovereignty*, 1.6.

60. This circularity of the cemetery setting applies for the published play. The original playscript started out in the Hard Rock Casino, Cherokee Nation. The revised version better serves to fulfil the Native drama feature of "circularity of Indigenous time and weltanschauung" listed by Darby, et al.

61. Nagle, *Sovereignty*, 2.11. Sarah Scafidi interviewed at length Native-identifying actors in the Arena Stage production of *Sovereignty*, Kyla Garcia (Taino) and Andrew Roa (Shasta). They plead for more honest school curriculum regarding historical and current Native issues, including the dilemma of the Ridge Party: "If we don't acknowledge the roots of these injustices [such as the governmental policy of Removal or the violence toward Native women] for our youth, how can we expect the adults to educate themselves?" (Scafidi 2018). See Sarah Scafidi, "Sovereignty Actors on the Cherokee Nation Story at Arena Stage." *DC Theater Scene*, January 10, 2018, <https://dctheatrescene.com/2018/01/10/sovereignty-actors-choke-ke-nation-story-arena-stage/>.

62. "Manahatta: Playwright Mary Kathryn Nagle" (interview), January 21, 2020, 0:42–0:52, www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4nZdGX-rMQ.

63. In his lecture "Of Other Spaces" Michel Foucault presents cultural heterotopias as "counter-sites" (23) presupposing "a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them [limitedly] penetrable" (26). See Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 22–27, which is Jay Miskowicz's translation of Foucault's 1967 lecture.

64. With regard to the violence and loss—linguistic and otherwise—in the Native boarding school experience, I highly recommend Jen Shook's 2020 article. Shook insightfully investigates Nagle's documentary-play (written with Suzan Shown Harjo) *My Father's Bones* (2013) in conjunction with N. Scott Momaday's play *The Moon in Two Windows* (2006). *My Father's Bones* focuses on the legal fight over the final resting place for Jim Thorpe's remains, but includes a strong boarding school component, Thorpe having attended the Carlisle school. In Shook's argument the past/present dialectic I have been discussing in *Sovereignty* and *Manahatta* is presented in terms of a form of cultural haunting: "ghosts link the past and present . . . , developing transcultural shared spaces and writing them into bone memory" (Shook 161).

65. In his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Overstory* (2019), Richard Powers summarizes the disparity between Indigenous and capitalist-settlers succinctly in terms of relationship to trees and nature; he creates a scene in which the character Adam, who lives in New York City amidst skyscrapers, believes to have found the circle of trees near Wall Street "on the spot where the island was sold, by people who listened to trees, to people who cleared them." See Richard Powers, *The Overstory* (New York: Norton, 2018).

66. “Words on Air,” 11:57.

67. “Playwright Interview (Mary Kathryn Nagle): Native Artists and Playwrights.” Oregon Shakespeare Festival, September 13, 2017, 3:27–31, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzE5b6QJUgk>.

68. Nagle, “Native Voices on the American Stage.”

69. Mary Kathryn Nagle, “A Cherokee Perspective on the American Stage of Resistance,” April 29, 2017, <https://www.larktheatre.org/blog/cherokee-perspective-american-stage-resistance/>. Rpt. in *Stages of Resistance: Theatre and Politics in the Capitalocene*, ed. Caridad Svich with Olivia George (South Gate CA: NoPassport, 2018), 112–19.

70. Sayet, “Native Women Rising”; Darby et al., *Critical Companion*, 220.

Home Is Where the Heartsong Is

X-Marks and Manifest Domesticity in *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*

THOMAS W. KRAUSE

Abstract: This essay encourages critics to take a new look at what “home” is and means in James Welch’s novel *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* (2000). It argues that home should be critiqued less for its geographic place in the historical transatlantic world of the novel, and more for the domestic processes that give it meaning and structure. Indeed, home in *Heartsong* is more the stuff of “who” and “how” than it is of “where.” The ways in which Charging Elk fails and succeeds in making a home for himself on two continents during the assimilation era depend not so much on where he is, but in large part on the company he keeps and how he keeps it. Scott Richard Lyons’s metaphor of the x-mark and Amy Kaplan’s concept of manifest domesticity inform a reading that explores home in *Heartsong* as a domestic and domesticated space constructed for and by Charging Elk. Subject and object to domestication, Charging Elk manages the oppressive political realities and social currents over which he has little charge but some command as he attempts to build a life and home for himself in France. Never exclusively one thing or another or easily and neatly bifurcated, home in *Heartsong* is a primary site in the struggle against US imperialism for control of Indigenous lives in the United States and abroad during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Keywords: X-marks, manifest domesticity, home, assimilation, imperialism

The titular character of James Welch’s (Blackfeet/A’aninin) historical novel *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* (2000) is a twenty-three-year-old Oglala Lakota man employed in William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody’s Wild West show in late 1889. During a performance in Marseille, France, Charging Elk falls from his horse and breaks his ribs. Injured and sick with influenza, he wanders into the night from his hospital bed, a move that brings about his eventual political exile from the United States and subsequent incarceration in Europe.

That Charging Elk ultimately decides to remain in Marseille has led critics to make various assumptions about what “home” is and means in *Heartsong*. According to Suzanne Ferguson, home is a “negotiated wholeness,”¹ a common ground between Indigenous and European historical identities. For Ulla Haselstein, home is “irretrievably located in the past,”² and “split and bound up with spatial and cultural distance.”³ Similarly, Arnold Krupat reads Charging Elk to have two homes. The first “centers on his French wife Nathalie and the child soon to be born to them,” while the second is “Paha Sapa, the sacred Black Hills of South Dakota.”⁴ Home, then, is undoubtedly a central critical theme in *Heart-song*, open to myriad personal, political, and societal interpretations.

Another productive approach to understanding home is to critique it less for its geographic place in the historical transatlantic world of the novel, and more for the domestic processes that give it meaning and structure. Home in *Heartsong* is more the stuff of “who” and “how” than it is of “where.” The ways in which Charging Elk fails and succeeds in making a home for himself on two continents during the assimilation era depend not so much on where he is, but in large part on the company he keeps and how he keeps it.

Regardless of where he is in the world, however, Charging Elk is never beyond the reach and grasp of American “manifest domesticity.” As described by critic Amy Kaplan, manifest domesticity is a process of US settler colonial domestication that “turns an imperial nation into a home by producing and colonizing specters of the foreign that lurk inside and outside its . . . borders.”⁵ If Charging Elk is anything, he is a unique specter of the foreign, as the narrative manifests his protracted domestication inside and outside the United States by and to imperial ends and means.

Yet Charging Elk is neither doomed nor helpless. Subject and object to domestication, he manages the oppressive political realities and social currents over which he has little charge but some command. Given that, critics might read Charging Elk’s decision to reside permanently in Marseille more charitably if it was considered an instance of his limited agency in action—what could also be called an “x-mark.” Defined by critic Scott Richard Lyons (Ojibwe/Dakota), the x-mark is a “sign of consent in a context of coercion.”⁶ Named for the x-marks made by Indigenous peoples to hundreds of government treaties, the x-mark is a metaphor for the forward-looking ways that American Indians have

historically accommodated change over time. X-marks, writes Lyons, signify “power and a lack of power, agency and a lack of agency,”⁷ and are, among other things, about choice, traditions and transitions, and the past and present.

Home, then, is in fact a negotiated wholeness in *Heartsong*. It is also an x-mark, an evolving location of agency and assimilation and of power and/or a lack thereof. As such, the x-mark is an important heuristic with which to study domesticity and to recognize how home is not exclusively one thing or another, nor irretrievably located in the past or easily and neatly bifurcated in Welch’s last published novel. Rather, home is better understood as a domestic and domesticated space constructed for *and* by Charging Elk, a primary site in the struggle against US imperialism for control of Indigenous lives in the United States and abroad.

I

Charging Elk is eleven years old in the prologue when his Oglala band led by Crazy Horse turn themselves over to the US military. As they do, the Oglalas sing a “peace song,” which to Charging Elk sounds like a “victory song.”⁸ Though the Oglalas have been illegally and violently dispossessed of their lands and many freedoms, they remain free to abdicate one home for another as they see fit. Their song is an x-mark, an assent to an existential threat that voices a striking distinction between capitulation and conquest, or between holding onto power and being driven into powerlessness.

Readers are therefore invited to arbitrate where victory and defeat stop and start, as the Oglalas’ concession is at once the end of an old way of life and the beginning of another. Lyons contends that Indigenous peoples who signed treaties did so because treaties held the promise of “a new way of life.”⁹ He adds that x-marks were “made with a view of the new as merely another stopping point in a migration that is always heading for home,”¹⁰ and that for many Indigenous peoples there has never been “only one home for one people forever.”¹¹ X-marks, however, do not in this instance “mark the spot” or denote home in a strictly mapped and material way. X-marks are more fluid than that, and in their usage, home is conceptual, spatial, and temporal. Nor is home ever given up entirely or irretrievably located in the past because home is a construct of the present.

Nevertheless, an x-mark is no guarantee that all will welcome or come into a new life and a new home at the same time and on equal and equitable terms. Charging Elk, for one, does not condone the sedentary Euro-American lifestyle of agriculture and schooling at Pine Ridge Agency in South Dakota that his father, Scrub, steers his family toward. Charging Elk is even “ashamed of his father”¹² for brokering peace with the United States in lieu of fighting it out. Accompanied by his friend Strikes Plenty, Charging Elk soon runs away from the agency, still kindling a flame of resistance. He escapes to the Stronghold, where for nine years he keeps with “the old ways”¹³ that Crazy Horse and Scrub have given up for gone.

X-marks intermediate the tensions between traditionalism and assimilation that divide Charging Elk and Scrub. The notion that Indigenous traditions, change, and the onset of modernity are not and have never have been unconditionally antithetical is key to Lyons’s argument. To presume otherwise is to presuppose that home for Indigenous peoples is largely immobile and ahistorical, fixed forever in space and time. Lyons trades that somewhat common understanding of home in American Indian literature for a historicist, pragmatic outlook that privileges a historical and ongoing “Native ascent to the new.”¹⁴ Asserting that traditionalism becomes problematic when it denies the potential for change, or when it “confuses modern practices and institutions with the assimilation of a ‘white’ or ‘Western’ identity,”¹⁵ Lyons carries home, Indigenous agency, and patterns of adaptability and renewal forward. Many Indigenous leaders and representatives acted under duress but with some autonomy when they signed their x-marks. Many knew what was at stake when they withdrew from the familiarity of what had been—from their own symbolic strongholds—for the promises and uncertainties of a new way of life.

All that notwithstanding, assenting to treaties did not automatically convey that Indigenous peoples were yielding to permanent land losses and subjugation under settler colonial authority. There is little to nothing in the history of Indigenous treaty-making that supports that line of reasoning. As legal scholar Chelsea Vowel (Métis) clarifies, though many Euro-Americans assumed that “Indigenous peoples were submitting to” settler colonial rule at treaty signings, that “was certainly not a point of view shared by Indigenous peoples themselves.”¹⁶ Nor did anything during the treaty-making process leave little doubt that “the

so-called arts of civilization,” as Indigenous rights activist Suzan Shown Harjo (Cheyenne and Hodulgee Muscogee) writes, “would replace, or try to replace, Native values or knowledge systems.”¹⁷ Even if they had, signing a treaty did not from the perspectives of many Indigenous peoples mean that any and all future possibilities for renegotiation had been permanently ruled out. This is because a “treaty is,” as Vowel notes, “an ongoing relationship,”¹⁸ and the “Renewal of treaty relationships is very much a core aspect of Indigenous treaty-making.”¹⁹ With an assent to the new came an implied assent to a renewal of treaty terms when the time was right. Though none of this directly contradicts Lyons’s interpretation of x-marks or their critical utility here, it is crucial to reflect on the sociopolitical nuances that went into Indigenous treaties. Doing so better discloses exactly what Indigenous signees were assenting to and the long-term implications they had in mind when they touched the pen.

Nowhere in *Heartsong* are the perceived divisions between traditionalism and assimilation more visible than in its depictions of Indigenous and Euro-American households and the workings of domesticity. Charging Elk is, for example, unable to look upon his parents’ one-room home at Pine Ridge without embarrassment or resentment. With a crucifix on the wall and only a table, two chairs, and a bed for furniture, the house is typical of those lived in by many Oglalas and other Indigenous peoples on the northern plains during the late nineteenth century. As historian Donald L. Fixico (Shawnee, Sac and Fox, Muscogee, and Seminole) has noted, “reservation life at the turn of the twentieth century entailed tremendous cultural adjustment for American Indians,” as “living in a four-sided lodge seemed inconceivable.”²⁰ The pace at which individuals acclimated to a new environment varied, as did attitudes toward the acceptance of a reservation existence forced on Indigenous peoples who never wanted or asked for it. The meager trappings of Euro-American assimilation and the sight of Scrub counting the rosary in front of his home is to Charging Elk a betrayal of the Oglala traditions he still fosters at the Stronghold.

In *Fools Crow* (1986), Welch’s other critically acclaimed historical novel, the romance of tradition and freedom wane as the everyday realities of hardship and loss become more life-threatening to Blackfeet. Welch does not sentimentalize American Indian history in his novels as much as he emphasizes the necessity of living in the present without forgetting the past. Following a hard winter at the Stronghold during which

some Oglalas starve to death, Strikes Plenty informs Charging Elk that he is returning to his family. He hopes to find a wife, and encourages Charging Elk to travel with Buffalo Bill because the “[good] times are gone,” and they “must see what lies ahead.”²¹ Charging Elk agrees and in leaving the Stronghold follows Crazy Horse, Scrub, and Strikes Plenty toward domesticity and an x-mark of his own.

Indeed, domesticity in one form or another is the only viable alternative to disappearance presented in *Heart song*. Home in the novel is where the assimilation of Oglalas into mainstream Euro-American society starts and Oglala traditionalism supposedly ends, where federal American Indian policies and practices intersect most visibly. Kaplan makes it a point to think about “domesticity not as a static condition but as a process of domestication, which entails conquering and taming the wild, the natural, and the alien,”²² and in *Heart song* domesticity is equally processual. In the late nineteenth century, Indigenous peoples had to not only be brought into the Euro-American domestic sphere, they had to be regulated in turn, as Kaplan claims that “Through the process of domestication, the home contains within itself those wild or foreign elements that must be tamed.”²³ Seeing Manifest Destiny through to its end necessitated a coordinated effort from Euro-Americans to transport domesticity to new home fronts.

Where Charging Elk and Strikes Plenty are headed, however, matters less than how they get there. When Strikes Plenty quits the Stronghold to find a wife and Charging Elk sets off with Cody for Europe, the young men are headed in opposite directions toward the same end. Cody’s Wild West show is not an alternative to domesticity but an extension of it. Historian Louis S. Warren asserts that though the Wild West show was “a cultural reaction against . . . domesticity,”²⁴ it was also a public forum in which to bring American Indians safely into the domestic fold. Accordingly, the Wild West show was “a . . . home for Indians abroad . . . a place in which they learned about the modern world but were also protected from it.”²⁵ Though Charging Elk derides the Oglalas who learn English and Christian virtues at the reservation schoolhouse, his traveling with Buffalo Bill exposes him to similar lessons in assimilation and domestication.

That American Indians in the late nineteenth century needed protection from the modern world is a popular misconception that Welch plays on in *Heart song*. Nor were many Indigenous performers in Wild

West shows there reluctantly or against their will. Historian Linda Scarangella McNenly has studied the history of American Indians in shows like Cody's and finds that on the whole, "Native people . . . recognized the benefits of working in Wild West shows and actively pursued these opportunities as a viable option to their new living conditions."²⁶ Charging Elk and Strikes Plenty, who wishes to tour with Cody but is not hired on, look to the Wild West show with a similar pragmatism. Leaving Pine Ridge with Buffalo Bill is a viable option for Charging Elk if he wishes to avoid living like his father. To a significant degree, then, the decisions that some American Indians like Charging Elk made to participate in mock reenactments of the Battle of the Little Bighorn and chase bison on horseback might be seen as x-marks. Fundamentally, they are signs of consent agreed to with eyes wide open and in a context of coercion that represent a desire for better fortunes and new opportunities.

Many critics, however, interpret Indigenous involvement in Wild West shows as an indication of passive victimry. Their tendency is to read history in *Heartsong* for a perceived mutual exclusivity in which Euro-American and Indigenous histories are separate and distinct halves of the same whole. Hans Bak, for instance, has suggested that Charging Elk's involvement with Cody "unwillingly and unwittingly makes him an accomplice in the erasure of history as embedded in the tribe's collective memory and the construction of a revised and officially sanctioned historical American memory."²⁷ Similarly, Andrea Opitz surmises that the prologue "functions . . . as a haunting reminder of the . . . violence that informs the history of the West and of the nation."²⁸ These arguments are very reasonable in that they correctly address the violence of US settler colonialism and the reification of American history as Manifest Destiny. At the same time, though, they discount important x-marks. The scene in the prologue is undeniably tragic, but it is also a triumph, a choice to choose life over, as critic Amanda Cobb-Greetham (Chickasaw) reads it, "inevitable disappearance."²⁹ Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that Crazy Horse went to Red Cloud Agency in 1877 not because he thought himself defeated, but because he deemed it "best as a matter of policy."³⁰ Crazy Horse later said that in going to the agency he "picked out a place" where he wished to live, and that "All of my relatives . . . approve of my choice."³¹ The prologue is therefore an example of US settler-colonial violence *and* a self-determined Oglala

desire for peace. Charging Elk is not an unwitting victim of his own complicity in Cody's Wild West drama, but an actor who chooses the stage over farm life. To deny, discredit, or ignore the legitimacy of these x-marks risks furthering the loss of Indigenous agency and history that scholars who contest the erasure of Indigenous memories and stories have sought to stop. At the same, however, it remains that Charging Elk, like the historical Crazy Horse, is not fully or freely in possession of his choices, as what agency he has is only expressed in reaction to settler colonial dispossession and displacement.

Thus, the prologue foreshadows how historical events and persons throughout the narrative are not to be seen as monolithic but multifaceted. Home in *Heart song* is not something around which occurrences unfold or a place out of time to which Indigenous peoples escape the adverse effects of history. Home is instead the locus of where history happens. In South Dakota and Marseille, home for Charging Elk is an x-mark, a combination of his own applied efforts and his will writ large, and concurrently, the product of a brutal, interpellative domesticity beyond his control. That it testifies to how Charging Elk finally bargains with domesticity to an extent that he manifests for himself where and with whom he lives.

II

The domestication of Charging Elk begins almost as soon as he steps out of the Marseille hospital. When he is found alone on the streets, authorities arrest Charging Elk and charge him with *vagabondage*. A sensational newspaper article written to garner sympathy for Charging Elk compels René Soulas, a pious Marseille fishmonger, to visit Charging Elk in jail. Soulas offers to provide room and board while the French judiciary, which has barred Charging Elk from leaving France on the grounds that without American citizenship or a valid passport he entered the country illegally, deliberates how to proceed. Franklin Bell, an American diplomat tasked with seeing to Charging Elk's welfare, is happy to oblige and escorts Charging Elk to the Soulas flat.

By 1890 government officials and vocal philanthropists had for years stressed the need to move American Indians into Euro-American households or permanent homes of their own. Along with a Euro-American education, a conversion to Christianity, a job in manual labor

or domestic service, and the fee simple ownership of land and property, a home with four wooden walls was considered essential to assimilation. Homelessness, or *vagabondage*, was not only antithetical to the economic and social advancement of Indigenous peoples, but a threat to Euro-Americans and their imperial ambitions. Domestication would obviate the need for the US military to fight or surveil traditionalists while opening up Indigenous landholdings to speculation and sale. Bureaucrats and social reformers often failed to concede that unhoused American Indians were not homeless but had been dispossessed of and displaced from their houses and lands by the American government.

Bell toes the company line when he allows Charging Elk to reside with the Soulasses. In foreseeing that the sooner American Indians “vanished or joined America, the better off they would be,”³² Bell evinces the imperial logic of manifest domesticity in his relationship with Charging Elk. America in this instance is a metonym for home, no matter if home is a modest lodging in South Dakota or a flat at the diplomatic and imperial reaches of American economic interests in France. Where Charging Elk is means less than the fact that, as an American Indian, he is a subject of the United States and must be duly seen to.

Tellingly, the Soulas flat is a picture of middle-class European domestic perfection. Making a European or American house a home during the late nineteenth century required more than four sturdy walls and a roof. Welch accentuates the difference when Bell first enters the Soulas apartment:

Franklin Bell was surprised at the spaciousness of the fishmonger’s flat. He had no idea of the kind of money a fishmonger might make, but the large flat was clean and gracious, with its soft velvet furnishings and trimmed and tasseled drapes, its polished wood tables and cabinets, the doilies and antimacassars draped in strategic spots. There were even a couple of electric lamps. This was a home.³³

The ability to purchase genteel household goods went hand in hand with domesticity and exemplified a proper European and American standard of living in comparison, for instance, to the poorly appointed rooms Charging Elk’s parents live in. Prized possessions and commonplace amenities alike were arranged, cared for, and purchased by European and American women who managed the affairs of the hearth on a day-

to-day basis. Home, the private familial space, was the chaste feminine analog to the vulgar masculine world of labor and market capitalism beyond its front doors.

Though the separate spheres ideology was glorified during the nineteenth century, modern historians have shown that gendered spaces were often permeable. Labor may have been gendered, but what women did in the home and what men did in the world was not necessarily mutually exclusive. In the context of US settler colonialism, scholars such as Mary P. Ryan, Anne McClintock, Jane Simonsen, and Laura Wexler have argued that men and women's work was united in the advancement of American domestic and international imperialism.³⁴ Indeed, during the assimilation era, Indigenous domestication occurred along separate but overlapping divisions of gendered labor. In *Heartsong*, Madeleine Soulas, René's wife, initially abhors the thought of a "savage" living in her home. Convinced that "God didn't intend for Christians and savages to live together,"³⁵ she cannot comprehend why her husband would bring Charging Elk into their house. Home for Madeleine is a sanctuary where the dangers that threaten it are not. To René, however, Charging Elk is an archetypal noble savage, an exotic "dark prince."³⁶ The Frenchman beams with pride when he takes Charging Elk to work with him at the quay, and sees in Charging Elk a chance to test his Christian piety and flex his moral superiority. Like the "Friends of the Indian" in America, who believed they had a moral obligation to facilitate the bloodless assimilation of American Indians, René maintains that he is duty-bound to support Charging Elk during his time of need. His largesse stems in part from having attended Buffalo Bill's show, where he hears from Cody that American Indians "are disappearing . . . and soon they will be gone."³⁷ René's attitude of benevolent paternalism and belief in Indigenous domestication through work as the only alternative to disappearance complements and resembles the rhetoric espoused by US officials like Bell.

Soon Charging Elk is neither savage nor stranger in the Soulas home. In time he bonds with the Soulas children, and Madeleine warms to his presence. René finds a place for Charging Elk outside the home as well, working for René at his fish stall. Charging Elk saves his pay and with it hopes to buy a ticket on an ocean liner to America. Yet his hopes for a return trip dim when Bell notifies René that Charging Elk may have to remain in France indefinitely. Kaplan writes that in novels of mani-

fest domesticity, “subjectivity [is often] scripted by narratives of nation and empire,”³⁸ and it seems the same is in store for *Charging Elk*. The story of nineteenth-century US settler colonialism is usually one of violence against and the removal of American Indians, who Beth H. Piatote (Nez Perce) has called “domestic subjects.” “The category of domestic subject is positioned,” writes Piatote, “in opposition to U.S. citizenship, marking its place as within but not of the settler nation.”³⁹ During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries specifically, Piatote continues, “Native Americans as domestic subjects by law were legal wards of the nation: living within and under U.S. control but lacking representation and full rights as individuals.”⁴⁰ American Indians living *without* the United States would have been domestic subjects by the same token. Even in Europe, *Charging Elk* remains a non-citizen ward of the US government who is subject to its laws and victim to his legally imposed liminal status. It is the same in France, where *Charging Elk* is paradoxically declared legally dead despite being very much alive, leaving him in a suspended state of subjectivity shaped by imperial European and American laws and Marseille labor norms.

Domesticity is thus shown in *Heartsong* to be an ally to military violence and federal politics in the colonization of Indigenous land and the assimilation of Indigenous peoples. Where the military campaign against the Oglalas ends in the prologue, the machinations of domesticity start and continue throughout the narrative. That they do speaks to the historical realities Piatote touches on when she writes that “In the assimilation era the tools of conquest were not so much armed commanders as administrative circulars,”⁴¹ with field commanders replaced or supplemented by field matrons. American and French bureaucracies and laws, no matter how absurd or disorderly, along with European women like Madeleine, frame domesticity for *Charging Elk* from beginning to end.

Many nineteenth-century examples of manifest domesticity in fiction promote exploitative and wistfully sentimental narratives of Indigenous assimilation or disappearance. Popular books by American novelists Lydia Maria Child, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, and Caroline Kirkland “sentimentalized conquest,”⁴² according to critic Roland Finger. Moreover, fiction normalized the allegedly nonviolent and unpreventable assimilation, death, and/or removal of American Indians. Domesticity is instead shown to be relatively peaceful, a “means,” writes Finger, “to

relieve the tensions produced by pursuit of material gain resulting from policies of genocide and removal of Indians.”⁴³

So too must Charging Elk make a home and a place for himself in Marseille. After Bell announces to René that Charging Elk is unlikely to leave France, the narrative picks up more than three years later in August 1893. For eight months, Charging Elk has been employed at a soap factory and for four months he has kept in his own apartment in *Le Panier* (the basket), having left the Soulas home to find companionship with a woman. Inhabited by immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East, *Le Panier* is thought to be disreputable. Nevertheless, the Marseille neighborhood is where Charging Elk finds himself around people “closer to his own than any of the others he had come across since he left Pine Ridge.”⁴⁴ By mobilizing and assenting willfully to a nationalized European-style domesticity in Marseille, and by keeping a job and a home of his own, Charging Elk achieves real autonomy over his imperial subjectivity when he commits to live as a *de facto* foreigner. Like Scrub, Charging Elk is impoverished, and like Scrub, Charging Elk signs his x-mark to cope with the demands of a new life in modern times.

Unfortunately, though Charging Elk can test the limits of manifest domesticity, he cannot go beyond them. Nor is it possible in a work of realist historical fiction for Welch to separate even the most uncommon Indigenous legal subjectivity during the late nineteenth century from the ubiquity of the laws that shaped it. On late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novels in American Indian literature, Piatote observes that “Literature challenges law by imagining other plots and other resolutions that at times are figured as nonresolution or states of suspension,”⁴⁵ and the same can be said of *Heartsong*. That Charging Elk is in a state of legal suspension is obvious, just as the plot of *Heartsong* is as imaginative as any in American Indian fiction. X-marks are made on unequal terms and as such perpetuate power imbalances. Scrub’s home and Charging Elk’s apartment represent these imbalances, as they are domesticated versions of the foreign that have been compartmentalized and internalized via manifest domesticity to distinguish civilization from that which it deems savage by comparison. Welch confronts and complicates this dichotomy by emphasizing how it exploited, and to lesser extent, could have been exploited by Indigenous peoples seeking new lives and homes to call their own.

III

Perhaps the most meaningful tie between x-marks and domesticity is shown when Lyons argues implicitly for a fundamental connection between something like domesticity and Ojibwe "culture." Lyons posits that because "there is no word for 'culture' in the Ojibwe language . . . Ojibwe senses of culture . . . tend to conceive of processes more than things."⁴⁶ He offers a few examples, including words such as *nitaa*, meaning "nurturing" or "tending to growth"; *nitaawe*, used to signify speaking or singing; and *nitaage*, the word for "to kill game or to mourn."⁴⁷ All of these "possess," Lyons maintains, "the sense of doing things well in order to bring about *more life*."⁴⁸ Culture, then, at least from one English professor's perspective, might be better understood "not as stable content or rules but rather as pragmatic processes geared toward the production of more life."⁴⁹ Thus, an x-mark is culture and culture an x-mark in that x-marks are pragmatic and reasoned symbols for sustaining life and producing more of it. Though *Charging Elk* is not Ojibwe, and *Oglala* "culture" is not Ojibwe "culture," pragmatism and preservation nevertheless guide the Oglalas' decision to choose life in the prologue. The want of more life is impetus enough for *Strikes Plenty* to leave the Stronghold to start a family, while practical considerations motivate *Charging Elk* to take up with Cody.

Of course, it might just as well be that influence, as much or more so than inclination, hastens *Charging Elk* and *Strikes Plenty* into domesticity. *Charging Elk* and *Strikes Plenty* are conspicuous literary examples of American Indians on the move or "in transit." Indigenous studies scholar Jodi Byrd (Chickasaw) defines being-in-transit as being "made to move,"⁵⁰ and existing as an "active presence in a world of relational movements and countermovements."⁵¹ The movements and countermovements of Indigenous peoples in the United States have for centuries been directly related and proportional to how, as Byrd argues, "ideas of 'Indianness' have created" the conditions needed "for U.S. empire to manifest its intent."⁵² Byrd uses "Indianness" as a catch-all to describe how the United States has marshalled its government "to make 'Indian' those peoples and nations who stand in the way of U.S. military and economic desires."⁵³ Indianness, in other words, bolsters "Anglo-American hegemonic mastery over the significations of justice, democracy, law, and terror,"⁵⁴ and is "felt and intuited" as both a "pres-

ence” and a “process.”⁵⁵ Like manifest domesticity, Indianness facilitates transitions, including from one home to another, with Byrd noting that “How we have come to know intimacy, kinship, and identity . . . is predicated upon discourses of indigenous displacements.”⁵⁶ As much as manifest domesticity, Indianness accounts for Charging Elk’s liminality in Marseille in that the processes that construct his spectrality and foreignness also shape his legal and imperial Othering. Yet inasmuch as empire manifests its intent on Charging Elk, it is also evident that Charging Elk manifests his intent on empire. How or if to privilege one for the other is arguably subjective, but framing the discussion within the full scope of its historical context is not.

What Charging Elk comes to know in Europe is that Euro-American domesticity is just as much about making a home as it is about making the right home with the right person according to a rigid set of rules. When Charging Elk visits a sex worker named Marie Coulet, he falls in love with and proposes marriage to her. Marie not only rebuffs Charging Elk’s proposal, but abets a local chef named Armand Breteuil in his plan to sexually assault Charging Elk. That plan goes awry when Charging Elk murders Breteuil and is taken into police custody for the second time in France.

The years Charging Elk spends in Marseille from 1889 to 1894 are therefore bookended by his committing vastly different crimes that trespass against society and the state in similar ways. Ordinarily, *vagabondage* and murder are unlike in severity of offense and how courts render punishment against them. Yet given the circumstances under which Charging Elk kills Breteuil, the acts are not so dissimilar. In being unhoused, Charging Elk is guilty of running afoul of domesticity, just as his murdering Breteuil goes against the general Euro-American abjection of homosexuality. When Charging Elk is on trial for murder, the prosecutor mentions as much, telling the court, “While we all, as God-fearing men, frown upon the nature of the homosexual act, in some quarters . . . it is considered quite normal.”⁵⁷ Male homosexuality has a place in French society so long as that place is under government control and outside the home. Sex work is as well acceptable so long as it stays to one side of the domestic sphere. That hypocrisy is on display in the character of Martin St-Cyr, a journalist sympathetic to Charging Elk. Though St-Cyr himself often solicits a prostitute, he mocks Charging

Elk's "pathetic attempt to become a Frenchmen"⁵⁸ by desiring to marry one. Lacking *entrée* to domestic life, Charging Elk cannot become French in the heteronormative sense any more than Coulet and Breteuil can do the same. Yet unlike them he remains a specter of the foreign for whom there is no comparable place in French society save prison. To that end, the chief magistrate sentences Charging Elk to life behind bars not just for murdering Breteuil, but because Charging Elk "cannot conform to even the most elementary code of conduct—and therefore will always remain a threat to society."⁵⁹

Homophobia in *Heartsong* warrants further mention and criticism for how it threatens domesticity. The French judiciary and René Soulas categorically denounce homosexuality as a perversion. Likewise, though Charging Elk does not specifically denigrate homosexuality, he proudly and matter-of-factly kills Breteuil because the chef is *siyoko*, which Charging Elk translates to French as "evil." It might seem, then, that the killing is ritualistic in a traditional Oglala worldview. Krupat, however, has shown that the traditional Oglala understanding of *siyoko* is more akin to "bogeyman" or "scary monster."⁶⁰ These terms are not typically interchangeable with evil by modern English or French definitions of the word, and as critic Craig Womack (Muscogee) has observed, "It is never clear *why* he (Charging Elk) thinks Breteuil is evil: because of the sexual violation, which Charging Elk has good reason to see as evil, or because Breteuil is gay, which he has no reason to see as evil."⁶¹ That Charging Elk believes he has at least one reason to equate gay with evil becomes clearer if Breteuil's murder is read, as critic Theodore Cecil DeSelles argues it should be, as an example of "homosexual panic."⁶² Debunked now as junk psychology, homosexual panic, or the "gay panic defense," was a legal tactic used during the twentieth century to rationalize violence against homosexuals. A similar defense of violence tries to justify murder and demonize homosexuality when homosexuality endangers domesticity in *Heartsong*. Indeed, it is during one of the "tenderest moments" between Charging Elk and Marie that Breteuil performs a "vile act on Charging Elk's cock, a cock meant for Marie alone and certainly forbidden to a man."⁶³ Additionally, before Charging Elk learns that Marie, whom he believes to have been killed by Breteuil, is still alive, he mourns the loss of "the woman who was to become his wife and give him children."⁶⁴ Sexual assault induces panic

and panic precipitates homicide when Breteuil threatens the perceived heterosexual monogamy and hoped-for marriage and attendant domestic ideal that Charging Elk envisions with Marie.

Found to be wrongfully tried as an American citizen, Charging Elk receives a pardon in March 1904 and is set free as a newly minted French citizen into the guardianship of Vincent Gazier, a French orchard keeper. In due time, Charging Elk marries Gazier's teenage daughter Nathalie and with her returns to Marseille.

Much is the same and much is different when Charging Elk finds himself again working the quay and living in a modest apartment. The markets and voices of the vendors are familiar to him, and he catches a glimpse of René and his son at their fish stall. Charging Elk backs away, though, before René sees him, turning his back on and leaving behind the family in whose company he was like a child to face his future with a wife who sees him as a man. No longer a ward of two countries and a citizen of none at the same time, Charging Elk is now a French citizen fluent in French and married to a French woman. That on the next page Nathalie tells Charging Elk she is pregnant creates a stark juxtaposition between Charging Elk's old and new lives in Marseille, with the latter a fulfillment of an imperial domesticity on the one hand and an x-mark on the other. Fluency in the national language, a job, a European-style home, and national citizenship are the hallmarks of domesticity and the nineteenth-century assimilation of American Indians. Yet it is also the case that these processes sustain Charging Elk's Oglala heritage, as they make more life possible for him.

Signs throughout *Heartsong* point to Charging Elk eventually going home and they do not misdirect. He is told over the course of the novel that he is at home with the Soulases, in his jail cell, or with the Gaziers, but Charging Elk only admits to being at home in France when he is surrounded by a family with whom to make it. In November 1905, Cody and his Wild West show return to Marseille. Charging Elk attends a performance and later walks the grounds where the Indigenous actors have their lodges. There he finds Oglalas, specifically a man named Andrew Little Ring and his family. When Little Ring asks Charging Elk, "Why not go home?"⁶⁵ Charging Elk does not answer because to give a reply would mean disclosing the long history of events that have led him home to Marseille. Charging Elk then rises to leave and thanks Little Ring and his family for making a "stranger feel as though a part

of him which had been missing for many years has come home.”⁶⁶ That the last scene should be read as a homecoming is clear when Little Ring assures Charging Elk that he is no stranger, that he is “Lakota, wherever you might go.”⁶⁷ Moments later, after Little Ring’s nephew pleads with Charging Elk to go home to Pine Ridge, Charging Elk explains that he cannot because “This (Marseille) is my home now,” and that soon Charging Elk and Nathalie “will have another life and the same heart will sing in all of us.”⁶⁸ The mention of one heart singing for many—a heartsong—is reminiscent of the Oglala peace/victory song in the prologue. A Lakota song of kinship and triumph that simultaneously occasions an end and a beginning—an x-mark—thus opens *Heartsong* and brings it to a close.

Critics who decry Charging Elk’s preference to live in Marseille as a betrayal of his fellow Oglalas or as an instance of his falling short of a nebulous Oglala ideal are misled.⁶⁹ All roads lead home in Welch’s novel, be they to South Dakota or the south of France. Charging Elk is a victim of assimilation and domesticity to be sure, but that victimry is only a half-truth. The other half is that he is autonomous by accounting for new ways of living that suit him best. These x-marks are symbols of his regard for life in modern times at the turn of the twentieth century, a life of adaptability, perseverance, and renewal—all of which would have been familiar to him at Pine Ridge. That Welch is able to redirect the traditional assimilative course of manifest domesticity toward an ending that empowers an Indigenous character highlights a universal maxim: that home is where the heartsong is.

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Claiming Oral Sovereignty Over Literariness

The Arrowmaker According to N. Scott Momaday

KYLE GARTON-GUNDLING

Abstract: Recent scholarship on American Indian literatures has shifted away from emphasizing the theoretical relationship between oral traditions and writing toward a greater focus on sovereignty. If sovereignty is one's concern, there are worthwhile reasons not to get caught up in tired questions of oral traditions and writing. But what if oral-written dynamics can bear importance for the sovereignty turn in American Indian literary studies after all? I explore this possibility by taking a new look at a key series of essays by N. Scott Momaday. By analyzing Momaday's commentaries on the traditional Kiowa story of the arrowmaker, we can see a way of re-exploring the relation between oral traditions and writing that affirms, rather than erodes, Indian sovereignty. For Momaday, the arrowmaker serves to undo Western thought's subordination of oral traditions to written literature, ultimately reestablishing oral traditions rather than writing as the primal source of literariness.

Keywords: Momaday, sovereignty, arrowmaker, oral tradition, writing, Modernism, New Criticism

Over the last decade, scholarship on American Indian literatures has eased much of its worries about converting oral traditions into written forms. Whereas earlier work expresses much ambivalence over the "special challenges,"¹ "inevitable losses,"² and "inherent contradiction" of contemporary American Indian literatures,³ more recent work discusses Indian practices of "synthesizing oral and alphabetic literatures" and using a "written form" to convey "the oral tradition being transmitted" without treating this dynamic as a problem.⁴ This détente can be understood, not only through the persuasiveness of arguments for Indian artists' adaptive success, but also as an aspect of what Michael Martin aptly calls the "sovereignty turn" in American Indian studies.⁵ As the field pays particular attention to how Indian artists make messages of indepen-

dence, resistance, remembrance, and reclamation, ruminating over the ambivalences of adapting oral traditions into writing may seem irrelevant, passé, or counterproductive. If Indian sovereignty is one's concern, then one should not get too stuck on tired questions of oral traditions and writing, which have been addressed mainly through Western theories in the first place.

But what if oral–written dynamics can bear importance for the sovereignty turn after all? I explore this possibility by taking a new look at a key series of essays by the author often credited with catalyzing contemporary American Indian writing, N. Scott Momaday. Studies of Momaday have followed larger trends in the field by previously dwelling on the conversion of Indian oral traditions into Western writing in his early work.⁶ More recently, as the spotlight has moved away from oral–written dynamics, so too has it moved away from Momaday. And what recent work there has been focuses not on oral–written transitions but such topics as “sovereignty for bodies and memories” and “the cultural specificity of his Kiowa culture.”⁷

However, within Momaday's corpus, we can see a way of re-exploring the relation between oral traditions and writing that affirms, rather than erodes, Indian sovereignty. Here I focus on Momaday's commentaries on the traditional Kiowa story of the arrowmaker, which he first put into writing in 1967 and analyzed publicly in 1970. Although Momaday's rendering of the arrowmaker “has become central to the Momaday canon,”⁸ this story, and Momaday's discussions of it, link orality and sovereignty in ways that previous scholarship has not explored. It is well-known that Momaday sees a “basic compatibility” between oral traditions and writing.⁹ But Momaday does not only argue that the gap between speech and writing is “more apparent than real.”¹⁰ He comes to affirm that what Western readers would recognize as “literariness” in oral traditions is actually a direct result of their distinctively oral character. In other words, Momaday claims oral sovereignty over literariness itself.

To make this claim, Momaday makes significant use of Western theories. After all, “those who make this comparison [of oral and written traditions] are committed to the written tradition.”¹¹ But Momaday redeploys these Western frameworks—particularly the Modernism and New Criticism that informed his Western artistic and scholarly training—precisely to challenge dominant Western views of oral traditions. For

Momaday, the arrowmaker serves to undo Western thought's subordination of oral traditions to written literature, ultimately reestablishing oral traditions rather than writing as the primal source of literariness.

This claim of aesthetic sovereignty evolves over the course of nearly thirty years. As Jace Weaver puts it, "it is hard to assess Momaday" because "he refuses to stand still."¹² To see how Momaday's arrowmaker moves through time, I first examine Momaday's presentation "The Man Made of Words," an influential talk Momaday gave at the First Convocation of American Indian Scholars in 1970. I then turn to "The Native Voice," Momaday's opening essay in the landmark *Columbia Literary History of the United States*.¹³ Momaday consolidates and reorganizes material from both of these pieces in his book of essays *The Man Made of Words*.¹⁴ After tracing this thread through Momaday's career, I briefly consider the arrowmaker's legacy in the twenty-first century and its implications for studies of Indian artistic sovereignty.

THE ARROWMAKER'S WRITTEN DEBUT

In his first major discussion of the arrowmaker in 1970, Momaday sets out to "validate the oral tradition" against prevailing assumptions of its inferiority or irrelevance to writing.¹⁵ While attitudes were improving, common perceptions were still descended from ones such as a 1917 translation of Ojibwa texts that posited their "simplicity" and "dull monotony."¹⁶ Many took it as the "safest assumption" that oral traditions change a great deal over time in contrast to the stability of writing,¹⁷ and that oral societies are naively "unself-conscious" as opposed to self-aware written documents and cultures.¹⁸ Momaday is up against a perception that oral traditions are unstable, simple, and unself-conscious, as opposed to literature, its more sophisticated opposite: stable, complex, and self-aware.

In order to "validate the oral tradition" against these disparagements, Momaday seeks to "provide a context in which the elements of oral tradition might transcend the categorical limits of prehistory, anonymity, and archeology in the narrow sense."¹⁹ We should not cordon off oral tradition from the Western canon but instead "use the term 'literature' in its broadest sense" to include both oral and written material.²⁰ *Inclusion* is not quite yet *sovereignty*; as I will show, Momaday's ideas in 1970 do not center orality as strongly as his later treatments of the arrow-

maker do. But Momaday's proposal to "include" oral traditions within "literature" is the first step toward posting oral traditions as a primal source of what Western traditions call literariness. Momaday's wish for the oral tradition to "transcend" the categories to which the Western gaze has assigned it, and to define "literature" as encompassing both oral traditions and writing, begins to weaken the association between literariness and writing.

Oral storytelling is nevertheless distinct from writing, Momaday acknowledges, because it involves such dynamic performative elements as "memorization, intonation, inflection, precision of statement, brevity, rhythm, pace, and dramatic effect."²¹ But while Momaday's transcription of the traditional Kiowa story of the arrowmaker does convey "precision of statement" and "dramatic effect," the printed version of Momaday's talk does not indicate more immediately theatrical elements such as "intonation" and "pace" as other, more anthropological renderings have done, using various diacritics, marginalia, or other specialized notation. Undaunted by the "problems that orthography and translation present,"²² Momaday presents the arrowmaker story purely as literary prose that stands on its own.

In this way, Momaday begins to promote an understanding of oral traditions as stable, in contrast to the commonplace view that oral stories are variable and fleeting.²³ The story of the arrowmaker, Momaday tells us, "has been neither more or less durable than the human voice, and neither more or less concerned to express the meaning of the human condition."²⁴ Since Momaday makes it clear that the story does, indeed, "express the meaning of the human condition," this comment suggests that the durability of the human voice means more than immediate duration. Rather, Momaday appeals to a metaphorical durability understood as a type of foundationalism, whereby "the whole of literature rests upon" the truths in the story of the arrowmaker.²⁵ This statement supports Momaday's contention that "the elements of oral tradition can be shown, dramatically, to exist within the framework of a literary continuance."²⁶ Positing this "continuance" breaks up writing's apparent monopoly on literariness and opens the door for oral tradition, not writing, to eventually assert itself as a primordial source of literariness.

This sense of stability is spiritual, Momaday explains; it indicates the ability to remain grounded in the midst of change. Stability finds further

expression in Momaday's discussion of the figure of Ko-Sahn, an elder from Momaday's childhood who embodies a stability of rootedness and interconnectedness. The modern, technological world in which writing predominates makes its inhabitants "disoriented" and their conception of nature "unreliable."²⁷ Turning common views on their head, Momaday suggests that the taken-for-granted modern world of writing makes experience unstable rather than stable. By contrast, Ko-Sahn is someone whose knowledge offers "strength enough to hold still against all the forces of change and disorder."²⁸ This kind of stability comes from the oral tradition, from Ko-Sahn's ability to "deal with it in words."²⁹ For Momaday, the stability of the oral tradition is not a specific attribute, but a stabilizing power.

Momaday nevertheless parlays this spiritual stability through the context of the literal stability of a written version of an oral tale. If a text is stable, then we can take the time to analyze it through literary close reading. The story itself, given in less than three hundred words, tells of a Kiowa arrowmaker who spies an interloper peering in on him and his wife through a seam in his teepee. The arrowmaker talks to his wife in a casual tone, but without looking asks the intruder to say his name, testing his language comprehension. Hearing no reply, the arrowmaker shoots the outsider with his freshly honed arrows.

While this story may seem simple, Momaday stresses its complexity. He insists that the story of the arrowmaker "is worth thinking about. . . . [It] bears examination easily and well."³⁰ To prove this claim, Momaday undertakes a meticulous close reading that analyzes the story's diction, tone, structure, and symbolism, devoting more than three times the story's length to its analysis. What matters here is not only the content of Momaday's interpretation, but the sheer fact that Momaday performs the act of close reading. Momaday "validate[s] the oral tradition"³¹ by subjecting it to a Western-style literary analysis that lacks a precise equivalent in oral traditions themselves, but which allows the story's complexity to come to light in ways that the written tradition can recognize.

This bid for recognition asserts that the arrowmaker is profoundly self-aware, as opposed to the idea that folklore and folk cultures are unselfconscious. Momaday explains that the story "returns in a special way upon itself"³² and is "conscious of itself"³³ because it is about language. Momaday concludes that "the story of the arrowmaker, as

opposed to other stories in general, centers upon this procession of words toward meaning.³⁴ The arrowmaker is a “man made of words” because his existence depends on skillful, deliberate, meaningful speech, and his ability to make inferences based on it.³⁵

The story’s self-aware concern with the power of language allows it to have a universal meaning. Momaday emphasizes universality rather than reading the story for specific knowledge of Kiowa culture, its enmities with other tribes, its craft of arrow making, and the like. The arrowmaker’s crucial request to the intruder contains “all of his definition and his destiny, *and all of ours*” (my emphasis).³⁶ The individual arrowmaker dramatizes the universal idea that “language involves the elements of risk and responsibility.”³⁷ Momaday then proposes with curious tentativeness that “it may also be that the whole of literature rests upon that truth.”³⁸ The apparent modesty of “may” still couches a forceful paean to the oral tradition—as exemplified in the story of the arrowmaker—as a fundamental wellspring of the literary merits of stability, complexity, and self-awareness.

Thus Momaday’s understanding begins to redeploy the standards of Western critics, particularly the New Critics who influenced his literary consciousness,³⁹ who are interested in “the meaning of the human condition” as expressed in literature.⁴⁰ Momaday’s analytic movement from the specific to the universal is a tacit but conceptually unmistakable appeal to W. K. Wimsatt’s concept of the “concrete universal,”⁴¹ a paragon of New Criticism and Western literary study. But while New Criticism has codified such literary concepts most explicitly, Momaday repurposes these criteria so that readers can come to see the arrowmaker’s literary elements as a direct result of the orality of American Indian traditions. This approach later evolves into an implicit claim of Indigenous sovereignty over literariness itself, a view that emerges more strongly in Momaday’s next iteration of the arrowmaker eighteen years later.

SPEECH OVER WRITING?

Largely on the strength of Momaday’s emergent literary fame, the Native American Renaissance grew during the 1970s and 1980s, more American Indian writers established themselves as formidable voices, and scholarship on contemporary Native American literatures followed.

Since this Renaissance was a complex “written renewal of oral traditions translated into Western literary forms,”⁴² pondering the nature of the relationship between oral traditions and writing became a prominent theme of American Indian literary scholarship.⁴³ In this period, even optimists like Kenneth Lincoln still cautioned of “special challenges” in oral-to-writing transitions.⁴⁴

Lincoln’s praise of Momaday in particular carries a curious mixture of passive and active language, crediting Momaday’s “adaptive ‘way’ into modern literary forms” while also saying that Momaday simply lets “[t]he Kiowa stories stand in and of themselves.”⁴⁵ Jack Forbes more critically groups Momaday with a coterie of Indian writers who write for mainly white audiences, thereby rendering Native American literature “a colonized and submerged literature” by pandering to non-Native interests.⁴⁶ These debates over authenticity reflect considerable room for further theorizing about the relation between orality and writing, assuming—as most scholars did, but Momaday did not—that an inherent gap separates the two.

While Momaday does not discuss this scholarship in detail, it makes sense to read his next major discussion of the arrowmaker in this academic context. There was a sense in the field that the relationship between oral traditions and writing—and Momaday’s work as an exemplar of this dynamic—matters a great deal, but there was no dominant framework for how to talk about this relationship. Increasing discussions of the role of oral traditions seemingly created increasing uncertainty. So Momaday seeks to convey the sovereign importance of the oral tradition even more strongly in his 1988 essay on the arrowmaker, “The Native Voice.” This essay includes Momaday’s 1970 study of the arrowmaker story from the latter portion of “The Man Made of Words.” But Momaday prefaces this segment with an expanded discussion of his ideas of the relation between oral and written traditions. In it, Momaday says that “‘Literature’ we take commonly to comprehend more than writing,”⁴⁷ and ultimately that “oral tradition is the foundation of literature.”⁴⁸ This is clearer, stronger, and more forceful wording than the tentative “it may also be that the whole of literature rests upon that truth” from the 1970 version, also given in this 1988 version.⁴⁹ Here we see the idea all the more starkly that oral traditions are where so-called “literariness” actually comes from.

In this version, Momaday does not only say that oral tradition is

an important part of literary heritage. Here he goes beyond his 1970 address to argue that oral traditions are actually superior to writing in some ways, specifically because of the tenuousness of speech as opposed to the permanence of writing. He asserts that “writing . . . encourages us to take words for granted,”⁵⁰ whereas in oral traditions, “words are rare and therefore dear.”⁵¹ The very thing that would make oral traditions seem unstable to literary people—its fleetingness—Momaday takes as a central driver of its very stability and power. Whereas written texts are easily mass-produced and can be stored without much thought, the spoken word, and associated elements of live performance, are all oral storytellers have. This scarcity leads to a profound sense of responsibility: stories “are spoken with great care . . . they must be taken seriously, and they must be remembered.”⁵² This oral imperative of remembrance fosters, in Momaday’s view, a distinct kind of stability. He writes, “In such a formulaic context as this [oral tradition], where the words are precisely fitted into the context of religious ceremony, the oral tradition achieves a remarkable *stability*, an authority not unlike that of Scripture” (my emphasis).⁵³ Momaday explicitly compares the body of oral tradition to written Scriptures in terms that a Western audience would recognize, but that ultimately reverse Western assumptions. The oral tradition has a stability, Momaday says, akin to a written Bible, but this stability actually depends on oral impermanence as opposed to written permanence. The need to remember spoken words drives generations of performers to hone oral texts into optimally memorable, aesthetically powerful forms and recite, teach, and preserve them with great consistency. Momaday’s interpretation thus makes the seemingly writerly attribute of stability reappear as the provenance of a far older oral tradition. This stability helps in turn to build the “authority” of an oral text’s religious power.

The importance of crafting a memorably stable oral text is also what helps to make its contents complex. In “The Native Voice,” Momaday includes a consideration of several American Indian oral poems as examples of the richness of the oral tradition, including this minimalist Sioux song: “soldiers / you fled / even the eagle dies.”⁵⁴ Momaday praises the poem’s “mysterious equation” of the soldiers and the eagle, encapsulated into a form that he calls “concentrated and beautiful” and “a nearly perfect formula.”⁵⁵ This extreme brevity, laden with implicit meanings and open to profound interpretations, is reminiscent of haiku or Ezra

Pound's emblem of Modernist minimalism, "In a Station of the Metro," but developed through orality rather than writing. In a rare acknowledgment of the mediations behind his presentation, Momaday considers, "What was lost or gained in this process of translation and transcription? This we cannot know, but it is perhaps enough to know that this song . . . is eminently worthy of being preserved for its own sake. It is literature of the highest order."⁵⁶ Rather than dwell on the mediated nature of this transcription, which could threaten the very possibility of knowing what "its own sake" is, Momaday quickly pivots back to his principal assertion of the oral poem's greatness in literary terms of complexity.

Along related lines, when "The Native Voice" reissues Momaday's detailed close reading of the arrowmaker, there is an additional assertion of complexity that is even more explicit and sustained than in the 1970 version: here Momaday stresses that the story "is *complex*, and yet it is clear; it seems to give more and more of itself in time. Clear it is, and yet there is a kind of resistance in it, as in a *riddle*; it is the richer for that. It is a kind of prism" (my emphasis).⁵⁷ This understanding of an oral story's complexity is highly legible within the Western literary tradition. It echoes Hemingway's quintessentially Modernist "ice-berg" metaphor of writing,⁵⁸ in which the words on the page are only the tip of the iceberg that suggest far greater reaches of figurative meanings below the surface. And yet, the arrowmaker's complexity derives from its orality, implying that its similarities to writing show writing's debts to orality rather than the reverse.

This reiteration of the arrowmaker further expands upon its declarations of the story's self-awareness, such as the claim that "the story of the arrowmaker returns in a special way upon itself" by dealing with the power of language.⁵⁹ Here too Momaday adds a more extended reflection on oral story's self-awareness not present in the 1970 version: "these attitudes [about the sacredness of words] are reflected in the character of the songs and stories themselves. . . . [T]hat tradition . . . reveals the singer's and the storyteller's respect for and belief in language."⁶⁰ The "belief in language," honed by the oral storyteller's awareness of words' scarcity, leads to the formation of self-aware stories that address the power and responsibility of language. Whereas Western readers are likely to expect self-awareness to rise out of the text-based experimentalism of Modernism, Momaday sees a self-awareness that is comparable to that in Western literature, but arises from the oral tradition's

exigencies of remembrance rather than written texts. Thus, Momaday again bases his claims of the oral tradition's stability, complexity, and self-awareness, not merely on their similarity to Western craft, but on their distinctively oral character. This analysis thus reframes literariness as the native domain of oral traditions, in which case the qualities of Western writing now appear as latecomers onto the sovereign territory of oral literariness.

RECKONING WITH WESTERN WRITING

The previously mentioned discussions about oral traditions and writing were complicated by the rise of high theory and its subsequently contentious relationship to American Indian literary studies. In the 1990s, divisions started to form more strongly between “nationalists” and “cosmopolitans.”⁶¹ Nationalists contended that previous studies of American Indian literatures, “mostly by white academics,” had been “inadequate or inappropriate” by missing much of the substance and nuances of writers’ tribal identities.⁶² As a corrective, scholarship in the field should ideally “proceed primarily from Indian sources.”⁶³ Cosmopolitan scholars, by contrast, made extensive use of non-Indian materials, relying particularly on Western critical theories such as semiotics or poststructuralism to frame the relation between oral traditions and writing.⁶⁴ Scholars continued to write extensively about oral traditions and writing, but differed over the proper role of Western theory in this discussion. To what extent does American Indian literature need Western theory?

While Momaday does not write about this methodological debate directly, his third and most recent major treatment of the arrowmaker intervenes in this conversation. Momaday complicates the nationalist/cosmopolitan divide by engaging with Western traditions in ways that affirm rather than erode Indian sovereignty. By engaging Western writers more extensively than before, Momaday is cosmopolitan in his choice of materials but nationalist in his analysis of them. His complex reworking of Western theories of artistic value ultimately develop his claims of Indigenous sovereignty over literariness in even greater depth and precision.

In 1997, Momaday’s essays were collected into a book whose title comes from his 1970 talk: *The Man Made of Words*. The book consolidates Momaday’s sense of the oral tradition’s grounding stability largely

through its naming and arrangement. By naming this collection after his 1970 presentation, Momaday signals that the metaphor of humans being “Made of Words” is the central governing idea of his thought as expressed in the nearly thirty years of essays the book collects. Accordingly, the primary essay is simply called “The Arrowmaker” and is taken almost verbatim from the latter section of the 1988 essay “The Native Voice.” While the content is not changed, the arrangement is significant. In “The Native Voice” (as well as the 1970 “Man Made of Words”), the story of the arrowmaker is a coda, an illustration of Momaday’s general claims about oral traditions. But here, Momaday reverses the order of “The Native Voice,” placing the story of the arrowmaker first and moving the preceding, more general material into a second, separate essay, “The Native Voice in American Literature.” Now the arrowmaker takes pride in place and becomes the central embodiment of the grounding power of the oral tradition.

This focus on the arrowmaker may explain why Momaday is more comfortable engaging with Western influences even more strongly in *The Man Made of Words*. By unambiguously positioning the arrowmaker as a foundational figure, Momaday takes up Western literary traditions without simply comparing the former to the latter in a derivative sense. Quite the opposite: here Momaday engages with Western writers precisely to transform all the more dramatically the relationship between Indian and Western traditions. By showing how seemingly literary qualities are native to oral traditions, Momaday reframes Western theory not as an imperial imposition on Native art, but as latter-day elaborations upon fundamentally oral aesthetic principles that ironically reveal literature’s dependence on orality. Momaday’s incorporation of Western thought becomes especially nuanced in his considerations of complexity. In particular, Momaday links two aspects of oral traditions’ inherent complexity to Modernism and New Criticism: concentration and unity.

The Man Made of Words both discusses and practices the principle of concentration, an idea emphasized in Modernism that Momaday sees as native to oral traditions. Concentration implies complexity because it involves conveying many meanings in few words, which provokes interpretation. As Ezra Pound put it, poets should “[u]se no superfluous word.”⁶⁵ Similarly, Amy Lowell insists that “concentration is the very essence of poetry.”⁶⁶ The similarity to Momaday’s understanding of

the oral tradition here is unmistakable. The introduction to *The Man Made of Words* remarks that, for the most part, “stories in the American Indian oral tradition are short. Concentration is a principal quality of their structure.”⁶⁷ But for Momaday, what gives Indian stories their Modernist-like concentration is not a Modernist, writerly process of staged revision, but an organic process of collective authorship. Because the spoken word “must be remembered,”⁶⁸ the most memorable and polysemous formulations are preserved. This understanding renders concentration as an Indigenous attribute of oral traditions that Western writers more recently elucidated but neither invented nor perfected.

Furthermore, Momaday practices concentration himself through editing. Momaday’s previously published essays are meticulously adjusted, mainly through deletions that enhance economy. This practice honors Hemingway’s advice on writing: “The way you tell whether you’re going good is by what you can throw away. If you can throw away stuff that would make a high point of interest in somebody else’s story, you know you’re going good.”⁶⁹ While Momaday is writing essays, not poems or stories, this is still precisely what Momaday has done—deleting redundant phrases or sentences even if they are eloquent.

Momaday’s goal is not just concision; his deletions also change meanings in ways that validate and valorize the oral tradition. This dynamic is especially evident in Momaday’s discussion of *Black Elk Speaks*, “To Save a Great Vision,” the third essay in *The Man Made of Words*. Here Momaday’s engagements with Western writing are especially complex, since *Black Elk Speaks* is an American Indian oral story worked into written prose by the Western writer John Neihardt. Momaday first wrote “To Save a Great Vision” for a 1984 collection of essays honoring Neihardt. But in keeping with Momaday’s focus on the oral tradition throughout *The Man Made of Words*, the 1997 version reduces references to Neihardt’s role in producing *Black Elk Speaks*, thus giving more credit to Black Elk himself. For example, Momaday deletes the statement, “It is to Neihardt’s credit that he intuitively perceived the underlying structure of the oral tradition.”⁷⁰ This deletion makes Neihardt look more like a passive scribe than an active artist, in spite of Neihardt’s extensive and now well-known role in crafting Black Elk’s story in its published form.⁷¹ Momaday also removes another homage to Neihardt that states, “we have a masterpiece of transformation of the oral tradition from one language and culture into another without the

loss of the essential spirit of the original narration,"⁷² which diminishes attention to the mediations behind *Black Elk Speaks*. These deletions downplay Neihardt's role in adapting Black Elk's tale and enhance the impression of the craft of *Black Elk Speaks* as coming directly from its eponym and the "Lakota world view" he embodies.⁷³

In addition to concentration, Momaday's treatment of *Black Elk Speaks* is concerned with unity. In Western scholarship, the New Critical notion of "organic unity" became a way of valorizing great literature through perceiving the indispensable interrelations between a text's parts.⁷⁴ As Northrop Frye puts it, the critic "can see the whole design of the work as a unity."⁷⁵ Along these lines, Momaday says that Black Elk's story has "a perceptible integrity" and is "self-contained."⁷⁶ This unity relates back to concentration by reinforcing the economy of the story, which contains "little if any extraneous matter."⁷⁷ And this concentration in turn ties back to complexity more broadly because, through this concentration, "[t]he meaning of these stories is not to be discovered at once."⁷⁸ But while Western readers can recognize these appeals to dominant notions of literary craft, Momaday continues to stress that this sort of integrity, while coinciding with that of written literature, is "entirely in keeping with both the structure and character of oral tradition."⁷⁹ Unity, like concentration, is the native territory of oral traditions.

Momaday's appraisal of the unity of Black Elk's story further leads to a consideration of its self-awareness. The formal element that links unity and self-awareness is the story's circular structure. Momaday quotes from the beginning of *Black Elk Speaks*: "the Power of the World always works in circles. . . . [A]ll our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation."⁸⁰ Black Elk's tragic story comes full circle by concluding that "the nation's hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer."⁸¹ Momaday explains that Black Elk's words about the circle "describe the shape of the story itself" because the story "begins and ends at the same point."⁸² Black Elk's mastery of circular storytelling is evidence of Black Elk's consummate self-awareness; he "is at every moment aware of the aesthetic foundation of the storyteller's function."⁸³

For all his praise of Black Elk's storytelling prowess, Momaday does not valorize Black Elk in individualist terms. Rather, Momaday says that Black Elk's narrative "is not a personal story, not essentially autobiographical; essentially, it is a testament."⁸⁴ The story's artistic excellence comes not from individual genius, as Romantically inclined literati

might assume, but rather arises from the oral sensibility of collective authorship: “The aesthetic realization of his story is not immediately of his own invention; rather, he fits his narrative into a universal scheme.”⁸⁵ The communal sensibilities of oral tradition, not the individualist tendencies of Modernist writing, generate the story’s self-awareness.

Ironically, the very act of distinguishing Black Elk’s oral collectivism from literary individualism actually reframes another Modernist concept of craft: T. S. Eliot’s notion of *depersonalization*. Eliot, whose influence on Momaday is well-documented,⁸⁶ asserts that great poetry is not about personal expression, but rather the opposite: the ideal poet follows a “process of depersonalization” that involves “a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable.” That “something” is the aesthetically effective combination of images into new forms, which must be done with a passive disposition, for the great poet “is only a medium and not a personality.” This literary view is what Momaday attributes from an oral perspective to Black Elk, who appears more as a vehicle for “the Lakota worldview” than a unique individual.⁸⁷ Ultimately, for Momaday, Black Elk’s self-aware depersonalization is what makes his story an act of “transcendence” that can inspire audiences “beyond the limits of his time and place,”⁸⁸ with the power of the oral tradition preserved in writing. While Momaday incorporates many traces of Western ideas into his praise of Black Elk, it is ultimately the “Lakota worldview” itself, as an example of Native oral traditions more broadly, that is the wellspring of the aesthetic attributes Momaday valorizes.

Furthermore, in the 1990s context of *The Man Made of Words*, what matters is not only the presence of Western theories, but *which* ones Momaday invokes. I see Momaday’s lack of engagement with poststructuralism or deconstruction not as a sign of outdatedness, but the result of a deliberate belief that Modernism and New Criticism more effectively reflect what is precious about oral traditions than later poststructuralist theories (unlike, for instance, Gerald Vizenor,⁸⁹ who is much more invested in postmodern theory and practice than Momaday is).

Whereas Momaday’s use of Western theories in *The Man Made of Words* is mostly implicit, his engagement with Western writers becomes much more explicit. However, Momaday strongly subordinates his discussions of them under a more primordial oral tradition. He does not mention any Western writers in his discussions of the arrowmaker.

This omission separates Momaday from other scholars who validate American orature by comparing it favorably to Western writers such as Anton Chekhov or Hemingway and Faulkner.⁹⁰ Momaday eventually discusses Western writers such as Jorge Luis Borges and Emily Dickinson in the ninth essay of *The Man Made of Words* and praises books as “a wonderful invention.”⁹¹ But Momaday places this essay near the end of the first unit, well after establishing the universal precedent of oral tradition. Momaday also invokes Borges and Dickinson to reverse Western taxonomies: these writers transcend the sterility of writing by recreating the power of oral tradition. Momaday proposes that “What Borges most esteemed in writing . . . I suspect, were precisely the things that distinguish the oral tradition—awe, astonishment, imagination, belief, holy dread.”⁹² He likewise credits Emily Dickinson with achieving the same sense of language’s preciousness that he prizes in oral traditions, declaring that “Words are indivisible with the highest realization of human being . . . Emily Dickinson’s poem tells us that we have our best existence within the element of language.”⁹³ Here there is none of the ambivalent reputational envy one detects in other comparisons. Momaday’s oral-centric arrangement and content centers Native aesthetics by treating Western writers as successful to the extent that they re-create the aesthetic merits of American Indian oral traditions.

CODA

While Momaday’s arrowmaker has not gotten a major update since 1997, the ideas his commentaries have developed continue to underlie Momaday’s thought. In the preface to *The Death of Sitting Bear*, a 2020 collection of fifty years’ worth of poems, Momaday carries on the same claim of Indian oral sovereignty over literariness. While Momaday acknowledges that “[t]he poem, as such, does not exist in Native American oral tradition,”⁹⁴ his aesthetic sense still developed “*first* in the oral tradition, *then* in writing” (my emphasis),⁹⁵ and the oral tradition is ultimately “a foundation of my creative expression.”⁹⁶ This sense of foundationalism continues to uphold the aesthetic primacy of oral tradition, even in written forms.

This idea has implications for how we look at Momaday and American Indian literature at large, creating new possibilities for

linking oral–written dynamics and sovereignty. Armand Garnet Ruffo registers that various scholars “worry about Momaday’s work for its sweeping generalizations about Indigenous cultures.”⁹⁷ Momaday’s grand claims about oral traditions may seem to amount to inappropriate “generalizations.” But a sovereignty-minded analysis makes Momaday’s moves look different. Momaday’s ambition is to declare Indian sovereignty, not solely over land or physical objects—although those are very important—but over the aesthetics of literariness. Momaday’s arrowmaker affirms the oral tradition’s stability, complexity, and self-awareness, not to generalize, but on the contrary, to specify a set of aesthetic practices of which oral traditions are, in Momaday’s view, the Native ground. Indeed, Momaday’s commentaries on the arrowmaker are a powerful “assertion of native aesthetic value.”⁹⁸ More specifically, they promote a sense of Indian aesthetic sovereignty sympathetic with Penelope Myrtle Kelsey’s ideas of “intellectual sovereignty” through which Indian literature is best understood through Indian frameworks.⁹⁹ Momaday reframes Western theories to consider what it means to be “Indian from the inside rather than as defined by the dominant society.”¹⁰⁰ That is, in using Western frameworks to clarify these Indian aesthetic merits, Momaday tries to show that ideas of apparently Western literariness are, in a crucial sense, Indian after all.

By recognizing and highlighting this claim, scholars might reinvigorate discussions of the oral–written relationship to move past questions of adequacy and compromise toward a focus on affirmation and empowerment. How might the understanding of the arrowmaker presented here illuminate themes of sovereignty in other parts of Momaday’s corpus? More broadly, how might acts of adapting oral traditions into writing be understood not only as makeshift means of expressing resistance, but as themselves constituting a type of resistance? If, as Momaday asserts, oral stories “are told to be believed,”¹⁰¹ the arrowmaker offers us a rich resource through which to further understand what this belief in the power of language might mean.

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