Univerzita Karlova

Filozofická fakulta

Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur

Filologie – anglická a americká literatura

Disertační práce

Mgr. Jana Marešová

Sky Woman, Trickster, Windigo: Reflections of Traditional Storytelling in Contemporary Canadian Indigenous Novel

Žena z nebe (Sky Woman), Šprýmař (Trickster), Windigo: Reflexe tradičního vypravěčství v současném kanadském indigenním románu

Vedoucí práce: Klára Kolinská, PhD

2021

Prohlášení:

Prohlašuji, že jsem disertační práci vypracovala samostatně, že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

V Praze, dne 31. srpna 2021

Jana Marešová

Klíčová slova

indigenní vypravěčství; kanadský indigenní román; oralita; vztahovost; Žena z nebe (Sky Woman); Šprýmař; Windigo

Key words

Indigenous storytelling; Canadian Indigenous novel; orality; relationality; Sky Woman; trickster; windigo

ABSTRAKT

Vypravěčství je základním prvkem indigenních kultur v Kanadě, který zajišťuje přenos a uchování systému indigenních znalostí a hodnot. Dosud nepříliš zavedený termín "indigenní" označuje kultury původních obyvatel Kanady, tzv. prvních národů (First Nations), Métisů a Inuitů, a je přepisem anglického označení "Indigenous", které se v současné době nejčastěji používá pro souhrnné pojmenování těchto národů. Tato práce se zabývá odrazem ústního vypravěčství v současné literatuře autorů z řad původních obyvatel Kanady. Nejprve je zkoumána role a důležitost vypravěčství v indigenních kulturách a potažmo literatuře. Následné analýzy románů se soustředí na tři zásadní a opakovaně se vyskytující postavy v indigenním vypravěčství – Ženu z nebe (Sky Woman), Šprýmaře/Šibala (Trickster) a Windigo a na to, jakým způsobem tradice ústního vypravěčství formuje narativní styly textů a jak se v nich projevuje hodnotový referenční rámec indigenních kultur. Teoretický základ práce čerpá primárně z teorií vyvinutých indigenními kritiky a romány jsou analyzovány skrze koncepty vycházející z indigenního pohledu na vypravěčství. Práce se tak snaží přinést odlišný pohled na tuto literaturu než je obvyklý pohled postkoloniálních a postmoderních teorií.

Tato disertace hledá odpovědi na tři základní otázky: Jak se tradice ústního vypravěčství odráží v současné indigenní literatuře Kanady? Jakým způsobem tyto tři tradiční postavy přispívají k manifestaci orality v psaných textech a jaké významy jejich užití vytváří? Jaké jsou specifické znaky indigenní literatury pracující s ústním vypravěčstvím a jak se tyto znaky případně liší od aspektů euroamerického vypravěčství?

Práce ukazuje, že oralita je přenášena do textů ve formě hodnot založených na konceptu vztahovosti (relationality) neboli vnímání reality jako souboru vztahů a chápání nutnosti vyrovnaných vztahů s veškerým tvorstvem jako předpokladu pro život jednotlivce i komunity. Druhá kapitola práce prezentuje definice a aspekty vypravěčství akcentované v indigenních teoriích – dynamičnost vypravěčství, vyrovnanou úlohu vypravěče a posluchače při vypravování, poskytuje přehled indigenních typologií příběhů, rozebírá důležitost spirituality a cykličnosti, vysvětluje užití příběhů jako teoretických úvah a v neposlední řadě popisuje vztah orality k psanému textu obecně. Třetí kapitola se věnuje poněkud kontroverznímu, ale pro současnou literaturu velmi důležitému problému kulturního přivlastňování ve spojitosti s indigenními příběhy, objasňuje příčiny rozdílných pohledů na užívání a šíření příběhů pramenící z koloniálních praktik a z odlišného přístupu

k vědění a nastiňuje, k jakým změnám by mělo z hlediska indigenních vědců a umělců dojít, aby k podobným kontroverzím nedocházelo.

Čtvrtá kapitola se zabývá postavou Ženy z nebe z příběhů stvoření světa a jeho zpracováními ve dvou současných románech. Je zde užíván termín „enstoried principles" – principy vztahovosti, reciprocity, respektu a odpovědnosti, které příběh Ženy z nebe ztělesňuje a které formují nejen tematické zaměření románů, ale i jejich narativní strategie. V páté kapitole je ve vztahu k těmto principům představena postava Šprýmaře poté, co jsou shrnuty kritické pohledy na často zavádějící pojetí této postavy v akademickém diskurzu. Analýzy tří šprýmařských románů ukazují různé aspekty této postavy - humorné převtělování se, upozorňování na nutnost neustálého přehodnocování vytvořených hodnot a úsudků, ale i negativní dopady jeho činnosti. V pořadí šestá kapitola se věnuje postavě Windiga, která přináší poučení skrze ztělesnění hodnot, které jsou v protikladu k uvedeným „enstoried principles". Je v ní popsána a následně na dvou románech ilustrována přeměna významu této postavy na zpodobnění kolonialismu a konzumerismu. Závěrečná kapitola shrnuje hlavní výsledky výzkumu, ukazuje, že koncept vztahovosti lze produktivně použít pro náhled indigenních textů, a nastiňuje též možnosti dalšího výzkumu.

ABSTRACT

Storytelling is an essential constituent of Indigenous cultures in Canada which transmits and preserves Indigenous knowledge and value systems. This work examines the way contemporary Indigenous writers work with the tradition of oral storytelling in their writing. At first, the role and importance of storytelling for Indigenous cultures, and consequently for literature, is discussed. The following analysis of individual novels is centered around three characters significant and recurrent in Indigenous storytelling – Sky Woman, the trickster, and the windigo, and it studies the way oral storytelling shapes the narrative styles, and how Indigenous referential frameworks are manifested in this process. The theoretical background is informed mainly by sources by Indigenous scholars and the texts are analysed through concepts based on Indigenous perspectives on storytelling, which hopes to bring a different view on these texts than those based on postcolonial and postmodern theory.

This dissertation searches for answers to the following questions: How is oral storytelling reflected in contemporary Canadian Indigenous writing? In which ways do these three characters contribute to the manifestation of orality in written texts and what meanings does their usage create? What are the specificities of Indigenous narratives using the oral tradition and how do they differ, if they do, from Western narrative strategies?

The work shows that concepts of orality are transferred to written texts in the form of values based on the notion of relationality – the perception of reality as a set of relations and indispensability of balanced relationships with all creation for individuals as well as for communities. Chapter 2 presents definitions and aspects of storytelling emphasized in Indigenous theories – dynamism of storytelling, the equal role of the teller and the listener in the process, it also provides an overview of Indigenous typologies of stories, discusses the importance of spirituality, cyclicality, and the use of stories as theories, and examines the correlations between the oral and written storytelling. Chapter 3 deals with the controversial, but for contemporary literature very important issue of cultural appropriation in relation to Indigenous stories; it explains the causes of the different approaches to using and sharing stories stemming from the legacy of colonial practices and from the diverse understanding of knowledge use in Western and Indigenous views, and presents the necessary steps to prevent these affairs from happening, as explained by Indigenous scholars and artists.

Chapter 4 examines the Sky Woman creation story and its reflections in two contemporary novels with the help of the term "enstoried principles" – principles of relationality, respect, reciprocity, and responsibility that the Sky Woman story embodies and that influence not only the themes of the novels but also the narrative strategies. The trickster is discussed in Chapter 5 in relation to these principles after an overview of the critical debate about misconceptions around this character in academia is provided. The analyses of three trickster novels show various aspects of this figure – humorous transformability, his teachings about the necessity to reconsider preconceived notions as well as harmful consequences of his actions. Chapter 6 deals with the windigo, which teaches by embodying oppositional values to the enstoried principles. The shift in signification of the windigo towards representation of colonialism and consumerism is explained and subsequently illustrated by two texts. The conclusion summarizes the main findings, demonstrates that relationality and enstoried principles can be used productively to approach Indigenous texts, but concurrently points to the limitations of this research, and outlines possible future steps in this regard.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a debt of gratitude to many people who guided me, helped me, and supported me during the process of researching and writing this work. Special thanks to:

Klara, for your immense patience with me, for introducing me to this topic and to the area of Indigenous studies as such. Our teacher-student relationship developed over the years to sincere friendship and that is a blessing in itself.

Evie and Miki, my Canadian parents, thank you for all your generosity, for sharing your home with me whenever I needed, for sending me books and newspaper clips, for offering writing advice, for nudging me to finish soon, for supporting me in so many ways. I am forever grateful.

To the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies for giving me the chance to spend the best year of my life in Edmonton. My stay there was essential for this research and for my love affair with this special place on earth. Paul and Sylva Jelen, your presence was an anchor so far away from home. Noemi and Marjeta, I appreciate our lasting friendship and support in academic life.

Keavy Martin and Richard Van Camp, thank you for meeting me repeatedly and for kindly answering all my questions. You both inspired me in many ways. Bruce, you shared your storytelling experience with me and welcomed me to your place, I am thankful. Bob Cardinal and Donald Dwayne – your teachings stay with me still, thank you.

This research would not be possible without much appreciated financial support from various institutions – Charles University, The British Library (The Eccles Center for American Studies), ICCS, CEACS, and without the support of my colleagues from the Department of English at UJEP.

To my wonderful gang of friends who were always ready to step in when a crisis occurred and who stayed my friends despite my perpetual busyness. Boří, thank you for letting me know I was not alone in this, Bobí, you know…, Gába, you fed me, comforted me and encouraged me and kept me going. Venda, Káťa, Ladi, Míša, Elena, Patrycja, all friends and lovers I was fortunate to meet and keep – thank you!

I am blessed with a great, stable, supportive family. The feeling that you are here no matter what allowed me to go to far away places, venture into new things knowing I have a safe space to go back to. Mami, tati, you never questioned my decisions and supported me in all my choices, thank you for giving me this space and your love. My amazing sisters, Eva a Jája, your love and presence is the greatest gift in my life.

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION 1

2 STORYTELLING IN INDIGENOUS CULTURES 8

2.1 POSITIONING 8

2.2 STORYTELLING 10

2.2.1 Definitions and key aspects 10

2.2.2 Roles of storytelling in Indigenous societies 14

2.2.3 Types of stories 17

2.2.4 Protocols and access 23

2.3 STORYTELLING AND INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEW 26

2.3.1 Relationality 27

2.3.2 Spirituality 33

2.3.3 Perception of time 37

2.3.4 Balance-based plot 39

2.3.5 Story as theory 41

2.4 ORAL STORYTELLING AND WRITTEN LITERATURE 43

2.5 CLOSING REMARKS 47

3 STORYTELLING AND APPROPRIATION 49

3.1 PRACTICES AND POLICIES OPENING SPACE FOR APPROPRIATION 49

3.2 THREE CASE STUDIES: APPROPRIATION OF STORIES AND IDENTITY FRAUDS 53

3.2.1 The Appropriation Prize 54

3.2.2 Michelle Latimer 56

3.2.3 The curious case of Joseph Boyden 60

3.3 APPROPRIATION: DAMAGES AND PATHS FORWARD 66

3.4 CLOSING REMARKS 68

4 SKY WOMAN 70

4.1 THE SKY WOMAN STORY 70

4.2 ENSTORIED PRINCIPLES 73

4.2.1 Reciprocity leading to respect 75

4.2.2 Relationality and responsibility 76

4.2.3 Creativity 78

4.3 INDIGENOUS PLACE-THOUGHT VERSUS CREATION AS HIERARCHY 79

4.4 THOMAS KING AND FIRST WOMEN 83

4.4.1 Subversiveness of *Green Grass, Running Water* 83

4.4.2 The Back of the Turtle 87
4.5 LESLEY BELLEAU: SKY WOMAN THE SEXUAL **97**
4.5.1 Sky Woman's echoes 98
4.5.2 Carnality and sexuality 102
4.6 CLOSING REMARKS **106**
5 TRICKSTER **110**
5.1 THE TRICKSTER DEBATE **110**
5.2 SEARCHING FOR A DEFINITION **115**
5.3 VIZENOR'S COMIC HOLOTROPICAL TRICKSTER **122**
5.4 WEESQUACHAK **131**
5.4.1 Qualities 132
5.4.2 Function and teaching moments 136
5.5 MOTORCYCLING NANABUSH **140**
5.5.1 Qualities 141
5.5.2 Teachings 145
5.6 TRICKSTER THE DESPICABLE **147**
5.6.1 The quality of an evildoer 148
5.7 CLOSING REMARKS **154**
6 WINDIGO **157**
6.1 DEFINING THE EVIL **157**
6.2 WINDIGO PSYCHOSIS **161**
6.3 WINDIGO THE CAPITALIST **164**
6.4 VAN CAMP'S DYSTOPIAN WINDIGO AND SIMPSON'S GEZHIZHWAZH **169**
6.5 *KISS OF THE FUR QUEEN*: WINDIGO WITH MULTIPLE FACES **174**
6.5.1 Various forms of the windigo 175
6.5.2 Stories as healing 179
6.6 *MOON OF THE CRUSTED SNOW*: WINDIGO IN ANISHINAABE DYSTOPICVISION **184**
6.6.1 Scott the Windigo 185
6.6.2 Anishinaabe ways as the new life 190
6.7 CLOSING REMARKS **192**
7 CONCLUSION **194**
8 BIBLIOGRAPHY **203**
9 LIST OF FIGURES **219**

1 INTRODUCTION

Storytelling is an essential constituent of Indigenous cultures in Canada. Stories have preserved and shaped Indigeneity for centuries and continue to do so up to this day. Traditional oral storytelling has served multiple purposes in the communities. Stories are carriers of personal and communal histories, they educate, entertain, define desirable social behavior and modes of social interaction, they provide a connection to spirituality, they are ceremonial, they express and transmit Indigenous knowledge systems. This long and rich tradition creates a solid and abundant ground for recent literature. Traditional storytelling is reflected, if the writer chooses to work with it, in the narrative techniques of contemporary writing, in the choice of characters and, of course, in the subject matter. As all cultural expressions, Indigenous storytelling embodies ontological and epistemological notions that might be pronounced in contemporary texts to varying degrees.

This work examines the way contemporary Indigenous writers of Canada work with the tradition of oral storytelling in their writing. At first, the role and importance of storytelling for Indigenous cultures and consequently for literature is discussed. The following analysis of individual novels is centered around three characters significant and recurrent in Indigenous storytelling – Sky Woman, the trickster, and the windigo - and it observes the meanings created by their use in the narrative, studies the way oral storytelling shapes the narrative styles, and the way Indigenous referential frameworks are manifested in this process. The criteria set for selection of these three characters were the frequency of their occurrence in recent texts and the fact that they are used in multiple Indigenous cultures so that more general conclusions about their significance in Indigenous cultures could be drawn. In summary, there are three main research questions: 1) How is oral storytelling reflected in contemporary Canadian Indigenous writing? 2) In which ways do these three characters – Sky Woman, the trickster, and the windigo - contribute to the manifestation of orality in written texts, and what meanings does their usage create? 3) What are the specificities of Indigenous narratives informed by the oral tradition, and how do they differ, if they do, from Western narrative strategies?

Oppressive colonial policies towards Indigenous communities introduced by the government, such as residential schools and banning of ceremonies and cultural practices by the Indian Act, were terminated only in the second half of the 20th century. Since then,

Indigenous artistic production and its recognition by non-Indigenous audience, both professional and non-professional, has been on surge. Indigenous literature "virtually exploded onto the Canadian intellectual,"[1] to borrow Emma LaRocque's (Cree/Métis) words, and requires critical attention and examination both in Canada and outside. The increase in the number of works by Indigenous writers in the last fifteen years is astounding. This does not concern only fiction but also scholarly works by Indigenous scholars, whose voices can now be heard more distinctly. There is, in short, a plenty of sources to study and debate, and this work aspires to be a contribution to this discussion.

The growing number of authors obviously means also a wider variety of genres, styles, and points of view. It is important to reiterate that not all Indigenous writers reflect and work with traditional storytelling and Indigenous knowledge and spirituality in their work, or in all their works (take, for example, detective fiction by Wayne Arthurson and children's literature by Richard Van Camp). For those who do, and whose works will be discussed here, implementing traditional storytelling is a way of self-expression, manifestation of continuance of Indigenous cultures, a way to cope with the legacy of colonialism and to reconnect, and help others to reconnect, with their Indigeneity. The consequences of colonialism are thus reflected frequently in their work. Since some of the issues and the impact of colonialism on Indigenous subject started to be publicly debated only recently, literary expressions of this experience provide a very valuable source of information about these processes and their influences on an individual.

On the other hand, the space for Indigenous voices is still limited in consequence of former colonial policies and ongoing social inequalities. Moreover, Indigenous artists often compete for opportunities with non-Indigenous writers appropriating Indigenous stories, experience, or identities. The contentious issue of appropriation divides Canadian literary sphere, uncovers the lack of awareness about the colonial damages of Indigenous cultures in mainstream society and cultural production, and painfully reopens the debate on criteria of Indigeneity. While Indigenous literatures have been thriving in recent years, it cannot be said that the appropriation issues have been widely understood or settled.

In the last decades of the previous century, Indigenous literature was perceived mainly through the lenses of Western paradigms and Western literary criticism. Scholars noticed and investigated the features of postmodernism in the works and tended to

[1] Emma LaRocque, "Teaching Aboriginal Literature: The Discourse of Margins and Mainstreams," in *Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literatures*, eds. Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016), 56.

understand the specificities of the narratives as representations of postmodern subversiveness and playfulness. Another frequently applied perspective on Indigenous texts has been the view of hybridity. Indigenous critics, however, point to the limitations of these approaches. Emphasis on postmodernity silences Indigenous modes of thinking according to Leggatt,[2] LaRocque, for instance, warns that exclusive focus on hybridity overshadows Indigenous knowledge,[3] Justice (Cherokee) refuses the term hybridity since it defines Indigenous peoples again in relation to white cultures,[4] and King argues in his famous essay that postcolonial criticism centers Indigenous writing around colonialism and oppression and separates it from their specific traditions.[5] In addition, the notion of hybridity presumes the emergence of new identities, while this work would like to show the inherent connection of contemporary writing to ancient traditions. Fagan (NunatuKavut) decides to use "adaptation" instead of hybridity to highlight the dynamic nature of Indigenous cultures.[6] Nevertheless, to me even the term adaptation implies adaptation *to* – adapting to standards and norms of Western cultures, which still suggests a hierarchical perception. Therefore, this work is trying to look at Indigenous texts through the terms and perspectives proposed by Indigenous scholars. This is not to say that postmodern and postcolonial lenses do not provide valid or meaningful insights into Indigenous literature or that using Indigenous perspectives is the only right way to analyze the texts. All approaches have their limitations as well as assets. This dissertation simply wants to present a different view.

Due to the boom of Indigenous fiction and scholarly writing starting at the beginning of the new millennium, we now have the possibility to compare Western perspectives with the point of view of critics coming from Indigenous communities. Thus, the objective of this work is to present the reflection of Indigenous storytelling in contemporary writing on the basis of the discussion of Indigenous theories of storytelling, by analyzing the usage of the characters coming from this tradition, and by examining the

---

[2] Judith Leggatt, "Quincentennial Trickster Poetics," in *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations*, eds. Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), 222.

[3] LaRocque, "Teaching," 65.

[4] Daniel Heath Justice, *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 215.

[5] Thomas King, "Godzilla vs. Postcolonial," *World Literature Written in English*, vol. 30, no. 2 (1990): 14.

[6] Kristina Fagan, "Weesageechak Meets the Weetigo: Storytelling, Humour, and Trauma in the Fiction of Richard Van Camp, Tomson Highway, and Eden Robinson," *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en Littérature Canadienne*, vol. 34, no. 1 (2009): 221.

influences of this tradition on written narratives. This process would enable comparison of the approaches to storytelling in Indigenous and Western perspectives.

Even though it is not the primary goal, this study can also help to challenge and undermine the still existing and prevailing stereotypical perception of Indigenous peoples in Czech culture. By examining literature dealing with contemporary life of Indigenous people in Canada, the work hopes to provide a different, more accurate picture of Indigenous identity other than those coming from popular culture, which distort and often misrepresent Indigeneity.

Canadian studies, in comparison to American and British studies, is a field that remains marginalized within the anglophone cultural studies, and Canadian Indigenous literature even more so. To draw attention to this sphere and to show its potential and importance for reflection of the cultural processes in Western tradition would be another goal of this work.

The opening chapter is focused on the significance of oral storytelling for Indigenous communities, its functions, forms, and protocols tied to it. It discusses the mutual importance of the teller and the listener and their responsibilities during the process. Since stories carry and convey basic cultural principles, this chapter also outlines key values of Indigenous knowledge which are reflected in and affect the narrative process such as relationality, interrelatedness, and spirituality. In addition, Indigenous theorizing through storytelling is introduced. The last section examines the intricate relations between the oral and the written and the way oral storytelling is translated into written texts.

Chapter 3 deals with the controversial, but for contemporary literature very important issue of cultural appropriation in relation to Indigenous stories; it explains the causes of the different approaches to using and sharing stories stemming from the legacy of colonial practices and from the diverse understanding of knowledge use in Western and Indigenous views, and presents the necessary steps to prevent these affairs from happening, as explained by Indigenous scholars and artists.

The discussion of Indigenous values transmitted by stories is continued in Chapter 4, which deals with the Sky Woman creation story and its variations and adaptations in literature. At first, the significance of this story for the Indigenous referential frameworks is investigated. The principles that the story stresses, such as creativity and individual and communal responsibility, are then exemplified and analyzed in texts by Thomas King and Lesley Belleau.

The following chapter is dedicated to a character discussed and analyzed profusely both in anthropology and literature, the trickster (also called the elder brother by Cree). The debate on the trickster in this work combines the contemporary critical views on the trickster and presents the forms in which this character is portrayed in today's writing. At the beginning, the objections towards trickster criticism from Indigenous scholars are clarified and their own definitions of this figure follow, including Gerald Vizenor's theories based on the trickster concept. Subsequently, trickster representations and their functions are analyzed in Ruby Slipperjack's *Weesquachak*, Drew Hayden Taylor's *Motorcycles & Sweetgrass*, and Eden Robinson's *Son of a Trickster*.

The last analytical chapter deals with depictions of yet another character featuring in oral storytelling – the windigo. The nature of this character and changes in its signification as described in critical sources and subsequently in fiction are discussed with the objective to analyze the function of this character in the narratives and the meanings created by its employment. The shift from originally a human-eating monster to a representation of capitalism and consumerism is explored, as well as the causes and implications of this transformation and connection of this character to the concept of relationality. Tomson Highway's novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, usually interpreted through the trickster character, and *Moon of the Crusted Snow* by Waubgeshig Rice are discussed as examples of contemporary windigo narratives.

As apparent from the previous paragraphs, each analytical chapter opens with a definition and explanation of the respective phenomenon or character which is followed by an analysis of the way these are used in contemporary texts. Novels published around and after the millennium are considered as contemporary; the majority of the novels were published after 2010. The discussion is targeted mainly to the younger generation of writers such as Leanne Simpson, Eden Robinson, and Lesley Belleau in order to attract attention to them in local scholarly circles, but texts by established writers such as Tom King or Tomson Highway are also examined since these create the referential and inspirational framework for the emerging writers, and the continuation of the tradition of storytelling in writing can be displayed this way.

In terms of sources of reference, preference is given to those written by Indigenous critics and scholars. This decision has been made for a number of reasons: 1) it is no longer true that Indigenous literary and cultural criticism is scarce, so there is no reason to exclude it from the debate, 2) inclusion of Indigenous scholarly voices is a way of their promotion

in Czech and Central European academia, in which there is still much space for their recognition, 3) the preference to Indigenous sources is given here with the hope to shift the power dynamics and to hear Indigenous voices first and mostly, especially on subjects directly concerning Indigenous communities, which has been a long-standing requirement of Indigenous academics in terms of self-determination and intellectual sovereignty. The author is, of course, aware that this preference is complicated by the fact Indigenous voices are presented and filtered through a non-Indigenous mind. This decision might seem biased and political, but it is the author's hope it will be understood as a gesture of awareness and resistance to the Western academic hegemony in knowledge comprehension. It does not mean that non-Indigenous criticism is avoided altogether, as that would be only silencing one instead of the other. Simply put, Indigenous perspective is presented at first and then complemented by or compared to non-Indigenous views.

The primary texts chosen come from and talk about various cultural backgrounds. Leanne Simpson, Waubgeshig Rice, Ruby Slipperjack and Lesley Belleau are Nishnaabeg, Drew Hayden Taylor Ojibway, Richard Van Camp is Tłicho and writing about Cree, Tłicho, and Dene, Eden Robinson is Haisla/Heiltsuk and writing, among others, about Haisla and Stó:lō, Tomson Highway is Cree, Tom King is Cherokee but writing about Blackfoot in Alberta or setting his works in fictitious reserves in British Columbia. These culturally diverse texts have been selected to provide an overview of techniques used in contemporary Indigenous writing across the cultures, as already the term Indigenous suggests. The author is aware of the dangers of generalizations and simplifications omitting cultural specificities lurking behind this approach. Whenever possible, the work will try to be culturally specific and community bound. However, a certain amount of generalization is necessary for any conclusions to be drawn. It is the author's plea not to take this work as an exhaustive ethnographical account of storytelling in individual cultures but rather as an outline of tendencies across the cultures.

Note on terminology

In this work I will use the term "Indigenous" as the term denoting people native to Canada and phenomena related to them the most frequently as it is the most frequently used term in contemporary studies focusing on original inhabitants of North America and their culture. The term Indigenous applies to many other peoples around the world but I will be using the term in relation to North America. In quotations other terms such as

“Aboriginal”, “First Nations”, “Native”, which are used interchangeably with “Indigenous”, will be kept as in the original. Let us clarify that the term “Indigenous” includes Métis and Inuit, contrary to the term “First Nations”. Since I mostly work with First Nations texts, my claims will be most relevant to them, however, general arguments can be applied to Métis and Inuit as well. Whenever possible, specific names of bands or communities will be given when discussing an author or a text, since it is considered the most appropriate and preferred way of naming the people and their literature and since it reflects the diversity and specificity of Indigenous cultures. Names defining national identities are used in the form the authors themselves use them. Therefore, several spellings of one nation or nation group might occur (for example, Anishinaabe, Anishawbe, Anishinaubae, Anishinaabeg). Unless referring to specific legal documents such as the Indian Act or to the stereotypical and misrepresentative images created about Indigenous peoples, I will not use the term “Indian” since it has many negative connotations and is regarded as pejorative.

As for the three characters discussed, I use the spelling predominant in secondary sources – Sky Woman, the trickster, the windigo. Indigenous style, as Gregory Younging describes it,[7] would capitalize these terms, together with terms such as Oral Tradition, Traditional Knowledge, Protocols.

Since decolonization of language and the acts of self-determination are still in process, terminology related to Indigenous peoples is a work in progress. The terms used in this work reflect current use in the field but they will be undoubtedly very soon replaced by other, more appropriate terms.

[7] Gregory Younging, *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples* (Edmonton: Brush Education, 2018), 77-81.

2 STORYTELLING IN INDIGENOUS CULTURES

2.1 Positioning

Before any discussion of the role of storytelling in Indigenous cultures can begin, it is necessary to clarify the position of the author of this work so that the perspective through which the issues are perceived is pronounced.

Despite the preference being given to Indigenous theorists and their voices, the author's interpretative perspective is not Indigenous. As a non-Indigenous person educated in the European/Western liberal frames of thought, my perception of the concepts discussed inevitably reflects my origin and cultural positioning and thus it remains an outsider view, which might complicate the examination. Therefore, this work should be read as the author's own, and so limited, understanding on Indigenous sources and knowledge rather than a comprehensive and authoritative study. By declaring this openly, I hope to meet Wendy Rose's (Hopi/Miwok) requirement of demonstrating integrity and intent as a way of ethical research on Indigenous cultures.[8] By quoting Indigenous voices, the reader is encouraged to seek original sources, to study them, to reach out to Indigenous scholars and elders and gather more knowledge, explore Indigenous literatures and worldviews and to have a debate with the author. Indigenous sources are used also to reduce "applications of irrelevant aesthetic standards", meaning Western aesthetic norms, which in consequence brings "domesticating and assimilating Native narratives into mainstream," as Helen Hoy explains, even though, to reiterate, the discussion of them is performed by a non-Indigenous mind.[9]

The author bases her arguments mainly on her readings, discussions and interviews with writers, scholars and also several community members and elders. The author acknowledges the right of Indigenous peoples to exert control over traditional knowledge and oral traditions and is aware of the fact that her readings carry the risk of violating this right. Nevertheless, to quote Helen Hoy again, "readings (however detached or

[8] qtd. in Renate Eigenbrod, *Travelling Knowledges: Positioning the Im/Migrant Reader of Aboriginal Literatures in Canada* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2005), 44.

[9] Helen Hoy, *How Should I Read These?: Native Women Writers in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001) 9.

unattributed) are always just that, readings, meetings between text and reader."[10] The reader is asked to take the context of the work into account and to approach my readings as primarily my own, which do not have definite nor conclusive quality. The author also acknowledges that her readings might be wrong or misleading and declares that the mistakes made are her own. Still, by claiming these are my readings only I do not mean to clear myself of the fact that my work perpetuates the disbalanced and long-lasting approach to Indigenous texts in which mostly non-Indigenous critics assess Indigenous texts. Therefore, I would like to emphasize once more that seeking Indigenous voices and reading their views is essential and highly recommended.

On the other hand, I read the writers' willingness to publish and thus share their work with Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences alike and the openness of the authors, Indigenous scholars, and elders, whom I had the chance to meet, to talk about specific aspects of Indigenous cultures as an assenting nod towards my interpretive efforts. "Elders and spiritual leaders are careful not to unduly share all their sacred information and practices, but they are willing to share sufficient material to allow non-Aboriginal people to better understand First Nations' worldview," as Harold Cardinal and Walter Hildebrandt write.[11] Writers and scholars share what they deem necessary to share to express themselves and their ideas and to be understood by other people, non-Indigenous ones included, most of the times. Greg Sarris (Coast Miwok) also asserts that "each group [Indigenous and non-Indigenous people] can inform and be informed by the other."[12] This work should be read as exactly that – an attempt to understand better, be informed, with the awareness that the knowledge can never be full and definitive.

The ethics of Indigenous cultures and knowledge, stories including, is very complex and there is no unified approach to it. It can be very well said that every Indigenous person would have a different understanding and approach to ethical treatment of their culture and to respectful sharing. As the reactions of Indigenous readers to texts written even by Indigenous writers containing ceremonies or traditional stories vary from enjoyment, acceptance to reservation and refusal and sense of betrayal, reactions to this work would very likely occupy a similarly wide scope.

---

[10] Hoy, *How Should I*, 19.

[11] qtd. in Angela Van Essen, "Bending, Turning, and Growing: Cree Language, Laws, and Ceremony in Louise B. Halfe / Sky Dancer's *The Crooked Good*," *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, vol. 39, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 79.

[12] Greg Sarris, *Keeping Slug Woman Alive: A Holistic Approach to American Indian Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 7.

2.2 Storytelling

2.2.1 Definitions and key aspects

Storytelling is, of course, a phenomenon common and examined in non-Indigenous cultures, too. Therefore, the following discussion will focus on those aspects and definitions of storytelling stressed by Indigenous scholars in order to present the specificities of Indigenous approaches to storytelling. Storytelling is a complex cultural, intellectual, political, social, and spiritual activity which carries and transfers knowledge in Indigenous cultures. For its complexity and essential position and function in Indigenous cultures, it is nearly impossible to articulate a precise and exhaustive definition of storytelling. Indigenous scholars in their definitions either highlight one aspect of it or try to express the intricacy of it by a metaphor: storytelling is a "vessel in which knowledge is carried",[13] it "acts as the vehicles of cultural transmission by linking one generation to the next",[14] Blaeser (the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe) says stories are "heartbeats" of Indigenous communities.[15]

Frequently, storytelling is defined as a process and activity rather than a cultural phenomenon which could be captured and defined out of time. Niigonwedom James Sinclair (Anishinaabe) writes that "Anishinaabeg storytelling, therefore, is not a simple one-dimensional act but a complex historical, social, and political *process* embedded *in the continuance* of our collective presence, knowledge, and peoplehood (emphasis added)."[16] Elain Jahner expresses a similar idea emphasizing action by saying that for Indigenous writers, "narrative forms have always had to do with particular *ways* of knowing and learning; they have not been mere objects of knowledge" (emphasis added).[17] So, storytelling is a continuing, ever-changing but enduring process and stories as its manifestations are productions rather than products.

---

[13] Niigonwedom James Sinclair, "Trickster Reflections," in *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations*, ed. Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), 22.

[14] Neal McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2007), 68.

[15] qtd. in Sinclair, "Trickster," 23.

[16] Sinclair, "Trickster," 23.

[17] Elain Jahner, "An Act of Attention: Event Structure in Ceremony." in *Critical Essays on Native American Literature*, ed. Andrew Wiget (Boston: Massachusetts: G.K.Hall, 1985), 245.

The failure to recognize storytelling as “a living, dynamic discourse”,[18] as Christopher B. Teuton (Cherokee) argues, inevitably led to the perception of oral stories as antiquities of distant past, and storytelling itself as a pre-stage in the development of Indigenous written literature. Also, positioning storytelling within the linear perception of time created the assumption of a beginning, the presupposition of original versions of oral stories and encouraged the need to search for these origins. This point of view enabled examination of oral stories and storytelling but it also significantly distorted its meaning and the angle of perception. The Indigenous perspective does not put emphasis on linear development of storytelling or perception of old stories as monuments of the past. “The stories did not have value in and of themselves – not as records, not as relics of past – but only in relation to the health of the living *sgadug*”[19] (emphasis in original), Teuton explains. Contrary to the Western formalist tradition and the Western belief that ancient oral stories carry certain historical value due to their age, historicity and intrinsic aesthetic value of stories seems not to be of the biggest importance from the Indigenous standpoint. The crucial aspect for understanding both the meaning and the value of stories is their connection to the living, present individuals and communities. In other words, storytelling should be regarded through relationality, one of the key aspects of Indigenous knowledge which will be discussed in length later. Moreover, the dynamic aspect of storytelling ensures its ability to react on social changes and to reflect them so that it is relatable to people of a given time, or as Petrone says, oral traditions thrive “through the power of tribal memory” and the ability “to renew themselves by incorporating new elements.”[20] Interestingly, the concept of relationality bound to storytelling secures both the continuation of ancestral memory through requiring accountability to ancestors and the introduction of new aspects through the necessity of relatability to contemporaries.

Storytelling is a two-way process in which the role of the teller is as crucial as the role of the listener. As Donald Lee Fixico, a Shawnee, Sac and Fox, Muscogee Creek and Seminole scholar, says: “The listener’s role is equal and reciprocal to that of the storyteller. Listening allows the potential energy of the story to come alive.”[21] Very similar idea that it is both the storyteller and the listeners participating in the story was expressed by Simon

[18] Teuton, “Indigenous Orality and Oral Literatures,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American literature*, ed. James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 171.

[19] Teuton translates Cherokee term *sgadug* as community. Teuton, “Indigenous,” 172-3.

[20] Penny Petrone, *Native Literature in Canada* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 17.

[21] Donald L. Fixico, *“That’s What They Used to Say”: Reflections on American Indian Oral Traditions* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017), 29.

Ortiz as well.[22] Storytelling as a process reflects relationality and mutual responsibility as essential features of Indigenous knowledge and practical application of these features is necessary for the success of the process. Storytelling is both a manifestation and an embodiment of these elements.

While it is the teller's duty to tell a good story, abide by the protocols, which determine what, who, when, and to whom a story is told, and react on the characteristics of the audience while deciding which story to tell and subsequently telling it, the listener's role lies in careful and active listening. The act of storytelling works fully only when the listener truly hears the story and derives from it some subjective meaning. Gerald Vizenor emphasizes the role of the listener when he explains that "the listener makes the story, but the story is also set up in a way that it can be personal and recognizable too."[23] The story is not completed, or "made" until one finds their understanding of it. The teller, on the other hand, must feel the story and breathe in it their own energy for the story to be entertaining and appealing to the listener. The teller has the responsibility to accommodate within themselves the collective, communal, ancestral story and their own life to ensure the story is appropriate, in line with tradition, and also identifiable with for the audience.[24] Storytellers must become "houses of ancient sound",[25] to use Neal McLeod's (nêhiyaw) words, they must hear and echo the ancestral stories while telling a story for their contemporaries. This is how the continuum across generations is secured. Both the teller and the listener must internalize the story for the process to be completed and meaningful.

The derivation of meaning of the story then relies on the internalization by the listener. This can take some time and Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree) stresses that the listener allows enough time to form conclusions in sufficient context and to trust that they "will come to you when they are ready."[26] Or, as Mabel McKay, Cache Creek Pomo elder, told to Greg Sarris when he was collecting her stories: "Don't ask me what it means, the story. Life will teach you about it."[27] From another perspective, the process is never finished as the story is retold over and over again and thus needs to be internalized by more and more

[22] qtd. in Kimberley M. Blaeser, *Gerald Vizenor: Writing in the Oral Tradition* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 15.

[23] qtd. in Blaeser, *Gerald* 25.

[24] Dwayne Trevor Donald, "The Pedagogy of the Fort: Curriculum, Aboriginal-Canadian Relations, and Indigenous Métissage" (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 2009), 76.

[25] McLeod, *Cree,* 100.

[26] Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 134.

[27] qtd. in Sarris, *Keeping*, 5.

listeners. McLeod writes that "a narrative can never be exhausted . . . the story will always be understood in slightly different ways, depending on the experiences of the people listening."[28]

Also, internalization determines the level of fabrication in the story since it depends on the listener what they consider true and what is identified as fiction.[29] Moreover, it is the personal investment that makes stories so suitable for teaching. Not only the listener/student must participate actively in the process, but they can identify with well narrated stories, which is very hard to reach when being taught by abstract theories.[30]

Relationality of the process of storytelling then works on multiple levels: the relation of the teller to the ancestral stories, relation of the particular story to the teller, relation of the teller to the listener/s, relation of the listener to the story. Relationality of stories leads Margaret Noodin (Anishinaabe) to say that stories are "a record of relationships always being recalibrated, recalled, reconstructed, and revitalized."[31] The constant forming and reforming of relationships also highlights the dynamism of storytelling as well as derivation of meaning. All these relations can be established only when both the teller and the listener meet their responsibilities in the process. Some of these relations might be pronounced or "gleaming through" the narratives in the form of references or dialogues, for example, which Horakova recognizes as "polyvocality" or "dialogism" of Indigenous writing.[32]

Storytelling is a complex activity built on the principle of reciprocity. Perhaps the most fitting definition of storytelling was expressed by Donald Lee Fixico, who writes that "a story being told is a body of spiritual energy."[33] Story is like a body in the elaborate working of individual parts to create a functioning wholeness, it is spiritual because it transcends the material, and it is energy because it is dynamic and ever-changing. And as bodies are part of the endless process of giving and taking and of the reciprocal flow of energy, stories are based on the same principle as well.

---

[28] McLeod, *Cree,* 17.

[29] Teuton, "Indigenous," 173; McLeod, *Cree,* 13.

[30] Wilson, *Research*, 17.

[31] Margaret Noodin, "Megwa Baabaamiiaayaayaang Dibaajomoyaang: Anishinaabe Literature as Memory in Motion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American literature*, ed. James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 183.

[32] Martina Horáková, *Inscribing Difference and Resistance: Indigenous Women's Personal Non-Fiction and Life Writing in Australia and North America* (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2017), 183.

[33] Fixico, "That's," 13.

2.2.2 Roles of storytelling in Indigenous societies

Storytelling has many functions in Indigenous societies. Stories carry knowledge, values, history, spiritual energy, and principles of social behaviour favored by the community, and those are transferred from generation to generation by the act of telling.[34] Apart from their informative and ethical value, and therefore their role in forming and reinforcing communal and personal identities, they also represent important educational strategies and source of entertainment.[35] All these functions have been widely recognized and acknowledged. Other two roles of storytelling, not less stressed by Indigenous scholars, are the ability of stories to stretch imagination and their significance for preserving memory.

By telling a story, the capability to imagine of both the teller and the listener is practised and expanded. Christopher Teuton writes: "Storytellers, 'liars', are bearers of recognized tribal oral histories, teachings, *and* stories that stretch imagination and belief. Often *gagoga*[36] stories move fluidly between different epistemological registers, including tribal history told as fact and mythic stories that are sources of deep reflection" (emphasis in the original).[37] Teuton reiterates the multiple purposes of storytelling in communities and also acknowledges the essential and indispensable role of storytellers as keepers of this tradition and knowledge. He then highlights the fact that stories require considerable imaginative skills since the listener must be able to move across various epistemological realms. The listener must be able to shift their perception from the factual (for tribal history), to the mythic and spiritual scope.

Imagination is extended not only by the shifts between epistemological paradigms but also by moving in time. Indigenous scholars frequently emphasize the ability of stories to transport human mind across time. Donald Fixico compares stories to "time portals where the past and present interact" and proceeds to explain that "stories cause us to lose our present sense of mind, simultaneously transporting us into timeless space where we

---

[34] Fixico, "That's," 13; McLeod, *Cree*, 11; Christopher B. Teuton, *Cherokee Stories of the Turtle Island Liar's Club: Dakasi Elohi Anigagoga Junilawisdii* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 18; Daniel Heath Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018), 34.

[35] Wilson, *Research*, 17; Petrone, *Native*, 3-4; Noodin, "Megwa," 176-177; Jo-Ann Archibald, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), 3, 83; Margaret Noodin, *Bawaajimo: A Dialect of Dreams in Anishinaabe Language and Literature* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 20.

[36]Teuton translates Cherokee term gagoga as lying. (Teuton, "Indigenous," 173)

[37] Teuton, "Indigenous," 173.

relive the past."[38] This time travelling by the means of storytelling serves again more than one purpose. Since the ideas, wishes, concerns, and problems occupying our mind are silenced during listening to a story (or telling it), it relieves the stress and provides humans with relaxation, an aspect essential for entertainment. Forgetting the present and being able to revisit the past or imagine the future, however, also practices our imagination, and by that it opens up space for imagining and examining one's connection to the past and the future. And it is in this space where one can find new solutions, get experience, and achieve better understanding of the current situation. As Margaret Noodin says, "the ability to visit elsewhere to step out of time, to look in all directions for connections is part of many Anishnaabe stories."[39] By hushing up the awareness of presence in our mind, storytelling enables us to move freely within different time dimensions and search for associations we would not be able to see if bound to and preoccupied with the present.

Movement in time is important, though not in the first place, for yet another key role of stories, and that is memory. Storytelling constitutes what Neal McLeod calls "Cree narrative memory," as he describes it in his equally titled book (2007). Similarly to other Indigenous scholars, McLeod recognizes the inseparability of the teller and the listener in the act of storytelling and the need for internalization of the story by the audience in order the potential of the act is brought out fully.[40] To demonstrate the qualities of narrative memory, he uses the metaphor of an echo:

> Collective memory is the echo of old stories that links grandparents with their grandchildren. In the Cree tradition, collective narrative memory is what puts singular lives into a larger context. Old voices echo; the ancient poetic memory of our ancestors finds home in our individual lives and allows us to reshape our experience so that we can interpret the world we find ourselves in.[41]

In this sense, memory is more than awareness and knowledge of one's tribal history. As the echo does in the space, memory must reverberate in the individual. At first, the individual (be it the teller or the listener) must be willing and able to listen to the old voices and then they must integrate these into their own lives. This means memory requires active participation and active connecting of one's self to the past. If the echo finds home in the individual, resonates in them, memory revives, and relationships are established. The individual connects to the ancestors, to the past, and through this connection they find

---

[38] Fixico, "That's," 6.
[39] Noodin, "Megwa," 176.
[40] McLeod, *Cree,* 7-8.
[41] McLeod, *Cree,* 11.

better understanding of the present. At the core of the process lies, once again, relationality, and storytelling is the means of it. The voices of the past would not echo in the individual if they did not see their connection to them. This view resembles the previously mentioned Noodin's claim that stories are records of relationships in restoration.[42] These relationships in re/consideration also work across time – they are relationships with ancestors, with contemporaries, future generations, and also with one's self.

This perception presents memory as a movement in time or a space where different time dimensions meet and overlap, not as a process focused only on the past. Motion here does not mean successive movement from one place to another. The notion of time and its passing is different from the European linear perspective, which will be discussed further on. In the Indigenous perspective, the relationships of the past to the present and significance of it to the individual seems to be the essence of memory. Noodin writes that "life and story are records of presence, memory of motion, theory and fantasy given shape and escape as they move from one mind to another."[43] Stories represent presence and at the same time they embody the past, they move in time and they move from one individual to another. As we can see, she agrees on the main points of storytelling, that is on dynamism and relationality, with Neal McLeod.

It is important to say, however, that in the Indigenous perspective, memory is grounded more in space than in time. Memory forms a connection to a certain place, evidence of a relationship to land is manifested through language – place names and stories. "It is the sense of space that anchors our stories; it is the sense of space that links us together as communities. Indeed, it is the sense of space that connects us to other beings and the rest of creation,"[44] McLeod says. Histories, stories and through them individuals and communities are bound to a certain place. This relationship to place, land, is what constitutes communal memory, and maintaining and nourishing the relationship with land is vital to the communities. The sense of communal identity depends on this lived relationship with the land[45] rather than on historical accounts and archeological evidence. Stories keep this relationship going, the spatial memory echoes through them. As Noodin writes, "land, water and sky are memorialized in story."[46] Jeannette Armstrong and Warren

[42] Noodin, "Megwa," 183.
[43] Noodin, "Megwa," 175.
[44] McLeod, *Cree,* 6.
[45] Wilson, *Research*, 80.
[46] Noodin, "Megwa," 182.

Cariou even say that, apart from other things, stories "can be understood as messages from the land to us."[47] This statement reverses the agency since it is not humans remembering the land through stories but the land letting itself be remembered by stories. The ground for this claim will become more apparent in Chapter 4 which discusses Watts's idea of Place-Thought. Meanwhile, we can say it is not only human-to-human and human to time relationships that are being established and affirmed by storytelling but also individual and communal relationships to space.

Yet another role of storytelling in Indigenous societies should be mentioned, and that is the function of counseling as, for example, Simon Ortiz reminds us.[48] Judgement and criticism of behavior or work of others and providing direct advice of what one should do in a particular situation is generally not considered appropriate and desirable, as several Indigenous scholars point out,[49] since it suggests the critic or adviser knows more about a person's life than they themselves. Instead of direct advising, the elder would tell a story from their life to provide guidance and counsel. This approach normalizes the situation of the individual rather than discussing it as a problem, makes the individual see that other people were in a similar situation once, and ensures that the individual makes their own mind about what to do.[50] The individuals need to interpret the story and apply it to their life on their own. Active and equally important role of the teller and listener and internalization of the story is required in counseling as well, similarly to the other functions of storytelling.

2.2.3 Types of stories

Mostly, Indigenous sources refer to stories of various kinds and genres as simply "stories". This single denomination includes what Western literary discourse would call myths, legends, personal narratives, historical narratives, fiction, ghost stories, spiritual accounts, anecdotes, fables, etc. The reluctance to classify stories generically does not come from the absence of typology of stories in Indigenous perspective but rather from the difficulty to find adequate and accurate English equivalents to respective Indigenous

---

[47] Warren Cariou, "Sweetgrass Stories: Listening for Animate Land," *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, vol. 5, no. 3 (September 2018): 341.

[48] David, Dunaway, "An Interview with Simon Ortiz," *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, vol. 16, no. 4 (winter 2004): 14.

[49] Wilson, *Research*, 43; Leanne Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing Books, 2011), 54.

[50] Wilson, *Research*, 28-29.

terms.[51] However, some scholars work with Western literary classifications, even though they also often express limitations and dangers of such an application on Indigenous stories.[52] With the ongoing discussion over terminologies and increased availability of Indigenous typologies, it is now possible to examine categories of stories in the Indigenous perspective, albeit no wider consensus on terms relevant to all Indigenous cultures has been reached and most likely never will be due to the current trends emphasizing specific tribal approaches to cultural concepts. Nevertheless, it is useful at first to examine the objections Indigenous scholars have expressed towards the Western terminology applied to Indigenous stories since it reveals a number of significant points about the Indigenous perspective on storytelling and it will clarify some of the arguments presented in the previous sections. Subsequently, some of the classifications offered by Indigenous scholars will be discussed.

There is a strong preoccupation towards the use of the term "myth" for Indigenous traditional oral stories. Penny Petrone noticed this and reflected it in her chapter on oral literatures already in 1990. The concern she emphasized was about the term myth, implying fictitiousness of narratives. She says: "Myth, for instance, in the mind-set of non-native reader, is considered as fiction. But the traditional narratives that whites have categorized as myth are not regarded by natives as untrue."[53] The occurrence of supernatural beings with special powers which classifies myths as fiction in the Western theory is not relevant in Indigenous perspective since spiritual realm and other-than-human beings are a valid part of Indigenous reality.

Another troubling issue connected to use of the term "myth" is the implication that these stories belong to early history or antiquity and have relevance only as a preceding step to modern literacy. Traditional stories are commonly placed at the beginnings of anthologies of Indigenous texts, which illustrates this presupposition, suggesting that "they [traditional stories] are not intended to be read as coextensive with living Indigenous oral narrative practices but as vestiges of past."[54] Moreover, Teuton claims that this approach "serves to reinforce a teleological literary history from the premodern to the present, all the while encoding colonial narratives of 'progress'."[55] In consequence, the connection of

[51] Noodin, "Megwa," 176.

[52] Simeon Scott, *âtalôhkâna nêsta tipâcimôwina: Cree Legends and Narratives from the West Coast of James Bay* (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1995); Fixico. "That's."

[53] Petrone, *Native*, 12.

[54] Teuton, "Indigenous," 172.

[55] Teuton, "Indigenous," 172.

traditional stories to contemporary Indigenous life, indispensable in Indigenous perspective, is overlooked, and oral stories are perceived as remnants of the past. Oral stories labelled as myths are entrapped in the linear view of literary development with the only movement being forward towards written literature. If continuity of storytelling is pronounced, it is tainted with exoticism and fascination with the pre-civilized. Dynamism and continuity of storytelling which moves in multiple directions is sidelined.

For these reasons, Gregory Younging (Opaskwayak Cree) lists "myth" as one of the inappropriate terms used for Indigenous stories, together with "legends", "mythology", and "tales" and explains that the application of these terms "is offensive to Indigenous Peoples because the terms imply that Oral Traditions are insignificant, not based in reality, or not relevant."[56] Therefore, I consciously avoid the term "myth" in this work as well, and I use the terms "traditional story" or simply "story" instead. Using "myth" with all the associations of the word would go against the aim of the work, which is trying to portray that oral storytelling and its principles live and function in Indigenous written texts today and are an integral part of it, not a pre-stage of it.

At the end of his article "Indigenous Orality and Oral Literatures", Christopher B. Teuton calls for "restorying" Indigenous orality and for "grounding Indigenous knowledge in culturally specific communicative terms,"[57] in order to break the overemphasized dichotomy of oral/written and all the implications this division carries, and in order to re-center the discussion around Indigenous concepts. Answering to this appeal, the following paragraphs present examples of Indigenous typologies.

Simeon Scott (Swampy Cree) provides a typology of Cree stories in his Introduction to *âtalôhkâna nêsta tipâcimôwina* (*Cree Legends and Narratives from the West Coast of James Bay*, 1995), a collection of recorded Cree stories with English translations. As apparent from the title, he relies on Western terminology and often compares Cree terms for narratives to what he considers their closest equivalents in English. Although this would not be the approach many contemporary Indigenous scholars would probably take, the year of the publication, which goes back to the decade in which callings for wider and exclusive use of tribal terminology were just starting to be heard in academia, has to be taken into account. Also, this sort of comparative approach makes it a

[56] Younging, *Elements,* 57.
[57] Teuton, "Indigenous," 173.

very useful guide into the typology of stories for non-Indigenous readers or readers primarily familiar with Western terminology.

Firstly, Scott distinguishes stories of, in his words, traditional and popular discourse, the difference between them being that traditional stories are well-known, often repeated, and canonical and the popular ones are "more casual and often more impromptu".[58] Traditional discourse is further divided into the category of âtalôhkâna, with subcategories of cyclical (groups of stories featuring a particular character) and non-cyclical narratives, and the category of historical narratives, (tip)âcimôwina, and songs. Popular discourse comprises of oratory, descriptions, and also (tip)âcimôwina in the meaning of personal accounts. (tip)âcimôwina can shift to traditional discourse when repeated frequently and getting wider recognition. Another distinguishing feature between âtalôhkâna and (tip)âcimôwina is that the former are set in time before "world jelled down to the way it is today,"[59] hence he compares them to myths, whereas the latter speak about real or close to real time. In addition, traditional discourse uses set expressions, archaisms, and culturally significant characters/animals, for example a spider or a lynx, which have specific connotations to Indigenous audience. This dimension is unfortunately but naturally lost or limited to non-Indigenous recipients. Popular discourse offers more space for improvisation, but certain liberties are possible also in the traditional one, in which rather thematic than verbal consistence is practised.[60] Interestingly, Scott does not offer translation of the Cree terms, only descriptions of the story types and their possible English counterparts, which leaves the question of limitations and differences between the signification of these terms unanswered and unaddressed but also manifests the right for Indigenous self-definition.

Chelsea Vowel (Métis) introduces her readers to two terms – âtayôhkêwina and âcimowina,[61] but highlights that these are only two examples of genres of one Indigenous culture. The terms basically align with Scott's categories – âtayôhkêwina being sacred stories set in ancient time and transmitting important values, knowledge, and laws and therefore protected by restrictions, and âcimowina being "more factual",[62] but figures from sacred stories can appear in them as well, and they can also belong to certain families and

[58] Scott, *âtalôhkâna,* xix.
[59] Scott, *âtalôhkâna,* xx.
[60] Scott, *âtalôhkâna,* xiii-xxxvi.
[61] Chelsea Vowel, *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis and Inuit Issues in Canada* (Winnipeg: Highwater Press, 2016), 97-98.
[62] Vowel, *Indigenous*, 97.

might be protected by protocols. Emma LaRocque mentions these categories as well (in slightly different spelling) and adds ehmamtowaytameh, which she translates as "thinking, reflecting, analyzing".[63]

Margaret Noodin (Anishinaabe) presents her typology and on the basis of animacy in her language distinguishes between two kinds of stories:

> In Anishinaabemowin, stories are either dibaajimowinan or aadizokaanag. Dibaajimowinan are usually thought of in the noun class sometimes called inanimate. Aadizokaanag are usually of the other noun class sometimes referred to as animate. The cast of aadizokaanag are familiar characters whose inclusion in any story adds layers of meaning . . . The closest literal translation is one that connects dibaajimowinan to the act of collecting and redistributing the truth that you've heard. This is a simpler, more direct narrative style. Aadizokaanag, by contrast, in poetry, would be the bones of self-knowing, the core means of communicating the complexity of life. Both are often translated as "story" in English. Sometimes aadizokaan is translated as "myth," but that term is laden with implications of fiction that are not necessarily part of the Anishinaabe classification. Together, the dibaajimowinan and aadizokaanag comprise Anishinaabe literature.[64]

Her distinction is based on the, so to speak, "depth" or complexity of the message of story, which also affects the style of the narrative and is reflected in the animacy of the story. Inanimate stories convey acquired truths and are delivered in a more straightforward manner. Animate stories, on the other hand, are more metaphorical, symbolic, and use specific traditional characters since they help communicate the complexity of knowing and experience. We can see that there are common features in her and Scott's typologies, mainly in the aspect of density of meaning as a distinguishing factor of stories. She disregards the English terms because they inherently carry the dichotomy reality/fiction, line which comes to being only in a particular listener's understanding, as discussed before, not as a pre-existing and universal category. The most interesting, and from non-Indigenous perspective unusual, point here is the animacy of stories.

The fact that aadizokaanag are animate suggests that they are endowed with spirit and agency and therefore have power to act independently of and differently from the teller's agency. Christopher Teuton openly states that "they [stories] are living things."[65] This notion undoubtedly subverts Western thinking of stories as cultural expressions which can be studied as objects. Robin Wall Kimmerer (Potawatomi) describes her language,

---

[63] Emma LaRocque, "Reflections on Cultural Continuity through Aboriginal Women's Writings." in *Restoring the Balance: First Nations Women, Community, and Culture*, ed. Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, et al. (University of Manitoba Press, 2009), 162.

[64] Noodin, *Bawaajimo,* 20-21.

[65] Teuton, *Cherokee,* 4.

related closely to Anishinaabemowin, as a "grammar of animacy"[66] and explains that there are many more animate entities in her language than in English and she also mentions stories: "In Potawatomi 101, rocks are animate, as are mountains and water and fire and places. Beings that are imbued with spirit, our sacred medicines, our songs, drums, and even stories, are all animate. The list of inanimate seems to be smaller, filled with objects that are made by people."[67] In this perception, nature is inhabited by far more sentient beings and the privileged position of humankind is challenged. What she argues in the last sentence seems to be quite surprising. Inanimate objects are made by people which means that animate entities, stories including, are those not created by humans. Of course, such a suggestion moves the discussion to the spiritual realm, a space separate from Western critical thinking. Nevertheless, where does such a proposition leave us?

One of the ideas Richard Van Camp, a Tłicho author, has been frequently expressing comes to mind, and that is his saying "story is the boss". In a video vignette from 2017 he explains what he loves most about writing by these words:

> When a story chooses you, I say the story is the boss. If you choose to accept that burden, there's always a cost to what it is that you're gonna write. But there is also a gentle welcome into a sweeter, greater mystery than you . . . and sometimes when I'm telling stories in a room, I don't know why I'm saying it, but someone will burst into tears, and you start to understand they called that story from me. Story is the boss.[68]

In his view, a story chooses the teller or writer, not the other way around, which confirms the animate agency of stories. The story can recognize when it needs to be told and the need seems to emerge from the spiritual realm. Stories, therefore, are not only expressions of intellectual and imaginative power but also of the spiritual energy, at least sometimes and some of them.

Jo-Ann Archibald (Stó:lō) mentions similar distinction of stories to the previous ones but in Stó:lō terminology. Stories set in the time before and usually explaining the origin of things are sxwoxwiyam, while personal stories are squelqwel.[69] She also explains the layers of meaning of stories, and points out that to interpret them can take a long time and a lot of practice.[70] Shawn Wilson distinguishes between sacred stories, stories with

---

[66] Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 55.

[67] Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 55-56.

[68] Richard Van Camp, "Aboriginal Day Live 2017 Vignette featuring Richard Van Camp," *APTN, YouTube*, accessed April 28, 2019, video, 02:26-03:08, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4g6EMrASDrY.

[69] Archibald, *Indigenous*, 84.

[70] Archibald, *Indigenous*, 84.

teachings or recounting events and then personal experiences but he does not give respective Indigenous terms.[71]

Factuality and fictitiousness seem to be a category of not very high importance for Indigenous scholars. The typologies examined here agree on the basic division of stories based on the directness or complexity of the message, which is also reflected in the narrative style and in the function of the story. aadizokaanag, âtalôhkâna, âtayôhkêwina, and sxwoxwiyam carry great cultural and spiritual significance and many of them would be called sacred stories, which brings us to the next issue of Indigenous storytelling, protocols and access.

2.2.4 Protocols and access

Since traditional stories bear crucial cultural and spiritual importance for communities, a system of protocols has been followed to prevent their misuse. Protocols can be defined as sets of rules of "appropriate ways of using cultural material"[72] based on respect and trust that have been developed in communities through time, they are customary but more formal than the word "custom" implies and each community has their own set of specific protocols.[73] In terms of storytelling, protocols may instruct that some stories can be shared publicly but other ones may belong to a person, family, or community and in order to use them, one needs to ask for permission, which may or may not be granted. Some stories can be told only by certain people or in certain periods of the year, some stories must not be changed, some stories are sacred and not accessible for outsiders.[74] Daniel Morley Johnson notes that "revealing sacred knowledge is a serious offence in many Indigenous nations"[75] and this knowledge is often carried in stories. Gregory Younging includes respect for Indigenous copyright in his list of principles of appropriate approach to working with Indigenous sources:

> Indigenous style recognizes Traditional Knowledge and Oral Traditions as Indigenous cultural property, owned by Indigenous Peoples and

[71] Wilson, *Research*, 98.

[72] Younging, *Elements*, 35.

[73] Younging, *Elements*, 35-6.

[74] Archibald, *Indigenous*, 38; Simpson, *Dancing,* 56; Sarris, *Keeping*, 22; Petrone, *Native*, 10; Gregory Younging, "Conflicts Discourse, Negotiations and Proposed Solutions Regarding Transformations of Traditional knowledge," in *Aboriginal Oral Traditions: Theory, Practice, Ethics*, ed. Renée Hulan and Renate Eigenbrod (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 62.

[75] Daniel Morley Johnson, "(Re)Nationalizing Naanabozho: Anishinaabe Sacred Stories, Nationalist Literary Criticism, and Scholarly Responsibility," in *Troubling Tricksters,* ed. Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), 216.

over which Indigenous Peoples exert control. This recognition has bearing on permission and copyright, and applies even when non-Indigenous laws do not require it.

> Writers, editors, and publishers should make every effort to ensure that Indigenous Protocols are followed in the publication of Traditional Knowledge and Oral Traditions.[76]

The protocols have been followed in communities for a long time, however, differences in approach to knowledge, together with colonization and assimilation practices, violated and interfered with these rules. Younging explains that while Western intellectual property laws presuppose that all society must benefit from a work and therefore it in time must enter the public domain, "Indigenous protocols dictate that certain aspects of traditional knowledge are unfit . . . for external access in any form."[77] In the 19th and the 20th centuries, Western belief that all knowledge is accessible and can be freely shared and should be preserved as monuments of human knowledge, lead many non-Indigenous ethnologists and anthropologists to publish oral stories without following the protocols. This may cause the wrong impression that some traditional stories are public because they already were published somewhere even though the circumstances of their acquisition might not be clear. Younging advises permission should always be sought for oral stories, even for previously published materials.[78] Particular guidelines for sharing differ so it is important to check directly with the community where the story originated from and not apply rules of one community on another.

Even Indigenous authors may be reprimanded or accused of breach of protocols.[79] The diversity of attitudes towards respectable sharing produces an array of reactions to writers working with traditional stories. Whereas some people might like seeing their traditions living and preserved, others might object that by using a story the author shares too much. These conversations are an integral part of Indigenous peoples reclaiming their cultural heritage and exercising control over it.

Some stories about the characters discussed in this work, that means about Sky Woman, the trickster, and the windigo might be of limited access for non-Indigenous audience, too. Effort was made to examine only those aspects which are analyzed by

---

[76] Younging, *Elements,* 38.

[77] Younging, "Conflicts," 65.

[78] Younging, *Elements*, 40.

[79] See, for example, the dispute over Shannon Webb-Campbell's poem, who did not seek the family's permission to write about a murdered girl. "Longread: Consultation, permission and Indigenous protocols," *CBC Radio*, April 13, 2018, https://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/who-gets-to-tell-indigenous-stories-1.4616308/longread-consultation-permission-and-indigenous-protocol-1.4616581.

Indigenous scholars and therefore assumingly meant for public use. Some parts of the stories might have been deliberately omitted to ensure the story can be shared widely. This is a common practice when telling traditional stories to a mixed audience, as Christopher B. Teuton explains.[80]

The access to stories and their meanings is, therefore, layered. David Garneau (Métis) explains this concept in his article "Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation". In the opening, he describes two of his paintings depicting two Indigenous group meetings, one curatorial, one advisory. The painting shows variously colored and shaped speech bubbles, but no words are captured. The viewer can recognize individual bubbles as belonging to specific figures, but the content of the meeting is hidden from the people who did not attend it. The author says he hopes viewers can "get a sense of the meetings portrayed" and admits that "many will feel frustrated that their comprehension is limited."[81] The outsider onlooker is still able to derive a general meaning, but the specificities of the meeting remain accessible only to the insiders. These exclusive spaces, or as he calls them "irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality"[82] ensure protection of sacred knowledge and objects and also allow free conversations and revisions of Indigeneity and Indigenous knowledge systems, undisturbed by settler colonial presence, which always changes the attitude of Indigenous participants, however supportive it might be.[83]

The same layers of access apply to Indigenous stories. Basil Johnston (Anishinaubae/Ojibway) talks about "the surface meaning" - accessible to anyone, "fundamental meaning" – based on context and connotations, and "philosophical meaning", which goes deeper and beyond these.[84] Armand Ruffo (Anishinaabe) stresses that Indigenous literature, even if written in English, is "coded"[85] and the meaning might not be within easy reach. The extent of understanding a story in all its layers thus depends on the listeners' language and interpretative abilities, experience, cultural knowledge and insight and access to it.

---

[80] Teuton, *Cherokee,* 4.

[81] David Garneau, "Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation: Art, Curation, and Healing," in *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action In and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, ed. Dylan Robinson (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016), 32.

[82] Garneau, "Imaginary," 34.

[83] Garneau, "Imaginary," 34.

[84] Basil Johnston, "Is There All There Is?: Tribal Literature," *Canadian Literature*, no.128 (Spring 1991): 57.

[85] qtd. in Eigenbrod, *Travelling,* 43.

If we, as non-Indigenous scholars and readers, are to treat Indigenous literatures and cultures with respect and if we do not want to follow in the abusive footsteps of epistemological colonialism, we must accept that some layers of meaning are not accessible for us, and we must acknowledge the right of Indigenous peoples to assert control over their cultural property even if that means our exclusion.

2.3 Storytelling and Indigenous worldview

"The truth about stories is that that's all we are" is the recurrent phrase in Thomas King's CBC Massey lectures from 2003.[86] In his typical subversive way, he explains that all worldviews stand and fall with stories. On the one hand, we cannot understand the world and ourselves without the narratives we tell, be it in the form of history, science, religion, or ideology but these are all in a way based on stories and so they are only true to those who live by them. Tell a different story and you would see the world differently and live in it in a different way. This will be further illustrated in the discussion on creation stories.

Since stories carry and teach values of Indigenous cultures, they reflect the ontological and epistemological paradigms which ground them. The essential concepts of the Indigenous worldviews need to be addressed because they differ from the Western perspectives[87] and because assumptions derived from these worldviews influence reading of texts and their understanding. Vowel warns readers against approaching Indigenous texts without the awareness of these differences and bitingly remarks: "If you go into these [Indigenous] stories always expecting to have your cultural beliefs and norms reinforced, you're doing it wrong."[88] She attacks seeking out Indigenous stories for their extraordinary, exotic tinge but failing to accept they stem from Indigenous conceptual frameworks that might challenge the Western ways of reading. This work strives to inform readers about these differences by presenting Indigenous approach to stories.

Storytelling plays a significant role in Indigenous knowledge systems and cultures, however, it is important to say that it is just one form of the expression of Indigenous cultures and perspectives.[89] Songs, beading, drumming, dancing, basketry, and many other

---

[86] Thomas King, *The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2003), 2.

[87] Wilson, *Research*, 33-39; Scott, *âtalôhkâna,* xiii-xxxii.

[88] Vowel, *Indigenous*, 98.

[89] Sinclair, "Trickster," 48; Teuton, "Indigenous," 168.

activities bear and sustain Indigenous worldviews as well. The emphasis is put here on storytelling due to the focus of this work, not because storytelling would always be the most vital of these activities.

Of course, Indigenous cultures are diverse and there might be differences in their respective epistemological concepts, but certain common features can be observed across these cultures. Emma LaRocque stresses that there is "a fairly remarkable shared understanding of life as a cosmo/ecological whole, enabling the human being to experience life past the sensory confines" in Indigenous communities.[90] Approaching life as a whole, holistically, and promoting relations and balance between the individual parts of the whole is a common grounding of Indigenous communities. These uniting features of the concepts are discussed in the following sections.

2.3.1 Relationality

Life and cosmos is kept as a whole by relationships. Establishing, maintaining, and strengthening relationships with other beings and with the universe as such forms the core of the Indigenous worldviews as Indigenous scholars explain. "Indigenous lifeways and cultural practices across the world are grounded in epistemologies that value communication and relationality as a condition of existence,"[91] Christopher B. Teuton writes. Relationality is not just an ideal of good living but a condition for it. Shawn Wilson bases his book on Indigenous research methods titled *Research is Ceremony* on relationality and explains its epistemological and axiological implications. It is a seminal work for understanding the Indigenous worldview and approach to knowledge.

A central idea of Wilson's argument is that we should not perceive ourselves in relationships with other entities but rather that we *are* these relationships that we create and keep.[92] To visualize this concept, he recounts one of his visions and the insight it provided for him. When sleeping once outside somewhere in South Dakota he saw himself as a point of light with many other lights around him. Wilson asks the reader to imagine themselves as this single point of light surrounded by darkness.[93] Another point of light appears, and you create a connection to it, soon another light appears, and more connections are made. He continues:

---

[90] LaRocque, "Teaching," 66.
[91] Teuton, "Indigenous," 167.
[92] Wilson, *Research*, 80.
[93] Wilson, *Research,* 75.

> The lights are coming into being as fast as you can imagine them now, and as you build your web of relationships, slowly these infinitely small threads of relationships are building up into something resembling a form around you.
>
> As the lights and the relationships come faster and faster, the form starts to take its shape as your physical body . . . Now other lights are taking on their physical form, as their webs of relationships grow and coalesce. As more and more of these points of light take on their physical form, the world around you starts to take shape . . . Every individual thing that you see around you is really just a huge knot - a point where thousands and millions of relationships come together.[94]

We are embodiments of our relationship with other things, we are formed by them, and so is the world around us. Our individuality is created by the specificity of our connections, it is not independent and separate but reliant on and conditioned by established relationships. The world in its form would not be accessible for us if we did not make any connections. This, of course, means that the shape of our world is given by our relationships, and that it is different for everybody since every individual creates different relationships with the world. There is no objective, external truth but reality is dependent on our relations to it. "Reality is relationships or sets of relationships,"[95] Wilson sums up. And since reality is relational, it is not an object but a process.[96] Objectification and objectivity of reality does not apply in Indigenous perspective since it would annul these dynamic relationships between entities.

Nothing in the universe is excluded from forming connections, therefore the relationships created are multiple and diverse. "They thus include interpersonal, intrapersonal, environmental and spiritual relationships, and relationships with ideas,"[97] Wilson recounts. So, even concepts and ideas are relational and not neutral and abstract, which leads to the view that knowledge cannot be owned or claimed since the ideas belong to all the relations the idea has created.[98] "An object or thing is not as important as one's relationship to it,"[99] he claims, and this can be applied to ideas as well. This would be the ground of the Indigenous perspective and would also form one of the most prominent differences between the Western and Indigenous paradigms. In the Western perspective, we tend to separate things in order to be able to define them and analyze them. This is not

---

[94] Wilson, *Research,* 76.
[95] Wilson, *Research,* 73.
[96] Wilson, *Research,* 73.
[97] Wilson, *Research,* 74.
[98] Wilson, *Research,* 114.
[99] Wilson, *Research,* 73.

possible for Indigenous paradigm since the separation damages the relationships which form the particular thing or concept.[100] One needs to look at things in their wholeness and one's understanding of a thing deepens with the number of relationships created to it. Therefore, holism is the preferred approach of many Indigenous scholars (Archibald, Donald, Noodin).

Relationality in the Indigenous perspective is tied to responsibility and accountability. Justice reminds us that relationality is also a demanding concept, that relations can be difficult, "conflict-ridden", and that the responsibility tied to them can be "terrifying".[101] Individuals are responsible for and accountable to all the relationships they create and they need to keep them healthy and strong if they want to maintain them. Wilson (also Archibald) talks about the 3 Rs of Indigenous learning: respect, reciprocity, and responsibility.[102] Respect to all relationships and to all relationships of others, reciprocity and balance of power in the relationship and mutual responsibility for the connection is needed for successful learning and research. In consequence, this perspective does not allow criticism of other opinions since it presumes one knows more about the other's relationships than they themselves.[103] In addition, one sided, unbalanced relationships benefitting disproportionately only one of the involved parties are not considered respectful, which translates into the current requirements of community involved research.

Humans are all one part of creation and each individual can reach out and establish relationships with any other part; we are infinitely interconnected. However, the egalitarianism of this approach also means that people have to respect all the other parts since they can create their own relationships and thus our form of the world depends also on their link to us, and people have responsibility to take care of these relationships.

2.3.1.1 All our relations

Interconnectedness and interrelationality of creation is reflected in the common expression "all our relations" used by Indigenous writers and scholars. When Shawn Wilson mentions it, he talks about one's connection to the ancestors through land and nutrition coming from the land, which had absorbed their bodies and transformed them to

[100] Wilson, *Research,* 119.
[101] Justice, *Why*, 77, 97.
[102] Wilson, *Research,* 77.
[103] Wilson, *Research*, 43, 57, 92.

nourishment.[104] The ancestors are literally part of us. The circle of life (however clichéd that sounds) connects us also to the natural world, a fact emphasized by Thomas King in the introduction to his fittingly titled anthology *All My Relations*:

> "All my relations" is at first a reminder of who we are and of our relationship with both our family and our relatives. It also reminds us of the extended relationship we share with all human beings. But the relationships that Native people see go further, the web of kinship to animals, to the birds, to the fish, to the plants, to all the animate and inanimate forms that can be seen or imagined. More than that, "all my relations" is an encouragement for us to accept the responsibilities we have within the universal family by living our lives in a harmonious and moral manner.[105]

The family of creation encompasses everything living but also entities not commonly perceived as living in Western perspectives such as stones (referred to by Cree as grandfathers)[106] or water. Interestingly, King includes also forms that "can be imagined", acknowledging spiritual beings and relationship with ideas, too. In accordance with Wilson's theory, King does not forget to accentuate the expression is a reminder of our responsibility to all creation, reminder to keep the relationships balanced, respectful and mutually prosperous.

"All Our Relations" is also one of the stories in Leanne Simpson's (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) collection *The Gift Is in the Making: Anishinaabeg Stories* from 2013. She opens the story by explaining the extension of the familial relationships of her people:

> The old people say that we are all related – not just to the people that live in our house, but to the plants, the animals, the air, the water, and the land.
>
> Our Nokomis [grandmother] is the moon. The earth is our first mama. Our father is the sky. Our Mishomis [grandfather] is the sun.
>
> We are just one big, beautiful family, with many different branches.[107]

The story says that as long as the people knew this and took care of their relationships to creation, they lived a good life. But when they started to forget, food got scarce, and they ran into troubles. Through counseling various animals, they found out they stopped paying attention to roses and so these decided to leave. And since there were no roses, bees did not have enough nectar to make honey and bears did not have enough

[104] Wilson, *Research*, 96.

[105] Thomas King, *All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native Fiction* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990), ix.

[106] McLeod, *Cree,* 19.

[107] Leanne Simpson, *The Gift Is in the Making* (Winnipeg: Highwater Press, 2013), 19.

honey to stay fat and feed the people. With the help of birds, people found the missing roses and gave them the care and attention they deserved, the roses thrived, and balance was gradually restored. The story teaches about the interconnection of humans and natural life, their dependence on each other, the necessity to take care of the connections and human responsibility to pay respect to all creation because the well-being of all depends on the well-being of one. Also, it shows the dependence of people on animals as without their help they would not be able to find remedy for their misbehaviour.

In the Indigenous perspective, relationships connect us to the rest of creation and through them we can communicate and understand the world and be in harmony with it. However, healthy relationships are sustainable only if we do not forget about their flip side – responsibility, reciprocity, and respect. Pitawanakwat (Anishinaabe) recognizes respect for all beings as a "fundamental value" of Indigenous peoples.[108] People can be in balance and connection with all creation, but they cannot disregard their role of being constantly aware of their relations and taking care of them.

2.3.1.2 The medicine wheel

The medicine wheel or circle (also called the Sacred Hoop) is a wide-spread symbol used in many Indigenous communities, mainly Plains cultures, in a myriad of variations.[109] It shows and explicates individual components of life/personality/world but also the interactions and interrelations between these components. Usually, the medicine wheel is a circle comprised of equal sections of four colors (frequently red, white, yellow, and black), each one associated with one aspect of human personality – physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual.

---

[108] Brock Pitawanakwat, "Anishinaabeg Studies: Creative, Critical, Ethical, and Reflexive," in *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies: Understanding the World through Stories*, ed. Jill Doerfler (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2013), 374.

[109] It is necessary to point here that some Indigenous scholars feel reservations towards the extensive use of this symbol and towards the modern interpretations and their application on all First Nations. See, for example, Chelsea Vowel's "Pan-Indianism, Pan-Métisism", *âpihtawikosisân*, accessed September 12, 2017, https://apihtawikosisan.com/2011/05/pan-indianism-pan-metisism/, or Andrea Bear Nicholas's "Medicine Wheel Teaching a Hoax," Kisikew, accessed September 12, 2017, http://kisikew.blogspot.com/2012/12/medicine-wheel-teaching-hoax.html. Andrea Bear Nicholas then refuses the medicine wheel altogether as a "non-Native invention" without any basis in Indigenous tradition ("The Assault on Aboriginal Oral Tradition: Past and Present," in *Aboriginal Oral Traditions: Theory, Practice, Ethics*, ed. Renée Hulan and Renate Eigenbrod, Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2008, 26).

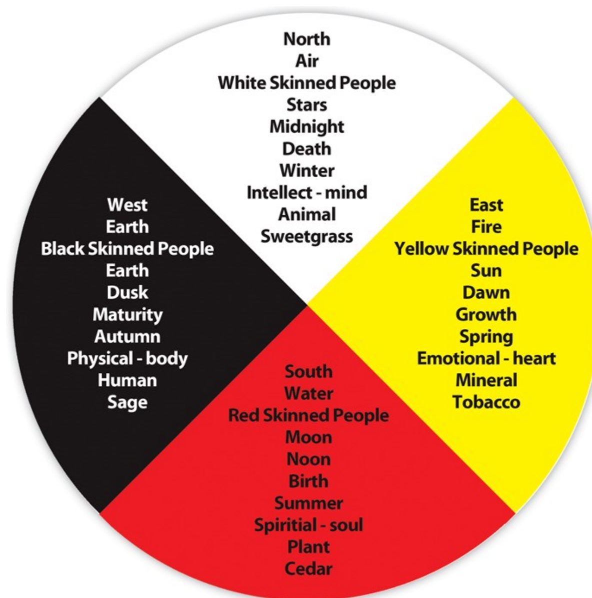

Figure 1 The Medicine Wheel

Source: Bob Joseph (Gwawaenuk Nation), "What is an Indigenous Medicine Wheel?" *Indigenous Corporate Training*, May 24, 2020, https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/what-is-an-indigenous-medicine-wheel.

The teaching of the medicine wheel lies in achieving balance.[110] Each side of personality is important and each one should be developed and nurtured, but none of them should be dominant on the long-term basis, overshadowing the rest. For a healthy and full life, one needs to find balance of these aspects and take care of them equally. "The task is to become whole," not to get further or higher, as Bob Cardinal (Enoch Cree) explained after a sweat lodge I had a chance to attend. Only a whole, balanced person can be fully a part of creation and feel their interconnectedness with other beings and entities.[111] The goal of the teachings is balance, but the principle is based again on relationality. The individual aspects influence each other, they are in constant exchange. This process of interrelation, as well as circle, has no end.

The concrete arrangement of colors and concepts, and animals associated with individual components, varies greatly from community to community or even person to person. The four sections might represent seasons, races, cardinal directions, stages of life etc. Shawn Wilson warns against rigid and authoritative attitude which would declare one

[110] The following explication is based on teaching me and other students from University of Alberta received from Bob Cardinal, elder of Enoch Cree First Nation, on January 18, 2015 combined with lecture by Carrie LaVallie I attended on June 23, 2016 and my readings of Shawn Wilson.

[111] Judie Bopp, *The Sacred Tree*. Four Worlds Development Project (Lethbridge: University of Lethbridge, 1988), 23.

version of the medicine wheel more authentic than the other.[112] Instead, the medicine circle can be used as a theoretical framework of relationality and it can be applied to any conceptual interrelation, not just personal development. He says: "Putting ideas in a circle or wheel indicates that they are interrelated and that each blends into the next . . . A change in one affects the others, which in turn effects[sic] new change in the original . . . The whole of the paradigm is greater than the sum of its parts."[113] There is a flux, flow, and dynamism between the parts, but their power must be balanced. What makes the whole greater than the sum of its parts are these relationships between them. The medicine wheel is another representation of the holistic approach of the Indigenous worldview. It allows us to see the complexity of issues and examine mutual influences and processes within it, to see things which are difficult to see normally[114] and helps us envision new prospects.[115] It does create space for looking at one component in more detail, but it accentuates that the component is shaped by the other parts within the circle. It values balance of all more than progress of one.

2.3.2 Spirituality

As the teaching of the medicine wheel illustrates, spirituality is a vital and integral part of the Indigenous worldview. Indigenous scholars frequently point out this fact since inclusion of spirituality in science, art, and life in general is not standard in Western paradigms.[116] Donald Fixico, for example, reminds us that in Indigenous reality, "the physical and metaphysical exist as one spiritual space" and that "the real world and the surreal world are one."[117] Sylvia McAdam (nêhiyaw) states, similarly, that "the physical and spiritual are intimately intertwined."[118]

Indigenous scholars include spiritual experiences, visions, and dreams in their writing and sometimes incorporate prayers to the texts or ask the readers to pray or smudge before reading (as in McAdam's *Nationhood Interrupted*). This is very unusual in Western academia and can produce confusion, resentment, or doubts within the non-Indigenous

---

[112] Wilson, *Research*, 70.
[113] Wilson, *Research*, 70.
[114] Bopp, *Sacred Tree*, 11.
[115] Bopp, *Sacred Tree*, 34.
[116] Archibald, *Indigenous*, 11; Fixico, "That's," 112; Wilson, *Research*, 89; Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 153.
[117] Fixico, "That's," 8, 35.
[118] Sylvia (Saysewahum) McAdam, *Nationhood Interrupted: Revitalizing nêhiyaw Legal Systems* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2015), 10.

reader. Since the Western worldviews separate the mental aspect from the spiritual (physical and emotional alike), incorporating spirituality into theorizing about science and art is difficult and might be hard to accept for many readers. However, in the holistic approach spirituality creates an inseparable part of the circle and is interwoven and interrelated with all the other aspects.

Being in contact with one's spirit is important in the process of learning. Learning, in the Western worldviews, predominantly engages the mental, intellectual aspect of human personality. In Indigenous perspective, it involves the human spirit as well. "When a person seeks knowledge, the knowledge moves, shapes, and changes their thoughts and their spirit," Allan Joe Felix says.[119] Reading and studying forms not only our ideas but also our soul, and so it is advisable to seek spiritual guidance through prayer or smudging during the learning process. For this reason, academic conferences organized by Indigenous associations and conferences on Indigenous issues often start with a prayer, ceremony or song as the attendees will take part in a learning process during the event.

Moses and Goldie recognize spirituality as a distinct feature of Indigenous writing.[120] Justice also talks about the significance of proximity and interconnectedness of the real and the spiritual in Indigenous literatures saying that "the space between our world and the Spirit World is often a thin membrane rather than a firm wall"[121] and uses this presupposition to explain why application of Western genres depicting the various connections of reality and fiction may be misleading. Frequent and integral use of spiritual beings might be classified as fantasy writing, however, that according to Justice implies "childish make-believe".[122] The word "magic" in another possible and sometimes used category, magical realism, also signifies supernaturality, extraordinariness, fiction. After all, even realism as a mode does not work precisely because reality in the Western points of view tends to be separate from spirituality. Instead, he presents "wonderworks" as a more appropriate term for Indigenous literature expressing the coexistence of the real and the spiritual.[123] Wonder or wondrous with its ambiguity avoids the binarity and invites articulation of experience "outside the bounds of everyday and mundane, perhaps

---

[119] The quote is taken from a preface to Sylva McAdam's *Nationhood Interrupted* titled in Cree tawâw niwâhkômâkanak (welcome, all my relations), the title implying the link between spirituality and relationality. McAdam, *Nationhood*, 17.

[120] Daniel David Moses et al., *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), xii.

[121] Justice, *Why*, 123.

[122] Justice, *Why*, 141.

[123] Justice, *Why*, 153.

unpredictable, but not necessarily alien . . . but not necessarily comforting and safe, either."[124] Equivocality and liminality of the word enables to capture the way Indigenous texts envision and point out to the simultaneous existence of all layers of reality.

It is not within the scope of this work to explore the various spiritualities of Indigenous peoples, nor is it its major purpose. The aim of this section was mainly to point out the fact that spirituality represents an indispensable part of the Indigenous worldviews and knowledge systems.

2.3.2.1 Power of words and stories

The animacy of stories expressed by the ability of the story to decide when it is told and by whom was mentioned before. This potential comes from the spiritual power of stories. Jo-Ann Archibald writes that most of the elders she worked with started with a prayer before telling a story.[125] Aware of the responsibility storytelling brings, of the importance of teachings in the stories and of their spiritual power, elders ask for spiritual support. Stories are endowed with spirit which is awakened by the act of telling. Donald Fixico describes this process in the following way:

> All stories possess spiritual power, which rests until a storyteller engages it with his or her own spiritual power. The two spiritual powers must connect and the better this is done, the better the results. When the connection is made, a flow of energy occurs from the storyteller to the story . . . During the story, the flow ebbs back and forth like an ocean tide and the context is the place, providing a geocultural contextual reference to the listeners. In the end, the power of energy flows back to the storyteller and to the listeners who have been empowered or inspired by the energies of the story and the storyteller in tandem.[126]

The storyteller's power acts on the power of the story and the energies of the two move and intermingle, influencing the listeners at the same time. Activation of the spiritual energy is also based on relationality – the storyteller must connect with the story to set the energy in motion. Archibald also talks about stories having their own life,[127] travelling from person to person and engaging with every individual differently, which comes from the unique union of the person's and the story's spirit.

---

[124] Justice, *Why*, 153.
[125] Archibald, *Indigenous*, 109.
[126] Fixico, "That's," 33.
[127] Archibald, *Indigenous*, 97.

Another angle from which to look at the power of stories is the values and teachings they carry. As Maracle (Stó:lō) says: "Words are not objects to be wasted. They represent the accumulated knowledge, cultural values, and the vision of an entire people or peoples."[128] Since words and stories keep the values of a nation, there is a great responsibility attached to their use. Jeannette Armstrong says that "you cannot call your words back once they are uttered, and so you are responsible for all which results from your words."[129] She stresses that one must prepare very carefully before speaking publicly. The power of words is also the reason for creation of protocols around storytelling since words "are held in reverence . . . awarded great attention, and used carefully,"[130] as Blaeser explains.

Both of these aspects lead to the belief that words are endowed with transformative and performative power. Words can educate, and through teachings they form and develop individual as well as national identity; they can function as a piece of advice and contribute to a change in one's life; they can persuade and transform the course of events. Moreover, what is often emphasized is the healing power of words and stories. We can find remarks on the healing power of stories in many theoretical texts[131] and there are also many novels and stories based on this principle, as the subsequent analyses of Indigenous texts will also show. Penny Petrone writes that words are "sacrosanct" and that they have "the power to create, to make things happen – medicine to heal, plants to grow, animals to be caught and human beings to enter the spiritual world . . . Words did not merely represent meaning. They possessed the power to change reality itself."[132] Even though I would object to the use of past simple in her argument and also to the word sacrosanct itself, which might have connotations of Western religions and also implies "untouchability" of certain things and that goes against the Indigenous concept of creation as dynamic and constantly changing, Petrone expresses well that words have the ability to alter or even create reality. "Spoken word has immediate creative power, in the literal sense, the uttered becomes reality,"[133] Kolinská explains. In this perception, every storyteller and even every talking person has the ability to change and form reality.

---

[128] Lee Maracle, *Memory Serves and Other Essays* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2015), 161.
[129] qtd. in Archibald, *Indigenous*, 27.
[130] Blaeser, *Gerald*, 20.
[131] Archibald, *Indigenous*, 27; Justice, *Why*, 4; Wilson, *Research*, 126.
[132] Petrone, *Native*, 10.
[133] "vyřčené slovo má bezprostřední tvořivou moc, a to v doslovném smyslu, vyslovené se stává skutečností" in Czech original. Klára Kolinská, "Moc slov: Vypravěčství a příběhy v ústní a literární tradici kanadských prvních národů," *PLAV*, vol. 10 (2016): 4.

Simultaneously, words and stories can function as a negative force. While stories can heal, they can also harm or curse others.[134] "Stories can be bad, bitter medicine and inspire people to bad actions,"[135] Justice writes. This is another reason why storytellers need to exercise great caution and responsibility. Words and stories are medicine – they can be used for the good but also abused.

The belief in the power of words and stories is not unique to Indigenous cultures, of course, even Western cultures place high importance in them. However, in Indigenous cultures this belief seems to be long lasting, not undermined by postmodern relativization of language, meaning, and values and it has not been pushed aside by science. While "attempts to change the physical world through language are regarded as magic"[136] in Western societies, as Petrone says, Indigenous cultures retained this belief, and it is reflected in contemporary writing as well.

2.3.3 Perception of time

Another frequently discussed disparity between the Indigenous and Western frames of reference is the perception of time. Keeshig-Tobias (Anishinaabekwe) points this out as one of the main contrasts between these cultures: "The Native and non-Native have basic differences about the universe and basic reality . . . space for one is spherical and time is cyclical; for the other, space is linear and time sequential."[137] Linear time is defined by a sense of finality, point of end, on one hand[138] and on the other by constant progress in the form of shifts from one epoch or era to another and constant increase of days, months, and years in the calendar. The cyclical time is obviously based on nature and its phases, and human life is perceived as part of these cycles.

This is not to say that Western thinking does not apply cyclical time sometimes or that Indigenous cultures do not have a grasp of linear time; it would be very simplifying to introduce such a clear-cut binary opposition. Nevertheless, the prevalence and privileging of linear time in Western societies and the cyclical one in the Indigenous can be discerned also in the way ideas and thoughts are presented. Noodin says that "creating cycles of ideas

[134] Justice, *Why*, 4; Wilson, *Research*, 126.
[135] Justice, *Why*, 4.
[136] Petrone, *Native*, 10.
[137] Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, "Let's Be Our Own Tricksters, Eh," *The Magazine to Re-Establish the Trickster: Magazine of New Native Writing*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1988): 2.
[138] Donald, *Pedagogy*, 110.

instead of chronologies" is Anishinaabe tradition.[139] Shawn Wilson explains his strategy of presenting the insights in the previously mentioned publication *Research is Ceremony* in a similar way: "The form of writing in this book . . . does not follow a linear process (i.e., describe what I wanted to do, describe how I did it, then describe what I found out) but rather a more cyclical pattern that introduces ideas or themes, then returns to them at intervals with different levels of understanding."[140] This method presents the insights and reiterates them during the process of display, gradually widening the circle of their connections and context. While this style might seem repetitive to some, it allows the author to present the ideas in a greater context and build the web of interconnections better than when the work divides individual aspects and exhausts one after another in a linear presentation. Moreover, the cycle of ideas shows the mutual influence and dependence of these ideas and shows the way the argument can be changed when a new aspect enters the circle,[141] as described in the medicine wheel section. The same strategy is explicated and used by Jo-Ann Archibald in her *Indigenous Storywork*.[142]

Circularity or cyclicality as a feature of Indigenous epistemology also applies to storytelling, not necessarily, however, only in the way the stories are narrated but in the way they impart meaning. "Stories go in circles, they don't go in straight lines. It helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside and between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home,"[143] Tafoya explains. In this view, stories do not follow the linear cause-effect procedure in the sense that a story communicates meaning immediately to the listener and that this meaning is conveyed in separation – a single separate story delivering meaning. Instead, deriving meaning might be a longer process, moving circularly as the recipient goes back to the story and explores its meaning/s. Also, stories exist in context, in circles of other stories, and the formation of their meaning is influenced by this context.

Suzanne Methot (Nehiyaw) agrees that Indigenous stories differ from a linear scheme and that focus should be centered on their meaning and not structures, but she describes stories as a spiral rather than a circle: "For Indigenous peoples, however, stories are spirals: they exist in time and space as they happen, and they also exist in each subsequent telling, spiralling off from a common root to become part of the lives of

[139] Noodin, *Bawaajimo,* 27.
[140] Wilson, *Research*, 42.
[141] Wilson, *Research*, 70.
[142] Archibald, *Indigenous*, 1.
[143] qtd. in Wilson, *Research*, 6.

successive generations."[144] The symbol of a spiral characterizes the movement in four cardinal directions as well as a circle, but spiral also incorporates motion up and down and across time as also Leanne Simpson explains.[145] The spiral can as well illustrate the cyclical presentation of ideas in which each reiteration expands their meaning and associations same as each spiral curve extends to space.

Of course, Indigenous scholars also talk about time in stories, expressing the permeability and overlaps of time divisions, which correlates closely to what was discussed previously in the section about stories as tools for the expansion of imagination. Younging writes that in Indigenous perspective, "all time is closely connected and actions can transcend time"[146] and Justice says that for their culture, "the past very much abides in the present" and that "all realities are liminal and affect one another."[147] This work with time is quite common also in modern non-Indigenous literature and thus, I believe, does not need further extensive explanation. However, it is necessary to emphasize that this perception of time is traditional in Indigenous storytelling and it is an expression of ancient Indigenous knowledge and not only an application of modern narrative strategies.

2.3.4 Balance-based plot

The overall aim towards balance in Indigenous epistemology is reflected also in the plot structure of Indigenous stories, as several critics and writers themselves noted. While there is a conflict needed in Western stories for building a plot based on crisis and resolution, Indigenous stories are formed around maintaining or restoring balance. Petrone says that "plot structure as non-natives know it, based on some form of conflict in a rising and falling linear structure, is not compatible to native thought."[148] Maracle then adds that most Western stories also require a hero and an adversary, and that such an arrangement supports the hierarchical organization of society and the necessity of the "worship of beings higher than them [readers]".[149] Thomas King says we could also perceive the typical and popular self-made man stories as narratives "that frame these forms of

[144] Suzanne Methot, *Legacy: Trauma, Story, and Indigenous Healing* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2019), 5.
[145] Simpson, *Dancing,* 144.
[146] Younging, *Elements*, 14.
[147] Justice, *Why*, 123, 126.
[148] Petrone, *Native*, 183.
[149] Maracle, *Memory*, 155.

competition as varying degrees of insanity."[150] These are, of course, very general and very simplifying characterizations and there can definitely be found conflict-driven stories in Indigenous cultures and narratives that are non-linear and undermining traditional plot structure in Western literatures on the other side, especially taking into consideration the literary development in the 20th century and the introduction of modernist and postmodern techniques. Nevertheless, the accent on arriving to balance is frequently a theme in Indigenous stories, as the subsequent analytical chapters will show, and it is reflected in the narrative structure as well.

Drew Hayden Taylor explains the need of balance by the traditional way of life in Indigenous societies in which conflict was cautiously avoided. "People were living in close quarters. If somebody had a problem, or if somebody was angry and wanted to make a very aggressive point about something, it was frowned upon and discouraged because conflict would infringe upon the harmony of the community and therefore its survival,"[151] he explains. In other words, balance was not only desirable but vital as survival depended on close cooperation within the community. Kristina Fagan mentions the belief in human inherent goodness and that in general, "the emphasis should be on encouraging the restoration of that goodness" and not on the conflict,[152] which is also reflected in the way stories are narrated.

Jace Weaver also points out that seeking long-lasting well-being for a community rather than improvement of an individual's situation forms one of the distinct features of Indigenous stories and he uses it as one of the reasons for introducing a new term "communitism", which, according to him, is "the single thing that most defines Indian literatures."[153] The term is a blend of words "community" and "activism" and expresses the "sense of community and commitment to it" prevalent in Indigenous literature.[154] Community provides a sense of self and belonging to an individual and through that it helps combating consequences of colonialism[155] but in order to transmit these values, it has to be functional and sustainable; it has to be in balance in other words. Goldie voices similar argument when he paraphrases Moses and says that "Native culture isn't concerned

---

[150] King, *Truth,* 26.

[151] Drew Hayden Taylor, "Alive and Well: Native Theatre in Canada," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 31, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 32.

[152] Fagan, "Weesageechak," 209.

[153] Jace Weaver, *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 42-43.

[154] Weaver, *That*, 43.

[155] Weaver, *That,* 43.

with good or bad, it's concerned with harmony."[156] On the other hand, Fagan warns against uncritical approach to the concept of community, which is often given "uniformly positive connotations," and stresses the importance of critics considering the ways writers both support and criticize their communities. [157]

Well-being of a community and of an individual with renewed or strengthened sense of being a member of a given community is perhaps more discernible as a theme rather than a plot scheme in Indigenous narratives, especially in contemporary texts. Undermining and playing with the traditional structure of a narrative is a feature of current literature in a global sense. Still, it is true that often the endings of the Indigenous novels discussed here portray a return to "standard" state of things and not necessarily a downright improvement of the protagonist's situation. A sense of progress might be missing and the reader might feel that, in the end, seemingly little changed for the characters. Thomas King ponders about the need for stories about overcoming hardships followed by a reward and asks "[W]hy we tell our children that life is hard, when we could just as easily tell them that it is sweet."[158] The sweetness of life lies in experiencing the balance of creation.

2.3.5 Story as theory

Since stories carry Indigenous ontological and epistemological notions, they can be used as theories about human experience and understanding of the world. The objective of these theories is, quite simply, to sustain humanity. "Story becomes a means of intervention preventing humans from re-traversing dangerous and dehumanizing paths,"[159] as Maracle expresses. She also explains the creation of such a theory. In general, the need for a theory arises when a problem is met and a way to deal with the situation is sought. Maracle recognizes these moments as a natural process of changing direction and searching for the right path "that will guarantee the peaceful coexistence of human beings with all things under creation."[160] This forms the basis of Indigenous theorizing or, as she says, "Salish study looks for the obstacles to growth and transformation."[161] Words, which

---

[156] Moses, *Anthology*, xiii.

[157] Kristina Fagan, "Teasing, Tolerating, Teaching: Laughter and Community in Native Literature," in *Me Funny*, ed. by Drew Hayden Taylor (Madeira Park: Douglas and McIntyre, 2013), 44.

[158] King, *Truth,* 26.

[159] Maracle, *Memory*, 35.

[160] Maracle, *Memory,* 164-5.

[161] Maracle, *Memory*, 231.

are “sacred, prayerful presentations of the human experience”, are used to describe the situation and unravel it and “[o]nce an understanding is achieved, the mythmakers story it up in a way that they hope leads humans toward social maturity and growth.”[162] Story represents both a tool for understanding the experience of meeting an obstacle as well as a means for finding a solution. The capacity of a story to appeal to human intellectual abilities as well as emotions is then what makes this story-theory very effective in launching changes. “Story is the most persuasive and sensible way to preserve the accumulated thoughts and values of a people,”[163] Maracle says. The same process applies when a person faces internal, not external issues, when they are trying to understand themselves or, to use Maracle’s words “unmasking” themselves.[164] The term “oratory” she introduces thus comprises all stories handed down through generations but also these theories that humans create to know themselves and the changing world.

Neal McLeod talks about storytelling as Indigenous theorizing, too, saying that it is “a visionary process of imagining another state of affairs.”[165] Stories can be subversive and prompt people to ask questions and consequently introduce changes – these can be social, political, or philosophical. The power of stories to trigger imagining new possibilities can result in reshaping reality. McLeod mentions Cree term mamâhtâwisiwin, “tapping into the Life Force”,[166] which expresses that. The life force, the flux, is a continuous movement and stories enable people to reconsider notions that might become static. Storytelling, due to its own dynamism and imagination, can serve as a tool, a theory, to get in touch with the flux.

In “Land As Pedagogy”, Leanne Simpson showcases the way a story functions as a theory. She starts by retelling a story of kwezens, a girl, learning to collect maple syrup by observing a squirrel nibbling on bark. While the story can be interpreted as a story about the origins of boiling syrup, Simpson highlights the way and context in which the girl learns how to do it. “She learned to trust herself, her family, and her community. She learned the sheer joy of discovery. She learned how to interact with the spirit of the maple . . . She learned what it felt like to be recognized, seen and appreciated by her community.”[167] As we can see, Simpson emphasizes the emotional and spiritual aspect of learning and for her, the story is a theory of a healthy learning process that engages the

[162] Maracle, *Memory*, 164, 231.
[163] Maracle, *Memory*, 161.
[164] Maracle, *Memory*, 232.
[165] McLeod, *Cree,* 98.
[166] McLeod, *Cree*, 100.
[167] Leanne Simpson, “Land As Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2014): 7.

individual but happens within a community, and thus leads not only to the sense of self-accomplishment but also to recognition by others. She also highlights the dynamism of theorizing, saying that she approaches this story "as a theoretical anchor whose meaning transforms over time and space within individual and collective Nishnaabeg consciousness."[168] In this way, this one story is an endless source of theorizing, its meaning changing with individuals in time. Theory is "contextual and relational"[169] and the responsibility to derive meaning lies with the individual.

The perception of story as a theory is governed by the principle of relationality, too. Indigenous theory is by nature personal and subjective. For this reason, Christopher B. Teuton adds a fifth feature of a general definition of theory by Jonathan Culler, who characterizes theory as interdisciplinary, analytical, reflexive, and questioning universally accepted notions.[170] The additional aspect places theory in direct relationship to a community and requires the theory being accountable to the community. Teuton says "In Native theory the subject is Native experience, the object, Native community."[171] Theory does not exist for itself but is valid only when having impact on the community. Maracle also criticizes the Western insistence on objectivity and abstractness of theory in academia and states that theory "means nothing outside of human interaction."[172] While it can be disputed that Western theory must be only abstract and created for its own sake, both Maracle's and Teuton's opinions highlight the feature of relationality as defining for Indigenous story-theory, feature that is prominent in discussions on Indigenous worldviews as such.

2.4 Oral storytelling and written literature

Most of the concepts discussed in this chapter so far come from and are connected to the tradition of oral storytelling. This work itself, however, focuses on contemporary written texts, so the relationship of the oral and the written should be explored. In short, it can be said that majority of the principles of oral storytelling such as relationality, need for internalization of the story, non-linear work with time and permeability of the

[168] Simpson, "Land," 7.

[169] Simpson, "Land," 7.

[170] qtd. in Christopher B. Teuton, "Theorizing American Indian Literature: Applying Oral Concepts to Written Traditions," in *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective*, ed. Craig S. Womack et al. (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 209.

[171] Teuton, "Theorizing," 209.

[172] Maracle, *Memory*, 162.

commonplace and the spiritual are transferred to written storytelling. However, there are also some differences between the oral and the written and since Indigenous authors often deal with this issue, the dynamics of these two modes of storytelling will be discussed in more length.

Firstly, Indigenous authors voice their objection towards the colonial perception of the written as higher and more developed form of expression. Vizenor writes that "the notion, in the literature of dominance, that the oral advances to the written, is a colonial reduction of natural sound, heard stories"[173] and Teuton points out that the derogation of oral cultures resulted in viewing these as "less culturally advanced".[174] Contemporary writers, when trying to negotiate the oral heritage and writing, are faced with what Emma LaRocque calls "the power struggle between the oral and the written, between the Native in us and the English."[175] According to Teuton, this tension is resolved by merging orality and writing and, as a result, he claims that "writing has been a tool of both colonialism and survivance."[176]

Orality as a feature of Indigenous writing has been recognized by other critics, too, for example, Eigenbrod, who says that "the symbiosis of the oral and the written seems to be a characteristic of contemporary Native writing,"[177] or Blaeser, who asserts that "the work of Indian writers contains many tangible manifestations of a commitment to as well as a descent from orality."[178] On the other hand, Kamboureli warns that perceiving orality as the defining element of Indigenous writing actually perpetuates the colonial binary division of the oral/written, primitive/developed and says that "written oratory," in contrast, dismantles this opposition.[179] In a similar way, Teuton argues that "'orality' is becoming understood as *one* form of textuality that exists in relation to others" (emphasis added).[180] These approaches are trying to stop the binary perception of orality and

[173] Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 72.

[174] Christopher B. Teuton, *Deep Waters: The Textual Continuum in American Indian Literature* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), xv.

[175] Emma LaRocque, "Preface or Here Are Our Voices – Who Will Hear?" in *Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada*, ed. Jeanne Martha Perreault and Sylvia Vance (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1990), xx.

[176] Teuton, *Deep,* xix.

[177] Renate Eigenbrod, "The Oral in the Written: A Literature Between Two Cultures," *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, vol. 15 (1995): 91.

[178] Kimberley Blaeser, "Writing Voices Speaking: Native Authors and an Oral Aesthetic," in *Talking on the Page: Editing Aboriginal Oral Texts*, ed. Murray and Rice (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 57.

[179] qtd. in Maracle, *Memory*, 253.

[180] Tetuon, "Indigenous," 173.

textuality by either presenting the written as a mode of expression of the oral or by defining the oral as only one of the possible styles of textual communication. It might seem contradictory, however, the views are actually complementary. Not all Indigenous texts reflect the oral but when they do, orality shapes and determines the way the text is narrated.

The question now is how this orality within the written is achieved. While Petrone in her "Conclusion" to Native Literature in Canada states that oral tradition is a source of "inspiration and direction" for writers,[181] mainly in terms of themes, non-sequential structure of narratives and juxtaposition of genres, Michael Wilson argues that the whole composition process is governed by orality as the authors design "the entire trajectory of their [Native writers'] novels either on specific oral stories or on narratives derived from concepts of orality, such as the use of multiple narrators that suggest subjectivity both in points of view and in the grain or nuance of the spoken voice."[182] The following chapters hope to show that these "concepts of orality" go beyond the sphere of literary devices such as multiple narrators, and that orality, as an embodiment of the Indigenous worldviews, informs/governs not only the narrative techniques and themes but the whole works as authorial and cultural expressions. Thus, I concur with Eigenbrod who says that "the reader of these stories will be drawn into the mind set of an orally-based thought process."[183] At the same time, this can work fully only when the reader is aware of the differences in the referential frames, which this chapter attempted to discuss.

The oral mind set, expressing Indigenous epistemology, might be also what Vizenor called "the shadows of tribal consciousness".[184] While colonial history caused serious damage in Indigenous cultures, traces of orality remained and Indigenous writers work with them, consciously or semi-consciously. Vizenor and others also talk about blood memory,[185] or ancestral memory - the ability to remember and feel one's ancestors' memories.[186] If we are able to accept this notion, orality within textuality might be understood as an expression of this blood memory.

---

[181] Petrone, *Native*, 182.

[182] qtd. in Teuton, *Deep,* xx.

[183] Eigenbrod, "The Oral," 93.

[184] Vizenor, *Manifest Manners,* 96.

[185] Vizenor, *Manifest Manners* 74; Bruce Sinclair (Métis), personal conversation, June 13, 2021; Sean Kicummah Teuton, *Red Land, Red Power: Grounding Knowledge in the American Indian Novel* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2008), 46-47.

[186] see, for example, Hubbard's discussion on N. Scott Momaday's work. Tasha Hubbard, "Voices Heard in the Silence, History Held in the Memory: Ways of Knowing Jeannette Armstrong's 'Threads of Old

Still, Indigenous critics point out the challenges of the transfer of the oral into the written. While oral storytelling is characterized by flexibility, immediacy, and performance, "writing ideas down fixes them as objects that can be taken out of context of time and relationship,"[187] as Wilson states, and storytelling "loses some of its transformative power because it is no longer emergent,"[188] Simpson adds. They emphasize the lack of a dynamic relationship in written texts and the lessened transformativity, both as an effect of a story and as its feature.[189] Due to its performativity, oral storytelling incorporates change and variation in wording and phrasing but also in selecting a story for the given audience. Because oral storytelling is dynamic and the teller can react to the audience and shape the story accordingly, a stronger relationship between the teller and listener can be established. This, in return, gives higher chance for internalization of the story by the listener and for their subsequent transformation. The main concern, in other words, lies in the reduction of immediate relationality in written texts. Teuton also states that "writing isolates, creates individualism".[190] Thomas King, similarly, divides stories into oral – public and written – private, based on the fact that "oral stories generally have an audience in which there is a group dynamic."[191] For him, it is the energy emerging in the audience that distinguishes the oral and the written. Nevertheless, at the same time Teuton says that Indigenous literature is "dominated by the concerns of Native community" and that "the ethical dimension" in this literature "owes much to the values expressed in oral traditions."[192] So, the concept of relationality as the essential value of oral tradition defines Indigenous stories in the written form as well because written literature aims to preserve this value through emphasis on community, even if the immediate relationship of the teller and listener or the group dynamics is missing.

"In the modern world, a book assumes the position of rememberer," Maracle writes.[193] Rememberer is one of the functions and names for a storyteller she uses, along with mythmaker[194] and orator, for example. In a conversation with Kamboureli, Maracle

Memory'," in *Aboriginal Oral Traditions: Theory, Practice, Ethics*, ed. Renée Hulan and Renate Eigenbrod (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 148.

[187] Wilson, *Research*, 123.

[188] Simpson, *Dancing,* 34.

[189] Sarris, *Keeping*, 27.

[190] Teuton, "Theorizing," 199.

[191] King, *Truth,* 154.

[192] Teuton, "Theorizing," 199.

[193] Maracle, *Memory*, 246.

[194] Maracle is one of the Indigenous authors using the word "myth" for some Indigenous stories even though she also points out its limitations and the differences in the Western and the Indigenous

reinforces that the written oratory stands on, preserves, and sustains Indigenous knowledge "in the same way a river becomes the sea".[195] The lack of transformability, performativity, and group dynamics does not prevent texts from embodying Indigenous values. The requirement of internalization of a story and the concept of relationality can be achieved in textual forms as well. The underlying principles, or undercurrents, of the oral and the written remain the same, even though the surface and the form changes.

2.5 Closing remarks

Storytelling is a globally common practice and it forms the core of literary studies as such. However, this chapter wanted to show that comprehension of the process of storytelling and the values transmitted by it are culturally based and might differ from the notions universally accepted in Western academia. The aim here was to outline these differences and describe Indigenous perception of storytelling as I understand it, not to pass judgement on any of the views discussed or to evaluate them.

The two basic aspects of storytelling that seem to seep through all the others are dynamics and relationality. Storytelling is a process in which several levels of energies are activated and the result of this process depends on the interconnection of the teller, listener, alternatively other listeners, context, and the story itself. Stories are relational by nature and establishing a relationship with a story, internalizing it, is crucial for deriving meaning and for completing the process of storytelling.

Relationality forms also one of the basic aspects of Indigenous worldviews. The only way of knowing the world is through relationships and thus relations are not optional but conditional for existence and understanding. Not only human connections are involved in these webs of relationships, but all creation. Since knowledge and existence depends on relationships, great responsibility is placed on sustaining all relations one has, spiritual connections included.

The dynamics of storytelling is given by the performative nature or oral storytelling but also by the perception of creation as flux and by the permeability of time spheres in Indigenous perspectives. However, this constant movement and transformation is not directed onward but towards balance as the teaching of the medicine wheel shows.

---

perceptions of a myth (*Memory*, 155). I avoid the word "myth" in this work, but I wanted to keep Maracle's use of the term to illustrate the still evolving and diverse use of terminology in Indigenous literary studies.

[195] Maracle, *Memory*, 254.

It cannot be said that these aspects are unique only for Indigenous storytelling or that none of these features exist in Western perception. This chapter focused on portraying those features that are repeatedly and distinctly emphasized in Indigenous sources and the following chapters will show if and how these features translate into contemporary texts.

3 STORYTELLING AND APPROPRIATION

Every so often, the hot and very divisive topic of cultural appropriation resonates in the public sphere in Canada, and every so often, the issue concerns appropriation of stories and contemporary Indigenous literary circles. It might seem that it is rather a political matter and thus not a part of an academic discourse. Nevertheless, it is the nature of literature to reflect the social and political situation and the appropriation problem illustrates how much colonialism has impacted Indigenous cultural production as a way of self-representation, and also shows the differences in the approach to storytelling in terms of accountability to community in the Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies. Therefore, it is not possible to separate contemporary Indigenous literature from politics. As Justice states: "To argue for and produce Indigenous writing *as such* is necessarily to engage in political struggle and to challenge centuries of representational oppression" (emphasis original).[196] Also, the frequency with which the issue repeatedly arises, and the level of emotional investment on both sides makes the problem impossible to overlook. Moreover, bypassing the issue might create an impression that a difficult conversation is being avoided or that the problem is being downplayed. On the contrary, I am aware of the significance of the issue, even more so since one of the controversies concerning the issue of cultural appropriation influenced my research and the content of this work directly. On the basis of three cases from recent years, the following section outlines the main aspects of appropriation of Indigenous stories, its connection to self-representation and freedom of speech, and presents suggestions by Indigenous scholars and artists for a more respectful and cognizant relationships among the members of Canadian literary and cultural community.

3.1 Practices and policies opening space for appropriation

The origins of the issue of appropriation lie in the practice of collecting Indigenous stories by non-Indigenous ethnographers in the 19th century, who transcribed, translated, and edited their sources and who did not follow Indigenous storytelling protocols in terms of acknowledgement of storytellers and use of stories by people not belonging to the communities of their origin. In consequence, Indigenous traditional storytelling has for

[196] Justice, *Why*, xx.

decades been mediated by researchers outside the communities. As Petrone says, scholars such as Franz Boas helped to preserve valuable material, however, "they evaluated it from the point of view of their own academic disciplines."[197] This "salvage research", as it is sometimes called for its aim to "record the cultures of peoples who were thought to soon become extinct", led to the silencing of Indigenous storytellers and knowledge holders and to non-Indigenous researchers becoming "experts *on* Aboriginal people" (emphasis original).[198] The collected stories were often altered to conform to Western literary and aesthetic norms – shortened, lengthened, narratives simplified and names in them changed to be more comprehensible. Noodin calls this practice "copywrong" and gives Cornelius Mathews and Henry Schoolcraft as examples.[199] Schoolcraft edited and published Ojibwe stories his wife, Jane (Ojibwe/Irish), told him without crediting her.[200] Mathews then used stories collected by Schoolcraft and adjusted them, or as he says "abridged the thread of the narrative to make it more obvious and more easily followed."[201] Bear Nicholas (Maliseet) mentions J. Barrat, who for unclear reasons translated Glooskap (the trickster) as a "liar" when it actually means a "good man" and thus considerably shifted the significance of this spirit character, and Charles Leland's fabrications of Glooskap stories, which were so successful they entered popular culture.[202] These are just a few instances from the history of Indigenous literatures, which, as Blaeser dryly puts it, is characteristic for "translation, re-interpretations, appropriation, romanticizing, museumization, consumerization, and marginalization."[203]

The colonial policies introduced by the Indian Act of 1876 and its amendments significantly contributed to the suppression of Indigenous voices as they were designed for assimilation of Indigenous people into the dominant culture. The Act, besides other things, banned Indigenous ceremonies and wearing regalia in public, which inhibited self-expression of individuals and passing on culture in communities.[204] Furthermore, Younging explains that Indigenous knowledge, stories including, has been approached in a similar way as Indigenous land and uses the term *gnaritas nullius*, no one's knowledge, to

---

[197] Petrone, *Native*, 4.
[198] Wilson, *Research*, 48-49.
[199] Noodin, *Bawaajimo*, 24.
[200] Noodin, *Bawaajimo*, 23.
[201] qtd. in Noodin, *Bawaajimo*, 24.
[202] Nicholas, "The Assault," 14, 17.
[203] Kimberley M. Blaeser, "Native Literature: Seeking a Critical Centre," in *Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literatures*, ed. Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016), 232.
[204] Jay Makarenko, "The Indian Act: Historical Overview," *Mapleleafweb*, accessed April 24, 2020, https://www.mapleleafweb.com/features/the-indian-act-historical-overview.html.

illustrate the correlations of colonial approaches to land and knowledge.[205] Due to that, "manifestations of . . . Indigenous knowledge . . . are embraced by Western peoples as their own . . . despite widespread Indigenous claims of ownership and breach of Customary Law," [206] Younging says. So, the suppression of Indigenous representation worked on two levels – through limitation of self-expression and through annulling claims to cultural production by absorbing it to the Western concept of public domain.

These practices resulted in the lack of Indigenous presence in cultural production in Canada until the second half of the 20th century. Margery Fee, when paraphrasing Keeshig-Tobias, notes that "there is a void in which Indigenous stories might have been expected to exist."[207] This gap was very often filled by non-Indigenous writers telling stories of Indigenous experience. In reaction to that, and once the restrictive policies were lifted, Indigenous artists started to demand that non-Indigenous writers "move over" and to call for control over Indigenous representation.[208]

The concerns of Indigenous peoples in terms of appropriation of stories have been succinctly summarized in Keeshig-Tobias's seminal article "Stop Stealing Native Stories", which was first printed in January of 1990 but republished in 2017 as most of her claims remain relevant. In it, she identifies as the biggest problem the lack of space for Indigenous writers and artists to tell their own stories on their own terms. Non-Indigenous stories on Indigenous experience might be oversimplifying or insulting, "but the real problem is that they amount to culture theft, the theft of voice."[209] As the cause she recognizes colonial policies that disrupted the cultures and also the fact that Canadian society is used to Indigenous cultural products marketed and sold by non-Indigenous individuals and companies and when an Indigenous person wants to present their work, there is little interest in it since "it's been done" before.[210] She touches on the importance of Indigenous protocols in storytelling, but for the most part, she attacks the general impression of equality in Canadian society. "With native people struggling for justice with land claims and in education, what makes Canadians think they have equality in the film industry? In

---

[205] Younging, *Elements*, 132.

[206] Younging, *Elements*, 132.

[207] Margery Fee, "The Trickster Moment, Cultural Appropriation, and the Liberal Imagination in Canada," in *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations,* ed. Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), 70.

[208] Fee, "Trickster Moment," 61-2.

[209] Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, "Stop Stealing Native Stories," *The Globe and Mail*, May 19, 2017, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/cultural-appropriation-stop-stealing-native-stories/article35066040/.

[210] Keeshig-Tobias, "Stop Stealing."

publishing?,"[211] she asks. Criticism of the unacknowledged privileging of non-Indigenous peoples can be noticed also in Maria Campbell's suggestion, which Keeshig-Tobias quotes: "If you want to write our stories, then be prepared to live with us."[212] On one hand, it is a statement in a way approving of freedom of expression, but on the other it implies that non-Indigenous people cannot comprehend fully the challenges of Indigeneity in Canadian settler state unless they experience it firsthand. Moreover, the proposal demands willingness to build relationships with Indigenous communities instead of one-sided interest in them and use of their artifacts and stories. As we can see, Keeshig-Tobias's arguments do not deal so much with who can tell which stories, but rather who holds the opportunities and space to do so. In other words, the debate does not revolve around freedom of speech but around the power dynamics in Canadian artistic production and society as such.

Claims, similar to Keeshig-Tobias's, about social inequality and legacy of colonialism as roots of the misunderstanding around cultural appropriation have been voiced in recent years, too. Chelsea Vowel uncompromisingly writes that the issue of fabricated "Indigenous" stories should be called colonialism since they function through "erasing pre-existing cultures and replacing them with the culture of settlers" and also mentions that because non-Indigenous people have better access to media and publishing business, "these kinds of fake stories are literally drowning us out",[213] by which she means that these stories overshadow Indigenous ones and confuse people about Indigenous cultures. Jesse Wente in a CBC video states that appropriation of Indigenous land, lives, and cultures was a government policy and that to ignore the inequalities is "to fail in your [non-Indigenous writers'] responsibility as a storyteller."[214] Lack of awareness of the existing consequences of colonialism for Indigenous communities and the "Western liberal myth of a level playing field"[215] prevent non-Indigenous society to see that the debate on cultural appropriation is in fact a debate on social justice.

Gregory Younging then explains the other cause of the disagreement around the right to write about Indigenous experience. According to him, Western and Indigenous epistemologies significantly differ in terms of access to knowledge and intellectual

[211] Keeshig-Tobias, "Stop Stealing."

[212] Keeshig-Tobias, "Stop Stealing."

[213] Vowel, *Indigenous*, 94.

[214] Jesse Wente, "Jesse Wente Reacts to the Appropriation Prize Controversy," interview by Matt Galloway, *CBC News*, May 15, 2017, video, 01:29-01:39, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/jesse-wente-appropriation-prize-1.4115293.

[215] Vowel, *Indigenous*, 126.

property rights. In the Western understanding, knowledge not claimed by or assigned to an author is in the public domain and thus freely accessible and reusable. The premise that "all society must eventually be able to benefit from that [the author's] genius" leads to the practice that after some time, all works/ideas fall into the public domain.[216] We can say that the Western paradigm aims for open and sharable knowledge whereas in the Indigenous system, or Customary Law as Younging calls it, "certain aspects of Traditional Knowledge are not intended for external access and use in any form,"[217] he writes. Sacred ceremonies, medicine bundles, crests, and also sacred stories are considered traditional knowledge, and protected by protocols, and therefore not considered appropriate for wide use. The notion of restricted pieces of knowledge goes against the Western perception of knowledge and can be hard to accept by some. Moreover, Customary Law is not recognized in the current legal system, which makes unapproved use of traditional knowledge unpunishable.

In essence, the issues around appropriation of stories in all its forms stem from colonial policies and represent one of the many long-lasting legacies of colonialism. In recent decades, Indigenous writers and storytellers have been fighting for space to tell Indigenous stories and they have tried to explain their objections to appropriation. Unfortunately, their position has not been fully understood and respected as the recurrent appropriation affairs in recent years illustrate.

3.2 Three case studies: appropriation of stories and identity frauds

The controversies arising around cultural appropriation usually follow two patterns – appropriation of stories and identity frauds. However, the issues in both of them often overlap and both are talked about as cases of cultural appropriation. In the former pattern, non-Indigenous writers use/write/adapt Indigenous stories without authorization by or credit given to elders/storytellers/communities, alternatively use Indigenous experience or voice without considering Indigenous requirements of relationality and accountability. The latter concerns individuals assuming Indigenous identity without having solid Indigenous ancestry or without being claimed by a particular Indigenous community and using their fabricated or unapproved heritage to get access to positions of power or projects designed for Indigenous peoples. The controversies falling into this category of so called

[216] Younging, *Elements*, 122.
[217] Younging, *Elements*, 123.

"pretendians" always reopen the complicated issue of definition of Indigenous identity and the criteria of belonging. The following section presents three case studies from recent years, all directly or indirectly connected to this research, explains their intricacies, and focuses on the reactions of Indigenous scholars and artists to them.

3.2.1 The Appropriation Prize

The first case actually does not concern a specific author appropriating Indigenous stories but a discussion of appropriation as a literary and cultural phenomenon in general. In May 2017, *Write* magazine, a quarterly published by the Writer's Union of Canada, dedicated their spring issue to Indigenous voices, featuring pieces by Richard Van Camp or Joshua Whitehead. Hal Niedzviecki, the editor of the magazine and a non-Indigenous writer, opened the issue with his editorial titled "Winning the Appropriation Prize".[218] In the text he expresses his disbelief in cultural appropriation, argues that "anyone, anywhere, should be encouraged to imagine other peoples, other cultures, other identities"[219] and satirically proposes a founding of the Appropriation Prize for the best writer to do so. While Indigenous writers started to voice their anger and objections to this proposal, several non-Indigenous editors of leading Canadian media, CBC including, promised to provide funds for the prize launch. Niedzviecki later apologized for being insensitive and stepped down from his position.

Arguments about free speech on one hand and a lack of space for Indigenous voices on the other resonated in the debate that this issue provoked in social media and literary circles. Niedzvieki's piece was meant to be about free speech and artistic freedom and the journalists supporting the prize did so with this in mind.[220] Browsing through the reactions of Indigenous respondents to the issue, none of them calls free speech into question. However, they stress that writers must be ready to be accountable and to be scrutinized by those they write about. As Jesse Wente says: "None of us that I've seen want to limit free speech. I wish there were so many more stories written about Indigenous people. But those stories come with responsibility."[221] He means the responsibility coming from the protocols around Indigenous stories but as well responsibility tied to relationality, the core

[218] Hal Niedzviecki, "Winning the Appropriation Prize," *Write*, May 2017, 8.

[219] Niedzviecki, "Winning," 8.

[220] Ashifa Kassam, "Canadian Journalists Support 'appropriation prize' after online furore," *The Guardian*, May 13, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/13/canadian-journalists-appropriation-prize.

[221] Wente, "Jesse Wente," 04:48 - 04:53.

value of Indigenous worldviews as discussed before. Ryan McMahon then points out the impossibility to take criticism of appropriation as censorship since "censorship is the state censoring the people – no one in Indian Country is trying to take away your right for you to write whatever you want."[222] Margery Fee understands the accusations of censorship as an inability to accept criticism and says that "the cry for freedom, in fact, was an attempt to stifle dissent."[223]

Rather than the question of free speech, the centre of the debate should be a creation of space for Indigenous voices to be heard. Niedzviecki in the editorial criticizes the fact that Canadian literature "remains exhaustingly white and middle-class"[224] and for this reason he encourages writers to imagine the other. Sarah Hagi writes that "the obvious solution would be to encourage the minorities they so deeply want to see in stories to, you know, write their own stories—but clearly that's not their [journalists', executors', editors'] priority."[225] *Write* magazine, it seems, wanted to create this space by inviting Indigenous contributors to their issue, the editorial, however, managed to do the opposite and instead, the magazine became "a space that is not safe for indigenous and racialized writers,"[226] as Nikki Reimer, a member of *Write* editorial board, notes. It is hard to say if the lack of space for Indigenous voices today or the undermining of the existing one stems from the ignorance of colonial history and its consequences for Indigenous communities, from the assumptions of equality between communities, or the fear that "white voices [are] being relegated to the sidelines."[227]

In this respect, the last two paragraphs of Niedzviecki's editorial, which are not often commented on, seem to be of interest. According to him, Indigenous writers often "write from what they don't know" and "reclaim the other as their own"[228] and praises them for this ability. In connection to the previous paragraphs, it seems that he is implying that Indigenous writers appropriate Western experience, which justifies cultural

---

[222] Hannah Sung, "Video: Opinion: What Is Cultural Appropriation?" *The Globe and Mail*, May 18, 2017, video, 03:06 – 03:13, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/video-video-opinion-what-is-cultural-appropriation/.

[223] Fee, "The Trickster," 65.

[224] Niedzviecki, "Winning," 8.

[225] Sarah Hagi, "A Bunch of White Canadian Editors Really Love Cultural Appropriation," *VICE*, May 12, 2017, https://www.vice.com/en/article/pg7q8m/a-bunch-of-white-canadian-editors-really-love-cultural-appropriation.

[226] Stassa Edwards, "What Can We Learn from Canada's 'Appropriation Prize' Literary Fiasco?" *Jezebel*, May 16, 2017, https://jezebel.com/what-can-we-learn-from-canadas-appropriation-prize-lite-1795175192.

[227] Hagi, "A Bunch."

[228] Niedzviecki, "Winning," 8.

appropriation by others. This is rather contentious for two reasons. Firstly, Western culture was imposed on Indigenous societies by colonialism, its acceptance was enforced, not chosen. And secondly, as discussed before, Western cultures and their principles are open to sharing, and thus appropriating them is actually desired and does not necessarily have negative connotations. Further on, Niedzviecki acknowledges that publishing industry demands Indigenous writers to conform to standards incongruous with Indigenous perspectives, which leads to their estrangement both from the business and from traditional heritage.[229] While this is true, he fails to see that it is to a large extent the misconceptions about appropriation that he himself perpetuates in the piece that contribute to this estrangement and prevent Indigenous writers from being centered and heard. It seems his arguments are based on the lack of awareness of Indigenous experience in the Canadian state and of Indigenous cultural perspectives, which is unfortunate since he was the editor of an Indigenous-focused issue.

One positive outcome from this debate is the foundation of The Indigenous Voices Awards, a contest supporting Indigenous writers, both published and unpublished, in Canada. The IVAs were established as a reaction to the Appropriation Prize controversy and are funded by community and individual donations. The aim of the awards is to "honour the sovereignty of Indigenous creative voices and reject cultural appropriation."[230] In the four years of its existence, the IVAs have awarded a number of emerging Indigenous writers and contributed significantly to the creation of safe space for these writers to be seen and heard.

3.2.2 Michelle Latimer

The second case relates to perhaps an even more controversial issue, the issue of identity fraud. Michelle Latimer is an acclaimed producer, director, actress, and filmmaker, whose films and documentaries won several prestigious prizes in Canada. In 2020, she created a CBC series adaptation of Eden Robinson's novel *Son of a Trickster*, probably the biggest Indigenous film production in Canada so far. Her documentary *Inconvenient Indian*, based on Thomas King's non-fiction book about Indigenous issues and relations to non-Indigenous peoples and settler state, came out also in 2020. Both of these works were

[229] Niedzviecki, "Winning," 8.

[230] "The Indigenous Voices Awards," *Indigenous Voices Awards*, https://indigenousvoicesawards.org/about-the-awards.

introduced with great success and enjoyed good reviews. Right at the time her work was getting a lot of mainstream attention, bringing Indigenous themes into focus, the issue of her unclear claims to Indigenous identity was raised, causing a turmoil in the media and leading to the *Trickster* series being stopped and the documentary withdrawn from film festivals.

Latimer has repeatedly claimed to be of Algonquin, Métis and French heritage and in a National Film Board of Canada press release she indicated the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg (Maniwaki) community as her family base.[231] The controversy started when an elder from this community announced they did not know who she was and asked her to prove her claims and state her intentions.[232] CBC then started an e-mail communication with Latimer to clarify her ancestry and hired a genealogist to research her family roots, who found two Indigenous ancestors in the 17th century and said that most of her ancestry is French Canadian, Irish, and Scottish.[233] Latimer at that time declared her claims come from oral family history and apologized for naming the community before making substantial research into her connections to it.[234] At the same time, she sent a libel notice to CBC starting a lawsuit for damaging her career.[235]

The case reverberated strongly in the media and many Indigenous artists and scholars again expressed their frustration. Eden Robinson said she did not know "how to deal with the anger, disappointment and stress,"[236] Alethea Arnaquq-Baril, a filmmaker and a subject Latimer's documentary, talks about the extreme pain this issue brings to individuals struggling with identity, and apologized to her community for inviting Latimer to them and vouching for her,[237] and Steven Lonsdale, an Inuit hunter also featuring in the documentary, says that it does matter who the film producer is "because we've had a long

[231] "NFB at TIFF 2020. World premiere for Michelle Latimer's Inconvenient Indian at the Toronto International Film Festival," *Media Space, NFB*, published August 13, 2020, https://mediaspace.nfb.ca/comm/nfb-at-tiff-2020-world-premiere-for-michelle-latimers-inconvenient-indian-at-the-toronto-international-film-festival/.

[232] Jesse Brown, "#359 The Convenient 'Pretendian'," *Canadaland*, published February 14, 2021, audio, 04:48-04:50, https://www.canadaland.com/podcast/359-the-convenient-pretendian/.

[233] Ka´nhehsí:io Deer and Jorge Barrera, "Award-Winning Filmmaker Michelle Latimer's Indigenous Identity Under Scrutiny," *CBC News*, published December 17, 2020, last updated December 18, 2020, https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/michelle-latimer-kitigan-zibi-indigenous-identity-1.5845310.

[234] Deer and Barrera, "Award-Winning,".

[235] Brett Forester, "Filmmaker Michelle Latimer Sues CBC for 200K in Libel Damages," *APTN News*, published May 26, 2021, https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/michelle-latimer-sues-cbc-for-200k-in-libel-damages/.

[236] Tamara Pimentel, "'I Feel Like Such a Dupe': Author Eden Robinson Reacts to Latimer's Indigeneity Issue," *APTN News*, published December 23, 2020, https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/michelle-latimer-trickster-inconvenient-indian-indigeneity/.

[237] Brown, "#359 Convenient," 28:40-28:53.

history of others telling our story, telling about our ways."[238] As we can see, the bottom line in their comments is the long history of misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples, the pain of misusing the opportunities when funds for Indigenous filmmaking finally became more available after the TRC reports in 2015, and broken trust in established relationships.

Defining Indigenous identity and belonging to a community is, however, a complicated task. Not only do the individual nations have different criteria for membership, but a number of colonial policies aiming for erasing Indigeneity made it very hard to restore one's ancestry. Bill C-31, for example, made people born in mixed marriages lose their status and The Sixties Scoop policies, that lead to thousands of Indigenous children being adopted to non-Indigenous families and losing their community connections,[239] are both legit reasons why many Indigenous people struggle to reclaim their heritage. The guests in Native America Calling radio show discussing Latimer's scandal therefore suggest being honest when talking about one's ancestry and saying openly if one does not have full information rather than fabricating it.[240] It is the fabrications and dubious claims of Indigeneity that hurt and confuse those whose family ties were disrupted or erased by colonial policies and who are trying to reconnect and find their communities. Arnaquq-Baril expresses her deep concern that this controversy will discourage those people from trying to find their connections.[241]

The host and guests in Canadaland podcast mention several other important aspects of this conversation. As for identity, Ryan McMahon says that "it's not so much how much Native are you, it's not what is your blood quantum" and explains that when people ask who you are they mean "position yourself " in relationship to me because "the core of our existence as Indigenous peoples is about relationships, how we forge relationships in our community and our nation as extended family."[242] This is, however, also complicated not only because of the colonial policies disrupting ancestral bonds but also because having a relationship with a family in a community is not the same as being claimed by a community or being an enrolled member of a band. Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs, a Mohawk actress, explains this in an open response to Latimer's case on Twitter. She

---

[238] Brown, "#359 Convenient," 53:20-53:25.

[239] see Vowel, *Indigenous*, for more detailed explanation on Bill C-31 and The Sixties Scoop, 28-32, 181-183.

[240] Art Hughes, "Exposing False Native Heritage," *Native America Calling*, published February 10, 2021, audio, 45:00, https://nativeamericacalling.com/wednesday-february-10-2021-exposing-false-native-heritage/.

[241] Brown, "#359 Convenient," 31:43.

[242] Brown, "#359 Convenient," 17:15, 16:32, 16:10-16:20.

distinguishes between being Indigenous and having Indigenous ancestry. While the former means one is claimed by a community and accountable to it, the latter signifies having an Indigenous relative in one's family tree, which does not make one automatically a member or a representative of a given nation or open the possibility to apply for projects designed for Indigenous peoples, but it does mean one can reconnect and learn about their ancestry.[243]

The theme that keeps coming back in all the conversations is responsibility and accountability. Arnaquq-Baril talks at length about the importance of responsibility in storytelling, asking for permissions, seeking out the most knowledgeable people, and positioning oneself publicly, especially when representing Indigenous peoples broadly.[244] She also revealed that she, as well as others, had approached Latimer privately before the scandal broke and had asked her to look into her ancestry more closely to prevent these problems, and a big part of her frustration comes from the fact Latimer did not "do the work" of finding her connections and disregarded these friendly demands, which, when unanswered, with time lead to the public investigation.[245]

In May 2021, Latimer finally responded with a more detailed and documented story of her roots, clarifying her connection to the dispersed community of Baskatong and her kinship to one Kitigan Zibi elder.[246] I do not have the authority to evaluate those claims; it is now up to the community to judge the strength of them and up to the Indigenous artists affected by the scandal to accept or dispute her place in Indigenous production. It is regrettable, though, that Latimer had not researched her heritage earlier as it would have averted a lot of doubt and damage. She also denied she had been asked questions about her roots prior to the outbreak.[247] All in all, this case shows the intricacies of Indigenous identity and the immense role of relationality and responsibility to a community in contemporary Indigenous cultures and their representations, and the scale of the damage caused when these responsibilities are not taken seriously.

---

[243] Devery Jacobs (@kdeveryjacobs), Twitter post, December 18, 2020, 4:49 pm, https://twitter.com/kdeveryjacobs/status/1339960923218391040/photo/1.

[244] Brown, "#359 Convenient," 33:00 – 42:00.

[245] Brown, "#359 Convenient," 41:35.

[246] Barry Hertz "'All I Can Do Is Speak My Truth': Filmmaker Michelle Latimer Breaks Her Silence After Indigenous Ancestry Controversy," *The Globe and Mail*, published May 11, 2021, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/film/article-all-i-can-do-is-speak-my-truth-filmmaker-michelle-latimer-breaks-her/#note2.

[247] Hertz, "All I Can."

3.2.3 The curious case of Joseph Boyden

When I first embarked on this journey called dissertation in 2013, Joseph Boyden was widely regarded one of the most prominent Indigenous writers of the younger generation with two successful and critically acclaimed novels out and a third one in the making. Non-Indigenous Canadian literary circles, let alone scholars in Central Europe, were oblivious to the questions about his identity for years "quietly swirling in conversations among Indigenous writers and artists,"[248] as Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm writes (the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation, Saugeen Ojibway Nation), and were excitedly awaiting his upcoming works. However, Margaret Noodin (Anishinaabe) mentions Boyden in her overview of modern Anishinaabe authors,[249] so we cannot be sure how extensive the suspicion of his weak identity claims among Indigenous artists actually was. The issue was brought to full publicity at the end of 2016 and continued well into 2017, sending shockwaves and igniting conflicting reactions from a variety of people.

Boyden's first novel, *Three Day Road*, published in 2005, employs the windigo concept extensively while telling the story of two Cree brothers enlisting to WWI and coping with their war experience and because of that, it was planned to include the discussion of the novel in this dissertation. Scholars praised the novel for bringing to attention Indigenous involvement and contribution to the war, a fact previously omitted from national war narratives.[250] In addition, grounding the text in the oral tradition,[251] using the windigo for "conceptualizing dimensions of trauma from a First Nations perspective"[252] while "simultaneously fulfill[ing] and challeng[ing] stereotypes of savagery"[253] linked to Indigenous people has been stressed in academic articles on the novel. Moreover, Visvis also interpreted the windigo concept as extending to the Western

[248] Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, "The Debate Is Over. It's Time for Action," *The Globe and Mail*, May 20, 2017, A11.

[249] Noodin, *Bawaajimo*, 33.

[250] Donna Bailey Nurse, "Way of the Warrior," *Quill & Quire*, vol. 71, no. 3 (March 2005); Neta Gordon, "Time Structures and the Healing Aesthetic pf Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*," *Studies in Canadian Literature/ Études en Littérature Canadienne,* vol. 33, no. 1 (2008); Hanna Teichler, "Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*: Transcultural (Post-)Memory and Identity in Canadian World War I Fiction," in *The Great War in Post-Memory Literature and Film*, ed. Martin Löschnigg and Marzena Sokołowksa-Paryż (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

[251] Teichler, "Joseph Boyden's," 246.

[252] Vikki Visvis, "Culturally Conceptualizing Trauma: The Windigo in Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*," *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en Littérature Canadienne,* vol. 35, no. 1 (2010): 225.

[253] Sophie McCall, "Intimate Enemies: Weetigo, Weesageechak, and the Politics of Reconciliation in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*," *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, vol. 25, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 73.

world subsumed by conflict and unable to step outside the colonial notions.[254] Interestingly, Anouk Lang mentions Boyden's conscious work to make the narrative resemble more Indigenous storytelling after he became aware that he, in his own words, "was applying a Western style of storytelling to an aboriginal [sic] story."[255] In hindsight, this comment might bear more importance than visible at first sight, on the other hand, it is not advisable to read too much into it. Undeniably, Boyden is a gifted writer and nobody from Indigenous studies I talked about this issue with disputed that. However, there is a feeling that he appropriated spaces and voices of others.

The controversy started with Robert Jago, Kwantlen/Nootsack Tribe, tweeting his concerns about Boyden's Indigenous identity in December 2016, which had been debated, according to him, in Indigenous groups for some time but became even more pressing in the era of reconciliation since Boyden was regarded one of the spokespersons of this social process.[256] Jago warns that "before Non-Native Canadians latch on to it [Boyden's idea on reconciliation], they should find out if it comes from an actual Native, or from a fabulist."[257] The investigation to Boyden's ancestry was then taken up by APTN, namely the reporter Jorge Barrera, who called Boyden's Indigeneity "ever shifting, evolving thing" and traced both his maternal and paternal ancestry with no hard evidence found about the Indigenous presence in the family.[258] Apart from Boyden's Indigenous self-identification moving from Nipmuc, Ojibwe, Mi'kmaq and Métis based seemingly on family stories rather than official documents, the article voices the unease about Boyden's position of a speaker for Indigenous communities, "because you can't cash in on being Aboriginal and not show what your real connection is,"[259] as Diabo says in the article.

Still, the article also claims that there are other ways of belonging to a community apart from blood, ways based on formed relationships and reciprocity both of which Wab Kinew, for example, finds in Boyden's life and work when asked by the reporter.[260] In

[254] Visvis, "Culturally Conceptualizing," 231, 234.

[255] qtd. in Anouk Lang, "'A Book That All Canadians Should be Proud to Read': Canada Reads and Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*," *Canadian Literature*, vol. 215 (Winter 2012): 127.

[256] Robert Jago (@IndigenousXca), Twitter post, December 23, 2016, 2:19 am, https://twitter.com/IndigenousXca/status/812105288300056582.

[257] Robert Jago, "Why I Question Joseph Boyden's Indigenous Ancestry," *Canadaland*, published December 24, 2016, https://www.canadaland.com/question-joseph-boydens-indigenous-ancestry/.

[258] Jorge Barrera, "Author Joseph Boyden's Shape-Shifting Indigenous Identity," *APTN News*, published December 23, 2016, https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/author-joseph-boydens-shape-shifting-indigenous-identity/.

[259] Barrera, "Author Joseph Boyden's."

[260] Wab Kinew, "Wab Kinew Discusses Joseph Boyden," interview by Shaneen Robinson. *APTN News, YouTube*, January 4, 2017, video, 00:50-01:40, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ChSiP8Qe54.

reaction to this article, Jago specified his objections in an article for *The Walrus,* saying that the main problem he sees is the fact that "Boyden has established himself as a political figure in First Nation communities" and hence carries responsibility for his words, that he does not qualify as Indigenous since he does not meet the general rule of not only self-identification but also being recognized by a specific community, "he has yet to point to a community that recognizes him as such [Indigenous]," and that his claimed self-determination as simply "Native" instead of as a member of specific band or nation cannot be legitimate because the term "Native" is a construct, not a legit culture.[261]

The Globe and Mail issued their own investigation several months later, pointing to varying stories of Boyden's origin recalled by Moosonee community members, to the dubious nature of his Métis card and to the emergence of "psychic identification" with the Indigenous culture starting with the success of his first Indigenous-themed story "Born with a Tooth", apart from other aspects.[262] Eric Andrew-Gee sums up the issue very aptly by writing that "the story of how Boyden thrived by cultivating a quality that is painfully at the heart of so many quests for Indigenous blood and belonging and, in doing so, laid bare historic wounds that he had hoped to heal."[263] The crux of this unfortunate case lies in his perhaps well-meant, but still harmful appropriation of voice and space of Indigenous peoples, something they have been fighting for many decades. This problem is also at the heart of Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm's argument and her suggestion to stop spending time debating cultural appropriation with non-Indigenous writers and audience because some people simply do not want to hear the other point of view and endlessly repeat the freedom of speech claim. Instead, she proposes intensified focus on Indigenous communities and arts: "We do not need them. We do not need to debate them because they demand it and we do not need them to tell our stories. It is time for us to refocus our energies on what matters to us: first and foremost, working within our communities to strengthen, empower and build each other up."[264] This, however, does not solve the problem of non-Indigenous voices speaking at the expense of Indigenous ones.

In the numerous interviews and comments Joseph Boyden has given in the last years, he mostly self-identifies as Indigenous indirectly, despite emphasizing his European heritage as well. For example, for *Quill & Quire* he says "part of me is native[sic], and it's

---

[261] Robert Jago, "The Boyden Controversy Is Not about Bloodline," *The Walrus*, published January 10, 2017, https://thewalrus.ca/the-boyden-controversy-is-not-about-bloodline/.

[262] Eric Andrew-Gee, "The Making of Joseph Boyden," *The Globe and Mail*, August 5, 2017, F2.

[263] Andrew-Gee, "The Making," F1.

[264] Akiwenzie-Damm, "The Debate," A11.

a very important part. But I also identify strongly with my Irish roots and with my Scottish roots" while also mentioning that "really, all my life – I've had an Anishnabe vision of the world."[265] In an interview with Bob Sexton, Boyden says that "I write primarily from the point of view of First Nations, of which I am part. My writing didn't really mature until I reconnected with the land,"[266] a statement which mirrors the struggle of so many Indigenous people to reclaim their culture. Interestingly, Julie McGonegal asks him openly about appropriation and his concerns relating to that. Boyden answers: "Am I allowed to write from a woman's point of view? . . . Am I allowed to? Only if I get it right . . . I better be respectful and as knowledgeable as I possibly can be if I'm going to do it . . . If you're bullshitting, you get called out on it. So I don't really worry about it [appropriation] because it will be obvious if it happens".[267] This claim is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, the question of cultural appropriation in Canada in terms of Indigenous peoples is not so much about who is allowed to speak for and about whom, as was discussed before. Indigenous artists and scholars such as Tomson Highway, for example, repeatedly articulated the claim that there is artistic freedom,[268] it is a question of power dynamics and enabling Indigenous voices to be heard by actively creating space for them, even if it means stepping aside. Secondly, I find it unfortunate that Boyden places the responsibility to bring attention to appropriation on others instead of highlighting again the necessity to educate oneself and take the obligation primarily on oneself. While recognition by a community validates one's Indigeneity, it seems to me that relying on others to call out appropriation means disregarding those communal relationships by avoiding personal responsibility to those ties. On the other hand, testing limits and provoking is also a part of artistic expression.

Joseph Boyden published his defense to the APTN article in August 2017 in which he admits he was not careful enough to let others speak on Indigenous issues,[269] a regret that was accepted positively by Indigenous scholars such as Adam Gaudry.[270] In terms of ancestry, he supports his Indigeneity firstly by mentioning DNA results but mainly by

---

[265] qtd. in Nurse, "Way," 17.

[266] Bob Sexton, "Q & A with Joseph Boyden," *Outdoor Canada*, February 13, 2012, https://www.outdoorcanada.ca/interview-with-joseph-boyden/.

[267] Julie McGonegal, "Reimagining Canada: A Conversation with Joseph Boyden on Metis Identity, Storytelling, and Public History," *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2012): 4.

[268] Carl Carter, "Native Theatre Losing the Legs It Stands on," *Alberta Sweetgrass*, July 2004, 3.

[269] Joseph Boyden, "My Name Is Joseph Boyden," *Maclean's*, August 2, 2017, https://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/my-name-is-joseph-boyden/.

[270] "Joseph Boyden's Statement about His Indigenous Roots Doesn't Address Main Controversy, Academics Say," *National Post*, January 13, 2017, https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/joseph-boydens-statement-about-his-indigenous-roots-doesnt-address-main-controversy-academics-say.

mentioning personal relations with Indigenous people in order to show that he is claimed by communities, so exactly following what Jago sets as an essential aspect of Indigenous identification. However, he quotes supportive messages from individual families, the Sandys and the Tozers, in other words personal attachments and "kinship relationships" as Wab Kinew described it,[271] which are not necessarily the same as a nation or band membership. In the second half of his article, Boyden presents what seems to be an essential question occupying his mind and the core argument of his defense:

> If I am accepted by people in Indigenous communities, if I have been traditionally adopted by a number of people in Indigenous communities, if my DNA test shows I have Indigenous blood, if I have engaged my whole career in publicly defending Indigenous rights as well as using my public recognition as an author to shine light on Indigenous issues, am I not, in some way, Indigenous?[272]

The same issue of different kinds of belonging arises here – being accepted by a community does not automatically give one all the rights to represent, use and share their culture. Especially the extent of sharing stories has been debated by communities for some time with no unified code or rule. Moreover, it is not for him to answer that question and implying that from his point of view this evidence is enough erases once again the communal and consensual nature of belonging that Kinew, Alfred and others stressed.[273] Similarly, in the somewhat pathetic ending of his article and the last sentence emanating victimry, "My great big family, we're far from being silenced,"[274] he also seems to be assuming a place of the oppressed and marginalized and his words resemble those of Indigenous rights activists. Rather than being an ally, he insists on being a member of this family and on speaking for them, possibly taking the voice of those who, he claims, would not be silenced, which seems to go against his proclaimed stepping down from the role of spokesperson for Indigenous communities.

Despite all the shadiness, both the APTN and G&M articles present Boyden's undeniable achievements and contributions to Indigenous culture – his teaching successes, his active support of Indigenous writers, his contributions to land-based education; he definitely has some close relationships with Indigenous artists (Richard Wagamese calls

[271] qtd. in Adrew-Gee, "The Making," F5.
[272] Boyden, "My Name."
[273] Adrew-Gee, "The Making," F5-6.
[274] Boyden, "My Name."

him “brother”, for example)[275] and nobody really disputes his narrative talent. It is also appropriate to add that there are Indigenous voices, for example Maurice Switzer (Mississaugas of Alderville First Nation), who consider this debate exaggerated, deem comparing the appropriation of voice to other colonial practices disproportionate and unjustified, and who point out the difficulties in tracing down one’s community.[276] As Wab Kinew says in an interview for APTN from January 2017, “there is a place for Boyden in our community, but if he wants that place, he has to come back and he as to answer some of these questions” and urges him to be honest: “if he’s not Native, tell us.”[277] It seems that Boyden has got off a bad start, assuming a role at the beginning which he could have earned by honest work. By this I do not mean to deny him his right for self-identification; the other part of the equation, however, appears to be incomplete.

What this case shows above all, and where it strangely intersects with the windigo concept, is the key place of respect and responsibility in Indigenous cultures, the reciprocal responsibility to community, the respect for the right of Indigenous peoples to determine who is to speak for them and the responsibility to answer and explain when being held accountable. It might be for a personal cost to acknowledge that one does not have all the rights but not doing so means not putting Indigenous perception on equal ground. Not doing so means preferring one’s interest or career at the expense of others, characteristics of an emerging windigo. There is little doubt that Boyden wrote his pieces and spoke for Indigenous peoples out of love and desire to make things better, still, he ended up hijacking space for Indigenous voices that has fully opened up only recently. Yet another, but connected, thing that was put to light in this debate was that a non-Indigenous person can tell Indigenous stories genuinely, authentically and with insight. Again, though, if we are to respect Indigenous storytellers and try to change the unequal power dynamics, rectify the historical exploitation of Indigenous oral tradition, being able to understand does not give one the right to tell the stories. “What are the artistic boundaries? And I say, we don’t have boundaries,”[278] Boyden says. I respond, we do not have boundaries, but we need to have respect. And for these reasons, Boyden’s texts will not be further discussed in this work for now.

---

[275] Richard Wagamese, *Embers: One Ojibway’s Meditations* (Madeira Park, British Columbia: Douglas & McIntyre, 2016), 174.

[276] Maurice Switzer, “Opinion: Indigenous Cultural Police and Joseph Boyden,” *Anishinabek News*, September 5, 2018, https://anishinabeknews.ca/2018/09/05/opinion-indigenous-cultural-police-and-joseph-boyden/.

[277] Wab Kinew, “Wab Kinew,” 03:50, 03:14.

[278] McGonegal, “Reimagining,” 7.

3.3 Appropriation: damages and paths forward

The harm done by appropriation of voice or identity is great and multilateral. Promising careers are wrecked, projects stopped, professional and personal relationships damaged, both the accused and the accuser exposed to public scrutiny and often faced with disrespectful comments, Indigenous people feeling misunderstood and overlooked and non-Indigenous society and its values feeling attacked. But where these affairs cut the deepest is the question of identity. Arnaquq-Baril, when reacting on Latimer, says that "it is an intensively Indigenous experience to be or to feel disconnected from your heritage and so . . . when the world is questioning who is Native enough, we all kind of felt that doubt about ourselves whether we are Native enough."[279] This comment shows how much the colonial policies disrupted the sense of belonging and the formation of Indigenous self, even for people brought up and living in Indigenous communities. The fact that Indigeneity was defined in the past by the authorities and now, when communities have control over membership, people misuse or abuse it, undermines the right for self-determination of the bands and intensifies the crises of identity arising from intergenerational trauma caused by the colonial policies. This is true both for pretendian affairs as well as for appropriation or fabrication of stories, which "makes things very confusing" for people trying to reconnect and finding only these stories,[280] as Vowel says.

Another problem with these debates that Indigenous scholars and artists point out is that they take time and energy away from more important work and more fruitful conversations. Disconnection plays a role in this, too, because the time dedicated to pretendians could have been used to find ways to reconnect for those who were truly affected by colonial policies.[281] Heath Justice writes that these discussions "shift attention from peoplehood to ethnicity, thus prioritizing settler colonial ways of thinking about belonging"[282] and Jesse Wente laments that it "absorbs too much energy, it causes so much pain in our communities, to have to re-argue for our value as human beings."[283] They both in essence call for the right to self-determination and for acknowledgement of Indigenous perspectives on belonging by non-Indigenous society and institutions.

[279] Brown, "#359 Convenient," 26:30-26:45.
[280] Vowel, *Indigenous*, 93.
[281] Hughes, "Exposing," 26:00.
[282] Justice, *Why*, 139.
[283] Wente, "Jesse Wente," 02:23-02:26.

What is the path forward then? Relationality and respect, values intrinsic to Indigenous epistemologies, connect all the suggestions expressed by Indigenous critics. As Keeshig-Tobias says, "the most important thing for a non-Native writer to do when they write about Native issues is to have respect – respect means research and talking to the people."[284] Talking to people and research leads to establishing relationships. That means to put aside the Western idea of creative writing as an individualistic intellectual and imaginative activity and accept relationality and accountability to a community as guidelines when writing about Indigenous experience. Respect can also mean refrainment. Vowel writes that "remaining an outsider, in certain ways, might be the most respectful way you engage with another culture."[285] This might be hard to reconcile with the idea of free speech, but when one learns about consequences of colonialism and when one starts building relationships with Indigenous peoples, it becomes clearer why speaking for them is harmful, and it might be easier to make the choice not to speak or write. Kim Tallbear (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate) brilliantly writes that "identity is a poor substitute for relations."[286] Rather than claiming to be Indigenous on the basis on a distant relative, one should start by building relationships with a community, be it out of kinship or not. It is the relationships that create a place for one in Indigenous communities, and there is a space for non-Indigenous people as well, as we have seen in Kinew's comments on Boyden.

Creating space for Indigenous voices to be heard represents another step to improvement. Margery Fee notes that repeatedly "Indigenous writers pointed out that what they needed was political solidarity and support, not the be spoken for, but to be heard."[287] The foundation of IVAs constitutes a move in this direction and hopefully more will come. Archibald also states that non-Indigenous people are not excluded from the conversation but that Indigenous writers need their own space to talk and share.[288] Respecting this space and protecting it is what means to be an ally.

Boyden's and Latimer's cases also showed that Canadian cultural institutions should reconsider the way they choose people to speak about and represent Indigenous experience. In a Canadaland podcast, Jesse Brown articulates this aptly:

---

[284] Fee, "Trickster Moment," 67.

[285] Vowel, *Indigenous*, 87.

[286] Kim Tallbear, "Playing Indian Constitutes a Structural Form of Colonial Theft, and It Must Be Tackled," *Kim Tallbear*, published May 10, 2021, https://kimtallbear.substack.com/p/playing-indian-constitutes-a-structural?r=dv6ay&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&utm_source=twitter&fbclid=IwAR2wmSGin3XV12jc3fnfVN-zSKeFp9R9XqNy0GImqIEQo1PecQ47RJJGAx4.

[287] Fee, "Trickster Moment," 69.

[288] Archibald, *Indigenous*,19.

> It wasn't Indigenous people who made Joseph Boyden the biggest Indigenous novelist in Canada, and it was not Indigenous people who decreed that Michelle Latimer was to be the foremost Indigenous filmmaker in Canada. Our cultural establishment did that, and our cultural establishment is not Indigenous. Out of all the talented Indigenous people looking for opportunities, our gatekeepers somehow found two Indigenous people who are not considered Indigenous by Indigenous people. How we managed that is not an Indigenous issue or a mess that Indigenous people should be left to clean up.[289]

Involving more Indigenous people in the decision-making processes might be a part of the solution as well as providing support for independent, Indigenous-lead projects. At the same time, the question of Indigenous identity and criteria of belonging should be held in Indigenous communities. This discussion will definitely take several more years and the conclusions might differ depending on specific communities and the impact of colonial policies on them. Meanwhile, non-Indigenous population might use the time to educate themselves about the colonial history and the intricacies of Indigenous experience in a settler state.

3.4 Closing remarks

The issue of appropriation exemplifies the long-lasting and far-reaching consequences of cultural colonialism and shows that decolonization is still an ongoing process. It is important to mention appropriation when discussing Indigenous storytelling because storytelling as a means of self-representation and cultural preservation was one of the cultural practices hit by colonial policies. The persisting misunderstandings in regard ownership of stories, knowledge and right to speak about Indigenous experience then demonstrate the rifts between the Indigenous and the Western perspectives.

Understanding of relationality and responsibility, values highlighted in this work as cornerstones of Indigenous epistemologies, is essential to comprehend the requirements Indigenous writers articulate to amend and prevent appropriation. The sensitivity of Indigenous writers to this issue comes also from the sense of relationality transmitted by stories. The very process of storytelling is based on relationality and stories often teach about the importance of healthy relations. When stories or voices are appropriated, it signals all the more that this core concept is misread or disregarded in non-Indigenous

[289] Brown, "#359 The Convenient," 07:57-08:33.

society. It is regrettable that stories that should ensure good relations are used in the way that destroys them.

4 SKY WOMAN

4.1 The Sky Woman story

There is no better way to open this chapter than with a story, the story of Sky Woman. The Sky Woman creation story[290] is one of many creation stories told on Turtle Island. Each nation has their creation story and, as common in oral tradition, each community or family would have their own version. The Sky Woman story is told by Nishnaabeg[291] (Ojibway) people, Haudenosaunee (Iroqouis) and there are many commonalities in Cherokee and Blackfoot creation story.

Since the goal of this work is to give space to Indigenous voices and avoid silencing or appropriating them, the story will be retold here as a sequence of quotations from a number of Indigenous sources rather than me retelling it without permission to do so. Parts of short stories by Indigenous writers will be used for this retelling as well as miscellaneous versions of the story in video formats and in prefaces to collections of stories and in theoretical texts by Indigenous scholars. This method should, on one hand, demonstrate the multiplicity of individual variations of the story and the quantity of the culturally diverse sources using the story, and on the other hand, allow us to cite all the details significant for later discussion. Quoting one version of the story, albeit easier to follow, more coherent in the form, and perhaps more in line with academic standards, would limit the inclusion of alternate features and would create a misleading impression that the one cited version has certain authoritative value, that it is the "right" one. So, here is/are the story/ies of Sky Woman:[292]

[290] There is no universally used title of this story, sources refer to it in a number of ways such as "the story about The Woman who Fell from the Sky" (Robin Ridington, "Got Any Grapes: Reading Thomas King's The Back of the Turtle," *Canadian Literature*, issue 224 (Spring 2015), tale of "the Woman who Fell from the Sky" (Irene M. Morrison, "Stories to Stop the Apocalypse: Indigenous Mythmaking as Solidarity-Building Practice in Thomas King's *The Back of the Turtle*," *South Atlantic Review*, vol. 83, no. 3 (Fall 2018), "the legend of First Woman" (Marta Dvorak, "Thomas King's Fusion and Confusion: Or What Happened to My Earth without Form?" *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1 (Fall 1996), "the Skywoman story" (Kimmerer, *Braiding*). For the purpose of this work, I decided on a simple denomination "the Sky Woman story" or "the Sky Woman creation story". This title does not want to be normative, it is used solely for the purpose of unity and clarity within the text.

[291] This spelling is used by Leanne Simpson and as she explains, it refers to Ojibway, Ottawa, Potawatomi, Michi Saagig, Saulteaux, Chippewa, and Algonquin people (Simpson, *Dancing*, 25). Other variations of the name used in sources are Anishnaabe, Anishnawbe, Anishinaabeg, Anishinaubae, etc. See Gregory Younging, *Elements*, 70.

[292] The various versions of the spelling of Sky Woman are kept as in the original texts and therefore differ.

"Back at the beginning of imagination, the world we know as earth was nothing but water, while above the earth, somewhere in space, was a larger, more ancient world. And on that world was a woman."[293]

". . . Sky Woman once lived in the Sky World where earth years were but mere seconds to the Sky People. Sky People were magical beings who were surrounded by a gentle light, and they knew neither pain nor death. They were similar to human beings in their ability to love and care for one another, and in their ability to dream."[294]

"And the wife [Sky Woman] was pregnant and like humans, [she] desired a certain food. What she wanted was the roots of this tree that was called the Tree of Life. Because she wanted this root from this Tree of Life so much, she ran over to it and began digging underneath tree to get to the roots."[295]

". . . somewhere in the black realm of space, on another world, a woman was digging for tubers. . . She's a strong woman, she is, and she digs and she digs and she digs, until …? She digs a hole into the sky . . . And what's a woman to do when faced with such an aperture? Why she looks into it."[296]

". . . she stuck her head into that hole so she could get a better view. That's very curious, she said again, and she stuck her head even farther into the hole."[297]

"Sky Woman fell from the upper world through a hole in the sky."[298]

"She falls for ages. She falls for so long that she has time to scream, to cry, to pray, to lose and regain her sanity and, finally, to sleep."[299]

"She fell like a maple seed, pirouetting on an autumn breeze . . . Hurtling downward, she saw only dark water below. But in that emptiness there were many eyes gazing up at the sudden shaft of light."[300]

". . . the birds be the first to see her, for they possess the gift of sight . . . they fly up into the sky, beat their wings to great effect, and catch her on their backs. Then slowly, very slowly, they lower her to the surface of the water . . . Our woman is no water creature, and if the water creatures abandon her to the sea, she'll drown."[301]

"One of them, A'nó:wara – the shell creature – rose from the waters and told the woman that she could rest on its shell."[302]

---

[293] King, *Truth*, 10.

[294] Sandra Laronde, *Sky Woman: Indigenous Women Who Have Shaped, Moved or Inspired Us* (Pentincton, British Columbia: Theytus Books, 2005), vii.

[295] "The Creation Story," *Onondaga Historical Association, YouTube*, April 28, video, 2016, 00:32-00:56, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WSzDM7Jmg94&t=105s.

[296] Thomas King, *The Back of the Turtle* (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers, 2014), 223-224.

[297] King, *Truth*, 13.

[298] Laronde, *Sky Woman*, vii.

[299] Skawennati, "She Falls for Ages," *skawennati*, accessed July 20, 2019, video, 14:34-15:10, http://skawennati.com/SheFallsForAges/index.html.

[300] Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 3.

[301] King, *Back*, 225.

[302] *Our Story: Aboriginal Voices on Canada's Past* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2004), 18.

“. . . and everyone was happy. Well, at least for the next month or so. Until the animals noticed that Charm [Sky Woman] was going to have a baby.

It’s going to get a little crowded, said the Muskrats.”[303]

“But, the woman thought, if only she had some earth . . . she could create a new life for herself on the shell creature’s back.”[304]

“As she settled down on the turtle’s back, Sky Woman asked for a small morsel of soil.”[305]

“The deep divers among them had heard of mud at the bottom of the water and agreed to go find some.”[306]

“One after the other, the creatures tried, and one after the other, they failed.”[307]

“Not one returned with a particle of soil. They all offered an excuse: too deep, too dark, too cold, there are evil manitous keeping watch.”[308]

“Soon only little Muskrat was left, the weakest diver of all. He volunteered to go while the other looked on doubtfully. . . They waited and waited for him to return, fearing the worst for their relative, and, before long, a stream of bubbles rose with the small limp body of the muskrat. He had given his life to aid this helpless human.”[309]

“All the creatures gather round and there in muskrat’s paws is a ball of mud.”[310]

“Skywoman bent and spread the mud with her hands across the shell of the turtle. Moved by extraordinary gifts of the animals, she sang in thanksgiving and then began to dance, her feet caressing the earth. The land grew and grew as she danced her thanks, from the dab of mud on Turtle’s back until the whole earth was made. Not by Skywoman alone, but from the alchemy of all the animals’ gifts coupled with her deep gratitude. Together they formed what we know today as Turtle Island, our home.

Like any good guest, Skywoman had not come empty-handed . . . When she toppled from the hole in the Skyworld she had reached out to grab onto the Tree of Life that grew there. In her grasp were branches – fruits and seeds of all kinds of plants. These she scattered onto the new ground . . . Wild grasses, flowers, trees, and medicines spread everywhere.”[311]

“She then breathed the breath of life, growth, and abundance into the soil and infused into the soil and earth the attributes of womanhood and

---

[303] King, *Truth*, 16.
[304] *Our Story,* 19.
[305] Basil H. Johnston and Norval Morrisseau, *The Art of Norval Morrisseau, the Writings of Basil H. Johnston* (Calgary: Glenbow-Alberta Institute, 1999), 3.
[306] Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 4.
[307] King, *Back of the Turtle*, 233.
[308] Johnston, “Is There,” 58.
[309] Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 4.
[310] King, *Back*, 233.
[311] Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 4-5.

motherhood, that of giving life, nourishment, shelter, instruction, and inspiration for the heart, mind, and spirit."[312]

"There on the land, Sky Woman gave birth to a little boy and girl. The animals brought seeds, berries, fruit, nectars for Sky Woman and her children. Later, they gave their flesh as food, their fur as clothing, and their bones as tools.

Birds, animals, insects, and fish saved humans from drowning and kept them from starvation ever since."[313]

As mentioned at the beginning, the story exists in multitude of versions. In some variations, the woman is not hungry but sick and seeks medicine by the tree, others say it is an otter instead of a muskrat who brings the piece of mud, in some the muskrat dies, in other versions he is just very exhausted, in one version the woman gives birth to twins, in others to a daughter, in some versions the Tree of Life is just a tree. Regardless of the actual version, the story is not only an explication of the beginning of the human world, but it carries essential epistemological assumptions, too.

4.2 Enstoried principles

The Sky Woman story is referenced and alluded to in a number of texts by Indigenous authors, both in works of fiction and theory. The frequency of the allusions is not the only factor speaking about the importance of the story in Indigenous cultures. It is the common initial position of the story in collections and anthologies that shows the quintessence of the ideas carried in it; the story represents a point of departure. For example, the collection of Norval Morrisseau's pictures accompanied by Basil H. Johnston's writings (1999) opens with this story as well as a volume of Indigenous fiction titled *Our Story: Aboriginal Voices on Canada's Past* from 2004, Robin Wall Kimmerer retells this story in the first chapter of her book on Indigenous wisdom and teachings of plants *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013) and Thomas King builds the Massey lectures he delivered in 2003 around this story.

The significance of the story is frequently declared in the texts but also directly manifested by the placement of it which illustrates the story is and should be a starting ground for discussions of Indigenous principles (or at least in regard the nations that tell this particular creation story). Leanne Simpson asserts that creation stories "set the

[312] Basil Johnston, *The Manitous: The Spiritual World of the Ojibway* (Saint Paul, Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1995), xv.

[313] Johnston and Morrisseau, *Art*, 3.

'theoretical framework', or give us the ontological context" which is a finding coming not only from her but importantly also from her elders, who say that "everything we need to know is encoded in the structure, content and context of these stories and the relationships, ethics and responsibilities required to *be* our own Creation Story" (emphasis original).[314] Creation stories are essential for understanding the world, one's position in it and one's relationships within creation. Interestingly, the elders do not highlight only the content but also the structure and context of these stories which are equally important for its message. In my understanding, the structure and context are informed by principles based on relationality; relationality and the Rs influence how the story is told, why, and what about.

While the significance of creation stories is generally acknowledged and the teachings in it revered, they are not of a dogmatic nature and are often retold with humorous elements. For example, the Sky Woman story is repeated in the story of the trickster and flood, in which he tricks the animals to dive down because he is lazy and wants a place to rest,[315] or, in Vizenor's favorite version of the story, the trickster gets the idea to create earth when he defecates and sees his excrement floating around him.[316] The latter will be more discussed in the following chapter; now, it is important to say that the existence of these versions prevents the creation story from becoming an unquestionable doctrine and creates a space for critical revision of the established principles.

Since creation stories set the ontological ground for understanding, it is through them as well that identity is established. As Kimmerer says "they [creation stories] tell us who we are."[317] For their cosmological quality, they are a part of so-called Original Instructions, ancient teachings; they provide essential ethical guidelines. However, she is quick to add that they are not instructions in the sense of an order or command: "They are like compass: they provide an orientation but not a map. The work of living is creating that map for yourself."[318] The concrete, practical application of these rules depends on the individual and their way of translating them into their life. The concept of need for internalization of the story discussed before echoes here. It requires an active presence and also a certain amount of creativity in order the individual is able to construct their own

[314] Simpson, *Dancing*, 32, 33.

[315] Linda Morra, "A Conversation with Christopher Kientz," in Troubling *Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations,* ed. Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), 126; Scott, *âtalôhkâna*, 36.

[316] Gerald Vizenor, *Earthdivers: Tribal Narratives on Mixed Descent* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), xii.

[317] Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 7.

[318] Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 7.

"map" of living. Creativity as one of the themes of the story also becomes a necessary skill for its full understanding. Similarly, Donald L. Fixico mentions that "creation myths also contain valuable insight into the correct way of life by providing a code of conduct for people to follow."[319] I call these instructions "enstoried" principles since they are rooted within the story and form the core teachings of the Sky Woman story regardless of the version narrated. These principles are reflected in the themes of the stories and in their structure, as well as in the way meaning is supposed to be derived from them. Not only does the story talk about these principles but simultaneously these principles shape the story as such. Let us see now what the essential principles ingrained in this story are to understand their importance and to get a better insight into Indigenous frames of reference and worldviews.

4.2.1 Reciprocity leading to respect

In the story, land was not created by Sky Woman solely, it was not an individual, but communal effort. She would not be able to bring into being Turtle Island without the help of animals. And even before that, the geese made sure she did not hurt or kill herself by falling straight into the water so they showed consideration for other beings. This tells us that people need other beings for survival and well-being, we are mutually dependent on each other. The land grew, as Kimmerer says "not by Skywoman alone, but from the alchemy of all the animals' gifts coupled with her deep gratitude."[320] Sky woman understood that the animals put themselves into danger for her and they keep doing that until today as we can see when Basil Johnston ends his short version of the story by the following sentence: "Birds, animals, insects, and fish saved humans from drowning and kept them from starvation ever since."[321] The gratitude Sky Woman expressed for their sacrifice enabled creating more space and better conditions of life for everybody. In other words, people need to understand that they are dependent on each other and on other creatures and they need to honour that other beings contribute to their well-being. If we do so and acknowledge the reciprocity of living, good life for everybody is secured. Also, awareness of the importance of all creation leads to respect to all creation. We never know

[319] Fixico, *"That's,"* 47-48.
[320] Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 4.
[321] Johnston and Morrisseau, *Art*, 3.

who might save us from drowning, it might be the least expected individual, as the muskrat in the story. Christopher Teuton summarizes that aptly, writing:

> The creation of Elohi[322] is made possible by the values that arise when creatures recognize their shared stake in survival. Communal solidarity, egalitarian discussion and consensus, and individual self-sacrifice for the welfare of the whole are necessary conditions for finding and developing that new space on which the community may grow.[323]

Recognition of reciprocity of creation enables respectful relationship towards all beings and is a necessary ground on which the community, or the whole world, can be created.

4.2.2 Relationality and responsibility

Relationality of the story is closely linked to the previous principle. The story talks about our relationship to Sky Woman, to the beginning of our world and also to the other beings because our world would not be created if it was not for the help of non-human creatures. "She [Sky Woman] is our connective tissue,"[324] Laronde (Anishinaabe) says, linking people to all the rest of creation (also reflected in the expression "all our relations" discussed in Chapter 2). These relationships are reciprocal, there are responsibilities as well as benefits since "duties and gifts are two sides of the same coin,"[325] as Kimmerer says, and talks about Indigenous cultures as cultures of gratitude. Sky Woman was grateful to the animals, she created a world and gave it as a gift to them and to her children to use. The gift represents a relationship and binds the receiver by the responsibility to maintain the relationship and to give back.[326] The responsibility coming from this gift is dual: responsibility to the rest of creation and also responsibility to ourselves. Simpson says that "we are each responsible for being present in our own lives and engaged in our own realities."[327] This is what Kimberley M. Blaeser calls "responseability"[328] – the responsibility to respond to and being engaged in life, which she finds to be a common feature of Indigenous literature. Only by being active and present in one's life story one

[322] Elohi means earth, our world, in Cherokee (Teuton, *Deep Waters,* xi).
[323] Teuton, *Deep Waters*, xiii.
[324] Laronde, *Sky Woman*, vii.
[325] Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 115.
[326] Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 25.
[327] Simpson, *Dancing*, 43.
[328] Kimberley M. Blaeser, "Pagans Rewriting the Bible: Heterodoxy and the Representation of Spirituality in Native American Literature," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 25, no. 1 (January 1994): 12.

can become a solid member of a community. In other words, apart from relations to all creation, the story also emphasizes the relation to one's self. This leads Teuton to write: "This story shapes me. I never tire of its beauty and its meanings; it is both a story and a constant source of reflection on the responsibilities of being."[329]

For Leanne Simpson, the aspect of responsibility serves as a basis for her concept of Indigenous resurgence, a cultural-political movement of re-creation and reaction to colonization, whose aim is to "produce more life and to re-create the conditions for living as Nishnaabeg peoples following our own inherent processes and expressions of life."[330] Since the consequences of colonialism cut deep into Indigenous cultures, she appeals to every Indigenous individual to take part in the process. To explain what is needed, Simpson uses the story saying the individuals should imagine themselves as the muskrat, diving deep down to search for a handful of earth. This represents the individual's search for meaning, roots, self, identity, connection to culture, dive to self-knowledge to recognize one's gifts and abilities. Deriving from Basil Johnston's understanding of the story, Drew Hayden Taylor calls this process "archetypal self-exploration, reaching deep inside yourself to find . . . the essence of who you are."[331] Having accomplished that, the act has to be collectivized and by meeting individual and communal responsibilities, what Simpson calls "implicate order"[332] grants success to re-creation. "After Mikinaag came forward and volunteered to carry the weight of the world on her back, the implicate order acted such that the earth and the Turtle's back grew into the great expanse of North America,"[333] she writes. The individual gift of the turtle was supported by the communal act of animals searching for the earth and the collectivized action was blessed. "Resurgence is dancing on our turtle's back,"[334] Simpson concludes, and at the same time explains the origin of the title of her book. The individual, communal and spiritual intersect in the dance. This serves as an example that the story can be used as a model for mental self-care as well as formation of political and cultural agenda.

Christopher Teuton perceives the story as a parallel to critical thinking and creation of knowledge, the dive down representing search for meaning. Similarly to Simpson, he talks about the necessity to bring the individual act into social context: "We depend on

---

[329] Teuton, *Deep Waters*, xiii.
[330] Simpson, *Dancing*, 144.
[331] Taylor, "Alive and Well," 30.
[332] Simpson, *Dancing*, 69.
[333] Simpson, *Dancing*, 69.
[334] Simpson, *Dancing*, 70.

each other to help articulate and extend what we've found and brought to the surface, for if we do not, we are left simply with a handful of mud."[335] Creation of new theories, new worlds, is conditioned by the cooperation of the individual and community, by the creation and maintenance of mutual relationships. Ideas might be powerful and transformative but if they are not meaningful on broader scope than an individual, they are not worth much.

4.2.3 Creativity

When Sky Woman fell, she did not have but a handful of seeds with her. To create the world, she had to use her imagination.[336] The story highlights creative powers of individuals. It is a story of essential importance because it empowers immensely every individual. Everybody is capable to create a new world by imagination and dreaming[337] and create "a purpose to give meaning their lives."[338] This changes the whole perception of the world, it is not something that was created independently on us and for us, without our contribution, and to which we need to learn to adapt. In this story, people can actively change and create the world they live in. Of course, creativity in the story stems from reciprocity and responsibility which ensures limitation of ego and sets the individual into communal context. Sky Woman's creation was an expression of gratitude rather than a selfish desire.

The relevance of the creation story to one's own possibility to create is given by the cyclicality of Indigenous stories. The Sky Woman story is repeated in the trickster and flood story but also each retelling represents a new creation. "Creation myths are not time-bound, the creation takes place in the telling,"[339] as Vizenor says. The story talks about the first creation but simultaneously each telling sets ground for a new re-creation. In other words, creation did not happen once a long time ago and for good, but happens over and over again and is constantly and cyclically being renewed. Kroeber says that Indigenous cosmos is "continuously self-recreative" and that storytelling is a "distinctively human contribution" to this incessant process of renewal.[340] The Sky Woman creation story embodies this notion.

---

[335] Teuton, *Deep Waters,* xiv.

[336] Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 8.

[337] Simpson, *Dancing*, 42; Laronde, *Sky Woman*, vii; Teuton, *Deep Waters,* xii.

[338] Johnston, "Is There," 58.

[339] Vizenor, *Earthdivers*, xii.

[340] Karl Kroeber (ed.), *Native American Storytelling: A Reader of Myths and Legends* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 49.

The notion of creativity, which stands in the centre of the story, explains the frequency of its use in literature as well. Writing is a creative act and as such it is directly linked to this story. The authors create worlds in their stories. Reliance on the Sky Woman creation story emphasizes creativity of writing on one hand, on the other it also conceptualizes Indigenous writing. Indigenous writing is creative but also relational, reciprocal and linked to responsibility – it is informed by the enstoried principles.

4.3 Indigenous Place-Thought versus creation as hierarchy

Since the Sky Woman story sets theoretical and ontological frameworks for Indigenous thinking, as said earlier, scholarly discussion has naturally been engaged in exploring the differences between the Indigenous paradigms emerging from this story and the Western paradigms, grounded in Christianity, humanism, and the Enlightenment.

Vanessa Watts, an Anishnaabe and Haudenosaunee scholar, in her article "Indigenous Place-Thought & Agency amongst Humans and Non-Humans"[341] brilliantly explains the essential disparities between these two knowledge systems. The term Place-Thought signifies world's or land's animacy and agency and the inseparability of place and cognitive processes. In this view, Sky Woman becomes part of the land and therefore the premises she carried with herself and in her story are embodied in humans and their societies because they originate from and are defined by land: "When Sky Woman falls from the sky and lies in the back of a turtle, she is not only able to create land but becomes territory itself. Therefore, Place-Thought is an extension of her circumstance, desire, and communication with the water and animals – her agency."[342] Human body consists of the same elements as land, it is a part of land, or as Watts says, "our flesh is literally an extension of soil."[343] This means people carry Sky Woman's thoughts in their flesh, they are inseparable from her because they are born from her body, the land. This is also true for other beings as Watts calls all beings "literal embodiments of localized meanings."[344] People and their societies are defined by the territory they occupy, even if the territory is as broadly demarcated as land or the world. People are born in this world, which is the flesh

[341] Vanessa Watts, "Indigenous Place-Thought & Agency amongst Humans and Non-Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go on a European World Tour!)," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2013).

[342] Watts, "Indigenous," 23.

[343] Watts, "Indigenous," 27.

[344] Watts, "Indigenous," 27.

and thought of Sky Woman and consequently, their bodies hold meanings emerging with Sky Woman.

There are three other important ideas for our discussion which arise from the inseparability of humans and Place-Thought. Firstly, union of human body and Place-Thought opens up human connection to the non-human, spiritual realm. Sky Woman inscribed herself into the land, but she herself was out of this world. Through placing her thoughts into the land and consequently our bodies, people receive access to the non-human realm as well. Secondly, all beings share the same connection as humans to land, which means all beings have the same agency and access to Place-Thought.[345] Agency and thinking are not human domains only, but a common feature of all creation. And thirdly, humans come to world last in the Sky Woman story which means they arrived "in a state of dependence on an already-functioning society with particular values, ethics."[346] The late arrival of humans to an already existing environment was solved by agreements with the natural world, which ensured humans become a part of the creation. Human respect towards creation should spring from the knowledge they were the last to arrive, with the least knowledge, and their survival is determined by their relation to other species. Teuton writes similarly that "the world does not begin with humans at the center of existence, but with animals, our teachers and sources of sustenance, who through their complex relations afford us mirrors by which we may understand ourselves and our world."[347] It can be concluded that animals sustain people not only by their flesh but also by their longer and deeper understanding of the world; they sustain people by their knowledge.

The difference of Western ontological-epistemological assumptions lies in the separation of body and thought, body and intellect.[348] Cognitive abilities make humans distinct from other beings, which is an idea which might imply sense of hierarchy with humans on a higher place than the rest of the natural world. The separation of body and intellect also allows exploitation of nature since nature represents a source of commodities sustaining body rather than a source of primordial thought. Colonial thinking perceiving land as an ownable entity stems from this separation. This is not to say that Western knowledge systems are inevitably colonial. Watts says that this heritage of Cartesian dualism "creates space for colonial practices to occur,"[349] not that the theory itself is

[345] Watts, "Indigenous," 23.
[346] Watts, "Indigenous," 25.
[347] Teuton, *Deep Waters*, xiii.
[348] Watts, "Indigenous," 29.
[349] Watts, "Indigenous," 28.

intrinsically colonial. The moment the theory starts to emphasize the differences between the body and mind instead of perceiving them in relation, the space for hierarchical, and by extension, colonial thinking is opened.

Dwayne Donald (Papaschase Cree) sees the emphasis on rationality in Western thinking as the point of differentiation between the Indigenous and Western epistemologies. Hegelian faith in science and understanding world by reason together with Cartesian skepticism laid ground for the perception of reason as liberatory and for considering spiritual and metaphysical understanding of the world as immature.[350] The fact that the liberation happens within oneself, within one's mind creates this separation of body and mind that Watts describes. Linda Tuhiwai Smith describes similar notion when talking about distance as an important concept for Western thinking, in which individual can be distanced from society and place.[351] The idea of Place-Thought, on the other hand, highlights the indivisibility of mind, body, and place; rationality is subjective, but subjectivity is still bound to place and to a continuation of Sky Woman's agency.

Thomas King has also dedicated a considerable portion of his work to the differences between Indigenous and Western thinking, and to the differences between Biblical and Sky Woman creation stories in particular. Apart from him working with these two stories in his fiction, he also devoted the first lecture of the CBC Massey lectures, aired in 2003, to this topic. With wit and humor characteristic to him, he describes a number of incongruities between Genesis and the story of Sky Woman, whom he calls Charm in the lecture. Biblical universe is hierarchical, competitive, individualistic whereas Indigenous world stands on values of egalitarianism, cooperation, and balance.[352] Hierarchy (God – man - animals - plants) creates a sense of order which is also reflected in the Western need and liking of binary oppositions since they simplify and structuralize the world. In Genesis, harmony and perfection is restricted to paradise, from which humans were expelled, whereas in the Sky Woman story

> we begin with water and mud, and, through the good offices of Charm, her twins, and the animals, move by degrees and adjustments from a formless, featureless world to a world that is rich in its diversity, a world that is complex and complete.[353]

---

[350] Donald, *Pedagogy*, 105.

[351] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples (London: Zed Books, 2012), 55-59.

[352] King, *Truth*, 23.

[353] King, *Truth*, 24.

In other words, there is no other paradise, the perfection is here in this world already. It is complex but without the sense of chaos since all the beings carry the ethics of interconnectedness and cooperation established in them by the means of creation. These rules are not imposed but lived because they are written in the land itself, as explained in the previous paragraphs. As King observes, the harmony in Genesis is conditioned by one rule – not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.[354] Apart from the obvious finding that this rule is not inherent in humans but comes from the external force, God, it is interesting to note that knowledge in Biblical story is external, too. Knowledge is represented by the tree and its apples that must be eaten before knowledge is gained. Therefore, to connect it with Watts's idea of Place-Thought, knowledge and body, body and thought is separate already in Genesis.

Tomson Highway discusses similar ideas to King's in *Comparing Mythologies*, a published version of his Charles R. Bronfman lecture, in which he mentions the tree of knowledge as well and says "that tree of knowledge is there, right there in the middle of the garden for us to partake of, for us to enjoy, for us to celebrate every day, twice, thrice a day if we have to."[355] For him, the source of knowledge is not prohibited or unattainable, but it is a part of common life, accessible any time. Interestingly, Highway also notices the separation of space and humans in Christianity as a consequence of the expulsion from paradise, saying that "space . . . was taken from us,"[356] which results in the Western emphasis on time rather than space. Similarly, Vizenor writes that creation stories focus on return to land, "rather than a separation from the earth and a futurist transcendence to a computerized heaven."[357] For Watts, traditional stories are extensions of Place-Thought and thus inherently connected to land and cannot teach otherwise.

In this light, the ontologies and epistemologies which arise from these two stories are profoundly different. Of course, there are many streams in the Western thought, some perhaps more attuned to Indigenous flux, and the characterizations described above are necessarily somewhat simplifying. Notwithstanding, certain general dissimilarities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous thinking are definitely noticeable and have been noted before (consider, for example, the famous issue of ownership of land). Therefore, it is understandable Indigenous writers feel the need to retell the Sky Woman story because it

---

[354] King, *Truth*, 21.
[355] Tomson Highway, *Comparing Mythologies* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2003), 47.
[356] Highway, *Comparing*, 32.
[357] Vizenor, *Earthdivers*, xi.

prepares the ground, literally, for a very different conceptual world. The enstoried principles represent an important part of these epistemological concepts. Having explained that, let us now see, finally, how the story is implemented in contemporary fiction.

4.4 Thomas King and First Women

4.4.1 Subversiveness of *Green Grass, Running Water*

The theme of the Sky Woman creation story features in several Thomas King's works. Ten years before giving the Massey lectures, King published his second novel, *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993),[358] which was well received both by public readership and critics. The latter praised mainly the way King combines and contrasts Genesis with the Indigenous creation story with the aim of undermining Western ontological dominance, calling the novel subversive,[359] re-examining colonising narratives[360] and Western mythology and heritage,[361] disruptive and with "political and cultural agenda"[362] and decolonizing.[363] For these qualities, together with its narrative playfulness and a creative use of the character of trickster, the novel has been associated with postmodernity.[364] Putting the limitations of the postmodern perception of the text aside for a while, the following briefly summarizes several key points the novel brings up in terms of creation stories.

The novel has four sections, each of them introduced by a heading in Cherokee syllabary denoting one of four cardinal directions and a color connected to it.[365] However, structuring the novel into four sections might also mirror four gospels of the New Testament, as Marta Dvorak notices.[366] Preceding the first section, there is a short retelling

---

[358] Thomas King, *Green Grass, Running Water* (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993).

[359] James H. Cox, "'All This Water Imagery Must Mean Something': Thomas King's Revision of Narratives of Domination and Conquest in *Green Grass, Running Water*," *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2000): 220; Ibis Gómez-Vega, "Subverting the 'Mainstream' Paradigm through Magical Realism in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*," *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, vol. 33, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 1.

[360] Jiri Salamoun, "Where Did All the Water Come From? How Water Crosses Boundaries in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*," in *Weaving New Perspectives Together: Some Reflections on Literary Studies*, edited by María M. Alonso (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012): 203.

[361] Dvorak, "Thomas King's," 88.

[362] Carlton Smith, "Coyote, Contingency, and Community: Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* and Postmodern Trickster," *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 531.

[363] Dorota Filipczak, "Paradise Revisited: Images of the First Woman in the Poetry of Joy Kogawa and the Fiction of Thomas King," *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, vol. 43 (2007): 300.

[364] Smith, "Coyote;" Filipczak, "Paradise;"Gómez-Vega, "Subverting."

[365] King, *Green*, 15.

[366] Dvorak, "Thomas King's," 87.

of the beginnings of the world in which Coyote falls asleep, starts talking to his dream-dog, which, not being content to stay just a dog, pronounces himself GOD.[367] The ironic and seditious mixture of Christian and Indigenous mythologies becomes evident from the very beginning.

By intentionally placing Christian mythology within the Indigenous story, King disrupts and reverses the dominance of the former over the latter. God is featured as a coyote's dream, coyote's invention, being pettish, spoilt, and hungry for power, characteristics resembling the coyote himself in his weak moments. The idea of God as omnipotent, omniscient, and rigorous but merciful is challenged right from the beginning and the ironic questioning of the potential of iconic figures in Christian mythology continues and is repeated in the portrayal of Adam, Noah, and Jesus. This charmingly humorous but, at the same time, for many non-Indigenous readers possibly quite unsettling approach expresses King's resistance towards and revision of dominant narratives.[368] As Ridington says, King dissects the Western tradition similarly "as Native culture has been pushed through that sort of North American grinder."[369] Simultaneously, presenting First Woman (King's name for Sky Woman in this novel) as the creator of the garden with Ahdamn arriving later and without any ado or a side story,[370] King reverses the male-oriented Christian cosmology.[371]

The differences in the nature of the creative process in the Bible and the Sky Woman story and in the relationships between humankind and animal world have also been noted by scholarly audience. Filipczak notices the dependence of people on animals portrayed by the First Woman story saying that "far from being dominated by people, as is the case in Genesis, animals communicate with human beings and provide support."[372] Cox connects the human-animal affinity instead of separation to the act of creation itself and writes that "the communal participation in the creation of land by animals and First Woman contrasts to the single-voiced command by a male deity that creates the firmament in Genesis,"[373] which expresses the difference in the individual-oriented biblical creation and the communal-oriented Indigenous one. Ridington starts his discussion of the novel

[367] King, *Green*, 1-2.

[368] Dvorak, "Thomas King's," 88; Salamoun, "Where," 206.

[369] Robin Ridington, "Coyote's Cannon: Sharing Stories with Thomas King," *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 22, no. 3 (1998): 359.

[370] King, *Green*, 39-40.

[371] Filipczak, "Paradise," 176; Dvorak, "Thomas King's," 89.

[372] Filipczak, "Paradise," 299.

[373] Cox, "All This," 224.

with Tedlock's argument of Indigenous creation stories being based on a dialogue rather than monologue, which brings him to the claim that conversation and dialogue between various beings "is at the heart of Native American poetics."[374] All these critics are actually referring to the previously examined enstoried principles of relationality and reciprocity, even though not using exactly these terms. As the novel revolves around two different stories, which set up two different worldviews, they focus on King's depiction of the disparity between communality versus individuality and equality/affinity versus dominance/hierarchy in the creation stories.

Attention has also been paid to the narrative technique of the novel which combines orality and written word and to the extensive use of water imagery. Interestingly, Smith unites these features in saying "as the watery image suggests, meaning shifts, contexts float."[375] As Salamoun notices, water invariably accompanies any restorative moment in the novel.[376] Water is an essential element in the Sky Woman story – she falls into it, animals dive into it to bring the piece of mud, and eventually land is created on the turtle's back floating in water. Naturally, water represents restorative and creative force, too. However, at the end of the novel, a dam is broken, and the water sweeps away both Eli and his cottage. As contradictory as it might seem, Cox reads this within the restorative power of the element. Water in the novel signifies "not doom, but a balance of destruction and creation, with a primary focus on the restoration of life."[377] The fact that a few chapters before Alberta is depicted as waiting in the rain, after which her early pregnancy gets apparent, supports this claim. In regard to water which shifts meaning, Salamoun focuses on the "revisionary nature" of water speaking of the element as subverting "the value-truth which is associated with Christian culture and stories."[378] Water replaces the void and darkness in Genesis as the starting point for creation of the world.

Similar revisionary nature can be attributed to the narrative technique based on orality. King's reliance on dialogue, conversation and multiplicity of narrative voices cannot escape the reader. Many other rhetoric devices, however, recognized as typical for the author not only in this work, such as unfinished sentences, omitted verbs, expressions

---

[374] Ridington, "Coyote's Cannon," 344.
[375] Smith, "Coyote," 529.
[376] Salamoun, "Where," 216.
[377] Cox, "All This," 230.
[378] Salamoun, "Where," 208.

of laughter, flexible syntax etc., are employed in the text.[379] The fluidity and amoebic flow of the narrative voices contribute to the subversive character of the novel, to the shifting meanings and floating contexts. Smith mentions that orality "displaces absence with an active, disruptive, and fleeting presence; it undermines the encoded narrative which seeks to contain Native American discourse."[380] Despite the fact the novel is obviously written, usage of orality in it counteracts the stability, normativity, and hegemony associated with the written word.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, most of the critics examined the novel through the lenses of postmodernity for which subversiveness, critical and ironic re-evaluation of master narratives and blending of genres is typical.[381] There has been a debate on the validity of application of Western theories on Indigenous texts suggesting that there are considerable limitations to such an approach coming from the dissimilarity of the Western and Indigenous conceptual frameworks. King himself in the well-known article "Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial" criticizes the fact that many scholars readily and willingly interpret Indigenous literature by postcolonial perspective. Several of the objections he raises can be extended to other Western theories, including postmodernism. One of the problems with the terminology is the temporal designation contained in the term postcolonial/postmodern. "The term organizes the literature progressively suggesting that there is both progress and improvement,"[382] King writes. The most serious misconception in applying non-Indigenous theories on Indigenous works is, in his words, that such practice "cuts us off from our traditions, traditions that were in place before colonialism ever became a question, traditions that have come down to us through our cultures in spite of colonization."[383] In other words, the fact that various aspects of Indigenous texts can be and usually are explained by Western terms overshadows the investigation whether certain devices come from Indigenous tradition. Blending, fusion, and ahistorical approach was recognized by, for example, Penny Petrone, Mareike Neuhaus and Neal McLeod as inherent to narratives in Indigenous cultures long before postmodernism developed.[384] This is not to say that the scholars did not acknowledge Indigeneity of the texts, they surely did

---

[379] Teresa Gibert, "Written Orality in Thomas King's Short Fiction," *Journal of the Short Story in English*, vol. 47 (Fall 2006); Dvorak, "Thomas King's."

[380] Smith, "Coyote," 528.

[381] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), 3.

[382] King, "Godzilla," 11.

[383] King, "Godzilla," 12.

[384] Petrone, Native; McLeod, Cree; Mareike Neuhaus, *The Decolonizing Poetics of Indigenous Literatures* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2015).

especially in terms of the novel's link to oral tradition. Still, the narrative techniques have been mainly and primarily explained through postmodern theory. As discussed in the first chapter, merging genres and storytelling across temporal scope constitute features of Indigenous narratives. This does not mean they cannot be inspired by postmodernity as well, but the Indigenous context should be acknowledged, too. Recognizing the ability of Indigenous writers such as King to master postmodern narrative might have been overlooking that these strategies originate also, or perhaps primarily, from their artistic Indigenous consciousness.

Playful undermining of the Western epistemological dominance, humorous rewriting of the history contact of two conceptual frameworks and witty contrasting of two cultural paradigms form prominent themes and narrative strategies of the novel. What might be slightly missing in the critical discussion and what this section attempted to demonstrate is that the principles and concepts inherent in the creation story constitute part of the text as well, contribute significantly to the meaning of the novel and inform its widely recognized subversiveness.

4.4.2 The Back of the Turtle

The Back of the Turtle, published in 2014, represents another of King's adaptations and recreations of the Sky Woman story. Typically for King, the story unfurls multiple voices, perspectives, and an abundance of varied cultural references. Whereas the title implies the story at first sight, the story itself referred to as "The Woman Who Fell from the Sky" gets told only towards the middle of the novel.[385] However, there are more or less explicit allusions to Sky Woman throughout the whole work and by closer inspection, it starts to feel like the creation story forms the novel's foundations, which resurface here and there but underlie the whole development. Morrison says the story serves as a frame for the narrative as well as "educational tool used by characters."[386] The following discussion would like to point out that the story is not only a tool but also a conceptual and narrative ground of the novel.

The prologue starts with a brief description of the setting, a fog-covered shore with a tide line at dawn, and a sentence "So it would begin."[387] Water and land mark the

---

[385] King, *Back*, 222.
[386] Morrison, "Stories," 50.
[387] King, *Back*, 1.

beginning of the novel as well as the beginning of the world in the creation story. Crisp, a peculiar man with specific use of English (which Ridington explains as "the language of the King James Bible"),[388] as the reader soon has the chance to notice, is sitting on the shore with a dog and takes out an apple. Having read King's previous novels, the reader gets immediately alert with the mention of a dog, often exhibiting extraordinary features in his works (consider the significance of the dog in *Truth & Bright Water*, for example), especially in connection to the apple. The interplay and confrontation of Sky Woman and the biblical story unravels even though only in hints for now.

The following chapter of the novel introduces another man on the shore, Gabriel, who wants to end his life in the sea deprived of life in consequence of an ecological catastrophe for which he is, as a scientist working for an environmentally arrogant corporation, responsible, as we learn later on. The first direct reference to the Sky Woman story appears when he kneels down to take a handful of wet sand. He pronounces an informal fallacy in Latin, *post hoc ergo propter hoc*[389] and then thinks which animal it was who brought the first piece of earth. The ambiguity of the Latin expression leaves many explanations open (is he referring to the physical process of squeezed sand melting back to the mass, to the origin of land from/after water, to the biblical earth without form or something else?) and its connection to the creation story challenges readers. King exposes here a wide cultural referential space combining the realm of origin of Western scholasticism, Christianity, and Indigenous mythology in which the whole novel operates.

The action of the first chapter actually mirrors the Sky Woman story in the way that Gabriel plunges himself into the sea, rests on a cluster of rocks (called in accordance with the cultural interplay The Apostles) and starts drumming and singing, as Sky Woman did on the back of the turtle. His song, however, is not meant to be generative but self-destructive. Nevertheless, Gabriel's plan backfires when he fishes a girl out of the tumultuous sea, and then other people, who join him in his song. A girl falling into the sea from somewhere represents another echo of the Sky Woman story, as Morrison also recognizes saying that "the girl also has much in common with the woman who fell from the sky."[390] What Gabriel started as a destruction actually turns out to be the very beginning of recreation.

---

[388] Ridington, "Got," 165.
[389] King, *Back,* 4.
[390] Morrison, "Stories," 52.

Of course, one might be wondering why the turtle, the original world-bearer and the titular animal, is left out in Gabriel's overture. This is soon clarified. The next chapter of the novel reveals that there was a turtle in a tank in Gabriel's work and he used to watch it every day during his lunch.[391] Dorian, the head of the corporation, remembers that the turtle was large with a depression in the back, "as though it had spent its life bearing a heavy load."[392] There is also a red slash near the turtle's head; not a wound, "just a colour abnormality,"[393] Dorian recalls. Indeed, this is not an ordinary turtle. Significantly, both Gabriel and the turtle went missing recently. While being worried by Gabriel's disappearance, Dorian feels relieved by the absence of the "trouble enough" turtle, appreciating "the simplicity and silence of empty water."[394] The conceptual difference King portrays starts to take shape. Dorian, self-oriented boss of a similarly self-oriented company, values simplicity and clear plans, when everything can be managed and controlled. In other words, he represents the Western knowledge system as King understands it. Gabriel's story, on the other hand, full of unexpecting, chaotic, and hardly explicable events reminds one of the view of creation as flux. Since we start with a devastated world, the turtle is missing to emphasize how off things became under the influence of Western paradigms.

Nevertheless, Gabriel's approach to Indigeneity serves as a ground for character development in the novel since his identity and sense of belonging is not clear-cut but troubled and complicated. His name alone suggests ambiguity. When introducing himself to a girl who finds him lying naked on the beach after his suicidal attempt, she contemplates on the name and asks, "Like the left-handed twin?"[395] The question, clearly referring to Sky Woman and her twins with oppositional creative and destructive powers, remains unanswered, indicating his unwillingness to be connected with it since we know from the opening chapter that he is familiar with the story, so he knows what she is referring to. Crisp, however, when learning Gabriel's name reacts to it by allusions to the biblical angel, the messenger of annunciation.[396] Ridington comments on this ambivalence saying that "he [Gabriel] could be the first man as well as the annunciator, at least in that

---

391 King, *Back,* 22.
392 King, *Back,* 22.
393 King, *Back,* 23.
394 King, *Back,* 25.
395 King, *Back*, 36.
396 King, *Back,* 35.

other story,"[397] when analyzing King's use of the two stories differing in cultural and time setting.

As the novel proceeds and readers learn more about the characters from their remarks, Gabriel's ambiguity strengthens. On Mara's questions what it is he does Gabriel, for example, answers "I destroy worlds,"[398] which might be a simple recognition of his role in the fatal spill or a reference to the Sky Woman story. The retrospective passages from his life, however, portray his alienation and difference from Indigenous community: "His world was a world of facts, of equations, of numbers. His family's world was made up of connections and emotions."[399] His affiliation with Western science through his profession, a world of exactness and abstraction, made him disconnected with human relationships and lead to his participation in the environmental destruction. On the other hand, biblical references of his name also pose him as a messenger of saving force. In this light, Gabriel seems to be the nexus of these two fundamental stories and, by extension, worldviews, an aspect developed further on in the novel.

The girl who approaches Gabriel on the beach is called Mara and the interplay of the Indigenous and the biblical applies on her character, too. Ridington observes that "with only one more letter in her name she would be the mother of God."[400] On the other hand, Mara's solitary appearance on the shore echoes the Sky Woman story since she comes to him as a rescuer, even though rather a sarcastic one, judging from her biting remarks on his suicidal attempts.[401] She is the first person he talks to after wanting to kill himself. What becomes a friendship, and possibly a romantic relationship later on, starts. She is an artist, appreciating in art "the notion that nothing was ever done, that art was fluid and continuously full of potential."[402] This comprehension connects her also to Sky Woman and the Indigenous understanding of creation as flux, ever continuous flow, notion, which stands in certain aspects in opposition to Western science believing in cosmos as a vast but knowable system with a set of clear and unchangeable rules. Mara observes the lack of human relationships in Gabriel: "Maybe that was Gabriel's problem. Maybe he didn't have a community. . . People weren't single, autonomous entities. They were part of a larger

[397] Ridington, "Got," 166.
[398] King, *Back,* 168.
[399] King, *Back,* 184.
[400] Ridington, "Got," 166.
[401] King, *Back,* 32.
[402] King, *Back,* 189.

organism."[403] It is clear from this excerpt and from her perception of humans as part of larger living cosmos that her worldview corresponds with the principles carried in the Sky Woman creation story. The affinity of her name could be another of King's playful ambiguities or also an expression of her significance for the recreation of destructed land and relations. She saves Gabriel and thus enables the reconciliatory and restorative processes.

Having launched this rich, playful, ambiguous, and disruptive epistemological interaction, King proceeds to retell the Sky Woman story as a part of the plot towards the middle of the novel. The frame story, as Morrison recognizes it,[404] is incorporated into the text and actually serves as the turning point of the narrative since we can observe things changing gradually for the better after this moment. The retelling itself spreads out to two chapters and is performed as a communal activity and, no less importantly, as a piece of entertainment for the guests of Crisp's birthday party. Crisp takes on the role of a storyteller even though he respectfully asks Mara, being the only openly Indigenous representative in the collective, to tell it at first.[405] She, however, declines, arguing that Crisp deserves to tell the story because it is his birthday and because "no one's been here longer than you,"[406] as she says. This might be from her side recognition of him as an elder or, if we want to read in a more insinuative way, as a character with some supernatural features, "mythical" and "tricksterish" figure, as Morrison classifies him.[407] While introducing the story, Crisp announces that the story is repeated each year "as a reminder."[408] He does not specify what the story is supposed to remind one of. The way the story is retold and how it influences the characters involved suggests several explanations.

Firstly, one of the themes of the story, as discussed above, is creativity. Sky Woman singing and dancing with the other animals creates land from the mud muskrat brought and the twins she gives birth to complete the world by creating mountains, rivers, valleys, plants, the right-handed twin making everything nice and beneficial, the left-handed one creating hurdles and adversities, "until the world were complete and

[403] King, *Back,* 189.
[404] Morrison, "Stories," 50.
[405] King, *Back,* 222.
[406] King, *Back,* 223.
[407] Morrison, "Stories," 53, 56.
[408] King, *Back*, 222.

perfect."[409] The "empty acreage" is transformed into "a paradise" by their joint effort.[410] Significantly, destruction, in the hands of the left-handed twin marring things constitutes an equally important role in the creation of the world. Theirs are not powers in opposition but in mutual completion. Ridington also observes that they represent "balance and complementarity rather than opposition."[411] If we refer this notion to Gabriel, the message of the story for him seems to be that he forms an inseparable part of creation in spite of his destructive actions, that destruction is needed for balance, that it is a different way of creation rather than its negation. In other words, the story is meant to be inclusive and to awaken his creative powers.

The second point stands from the mentioned inclusiveness of the story, both in the message and in the way the story is told. Crisp encourages participation of his listeners, making them guess what happens next, asking for their opinion and welcoming their comments. It cannot be said that Crisp is the sole storyteller and Mara and Gabriel listeners, they are all active participants. Incorporation of Mara's and Gabriel's inner thoughts and reactions to the story and memories triggered by it emphasizes this fact even more. The inclusive quality of the story is especially crucial for the character of Gabriel. Sensing his need of community acceptance and having heard him singing a round dance song on the way to the party, Mara nudges Gabriel to sing a song when Crisps asks for it as a part of the storytelling. Though reluctantly, he complies, and it turns out to be a transforming moment in his development: "It had been a while since he had sung like that. In front of people. For a purpose. And he had to admit, it felt good."[412] He experiences a sense of belonging, being an active and worthwhile member of a community, performing for the benefit of all. Moreover, Mara urges him to take the lead, which he has always been too afraid and insecure to do. And finally, by singing a round dance song he discloses his Indigeneity and shows his willingness to be identified as Indigenous. In the moment of singing, Gabriel's transformation from the destructor to a creator, from a solitary man to a community member, and from identity denial to acceptance begins. As Ridington suggests, Gabriel represents both the left-handed and the right-handed twin, the two forces existing together in one person, "union of the two that creates balance."[413] Going back to the idea of Gabriel ambiguous embodiment of Western and Indigenous perspectives, we can propose

---

[409] King, *Back,* 236.
[410] King, *Back*, 237.
[411] Ridington, "Got," 167.
[412] King, *Back,* 235.
[413] Ridington, "Got," 167.

that in his character, King aims to claim that these two can actually coexist, if properly balanced and targeted towards the benefit of all, not just an individual. Morrison writes that "King manages to salvage a fleeting vision of a better world . . . through a story of a burgeoning relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities."[414]

Even though the story told represents and highlights Indigenous worldview, King keeps the cross-cultural interplay rich in these chapters, too. There are stone pillars and timbers near the entrance to the hot springs, where the party takes place, with words, in rather broken Latin, *aeterna sustineo* carved into them. It might to allude to Dante and his gate of Hell which "endures forever"[415]. However, these words can be perhaps related to the Sky Woman story as well, especially to the role of the turtle which "sustains forever" the world on his back. King challenges the temptingly easy judgement that a Latin inscription automatically refers to Western knowledge.

Similarly, King plays with our expectations in terms of the character of Crisp. Another non-Indigenous reference preceding the Sky Woman story is Crisp's exclamation "Bring me my Chariot of fire!",[416] an expression pertaining both to William Blake and the Old Testament and generally understood as a symbol of divine power or energy. By these remarks, Crisp shows his familiarity with and allegiance to Christian mythology and the tradition of Western literary canon.[417] However, King prepares a little twist for those who would jump to the conclusion that Crisp represents the non-Indigenous worldview. At the end of chapter 41, the chapter in which the re-telling of Sky Woman story is finished, it is revealed that Crisp had, "just like in the story,"[418] a twin called Dad. And they evinced the same disparate differences as the right and left-handed twins: "Dad and me were loose in the world, astride the universe with grand designs, him with his assurances and admonishments, me with my appetites and adventures."[419] Dad, or Father, can be identified as Christian God, with all his promises, covenants but also reprimands and punishments. Crisp's description of himself, on the other hand, resembles closely a definition of Indigenous trickster, courageous and at the same time foolish character, often falling victim to his own tricks. Crisp is the older twin, a detail which demonstrates the

---

[414] Morrison, "Stories," 58.

[415] I refer here to the famous opening of Canto III, the inscription on the gate of hell, in which the following line appears: "Before me nothing was created but eternal things and I endure eternally." Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. John D. Sinclair (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 47.

[416] King, *Back*, 221.

[417] There are multiple references to English literary works in the novel, see Ridington, "Got" for more.

[418] King, *Back*, 238.

[419] King, *Back,* 238-239.

precedence of Indigenous epistemology. In this way, King employs a similar technique as in *Green Grass, Running Water* – portraying the Indigenous story as incorporating the Christian one rather than the other way round, but even more precisely showing the endless interchange and interaction between these two in which it is impossible to discern any dominance or dependency.

The story, the sense of community, and also his growing attraction towards Mara echo in Gabriel after the party and we can see him going through an emotional process of admission, acceptance and exposure of the truth. Gradually, he is able to admit that for the love of science he missed all the important events in his family, became detached and in the end killed all his family with his own invention.[420] He walks down the lifeless canyon full of animal bones and realizes his foolish belief in the goodwill of science. His inherent healthy curiosity was not used to help and benefit people but was abused to produce profit and generate power.[421] He comprehends now he forsook his familial and communal ties for his naïve belief in science, which, however, in connection to business loses all human ties and responsibility. He manages to open up and disclose who he is to Mara as well.[422] Despite all that, Gabriel still cannot see any other remedy than to kill himself and thus rid the world of its destructor. And it is Mara again who saves him and shows him that even his suicide, as well as his previous life, would be a self-centered and individualistic solution. She reminds him of the relationality of his existence asking him to save her if he does not want to save himself and explaining "It's not about moving . . . It's about community"[423] when he is very doubtful to their attempt to move a ship stuck in the sand. Morison calls this act "hopefulness to a place-specific thing,"[424] we might call it hopefulness to community and relations.

As the sense of community is restored and Gabriel reconnects and reconciles with his past and Indigeneity, life starts to come back to the sea as well:

> The ocean had come back first. On the days when Crisp swam out to the horizon, he found more and more signs of life. Small fish darting about the seaweed, urchins and anemones huddling together, crabs and starfish patrolling the rocks and sandy bottom, larger fish moving in from the depths. . .
>
> The birds were not far behind, the gulls leading the way. . .

---

[420] King, *Back*, 406, 337.
[421] King, *Back,* 446-447.
[422] King, *Back,* 357.
[423] King, *Back*, 475, 498.
[424] Morrison, "Stories," 57.

Last week, the ravens had returned in force, forever unsympathetic.

And now the turtles were hatching.[425]

It is a comeback both of the natural and also of the supernatural, as the remark about the ravens, traditional trickster figures of the West Coast, and the turtles reveal. What more, the missing indented turtle also comes back.[426]

All this re-creation was triggered by the retelling of the Sky Woman creation story. Its thematic content, emphasizing creative potential, and also the communal spirit of the way it is told launched significant changes and development for Gabriel and all his newly acquired community. King illustrates the power of stories to "heal collective trauma" and "create communities and inter-community dialogue,"[427] as Morrison points out. The story has been accompanying Gabriel all his life, he remembers his mother telling it and he even names what he takes as his great invention after it.[428] However, he does not seem to understand its teachings until he comes to the destroyed community and meets Crisp and Mara. Only then he internalizes and follows the teachings, taking on the role of a creator and a member of a community. Therefore, when he is asked by Mara to tell her his story from the beginning, he starts by saying "There was a woman who lived in a sky world. And she was curious."[429] Sky Woman managed to turn her curiosity and downfall into a breathtaking success and so must Gabriel learn to do.

The Back of the Turtle combines two perspectives in a similarly playful but subversive manner as *Green Grass*, *Running Water*. Since the narrative revolves around an Indigenous creation story, it is apparent that the author places preference and precedence to it. Also, as Morrison notices, he advocates to make Christian stories "more malleable,"[430] to loosen the authoritative and normative tone. Nevertheless, he also demonstrates their mutual permeability, especially in the characters of Gabriel and Crisp. After all, as Crisp says when comparing the Garden of Eden and the Sky Woman story: "And in the end, whether we was tossed or whether we was the architects of our own ruin, the end's the same."[431] People need to learn to live in the world and be part of it all the same,

[425] King, *Back,* 516-517.
[426] King, *Back,* 492.
[427] Morrison, "Stories," 49.
[428] King, *Back*, 226, 399.
[429] King, *Back,* 510.
[430] Morrison, "Stories," 50.
[431] King, *Back*, 237.

notwithstanding the creation story they take as their own. Our task is the same, even though we come to the world equipped by different conceptual maps.

Orality and storytelling in the novel needs to be addressed also in terms of a literary technique. Orality in King's works has been discussed by several scholars, but they mainly focused on his short fiction. I find Gibert[432] as well as Truchan-Tataryn and Gingell[433] especially useful and so taking their analyses as a model, let us explore the devices King uses for implementing orality in the text. There are repetitions (majority of chapters featuring Sonny starts with his name and a verb, for example, "Sonny stands", "Sonny walks", "Sonny wakes") and use of onomatopoeia (expressions "wham-wham" and "hammer-hammer" recurring in nearly every chapter concerning Sonny, "lap, lap, lap" for waves), elisions of verbs, brief sentences and parataxis ("Kindness perhaps. Even affection." ". . . he began to sing again. Not the memorial song. A grass dance this time. A fierce song. A song for warriors."),[434] pauses and hesitations ("If anything, she had seemed … disappointed." "She looks and leans into the water and then. . ."),[435] juxtaposed declarative statements ("Surely there were other turtles with indentations in their shells, other turtles with red markings./That turtle had disappeared in Toronto./This turtle had appeared on a beach in Samaritan Bay.") and lists ("Dorian had already endured MRIs, CAT scans, X-rays, a muscle biopsy, a colonoscopy, and tests for ALS, CVD, and HIV, …").[436] All these features contribute to the orality or aurality, as Truchan-Tataryn and Gingell call it, for they invite the reader to read the text aloud.[437] Of course, some of the devices have also other functions in the text such as producing humorous effect (the lists and juxtaposed statements) or, for example, the recurrent expressions in Sonny's chapters and insistence on repeating the same actions indicate his intellectual disability.

Overall, the text frequently gives the impression of being narrated orally rather than being written, being dialogic rather than monologic, despite the fact that some of the "dialogic" devices recognized by Gibert and others,[438] such as addressing the reader "you", are missing. This dialogic or conversational nature of the text, as Ridington also

---

[432] Gibert, "Written."

[433] Maria Truchan-Tataryn and Susan Gingell, "Dances with Coyote: Narrative Voices in Thomas King's *One Good Story, That One*," *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 2, no. 3 (2006).

[434] King, *Back*, 518, 9.

[435] King, *Back*, 37, 224.

[436] King, *Back*, 492, 396-397.

[437] Truchan-Tataryn and Gingell, "Dances," 11.

[438] Gibert, "Written."

observes,[439] corresponds with the use of the Sky Woman story as a frame narrative since this creation story has been told primarily orally and as such encourages dialogue and active cooperation of the listener/reader as discussed in the previous chapter. King demonstrates this active participation of the listeners in storytelling in the novel, too. While Crisp is telling his version of Sky Woman story, the narration frequently digresses to monitor Gabriel's and Mara's thoughts evoked by it, as mentioned before. Gabriel recalls his mother telling the story, Mara identifies her favorite parts and shares the questions the story raises for her.[440] This is a fine example of the stimulation of storytelling, which generates questions in the receiver. Ridington notes that "Indian stories provide clues for the listener to become the storyteller."[441] The novel shows this by incorporating Mara's and Gabriel's thinking about the questions evoked by the story in which they disclose some parts of their past, parts of their stories.

Not only the influence by also direct integrating of the features of oral storytelling is an essential element of both the thematic and stylistic content of the novel. Truchan-Tataryn and Gingell identify it as "stylistic hybridizing of the oral and written."[442] To avoid the controversial word "hybrid" referring to the postcolonial perception of Indigenous texts criticized by King himself and implying a certain degree of arbitrariness rather than a conscious consideration and formation, we can say that King's novel *The Back of the Turtle* exemplifies coalescence of the oral and the written. Orality in the novel can be found in the style, but also in the structure and themes, which are informed and promote the enstoried principles.

4.5 Lesley Belleau: Sky Woman the Sexual

Lesley Belleau is, unlike Thomas King, one of the emerging and not so well-known authors. She is an Anishnaabekwe writer from Ketegaunseebee Garden River First Nation in Ontario and she has published a collection of short stories (*The Colour of Dried Bones*, 2008), collection of poems, *Indianland,* from 2017, which got so far the biggest critical attention of all her work, and a novel, *Sweat*, published in between these two other pieces, in 2014. It is the novel which will be examined closer here, since its themes and characters draw upon the Sky woman creation story.

[439] Ridington, "Got," 164.
[440] King, *Back,* 222-223.
[441] King, *Back*, 168.
[442] Truchan-Tataryn and Gingell, "Dances," 5.

4.5.1 Sky Woman's echoes

As in King's novel, the Sky Woman story permeates the narrative of *Sweat*[443] in various ways. The story itself is incorporated into the text as the first chapter and in the following ones, the reader quickly notices that the characters share some characteristics with or experience a similar moment in their life as Sky Woman did. Also, there are several features recognizably coming from the creation story, such as the twins, recurrent motif of falling, or the repetitive usage of the motif of a hole and characters "pointing down the abyss."[444]

The first chapter presents a contemporized, especially in terms of language, version of the old, traditional story. There is a tree in front of a woman's house and she does not like it because it is obstructing her view, even though there is little to see behind the tree. She asks her husband to move the tree while she is away picking herbs. The man, clueless how to satisfy her wishes, goes and sits by the tree who starts speaking to him and eventually offers to move, at the same time warning the man that "you gotta deal with the consequences."[445] The man is happy with the unexpected solution until he sees the immense black hole which has been left by the tree. As he is trying to cover it up, he sees his wife running joyfully towards him. Before she reaches his outstretched arms, however, she falls down the hole and he never sees her again. Modern, colloquial expressions are used such as *dude, bro, scare the shit outta* and the whole conversation between the man and the tree resembles a locker room talk with the tree commenting on the man's sexual life and comparing his wife's genitals to the most beautiful flower.[446] The opening conversation between the man and the woman also reminds one of a common dialogue, a coercive discussion between a couple. Otherwise, the story still retains features of a traditional, mythic, story (absence of time specification, universal characters, talking tree) and follows, though innovatively, the traditional storyline. In contrast to the other chapters, which are named according to the narrated character, this chapter carries the title "a story". It is, indeed, *a* version of the story of Sky Woman. The indeterminacy of the article suggests the open-ended and non-normative character of the story, even if it is the creation story of Nishnaabeg nation. As Teuton, Fixico and others explain, a story acquires full

[443] Lesley Belleau, *Sweat* (Sudbury, Ontario: Scrivener Press, 2014).
[444] Belleau, *Sweat*, 16, 26, 27.
[445] Belleau, *Sweat,* 14.
[446] Belleau, *Sweat,* 13-14.

meaning only when internalized by the listener/reader, only then it becomes *the* story, meaningful and formative. Despite that, the initial position of the story in the novel undoubtfully highlights the importance of the story for the narrative and the lives described in it as it represents a point of departure from their crises.

The novel follows two Indigenous women, Beth and Jolene. Whereas Beth is a painter and lives comfortably with her husband, Jolene struggles financially as well as psychologically. Both of them, however, need to come to terms with their past. Beth lost her son just a few days after he was born and fell into a long-lasting depression. She can also feel a rift between her and her husband growing wider, not talking or even seeing each other and only their bodies meeting occasionally at night. What helps her in the end is the idea of adoption and she becomes a mother of twin boys. Jolene's story starts with her coming to a women's sweatlodge in her home community where she has not been in years. The past comes back to her there and is overwhelming. Her mother abandoned her when she was a kid and the authorities placed her in a foster home. She also recalls all the abusive relationships she has had, one of them resulting in her pregnancy. Secretly, she gives birth to twin boys and knowing she would not be able to take care of them, gives them out for adoption, which is where the lives of these two women intersect.

Alternating Beth's and Jolene's stories, there are sections of the "mythic chorus", as the book cover calls it, of grandmothers. These chapters can be taken as a continuation of the Sky Woman story since the grandmothers help a young woman, emerging out of nowhere, give birth to twins.

The moments that give away the connection of the characters to the Sky Woman story spread throughout the whole narrative. For example, the chapter following the opening story starts with Beth thinking about the image of tree limbs intertwining that she saw in her dream, there is, of course, a clear connection in the characters of the twins, one with dark hair and dark skin and one fair, the speaking tree that helps Jolene find her cat and there is also a connection of the grandmothers to Sky Woman since one of them "remembers her descent."[447] This interconnection reaches a higher level of significance when it is revealed through her thoughts that the fallen woman giving birth with the help of grandmothers is Jolene.[448] This is where the realistic and mythic spheres of the novel meet directly, not only in figurative sense through the means of a parallel between Jolene's (or Beth's as well) and the mythic woman's lives but also in immediate merging of these two

[447] Belleau, *Sweat*, 17, 34, 36.
[448] Belleau, *Sweat,* 53.

characters into one. In this way, the statement "She was all women, exploding,"[449] referring to the fallen woman in one of the grandmothers' section is clarified and put into practice. Every woman is a Sky Woman and Sky Woman encompasses all women.

The union of the woman from the traditional story with the character from fictionalized reality brings us back to Leanne Simpson's claim that creation story is personal.[450] In Belleau's text, however, it is not the muskrat the individual is identified with, as Simpson proposes, but Sky Woman. Even so, the result of this identification, one's responsibility to search for meaning in our life, as Simpson says,[451] remains. Both Beth and Jolene need to take back responsibility for their own life in order to move forward.

The enstoried principles carried in the creation story do not evince such prominence in this novel at the first sight, but they are still traceable. One of the recurrent motifs in the work is creativity. The whole storyline starts, so to speak, with the woman's obstructed imagination and creativity, as the following sentences from the first paragraph illustrate: "It [the tree] was blocking her view. Of what, she couldn't imagine, but it stood in the way of something, that must have been for sure."[452] The woman feels like the tree is preventing her from seeing farther, from venturing forward. Despite losing her home and husband when her wish is met, she proves to be right because she manages to create a whole world down below. Her husband can feel her through this creation of hers: "He never saw her again, just felt her in the movements below, in the quaking, the rushing of life. . ."[453]

Creativity as a theme coming from the Sky Woman story is also reflected in the grandmothers. The first description of a grandmother we get depicts her at dawn building a fire:

> Remnants of yesterday, everywhere. Fragments left behind, to take, to discard, to birth again, to destroy. She is a weaver. She builds from such piecings. Watches creation form from her fingers, the in, out, to and fro, from nothing, nothing, but unwanted pieces, pieces that don't make sense without the others.[454]

The grandmother has the ability to weave from little left-aside and discarded pieces, to create something meaningful out of pieces void of their former meaning. Similarly to Sky Woman, who, as Kimmerer writes "came here with nothing but a handful of seeds and

---

[449] Belleau, *Sweat,* 37.
[450] Simpson, *Dancing*, 41.
[451] Simpson, *Dancing*, 43.
[452] Belleau, *Sweat,* 11.
[453] Belleau, *Sweat,* 16.
[454] Belleau, *Sweat,* 23.

the slimmest of instructions to 'use your gifts and dreams for good',"[455] the grandmother has to use her dreams, her imagination to create from these pieces. The correlation of weaving and creation intensifies in the moment when the fallen woman is giving birth to the first of the twins: "That minute. Crucial. Find a spot and watch it, focus . . . Find a rhythm. Like weaving. The rhythm is crucial, musical even . . . A basket forming, a new birth."[456] Giving birth is like weaving, creating something out of little or nothing. All women in the narration are endowed with creative power which is realized in many ways – giving birth to children, weaving, painting, cooking but also (re)creating the world. To reiterate his words, Teuton says that creation stories "enable us to create our worlds"[457] and this is what Beth and Jolene are trying to do – recreate their world which fell apart. Sky Woman represents a reminder and reassurance that they have the creative power to do so, which is in the narrative highlighted by the unification of Sky Woman with the other characters.

Another enstoried principle present in Belleau's retelling is the sense of reciprocity and cooperation. In "a story" it is the tree, which, apart from making obscene comments, propagates this notion by saying to the husband "If you just would've asked, I would have moved."[458] In other words, the tree reminds him of the mutual dependency of creation and of the necessity to sometimes ask for help and rely on others, just as Sky Woman relied on other animals to bring her the piece of mud. Reciprocity and mutuality as a theme permeates also the grandmothers' sections as they all participate in comforting the fallen woman during her labour and after that in nurturing her children and nursing her back to health. Jolene's story emphasizes reciprocity, too. When Elsa offers her help to Jolene after she is sick in the sweatlodge and Jolene hesitates since they do not know each other at all, Elsa explains her motivation: "People are put in front of each other to help each other."[459] A simple, but potent belief echoing Teuton's statement of all creatures' "shared stake in survival."[460] The characters in the novel are learning to accept and depend on this principle, to open and cooperate with the rest of creation even though it means exposing one's wounds.

[455] Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 8.
[456] Belleau, *Sweat,* 66.
[457] Teuton, *Deep Waters*, xii.
[458] Belleau, *Sweat,* 13.
[459] Belleau, *Sweat,* 122.
[460] Teuton, *Deep Waters*, xiii.

In accordance to King's conviction that Indigenous creation stories do not form ground for authority, veracity, and normativity, but rather embrace conversation, ambiguities, and balance, neither Belleau's version of creation story feels authoritative. The woman's fall itself seems to be more result of arbitrariness of fate, the woman's whim or her clumsiness and absent-mindedness when running than of careful planning and organizing as in the Bible. Even though there is certain sense of "it is meant to be" in her wish to get rid of the tree for no solid reason, it does not feel like it is a part of God's plan; it feels like the ambiguity, imperfections and missteps are all welcome part of creation and are positive and welcome since they might be a start of something new.

4.5.2 Carnality and sexuality

This chapter dealing with Lesley Belleau was called "Sky Woman the Sexual" because the most prominent feature she adds to the creation story is a stress on physicality and sexuality. What more, a strong connection between creativity and sexuality is suggested.

The title of the novel itself invites double reading. On one hand, sweat is an essential bodily fluid evoking, among other things, heat, bodily contact and hence sexual intercourse. On the other hand, it refers to the sweat lodge where most of Jolene's story takes place and to the relaxation and healing that sweating enables. This characteristic blending of the sexual and the spiritual signals the thematic focus of the work.

Sexuality is not absent even from the initial retelling of the creation story. Not only are there the profane remarks of the tree, but the description of the woman features significant physicality, too. As she is running towards her husband, he can see "her breasts through the fabric, full, perfected by time, nipples thrusting toward him. He could smell her, juniper, goldenrod, her milkweed thighs . . ."[461] The description emanates his desire for her as he fixates on her nipples and thighs but also her full fertility and procreative potential. The latter is then emphasized by expressions like "her breath more potent than a thousand new births" and "if she were a flower, her lips would be filled with ripe pollen."[462] Use of this language obviously shows her maturity in terms of her womanhood. However, since we know the rest of the Sky Woman story, we can also say that she is ripe, ready to realize her creative potential, not only the procreative one. Significantly, it is still

[461] Belleau, *Sweat,* 15.
[462] Belleau, *Sweat,* 15, 16.

the "mythic" woman who is portrayed in this sexual way which makes her very close to actual humans and also shows the openness of Indigenous epistemology to physicality (as Tomson Highway points out in his *Comparing Mythologies*, for example[463]).

The following passage then leaves no doubt that Belleau wants to show the proximity of the spiritual and the sexual. In this excerpt, Beth dreams about falling down in the air after having sex with her partner. As she falls and thus becomes united with the character of Sky Woman, she feels the spirits of her female ancestors surrounding her and it brings her a lot of pleasure - spiritual, feeling "comforted, welcomed and loved" in this "kinship,"[464] as well as physical:

> And she is falling, unafraid, her clothing falling off her body like smoke. . . She feels a hum gather inside her legs, a womansong of water. Her lips open, multifolding the air. The flowing begins to sing, a pinkness exploding as she prepares to connect with the earth, a liquid drips down her thigh, a heat in the center of her body opens, burns out of her into the air, making a huskier scent, one as old as the sky; a beat of blood makes her cry out and it is beautiful, such a ringing of love, it is beautiful this womanhood escaping and she feels the water between her thighs and the drip of love. . . and she lies there on the grassbed her pinkness being strummed by history, by the breath of all creation, by a hand as large as thought itself.[465]

The mythic fall down the sky is here described as a sexual intercourse with the air, history, creation, and thought. This is quite a daring, for some perhaps shocking, connection of spirituality and sexuality, however, Belleau manages to incorporate the idea of correlation between the sexual and the creative power. It is, to clarify, "thought itself" caressing her genitals. Therefore, the pleasure does not come from the physical element solely but the source of it is an idea, imagination, intellectual/spiritual activity in other words. Sexual power is creative in more than just generative sense.

Vanessa Watt's words about land as a protraction of Sky Woman's body[466] come to mind here and actually help understanding the fusion of her and the characters. If, as Watts says, Sky Woman "becomes territory itself" and "Place-Thought is an extension of her circumstance, desire, and communication with the water and animals" and "we are extensions of the very land we walk upon,"[467] it is only natural that the thoughts of Sky Woman are replicated in the characters' experience. They are, essentially, thoughts of one,

463 Highway, *Comparing*, 43-47.

464 Belleau, *Sweat,* 88.

465 Belleau, *Sweat,* 88-89.

466 Watts, "Indigenous," 21.

467 Watts, "Indigenous," 23.

extended body. And if these thoughts come from a physical body, not a mystical, unsubstantiated one, they come with all that is connected with it, even bodily desire.

Belleau does not portray sexuality one-sidedly, though, and she does not hide the negative aspects that arise in connection to it. It is, after all, sexual desire among other possible motives, that drives her mother's friend to rape Jolene.[468] And again, even in this very troubling moment, there is a link between the sexual and the spiritual. At first, she has a vision in the sweat in which she meets the fallen woman's husband and slowly comes to the realization she met him before, recognizes his hands as the hands of the rapist and of all the other abusive men she has been with.[469] The vision, bringing back these traumatic memories of being raped with her back against, not accidentally, a tree, and the smell of cedar branches make her vomit in the sweat. Now, this is not to say that the spiritual incorporates abusive sexuality. The vision comes in the sweat, a very spiritual and healing place, and it seems that the spirits evoke these memories in Jolene so that she realizes the vicious correlation between the trauma and her choice of partners and so that she is confronted with her past and not hiding before it. Only then her healing can start. As Suzanne Methot summarizes in her chapter on the importance of facing trauma, "a survivor must recall, manage, restructure, and reframe the information they carry within themselves."[470] This process gets started for Jolene in the sweat.

One of the grandmothers' chapters is then dedicated to the colonial trauma of sterilization of Indigenous women. Their bodies as well as bodies of young women are depicted as being "silenced" and "spliced", the unborn children "stolen from their mothers, taken by stiff, white hands that flung them silent into this place of dreamlessness, searching."[471] Belleau here addresses the issue of colonialism exercising its power by intentionally annihilating female fecundity to exterminate the colonized. As Audra Simpson, Finney, Palmater and others pointed out,[472] the colonial attack on female body is closely related to the seizure of land. Watt's ideas of land as Sky Woman's body can support and clarify these assumptions, too.

---

[468] Belleau, *Sweat,* 98-99.
[469] Belleau, *Sweat,* 97.
[470] Methot, *Legacy*, 139.
[471] Belleau, *Sweat*, 84, 85.
[472] Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2014); Sandrina de Finey, "Indigenous Girls' Resilience in Settler States: Honouring Body and Land Sovereignty," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, vol. 31, no. 2 (2017); Pamela Palmater, *Indigenous Nationhood: Empowering Grassroots Citizens* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2015).

Still, the narrative is directed and centered around healing. All the women in the novel are searching for new beginnings. As mentioned earlier, they at first have to, however, face the past and accept it. This notion is most prominent in Jolene's story as she undergoes the painful revisioning of her mother leaving her, of the rape and domestic violence during the sweat. It is also there, nevertheless, when she finally "can feel the beating", "she is suddenly aware of the blood in her veins", "she can feel her heart" after being dead inside for a long time.[473] Confrontation and re-living of the pain is needed so that she can be aware of the wounds, and so that she can start mending them instead of pretending they do not exist. Drew Hayden Taylor's explanation of the Sky Woman story as "archetypal self-exploration" or "psychological process of reaching deep inside yourself"[474] illustrates it nicely. For Jolene, the sweat lodge ceremony in which she becomes Sky Woman is a dive deep down to her psyche, exploring her pain, denial, and unhealthy ways of coping with trauma. As Taylor also says, the plunge is "a dangerous journey with dangerous ramifications."[475] The emotions Jolene needs to revisit could be very harmful if she were to face them in solitude. However, sweat lodge is a spiritual place, "the safest place on earth"[476] as Bob Cardinal, Enoch Cree elder, emphasizes, and the spirits are there to support her. Moreover, after the ceremony, Elsa approaches her and offers her guidance. The narrative stresses the importance of cooperation and mutual sustenance, one of the enstoried principles, in this aspect as well.

The ending of the novel then pictures exactly this togetherness and reciprocity as the women and the twins join in a communal round dance, Jolene happy to see her sons again. The women hold each other's hands, "forming a tight circle around the boys,"[477] revoking Sky Woman's dancing on the turtle's back, and the circle of the narrative is closing, too. The last chapter depicts a grandmother falling asleep, content and calm, the twins in her arms. She "looks above to the sky, a huge blackened length, and she finds what she is looking for at last, a pinprick of space in the sky and she knows that she is being watched over and cared for."[478] The sense that there is her loved one in the sky thinking about her as well as the fact that her story and the teachings it carries are still present and being relived brings her great comfort.

[473] Belleau, *Sweat*, 96.
[474] Taylor, "Alive and Well," 30.
[475] Taylor, "Alive and Well," 30.
[476] Bob Cardinal, teachings after a sweat lodge, January 18, 2015.
[477] Belleau, *Sweat*, 153.
[478] Belleau, *Sweat,* 156.

The Sweat represents both a traditional retelling of the Sky Woman story instilling the principles of relationality, reciprocity, responsibility, and creativity and an innovative approach to it, highlighting the aspect of sexuality. It focuses on the complexity of women's creative potential in the sense of the ability to bring forward new life, being artistically creative, forming relationships and communities and also re/creating one's life after traumatic experiences. Sky Woman epitomizes a model to follow and guidance, however, it is a story that has to be lived for its meaning being truly realized.

4.6 Closing remarks

The Sky Woman creation story sets both ontological and epistemological principles and for this reason it serves frequently as a starting point and/or structural basis of many Indigenous literary works. The concepts it instills are solid and stable, however, they are not authoritative and commanding. Space for individual interpretation and realization of them is left open by the nature of Indigenous storytelling which requires active cooperation of the listener/reader and their internalization of the story. The principles present in the Sky Woman story function as sort of a map or blueprint for individuals, but concrete renditions vary. The novels discussed represent examples of such realizations, each of them taking a different stance albeit keeping in accordance with the principles. Moreover, the concepts cannot be imposed and must be lived because, according to Indigenous frames of reference, they come from the land itself, the extension of Sky Woman's body, and people cannot but live them since they are inscribed in their flesh as well through the land, as Watts explains. Not living them means to be displaced and disconnected from the rest of creation.

The enstoried principles, though complex and interconnected, can be summarized in three main points: reciprocity leading to respect to all creation, relationality to all creation linked to responsibility to others and to oneself, and creative power of every individual. The story of Sky Woman can be, and should be, relived by every individual, falling down uncontrollably, diving deep courageously and creating their worlds but also relying on others and expressing gratitude to all creation. To reiterate Teuton's words once more: "We depend on each other to help articulate and extend what we've found and brought to the surface, for if we do not, we are left simply with a handful of mud."[479]

[479] Teuton, *Deep Waters*, xiv.

People need to understand themselves at first to be good community members, but they also need to contextualize and collectivize their experience and findings for the general well-being, otherwise the experience alone has little meaning.

Thomas King has implemented the Sky Woman story in several of his works. *Green Grass, Running Water* has been critically valued mostly for the witty postmodern attacks on Western epistemological dominance, however, by closer inspection it can be found that the novel is also informed by the enstoried principles and by Indigenous knowledge and that the techniques used can very well be also a reflection of traditional storytelling.

It is apparent that the Sky Woman creation story functions as a conceptual framework in King's *The Back of the Turtle* and it seems to be of more importance than the perception of the story as a frame of the narrative, as some scholars pointed out. The aspects King emphasizes in the text can be put into a broader context of Indigenous epistemology. The novel, by the means of Gabriel's development, promotes creativity as balancing power to destruction instead of its binary opposition, and awareness and nurturing of relationality as a necessity for consolidation of one's identity and for a fulfilling life.

King continues in the subversive and humorous style of comparing and contrasting Indigenous and Western epistemologies presented earlier in *Green Grass, Running Water*. Nevertheless, it is obvious how much importance he places in the Sky Woman story as the representation of the Indigenous perspective from the number of allusions to it, from direct implementation of the story into the text, from "oralizing" the text by various devices inviting the characters and readers to participate in the narration, and from building his story up on its principles as mentioned above. It needs to be said immediately, however, that he also shows coexistence and mutual complementarity, rather than animosity, of the epistemologies in the characters of Crisp, Gabriel, and Mara. In addition, King does not portray Western epistemology as the thoroughly negative and destructive one but via frequent allusions to Western cultures he shows the dependence of the characters on this perspective as well. The Western is critically and ironically examined and employed (but that does not necessarily mean it is altogether denied). Still, it is the Sky Woman story and her concepts that enable the restoration of community and prevent Gabriel from taking his own life in the end. The aim of the narrative seems to be showing the complexity and

multifaciality of contemporary Indigeneity rather than just subverting the Western perspectives.

Lesley Belleau in her novel retells the Sky Woman story in a playful manner while enforcing its principles, too. Sky Woman literally permeates the narrative and the characters as they become one with her in certain moments. The internalization of the story is not only figurative but accomplished fully with the two main characters, the grandmothers, and Sky Woman transforming into one another. The story emphasizes creative power in many forms but with a common purpose – Jolene and Beth need to re-create their worlds after traumatic experience, and they are able to do so following the enstoried principles. They learn to exercise relationality, dependence, and reciprocity and this helps them to restore their lives and also to form a sort of a community at the end.

Belleau does not directly compare and contrast Indigenous epistemologies with the Western ones. Even though some of her characters live in modern world and are part of intercultural community, they seem to be more concerned with finding and solidifying their Indigenous heritage than with reconciling Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways, which seems to be an approach often taken by the previous generation of writers. However, the ontological differences still show up in, for example, a certain sense of haphazardness in the creation, especially in the woman's unsubstantiated wish and her clumsy fall down the hole as well as the accentuated sexuality in the creation story. This sense undoubtedly stands in contrast to the Western perception of creation as a plan or gradual development governed by knowable rules and not so much by physical desires. Belleau, nevertheless, does not comment on this and does not choose it as her subject matter.

What definitely does constitute her subject matter, however, is sexuality seen as creative power. The emphasis on physicality and sexual desire stands out from the pages and is directly linked to the spiritual realm. The descriptions and actions of Sky Woman in the novel portray her as a physical being with corresponding bodily impulses. Since humans share the same flesh and thought as her through land as her/our body, according to Watts' argument, the close bond of the sexual and spiritual translates into humans, too. The novel celebrates especially female sexuality, which forms a significant source of creativity, not only in the most obvious, generative, sense. On the other hand, sexuality might as well be destructive, as Belleau points out by implementing sexual violence and abuse in her characters' stories. Even these traumatic events, however, can be overturned and become

productive by having the courage to face them, start the healing process and follow Sky Woman's principles of responsibility, reciprocity and relationality.

Despite the prominence of the theme of sexuality in the novel, Belleau directs the text towards and ends it by healing and renovation of community. Beth and Jolene, isolated and feeling displaced in their worlds, as Sky Woman was after her fall, manage to put back together their lives and even initiate communal relationships. Similarly to King's novel, the characters' life events and actions mirror the Sky Woman story but this correlation does not secure their successful return to a balanced life. It is only when they learn to accept and live according to the principles of her story when their stories take more harmonious turns.

The Sky Woman story and the two novels discussed illustrate the need of restored balance as a desirable end of Indigenous stories. It is not Gabriel's new scientific discovery, Beth's success of her paintings or Jolene's surprising change from a loser to achiever that drive the texts, it is their re/gained responsibility over their lives and reconnection to the community.

5 TRICKSTER

It is hardly possible to refrain from discussing trickster stories when examining Indigenous literatures. At the same time, there is no easy way to do so. No other character from Indigenous traditional storytelling has been studied, explained, misplained and overused more than the trickster. Anthropologists, ethnographers (with Paul Radin carrying the flagpole) followed by poststructuralist, postmodern, and postcolonial literary critics were all attracted by this tricky, shifty, elusive figure teaching about human frailty. And writers continue to tell stories about and with tricksters in various forms and genres. In consequence, the discussion of and the materials about the trickster are extensive, miscellaneous, and sometimes contradictory. While attempting to contribute to this ongoing debate, this chapter, rather than giving definite and absolute answers, pursues two objectives. Firstly, to present current critical approaches to the trickster and secondly, to provide contemporary, culturally specific definitions of the trickster by Indigenous scholars and their implications and consequently use them in examination of three novels by Indigenous writers.

5.1 The trickster debate

Looking retrospectively, the trickster debate has swayed from an avid interest expressed by non-Indigenous scholars in this character to reclaiming the trickster by Indigenous artists, started by the Committee to Re-Establish Trickster founded by Highway and continued by Vizenor's trickster discourse, and to rejecting it altogether as a Western misconception as expressed in Womack's (Muskogee Creek/Cherokee) claim that "there is no such thing as a trickster . . . tricksters were invented by anthropologists."[480] The discussion is complex because it does not concern only literary studies but stretches to anthropology and to the issue of cultural appropriation. The development of trickster criticism and criticism of trickster in terms of literature was excellently summarized and explained in the publication *Troubling Tricksters*[481] edited by Deanna Reder and Linda M.

[480] qtd. in Kristina Fagan, "What's the Trouble with the Trickster?: An Introduction," in *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations,* ed. Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), 10.

[481] Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra, *Troubling Trickster: Revisioning Critical Conversations* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010).

Morra and published in 2010. Mapping both Indigenous and non-Indigenous critical attention towards the trickster, the book presents arguments clarifying the trickster concept and reveals the shortcomings of the existing approaches to it.

The popularity of the trickster in the last decades of the previous century turned out to be a double-edged sword or, as Linda M. Morra puts it when paraphrasing Margery Fee, "discourses that have evolved around the trickster figure have both facilitated and impeded the process of Indigenous empowerment."[482] While the intensified employment of the trickster raised awareness and recognition of Indigenous literature in Canada, the critics' tendency to look for the trickster in every work authored by an Indigenous writer overshadowed other concepts dealt with in the texts and their overall diversity. As Kristina Fagan says in the Introduction to *Troubling Tricksters*, "literary critics seized upon the trickster as a culturally appropriate means of approaching Indigenous literature."[483] In a very ironic and conspicuously trickster-y twist, the trickster, characteristic for its transformative, evasive nature, grew into a "fixed and static sign of Indianness"[484] or, as Fagan puts it, "a symbol of instability became a way of stabilizing Native texts."[485] Consequently, the conceptual variety in the texts got frequently lost in pursuit of the trickster and the agency of the author, deliberately using the trickster and building the narration in a certain manner, was sidelined by perceiving it as a fixed cultural representation. It is exactly this construction and use of generalized and simplifying notions about tricksters which reflect the ongoing disbalance of power for self-determination and lack of attention to national specificities in relation to Indigenous studies in academia.

Fagan recognizes that while firmly embedded in Indigenous tradition, the interest in the trickster intensified in the cultural and political environment of that era, calling the frequent employment of the trickster "strategic invocation of this 'traditional character'".[486] The ambiguity of the trickster fitted well in the times of emphasized sexual and gender multiplicity, exploration of urban Indigeneity and the overall subversive tendency characteristic for postmodernity, poststructuralism, and deconstruction.[487] The

[482] Linda M. Morra, "Introduction: Imagining beyond Images and Myths," in *Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literatures*, ed. Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016), 118.
[483] Fagan, "What's," 5.
[484] Hoy, *How*, 5.
[485] Fagan, "What's," 8.
[486] Fagan, "What's," 11.
[487] Fagan, "What's," 13.

trickster provided the authors with a very timely and smart political and artistic move to bring Indigenous literature into wider critical attention and to stay in contact with the tradition at the same time. The trickster is ideal for demonstrating the fallacy of Western binary thinking, as deconstructionists and poststructuralists show as well, since it moves across binaries and perpetually shifts between categories and destabilizes them. Judith Leggatt observes that "the growth of academic interest in tricksters during the latter half of the twentieth century reflects a shift in Western thought that has taken place during the same period."[488] It has to be pointed out as well, nevertheless, that not all Western and non-Indigenous critics approached trickster narratives through postmodern theories exclusively. Eigenbrod, for example, recognizes that King's work is deeply rooted in Indigenous cultures and builds on knowledge kept by the elders.[489]

This, however, does not mean that the trickster corresponds fully with postmodernity. As Leggatt warns, "to read tricksters in light of such [postmodern, poststructuralist and deconstructionist] theories might be to miss specifically Indigenous modes of thought inherent in the tales."[490] She, unfortunately, does not elaborate on what the specific "Indigenous modes of thought" would be in her understanding. Referring to Chapter 2 of this thesis, it can be deduced that the main difference would be perceiving the subversive trickster, similarly to other "abnormalities" undermining the system, as part of the system as such in Indigenous thought whereas postmodern thinking would understand it as dismantling the system altogether and showing its falsity and artificiality of construction. She does point out one difference between the understanding of the connection of the trickster and the past in Western and Indigenous knowledge systems. Whereas the subversive quality, characterized by the trickster, in postmodernism stems from "modernist angst" and revolt against past, in Indigenous perception trickster "is an integral part of an ongoing tradition."[491] Niigonwedom James Sinclair further notes that the trickster theories based on Western concepts developed in the second half of the last century are "broad, generalized, ahistorical and atemporal" with little connection to their teller and thus distanced from "the Indigenous political processes in which they are embedded."[492] He, quite predictably, advocates for respectful criticism stemming from and

[488] Legatt, "Quincentennial," 221.
[489] Eigenbrod, *Travelling*, 167.
[490] Legatt, "Quincentennial," 222.
[491] Legatt, "Quincentennial," 227.
[492] Sinclair, "Trickster," 28.

nurturing relationships with communities and individuals.[493] Even theory, in the same way as story, must be personal and internalizable in order to be functional and meaningful in Indigenous view.

Yet another issue entered the debate alongside the trickster and that is the question of cultural appropriation. The desired heightened attention to Indigenous texts and cultures opened a space for cultural creativity which, however, was not filled with Indigenous voices only. Lenore Keeshig-Tobias in her famous, and already mentioned, essay "Stop Stealing Native Stories" points out the fact that the power dynamics in Canadian culture remains in favor of non-Indigenous voices speaking about and for Indigenous people: "Canadians all too often use native stories, symbols and history to sell things. . . But why hasn't Basil Johnston's *Indian School Days* become a bestseller?"[494] Nevertheless, Margery Fee assesses, with the distance of a few decades, the discussion as generally beneficial and as producing new possibilities for Indigenous artists arguing that "the debate, however painful, opened up access to grants and legitimacy that enabled Indigenous artists to do their work, work designed to provide Indigenous people with a sense of cultural identity."[495] Despite the lack of mutual understanding, the debate marked a start of a search for more respectful relationship toward Indigenous storytelling tradition, at least to some extent and on some levels of cultural life, a search that is still in process, as demonstrated in the chapter on appropriation.

The contributors of *Troubling Tricksters* do not offer only critical views on the theoretical approach to the trickster over time, they also express their suggestions for a more balanced understanding of this character. In the first place, they seem to agree on the necessity of a culturally specific approach to the trickster, avoiding one-size-fits-all definitions and taking into consideration the historical, spatial, social, and political context.[496] For Niigonwedom James Sinclair, respectful critical approach "starts in the recognition that most everything in Anishinaabeg trickster stories . . . depend on the storyteller(s), the context(s), the time(s), and the who/what/where/when/why a story is being told as well as both to and for."[497] In other words, there are far too many variables in the trickster stories and to overly generalize the aspects of the trickster means running the risk of distorting the meaning and purpose of the particular telling. Respectful criticism

[493] Sinclair, "Trickster," 27, 43-44.
[494] Keeshig-Tobias, "Stop," A7.
[495] Fee, "Trickster," 71.
[496] Reder and Morra, *Troubling*, 10, 16, 25.
[497] Sinclair, "Trickster," 25.

means acknowledging the author's agency while trying to describe the specificities of their work within the tradition of trickster poetics.

Fee then argues for the change in the method of trickster criticism, namely "to define the moment of the trickster" instead of assigning the trickster label on a given character in a text.[498] This would, according to her, ensure that the trickster is not hunted as "a rare bird" but perceived "as part of a historical process of rearranging social relations, a true transformation."[499] For her, the critical attention should refocus on the processes and changes the trickster brings about, on the social and mental shifts in individuals as well as communities. The way trickster poetics can be transformative is, after all, illustrated by the appropriation debate and its outcomes. Similarly, Anne Doueihi calls for "attending to the terms set up by the narratives themselves."[500] In other words, she voices the need to examine the specific features of the narrative first and subsequently its position within the trickster discourse rather than trying to apply a certain theory to the text and understand it only through it.

The trickster debate has not been finished and neither is *Troubling Tricksters* positioned as conclusive. We will definitely see other approaches to the trickster in the future which might be as unexpected as the turns in the trickster narratives. While respecting and following the suggestions of Indigenous scholars for examining the trickster, one needs to be aware also of the difficulties arising from them. The call for attention to tribal specificities complicates formulations of universal definitions, which are sometimes necessary when discussing Indigenous literature in general, and for non-Indigenous audience specifically. Another trouble for non-Indigenous critics then comes with the requirement of considering the context – is it accessible for them to the extent that would ensure thorough and respectful point of view? And what about authors working in urban or mixed tribal contexts? It is apparent that the, indeed, "troubling" discussion around the trickster will spark new questions and will inspire a need for new critical approaches. This, however, sounds very much like something the trickster teaches humans to do.

---

[498] Fee, "Trickster," 71.
[499] Fee, "Trickster," 71.
[500] qtd. in Leggatt, "Quincentennial," 222.

5.2 Searching for a definition

Having described the intricate issues within trickster criticism, defining the trickster appears to be a similarly complicated task. To follow the suggestions for cultural specificity outlined in the previous section and to provide a multiplicity of views, let us have a look at several definitions offered by Indigenous writers and scholars from various cultural backgrounds and try to discern the similarities as well as the discrepancies between them. Including more opinions, conflicting and consonant alike, will hopefully also avoid creating "absolute cultural authority" from a single voice, as Warrior and Fagan warn.[501] Of course, even the following overview is just a selection of views and cannot pretend to do justice to the immense variety of Indigenous cultures and the multitude of embodiments of the trickster in Indigenous stories. The views included were chosen according to cultural relevance to the texts examined in the latter part of this chapter and according to their importance for the development of trickster criticism.

As Kolinska says, the term trickster was coined by Western anthropologists in the 19th century and "there is no fully corresponding generic equivalent in any Indigenous languages in America."[502] The variety of expressions for the trickster in Indigenous languages reflects the array of definitions of this concept. There are differing variants not only on the level of various nations but also on community levels as well as numerous divergent names used by individual authors and scholars. For example, in Cree, the trickster is *wîsakêcâhk* (Simeon Scott, Swampy Cree), *wîsahkêcâhk* (Neal McLeod, James Smith Cree) or Weesageechak (Tomson Highway, the Barren Lands First Nation), in Nishnaabemowin Nanabush, Nanabozho, Nanibozho (Leanne Simpson, Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg), Nana'b'oozoo (Basil Johnston, Anishinaubae/Ojibway), Waynaboozhoo (Edward Benton-Banai, Anishinabe/Wisconsin Ojibway), Wenaboozhoo (Niigonwedom James Sinclair, St. Peter's/Little Peguis), while Ruby Slipperjack (Eabametoong First Nation) uses *weesquachak*, he is called *Kyoti* in Okanagan (Jeanette Armstrong, Syilx/Okanagan), in Blackfoot then Napi, Naapi (Eldon Yellowhorn) or náápi (Lena Russell, Kaina), in Mikmaq Klooscap (James Sákéj Henderson) or Gluskeb (Renate Eigenbrod), Gluskabi in Abenaki (Margaret Noodin) and Wee'git in Haisla (Eden

[501] Fagan, "What's," 10.

[502] translated from original: "tento termín byl poprvé použit západními antropology v devatenáctém století a v žádném z původních jazyků Ameriky nemá plně odpovídající generický ekvivalent." Klára Kolinská, ed. *Čekání na kojota* (Brno: Větrné mlýny, 2007), 527.

Robinson).[503] The meanings of these denominations also differ. *wîsahkêcâhk* is translated as the Cree transformer,[504] Nana'b'oozoo as a trembling tail[505] and Naapi signifies old man.[506] Some nations have traditional representations of the trickster in an animal form – for Cree it is coyote or crow, for Lakota spider, for the Northwest Coast peoples raven.[507] Jace Weaver, interestingly, remarks that all animals used to represent the trickster are animals living close to humans, which supports the fact that the trickster embodies humankind.[508] Still, these depictions are in no way binding and the trickster can appear in many other forms in the stories.

The trickster is a powerful spirit and trickster stories are sacred, therefore, there is a set of protocols connected to telling them.[509] For example, these stories should not be told in spring, summer, and fall or whenever there is no snow on the ground. Having consulted her elders, Leanne Simpson explains this rule in a number of ways: firstly, the protocol pays respect to the spiritual beings by avoiding embarrassing them since the spirits are not so close to the earth in winter so there is a smaller chance they would get hurt or offended when stories about them are being told; secondly, telling these stories only in winter time enables people to take their time while telling them and also while pondering their meaning in the rest of the year,[510] and thirdly, Simpson indicates a practical reason: telling stories in winter helps people not to get overcome with winter gloom when the options of going outside are limited.[511] Also, telling the stories means calling the spirits, which should be

---

[503] Scott, *âtalôhkâna*; McLeod, *Cree*; Tomson Highway, *The Rez Sisters* (Markham, Ontario: Fifth House, 1988); Simpson, *Dancing*; Johnston, *Manitous*; Edward Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Sinclair, "Trickster;" Ruby Slipperjack, *Weesquachak* (Pentincton, British Columbia: Theytus Books, 2005); Jeannette Armstrong, "This Is a Story," in *All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native Fiction*, ed. Thomas King (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992); Eldon Yellowhorn, "Naapi in My World," in *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations,* ed. Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010); Lena Heavy Shields Russell and Pitáákii Inge Genee, *Ákaitsinikssiistsi: Blackfoot Stories of Old* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2014); James (Sákéj) Youngblood Henderson, "Postcolonial Ghost Dancing: Diagnosing European Colonialism," in *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, ed. Marie Battiste (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000); Eigenbrod, *Travelling*, 163; Noodin, *Bawaajimo*, 37; Eden Robinson, "The Door to Personal and Magical Transformation is Darkness: An Interview with Eden Robinson," interview by Anita Bedell, *PRISM magazine*, 2 March, 2017, https://prismmagazine.ca/2017/03/02/the-door-to-personal-and-magical-transformation-is-darkness-an-interview-with-eden-robinson/.

[504] McLeod, *Cree*, 106.

[505] Johnston, *Manitous*, 244.

[506] Yellowhorn, "Naapi," 169.

[507] Henderson, "Postcolonial," 185.

[508] Jace Weaver, *Other Words: American Indian Literature, Law, and Culture* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 251.

[509] Johnson, "(Re)Nationalizing," 205.

[510] Simpson, *Dancing,* 57.

[511] Leanne Simpson, *Gift,* 5.

done with caution and with respect.[512] Similarly, Eden Robinson says there are "informal" and "more formal" tales of the trickster, the informal being the ones that people tell around kitchen tables and which ones she uses for her writing.[513] Notably, she does not elaborate on the formal ones. What she means is the distinction between the protected, sacred stories that can be told only under specific circumstances, and the public ones that can be shared more freely. Even though the restrictive measures would vary between nations, and despite the fact that there might be storytellers and writers not following these protocols (for whatever reasons they might have, not necessarily out of disregard), their existence speaks about the power the stories are considered to be endowed with.

Tomson Highway, the key figure in the Committee to Re-Establish Trickster, includes "A Note on Nanabush" in the production notes to the texts of his early plays and also to his novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. In them, he proclaims the trickster to be "as pivotal and important a figure in the Native world as Christ is in the realm of Christian mythology."[514] He also mentions the variety of words for the trickster in Indigenous languages, talks about his transformability noting that "this trickster goes by many names and many guises" and explains his nature as "essentially a comic, clownish sort of character" whose role is "to teach us about the nature and the meaning of existence on the planet Earth."[515] In the note preceding his novel, he adds a commentary on gender saying that since there is no gender in Indigenous languages, the trickster "is theoretically neither exclusively male nor exclusively female, or is both simultaneously."[516] Moreover, he observes that since the contact the trickster "assumed other guises."[517] In *Comparing Mythologies* Highway further states that the trickster is a "totally outrageous clown, half-human, half-god" and that this "laughing deity" lives "inside our language and thus inside us [Indigenous peoples]."[518] Highway accentuates the comic nature of the trickster and his/her ability to transfigure and inhabit various categories. He contrasts the trickster with Christian/Western mythologies and worldviews, differentiating between a male-oriented, perfect world from which humans were expelled on one side, and a female-oriented and

---

[512] Simpson, *Dancing,* 57.
[513] Robinson, "Door."
[514] Highway, *Rez*, xii.
[515] Highway, *Rez*, xii.
[516] Tomson Highway, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, Penguin Random House Canada, 1998).
[517] Highway, *Rez*, xii.
[518] Highway, *Comparing*, 40, 23.

naturally imperfect world which can be enjoyed by humans incessantly on the other.[519] The clash and troubled coexistence of Christianity and the Indigenous worldview and its consequences also frequently form themes examined in his works.

Lenore Keeshig-Tobias', Anishinaabekwe, description of the trickster in the article for The Magazine to Re-Establish the Trickster from 1988 echoes Highway's words. She writes: "Half hero, half fool, this figure is at once like each one of us and like none of us. Trickster tales are at once admonitions, instructions and entertainment."[520] The evasive, comic and simultaneously educative nature of the character is prominent in her explanation, too. She also stresses the ambiguity of the trickster in the sense that he resembles people while being a spirit.

Basil Johnston dedicated a considerable part of his work to restoration of Anishinaubae spiritual and cultural traditions hoping that through the stories, Indigenous people will find values and relevance in them.[521] In his *The Manitous* from 1995, the trickster, or Nana'b'oozoo, stories occupy the most pages of the book since, as he says, "he is the prototype of humankind and the center of human interest."[522] At the beginning of the lovely story about Nana'b'oozoo, Johnston describes him as the one who, despite fathered by the manitou Ae-pungishimook, "behaved more like a human being than a manitou", "doing what he ought not to have done and neglecting to do what he ought to have done."[523] He has all human weaknesses, being lazy, always hungry, timid but revengeful, not listening to advice, quick in temper, slow in thinking things through, vane, violent, a show-off, easily fooled by appearances, skeptical to spiritual ceremonies etc. On the other hand, he was known for his "concern for his friends and real compassion for others."[524] Not even this positive trait is without a catch, though, as in one of the stories he abandons his old grandmother in the woods because she became a nuisance to him.[525] Generally, he means well but his weaknesses come in the way and if he accomplishes something good, "such success was earned quite by accident."[526] What comes forth in Johnston's story is that even though sometimes Nana'b'oozoo attempts to play tricks on others to make his life easier, more frequently it is his good will that leads him into trouble and he

[519] Highway, *Comparing*, 31-38.
[520] Keeshig-Tobias, "Let's Be," 2.
[521] Johnston, *Manitous*, xiii.
[522] Johnston, *Manitous*, xiii.
[523] Johnston, *Manitous*, 51-52.
[524] Johnston, *Manitous*, 77.
[525] Johnston, *Manitous*, 86.
[526] Johnston, *Manitous*, 94.

inadvertently manages to escape, while still frightened and fearing for his life, by "tricking" the enemy thanks to his special skill he does not know he has. So, contrary to what his English name suggests, the trickster is more often being tricked than tricky. He represents frailty of human nature and by his misadventures "exemplifies what ought and what ought not to be done."[527]

Johnston also mentions his ability to transform, being "a manitou in the guise of a man or woman"[528] but accentuates his human-like clumsy and ridiculous behaviour. In the Glossary to his book, he also provides an explanation of the Anishinaubae name Nana'b'oozoo meaning "trembling tail", which reflects the timid and cowardly nature of many people.[529] Johnston ends his story by saying that Nana'b'oozoo "learned, but slowly" and became less of a blunderer but left the country when people started following the ways of "the pale-faced latecomer."[530] Johnston's work can be taken as an attempt to call the trickster back, to let him know that there are people ready to follow him and "welcome him into their lives" as this was his condition for return.[531]

The role of the trickster as a mentor gets a prominent place also in Leanne Simpson's understanding. She explains that "Nanabozho is also a powerful teacher, our first teacher, the first researcher . . . He has given a large number of gifts to the Nishnaabeg and done a large amount of balancing."[532] Simpson perceives his clownish appearance as a method of teaching rather than the essence of his character in saying that "Nanabush assumes a role of 'buffoon' in some instances in order to be an effective teacher"[533] and notes that there are stories of trickster's brilliance and skill as well as of his/her clumsiness, which slightly conflicts Johnston's perception. In other words, she objects to relegating the trickster to the role of a joker because it understates the educative function that she perceives to be his crucial quality. Similarly to Sinclair, she calls for contextualizing trickster stories so that the values they were created to transmit do not vanish under the weight of Western concepts.[534]

---

[527] Johnston, *Manitous*, 244.
[528] Johnston, *Manitous*, 75.
[529] Johnston, *Manitous*, 244.
[530] Johnston, *Manitous*, 95.
[531] Johnston, *Manitous*, 95.
[532] Simpson, *Dancing*, 73.
[533] Simpson, *Dancing*, 73.
[534] Simpson, *Dancing,* 74.

An interesting point to the debate was brought by Neal McLeod (and reiterated by Simpson and Innes, for example).[535] McLeod deems the term trickster as "inaccurate" since it suggests that "this sacred being is little more than a buffoon," and stresses the importance of the Cree term *kistêsinaw* which means "our Elder Brother."[536] For him, which term is used is of great importance since it determines the whole attitude towards this character. Using Elder Brother "instantly assumes a state of kinship and relationship between humans and the rest of creation"[537] and thus shifts the conceptual framework beyond only human-centered discourse, he explains. In other words, the term Elder Brother embodies the close relatedness of the trickster and humans while avoiding downplaying the significance of his actions as mere tricks. It also reflects the importance of the concept of relationality in Indigenous storytelling. Of course, the term McLeod endorses goes against Highway's, Keeshig-Tobias' and Johnston's presentations of the trickster as gender fluid or gender neutral while they agree on trickster's/Elder Brother's transformability. This incongruity highlights the complexity and variety of this figure in perception of individual cultures and individuals as such and illustrates the need for cultural specificity when talking about the trickster. Alternatively, McLeod also uses the term "the Cree transformer" instead of the trickster to highlight his transformative skills.[538]

McLeod presents another significant argument and that is his understanding of trickster narratives as a source of a "Cree critical theory."[539] Trickster stories create a part of *âtayôhkêwina*, sacred stories or spiritual history, which are essential for understanding one's ancestry but also one's experience of the contemporary world. Trickster stories play a crucial role here since the trickster with his transformability enables to "re-imagine the landscape of Cree territory . . . and constructed social spaces."[540] Tasha Beeds (nêhiyaw) also emphasizes that the trickster stories form "the core of our [nêhiyawak] philosophies," which are always transforming to react to people's actual experience.[541] This seems to be the reason for the trickster's immense popularity – with his flexibility and adaptability he can accommodate all the features of contemporary life while still remaining traditional and

---

535 Simpson, *Dancing*; Robert Alexander Innes, *Elder Brother and the Law of the People: Contemporary Kinship and Cowessess First Nation* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2013).

536 McLeod, *Cree*, 97, 103.

537 McLeod, *Cree*, 97.

538 McLeod, *Cree*, 106.

539 McLeod, *Cree*, 97.

540 McLeod, *Cree*, 98.

541 Tasha Beeds, "Remembering the Poetics of Ancient Sound kistêsinâw/wîsahkêcâhk's maskihkiy (Elder Brother's Medicine)," in *Indigenous Poetics in Canada*, ed. Neal McLeod (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014), 63, 61.

referring to ancient knowledge. In this sense, the trickster becomes a powerful tool to re-think the world, a tool to bring forth new theories to explicate the contemporary condition, a function far more serious than that of a buffoon.

Another point results from the trickster stories being part of âtayôhkêwina. As McLeod explains, the term applies to stories featuring âtayôhkanak, spiritual helpers, meaning the trickster is one of them.[542] The trickster embodies the interconnection of stories and spirituality and this also explains his prominent role in traditional storytelling. Benton-Banai also accentuates the trickster's spirituality and his affinity to people at the same time saying that he constitutes "the link through which human form was gradually given to the spiritual beings of the Earth."[543] Considering this, the trickster cannot be understood simply as a clown, since he bridges the human and the manitou worlds, and his role is greater than to elicit laughter.

James (Sákéj) Youngblood Henderson, Chickasaw, confirms conversely the significance of the trickster as an essential cognitive device, a theory of cognition, when talking about the influences of Eurocentrism. In his essay "Postcolonial Ghost Dancing" he explains the way ideas defining Western culture such as diffusionism, universalism, and dependence on differences are used to legitimize colonialism. With reference to other Indigenous groups, he calls this Eurocentrism of thought the "anti-trickster". In the same way the trickster represents a key cognitive device in Indigenous cultures, teaching about balance and the possibilities of transformation, Eurocentrism is a fundamental mode of thought creating seeming neutrality, objectivity, and verisimilitude of Western thinking, which produces the semblance of progress and higher developmental stage of Western cultures. While the trickster serves to achieve survival and continuance of the cultures by merging the traditional with the transformative, the "anti-trickster", as Youngblood says, acts "to justify the oppression and domination of contemporary Indigenous peoples and their spiritual guardians."[544] In the context of the Western constructed universality, the trickster proves to be immensely important with his power to challenge and transform the norms and counteract the construction of Eurocentric paradigm.

Acknowledging the other sides of the trickster is, however, equally vital. While his role as a teacher, mediator, and spiritual helper deserves to be celebrated and appreciated, scholars also point out that the quality of the trickster is more complex and some of his

[542] McLeod, *Cree*, 17.
[543] Benton-Banai, *Mishomis*, 30.
[544] Henderson, "Postcolonial," 58.

slightly or increasingly disturbing features should not be overlooked. Richard Van Camp with his short story "Why Ravens Smile to Little Old Ladies as They Walk By …" opens up the theme of sexuality in trickster stories, for example. Jace Weaver calls the trickster a lecher but still holy.[545] Kristina Fagan discerns the tendency to play down the negative features of the trickster especially in literary criticism.[546] Gerald Vizenor cautions against idealizing this figure saying that the trickster is "capable of violence, deceptions, and cruelties."[547] While Daniel Morley Johnson perceives this capacity as still serving a good end – subverting and challenging established social norms,[548] Craig Womack is far less conciliatory: "Celebrating tricksters, it seems to me, should be done with caution. It is important to remember that shape-shifting can also be a form of witchery and that tricksters can be oppressive assholes as often as liberators."[549] This moral ambivalence makes the character really fascinating, hard to grasp, and distinct from Western binary categories of good and evil.

The complexity of the trickster mirrors the complexity of human life and human character and that is why he is the most suitable teacher for humankind and also our relative. The trickster is evasive and manifold, manitou and humanly weak at the same time, clumsy and sacred, comic and dangerous, liberator and oppressor. He also inhabits all the spaces in between these categories since he is not dependent on binary oppositions. The trickster is a representation and embodiment of human power to transform and re-envision the world and a warning that such a crucial process must be done with vigilance.

5.3 Vizenor's comic holotropical trickster

Gerald Vizenor, an Anishinaabe/mixblood scholar, critic, and author, dedicated considerable space to the trickster and trickster narratives in his work. Vizenor's perception of the trickster is closely linked to the other notable terms he brought forward such as survivance, postindian warriors, and manifest manners. For Vizenor, the trickster has been gravely misunderstood by Western cultural sciences and the inability to grasp the trickster in its complexity depicts the chasm between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous

[545] Weaver, *Other Words*, 251.

[546] Fagan, "What's," 10.

[547] Gerald Vizenor, *The People Named the Chippewa: Native Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 3-4.

[548] Johnson, "(Re)Nationalizing," 209.

[549] Craig S. Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 301.

thinking in general. The substance of the trickster lies in his communality, figuration linking the unconscious with the lived experience, ability of counterpoise, and comicality.

Vizenor poses several objections to the Western understanding of the trickster. Firstly, he feels that the trickster is in non-Indigenous debate often displayed as a "mere cultural representation" lacking his figurative and spiritual quality.[550] This deficiency in interpretation is caused, according to Vizenor, by the inability of anthropologists to "hear stories as creative literature."[551] In other words, the collectors and transcribers were not aware and did not take into account the interconnection and the necessity of active participation of both the narrator and the listener. As a consequence, the transcribed and examined stories frequently do not undergo internalization by the audience and the lack of the cultural context causes the fact that the trickster is primarily understood as an emblem of cultural difference and rarity, not as an enabler of transformation.

The second obstacle stems from the exclusiveness and self-centeredness of non-Indigenous science. Vizenor calls the scholarly debates of the trickster "autistic monologues with science" since, in his point of view, the anthropologists lead dialogues between each other but not with the tribal narrators, which keeps the conversations within one cultural paradigm and the differences between conceptual frameworks remain unaddressed.[552]

And thirdly, in Western science, the trickster is understood as a static cultural unit. Vizenor explains this on the example of the Jungian interpretation of the trickster. While Vizenor seems to agree with Jung that the trickster is an archetypal pattern derived from the unconscious (even though he would object to the universality of this unconsciousness), he refuses Jung's claim that the trickster is an artifact shattered by civilization and only partially surviving in hardly recognizable forms in folklore.[553] The misconception of the trickster as an artifact is built on the presupposition that the trickster is not and cannot be active and an agent,[554] and therefore remains stationary, while in Indigenous cultures the trickster is endowed with animacy, even though he is not an actual person and he has "no corporeal or material representation."[555] As discussed in the second chapter, the distribution of animacy differs considerably in Western and Indigenous paradigms. All

[550] Vizenor, *Manifest*, 75.
[551] Vizenor, *Manifest*, 75.
[552] Gerald Vizenor, *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 198, 203.
[553] Vizenor, *Narrative*, 205.
[554] Vizenor, *Narrative*, 205.
[555] Vizenor, *Narrative,* 196.

these factors combined prevent non-Indigenous science to get closer to the essence of the trickster and leave the scholars only with the option to proclaim his obscurity.

The number of definitions of the trickster in Vizenor's work reflects the complexity of the figure. The trickster is a sign, holotrope, figuration, discourse, liberator, healer, and ironic creator, to name a few. Comicality, communality, figuration, and fortuity are the qualities that stand out in most of these definitions. Kimberley Blaeser writes that "throughout the Vizenor canon we find his efforts to expose, remove, relocate, and rewrite the sign 'Indian'."[556] Subverting the Western perception of the trickster and explicating him from Indigenous perspective can surely be considered a part of these efforts. The trickster is, after all, also a sign and often equally misleading as the word "Indian". In order to rectify this misconception, Vizenor introduces the term holotrope. The trickster is "the whole figuration that ties the unconscious to social experiences,"[557] he writes in his *Narrative Chance*. The trickster is not a simple, separate, individual figure in a narrative, but he is communal. Vizenor adds that "the author, narrator, characters, and audience are the signifiers and comic holotropes in trickster narratives."[558] This means that the basis of the trickster figuration does not lie in the one-way relation of the signifier and the signified but the signifier constitutes of several elements entering the process of the narration, namely the narrator, characters, and audience. Moreover, Vizenor points out the communality of the trickster in the context of trickster narratives. Building on Bakhtin and his theory of utterance, he states that the "trickster is a comic discourse, a collection of 'utterances' in oral traditions."[559] Every trickster story operates in relation to all the other trickster stories, together creating a whole discourse. We can say that the essence of the trickster is dialogic and this dialogism comes from two sides simultaneously – from the contextualization of a trickster story within the trickster discourse, and from the dialogic nature of the process of trickster storytelling. The trickster cannot be understood in isolation of one story, one narrator, or one listener since the communality, or dialogism, is what defines him.

The idea of the trickster as a comic liberator and healer comes from his power to "seek the balance in contraries and the contraries in balance"[560] and from being "an ironic

[556] Blaeser, *Gerald*, 39.
[557] Vizenor, *Narrative,* 188.
[558] Vizenor, *Narrative,* 188.
[559] Vizenor, *Narrative,* 191.
[560] Vizenor, *Earthdivers,* 20.

creator and, in the same instance, the contradiction to creation."[561] He enables transformation and creation on the one hand, but also subverts and undermines the already created by intentionally breaking and twisting the rules. In this way he keeps creation, conceptual frameworks including, in a constant process of re-evaluation and restoration and prevents the emergence of what Vizenor calls "terminal creeds" - stagnant, rigid beliefs that enclose human potential in preconceived notions such as Manifest destiny or the "Indian". He can liberate people from being defined and from defining themselves by these notions. This also explains the difficulty to characterize the trickster; he resists universal, comprehensive definitions because once fully defined, he would become static and terminal. For this reason, as Vizenor says, the trickster is a "comic sign that 'wanders' in universal signification."[562] The trickster travels continually through signification. Expanding on Vizenor, Renate Eigenbrod calls this quality "wanderlust",[563] expressing the notion of ever-changing world. Moreover, this feature is not mere fidgetiness but trickster's ability to move across boundaries also brings the possibility and responsibility to kill monsters,[564] both in the shape of actual beasts and in the figurative sense in the form of terminal creeds, we can add.

Fortuity, or chance, is yet another defining feature of the trickster which ensures his continual flexibility and transformability. Vizenor frequently stresses that the trickster is a sign in a language game[565] and he links this game to orality. "The trickster sign wanders between narrative voices and comic chance in oral presentations,"[566] he says. The trickster as a sign is not fixed, determined, and stable and thus its meaning shifts between the varied participants' connotations and its indeterminacy is further magnified by the momentum of the oral storytelling in which many unexpected factors can operate and influence the transmission of the narration. This highlighted aspect of the, often subversive, game and emphasis on chance in the process of the construction of meaning is what the trickster shares with postmodernity and what made the trickster attractive to poststructuralist and postmodern critics.

Vizenor reiterates that the trickster is a liberator with humor as his instrument of liberation. Humor is the tool to expose and counter manifest manners, manifestations of

[561] Vizenor, *Manifest,* 170.
[562] Vizenor, *Narrative,* 206.
[563] Eigenbrod, *Travelling*, 165.
[564] Eigenbrod, *Travelling*, 166.
[565] Vizenor, *Narrative,* 187, 192, 197.
[566] Vizenor, *Narrative,* 189.

colonial notions in representations of Indigenous cultures, and by liberating the representations to ensure Indigenous survivance, "the active sense of presence."[567] Settler colonialism has hindered Indigenous presence through dispossession and various assimilation policies. Even though Indigenous consciousness exists in shadows, as Vizenor puts it, due to the disruption of the oral tradition by colonialism, these shadows are powerful enough to "overturn . . . the final vocabularies of dominance."[568] Indeed, in Anishinaabe culture shadows are animate and with agency.[569] Vizenor employs the trickster in his own writing for exactly this purpose – to dismantle the misleading notions of dominance. As Blaeser asserts, Vizenor "liberates the reader from preconceived notions, inciting an imaginative re-evaluation of history."[570] The trickster narratives constitute both the themes of his writing and his method of writing.

Vizenor believes strongly that trickster narratives are crucial for Indigenous survivance. In an interview with Blaeser, Vizenor characterizes trickster narratives as life, juice, and energy.[571] They are juicy and energetic in their humor and ironic view on human nature and they are key to life and survival due to the trickster's ability to teach us to "balance the forces of good and evil through humor"[572] and to show us the potential of transformability and re-creation, "div[ing] into unknown urban places now . . . to create a new consciousness of coexistence,"[573] to quote from the Preface to his *Earthdivers*. The re-creation, however, does not mean abandoning the old and the traditional, but keeping the tradition while simultaneously searching for new ways to exist in the contemporary world. The trickster is an embodiment of these opposing forces.

Vizenor's story "Ice Tricksters" presents probably the most telling definition of the trickster in his work. A family from the Leech Lake Chippewa Indian Reservation in Minnesota enter an ice sculpture competition held as a part of the celebration of July 4. The recurrent word "almost" characterizes the trickster in this story. Their sculpture is "almost a man and almost a woman,"[574] has features of all the members of the family, slides down to the lake overnight and melts partially so that it becomes "almost a

[567] Vizenor, *Manifest,* vii.
[568] Vizenor, *Manifest,* 68.
[569] Vizenor, *Manifest,* 63.
[570] Blaeser, *Gerald,* 85.
[571] Blaeser, *Gerald,* 17.
[572] qtd. in Blaeser, *Gerald,* 64.
[573] Vizenor, *Earthdivers,* ix.
[574] Gerald Vizenor, *Shadow Distance: A Gerald Vizenor Reader* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 121.

trickster"[575] and when the judges of the contest ask what a trickster is, the family answers "almost a person."[576] The word "almost" expresses the indeterminacy and elusiveness of the trickster – being almost a man, almost a woman, almost a person, a bit of everything but nothing fully and constantly. Their trickster is even "almost a whole trickster,"[577] suggesting the term itself always leaves some space for re-interpretation, and no representation of him can be definitive and exhaustive, since its signification is characterised by chance.[578] Also, the trickster they created is communal – was created collectively, has attributes of all the family members, combines the ideas about the trickster of all the members. The story represents a narrative version of Vizenor's definition of the trickster being a communal sign, a holotrope.

The trickster inhabits the transformative spaces of imagination, spaces between word meanings, and invites the audience to liberate their mind by exploring the gaps in notions and concepts. The theory of the trickster operates in liminal spaces and generates a great creative space since it works not with new configurations of established concepts but with the blurred lines and shadows in between these concepts. Vizenor writes "the trickster is being, nothingness and liberation; a loose seam in consciousness; that wild space over and between sounds, words, sentences and narratives; and, at last, the trickster is comic shit."[579] However arbitrary the connection of the trickster with excrement might seem, it is actually based on traditional storytelling as well and serves as another theoretical basis for Vizenor's conceptualization.

The earthdiver creation story has many versions (the Sky woman story discussed in the previous chapter being one of them) and plays an essential role in Indigenous survivance because it speaks about the ability to re-create one's whole environment, one's world. However, in Vizenor's perception it is at the same time a trickster story and as such it can be very ironic. The story he quotes in his Preface to *Earthdivers*, in which Wenebojo, the trickster, defecates while standing in deluge and then creates the new earth,[580] resists the severity of the creation stories with subversion. The core aspects of the story, reciprocity and relationality, still remain valid, though, since the trickster asks the

[575] Vizenor, *Shadow,* 122.
[576] Vizenor, *Shadow,* 123.
[577] Vizenor, *Shadow,* 124.
[578] Vizenor writes that "the signifier in a trickster narrative is signified in chance." Vizenor, *Narrative*, 189.
[579] Vizenor, *Narrative,* 196.
[580] Vizenor, *Earthdivers,* xii-xiv.

other animals to dive down and bring him a piece of mud to create the earth.[581] The humor in this story, nevertheless, was not fully comprehended by anthropologists, according to Vizenor, as he relates their attempts to explain the story by, for example, theories of male anal creation as a result of envy of female pregnancy.[582] By their desperate search for serious psychoanalytical explanation, they completely overlooked the humorous aspect of the story and, as he sums up, the assumptions of Western science about the meaning of these stories are off and "shit mounds at the end of the trail in social science."[583] The comic aspect is what liberates and ensures nothing is taken too seriously and turned into a doctrine, and Vizenor makes sure his theories sparkle with irony, too. He remarks that "Nanabozho could not escape his own shit"[584] but neither can humanity. Human understanding is limited and the chance the theories people make are full of fabrication, imprecision, and nonsense has to be accepted. Blaeser notes that Vizenor's recipe for preserving mental balance constitutes of "humor and continual questioning,"[585] which corresponds with trickster qualities. It is important never to stop the inspection of one's mindset and thus subverting with humor the earth our mind walks upon, our conceptual frameworks. Therefore, Vizenor closes the Preface to *Earthdivers* by narrating that "Wenebojo kept on throwing earth around" in a ceaseless process of re-construction and re-evaluation,[586] and that is what keeps the world as well as human cognition in balance.

Vizenor's theorizing openly employs Western critical views. He cites a huge number of key names both of literary criticism and cultural studies as such (from Radin, Levi-Strauss, and Eagleton to Derrida, Barthes, and Lyotard) and works with poststructuralist concepts. For this approach, some scholars classified him as a critic of "cosmopolitan or hybridist"[587] group and the whole Indigenous criticism produced they therefore considered to be, said in Pulitano's words, "a complex, hybridized project."[588] Despite the fact that Vizenor is mostly concerned with the mixblood, urban, or, as he calls

---

[581] Vizenor, *Narrative,* 203.
[582] Vizenor, *Earthdivers,* xv.
[583] Vizenor, *Narrative,* 204.
[584] Vizenor, *Narrative,* 203.
[585] Blaeser, *Gerald,* 50-51.
[586] Vizenor, *Earthdivers*, xiv.
[587] Robert Appleford, "A Response to Sam McKegney's 'Strategies for Ethical Engagement: An Open Letter Concerning Non-Native Scholars of Native Literatures'," in *Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literatures*, ed. Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016), 90.
[588] Elvira Pulitano, "'Introduction' from *Towards a Native American Critical Theory*," in *Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literatures*, ed. Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016), 257.

it, “pantribal”[589] identity and acknowledges intersections of the postmodern and Indigenous theories in, for example, the reflexive and subversive characteristics of postmodernity and literature of survivance visible in emphasis on language game,[590] or the shared mistrust of metanarratives,[591] he also indicates the points of divergence. “The postindian antecedes the postmodern condition,”[592] he claims, adding that Indigenous resilience foresaw the critical attitude of postmodernity towards narratives of history. Similarly, when discussing Ong and Derrida and the primordiality of the written or the oral, he un/resolves this debate by saying that “the trickster was created with bears and crows”[593] and survived all translation, classifications, and re-evaluations; he precedes and persists them. “The postindian mien is survivance over dominance; the postmodern is the discourse of histories over metanarratives” (*Manifest* 167) he adds. According to him, the postmodern and the Indigenous or postindian (stressing the refusal of the invented “Indian”) differ in their purpose. While the former aims for equivalence of discourses, the “decentralized community of differences,”[594] as Linda Hutcheon puts it, the latter strives for resurgence and continuing endurance of Indigenous cultures. This difference relates to the aforementioned Judith Leggatt’s point expressed in the following: “The disruptive possibilities offered by poststructuralism, postmodernism, chaos and other such Western academic constructions grow out of modernist angst, and, at the same time, react against past modes of thought. Trickster discourse, on the other hand is an integral part of an ongoing tradition.”[595] So, while postmodernity is a paradoxical revolt against the past, trickster poetics represents its conscious continuation.

Neither is Vizenor uncritical towards the mixblood and postindian identities: “Postindian identities are inscrutable recreations, the innermost brush with natural reason, and, at the same time, unbounded narcissism and a rush of new simulations of survivance.”[596] He does not idealize the contemporary Indigenous identities; he is aware they still operate through simulations and that the nature of the identity can be in some aspects contradictory.

---

[589] Vizenor, *Manifest,* 60.
[590] Vizenor, *Manifest*, 69; Vizenor, *Narrative*, 192.
[591] Vizenor, *Manifest,* 67.
[592] Vizenor, *Manifest,* 167.
[593] Vizenor, *Narrative,* 201.
[594] Hutcheon, *Poetics*, 12.
[595] Leggatt, “Quincentennial,” 227.
[596] Vizenor, *Manifest,* 52.

The emphasis on the tribal, to use his term, seeps through his work, in spite of the disruptions of Indigenous cultures by colonialism, which he represents by the recurrent usage of expressions such as "shadows", "memories", "remembrance", "silence" when conveying his ideas. Still, the connection to the tribal remains strong, if the people are willing to see the shadows and "hear stories in the blood."[597] Blaeser observes that these connections are "internal rather than external" and the connection to specific place, land, often seen as defining of Indigenous literatures, is "imaginative rather than actual."[598] The basis of the tribal belonging, in other words, is not necessarily established by formal locations of people but rather by emotional and experienced associations with Indigenous culture. The internal bond with the tribal and communal is manifested, for example, in the trickster narratives. Even though Vizenor engages Western theories and his criticism is not always tied to a specific community, he "seeks and achieves a tribal connection."[599] Jace Weaver, who is considered to represent the nationalist group of critics, also recognizes Vizenor's strong tie to tribal culture. "The identity Vizenor has elaborately been defining and redefining has at its base the deep and unmistakable roots of 'tribal' values,"[600] he writes, even if Vizenor names these identities "crossbloods" or "mixedblood". Michèle Lacombe writes correspondingly that "his [Vizenor's] approach is based in a Native-American, specifically Ojibway rather than a post-colonial sense of hybridity,"[601] recognizing thus the tribal basis of Vizenor's criticism, even though still using the problematic word "hybridity". It seems that including Vizenor's work only in the theories of hybridity would be to downplay the weight he consciously places on the tribal and to remove the ironic agency with which he exercises Western criticism.

Vizenor's criticism and reactions to it represent an embodiment of the conflicted effects of the convergence of the concept of the trickster and postmodernity. Vizenor uses postmodern theory while his trickster remains embedded in Indigenous perception. The key aspects of his trickster - educative transformability, communality, and comicality, correspond with the view of other Indigenous scholars, regardless the poststructuralist terms populating his texts.

---

[597] Vizenor, *Manifest,* 98.

[598] Blaeser, *Gerald*, 200, 201.

[599] Blaeser, *Gerald,* 199.

[600] Jace Weaver, "Splitting the Earth: First Utterances and Pluralist Separatism," in *American Indian Literary Nationalism*, ed. Weaver, Womack, and Warrior (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 21-22.

[601] Michèle Lacombe, "On Critical Frameworks for Analyzing Indigenous Literature: The Case of *Monkey Beach*," *International Journal of Canadian Studies,* no. 41 (2010): 256.

5.4 Weesquachak

Ruby Slipperjack (Anishinabe) comes from the Eabametoong First Nation in Ontario and, despite her insistence that she does not feel like a writer,[602] she is an acclaimed author. Interestingly, her other novels, *Honour the Sun* (1987) and *Silent Words* (1992), got more critical attention than the novel I would like to examine, *Weesquachak*, from 2005 (published previously under the title *Weesquachak and the Lost Ones* in 2000). Perhaps the novel got sidelined for its specific style because, for example, New called it "somewhat mechanically written,"[603] even though I would strongly disagree with that statement. The reason might be also in Slipperjack's characteristic requirement on the reader to read between the lines, "to have that feeling between the sentences,"[604] and to search for their own explanation of the narrative events. Be that as it may, the novel brings and interesting portrayal of its titular character, Weesquachak or the trickster, who features as the initiator of the events while at the same time staying in the background.

The story follows the relationship of Janine/Channie/Charlie and Fred with all the high and low points, misunderstandings, and suffering. After many hurtful split-ups, fierce arguments, betrayals, and a good deal of physical pain as well, they gradually find the way back together and the narrative ends with their wedding. It also talks about their struggle and learning to communicate their feelings properly and about Channie's search for her place in the world, moving between different cultures. Weesquachak accompanies them throughout the whole process. Beyer notes Slipperjack's "dramatic, on and off again relationships" and praises the "sense of community" in the novel.[605] Indeed, the novel deals with the couple's complicated relationship but also with familial interactions and their connection to other community members, depicting the search for one's place in the complex web of community life.

Following Doueihi's advice to examine primarily the terms as set by the narrative itself,[606] I will at first consider various qualities of Weesquachak as depicted in the text and then connect them with the definitions provided in the previous sections. Subsequently, the

[602] Hartmut Lutz, *Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native Authors* (Markham, Ontario: Fifth House Publishers, 1991), 212.

[603] W. H. New, "Aftermath 2001," *Canadian Literature*, no. 175 (2002), 192.

[604] Lutz, *Contemporary*, 210.

[605] Donna Beyer, "Peguis First Nation Reads Native Literature: Toward a Community Based Theory," (Master thesis, University of Manitoba, 2011), 21.

[606] qtd. in Leggatt, "Quincentennial," 222.

analysis will focus on defining and interpreting the trickster moments, as suggested by Margery Fee.[607]

5.4.1 Qualities

Despite the fact that otherwise Weesquachak enters the text only occasionally and the majority of the space is given to Channie's thoughts interspersed with Fred's points of view, the novel opens with Weesquachak talking:

> Walking along the sand beach with my bag of songs over my shoulder, I long for the old days when people use to talk about me. They acknowledged my existence then. I am Weesquachak or the Trickster as other people call me these days. I have been around since the beginning of time and was always an integral part of the people's lives for generations. Now, I feel very much alone.[608]

In the first paragraph of the narrative, the author delineates the very basic information about Weesquachak – that he has been there since time immemorial and that he is, or at least used to be, vital to the people. However, he feels disregarded now and the people seem to have forgotten about him. This sense of loneliness is what makes him akin to humans, but it also triggers his mischief. As the pivotal element of the people's lives, he seeks the spotlight he was accustomed to and this need of attention also constitutes his human-like weakness. We can sympathize with his sadness of being alone, however, his ego takes hold and he selfishly focuses on satisfying it; "I will not be forgotten. I will make them know I exist,"[609] he proclaims. Shortly after this assertion, he notices Channie going from their cabin to the train station, and she becomes the instrument for his gratification.

Even though Channie herself is still searching for her place in the world, moving repeatedly in between leaving to town for school and for work and coming back to the community, Weesquachak has noticed her extraordinary quality of being grounded in Indigeneity. "Right from the moment she was born, I knew she was an old one. She could become the bridge from the past to present,"[610] he says in his second address. Channie feels lost (hence the "lost one" from the first title of the novel), but Weesquachak knows a strong connection to traditional Anishnabe culture exists within her, albeit she is not fully

[607] Fee, "Trickster," 71.
[608] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak*, 7.
[609] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak*, 10.
[610] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 10.

aware of that. This "aura"[611] of the past around her attracts him greatly. At the bottom of his fascination by her still lies the anguish of solitude, discernible in the following line, for example: "I want to be one with her so that I can be back in my old 'home',"[612] his sexual desire, however, is dangerously growing and tainting his plans: "I want her. I want her more that I have ever wanted anyone in a very, very, very, long time."[613] The reader might be compassionate to Weesquachak at first, but by now it starts to be clear that his actions put Channie in danger.

Weesquachak's transformative ability surfaces at the very beginning as well. While the first sentence depicts him "walking along the sand beach" carrying "bag of songs over [his] shoulder" expressions implying a human being, in the last sentence of his opening speech he decides to "take flight and see what she [Channie] is up to."[614] When a raven glides over her two paragraphs further, the reader acquainted with trickster stories easily recognizes Weesquachak's new form in it. The bird intensifies her anxiety from the upcoming journey with insecure outcomes and the sense of an era coming to an end.[615] She annoyingly asks: "What does he [the raven] know anyway?"[616] The question expresses her foolishness and her distance from Anishinabeg culture; she does not read the sign and does not comprehend how much the raven actually knows. Weesquachak, nevertheless, sensing her irritation, transforms swiftly into something more pleasant to her, "soft and quiet,"[617] and a black and white dog appears. In this new form, he manages to win her affection momentarily as she stops to pat his head. There comes another warning when she takes her now "gritty"[618] hand away, which represents that nobody comes off clean being part of Weesquachak's mischief. Being more attuned to her city adventure that to her traditional culture at that moment, she ignores the hints and sets off.

Weesquachak does not stay only in various animal forms in the novel. Quite soon after Channie's arrival to Port Arthur (today's Thunder Bay) he metamorphoses into a white man,[619] hoping he would win her heart and when this plan does not work out, he places wagers on becoming a handsome Anishinabeg man.[620] Still, Fred and Channie keep

---

[611] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 48.
[612] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 48.
[613] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak*, 48.
[614] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak*, 7.
[615] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 7.
[616] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak*, 7-8.
[617] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak*, 10.
[618] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak*, 11.
[619] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak*, 45.
[620] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 81.

getting together so he turns into Fred's lover, Karen, to make Channie jealous and provoke her to end the relationship.[621] Finally, in a frenzy to get rid of every obstacle, he takes on the form of Channie's lifelong friend Ron[622] and kills both Karen and Jason, the object of Fred's jealousy. At the very end, during Fred's and Channie's wedding Weesaquachak bids his farewell as Ron to them, and a raven flies around, "squawking and reeling crazily."[623] Slipperjack's trickster has multiple forms at his disposal and he employs them accordingly to his aim. There are no limits to his shapeshifting, as he says: "I am anything I want to be. I am he. I am she. I am it. *I am*."[624] (emphasis added) Weesquachak exists and that is all that is necessary to say; his existence is not bound to any particular fixed form since he precedes the world of shapes.

Weesquachak's status remains true to the tricky/ing aspect suggested in his English name as well. The tricks he plays on the characters are rooted in, as discussed before, his loneliness and magnified by his intensive sexual desire directed to Channie. He confesses that "I love women, I especially love having sex with women and I find that I have come to want this woman more than anything I have wanted in a very, very long time."[625] The game he stages is quite cruel and he does not show much compassion to the characters' suffering he causes. As Farrell-Morneau (Anishinawbe) puts it, "we also see Weesquachak's inability to sympathize with the loss of loved ones because he is focused solely on his own interests."[626] He provokes jealousy in both Channie and Fred, he is behind their numerous arguments but the most tragic plot he designs results in Channie's miscarriage and nearly her death.

As they spent time together on Fred's trapline for the first time and Channie gets pregnant, they both get the feeling that there is somebody sneaking around. On top of that, strange incidents seemingly without causal agent start happening such as a wood pile falling on Channie while she is hanging clothes, a bunch of hair appearing on a branch that is neither his nor hers, a hole made in Fred's canoe, etc., and they start secretly blaming one another. Distance is growing between them, deepened by their inability to express their feelings and anxieties in a healthy way. Fred gets suspicious and being more in connection

---

[621] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 240.
[622] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak*, 218.
[623] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 276.
[624] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 276.
[625] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 45-46.
[626] Amy Lynn Farrell-Morneau, "Memengwaawid, To Be A Butterfly: An Indigenous Exploration of Northwestern Ontario Anishinawbe and Muskego or Ininiw Sacred Stories and Teachings in a Contemporary Novel," (PhD diss., Lakehead University, 2014), 218.

to his Anishinabeg heritage, he hints one night that Weesquachak might be the cause, asking "What would you think if we had Weesquachak pestering us here in the summer?"[627] She, nevertheless, dismisses this as nonsense since she considers trickster tales as fabrications disconnected from reality. Despite not expressed directly in the text, one can read in between the lines that Weesquachak is as well responsible for Fred's delay at Christmas when he goes to town for supplies very close to Channie's due date. Channie starts to get cramps and is forced to travel on her own on a snow mobile for miles to get help. She loses her baby, another reference to the first title, and escapes death by a whisker.[628]

In spite of his cruel traps and tricks, Weesquachak retains his characteristic humorousness and several comic moments flick through the episodes of pain and hurt, for example, Channie's well-meant pat of the dirty dog at the beginning. Another source of humour is Weesquachak's movement through realms and forms and also his lack of understanding of the beings he transforms into. Shapeshifted into an attractive white man, he finds women easily drawn to him and he is unable to resist the temptation.[629] Realizing this would hardly help him getting Channie, he tells his suitoresses that he "is only interested in having a relationship with my own kind"[630] and is surprised by their shocked reaction. Even though he is actually being honest in his turn-down line, he makes a fool out of himself by not understanding social codes. Similarly, he gets a bit carried away while sneaking up Fred's cabin and taking up shapes of various animals, who get mad by his "liberal use of their forms."[631] Similarly to the storylines of traditional tales, he has difficulties keeping his tricks under control and while plotting against the other characters, he gets himself into trouble instead.

As we can see, Slipperjack's Weesquachak fits into the traditional trickster discourse. Despite functioning in modern world and suffering from the neglect of his own people, his basic characteristic remains. He represents ancient knowledge, he retains his limitless ability to transform, he plans his tricks that frequently turn against him, and he also generates humor by his clumsiness. The mischief he stages for the characters ends several times in death and the incidents he incites tend to be dangerous, which brings to

[627] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak*, 183.
[628] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 158-162.
[629] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 46, 52.
[630] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 47.
[631] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 144.

mind Womack's idea of the trickster as "oppressive asshole."[632] The Weesquachak Slipperjack portrays is both traditional and complex. By examining closely his features, we need to agree with Doueihi that it is important to start with the terms the narrative itself sets[633] rather than assigning to him preconceived labels which might lead to overlooking some particularities. By starting from the narrative, space for all specificities of this author's trickster is opened while the similarities with other trickster definitions might be still observed.

5.4.2 Function and teaching moments

It is also necessary to examine Weesquchak's role in the narrative, or as Emma LaRocque asks: "What purpose does the Trickster[sic] serve in contemporary times?"[634] Is he the liberator Vizenor talks about? Does he provide teachings to the characters as Keeshig-Tobias, Simpson, and McLeod state? What are the "trickster moments"?[635]

Both Fred and Channie are familiar with the traditional trickster tales. When Channie gets lost in a swamp while pursuing a partridge, she remembers her mum telling stories just like that about the trickster in an animal form leading people astray. She scolds herself for not knowing better: "I had fallen for the old trick after being warned about it over and over again from the time I could remember."[636] She heard the warning stories but had to experience it herself to internalize the message and truly learn the lesson. In the same way and on a deeper level, Channie and Fred have to go through many downfalls in their relationship to find a good way to live together and to know themselves better.

Vizenor and McLeod talk about the trickster's ability to re-imagine, re-create the world. His ability to shape-shift to various animal and human forms can be understood as a metaphor for the epistemological growth of the characters or human beings in general. As Farrell-Morneau notes "unlike any other character appearing in sacred story or other types of narratives in Ojibwe and Cree story, he has the power to cause change."[637] At the beginning, Channie is strong-willed and striving for independence but also unable to find her place in or out of the community and struggling with expressing her feelings. Fred has still not processed the tragedy of his first wife dying and as a consequence, he is prone to

---

632 Womack, *Red*, 301.
633 qtd. in Leggatt, "Quincentennial," 222.
634 LaRocque, "Reflections," 159.
635 Fee, "Trickster," 71.
636 Slipperjack, *Weesquachak*, 119.
637 Farrell-Morneau, "Memengwaawid," 225.

alcohol and has troubles communicating his affection in other than authoritative way. At the end, the novel describes two people able to talk through their emotions, Fred is alcohol-free, and Channie finds her place in the community, gets to know her heritage better and participates in ceremonies. To identify the trickster moments in the narrative means to detect the moments of the character's gradual transformation and self-realization.

The tension caused by their impossibility to communicate gets more and more palpable the first time they live on the trapline together. No matter which tricks Weesquachak plays on them, they cannot talk to each other and "silences became longer as my belly became larger,"[638] as Channie says. After her miscarriage, she knows they need to speak openly to each other, urges him to do the same and slowly they learn to communicate even though it is often in the form of an argument.[639] Channie also gradually works on expressing her feelings after she finds out Fred needs that and realizes she inherited the lack of open affection from her mother.[640] Her mother's reservation is not explained in the text but the legacy of residential schools seems to be lurking between the lines. Once Channie improves in her demonstrations of love, Fred feels more secure and does not need to search for support in alcohol or other women. He needs her love because it is the only thing that gives him purpose: "he saw his love for her as a sort of self-preservation."[641] Throughout her stay on the land, Channie gets closer to her Nishnabeg culture and spirituality too, "her spirit flights increased,"[642] and Gook, Fred's aunt and a community elder, serves as her spiritual guide. Towards the end of the novel, a significant uniting moment for Fred and Channie comes when he lies seriously injured in the hospital and learns to appreciate books, her pastime he previously despised in her as a sign of her Westernization.[643] Step by step, they are finding more common ground and manage to sew their worlds together. Weesquachak's actions trigger all these changes but there is no direct causal connection of his deeds and their realization since, in accordance to Indigenous conceptual framework, the characters at first need to internalize his teachings. He is not there to direct them but guide them, which evokes Kimmerer's idea of stories providing orientation, not directives,[644] as mentioned in the previous chapter. The trickster creates teaching moments by his actions for the characters, but the concrete conclusions drawn

[638] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 130.
[639] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 215, 227.
[640] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 112-163.
[641] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 223.
[642] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 121.
[643] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 258.
[644] Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 7.

from these moments depend on their readiness or willingness to listen and on their experience. Rather than the individual mischiefs, the moment Channie realizes her inability to express emotions and her spiritual disconnection, and the moment Fred accepts Channie's individuality and his own insecurity can be identified as the trickster moments.

Interestingly, both Fred and Channie mirror Weesquachak in some of their weaknesses. Channie describes Fred in the following statement: "He always had good intentions but was easily distracted before he'd suddenly remember what he was supposed to do or where he was supposed to be."[645] This trait resembles greatly Weesquachak's irresponsible nature. Meaning well, Fred leaves her during Christmas and causes irrevocable harm. Channie herself admits that she "became totally oblivious to anyone and everyone around me,"[646] withdrawing to herself. In both cases, their behavior shows lack of consideration and compassion to others. This is where Johnston's words about the trickster's "real compassion for others"[647] and McLeod's emphasis of kinship resonate. Fred and Channie need to learn to appreciate their relations and realize how their actions and weaknesses affect others.

As negative as Weesquachak's acts might seem at first, during the narrative the malefactor becomes, at least to some extent, the benefactor. Whereas in his previous speeches Weesquachak is solely focused on getting Channie and plotting against everyone who stands in his way, or, as he says "You see, I took care of Fred. I took that baby, too. I want her all to myself,"[648] when he sees how much he harmed her, he declares "I will hand you your lost one on a cedar bed platter, but only when I feel you are ready"[649] and he puts effort in bringing her and Fred back together. It is at this time that Fred and Ron start to be sure of his presence in the community, too. Weesquachak's change might have resulted from his compassion with Channie or from his fear he would be disclosed and Slipperjack avoids answering it explicitly. Like this, she does not only invite the reader to find their own explanation but also manages to maintain Weesquachak's inner conflictedness and unpredictability depicting his resemblance to human beings and their similarly intricate nature. As Farrell-Morneau says, "Weesquachak is in many ways like humans—complex."[650] Moreover, his beneficence is complicated by the numerous deaths he stages

[645] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 157.
[646] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 182.
[647] Johnston, *Manitous*, 77.
[648] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 168.
[649] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 186.
[650] Farrell-Morneau, "Memenhwaawid," 225.

while taking care of his "little lost ones."[651] Despite his self-congratulatory farewell speech, in which he says "My job is done. Goodbye my lost ones, for you are now found"[652] and takes the credit for Fred's and Channie's reunion, many of his tricks had opposite effect instead. After all, he does not achieve his initial goal to get Channie for himself. Rather than teaching by example, Weesquachak creates transformative possibilities in the narrative and only if the characters take these instances as opportunities for a change, metamorphosis occurs. The author leaves creative space for the readers, too, by not explicating the causality in the narrative. Horne finds this to be a characteristic feature of Slipperjack's writing, using the term "implicature" or communicating the message "not only through but also between the silent words of print."[653] By implying rather than disclosing, the readers are prompted to join the characters in their search for meaning.

Slipperjack's portrayal of the trickster in this novel echoes his role and features in traditional storytelling. Weesquachak continues to evince his qualities traditionally associated with him – transformability, comicality, and teaching balance, while operating in modern environment. In addition, the novel shows the danger of his appearance in one's life representing the peril of yielding to one's weaknesses. The fact that the world has changed for Indigenous communities does not make the trickster obsolete or powerless. On the contrary, since the trickster precedes the structuralized, conceptual world, his transformative force can be utilized in creating new paths because he is not bound by any preconceived notions. It is for this quality that Vizenor calls him liberator. However, the trickster does not come and recreate a new balanced world for the characters, he does not control the world (even if he frequently wants to), the characters themselves must be the agents of the transformation. As Vizenor's earthdivers, they need to dive deep down into the waters of their inner self to recreate themselves. Or in Simpson's words, "we are each responsible for finding our own meanings . . . for coming to our own meaningful way of being in the world."[654] Weesquachak appears to remind the characters of this responsibility and also of their capacity to do so. So, to answer LaRocque's question from the beginning of this section about the trickster's purpose in contemporary world, his aim and values he transmits remain the same as in the traditional tales. It is by learning to internalize the

[651] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 263.
[652] Slipperjack, *Weesquachak,* 276.
[653] Dee Horne, "Listening to Silences in Ruby Slipperjack's *Silent Words*," *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en Littérature Canadienne*, vol. 23, no.2 (1998): 123.
[654] Simpson, *Dancing*, 43.

teachings that the characters contemporize the traditional tenets in the trickster stories. He is there to teach about the complexity of human nature, importance of nurturing relationships and simultaneously of people's immense liberating capacity to restore themselves and the world around. The analysis also shows that the occasions featuring the trickster do not necessarily equal the trickster moments Margery Fee calls for. In my understanding, the trickster moments represent the points of transformation, the instants of internalization of the teachings by the characters. Analyzing solely the depiction of the trickster without his impact on the characters' development leaves his role as a teacher and liberator unanswered.

5.5 Motorcycling Nanabush

Kristina Fagan recognizes that the trickster in contemporary Indigenous writing springs out of "urban, cross-cultural"[655] environment, which, however, does not make these expressions any less authentic or true. As she says, they are manifestations of tradition, "recreated because of specific and current needs."[656] These comments refer mainly to Tomson Highway and Thomas King, the two "celebrities" of Canadian Indigenous writing, but they can relate to Drew Hayden Taylor and the employment of the trickster in his novel *Motorcycles & Sweetgrass*[657] as well. The motorcycling trickster in this novel reminds one of Highway's trickster in the form of a cabaret pianist in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and his confident self-likening to Jesus Christ undoubtedly resembles King's exploration of Christianity versus Indigenous knowledge *in Green Grass, Running Water* or *The Back of the Turtle*. The need behind these employments of the trickster then seems to be informed by a search for a path that would safely connect and balance tradition with modern lifestyle, tribal consciousness with Western thinking. Even though the novel does not look away from the painful legacy of the cross-cultural encounter in the form of residential schools, it still attempts to find modes of life that would bridge over the hurtful memories. Roberts contends that the novel seeks change for the characters and the community, "but not by arguing that that change is inherently shitty."[658] I would add that the story also expresses the need to go back in order to move forward. The trickster, or

[655] Fagan, "What's," 12.
[656] Fagan, "What's," 12.
[657] Drew Hayden Taylor, *Motorcycles & Sweetgrass* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2010).
[658] Duffy Roberts, "Versions of History," *Canadian Literature*, vol. 209 (Summer 2011): 164.

Nanabush, as he is called in the novel, is leading the way on his 1953 Indian Chief motorcycle.

Motorcycles & Sweetgrass follows the Second family living in a fictional Anisnawbe community of Otter Lake and the way they deal with the upheavals caused by Nanabush's arrival to their lives. Long time ago, Nanabush dated Lillian, grandmother in the family, but their relationship ended when she left for residential school and accepted Christ as her spiritual guide. Nevertheless, she never completely forgot about Nanabush, lovingly telling trickster stories to her family, and when she is dying, he answers her calls and comes to bid his farewell in the form of a white handsome man on a motorcycle. After her departure, Nanabush turns his focus to Maggie, Lillian's daughter and chief of the community, who finds it hard to resist his charm in her life full of petty small-town politics. Her son Virgil, however, notices there is something strange about the guy and decides to put a stop to this affair with the help of his peculiar uncle Wayne. At first, they need to find an answer to the question "Who the hell are you?"[659] as Virgil asks when first meeting the biker. Let us respond to this question by looking at the form of the trickster as presented in the text.

5.5.1 Qualities

Similarly to Slipperjack's Weesquachak, Hayden Taylor's Nanabush also radiates a certain ancient vibe. In the Prologue, Nanabush is as a young Indigenous man swimming in a lake with Lillian. The sunfish below suffers silently this ruffle while thinking that "there was something familiar about the man" and trying in vain to remember when they could have met.[660] When Nanabush makes his grand entrance to the community, the bystanders also have a feeling that "the rider was new here, yet in a way they couldn't explain, he also wasn't."[661] They are left with the impression that it is all "so … complex."[662] The characters, both human and other-than-human, instantly sense the man comes from a different realm. Both of these instances also express the feeling of familiarity or kinship to him, even though the participants do not let these thoughts bother them for too long. When Virgil observes Nanabush's, or at that time John's, dance by the lake, he describes the

[659] Taylor, *Motorcycles*, 76.
[660] Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 2.
[661] Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 34.
[662] Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 34.

dance as both ancient and modern, "and just about everything in between."[663] As a shape-shifter and wanderer through spheres, Nanabush can take on contemporary features while maintaining his connection to antiquity, to the time before.[664] In this way, embodying the old and the new simultaneously, he can also help Virgil to find a way to reconcile his ties to the family with his desire to explore the world.

The transformability of Nanabush is implied as early as in the Prologue. Having scared her by being under the water longer than anybody else could without harm, Lillian teasingly asks him if he is a half-fish. His reply "on occasion"[665] is in fact more honest that she might think at that moment. Despite the fact that he stays in a human form mostly the whole narrative (being an Anishnawbe young man first, then a white biker and lastly an Anishnawbe biker), his shape-shifting seeps through by the changing color of his eyes and instability of his last name which creates much confusion in the community. Moreover, he displays his ability to communicate with animals not only in his epic argument with the raccoons, but also by emitting an "authentic *crow* caw" (emphasis original) understood in bird language by the overhearing crow as "I'm back" when arriving to Otter Lake.[666]

Hayden Taylor depicts the disconnection of people from Nanabush as well. Unlike Slipperjack's novel, in which the separation was mostly expressed by Weesquachak's words, this story materializes his detachment in chapter two by portraying him as an old, decrepit, secluded drunkard sharing a room with a cockroach in an undefined urban area. As he subsequently explains to Virgil, he tried to forget the alienation from his people and the boredom and emptiness of his life by drinking.[667] He recognizes he was hurt by this disinterest. When he meets Jesus, however, he puts the blame on him and his "friends"[668] but expresses his willingness to forgive. In this light, the chapter might be read as an allegory of the effects of colonization and residential schools on Indigenous peoples which created disruption in Indigenous cultures and belief systems. Nanabush undergoes the same struggle as so many of his people trying to reach oblivion in the form of substance abuse to stop the pain inflicted by the system.

---

[663] Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 130.
[664] This is how Marlene Millar, Métis Meadow Lake area elder, referred to ancient stories.
[665] Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 3.
[666] Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 32.
[667] Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 78.
[668] Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 267.

Before their fight, Wayne characterizes Nanabush followingly: "he is more human than most humans, he has all their nobility, and all their faults – magnified."[669] It is this mixture of noble compassion and low lust that wakes him from his stupor. Having called on and being silently rejected by an Indigenous woman he sees out of his window, Nanabush starts thinking about Lillian, who, unlike all his other memories seems "real" and suddenly he knows what to do.[670] The incidents he sets in motion are, likewise, motivated by concoction of contradictory emotions. For example, he promises Lillian to bring some magic into the community out of genuine feelings for her but then he self-centeredly focuses on her daughter, hoping the ability to make him feel good "runs in the family."[671] He once ate a raccoon when hungry, bringing on himself the rage of raccoon posterity but then he saves a little bird because he sympathizes with it.[672] He wants to help Maggie finalize the land claim but cannot get over her refusal to go for lunch with him when he is hungry and she is busy.[673] As Wayne says to Virgil, Nanabush is "a creature of appetites, of emotions, of desires. That is not a good thing to be."[674] The emotions get the better of him and he becomes focused only on what he wants. In consequence, the blunders he makes complicate the lives of the people around him even if he originally wanted to help them. His mischievousness stems from his tendency to be self-centered.

The humor in this novel is more pronounced than in Weesquachak and the missteps Nanabush has made over the years are often a source of laughter as well as anger and frustration. After all, Hayden Taylor argues, similarly to Vizenor, that humor is essential for Indigenous peoples to survive colonial oppression and compares it to "spiritual pemmican."[675] There is not enough space here to discuss all the humorous instants in the novel and their implications, but I would like to mention one which, apart from expressing Nanabush's reckless nature, also shows his subversiveness. The petroglyphs Nanabush carves run through the narrative as a recurrent motive. It is at their last meeting with Virgil that Nanabush reveals these marks have no special meaning, he has made them whenever and wherever he was bored on his wanderings through the continent. He asks Virgil "Yeah, what did you think they were? I mean, who knew people would think they were important?

---

[669] Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 284.
[670] Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 23.
[671] Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 78.
[672] Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 258.
[673] Taylor, *Motorcycles*, 227.
[674] Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 202.
[675] Drew Hayden Taylor, ed. *Me Funny* (Madeira Park, British Columbia: Douglas and McIntyre, 2013), 69.

People crack me up."[676] Inadvertently, he managed to trick all the humankind, or at least those scientifically inclined. The joke is obviously pointed to the tendency of Western science to assign serious meaning to anything historical and search for this meaning even though there might be none. It is the lack of room for chance, flippancy and mistake in Western frame of reference that is being laughed at. This incident can be read as a manifestation of Vizenor's trickster as "ironic creator."[677] He created the petroglyphs when fooling around and people were foolish enough to take them seriously.

Hayden Taylor explores the divergence of Western and Indigenous thought by comparing Nanabush and Jesus Christ. Roberts even understands the Prologue as an allegory to the biblical expulsion from paradise, taking Lillian's forced departure to a residential school as the need of Christians to "balance the scale of moods" and make the Anishnawbe equally miserable.[678] Interestingly, it is not Lillian who needs to come to terms with the conflicted belief systems, it is Nanabush himself. Trying to understand why so many people chose to follow Jesus instead of him, he goes, more precisely breaks in, a church, but rather than arriving to absolution he finds more dissimilarities between Christ and himself.[679] Only later on in the narrative, while dreaming, gets he to meet Jesus again and they discuss their differences. It is the incorporation and acceptance of faults what lies at the bottom of their divergence or, as Nanabush/John says, "Perfection is boring. Flaws are interesting."[680] This seems to be the reason why Nanabush can live among the people still since he is closer to them in his flawed nature while Jesus inhabits the higher grounds, open only to those deserving. Nevertheless, their different views are bridged by Lillian as the one who could put them both in her spiritual beliefs and also, significantly, by laughter. The brief moments of laughter they are able to bring to each other establish some sort of intimacy between them and consequently partnership when Nanabush/John asks him a favor to make his travelling faster.[681] The Epilogue, in which Nanabush is seen "riding the waves like speed bumps"[682] on his motorcycle, reveals their newly founded cooperation. Unlike other authors, Hayden Taylor places the necessity to reconcile these two frames of reference to the trickster character itself. This highlights the proximity of the trickster to people and their common responsibility, as well as ability, to adapt and find new ways of

---

[676] Taylor, *Motorcycles*, 331.
[677] Vizenor, *Manifest*, 170.
[678] Roberts, "Versions," 164.
[679] Taylor, *Motorcycles*, 96-97.
[680] Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 268.
[681] Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 269.
[682] Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 345.

existence in the ever-changing world. Still, the trickster cannot do it otherwise than in his fundamentally mischievous, a bit crazy way.

5.5.2 Teachings

Virgil faces a similar crisis of identity as Channie in *Weesquachak*, he finds it hard to connect to what it means to be Anisnawbe in today's world and is drawn more to the modern amenities than to his traditional heritage. His favorite spot is still the rock around which Lillian, his grandmother, used to pick sweetgrass, "only now he came for the train, not the sweetgrass,"[683] an expression which symbolizes the move from his Indigenous roots to Western inclination. As well as Channie, he does not believe Nanabush to be a part of reality, let alone his spiritual kin, he can only imagine him as a part of made-up stories. Heath Justice considers this to be the main reason for Nanabush's appearance in Otter Lake, because "the People don't remember who they are – they don't remember their relatives."[684] Despite the fact that during the course of the story he gets to feel his presence very prominently, Virgil fully accepts him, and by extension his Anishnawbe culture, only at the very end. Again, laughter serves as a catalyst of his cautious respect. As the seemingly ominous mystery of the petroglyph is disclosed, they both have a good laugh and Virgil can see that his worries and doubts about John as "all too ridiculous".[685] Directly after this, a moment of revelation and truth comes, when Virgil asks John if he really is Nanabush. "What's in a name, Virgil? I am who I am. Aren't you who you are?"[686] John replies. The name is inessential if the essence itself is not understood. By turning the question back to Virgil, John makes him aware that his and John's identity are equally complex and finally, Virgil summarizes that "my grandmother would say he's us,"[687] a statement that recognizes Nanabush's kinship with his community and him as an embodiment of human (non)qualities and is able to embrace his own tradition and origin.

Their bond and understanding is symbolized by sweetgrass, whose smell represents Anishnawbe identity. John/Nanabush presents Virgil with a braid of sweetgrass at their first meeting on the rock and at their last one, Virgil reciprocally gives the braid back to him. Warren Cariou notes that "with this acceptance of the gift that Nanabush himself

---

683 Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 75.
684 Justice, *Why*, 95.
685 Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 325.
686 Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 325.
687 Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 325.

created . . . the energizing circulation of gift-reciprocity is established."[688] The action of give and take seals and nurtures their mutual recognition. Moreover, it signals Virgil's internalization of being Anishnawbe. In fact, multiple relationships are being constituted at that moment. Cariou explains it succinctly: "Nanabush is able to interpret the land through the plant, and in a way he is also able to sense an embodied essence of the Anishinaabe people, linking the two together in an assertion that is also a relationship. Through his action, sweetgrass is revealed to signify *as material*, as a physical embodiment of the relationship between the earth and human beings."[689] (emphasis original) The braid of sweetgrass symbolizes close relationship and respect to land,[690] which is the essence of Anishnawbe identity and Nanabush mediates this relationship by giving the braid to Virgil. Thanks to that, Virgil understands his connection to land as well as his kinship to Nanabush. So, by this act of giving, manifold relationality starts moving dynamically and in numerous directions simultaneously on the land-sweetgrass-Nanabush-people axis.

The energizing reciprocity does not benefit only Virgil though. John/Nanabush came to Otter Lake feeling lonely, underrated, and disconnected from human beings. He answered to Lillian's call because, as he puts it, "she was the last person to really believe in me, not as a legend but as a real flesh-and-blood person. She saw me, touched me, loved me."[691] Nanabush needs the same attention and love as human beings; in this regard he is truly our kin, our brother, as McLeod says. Virgil lets him feel acceptance again and Nanabush thus can leave the community knowing people did not stop believing in him. Correspondingly, the tone of the subsequent chapter is filled with balance and restored relationships: Maggie spends more time with Virgil, Virgil has now a close connection to Wayne, Wayne manages to step out of his comfort zone and visit his mother's grave. In his typical manner, without actually meaning it, Nanabush helped the family to rebuild their closeness.

There is one teaching, however, that Nanabush gives intentionally. When Virgil warns him that the street he wants to take is a dead end, Nanabush says "There are no such things as dead ends. Only people who find dead ends."[692] There are no limits or barriers for Nanabush since he can transform and re-form anyhow and anytime. He reminds us that humans have the same ability to recreate and re-think the world but by establishing static,

---

[688] Cariou, "Sweetgrass," 350-351.
[689] Cariou, "Sweetgrass," 351.
[690] Kimmerer, *Braiding*, ix.
[691] Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 331.
[692] Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 337.

universal norms and values (terminal creeds, using Vizenor's terminology) we are creating conceptual dead ends for ourselves. His mission in the community is to shake and subvert these values to keep the healthy dynamic, energetic flow of creation. "A good bout of complete nonsense now and again would keep everybody sane,"[693] he remarks. Heath Justice perceives this as one of the key features of Nanabush saying that "driven by excessive appetites for food, sex, and praise, they [tricksters] break down the established social order, but in so doing also disrupt inequitable power relations, frozen ideologies, and unhealthy traditions."[694] Nanabush's weaknesses, which allow people to identify with him, create, intentionally or not, chaos and disruption which might be painful, but it is necessary for recreation and it opens up space for reconfiguration of social norms and values.

Hayden Taylor brings the trickster more to the center of the narrative than Slipperjack; Nanabush moves and openly interacts with the other characters. In this way, it allows the author to fill the text with comicality arising from his escapades. Hayden Taylor's trickster evokes the clownish figure Tomson Highway describes.[695] In addition, him operating among the other characters accentuates the closeness of this spiritual being to humans. The writer also directly compares and contrasts Anishnawbe cosmogony with Christianity by confronting Nanabush and Christ in the text. While articulating their differences, the text still aims for reconciliation and balance, allowing these two worldviews to exist alongside, if not in union. The basic qualities and teachings of Nanabush remain the same, despite these specificities. McFarlane writes that "the book's real strength is the underlying account of a community struggling to weave a traditional past with some kind of meaningful future."[696] Nanabush embodies and enables this search by his ability to revision and re-create while still being deeply rooted in tradition.

5.6 Trickster the Despicable

"It's a messy messy dance",[697] Eden Robinson, Haisla/Heiltsuk, says in an interview with Anita Bedell while talking about the contradictory approach of her community to closing down a big factory which polluted the environment but also

---

[693] Taylor, *Motorcycles,* 333.
[694] Justice, *Why*, 92.
[695] Highway, *Rez*, xiii.
[696] Christine McFarlane, "Trickster Plays with Small-Town Minds in Otter Lake," *Windspeaker*, vol. 29, no.3 (2011): 16.
[697] Robinson, "Door."

provided jobs. The remark could very well refer to the issues she explores in her works as such. Robinson's texts stand out in Canadian Indigenous literature by their raw and ruthless use of violence and also by their complexity and equivocality. Helen Hoy observes that "she and her stories are not so easily corralled,"[698] Sugars notices the intentional racial and ethnic ambiguity of some of her works[699] and Emberley and Lacombe discuss the interweavement of "the modern and the sacred."[700] They all marvel at the subversive capacity of her writing, the way she challenges the preconceived value of some very basic concepts such as familial bonds. Published in 2017, *Son of a Trickster*,[701] her third novel and the first book in her trickster trilogy, represents yet another figure in this messy dance presenting a teenage boy Jared struggling in his dysfunctional family, battling his way through school, coping with complicated friendships and first romantic relationships and, last but not least, dealing with substance abuse.

Since the scope of this work is limited, the following analysis focuses solely on the first book of the trilogy, with occasional references to the sequel, *Trickster Drift*.[702] Despite the fact that the trilogy has not been completed to the date this was written and thus Jared's story has not been resolved yet, I believe that even examining the first novel brings fruitful and significant insight into Robinson's contribution to the trickster narratives as she presents in it her view of key characteristics of the trickster.

5.6.1 The quality of an evildoer

In order to avoid unnecessary repetition in terms of the basic features of the trickster, let us focus primarily on the aspects in which her representation differs from the other authors. Not surprisingly for Robinson, mainly the crude conditions and high disagreeability, if not open hostility, of the magical world constitute the most noticeable

[698] Hoy, *How*, 176.

[699] Cynthia Sugars, "Strategic Abjection: Windigo Psychosis and the 'Postindian' Subject in Eden Robinson's 'Dogs in Winter'," *Canadian Literature*, vol. 181 (Summer 2004): 78.

[700] Julia Emberley, "The Accidental Witness: Indigenous Epistemologies and Spirituality as Resistance in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*," in *Critical Collaborations: Indigeneity, Diaspora, and Ecology in Canadian Literary Studies*, edited by Smaro Kamboureli and Christl Verduyn. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014), 75; Lacombe, "On Critical."

[701] Eden Robinson, *Son of a Trickster* (Toronto: Knopf Canada, Penguin Random House Canada, 2017).

[702] Eden Robinson, *Trickster Drift* (Toronto: Knopf Canada, Penguin Random House Canada, 2018).

distinction. At the same time, her trickster retains his key attributes, i.e. he is a shape-shifter, his nature is witty and snippy, and he falls prey to his tricks.

The first chapter introduces the reader both to the dismal relationships in Jared's family and also to the negative perception of the trickster or Wee'git, its Haisla incarnation. Instead of expressing affection, his grandmother threatens to kill Jared, addresses him "you dirty dog's arse" and presents him with "a jar of blood" on his birthday.[703] Her daughter, Jared's mother, returns her pleasantries calling her "fucking cuntosaurus."[704] This briefly but succinctly summarizes the nature of relationships in their family, even more complicated by his parents' subsequent divorce and his mother's choice of violent and abusive partners. Grandmother Nita's resentment of Jared springs from her conviction that he is a son of a trickster, therefore not human and dangerous. She writes to him explaining: "If Wee'git visits you, be careful. He does mean things because he thinks he is funny."[705] She also implies bad experience with the trickster runs in the family, which is confirmed by his other grandma, Nana Sophia.[706] Even though these warnings are disclosed in the first chapter, the narrative then shifts to the portrayal of Jared's entangled and troubled family and community life, creating a break in the tension crafted in the opening.

There is one thing that the protagonists of the three discussed novels share, and that is their initial disbelief in and denial of spiritual beings as part of their lived reality. Channie and Virgil alike, Jared's spiritual scepticism signals his disconnection from Indigenous culture. Rose states that all of his personal wounds fall into "the overarching loss of Indigenous culture."[707] Robinson, however, combines the spiritual denial with substance abuse, which creates numerous comic situations and also bridges the spiritual world and contemporary lifestyle, albeit emphasizing its negative sides. When a talking raven first comes to him, he considers it an effect of smoking weed, when he first meets Jwa'sins and sees a monster beneath her face, he blames the mushrooms and when he starts seeing ape men in his basement, he is afraid that he damaged his brain permanently by drugs.[708] This technique of linking the spiritual and the narcotic is daring and subversive as it combines these two already "abnormal" elements together, but it proves to be very

---

[703] Robinson, *Son*, 1.
[704] Robinson, *Son,* 1.
[705] Robinson, *Son*, 14.
[706] Robinson, *Son,* 12.
[707] Hilary A. Rose, "Son of a Trickster," *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2018): 498.
[708] Robinson, *Son,* 33, 148, 225.

effective. The reader already knows about the existence of supernatural beings in the novel and by recognizing, unlike the protagonist, these visions as not hallucinatory, they, consciously or not, rank them as part of Jared's reality and therefore they start to participate in the shifted division of the normal and the supernatural.

The spiritual world might give him many hints and the trickster even comes to him in the form of a man telling him he is his father[709] but Jared only starts to accept magic as a part of reality when brutally faced with it. Having been transferred to the spirit world and having his toe chewed off by otters, the raven makes Jared see that he can do magic, too. The raven says: "You tell yourself it was a dream. When you shifted your consciousness out of phase with your body and went wandering around, hello-ing through dimensions."[710] The raven refers to the moment when Jared lost consciousness after being tortured by his mother's boyfriend David and his mind moved to another dimension. Even though Jared finally understands what happened to him on that day, the revelation of his connection to the spiritual realm brings him more anger than consolation: "So some random asshole listened in on the shittiest, crappiest moment of his life and, instead of helping, hung back, out of sight, making smartass commentary track as Jared fell apart and slowly, painfully, glued his life back together."[711] Jared recognizes his ability to travel to other dimensions but also realizes his father did not lift a feather when he was suffering. This glaring lack of compassion towards his own kin qualifies the raven to be the "oppressive asshole"[712] Craig Womack warned against and explains Gran Nita's hostility towards Jared as an inheritor of this failing.

For Robinson, magic and violence are very close. It is in the moment of the immense physical and emotional pain when Jared's consciousness snaps and he enters the spirit world for the first time. Pain functions as a gate to the spiritual realm, suffering is transformative (the sequel then presents this literally when Jared transforms to a raven in another moment of intense pain).[713] In the interview with Bedell, Eden Robinson says, when asked about the dark magic in the novel, that "the crucible's important to self-development" and explicates that their traditional stories are frequently dark because they express the nature of life.[714] Then she asks: "It's often unpleasant, but what does that

[709] Robinson, *Son,* 84.
[710] Robinson, *Son,* 257.
[711] Robinson, *Son,* 258.
[712] Womack, *Red*, 301.
[713] Robinson, *Trickster*, 337-338.
[714] Robinson, "Door."

unpleasantness mean?"[715] In other words, experience, however painful, represents a moment of change. The violence in her works serves a purpose, not only an effect. The most obvious transformation Jared undergoes is his acceptance of the spiritual realm as a part of his world. This also enables him to become closer, despite their relationship is still far from harmonious, to his mother, who has the same ability, and to his Gran Nita, by whose loving letter the novel ends. In addition, Jared decides to abstain from drinking. As we can see, the ending demonstrates to some extent a similar restoration and balance as the other two discussed novels. In this respect, I would slightly disagree with Dobson, who claims that the novel "provides an ending where events are far from settled."[716] Jared's acknowledgment of the spirit world represents a big step towards putting his life back on track. Having said that, Jared's relationship with magic has just started and is continued, with all the pain and troubles that come with it, in the sequel.

The reason for the trickster being so contemptible is not revealed in the first novel. Whether rooted in his weaknesses and susceptibility to fulfil his desires as in *Weesquachak*, in feelings of alienation as in *Motorcycles & Sweetgrass,* or in something else, any critical interpretation needs to be withheld until the trilogy is completed. Robinson gives a little hint by saying that "he's [the trickster] surprisingly angsty" and that she wanted to discuss "the weight of him being sacred."[717] It will be interesting to see where the anxiety and burden of spirituality comes from, if Robinson decides to reveal it. Nevertheless, she definitely brings a different, unidealized approach to spirituality. Reconnection with spirituality might help to consolidate Jared's identity but still it is a transformation full of pitfalls. Or, as Sutcliffe notes, understanding his Indigenous heritage "incorporates both good and bad spirit beings."[718]

The assumption that Robinson aims to illustrate the proximity of the physical and the spiritual world can be supported by the "supernatural" passages in the form of four (I resist the temptation to read too much into the significance of the number) short, italicized chapters inserted in the text. They combine contemplations on biological issues such as human DNA or the extinction of trilobites with explications of the nature of magical world in which the narrating subject takes on the instructional tone Emberley recognizes in

---

[715] Robinson, "Door."

[716] Kit Dobson, "Son of a Trickste," *McGill Journal of Education*, vol. 53, no.2 (Spring 2018): 400.

[717] Robinson, "Door."

[718] J. C. Sutcliffe, "Spirited Away: Transforming Birds, Fireflies and Weed Cookies in Eden Robinson's British Columbia Outpost," *Literary Review of Canada*, December 2017, accessed February 12, 2018, https://reviewcanada.ca/magazine/2017/12/spirited-away/.

Monkey Beach as well. She calls this subject "the accidental witness" and identifies its role as encouraging the reader to participate in the protagonist's search for truth.[719] If we were to apply this interpretation to *Son of a Trickster*, supposing the function in both texts remains the same, based on the similarity of the narrative technique in these passages, we could say the subject elicits the reader's acknowledgment of the spiritual world, mirroring Jared's acceptance of magic. Emberley's reading helps to shed light on the function of these chapters, which might be at first difficult to connect to the main story.

By close inspection, two themes might be discerned in these scientific, supernatural, and spiritual sections – interconnectedness of all past and present creation represented by our flesh and blood and the ability to perceive and transgress time and space dimensions. The first chapter talks about the limitation of human experience in linear perception of time and ends with a beautiful, and at the same time slightly ironic, explanation of our relatedness to stars: "Remember that you were not always earthbound. Every living creature, every drop of water and every sombre mountain is the by-blow of some bloated, dying star."[720] We carry this memory in our flesh together with the memories of the dead creatures, "a cricket or a dinosaur or a single blade of grass,"[721] that in the form of carbon make up our existing body. This is outlined in the third of these chapters, simultaneously explaining the significance of the second one titled "Requiem for the trilobites" – even creatures living millions of years ago are our ancestors and as such deserve compassion. Needless to say, the passage is not pathetic but sparkling with gritty humor, characteristic for Robinson. The combination of science, spirituality and humor in these sections is interesting and shows the permeability of the boundaries of realms which are traditionally more clear-cut in Western thinking.

Finally, the last section correlates these passages to the trickster by expressing our desperate inability to transcend our dimension, no matter how rich and complex we as creatures are. By going beyond our universe, our body would disperse, similarly to stars being destroyed when devoured by a black hole. The passage ends followingly: "When you shift out of our dimensions, you run the risk of dispersion so profound, even the memory of you is obliterated. Universes are stubbornly separate. / Unless you are a Trickster."[722] The narrating voice builds the message gradually throughout the chapters to clarify the innate

---

[719] Emberley, "Accidental," 77-78.
[720] Robinson, *Son*, 15.
[721] Robinson, *Son,* 159.
[722] Robinson, *Son,* 222.

spirituality of humans given by their liaison with universe on one hand, on the other it states our deficiency in crossing dimensions in comparison with the trickster. Essentially, it is yet another take on the transformability of the trickster, not only regarding various human and other-than-human forms, but also regarding various time and space dimensions, which closely resembles Vizenor's view on the trickster as wandering through significance.

Notably, the description of transgression to another dimension through the black hole evokes brutality. The voice instructs: "consider the *violence* necessary to shred the matter of suns into its swirling accretion disc, where the broken stars scream radiation before they're funnelled into the heart of the black hole" (emphasis added).[723] Violence enables transformation. The metaphor of stars is transcribed into Jared's story through the violent acts that form milestones of his life. Robinson takes the imagined force working in space and connects it with violence in the community. Similarly to what Sugars describes in her article titled "Strategic Abjections" in relation to *Traplines*, the use of violence is strategic. On one level, Robinson plays with the preconceived notion of violence on reserves but complicates it by engaging violent non-Indigenous characters as well, on another there are references to colonial oppression (Granny Nita's harmful experience of residential school, for example) evoking the violence as a consequence of historical trauma, and still on another level she uses brutality to challenge the notion of spirituality in connection to Indigenous tradition as benign and inherently good.

This is not to say that the tone of the novel is dismal or sombre throughout. After all, it is a trickster novel, so sarcasm and comic detachment permeate the text. Sutcliffe notices that the violence in the book is "a fact of life that's neither condoned nor exoticized" and as such it is subjected to humor. Fagan also recognizes the intermingling of violence and humor in Robinson's works, saying that "humour is entwined with and implicated in violence and ridicule."[724] Apart from the raven's biting and sassy remarks, Jared's mother embodies the sarcasm with her uncompromising attitude and her motto: "The world is hard. You have to be harder."[725] Her way of disabling David at the moment of abuse reverberates with dark grotesqueness when she uses a nail-gun, of all conceivable guns, to pin him to the floor and render him harmless. The lines between spirituality and

---

[723] Robinson, *Son,* 222.
[724] Fagan, "Teasing, 41.
[725] Robinson, *Son,* 17.

brutality, violence and humor are blurred in the narrative, distorted in the "messy messy dance".

Son of a Trickster highlights the ambiguity of the trickster and spiritual world as such. On one hand, entering it significantly broadens one's possibilities, on the other one it is a dangerous space. The first lesson this trickster tale seems to give goes Beware! Robinson keeps the reader constantly on edge, challenging their assumptions of awe-inspiring magic, violence in Indigenous communities, and likeability of the trickster. Still, the trickster accompanies his son, Jared, in his transformation, however complicated their relationship is. Robinson digs deeper into the negative force of the trickster and portrays violence in complexity – showing openly the pain and trauma but also displaying the possibilities the experience can open as well as the capacity to present humor in connection with brutality. The first novel uproots Jared's conception of the world. Whether this trickster tale in the end teaches balancing or not, remains unanswered for now.

5.7 Closing remarks

The trickster undoubtedly represents the most frequently employed character from traditional storytelling in contemporary Indigenous writing. Eden Robinson jokes that "It's also a union regulation as a Native writer that you have to write a Trickster story at least once" (Bedell). The abundance of the trickster tales stems from the pivotal role he plays in Indigenous cultures. This shape-shifting, comic, treacherous, dynamic, faulty and thus humanlike spiritual being is instrumental in people's understanding of the world and human nature alike, and the tool for this understanding is humor. Similarly, Kolinska summarizes that the function of humor in the trickster tales is "liberation of existential anxiety and exploration of new possibilities and limits of existence."[726] Despite the fact that the individual definitions of the trickster differ in specificities and might even contradict one another as, for example, in regard the gender of the trickster, his/her role of a teacher seems to be common and is emphasized by most scholars and writers. He teaches about the importance of not being self-centred, about compassion and the necessity to find balance between the contradictory forces working around and within us and perhaps most importantly, about the human's ability to transform, reconstruct themselves and their

[726] translated from original: "Šprýmařské příběhy jsou plné bujného a plnokrevného humoru, jehož funkcí je v podstatě uvolnění existenciální úzkosti a poznávání možností a limitů existence." Kolinská, *Čekání*, 528.

world, which does not mean moving away from tradition but, by contrast, exercising the re-creative capacity embodied in the traditional figure of the trickster. On account of that, for Vizenor, the trickster with his teachings is vital for Indigenous survivance.

It might be objected that the described commonality of the features of the trickster stands in contradiction to the criticism of the perception of the trickster as a set cultural representation. While I suggest that transformability and transformativity of the trickster seems to be "invariable", it needs to be said that particularities of these transformations are different and unique in every work, and that each employment of the trickster should be approached with this in mind. Also, the trickster with his/her elusiveness and ability to work across categories is ideal for expressing varying issues in time. So, if now the trickster serves the function of teaching characters acceptance of their identity or acceptance of spirituality as a part of reality by which the authors express what they deem important for their communities, this can easily change in time and in the upcoming generations. For this reason, the trickster will have to be permanently examined, defined and re-defined.

The high occurrence of the trickster in texts, and his partial accordance with subversive tendencies lead many critics to read the texts through poststructuralist and postmodern lenses. Despite demonstrating several postmodern features such as undermining normative values and Western modes of thinking, use of sarcasm and irony, and incorporation of popular culture, all the three novels discussed seem to convey the belief in Indigenous perception rooted in traditional concepts of interconnectedness of creation, relationality, and balance and they advocate human creative and transformative ability. Therefore, the trickster does not ultimately function there deconstructively but rather reconstructively.

The individual authors' approaches to engaging the trickster in the narrative differ. While Slipperjack keeps Weesquachak mostly in the background and his interactions with characters are more implied than exposed, Hayden Taylor's Nanabush is one of the central characters and directly communicates with and influences the others. Robinson, in comparison, employs Wee'git openly, mainly in the second half of the novel, but he mostly operates from the spiritual realm, accessible to only some of the characters. The authors also vary in accentuating different features of the trickster. Weesquachak acts on the basis of his self-pity and sexual appetite and characteristically designs a number of nasty tricks, Nanabush balances the Anishnawbe and Western ways and his tricks comically end in

failure, whereas Robinson delves into the manipulative and oppressive side of his nature. Since the trickster is such a complex, transformative being, it opens a plenitude of possibilities to engage him in the narrative for the writers. With a nod to Doueihi's attendance to the textual particular terms, to examine the specificities of his depiction in the texts seems to be very productive in revealing his functions.

Nonetheless, the teaching of transformability appears to be the key common feature of the three novels. From the point of view of literary theory, it can be said that the trickster represents a literary device to let the characters undergo change. Nevertheless, such a perception strips the trickster from its essential role in Indigenous epistemology and prevents to understand its importance in broader cultural context. All the main characters transform, change due to the actions of the trickster, however, the characters themselves need to reach the transformation with awareness, the trickster does not simply act it out for them. I intentionally resist the word development here since it in Western paradigm implies improvement. Rather than that, the characters transform into beings not necessarily more successful or more efficient, but more in connection with intricate creation. The trickster teaches that transformation means to survive and more importantly, to live fully.

6 WINDIGO

wîhtikow wanders
in the grey, concrete forest
Neal McLeod, "Wîhtikow Wandering"

Indigenous stories manifest connection to ancestral history as well as reaction to present circumstances. Windigo, a human-eating monster, roams the boreal forests in Canada as well as concrete groves of urban spaces, to use McLeod's words.[727] Windigo embodies one of the biggest human weaknesses, greed and selfishness, which remains unchanged even if plastered by new labels such as consumerism or capitalism. It is an evil, horror-inducing creature – qualities, seemingly easily understood, that attracted also non-Indigenous artists and popular culture (it appeared in Stephen King's novels, for example, and there is also a Marvel comics called *Wendigo*). Similarly to the trickster, however, there is also a lot of misrepresentation of windigo in contemporary culture as the evil is frequently portrayed as a self-contained entity and the thrill and sensation surrounding murder stories connected to the windigo overshadow the cultural significance of the windigo concept. This chapter focuses on the windigo in Indigenous stories, presenting various descriptions of this being, its understanding in today's context and reflections of these in two texts by Indigenous authors.

6.1 Defining the evil

Firstly, the name windigo appears in many varieties as nations and individual communities use differing variants, which is similar to the range of terms used for the trickster as discussed in the previous chapter. The term windigo used in this work is just one of those many versions, chosen since I am the most accustomed to it; it is not the most frequently used or a universal term. Respective variants will be kept in quotations as appearing in the original, not only to respect authorship rights but also to indicate the diversity of the versions. Simeon Scott (Cree) uses wîhtikôwak (plural) and translates it to English as "the windigoes," Floyd Favel (Cree) uses wîhtikow, Carol Daniels (Cree)

[727] Neal McLeod, *Songs to Kill a Wîhtikow* (Regina: Hagios Press, 2005), 27.

mentions witago, Suzanne Methot (Nehiyaw) wittigo, Richard Van Camp (Tłicho) Wheetago, Leanne Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) gives Wiindigo, Margaret Noodin uses wiindigoo (Anishinaabe), Basil Johnston (Anishinaubae) talks about Weendigo or Weendigook, Robin Wall Kimmerer (Potawatomi) about Windigo, and the list of variants goes on. [728]

Unlike its denomination, the characteristics of the windigo given by Indigenous authors and scholars are more or less congruent. The windigo is a giant man-eating spirit or once-human creature, with insatiable craving for human flesh, endowed with supernatural strength, surrounded by chill and smell of decay, it has a heart of ice, its lips and fingers are ragged from being chewed on hungrily or it does not have any lips anymore, and its shriek paralyzes people. Stevens and Ray add that "hair grows profusely from the [windigo's] face,"[729] Johnston describes that the windigo "was gaunt to the point of emaciation . . . its complexion the ash gray of death, and its eyes pushed back deep into their sockets,"[730] Kimmerer that it has "arms like tree trunks, feet as big as snowshoes"[731] and Friedland, on the basis of her sources, mentions that the windigo loses a sense of bodily cleanliness.[732] The windigo is an evil spirit that comes in wintertime, or a person can turn windigo during times of famine or, on the contrary, by succumbing to greediness; alternatively, one can be cursed and become a windigo.

Scott includes the windigo tales in âtalôhkâna, sacred legends, (Carlson uses the word atâyohkewina), comparing them to local legends, in which "extraordinary happenings believed actually to have occurred"[733] are retold. The inclusion of windigo stories in sacred legends signals the significance of the teachings in these stories.

Basil Johnston provides two explanations of the term windigo: it may come from *wee dagoh* meaning solely for oneself, or from *weenin n'd'igooh*, which translates as fat or excess.[734] Both of these possible origins indicate that selfishness and excessive behavior form the essence of this being. Kimmerer says that "cautionary Windigo tales arose in a common-based society where sharing was essential to survival and greed made any

---

[728] Scott, *âtalôhkâna*, 79; Floyd Favel, "All My Relatives," in *The Great Gift of Tears*, ed. H. Hodgson (Regina: Coteau Books, 2002); Carol Daniels, *Bearskin Diary* (Gibsons, British Columbia: Nightwood Editions, 2015); Methot, *Legacy*; Richard Van Camp, *Night Moves* (Winnipeg: Enfield & Wizentry, 2015); Simpson, *Dancing*; Noodin, *Bawaajimo*; Johnston, *Manitous*; Kimmerer, *Braiding*.

[729] qtd. in Farrell-Morneau, "Memengwaawid," 233.

[730] Johnston, *Manitous*, 221.

[731] Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 304.

[732] Hadley L. Friedland, *The Wetiko Legal Principles: Cree and Anishinabek Responses to Violence and Victimization* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 22.

[733] Scott, *âtalôhkâna*, xx.

[734] Johnston, *Manitous*, 222.

individual a danger to the whole."[735] The evil nature of the windigo stems from human susceptibility to behave selfishly, to act for one's own good only. This tendency, however natural for humans, can prevent the individual from seeing themselves as a part of the creation, as a part of the reciprocal relationships that ensure the well-being of all. "A fraction too much or too little of anger, envy, or lust is enough to create an imbalance in a person's character,"[736] says Johnston. When one becomes focused only on their desires, emotions, (or trying to suppress them which actually still means being centered on them), only one part of their personality is emphasized, they become possessed by these feelings. For this reason, the windigo also expresses the tendency to self-indulgence and subsequent potential addiction, which eats up the individual from the inside. When one stops checking their desires in relation to the rest of creation, these desires become toxic. The more the windigo eats, the bigger it gets, and a larger body leads to increased hunger.[737]

Both of these features, self-centeredness and self-indulgence, are reflected in windigo's appearance – it is always hungry, seeking satisfaction of its desires, and the constant hunger makes it consume its own lips and fingers. Selfishness precedes self-destruction. The infectiousness of the windigo's bite then signifies the attention the self-destructive individual gets, making the others lose their balance as well while being preoccupied with helping the afflicted person.[738] Farrell-Morneau points out that the windigo tales essentially form an antithesis to the Medicine Wheel and the Seven Grandfather Teachings,[739] which promote respect, responsibility, and reciprocity.[740] Their lesson is to teach what can happen when one does not live in balance with creation, when one does not respond to their own and the others' needs in a healthy way.

Some sources also talk about the cures to purge the windigo. Carlson mentions eating heated animal fat, which would melt the ice inside the possessed and the ice would be vomited if the cure was successful, or using alcohol to dissolve the ice, and organizing a shaking tent ceremony.[741] Rohrl even conducted a research in 1970 about the nutritional aspect of the windigo state claiming that especially bear fat is rich in nutrients essential for

[735] Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 307.
[736] Johnston, *Manitous*, 223.
[737] Johnston, *Manitous*, 222.
[738] Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 306.
[739] Seven Grandfather teachings are connected to the medicine wheel and talk about wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth and how to use these to live in balance. See Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book*, 60-66.
[740] Farrell-Morneau, "Memengwaawid," 232.
[741] Nathan D. Carlson, "Reviving Witiko (Windigo): An Ethnohistory of 'Cannibal Monsters' in the Athabasca District of Northern Alberta, 1878-1910," *Ethnohistory*, vol. 56, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 361.

proper function of brain cells and thus for the prevention of mental illness. More frequent and more noticeable are, however, stories of killing a windigo. Fogelson somewhat matter-of-factly says that "when the violent stage [of the windigo psychosis] is reached, the afflicted person is killed by the community, and the corpse is usually chopped to pieces and burned to melt the icy heart and forestall resurrection."[742] Carlson registers also ostracism beside killings and notes that the usual instrument for execution was an ax since it was believed that "bullets could not pierce the flesh of a witiko."[743] It is not surprising that these thrilling and chilling murder stories achieved popularity and undoubtedly contributed to the emergence of the windigo in popular culture outside Indigenous communities. Basil Johnston talks about the necessity to destroy the windigo, but the killing seems to be figurative in his explications. "Humans must kill the Weendigo to betoken that they must put an end to certain self-serving indulgencies or be destroyed,"[744] he writes. In this sense, killing the possessed means to find a way to terminate the excessive behavior and restore balance as the windigo is an embodiment of indulgence, otherwise the excess will kill the individual. This is also supported by his remark that the windigo is not defeated due to human heroic actions but rather by the fact that the essence of the windigo is based on weakness and it can be destroyed through that.[745] It seems to me that the emphasis on the murder stories was given by the misinterpretation of the windigo concept. Indeed, there are accounts of people being killed under the suspicion of being possessed (the Swift Runner case[746], for example) and these accounts might be used in Indigenous communities as a warning, but the killings do not constitute the only way to treat the windigo. Rather, these narratives are tragic in the sense of telling stories of people losing control over themselves and communities not being able to save them.

The windigo might be connected to the periods of starvation during the winter, but the values transmitted by the windigo tales display universal qualities. They represent warnings against greedy, egoistic behaviour, which affects negatively not only the initiator but all the community. Moreover, they explicate that excessive self-focus ultimately leads to self-destruction as the individual can never feel full, rounded, and satisfied when not

[742] qtd. in John R. Colombo, *Windigo: An Anthology of Fact and Fantastic Fiction* (Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1983), 5.
[743] Carlson, "Reviving," 361.
[744] Johnston, *Manitous*, 224.
[745] Johnston, *Manitous*, 230.
[746] Swift Runner was a Cree man who murdered his wife and children in fear of starvation during the winter of 1878-1879. He was sentenced to death and hanged on the 20 of December, 1879. Peter Morrall, *Madness: Ideas about Insanity* (London: Routledge, 2017), 145.

being immersed in the web of creation. In times of need, such as long winter, these issues were the more pressing since people were vulnerable, weak and therefore prone to give way to their weaknesses. The windigo, however, is more than a horror monster creeping through the snow-covered forest.

6.2 Windigo psychosis

The windigo concept overstepped the literary and ethnographic spheres and the tales of possessed people with cannibalistic tendencies became a point of interest for psychology as well. The examination of the numerous accounts of people turning windigo, especially those connected to Algonquian peoples, resulted in the introduction of the term windigo psychosis in psychiatry. The windigo psychosis is defined as an "obsessive-compulsive anthropophagous inclination accompanied by homicidal behavior."[747] The term has been subjected to criticism by several scholars for its inaccuracy, insufficient support by data, and perpetuation of negative stereotypes about Indigenous peoples. Despite that, the term still exists in general discourse and is, for example, listed in the American Psychological Association dictionary.[748] Let us briefly outline the ongoing discussion since it illustrates the disparity between Western and Indigenous conceptualizations.

Among other ethnographers and psychologists (Cooper, Parker, Hallowell), scholars frequently base their understanding of windigo psychosis on Morton Teicher's research from 1960s. He examines about 70 cases of the windigo and notes that these "demoniacal possession[s] . . . range over the entire spectrum of psychiatric illness."[749] He explains that the illness causes "distortions of reality,"[750] "element of dissociation"[751] while Parker adds that "the condition represents a breaking down of ego defenses and an expression of dependency and aggression needs."[752] From this perspective, the windigo psychosis is a serious psychiatric disorder characterized by disintegration of personality, hallucinatory visions, and violent tendencies.

---

[747] Carlson, "Reviving," 359.

[748] "windigo psychosis," *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, accessed June 25, 2020, https://dictionary.apa.org/windigo-psychosis.

[749] qtd. in Vivian T. Rohrl, "A Nutritional Factor in Windigo Psychosis," *American Anthropologist*, vol. 72, no. 1 (February 1970): 98.

[750] qtd. in Rohrl, "Nutritional," 98.

[751] qtd. in Visvis, "Culturally," 228.

[752] qtd. in Rohrl, "Nutritional," 98.

James Waldram in his *Revenge of the Windigo* critically assesses the accepted notion of the windigo psychosis and presents several objections to its perception. Firstly, as also apparent from the first quotation in the previous paragraph, the whole discourse around the psychosis reflects a troubling conception of Indigenous peoples stuck in stereotypical images of the noble savage or bloodthirsty Indian (using King's terms[753]). The windigo as a being breaking the taboo of cannibalism suits these assumptions and perhaps strengthens them. "These syndromes are intensely, voyeuristically exotic,"[754] Waldram writes. Examination of the psychosis builds on the Eurocentric opposition of the civilized – primitive and the normal – abnormal. This also explains the heightened interest of specialists in this subject as they "continue to confound as they titillate psychiatry."[755] The same reservations he holds towards the consideration of the windigo psychosis as a culture-bound phenomenon as this premise is also based on the dichotomy of what is perceived as standard in Western society and what not, and hence must be specific to the other culture.[756] Secondly, he re-evaluates the research done up to that time and points out some questionable practices such as founding the research on stories without actually interviewing the supposed patients,[757] paying excessive attention to mental health of Indigenous peoples motivated by the need to confirm their otherness and uncritical acceptance of previously established claims was, likewise, pointed out.[758] Waldram concludes that "The windigo's revenge is not its return to eat us in the embodied sense, but rather the persistence and tenacity with which we cling to ill-conceived ideas as truths, the ways in which we are consumed by the very knowledge that we trust to guide us."[759] The windigo psychosis in his view seems to stem for the Western search of self-affirmed normality rather than from actual psychological deviations of Indigenous peoples.

Yet another cause of the misconception of the windigo is presented by Nathan D. Carlson, who turns his attention to the disparity in cosmologies. He contends that

---

[753] Thomas King, *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2012), 34-35.

[754] James B. Waldram, *Revenge of the Windigo: The Construction of the Mind and Mental Health of North American Aboriginal Peoples* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 210-211.

[755] Waldram, *Revenge*, 209.

[756] Waldram, *Revenge,* 211.

[757] Waldram, *Revenge*, 194. The unreliability of data in Teicher's research was also criticized by Lou Marano, "Windigo Psychosis: The Anatomy of an Emic-Etic Confusion," in *The Culture-Bound Syndromes: Folk Illnesses of Psychiatric and Anthropological Interest*, ed. Ronald C. Simons, C. C. Hughes (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1985), 42.

[758] Waldram, *Revenge*, 320, 210.

[759] Waldram, *Revenge*, 320.

> any reckoning of the witiko phenomenon must entail a fair-minded consideration of northern Algonquian . . . beliefs in a cosmos dictated and affected by spirit beings, dreams, "medicine," and "power," a cosmos wherein witikos are a taxon of beings existing in the real world and interacting with real human individuals.[760]

Since the other-than-human or spiritual beings are not considered a part of reality in Western cosmology, interactions with them, even violent ones as is the case with the windigo, are relegated to the sphere of fabrications, hallucinations, and disorder (the word "disorder" alone expresses the belief that something is out of order, an anomaly). Therefore, according to Carlson, Indigenous perspective must be taken into account when examining the windigo.[761]

Interestingly, Carlson does not seem to concur with Waldram's refusal of the term windigo psychosis nor with Marano's explication of the windigo as an embodiment of collective fear in a traumatized society.[762] Scarcity of traditional food sources such as buffalo, moose, and beaver in consequence of overhunting during the fur trade period in the 18th and the 19th centuries, combined with the decimation of Indigenous population by European diseases resulted in deep trauma in these societies.[763] This collective fear and anguish, which could be labelled as collective PTSD in contemporary terms,[764] lead to a raised frequency of the windigo tales as the communities were trying to contextualize the trauma. Even though Carlson disputes these claims, his research focuses on accounts from the end of the 19th century, in other words exactly on the period of trauma, which seems to cast some doubts on his rejection of Marano's theory. Carlson works with the term windigo "condition" rather than "psychosis", which can be consented to, and calls for more appropriate discussion of it, Indigenous-inclusive, and for general acknowledgement of its existence, in reaction to Marano, Waldram and others.[765] However, what troubles both Marano and Waldram is the construction of the psychosis embedded deeply in Western paradigms and its endurance in academia, more than the actual question of the veracity of the condition. After all, Waldram concludes, though not very convincingly, that "there might well be something real buried underneath."[766]

---

[760] Carlson, "Reviving," 356.
[761] Carlson, "Reviving," 382.
[762] Carlson, "Reviving," 440.
[763] Marano, "Windigo," 439-440.
[764] Visvis, "Culturally," 228.
[765] Carlson, "Reviving," 381.
[766] Waldram, *Revenge*, 211.

It is evident that the windigo does not stop to amaze and baffle the scholars. Undoubtedly, the debate on the windigo condition could benefit from a more extensive inclusion of Indigenous voices. Regardless the controversies over the actual existence of the psychosis or over the use of the term as such, what seems to be somewhat lost from the discussions is the question of the necessity for such a concept in the societies. The following chapter is asking this question specifically in relation to the Indigenous perception of the contemporary world.

6.3 Windigo the Capitalist

The windigo character did not remain a haunted and haunting demon in the old stories but has been effectively transplanted to explicate the horrors of contemporary society. As Neal McLeod says, "wihtikow dwells in all things,"[767] so it can be referred to in various circumstances. Most frequently, authors relate its greediness and insatiability to colonialism and consumerism, which, similarly to humans turning windigo, destroys individuals as well as the well-being of whole communities.

Before we proceed to examine specific theories referring to various forms of contemporized windigo, let us briefly comment on the possibility of such a conceptual transfer from one historical-social period to another. I find Friedland's work very suitable here, even though her focus lies on legal implications of the windigo stories. In Chapter 2 of her publication *The Wetiko Legal Principles*, she starts by asserting that windigo is "a complex intellectual concept within certain Indigenous societies."[768] The startling generalness of this statement stems from her conviction that the windigo is multilateral, and even cannibalism as the defining feature of the windigo creates an overly simplified and one-sided perception of the concept. For the same reason, she also disputes Teicher, Marano, and Brightman and their claims which are based, in her point of view, on such a unilateral understanding, be it in terms of Indigenous belief systems or behavioral patterns of Indigenous peoples.[769] Having reviewed their research and conducted her own, she points out that, in contrast to what scholars have been mostly examining, the windigo condition manifests itself in many ways (not just by cannibalistic tendencies), can be evoked by many incentives (not only starvation in winter) and is treated in many ways (not

[767] McLeod, *Songs*, 9.
[768] Friedland, *Wetiko*, 21.
[769] Friedland, *Wetiko*, 25-9.

necessarily by execution). Moreover, the windigo concept is "a complex social concept with a history,"[770] she says. This means that the concept is dependent on the context and historical moment of its use and is continually reconstructed and reshaped to reflect current social conditions. As a result, she arrives to the conclusion that "The major theme that the *wetiko* concept appears to connote across time, space, and changing contexts is *people who are already or are becoming harmful or destructive to themselves and/or others in socially taboo ways"*[771] (emphasis original). In other words, the windigo is a figuration of a variety of actions that are dangerous and detrimental to oneself as well as to others. Such a broad definition allows the changes in the depiction of the windigo and creation of specific forms of manifestation of this behavior in reaction to the social circumstances of the given period, be it cannibalism during the end of fur trade era and consequent starvation or the current issues of substance abuse. This resonates considerably with the previously discussed definitions by Johnson, Kimmerer, and Farrell-Morneau, in which the windigo concept represents a negative reinstatement of the respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and relationality teachings, irrespective of the actual form in which it manifests itself.

In regard the conceptual changes, Friedland notes that her interviewees mention that the windigo yell is no longer heard as often and the "windigoed" people no longer display traits of eating their own lips as typically portrayed in the traditional stories.[772] In short, the windigo has transmuted.

Indigenous scholars note this transformation as well and most commonly explain the windigo in the contemporary context as a reference to consumerism and capitalism. Johnston says that due to its transformation, the people stopped recognizing the windigo and started to think about it only as a character in old stories. However, "the Weendigoes did not die out or disappear; they have only been assimilated and reincarnated as corporations, conglomerates, and multinationals,"[773] Johnston clarifies and gives an example of timber companies plundering woods for profit without any consideration for the displaced and killed animals and sustainability of the environment. Despite the fact that the contemporary windigos might be disguised as well-mannered and smart looking administrators, they are still "fueled by the unquenchable greed inherent in human

[770] Friedland, *Wetiko*, 31.
[771] Friedland, *Wetiko*, 33.
[772] Friedland, *Wetiko*, 29-30.
[773] Johnston, *Manitous*, 235.

nature."[774] The basic principle of (self)destructive behavior of the windigo, as Friedland outlined it, remains.

Simpson and Kimmerer both use Johnston's propositions as a ground for their interpretation of the current form of the windigo. While Simpson directly states that the windigo is a contemporary reference to colonialism and capitalism, both in terms of exploitation of natural resources as well as the psychological effects of colonialism in the formation of indulgence as a coping mechanism,[775] Kimmerer even uses the term "Windigo economics"[776] to describe capitalism as an economy based on artificially created need and consumption. Simpson further notes that excessive exploitation compares to cannibalism, arguing that "when one harms the earth, one harms oneself because we are part of that whole,"[777] reflecting the holistic approach of Indigenous cosmogony. And Kimmerer warns that "we have unleashed monster" when we bought into the "systematic policy of sanctioned greed" which posits indulgence in materialism and self-interest as a way to happiness, when in fact it is a feast that "nourishes only emptiness, the black hole of the stomach that never fills."[778] Colonialism, capitalism, and consumerism are thus manifestations of the magnified greed that defines the weakness of human nature.

Both of them, however, emphasize that there also exists Indigenous tactics to defeat the windigo. For Simpson, the Gezhizhwazh stories, which will be discussed later on, provide a source of knowledge how to tackle the windigo by the means of wit, planning, and self-sacrifice.[779] Kimmerer sees the solution in the One Bowl and One Spoon teachings.[780] Having pointed out that the windigo is the strongest in the times of scarcity, in the winter, she deduces that an antidote to it would be creating plenty. The teachings then, in which natural resources are perceived as one bowl and all the beings are to share it or eat it by one spoon only, ensure sustainability.[781] Considering the well-being of all creatures prevents individuals from taking too much for themselves and also promotes caring for and nurturing nature so that its gifts are continuous and multiplied. Yet one more thing is needed to successfully fight the windigo, and that is expressing gratitude since "scarcity and plenty are as much qualities of the mind and spirit as they are of the

---

[774] Johnston, *Manitous*, 237.
[775] Simpson, *Dancing,* 70.
[776] Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 308.
[777] Simpson, *Dancing,* 70.
[778] Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 308.
[779] Simpson, *Dancing,* 72.
[780] This teaching presents natural resources as one bowl that is shared by all creation, eating from the bowl with one spoon so that sustainability and mutual cooperation is achieved. Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 376.
[781] Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 376.

economy."[782] It is necessary for people to change their mindset, and instead of focusing on what they lack, they should actively appreciate what they have. In her view, gratitude is what fills the bottomless hole in the stomach of a windigo.

On the other hand, Tara Million (Nêhiyaw) expresses her worries that the change in the signification of the windigo moves away from the traditional understanding of it as embedded in community and inherently relational since perceiving colonialism as the windigo externalizes the evil and separates it from the community. In her view, the windigo is a relative and one's response to it is given by the importance of this kinship, while colonialism is an external force and thus representing the windigo as colonialism resembles more Western concept of the evil as extraneous.[783] The nature of the evil might have changed, and her observations are definitely noteworthy, but the ways to deal with the windigo are, according to me, still enrooted in the principle of relationality.

Suzanne Methot in her book *Legacy*, dealing with intergenerational trauma and methods of healing, provides a very insightful observation on how the general and mass forces of colonialism and capitalism translate into the psychological distress of an individual. She provides traditional depiction of the windigo from oral stories, which agrees with the aforementioned descriptions, and she connects the windigo to colonization. She also refers to the sociological term "post-catastrophic memory"[784] expressing collective experience of trauma and its instillation in memory, which can manifest itself through the windigo. "Once a person is overtaken by a wittigo, they lose their humanity,"[785] she writes. By humanity she means being consciously and responsibly part of the whole creation, establishing and maintaining relationships with the creation and one's community. "When Indigenous people claimed they were possessed by the wittigo, it was a way of stating that they felt disconnected from other people and unable to control their feelings or desires,"[786] she concludes. Becoming a windigo then means feeling one's personality being out of balance and feeling detached from the rest of the community and the flux of creation. For this reason, she criticizes the term "windigo psychosis" because it

[782] Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 376.

[783] Tara Million, "Finding Contemporary Understandings of Wetiko Legal Principles in Cree and Anishinaabe Literature," ILSA conference, June 8, 2021.

[784] Methot, *Legacy*, 23.

[785] Methot, *Legacy*, 23.

[786] Methot, *Legacy*, 272.

misinterprets the concept as a mental illness and killing the possessed people as inability of Indigenous societies to deal with individuals suffering from mental disorders.[787]

According to Methot, the occurrence of the windigo in communities marked the times of crises and transitions. Colonization, changes in social and economic structures of Indigenous societies transiting to capitalism and disruption of their traditional lifestyles constitute such a time. She agrees that the windigo is a symbol for the greedy nature of capitalism and colonialism, but not only of that. Returning back to the idea of post-catastrophic memory, Methot investigates the psychological effects of trauma on an individual. The collective and intergenerational trauma evinces through violence, predatory behaviour and unresolved emotions that consume the individual from within.[788] "Today's wittigo cannibalizes other people's souls through sexual abuse, and it eats away at another person's identity by inflicting emotional abuse,"[789] Methot says. All of these issues stem from the long-lasting collective trauma, as "traumatized people try to regain a sense of power or control by becoming predators over others,"[790] these are all desperate attempts to feel in control of one's life. Moreover, the sense of unbelonging is often hushed by alcohol and sex, not treated and resolved.[791] Social and psychological issues resulting from intergenerational trauma caused by colonialism are also signs of the windigo since in their essence they stem from and are based on self-centeredness.

Similarly to Kimmerer, Methot proposes kindness as a cure to the windigo. She states that "killing a wittigo is about destroying the negative energy that makes an individual feel disconnected, angry, fearful, or sad."[792] This can be done through unlearning the toxic behaviours, understanding the experienced trauma, and kindness to oneself and to others. Windigo's hunger can be annihilated by creating plenty and its cannibalism eradicated by well-meaning nourishment of the whole community.

The windigo concept represents Indigenous theorizing on (self)harming behaviour of individuals stemming from the human inclination to greedy and self-centered actions. It has been successfully and meaningfully transferred from the traditional oral stories telling about cannibalistic tendencies to contemporary stories explaining the sociological and psychological aftermath of colonialism as well as the dangers of a society based on

---

[787] Methot, *Legacy*, 272.
[788] Methot, *Legacy*, 273.
[789] Methot, *Legacy*, 274.
[790] Methot, *Legacy*, 24.
[791] Methot, *Legacy*, 274.
[792] Methot, *Legacy*, 274.

capitalism. This transfer illustrates the vitality and dynamism of Indigenous theory, which is rooted in ancestral knowledge but does not fossilize it and is re-conceptualized to fit the issues of today. The recurrent occurrence of the windigo stories, especially in times of social distress, is motivated by the persistent need to eliminate harmful behavior and to secure the well-being of communities.

6.4 Van Camp's dystopian windigo and Simpson's gezhizhwazh

Before we proceed to a more detailed analysis of contemporary novels featuring the windigo, I would like to briefly discuss three other stories that exemplify the theoretical concepts examined beforehand or that introduce an aspect of the windigo which was not yet mentioned. The stories were selected to provide more context for the windigo concept and to portray its complexity. The windigo tales work in a similar way to the Sky Woman creation story in the sense that the stories can be used as theories, embodying and explicating the aforementioned enstoried principles.

A case in point to illustrate Methot's idea of collective trauma and its consequences might be Richard Van Camp's short story "The Fleshing"[793]. Van Camp frequently employs the windigo in his futuristic dystopian texts, however, this story stands out by depicting the impact of trauma on people. The whole northern community, where most of his stories take place, shows various forms of harmful and dysfunctional behavior. There is violence, alcohol and drug addiction, sexual and psychological abuse. In this story, a town bully Dean turns windigo during a house party. A teenage boy Bear is heading to the party carrying a bag full of caribou meat as he was instructed but not knowing what for. What he expects to be a party night turns out to be a fight for life instead. The youth are caught up in the house with the windigo, feeding it meat and playing it violent clips on the TV to buy time. Having checked the situation, Bear decides to act and fights Dean the windigo:

> He charged me again and I whipped him in the mouth. His head snapped back and a tooth - an incisor as big as my thumb - fell out of his mouth onto the floor.
>
> It looked at his hands again. They were broken in half, split and exposing meat. Blood started to seep over his own wounds. With this, the demon grinned, closed its eyes slowly and started slurping, feeding on its own hands,

[793] Richard Van Camp, "The Fleshing," *Godless but Loyal to Heaven* (Enfield & Wizentry, 2012).

> lapping up the blood that spurted up and out. It sounded like ice cracking under his skin. He howled in agony but could not stop feeding.[794]

Dean cannot help but devouring himself when the windigo in him smells the blood coming out of the wounds inflicted by Bear. The insatiable hunger makes him eat his own hands even though it hurts him immensely. Turning windigo makes Dean feel the burden of endless greed which results in pain and suffering in the form of self-harm. Suffering is both the beginning and the product of evil that he represents in the story and the two are entanglingly intermingled. Van Camp explains that "it's a horrible thing to always be suffering, to never be happy with what you have."[795] Dean is devouring himself also metaphorically from within by insatiable desire for something. The frustration of perpetual longing and sense of incompleteness is relieved through aggression against other people such as becoming a bully like Dean, just as Methot explains. This story illustrates that the source of evil lies in human pain and suffering; evil is the outcome of sorrow, not a pre-existing, disconnected external force. When this pain is not healed, it breeds more suffering to the individual as well as to others which is presented in the story by the windigo possession.

The windigo appears in a number of Van Camp's stories, typically depicting a dystopian world in which people are hunted by the windigos and various other monsters. Re-emergence of the windigo was caused by careless and greedy extraction of resources from land: "Wheetago have always counted on our greed – even from under the ice: our digging, the Rape of our Great Mother, to call them back,"[796] the narrator says in "Wheetago War". This and similar stories in his "windigo series" evince the action and horror thrill but there is also a strong ecological message criticizing the exploitation of land.

Van Cam's special technique in his works is to stretch and connect stories across individual collections, so the stories create prequels and sequels to other ones in his works. "On the Wings of this Prayer" from *Godless but Loyal to Heaven* (2012) can be taken as an initial story to the other subsequent windigo tales. A woman in Alberta tar sand area steps on the jaws of an old windigo man that had been buried in the earth but his remains were uncovered by excavators. She turns windigo and before her family manages to cure her,

---

[794] Van Camp, "Fleshing," 34.
[795] Richard Van Camp, conversation on the use of monsters and evil in his work, June 5, 2015.
[796] Van Camp, *Night*, 188.

she flees and becomes "their queen . . . giv[ing] birth to them through her mouth."[797] The story is narrated directly to the reader, it is an appeal, a wake-up call to the reader from the characters, who in fictitious future desperately fight for their lives. The narrator says:

> We wish you luck. The future is a curse . . . We carry on for you and what you do next . . .
>
> You must stop the Tar Sands. Do not bring cancer to our Mother. Do not unleash them.
>
> On the wings of this atomized prayer, we reach to you with all we have left . . .
>
> You *can* change the future.
>
> Now wake up.[798] (emphasis original)

The directness of the appeal which comes at the very end of the story creates a shift from a dystopia to the reader's lived reality and the portrayed fictitious, horrifying future becomes a very possible future. Also, the work with time is unusual. As Conrad Scott notes, "the hapless inheritors of our current drive to render fossil fuels from the ground are able to anchor their salvation to an earlier time when change is still possible."[799] The story comes from the future, but the narrator insists on us to prevent exploitation of resources now so that the future is altered. This is a good example of the permeability of time spheres in Indigenous storytelling, in which time is not linear but circular or spiral and thus the future can influence the present and change in the present in return modifies the future. And it is through storytelling that such temporal shifts are especially possible, as was discussed in the second chapter, or as Scott summarizes, "the protagonists narrate themselves out of catastrophe and into the potentiality of healing solutions."[800] Nevertheless, Van Camp utilizes the windigo to represent the dangers of irresponsible management of natural resources, which is a contemporary form of selfishness, and urges the reader to face the ills of modern society. In other words, "On the Wings of This Prayer" is a story that contemporizes the windigo concept both by the representations of modern predator economy as the windigo and by narration through the very popular genre of

[797] Van Camp, "On the Wings of This Prayer," *Godless but Loyal to Heaven* (Enfield & Wizentry, 2012), 10.
[798] Van Camp, "On the Wings," 16-17.
[799] Conrad Scott, "(Indigenous) Place and Time as Formal Strategy: Healing Immanent Crisis in the Dystopias of Eden Robinson and Richard Van Camp," *Extrapolation*, vol. 57, nos. 1-2 (2016): 81.
[800] Scott, "(Indigenous)," 76.

dystopia, in which, interestingly, the windigo appears in the form of a menacing monster as in the traditional tales.

Leanne Simpson's story "gezhizhwazh" from her collection *Islands of Decolonial Love*[801] exemplifies the transformation of the windigo into colonialism and consumerism. However, the story serves at least three purposes simultaneously. Firstly, it directly explains the nature of contemporary windigo in contrast to the traditional stories, secondly, by its uncompromising narration it points out the gulf between Western and Indigenous cosmogonies, or what Aurylaité calls "gestures of epistemic disobedience,"[802] and thirdly offers a solution to current social issues through the main character, gezhizhwazh, and through pronouncing the audience's role in the fight. The story itself starts by asserting the necessity to balance the general popularity of the windigo stories with stories of resistance: "everyone always tells wiindigo stories when they should be telling gezhizhwazh stories."[803] This opening statement implies that the emphasis on windigo stories for their sensationality overshadows the traditional teaching function of these stories. The story then proceeds, through narrator-listener dialogic narrative technique, to explain the character of gezhizhwazh. Her name, gezhizhwazh, means to cut[804] and she is a Nishnaabeg woman and shape-shifting spiritual being who, in the old stories, successfully beats the windigo when she learns their strategy by letting herself to be slowly eaten by them. She is still around, penetrating the system in various forms but she has troubles defeating the contemporary windigo since "this time their power is all over the place. there is no single target. it's everywhere."[805] Gezhizhwazh recognized the windigo disguised as colonialism and consumerism in today's society. Or, as the narrating auntie says, "the wiindigo had insidiously reincarnated and come back stronger. instead of an insatiable appetite for anishinaabeg, this time, they had an insatiable appetite for anishinaabeg aki [land] and all of its gifts" and moreover, they became more cunning since "they found a way to convince people to buy disconnection, insatiable hunger and emptiness."[806] They managed to build the entire social structure around greed and constant need, the two defining features of both the windigo and colonialism and consumerism.

---

[801] Leanne Simpson, *Islands of Decolonial Love* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2013).

[802] Kristina Aurylaité, "Decolonial Gestures in Canada's Settler State: Contemporary Indigenous Writers Jordan Abel and Leanne Simpson," *Baltic Journal of English Language, Literature and Culture*, vol. 7 (2017): 19.

[803] Simpson, *Islands*, 105.

[804] Simpson, *Islands*, 112.

[805] Simpson, *Islands,* 110.

[806] Simpson, *Islands,* 109.

Even though the story is not as directly critical of non-Indigenous dominance as the other stories in the collection, it still very openly and unapologetically defines the ills of Western society, and can therefore be described as deploying what Mignolo calls "decolonial gestures" or the "epistemic disobedience" as defined by Aurylaité[807]. These intentionally provocative and unsettling moves aim to shake up, decolonize the reader's mind.[808] It is especially the part portraying the origin of the disconnection of the windigoed people which might make one uneasy: "wiindigo kept that one [birthing ceremony] controlled through medical intervention . . . this translated into drugging women so they couldn't be present at their ceremony. planned c-sections."[809] The disruption of the intimate closeness of the mother and child at birth creates a hollow place in the newborn that cannot be filled again easily, definitely not in a consumerist society: "they ate, drank, swam and breathed in the toxic soup they'd inadvertently created, all in attempt to fill the bottomless hole. they sat in front of screens for most of their waking hours."[810]

Despite the cunning omnipresence of the new windigo, gezhizhwazh finds a way to counterattack. She takes the advice of her kin spiritual being and lover, the trickster, who tells her to "fix the beginning, gezh, maybe the rest will follow" and becomes a midwife to assist births to prevent the creation of a hole in children, "building an army . . . of souls that could see through the wiindigo illusion."[811] This is the role of gezhizhwazh in contemporary society.

The story, however, talks also about the role of the listener/reader, which sounds quite simple: "just wait."[812] The listener reacts with surprise to this thinking that "nothing is going to happen."[813] However, the advice goes beyond simply not doing anything. To wait while gezhizhwazh is doing her job means to submit oneself to trust in the spiritual realm and let it act even when it seems like nothing is going on. By this, Simpson urges the reader to trust the spiritual, which at first means to accept it as a valid part of reality and existence, something perhaps difficult for a Western or Westernized mind but something that gives rise to Indigenous resurgence. This constitutes yet another disturbing decolonial gesture but it is also decolonizing through love. There are several islands of love in the story – the auntie/storyteller expresses love to her relative by telling the story, gezhizhwazh

[807] Aurylaité, "Decolonial," 5.
[808] Aurylaité, "Decolonial," 11.
[809] Simpson, *Islands,* 111.
[810] Simpson, *Islands,* 111.
[811] Simpson, *Islands,* 110, 112.
[812] Simpson, *Islands,* 112.
[813] Simpson, *Islands,* 112.

expresses love to humankind by fighting the windigo endlessly, and the reader is asked to express love through trusting her. As Simpson says in an interview, love is not only an emotion, "but a practice of respect, reciprocity, consent and humility."[814] Waiting, respecting the spiritual, being humble in not perceiving human intervention as necessary and giving consent to the spirits to act on one's behalf is an act of love, profoundly decolonizing.

The basic principle of the windigo, greed and selfishness, remains unaltered in these three stories albeit differing in manifestations. While "On the Wings of This Prayer" and "gezhizhwazh" implement the contemporary vision of the windigo as the exploitative capitalist tendencies, "The Fleshing" examines the inner sources of the evil and the interdependence of self-interest and suffering. Two of the stories then turn to the reader/listener and, in Van Camp's case, urge us to prevent future ecological catastrophes or have trust in the spiritual support, as Simpson suggests. The bottom line of all the stories, however, is renewal of respectful relationships, be it with land, with spiritual beings, or with oneself.

6.5 *Kiss of the Fur Queen*: Windigo with multiple faces

Kiss of the Fur Queen, Tomson Highway's first and, so far, only novel, does not need a lengthy introduction since it has received national and international regard and sound critical attention. In terms of Cree oral tradition and ontology, scholars turned their focus mainly to the significance and interpretation of the trickster in the novel, which appears in various, rather extravagant forms.[815] I would like to take the windigo as the focal point of the examination of the narrative and see what kind of results and insights such a perspective would bring. By this I do not want to suggest that the existing critical approaches are lacking or misleading; the emphasis on the trickster is definitely valid as, after all, the novel carries one of the trickster's transformations, the queen, in its title.

[814] Leanne Simpson, "Reviving Indigenous Spaces: Echoes of a Native Spirit. An Interview with Leanne Betasamosake Simpson," *Writers in Conversation*, interview by S. Dey and J. Walker, vol. 5, no. 1 (February 2018): 2.

[815] Andrew J. Buzny, "Kissing Fabulose Queens: The Fabulous Realism of Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*." *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 6, no. 3 (2011); Heather Hodgson, "Survival Cree or Weesakeechak Dances Down Yonge Street: Heather Hodgson Speaks with Tomson Highway." *Books in Canada*, vol. 28, no. 1 (1999); Rubelise da Cunha, "The Trickster Wink: Storytelling and Resistance in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*." *Ilha do Desterro*, vol. 56 (2009); Verena Klein, Healing the Native Canadian Soul: Three Accounts of Spiritual Homecoming." *Litteraria Pragensia*, vol. 15, no. 30 (2005); Sarah Willie Krotz, "Productive Dissonance: Classical Music in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*." *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en Littérature Canadienne*, vol. 34, no. 1 (2009).

Moreover, the novel works on various levels and opens up to various perspectives, as recognized in Hodgson.[816] Thus, it seems to me that the incorporation of the windigo concept, despite lying more under the surface than being explicit, offers a valid viewpoint on dealing with the trauma of the residential school experience and that it deserves more detailed examination so that another of these many layers becomes more apparent.

The novel tells a story of two Cree brothers who are taken away from northern Manitoba to a Catholic residential school, in which they are exposed to drastic assimilation practices and also sexual abuse. The scars the school left on their bodies and psyche are deep and they only manage to start healing them in adulthood when they find a way to merge their Cree identity with their careers rooted in European art – Jeremiah becomes a pianist and Gabriel a ballet dancer. Unfortunately, Gabriel contracts HIV and the novel ends with him passing away.

6.5.1 Various forms of the windigo

Scholars mostly recognized the similarity of the abusive priest, Father Lafleur, and the windigo as the text expresses directly that Jeremiah is reminded of a windigo when witnessing the mistreatment of his brother: "Visible only in silhouette, for all Jeremiah knew it might have been a bear devouring a honey-comb, or the Weetigo feasting on human flesh."[817] Going retrospectively in the narrative, the metaphorical embodiment of the priest as the windigo can be traced even earlier. Song notices the "foreshadowing of sexual abuse . . . in Jeremiah's first encounter with Father Lafleur,"[818] albeit not connecting it to the monster, when the principal puts a hand on his thigh, purring "like some large, furry animal."[819] This alone does not render enough reference to the windigo. What makes the connection clearer is the last sentence of the paragraph, which describes the iciness surrounding the clergyman: "Cold air, like a large, gnarled hand, clamped itself on Champion's [Jeremiah's] head."[820] The event of Gabriel's arrival to the school mirrors Jeremiah's first entrance as Father Lafleur catches Gabriel falling into the lake, "clamping

---

[816] Hodgson, "Survival," 5.
[817] Highway, *Kiss,* 79.
[818] Chengcheng Song, "The Residential School Experiences in Drew Hayden Taylor's *Motorcycles & Sweetgrass* and Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, vol. 8, no. 12 (2018): 1579.
[819] Highway, *Kiss,* 54.
[820] Highway, *Kiss*, 55.

his hand onto the boy's thigh."[821] On several other occasions, the priest's description resembles windigo's features. He seems giant, he crows, spurts out the word "lust", licks his lip when watching Jeremiah sing and towards the end the monster has Lafleur's face when Gabriel dreams.[822]

Highway systematically builds a picture of the abuser as the windigo, which grounds the novel in Cree spirituality. However, the metaphor of the priest as a windigo goes further and extends to the representation of Christianity as a colonizing force coercing control via abusive violence. Highway himself in an interview with Heather Hodgson says that "[his] novel is about the killing of one religion by another."[823] As the novel progresses, Gabriel becomes more open to exploring Indigenous spirituality while Jeremiah struggles with the legacy of residential school which for him results in internalized feeling of Indigeneity as barbaric and despicable. The brothers discuss religion openly in chapter 26, and Gabriel is voicing his objections towards the hypocrisy of Christianity, which preaches love and compassion at church while allowing atrocities outside of it, and promotes Indigenous religion, which "listens to the drum, to the heartbeat of Mother Earth."[824] When Jeremiah labels that as pagan and savage, Gabriel retorts: "Christianity asks people to eat the flesh of Christ and drink his blood – shit, Jeremiah, eating human flesh, that's cannibalism. What could be more savage?"[825] Relating communion to cannibalism refers evidently to the windigo and not only the individual members of the church but the whole institution gets associated with the monster.

The brothers' debate continues and, in a strategy typical of Highway, turns to irony when Jeremiah declares that the crucifix is "an instrument of love."[826] The scene of Gabriel's abuse comes inevitably to the reader's mind here, which McKegney calls "almost clichéd illustration of the symbolic rape of Indigenous cultures by evangelical Christianity."[827] In the scene, the crucifix, hanging from Lafleur's neck, rubs against Gabriel's lips and the sensation reminds him of the taste of honey,[828] association which becomes a metaphor for sexual pleasure and desire in the course of the novel, however, a

[821] Highway, *Kiss,* 69.
[822] Highway, *Kiss,* 57, 61, 62, 66, 299.
[823] Hodgson, "Survival," 2.
[824] Highway, *Kiss,* 184.
[825] Highway, *Kiss,* 184.
[826] Highway, *Kiss,* 184.
[827] Sam McKegney, "From Trickster Poetics to Transgressive Politics Substantiating Survivance in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*." *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, vol. 17, no. 4 (2005): 89-90.
[828] Highway, *Kiss,* 79.

metaphor still closely intertwined with the image of the crucifix and thus abuse, as Buzny also recognizes.[829] As a result, the windigo metaphor gradually builds up, representing the priest, the Church, and the abuse simultaneously. The unity of these three significations of the image of the windigo is depicted in one of Gabriel's nightmares, later on, when he dreams about God the Father, the head of the Church, asking him to get out of bed and Gabriel screaming "Haven't you feasted on enough human flesh?"[830] The windigo serves to Highway as a device for expressing the terror of abuse of an individual but also for contextualizing it and depicting the forcible colonization of Indigenous peoples by institutional religion.

Gabriel, having been repeatedly swallowed up by the windigo, gets himself infected by the insatiable hunger, which in his case results in promiscuous homosexual relations. His numerous sexual experiences are recurrently associated with religion by various images such as the aforementioned crucifix, communion or Christ.[831] The church gets so closely connected to the sexual act in his head that it is as if any mention of a priest or church brings to mind sexual connotations. For instance, when Jeremiah asks what the Cree word for a school for priests would be, Gabriel answers "*semen*-airy"[832] (emphasis original), which is at the same time a cruel joke, reminder of the abuse, and a pleasurable idea for him. Evidently, Gabriel's hunger for physical gratification resembles the windigo as it eats him from within and also in the end causes his premature death.

While scholars agree that his behaviour demonstrates features of a windigo, they are not united on the general nature of his intensified sexual desire. While Fagan and Vranckx interpret his frequent sexual encounters as "tainted by a compulsion to re-enact his paedophiliac and colonial abuse"[833] and as "sexual self-abuse,"[834] Buzny considers Gabriel's embracement of his sexuality together with his acceptance of his Indigeneity as a sign of "acknowledging the legitimacy of his sexual desires" and ability to "decolonize his body"[835] and Belghiti refers to the abuse as having in the end "positive result" and as

---

[829] Buzny, "Kissing," 7-8.

[830] Highway, *Kiss,* 297.

[831] Highway, *Kiss*, 169, 181, 204.

[832] Highway, *Kiss*, 191.

[833] Sylvie Vranckx, "The Ambivalence of Cultural Syncreticity in Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and Van Camp's *The Lesser Blessed*," in *Old Margins and New Centers: The European Literary Heritage in an Age of Globalization,* ed. Caroline De Wagter and Marc Maufort (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 298.

[834] Fagan, "Weessageechak," 218.

[835] Buzny, "Kissing," 7.

transforming into "a source of his [Gabriel's] corporeal potential."[836] In my opinion, both points of view are valid and the strength of the depiction of this issue lies exactly in the conflicted nature of his sexuality. On one hand, Gabriel is happy in his body and enjoys the experiences his liberated body offers, on the other the memory of the abuse, represented by the windigo, comes and haunts him until the very end in his dreams and visions. In my view, it is a very accurate depiction of the lethal mixture of pleasure and suffering, or the "paradoxical interdependence of overconsuming and of being consumed,"[837] as McCall writes, that creates the essence of the windigo.

Despite the fact that Gabriel's "infection" by the windigo is much more pronounced in the book, Jeremiah demonstrates some harmful behavior as well. For a long period of time, Jeremiah's coping mechanism to deal with the residential school experience is complete immersion into Western culture to the point of denial of his Cree identity and spirituality; he wishes to become "a perfect little 'transplanted European'."[838] Yet another aspect of his personality gets negated in the process of self-denial, and that is his sexuality. He can get aroused only when a sexual activity is paired with violence: "Amanda bit Jeremiah's ear. Half in pain, half in joy, Jeremiah wailed: yes, Father, make me bleed, please, please make me bleed."[839] Moreover, watching misogynistic violence offers him a relief.[840] His own abuse at school, even though he has tried to supress it and he is only able to admit it and remember it later on, influences negatively his sexual desire. Song writes that "his [Jeremiah's] abusive past directly results in his sadomasochistic tendencies."[841] From the psychological point of view, these inclinations can be explained as re-enactment and dissociation. Methot dedicates a whole chapter to these signs of what she calls "fractured narratives"- incomplete, fragmented recollection of a traumatic event or none what so ever. "Survivors with sensory knowledge but no narrative memory of a traumatic event often engage in re-enactments,"[842] she explains. Furthermore, Methot writes that "individuals who have learned to use dissociation to manage the overwhelming feelings associated with their original traumatic experience often use it as a coping mechanism in

[836] Rachid Belghiti, "Choreography, Sexuality, and the Indigenous Body in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*." *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 5, no. 2 (2009): 4.
[837] McCall, "Intimate," 65.
[838] Cunha, "Trickster," 124.
[839] Highway, *Kiss,* 259.
[840] Highway, *Kiss,* 260.
[841] Song, "Residential," 1580.
[842] Methot, *Legacy*, 153.

daily life" and they are unable "to connect emotionally with other people."[843] Both of the claims describe the character of Jeremiah perfectly; in deriving pleasure from violence, either felt or watched, he re-enacts his painful abuse. He was able to survive the trauma by dissociation, which is also why seeing abuse of other people relieves him, but this coping technique prevents him from starting romantic relationships in adulthood and from acknowledging his traumatic past. (The concept of re-enactment can also be applied to Gabriel's promiscuous behavior with usually older men and the sizeable focus on re-enactments in the novel might be taken by some as a sign of Highway's unresolved issues with the abuse, as one of Fagan's students pointed out and marked as unhealthy).[844]

Amanda still manages to stir Jeremiah's sleeping sexual pot in the quoted passage. This might lead to Jeremiah's subsequent terrifying experience of feeling a strong desire towards a young boy in a day club where he is teaching. As it happens, he is telling the kids about the windigo that day and senses the beast inside him: "Into a vortex screaming with monsters Jeremiah stumbled, clawed hands reaching for his testicles, wet tongues burrowing past his lips."[845] He realizes that succumbing to the desire would turn him to the windigo altogether. McKegney brilliantly notices that Highway echoes the physical description of the original abuser Father Lafleur as a bear and windigo devouring flesh[846] when depicting Jeremiah "like a bear with a honeypot . . . hunched at a typewriter."[847] Fortunately, the windigo temptation comes at a moment when Jeremiah is able to resist it, "seeking instead emotional, spiritual, and psychological nourishment in the creative process."[848] Similarly to the traditional tales, the windigo nature transmits from the attacker to the victim, turning them to, in this case, potential abusers. It can be concluded that the windigo stories, including this novel, serve as theories of cycle of abuse and intergenerational trauma in the way stories function as theories as discussed in the second chapter of this work.

6.5.2 Stories as healing

It probably does not come as a surprise at this point in this thesis that it is, apart from other aspects, a story, or more precisely two stories, that make the healing process

[843] Methot, *Legacy*, 155.
[844] Fagan, "Weesageechak," 219.
[845] Highway, *Kiss,* 272.
[846] McKegney, "From Trickster," 101.
[847] Highway, *Kiss,* 273.
[848] McKegney, From Trickster," 101.

possible for the brothers. The first story is told by the brothers as they are shopping in a mall to make Gabriel a "city boy"[849] when he comes to Winnipeg. Immersing themselves into the world of fashion, extravagance, consume and gluttony, they re-tell how the trickster in the form of a weasel destroyed the windigo by crawling up his anus and chewing on his innards but emerging out with a stain of dirt on its tail. The parallel between the boys entering the monstrous mall and the trickster invading the windigo is evident and made explicit in the last sentence of the section in which the mall is portrayed as "grey and soulless . . . a beast, having gorged itself."[850] The mall, representing consumerism and commerce, is a transformation of the windigo, as several academics recognized[851] and the passage presents an example of the changed form of the windigo as introduced by Simpson, Johnson or Kimmerer.

Once again, the scholars do not concur on the implications of the story. Some take it as an analogy for the brothers' self-negating and self-abusive behavior caused by their traumatic past, "part of them permanently stained by their abuse,"[852] some consider the fact that they use Cree storytelling to express their experience as an act of "indigenization" and "disempowerment"[853] of the colonial space and as a shift in the windigo significance from "evoking an unapproachable awe to being emptied of its [windigo's] authority."[854] While I agree that the story is used as a parallel to their self-implication in the Western cultures as a result of internalized shame of their Indigenous selves, I would not necessarily perceive the metaphorical stain as a permanent negative mark on their characters but perhaps as a new form of identity, in the same way as the weasel acquires the attribute of the black spot on the tail, which becomes its distinguishing feature. Significantly, shortly after the mall episode, Gabriel realizes his queer sexuality.[855] On the other hand, the passage is also permeated with Gabriel's desire when he goes "*hunting*" (emphasis added) for a washroom and seeing a man's bare penis stays "with pleasurable insistence" on his mind as the brothers finish their story and their shopping.[856] Taken in the context of the windigo story, the word "hunting" seems to carry more meanings and bestows Gabriel with windigo

---

[849] Highway, *Kiss,* 116.

[850] Highway, *Kiss*, 121.

[851] Cunha, "Trickster;" Vranckx, "Ambivalence;" McCall, "Intimate;" Lindsey Claire Smith, "'With These Magic Weapons, Make a New World': Indigenous Centered Urbanism in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen.*" *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, vol. 29, no. 1/2 (2009).

[852] Fagan, "Weesageechak," 218; also McKegney, "From Trickster;" Vranckx, "Ambivalence."

[853] Smith, "With These," 157.

[854] Cunha, "Trickster," 106.

[855] Highway, *Kiss,* 125.

[856] Highway, *Kiss,* 120, 121.

features, which are later on amplified. The ambiguity of the passage invites many readings and, in my opinion, the point is not to come with one definitive answer but rather to perceive all the layers and implications the narrative creates here.

In a similar way, there is an ambiguity in terms of why the brothers tell the story. Surely, the story serves as an expression of their Cree perspective as L. C. Smith mentions[857] and it represents and act of resistance against the restraints of English language, and the residential school as an institution propagating it, as Jeremiah says: "You could never get away with a story like that in English."[858] However, while telling the story, expressing their Indigeneity, they are simultaneously contradicting it by immersing in the Western lifestyle and consumerism. McKegney then maintains that "the tale functions for the brothers as simple comic relief, while it is the narrator who makes the metaphorical associations that become evident to the reader."[859] I do agree that the analogy is created mainly by the narrator and that there is definitely a strong humorous element for the brothers in telling the story. However, the fact that Gabriel tells the story while being conscious of his provoked desire and the fact he asks a question about the trickster's motivation to kill the windigo suggests also some semantic search on his part in regard his experience of abuse, or his attempt to "develop his own 'trauma theory',"[860] as Fagan says. Incidentally, Jeremiah starts the story when the suits and shift dresses around create the imagery of priests, nuns, and haloes, items undoubtedly connected to their trauma, to "disarm such occult phenomena" and this move to Cree traditional storytelling might signal his search for contextualizing his past outside the Western framework.[861] Nevertheless, I do not see the windigo's significance as diminished by its connection to such a mundane thing as a mall, as da Cunha claims.[862] On the contrary, the windigo's importance in the narrative grows with the number of representations and forms it expresses. To sum up, the weasel story functions on many different levels and conveys many meanings, sometimes slightly contradictory, but this alone depicts the brother's conflicted feelings and opposing internal forces very well. In spite of the ambiguity, the story does signal Gabriel's and Jeremiah's attempt to conceptualize their experience, even

---

[857] Smith, "With These," 157.
[858] Highway, *Kiss,* 118.
[859] McKegney, "From Trickster," 92.
[860] Fagan, "Weesageechak," 218.
[861] Highway, *Kiss,* 117-118.
[862] Cunha, "Trickster," 106.

if not entirely on the conscious level yet, and at least in Gabriel's case also a growing awareness of his identity as a gay person.

The second story, Son of Ayash, functions as another analogy to the brothers' lives, and this time the parallelism manifests itself more obviously. Abraham Okimasis, their father, tells this traditional story on his deathbed just when Gabriel is about to tell him about their abuse. Son of Ayash, as the father disjointedly narrates, is sent to remedy the evil world and "with these magic weapons, make a new world."[863] He dives deep into the human soul and fights many evils, "the most fearsome among them the man who ate human flesh,"[864] Abraham says in the moment when the priest gives him his last communion, which alludes to Gabriel's comparison of this practice to a cannibalistic ritual and of course, to the windigo. As Vranckx says, the story of Ayash "metaphorizes the brothers' attempts to overcome the forces of ongoing colonialism in their lives"[865] and McKegney explains in more detail the likeness of Ayash's abandonment on an island where he gets his magic weapons to the brothers' confinement in residential school, where they, however, improve their skills, and Ayash battling in dark places to Jeremiah's struggle to contain his abusive potential.[866] McKegney also notices that the story of Ayash carries a great significance for triumphing over their struggles since they manage to internalize the meaning of the story and "apply their respective skills for dance and music to a creative examination of Cree spirituality."[867] Internalization of a story is a key component in transforming a heard narrative into a reconstructive and, in this case, healing force, as discussed in the second chapter of this thesis.

What strikes me as remarkable and not often mentioned in secondary sources is the gradual conflation of several windigo stories, including Son of Ayash, into individual experiences of the brothers. In several instances, the memory of the flesh-eating priest as the windigo, the reminiscence of the weasel story, the story of the female shaman Chachagathoo exorcizing the monster and the vision of Ayash and his magic weapons intermingle and overlap. For example, chapter 37 depicts the deceased Abraham "standing inside some being's lungs" and "inside the creature's heart" while Gabriel is dancing and his boyfriend wondering about the dark places in Gabriel's soul and the stories of "priests

[863] Highway, *Kiss*, 227.
[864] Highway, *Kiss*, 227.
[865] Vranckx, "Ambivalence," 299.
[866] McKegney, "From Trickster," 95, 100.
[867] McKegney, "From Trickster," 95.

playing complex games with brown little boys."[868] Another instance is the confusion in Jeremiah's drunken dream of Chachagathoo (and Amanda) for a windigo when she urges him to get up which foreshadows the reminiscent scene of abuse, where the priest commands Jeremiah to get up.[869] The stories also coalesce in the brothers' artistic performances, combining the windigo starvation stories, the shaman, visions of a priest's robe and performed by the brothers' magical weapons – dancing and music. The concept of the windigo embodied in the insatiable hunger or desire connects the individual stories and therefore can be perceived and used as parts of one broad windigo narrative. Gabriel's and Jeremiah's traumatic experience and their healing through resurgence of their Cree spirituality also form a part of this windigo discourse.

Yet another aspect is worth mentioning and that is the insider humor that Highway weaves into the narrative via using Cree place names for which translations are not provided in the glossary. Van Essen explains this excellently in her article on the use of Cree in the novel, where she illuminates some of the Cree expressions for non-Cree readers. She asserts that creating these jokes only for insiders is intentional: "Highway arranges disparate experiences of the text, where readers who understand Cree will have comic relief but readers who cannot understand Cree will not."[870] One of these names is Wuchusk Oochisk which means, as Van Essen clarifies,[871] muskrat anus in English and appears in the text on several occasions, one of them being right before the scene of Abraham's death. Knowing the meaning of the expression, the connection to the weasel story becomes apparent, and so does the allusion to Jeremiah's abuse. The function of these internal jokes is not only to offer a comic relief but also to "inspire resistance to the destructive powers that the novel works to reveal."[872] Highway uses this raw and uncompromising humor as a way to deal with the traumatic experience described in the novel and also to subvert the colonizing power, creating a level of meaning accessible without assistance only to Cree speakers. This design shows as well that the individual motives such as a "bumhole" or the windigo are to a large extent interconnected and generate meaning on multiple levels.

---

[868] Highway, *Kiss* 235, 237.

[869] Highway, *Kiss*, 252, 286.

[870] Angela Van Essen, "Nehiyawaskiy (Cree land) and Canada: Location, Language, and Borders in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*." *Canadian Literature*, vol. 215 (Winter 2012): 106.

[871] Van Essen, "Nehiyawaskiy," 107.

[872] Van Essen, "Nehiyawaskiy," 106.

In this analysis, I hoped to show that the windigo can serve very well as a conceptual framework for this novel since the windigo theory/story enables interpretative insights and understanding of the brothers' experience. The importance of the concept is reflected in the number of levels the windigo works on in the text; it can be used to explore the traumatic experience, the various forms of re-enactment, both positive and negative expressions of desire, ways of healing, and also production of humor. The universal relevance of the windigo as an embodiment of destructive and harmful behavior is shown in the permeation and merging of individual characters together – the windigo can be seen in the priest and Church as such as well as in the brothers, Ayash defeating the windigo blends with Chachagathoo and also with Jeremiah and Gabriel overcoming their trauma by art, Abraham becomes the weasel invading the beast. Highway skilfully uses the windigo to express both the personal pain as well as the intergenerational cycle of harm and the colonial damage of Indigenous communities.

6.6 *Moon of the Crusted Snow*: Windigo in Anishinaabe Dystopic Vision

For its grim and sinister nature, the windigo suites well in the emerging genre of the so-called Indigenous speculative fiction or Indigenous Futurism, an example of which might be the aforementioned Richard Van Camp's wheetago war stories in his collection *Night Moves* (2015) and *Moccasin Square Gardens* (2019) or Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* (2017). *Moon of the Crusted Snow*[873] by Waubgeshig Rice from 2018 represents another addition to this category, however, to perceive it just as a chilling post-apocalyptic tale would be misleading and simplifying. In fact, Rice himself expresses reservations towards the label "post-apocalyptic" since it silences the apocalypse the Nishnaabeg people already experienced and prefers calling it post-urban because the solution of the potential crisis of the modern world he presents would be living on land.[874] This alone also suggests that the text carries broader socio-cultural messages and these messages are transmitted, among other techniques, via the windigo concept. The following analysis aims to show the ways the author works with the windigo in this novel and how this piece fits within the general tradition of the windigo tales.

[873] Waubgeshig Rice, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2018).

[874] Waubgeshig Rice, "Storytelling with Waubgeshig Rice," *Kobo Writing Life Podcast*, interview by Joni Di Placido and Stephanie McGrath., audio, October 8, 2019, https://kobowritinglife.libsyn.com/storytelling-with-waubgeshig-rice. 04:00-04:06.

Securing food stays at the centre of the text from the very beginning as the first chapter depicts the main character, an Anishinaabe man Evan, shooting a moose during his fall hunt and bringing it home, feeling the satisfaction of providing for his family for the upcoming winter. There is a slight eerie feeling oozing through the narrative, perceptible in remarks like "my nookomis keeps saying this winter is gonna be a rough one,"[875] significantly placed as the last sentence of the first chapter, and in the fact that the pleasure of the modern life such as a satellite or cell signal got suspended. Despite that, the characters are not alarmed at first since they are accustomed to the harsh life in a northern community where these intermits are not uncommon. The sense that something is off gets gradually intensified, however, with the energy supply not getting renewed and with the arrival of two boys, members of the community, from the nearest southern town and their news of total chaos and despair in the urban areas.[876] The looming collapse of the world is further strengthened by the characters' bad dreams. Having heard the news for the south, and with the snow coming and the energy still cut off, the community council decides to ration their emergency food supplies. It is to this worrying but still under-control situation when the character of Justin Scott comes to the scene and with him the tempo of the unfolding catastrophe quickens.

6.6.1 Scott the Windigo

Justin Scott is a white man, but several of his features indicate his strange nature and offer hints he might be more than that. Evan is watching him coming up on his snow mobile and notices that "even from this distance, the driver appeared tall and burly," with "massive head" and large facial features, his entire gear is black, his voice is guttural and echoes across the land and the chilliness of the weather seems to have no effect on his bald head;[877] Scott is overall of staggering stature, "he was a beast of a man who was invading his people's space"[878] as the narrator sumps up Evan's impression of him. Surely, the choice of the word "beast" is telling and together with the coming winter, snow all around and the beginning insecurity about the availability of food in the community, typical motives in traditional windigo tales, the informed reader might recognize the connection. (To be fair, Rice admits his inspiration was not only the windigo as he knew it from his

[875] Rice, *Moon*, 11.
[876] Rice, *Moon*, 80-2.
[877] Rice, *Moon,* 98, 101, 99, 100, 103.
[878] Rice, *Moon,* 100.

family storytelling but in terms of Scott's looks Cormac McCarthy's character Judge is reflected in him, too.)[879] Interestingly, when introducing himself, Scott repeatedly uses the phrase "the name's Scott"[880] instead of saying "my name is Scott" as if implying that the name is just acquired and not truly his own.

"It [the windigo] would come in and exploit communities when they're at their most vulnerable and take over and upend the balance,"[881] explains Rice for his readers in a facebook live stream and this is basically what happens after Scott's arrival. Scott deftly manipulates the members of the community, dazzling them by his physical strength and hunting skills in combination with playing on their emotions by showing his pretended vulnerability.[882] Having earned their trust at least partially, Scott is quick in identifying the weaknesses of the community and use them to control people. He becomes "the man to go to if you'd run out of smokes or alcohol,"[883] which means he targets people with addictions and feeds their desires and thus makes them dependent on him. This susceptibility to substance abuse together with the depletion of sources is what makes the weaker characters "experience a mental state known as 'the windigo psychosis',"[884] as Martens claims. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the novel depicts here the consequences of colonial and intergenerational trauma and the cycle of abuse as Methot describes it, since Scott the windigo influences primarily the people the least connected to traditional knowledge and Indigenous culture, such as Evan's brother Cam. Evan himself smokes and drinks occasionally though he does not talk about it openly since it is "easier to ignore all the sadness and despair that had come to their families because of alcohol"[885] so he is also partially caught in the cycle but mostly manages to suppress these tendencies. Scott is, however, aware of Evan's frailty,[886] which prevents Evan, together with Scott's indisputable superiority in physical strength, from confronting him openly until the end. This equivocal aspect of Evan's character makes him a more humane and not so ideally positive hero of the novel and it also shows the extent of the social issues in the community; hardly anyone is exempt from the impact of colonial trauma.

---

[879] Waubgeshig Rice, "Moon of the Crusted Snow Discussion." *Facebook*, video, March 22, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/waubgeshigrice/videos/1372931792909389, 19:00.

[880] Rice, *Moon,* 100, 101.

[881] Rice, "Moon," 35:00.

[882] Rice, *Moon* 124, 107, 116.

[883] Rice, *Moon*, 131.

[884] Reuben Martens, "Petromelancholia and the Energopolitical Violence of Settler Colonialism in Waubgeshig Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow*." *American Imago*, vol. 77, no. 1 (2020): 198.

[885] Rice, *Moon*, 45.

[886] Rice, *Moon*, 132.

As the community descends into more chaos and despair with the dwindling supplies and rising deaths, it is mentioned in several places that Scott "has a plan."[887] Evan's subsequent dream in which Scott's true nature is revealed discloses by extension also his plan, at least to those familiar with the windigo stories. The description of Scott the windigo resembles very closely the portrayals of the monster in traditional stories. The creature emits "a deep, guttural growl" and "savage rumble", which leaves Evan immobile, exudes "feral odor" and its mouth is equipped by "long incisors jutting upward and downward" and the last sentence of the dream, "the beast Scott had become lunged forward" sums up the apparition and echoes the impression of "beast of a man" from when Evan met Scott for the first time.[888] This vision enables Evan to understand the situation when they find one body missing from the improvised morgue the next day, and he voices his suspicion that Scott took the body to eat it with his friends.[889] Evan and his comrades go, confront him and Scott is killed. Scott does not try to hide what he did and carelessly dismisses their evident horror, so sure he is about his power and so uncontrollable his hunger has become. From the point of view of Scott's depiction and the plot of the story, the novel can be taken as a contemporary recreation of the traditional windigo tales – it is a story of the threat of starvation becoming real in modern world and the danger of selfishness and greediness embodied in the character of Scott, who has to be destroyed and what the represents must be eradicated so that the community can survive.

Yet, in compliance with the understanding of the windigo as a metaphor for colonialism and consumerism discussed by Johnson, Simpson, Kimmerer and others, Scott also clearly represents these aspects of Western culture, as the author openly admits by saying in an interview: "the main antagonist, Justin Scott, he obviously is the manipulative, exploitative, colonial kind of figure who really comes to upset the balance and only looks out for himself."[890] The schism between the portrayal of the Indigenous and Western, or more precisely southern in this case, ways of dealing with the crisis starts even before Scott's arrival. When Kevin and Nick, the two boys having returned to the community from school in the south, relate their experience of the first days of the shutdown, they are describing scenes of people frustrated at a gas station, crowd "elbowing and shoving others out of the way" to get to a grocery store, "hungry students tor[ing] through the kitchen"

[887] Rice, *Moon*, 162, 182.
[888] Rice, *Moon*, 187.
[889] Rice, *Moon*, 196.
[890] Waubgeshig Rice, "Meet the Writers: Waubgeshig Rice," *Monocle*, interview by Georgina Godwin, July 12, 2020, https://monocle.com/radio/shows/meet-the-writers/240/, 24:00.

etc.[891] In other words, the reaction of the people in the south to the crisis is violent and "rampantly individualistic,"[892] as Martens observes. The security of the whole community, which is of essential and prevalent importance for the band council and Evan, seems non-existent in the city. It might seem to create a somewhat simplifying binary opposition of city-south-non-Indigenous-individualistic and community-north-Indigenous-communal, however, it seems to me that the city serves as a representation of the colonial self-centeredness and thus the individualistic features are stressed to make the metaphor more comprehensible.

Scott's behavior is very bold, assertive, and quite obnoxious from the time he comes to the scene, he does not give the impression of someone coming to ask for help humbly, being aware he does not have to be granted entrance. His manner of interaction can be qualified as jovial and sarcastic, throwing jokes around and addressing Evan and Isaiah as "brother", "friend", and "son". Towards the end of the initial discussion Scott has with the representatives of the community, he says to Terry, the chief: "Well, Chief Meegis, I'm a hunter, much like you are, I assume . . . I know all about emergency management. I can help your people adapt to this situation."[893] He plays on the note of shared values and familiarity with the on-land lifestyle in the statement but also asserts his *knowledge* to manage the situation, expressing the Western dependence on the intellectual and rational and its superiority, and his ability to assist people in adapting, which alludes to the assimilation policies of settler state in Canadian history. Martens also characterizes it as "the typical settler-colonial fantasy of saving the Indigenous people from mortal danger."[894]

This utterance and his subsequent interactions in the community is what makes Scott a figure that "encapsulates settler-colonialist attitudes,"[895] as English mentions in an interview with Rice. When he comes to the community meeting, despite the representatives telling him to keep out of sight, he intentionally uses their hospitality and the protocol of respect to introduce himself on his own terms, knowing they would most probably not oppose him and scold him publicly. Scott applies the same strategy as before, greeting

---

[891] Rice, *Moon,* 82, 85.
[892] Martens, "Petromelancholia," 199.
[893] Rice, *Moon,* 107.
[894] Martens, "Petromelancholia," 204.
[895] Waubgeshig Rice, "Interview with Waubgeshig Rice," *Canadian Notes & Queries*, interview by Sharon English, vol. 106 (Winter 2020): 37.

people in their language and proclaiming "We'll get through this. Together."[896] while fist-pumping the air. In other words, he invades the people's space, imposing his presence onto the community circle without following their advice, declares himself to be part of the community, accompanying the statement with a gesture of triumph but also a gesture suggesting invasive force.

His intrusive and aggressive conduct escalates when another group of strangers arrives to the community asking for food. Without a warning or command, he shoots the leader of the group as the man suddenly pounces on Terry in desperation.[897] In this way, he usurps control over the situation, and even though he tactically calls on the participants of the incident to listen to the chief, he knows Terry would not be able to react appropriately in the heat of the situation and by not knowing what to do, "hand[s] it over to Scott,"[898] as Evan recognizes. Scott manoeuvres very well his liminal space in/out of the community, taking advantage of the position that suits him the best at given moment. Due to his skilful manipulation, he secures a position in the community, which enables him to launch this violent attack "on behalf" of the community without being reprimanded, and which, on the contrary, grants him more power since he proves himself to be a decisive, daring, and uncompromising leader. All of these features – intrusion, disregard of local protocol, manipulation, and open violence, can also be identified as features of settler colonialism. Scott clearly represents the windigo in its colonial form as well.

Martens connects the traditional and the new form of the windigo, too, saying that "Scott . . . has . . . fallen victim to the 'windigo psychosis'", which "is the quintessential symptom of settler colonialism."[899] Putting aside the dependence on the problematic term "psychosis", the preceding analysis suggests that rather than Scott being a prey of the windigo, he *is* the windigo and from his very introduction in the text there seems to be sufficient evidence to claim so, starting with the imagery of his visage. It is but a small change in expression but indicative of a significant shift in perception since saying that he becomes the windigo would transfer the evil force to the outside, it would become external, whilst the windigo comes from within, from the personal weaknesses, as pointed out by Johnson and Van Camp, for example. Scott represents the windigo entity as such, not a person turning windigo, and that is the reason why there is nothing said about Scott's

[896] Rice, *Moon,* 114.
[897] Rice, *Moon*, 140.
[898] Rice, *Moon,* 141.
[899] Martens, "Petromelancholia," 205.

background or causes of his manipulative behavior, he represents a concept, not a human character.

6.6.2 Anishinaabe ways as the new life

In spite of the fact that Scott and his actions function as pivotal instigators of the plot in the novel, the focus of the text does not lie in the exploration of the evil of cannibalism and colonialism or the post-catastrophic world but, by contrast, in survival, as Schingler notices as well,[900] and in restoration of balance in the community or, as Clark puts it: "it's the cohesion of community among this Indigenous culture and the positive influences of family and tradition that shine in the story."[901] The main protagonist, Evan, through whose view most of the action is perceived, constitutes an anchor of the narration as well as a pillar supporting his family, elders, and the community as such. The values of close family and the importance of culture based on respect and relationality is transmitted through his character. Nevertheless, the narrative portrays the consequences of colonialism in his character as well, for instance, he does not speak his language fluently and is not sure about some ceremonial procedures.

Aileen, his aunt and a respected elder in the community, leads him and shares teachings when he comes to visit. Not surprisingly, it is her who delivers a quintessential message of the novel. On one of his visits during the shutdown, she muses about the word apocalypse that the young use to describe their current state of affairs and reacts in the following way: "Yes, apocalypse. What a silly word. I can tell you there's no word like that in Ojibwe. Well, I never heard a word like that from my elders anyway."[902] Then she explains that there have already been several apocalypses for her people, and she specifies the arrival of settlers and the residential school policy; however, she means the experience of colonialism in general which brought near destruction to her people on several occasions during the history: "We've had that over and over. But we always survived. We're still here."[903] Her message emphasizes the resilience of her people, their strength and perseverance in face of great obstacles and tragedies and the unrelenting belief in the endurance of creation. Moreover, the fact that there is no word for an apocalypse in their

---

[900] Michelle Anne Schingler, "Moon of the Crusted Snow," *ForeWord*, October 19, 2018, https://www.forewordreviews.com/reviews/moon-of-the-crusted-snow/.

[901] Craig Clark, "Moon of the Crusted Snow," *Booklist* (August 2018): 25.

[902] Rice, *Moon,* 149.

[903] Rice, *Moon,* 150.

language implies the non-linear perception of time. There is no apocalypse because there is no final end of the world; there might be several endings but these are always followed by a renewal in the perpetual cycle of destruction and rebirth. In my opinion, it is this teaching, grounded in the Indigenous knowledge and spirituality, that informs the hopeful nature of the narrative even if the genre of dystopia does not necessarily match this. Rice himself talks about his view on dystopia as a "fun way to imagine a future"[904] rather than depicting the end of the world, which corresponds with the cyclical perception of creation; he is imagining the end for another start.

For this reason, I cannot concur with Martens's interpretation of the ending where, according to him, "there is little to suggest that the Anishinaabe have a long and prosperous future ahead of them" and that the novel is refusing to "end in a state of bimaadiziwin", state of balance.[905] Surely, the balance has been significantly disrupted with the collapse of the modern world and a number of people dying in the community as a direct or indirect result, however, the last chapter definitely indicates exactly the new beginning and renewal that Aileen mentioned in her teaching. The text says that the Anishinaabeg in the community withered, "but they refused to wither completely" and the penultimate sentence mentions starting "this new life nestled deep in the heart of Anishinaabe territory."[906] Together with the focus of the last chapter on Nicole and her kids getting ready to meet Evan, a picture of a promising young family in other words, the closing breathes with hope and belief in better days ahead, in spite of the forced dislocation and abandonment of their former home. It seems to me that reading the ending in a pessimistic way is to read it through the Western perspective, giving too much weight to the collapse of the system and shifting the narrative to the linear time progression which would emphasize, falsely, only the finality and not the possibility of renewal. This might also be the reason for Martens's misreading of the gunfight in chapter thirty where according to Martens Evan is killed, which, however, does not correspond with the epilogue in which Nicole says to the children there are going to see dad. Also, Rice dispelled any doubts about Evan's ending in a facebook live stream.[907] It is true that Evan's survival is only implied and not directly stated, however, interpreting the ending as his death might be reading the novel through the need of conflict in Western narratives. Since

[904] Rice, "Moon," 5:00.
[905] Martens, "Petromelancholia," 209, 207.
[906] Rice, *Moon,* 212, 213.
[907] Rice, "Moon," 29:00.

Evan represents resurgence of the Indigenous lifestyle, his death would go against the message of the novel that portrays Nishnaabeg values as the possible sustainable future.

Waubgeshig Rice successfully joined the very popular genre of dystopia with Indigenous worldviews and the tradition of oral stories. The windigo is in the story implemented both in its traditional, monstrous, and cannibalistic form, but also in the contemporized transformation to represent colonialism and consumerism. Interestingly, the novel echoes the traditional stories since one of its main themes is scarcity of food in communities, but it transfers this problem from the past to potential future. In addition, Rice uses the framework of dystopia to acquaint readers with the fundamental moments of Indigenous experience of colonialism, with the basics of his language and with the elementary values of Indigenous communities formed on respect and responsibility for oneself, but also for one's relations, the enstoried principles. His employment of the windigo seems to be a bit more straightforward and intelligible than, for example, Highway's, but it still works on several levels. As the author says in an interview with Rosanna Deerchild, he was considering both non-Indigenous and Indigenous readers, including those not brought up in touch with Indigenous cultures.[908] The novel thus serves as an excellent introduction to foundations of Indigenous beliefs and storytelling while being an exciting and terrifying reading experience.

6.7 Closing remarks

As well as the Sky Woman and the trickster, the windigo, another significant and frequently employed character of oral storytelling in contemporary Indigenous writing, represents the importance of values of reciprocity, respect, relationality, and responsibility. Despite being an evil entity, the windigo serves to emphasize these concepts by negative exemplification, showing what happens when one does not follow these values. The traditional windigo stories, usually set in times of winter starvation, transmit teachings of the dangers of selfishness and indulgence which creates imbalance in the community, representing these failings in the form of a flesh-eating monster whose insatiable hunger

[908] Waubgeshig Rice, "Waubgeshig Rice Balances Historical Accuracy with Dystopian Future in New Novel," *Unreserved, CBC Radio*, interview by Rosanna Deerchild, January 25, 2019, https://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/they-don-t-know-what-they-don-t-know-teachers-reach-out-for-tips-on-integrating-indigenous-content-1.4990312/waubgeshig-rice-balances-historical-accuracy-with-dystopian-future-in-new-novel-1.4992026.

expresses the peril of lack of moderation which has the tendency only to grow when not controlled and leading possibly even to cannibalism. Similarly to the trickster, the windigo concept has been misread through Western perspectives, visible, for example, in the emergence of the term windigo psychosis. This term exoticizes the windigo condition and intensifies the negative stereotypes of Indigenous peoples as savage and uncivilized.

In accordance with the vitality and adaptability of Indigenous storytelling, the windigo has been lately transformed to refer to the destructive forces of colonialism and consumerism, which both rest upon constant need and creation of want rather than gratitude and satisfaction. In addition, the windigo has been recognized as a useful non-Western way to approach intergenerational trauma and its symptoms such as various forms of abuse and addiction.

Tomson Highway presents the windigo in multiple forms and through multiple characters in his novel. While the priest at the residential school serves as the epitome of the colonial force and the ideological abuse of religion, the struggle of the Okimasis brothers expresses the weight of personal and intergenerational trauma, the cycle of abuse and also the self-destructive power of desire. Despite working more under the surface than being explicit in the novel, the windigo concept can be used very effectively in approaching the novel.

Waubgeshig Rice chose to play on the terrifying quality of the windigo in his dystopian or post-urban novel. The author makes use of both the traditional description of the windigo appearance and behavior, creating a manipulative and intimidating antagonist in Scott, while making reference to the exploitative nature of colonialism represented by him as well. The overall message of the work, however, lies in the promotion of Nishnaabe values of communality and relationality as a way towards a sustainable lifestyle.

The windigo is undoubtedly an exciting and chilling character to explore, however, it is necessary to understand it in all its layers and meanings. The windigo tales are not only cautionary and horror tales, they impart knowledge on the lack of control of weaknesses of an individual and its consequences, on the psychological impact of trauma and on the devastating nature of exploitative forces.

7 CONCLUSION

Indigenous literature in Canada has experienced significant expansion in recent decades both in terms of the number of works published as well as of a wider public and critical recognition. Termination of governmental policies embedded in colonial notions, such as the practice of residential schools or the ban of ceremonies, opened up space for culture and language revival activities, artistic boom, self-determination and acknowledgment of the colonial trauma. It is fascinating to observe the rapid development in terminology, implementation of Indigenous theory, and the general vigorous fight for self-definition and autonomy in Indigenous studies, albeit this expansion also generates complications in research activities. Even in the eight years that I have worked on this project the field has grown considerably and so many new publications and ideas emerged that it is hard to keep up. Due to this growth, it is no longer possible to approach Indigenous literature as a homogenous field and any kind of generalization runs the risk of perpetuating misconceptions. However, it cannot be said that the legacy of colonialism has been settled and overcome and that the power dynamics is balanced. The ongoing issues with identity frauds and cultural appropriation, as shown, for example, by the case of Joseph Boyden, illustrate the continuous struggle for establishing healthy interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures in Canada. Another aspect that cannot be resolved easily is the question of the right to access and ethical research. The issue of to what extent a non-Indigenous researcher can study Indigenous cultures and on what terms has no clear answer either. Nevertheless, the core values of Indigenous epistemologies stressed throughout this work, relationality and respect, represent important guiding points for the study of Indigenous literatures.

In regard Indigenous cultures, one fact has not been challenged and that is their rootedness in orality (or oratory, to use Maracle's term) and the importance of traditional storytelling. This work stems from and builds on this understanding. The aim of this research was to examine the way orality and traditional storytelling is reflected in contemporary texts by Indigenous authors. The analysis focuses on three characters which frequently appear in traditional stories and which all readers of current Indigenous literature will also often encounter in the texts – Sky Woman, the trickster, and the

windigo. The main question of interest was how these characters contribute to the manifestation of orality in the texts and what meanings their usage creates. As this research shows, answers to both these questions lie in the ontological and epistemological principles the characters embody, the principles I called "enstoried" since they operate in and are transmitted through stories. At the same time, these principles inform and shape the narrative structure of the stories and serve as a theoretical base for the derivation of meaning from them.

Concepts of orality are transferred to written texts in the form of values. So, traditional oral storytelling and contemporary literature based on this tradition are both informed by the same values or principles. This conceptual framework within which storytelling functions is called storywork by Archibald or oratory by Maracle. The terms used might differ, the values, however, are shared – relationality, reciprocity, respect, and responsibility. Indigenous scholars often talk about these 3Rs (or 4Rs, depending on their respective approach) as the main guiding concepts of Indigenous knowledge.[909] In my understanding, relationality represents the core principle to which the others are bound. Respect and reciprocity are necessary conditions for a healthy, nurturing relationship, while responsibility helps maintain it. As the analyses of the works have shown, all the three characters teach these values, even though each one from a different angle. We could say that the characters embody and advance these principles, the Rs. Relationality also ensures that storytelling is accountable both to ancestors and to the teller's contemporaries, which establishes a continuation of tradition while simultaneously enables reacting to current issues and constitutes the dynamic nature of storytelling.

The analytical part of this work opened with the discussion of Sky Woman, a character from primarily Nishnaabeg and Haudenosaunee creation stories. Sky Woman as a starting point for analysing texts is fitting for two reasons. Firstly, creation stories in general talk not only about the beginning of the world or a people, but they also set basic concepts and principles and shape the referential framework of a given culture. Vanessa Watts illustrates the significance of stories for epistemological and cognitive frameworks by linking Sky Woman's body with land and human body and mind. Thus, creation stories form essential sources for the examination of Indigenous storytelling and the values it transmits. Secondly, the ability to create represents a significant theme of these stories and since literature is creative art, Sky Woman seems to be a valid point of departure for

[909] Wilson, *Research*, 58, Archibald, *Indigenous*, 1.

literary analysis. Sky Woman creation stories can be also understood as an orientation or guide for one's self-reflection and self-recreation, abilities much needed for identity search and belonging, which continue to be important issues for Indigenous individuals today. It is for these reasons Sky Woman appears frequently in contemporary texts. Since creation stories set conceptual groundings of cultures, texts featuring Sky Woman constitute ideal sources for the comparison of referential frameworks reflected in storytelling.

Thomas King often dedicates his novels and short stories to such contrasting. *The Back of the Turtle* is no exception, however, the focus of this novel is rather on restoration of communality, relationality, and Indigenous identity than on the inspection of differences between Western and Indigenous perspectives. The Sky Woman story permeates the whole narrative in the form of allusions, themes, and characters' features as well. Moreover, the story as such is retold as a part of the novel, the part which serves as a turning point in the plot. The act of telling as such mirrors the Rs, it is communal, reciprocal - the listeners are encouraged to participate, and relational - it helps to build closer relationships among the participants. Due to that, the themes promoted by the Sky Woman story, the ability to (re)create and the importance of relationships materialize in the lives of the characters as they are able to heal themselves as well as their environment. King's novel manifests the principles of Indigenous storytelling by implementing the act of telling a story within the text and simultaneously it emphasizes the enstoried principles by their double transmission – by retelling the Sky Woman story and by the thematic focus of the novel as such.

Lesley Belleau stresses in her novel the interconnection and even fusion of Sky Woman and her female characters, which exemplifies Watts's approach to Sky Woman and demonstrates not only the significance of creation stories for individuals but also shows that relationality works across generations, time scopes and physical and spiritual realms. In addition, sexuality is accentuated in the novel and sexual energy is portrayed as a force for the creation of thoughts as well as a new life. The narrative revolves around the importance of facing trauma, personal healing, and letting oneself be a part of a community which aligns with the R-principles.

The character of the trickster has been inspected by scholars numerously. Non-Indigenous critics usually preferred to look at it through postmodern lenses because the trickster suits well the disruptiveness typical for postmodernity. This work approaches the trickster on the basis of the definitions provided by Indigenous intellectuals, with the aim to answer the call for a more culturally specific and less Eurocentric attitude. The trickster

teaches the enstoried principles by embodying human weaknesses and by warning against their results in a humours way. Apart from that, the trickster also serves as a reminder of the need to constantly re-examine and challenge accepted notions and ways of thinking by its ability to shapeshift and to move across categories and characteristics such as gender.

By orchestrating his mischievous tricks, Slipperjack's Weesquachak teaches the central couple about their weaknesses and by exposing them to numerous, often traumatic, obstacles, he makes them realize and work on their shortcomings as they learn to communicate better, express their feelings and appreciate one another's individualities. His teachings are inadvertent; he primarily focuses on satisfying his own needs, as is typical for him, but the mishaps he creates function as transformative moments for the characters. Internalization of his teachings is needed for character development. Slipperjack's depiction and use of the trickster can be considered as a modern adaptation of the traditional trickster stories as her Weesquachak retains characteristic features, however, he does not occupy the central stage and his presence is often rather suggested than stated directly.

The trickster in Taylor's novel, on the other hand, is employed as one of the main characters and interacts closely with other beings - human, spiritual and animal. He himself transforms and changes his/her appearance as well as triggers transformations of interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships. The chaos Nanabush creates forces the characters to reconfigure their beliefs and norms and thus he helps to reconstruct the world they live in. The acceptance of chance and imperfections as an integral part of creation is portrayed as the main difference between Indigenous perspectives and Christian beliefs, which is depicted by Nanabush's dialogue with Christ. The narrative bridges these differences by laughter and its overall tone is reconciliatory. The trickster enables the characters to reconnect with their culture, build stronger relationships and teaches about human ability to reconstruct their world by disrupting fixed rules and dead ends.

While the former two texts depict trickster's deeds as risky and sometimes painful, Robinson in her novel puts emphasis on the outright danger and serious harm his actions can cause. Similarly to Taylor's and Slipperjack's characters, the protagonist in this narrative suffers from disconnection from spirituality and Indigeneity. Nevertheless, spirituality in this narrative is not idealized, and transformativity is often linked to violence. This technique enables Robinson to challenge the often romanticized perception of Indigenous spirituality, to re-examine the trickster figure, and to present a more complex

picture of interconnectedness. Spheres and realms are permeable, but that does not mean the process is uncomplicated and risk-free. On the contrary, shapeshifting and living in touch with spirits requires good knowledge and caution.

The windigo teaches by embodying oppositional values to the enstoried principles. With its boundless self-centeredness and insatiable cravings, the windigo represents a materialization of human tendency to be selfish, and the windigo stories talk about the consequences such behaviour has for communities as well as for the afflicted individual. The change of the signification of the windigo in recent decades illustrates the way traditional storytelling reacts to current issues and exemplifies the way stories function as theories, transforming to provide guidance for current obstacles.[910] The figure transferred from a giant, man-eating monster to a representation of colonial exploitation and consumerism, while the vices it warns against remained unchanged. Moreover, the windigo stories function as theories of trauma since the cycle of trauma originates, as well as the windigo's hunger, from the sense of incompleteness and disconnection leading to indulgence or abuse.

Highway combines both the traditional and the contemporized meanings of the windigo and the various windigo imageries and stories he retells or alludes to in the narrative express colonial and ideological abuse of the brothers, their personal pain and struggle with traumatic experience, and the intergenerational cycle of trauma. The windigo stories retold in the novel also serve as theories of healing for the brothers; once they internalize them, they are able to break the traumatic cycle. Rice's windigo represents the greedy and manipulative nature of colonialism and consumerism even though the character of Scott as such echoes in a number of features the form of the traditional windigo. The novel promotes Indigenous resurgence and sustainable way of life for which relationality is indispensable.

Apart from the enstoried principles represented by these three characters and their actions, internalization constitutes another aspect or traditional oral storytelling that has been transferred to written texts. The act of storytelling is completed only when the story gets incorporated within the listener and when the listener is able to find a personal relation to it, and subsequently a personal meaning. The listener should take an active part during the whole process, but it is especially the internalization that is essential for the completion of the process and meaning derivation. Contemporary Indigenous authors reflect this

[910] Maracle, *Memory*, 231-233.

aspect through character development. Sky Woman, the trickster, and the windigo function as models or action initiators, however, transformation of the human character only happens when the values represented by the spiritual figures are internalized and accepted. The fact that the development of characters can be realized only through their volition and awareness might lead to the separation of the physical, though fictional, and the supernatural worlds, and this might be the reason why the traditional spiritual beings are sometimes understood as devices of magical realism. Such an approach, however, overlooks the values the spiritual beings embody, and neglects relationality of the human and other-than-human. In other words, the enstoried principles create a bond between all the characters and a shared frame of reference – Sky Woman, the trickster, and the windigo embody the principles and human characters must internalize them in order to reconnect with their self, reconstruct their worlds, or rebuild their relationships. Justice coined the term "wonderworks" for Indigenous fiction characteristic for portraying the proximity and interconnection of the physical and supernatural worlds, in which "the wondrous" is not an anomaly or deviation but rather a possibility.[911] All the novels discussed here can be classified as wonderworks.

Traditional storytelling with its features also shapes the structure and narrative techniques of contemporary works which reflect it. Interconnectedness of all creation, expressed in the frequently used "all our relation" phrase, and permeability of spheres ranks as an important theme but can be discerned in the setting and the scope of the characters as well. All three of the figures discussed come from the spiritual realm but operate in the real world, and so they signal the connection of the mundane and the spiritual by default. However, their existence and interactions broaden the characters' perception of reality and they make the permeability of spheres visible. As we have seen, the human characters in the texts very often experience disconnectedness from their spirituality or Indigeneity as such and all the plots lead to the restoration of their cultural and spiritual identities. If we view this through the medicine wheel teaching, the novels focus on balancing the spiritual side of the personality of the characters. The characters learn to depend, trust the spiritual and thus restore the relations with the other-than-human beings as well.

Preference of non-linear time and usage of flashbacks and flashforwards aligns with contemporary literature in general. Their implementation, however, is also determined by

[911] Justice, *Why,* 153.

the perception of time in Indigenous cultures, which works on cyclical, not necessarily cause-effect, basis. Due to that, time overlaps, in which the ancient past correlates with the present or future as in, for example, Robinson's connection of stars and human flesh, and instances of ancient phenomena circling to the present, such as reincarnations of the trickster, are common.

Enstoried principles promote equilibrium of all aspects of an individual's personality and wholesome relationships within the community. This aim for balance represents another factor reflected in the structure of the narratives and was described as the use of balance-based plots as opposed to conflict-driven plots that are common in Western texts. Restoration of identity, relationships, and/or environment and community stand out as prominent themes in all the discussed novels and can be viewed as examples of Weaver's term communitism. Character development is based on the exploration of the inner conflicts of the characters and reconfiguration of their immediate relations and resolution is not portrayed through improvement of one's social status or progress but rather as a renovation of balanced relationships and acceptance of one's personality, or in other words, healing in various forms. Characters stay in the same place as at the beginning, they interact with the same people, but the quality of these relations changes from harmful to nurturing. Gabriel finds his place in the community and reconnects with his Indigenous roots, Virgil builds relationship with his mother and uncle, Channie learns how to cohabit with her partner by overcoming her emotional issues, etc. In all the stories, intrapersonal and interpersonal bonds are strengthened, and communal relationships recuperated.

Stories embody the values that lead to communal restoration and personal balance. Thus, telling stories frequently features as a narrative strategy within the texts. As we have seen in King's or Highway's novels, for example, the event of storytelling represents a transformative moment for the community or for dealing with trauma. This places double emphasis on the necessity of implementation of the enstoried principles and it also illustrates the perception of stories as theories within the Indigenous perspective. Sky Woman story is a theory of relationality as such as well as of individual responsibility and ability to recreate the world, the trickster serves as theoretical ground for re-evaluation and re-examination of notions, and the windigo explicates trauma and addiction while simultaneously provides teachings for healing.

Having summarized the main findings of this work, we can argue that traditional storytelling represents an essential part of contemporary Indigenous literature not only in terms of thematic content but also as a significant aspect of narrative structures determined by Indigenous frames of reference. Despite the fact that not all Indigenous authors work with traditional storytelling in their writing, as stated at the very beginning of this text, a considerable number of them do, and storytelling and the values it carries frequently constitute a fundamental component of their literature. Reasons for this increased attention to traditional storytelling in contemporary writing seem to be multiple and working on two levels. Firstly, the authors continue in the ancient and rich tradition of storytelling that has formed the core of their culture, and this shapes the narratives; their writing is an expression of their culture and worldview. On the second level, the attention to traditional storytelling might be heightened in the texts to amend the disruption of Indigenous cultures caused by colonialism ("to counteract the erasure of Native identities,"[912] as Ruffo says). I intentionally separate these two since I do not want to center Indigenous writing solely around colonialism. While it is true that the plots and themes in the novels often deal with the aftermath and various psychological and cultural consequences of colonial history, this project wanted to show that the values and principles of narrative techniques of Indigenous texts are not defined by the contact. It is also true that by comparing Indigenous and Western perspectives and displaying the devastating effects of Western dominance on their societies with the use of traditional storytelling and characters, the authors show the disparities between these two knowledge systems to highlight harms inflicted on Indigenous identities by the forced replacement of one by the other, or, on the other hand, to try to find a way to reconcile them, or at least let them operate side by side (King, Highway, Taylor would represent this category). In addition, and more prominently in recent years in connection to the premises of Indigenous resurgence as introduced by Leanne Simpson, storytelling and its characters as a traditional means of transmission of values are used to promote Indigenous principles and to put them in the forefront in order to challenge Western epistemological dominance and to counter it (without openly saying it or directly commenting on it). In other words, reflections of traditional storytelling and emphasized need to engage Sky Woman, the trickster, and the windigo in contemporary literature can be taken as expressions of decolonization. Still, I would like to highlight that Indigenous literature is not conditioned or determined by the colonial, there are traditional

[912] Armand Garnett Ruffo, "Introduction," in *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature*, ed. Moses, Goldie, Ruffo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), xxv.

principles that operate in the text regardless of the reflection of colonialism or absence of it.

The upcoming years and decades might show that this need was fulfilled, that the characters served their purpose and Indigenous literature might take a different turn and focus on a different subject matter. This is not to say the principles described here would lose their significance. On the contrary, I believe that the enstoried principles will be present in Indigenous texts still, but they might not be presented as conspicuously as today, if Indigenous peoples achieve cultural restoration and if Indigenous frames of reference are understood more widely. They might be taken as natural and inherent components of narratives as many principles of Western frameworks are. Continuous critical attention and its approach to Indigenous texts will play an important role as it can enhance this process.

Another aspect that invites further research and examination is the use of other characters of traditional storytelling. This project worked only with three characters, the most frequent ones, in order to provide the basic background for mostly Central European readers. There are other characters such as rougarou, Little People, Chahkabesh, and Sasquatch that deserve attention and it would be very interesting to compare their employment with the characters discussed here.

Storytelling and oral tradition form key components of Indigenous cultures. Thanks to the wider availability of Indigenous theories on storytelling, it is now possible for non-Indigenous reader to understand its importance better. This work hopes to introduce Central European readers to the basic aspects and to the functions of three frequently used characters. Oral storytelling and its reflections in written texts should not be taken as a special feature of Indigenous literature but rather as core element of it, which influences not only the themes but also the structure of the text and whole referential framework the text manifests.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary sources

Belleau, Lesley. *Sweat*. Sudbury, Ontario: Scrivener Press, 2014.

Highway, Tomson. *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. Toronto: Doubleday Canada, Penguin Random House Canada, 1998.

King, Thomas. *Green Grass, Running Water*. Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993.

—. *The Back of the Turtle*. Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers, 2014.

Rice, Waubgeshig. *Moon of the Crusted Snow*. Toronto: ECW Press, 2018.

Robinson, Eden. *Son of a Trickster.* Toronto: Knopf Canada, Penguin Random House Canada, 2017.

—. *Trickster Drift*. Toronto: Knopf Canada, Penguin Random House Canada, 2018.

Slipperjack, Ruby. *Weesquachak*. Pentincton, British Columbia: Theytus Books, 2005.

Taylor, Drew Hayden. *Motorcycles & Sweetgrass*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2010.

Secondary Sources

Akiwenzie-Damm, Kateri. “The Debate Is Over. It’s Time for Action.” *The Globe and Mail*, May 20, 2017, A11.

Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. Translated by John D. Sinclair. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961.

Andrew-Gee, Eric. “The Making of Joseph Boyden.” *The Globe and Mail*, August 5, 2017. F1-8.

Appleford, Robert. “A Response to Sam McKegney’s ‘Strategies for Ethical Engagement: An Open Letter Concerning Non-Native Scholars of Native Literatures’.” In *Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literatures*. Edited by Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra. 89-94. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016.

Archibald, Jo-Ann. *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008.

Armstrong, Jeanette. “This Is a Story.” In *All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native Fiction.* Edited by Thomas King. 129-135. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992.

Aurylaité, Kristina. “Decolonial Gestures in Canada’s Settler State: Contemporary Indigenous Writers Jordan Abel and Leanne Simpson.” *Baltic Journal of English Language, Literature and Culture*, vol. 7 (2017): 4-25.

Barrera, Jorge. “Author Joseph Boyden’s Shape-Shifting Indigenous Identity.” *APTN News*, December 23, 2016. https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/author-joseph-boydens-shape-shifting-indigenous-identity/.

Beeds, Tasha. “Remembering the Poetics of Ancient Sound kistêsinâw/wîsahkêcâhk’s maskihkiy (Elder Brother’s Medicine).” In *Indigenous Poetics in Canada*. Edited by Neal McLeod. 61-71. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014.

Belghiti, Rachid. “Choreography, Sexuality, and the Indigenous Body in Tomson Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen*.” *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 5, no. 2 (2009): 1-15.

Benton-Banai, Edward. *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

Beyer, Donna. “Peguis First Nation Reads Native Literature: Toward a Community Based Theory.” Master thesis, University of Manitoba, 2011.

Blaeser, Kimberley M. *Gerald Vizenor: Writing in the Oral Tradition*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996.

—. “Native Literature: Seeking a Critical Centre.” In *Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literatures*. Edited by Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra. 231-238. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016.

—. “Pagans Rewriting the Bible: Heterodoxy and the Representation of Spirituality in Native American Literature.” *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 25, no. 1 (January 1994): 12-31.

—. “Writing Voices Speaking: Native Authors and an Oral Aesthetic.” In *Talking on the Page: Editing Aboriginal Oral Texts*. Edited by Laura J. Murray and Keren D. Rice. 53-68. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

Bopp, Judie. *The Sacred Tree*. Four Worlds Development Project. Lethbridge: University of Lethbridge, 1988.

Boyden, Joseph. “My Name Is Joseph Boyden.” *Maclean’s*, August 2, 2017, https://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/my-name-is-joseph-boyden/.

Brown, Jesse. “#359 The Convenient ‘Pretendian’.” *Canadaland*. Published February 14, 2021. Audio. 01:01:11. https://www.canadaland.com/podcast/359-the-convenient-pretendian/.

Buzny, Andrew J. "Kissing Fabulose Queens: The Fabulous Realism of Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*." *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 6, no. 3 (2011): 1-18.

Cardinal, Bob. Enoch Cree Nation. Treaty No. 6 Territory. Enoch. Conversation after a sweat lodge ceremony. January 8, 2015.

Cariou, Warren. "Sweetgrass Stories: Listening for Animate Land." *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, vol. 5, no. 3 (September 2018): 338-352.

Carlson, Nathan D. "Reviving Witiko (Windigo): An Ethnohistory of 'Cannibal Monsters' in the Athabasca District of Northern Alberta, 1878-1910." *Ethnohistory*, vol. 56, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 355-394.

Carter, Carl. "Native Theatre Losing the Legs It Stands on." *Alberta Sweetgrass*, July 2004: 3.

Clark, Craig. "Moon of the Crusted Snow." *Booklist* (August 2018): 25.

Colombo, John R. *Windigo: An Anthology of Fact and Fantastic Fiction*. Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1983.

Cox, James H. "'All This Water Imagery Must Mean Something': Thomas King's Revision of Narratives of Domination and Conquest in *Green Grass, Running Water*." *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2000): 219-246.

Cunha, Rubelise da. "The Trickster Wink: Storytelling and Resistance in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*." *Ilha do Desterro*, vol. 56 (2009): 93-118.

Daniels, Carol. *Bearskin Diary*. Gibsons, British Columbia: Nightwood Editions, 2015.

Deer, Ka´nhehsí:io and Barrera, Jorge. "Award-Winning Filmmaker Michelle Latimer's Indigenous Identity Under Scrutiny." *CBC News*. Published December 17, 2020. Last updated December 18, 2020. https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/michelle-latimer-kitigan-zibi-indigenous-identity-1.5845310.

Dobson, Kit. "Son of a Trickster." *McGill Journal of Education*, vol. 53, no. 2 (Spring 2018): 399-401.

Donald, Dwayne Trevor. "The Pedagogy of the Fort: Curriculum, Aboriginal-Canadian Relations, and Indigenous Métissage." PhD diss., University of Alberta, 2009.

Dunaway, David. "An Interview with Simon Ortiz." *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, vol. 16, no. 4 (winter 2004): 12-19.

Dvorak, Marta. "Thomas King's Fusion and Confusion: Or What Happened to My Earth without Form?" *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1 (Fall 1996): 86-95.

Edwards, Stassa. “What Can We Learn from Canada’s ‘Appropriation Prize’ Literary Fiasco?” *Jezebel*, May 16, 2017. https://jezebel.com/what-can-we-learn-from-canadas-appropriation-prize-lite-1795175192.

Eigenbrod, Renate. “The Oral in the Written: A Literature Between Two Cultures.” *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, vol. 15 (1995): 89-102.

—. *Travelling Knowledges: Positioning the Im/Migrant Reader of Aboriginal Literatures in Canada*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2005.

Fagan, Kristina. “Teasing, Tolerating, Teaching: Laughter and Community in Native Literature.” In *Me Funny*. Edited by Drew Hayden Taylor. 23-46. Madeira Park: Douglas and McIntyre, 2013.

—. “Weesageechak Meets the Weetigo: Storytelling, Humour, and Trauma in the Fiction of Richard Van Camp, Tomson Highway, and Eden Robinson.” *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en Littérature Canadienne,* vol. 34, no. 1 (2009): 204-225.

—. “What’s the Trouble with the Trickster?: An Introduction.” In *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations*. Edited by Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra. 3-20. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010.

Farrell-Morneau, Amy Lynn. “Memengwaawid, To Be A Butterfly: An Indigenous Exploration of Northwestern Ontario Anishinawbe and Muskego or Ininiw Sacred Stories and Teachings in a Contemporary Novel.” PhD diss., Lakehead University, 2014.

Floyd Favel, “All My Relatives.” In *The Great Gift of Tears*. Edited by Heather Hodgson. 23-96. Regina: Coteau Books, 2002.

Fee, Margery. “The Trickster Moment, Cultural Appropriation, and the Liberal Imagination in Canada.” In *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations.* Edited by Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra. 59-76. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010.

Filipczak, Dorota. “Paradise Revisited: Images of the First Woman in the Poetry of Joy Kogawa and the Fiction of Thomas King.” *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, vol. 43 (2007): 291-303.

Fixico, Donald L. *“That’s What They Used to Say”: Reflections on American Indian Oral Traditions*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017.

Finney, Sandrina de. “Indigenous Girls’ Resilience in Settler States: Honouring Body and Land Sovereignty.” *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, vol. 31, no. 2 (2017): 10-21.

Forester, Brett. “Filmmaker Michelle Latimer Sues CBC for 200K in Libel Damages.” *APTN News*. Published May 26, 2021. https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/michelle-latimer-sues-cbc-for-200k-in-libel-damages/.

Friedland, Hadley L. *The Wetiko Legal Principles: Cree and Anishinabek Responses to Violence and Victimization*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018.

Garneau, David. "Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation: Art, Curation, and Healing." In *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action In and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Edited by Dylan Robinson. 21-42. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016.

Gibert, Teresa. "Written Orality in Thomas King's Short Fiction." *Journal of the Short Story in English*, vol. 47 (Fall 2006): 1-10.

Goetz, Steven. "Controversy over Canadian Author Joseph Boyden's Indigenous Roots Isn't about Blood." *VICE News*, December 30, 2016. https://www.vice.com/en/article/zmyp99/controversy-over-canadian-author-joseph-boydens-indigenous-roots-isnt-about-blood.

Gómez-Vega, Ibis. "Subverting the 'Mainstream' Paradigm through Magical Realism in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*." *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, vol. 33, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 1-19.

Gordon, Neta. "Time Structures and the Healing Aesthetic of Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*." *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en Littérature Canadienne,* vol. 33, no. 1 (2008): 118-135.

Hagi, Sarah. "A Bunch of White Canadian Editors Really Love Cultural Appropriation." *VICE*, May 12, 2017. https://www.vice.com/en/article/pg7q8m/a-bunch-of-white-canadian-editors-really-love-cultural-appropriation.

Henderson, James (Sákéj) Youngblood. "Postcolonial Ghost Dancing: Diagnosing European Colonialism." In *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*. Edited by Marie Battiste. 57-76. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000.

Hertz, Barry. "'All I Can Do Is Speak My Truth': Filmmaker Michelle Latimer Breaks Her Silence After Indigenous Ancestry Controversy." *The Globe and Mail*. Published May 11, 2021. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/film/article-all-i-can-do-is-speak-my-truth-filmmaker-michelle-latimer-breaks-her/#note2.

Highway, Tomson. *Comparing Mythologies*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2003.

—. *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. Toronto: Doubleday Canada, Penguin Random House Canada, 1998.

—. *The Rez Sisters*. Markham, Ontario: Fifth House, 1988.

Hodgson, Heather. "Survival Cree or Weesakeechak Dances Down Yonge Street: Heather Hodgson Speaks with Tomson Highway." *Books in Canada*, vol. 28, no. 1 (1999): 2-5.

Horáková, Martina. *Inscribing Difference and Resistance: Indigenous Women's Personal Non-Fiction and Life Writing in Australia and North America.* Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2017.

Horne, Dee. "Listening to Silences in Ruby Slipperjack's *Silent Words*." *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en Littérature Canadienne*, vol. 23, no.2 (1998): 122-137.

Hoy, Helen. *How Should I Read These?: Native Women Writers in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Pres, 2001.

Hubbard, Tasha. "Voices Heard in the Silence, History Held in the Memory: Ways of Knowing Jeannette Armstrong's 'Threads of Old Memory'." In *Aboriginal Oral Traditions: Theory, Practice, Ethics*. Edited by Renée Hulan and Renate Eigenbrod. 139-153. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2008.

Hughes, Art. "Exposing False Native Heritage," *Native America Calling*. Published February 10, 2021. Audio, 56:30, https://nativeamericacalling.com/wednesday-february-10-2021-exposing-false-native-heritage/.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York and London: Routledge, 1988.

Innes, Robert Alexander. *Elder Brother and the Law of the People: Contemporary Kinship and Cowessess First Nation.* Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2013.

Jacobs, Devery (@kdeveryjacobs). Twitter post. December 18, 2020, 4:49 pm. https://twitter.com/kdeveryjacobs/status/1339960923218391040/photo/1.

Jago, Robert. "The Boyden Controversy Is Not about Bloodline." *The Walrus*. January 10, 2017. https://thewalrus.ca/the-boyden-controversy-is-not-about-bloodline/.

—. (@IndigenousXca). Twitter post. December 23, 2016, 2:19 am. https://twitter.com/IndigenousXca/status/812105288300056582.

—. "Why I Question Joseph Boyden's Indigenous Ancestry." *Canadaland*, December 24, 2016, https://www.canadaland.com/question-joseph-boydens-indigenous-ancestry/.

Jahner, Elaine. "An Act of Attention: Event Structure in Ceremony." In *Critical Essays on Native American Literature*. Edited by Andrew Wiget. 238-246. Boston, Massachusetts: G.K.Hall, 1985.

Johnson, Daniel Morley. "(Re)Nationalizing Naanabozho: Anishinaabe Sacred Stories, Nationalist Literary Criticism, and Scholarly Responsibility." In *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations*. Edited by Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra. 199-219. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010.

Johnston, Basil. "Is There All There Is?: Tribal Literature." *Canadian Literature*, no. 128 (Spring 1991): 54-62.

—. *The Manitous: The Spiritual World of the Ojibway*. Saint Paul, Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1995.

Johnston, Basil H. and Morrisseau, Norval. *The Art of Norval Morrisseau, the Writings of Basil H. Johnston*. Calgary: Glenbow-Alberta Institute, 1999.

Joseph, Bob. “What is an Indigenous Medicine Wheel?” *Indigenous Corporate Training*, May 24, 2020. https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/what-is-an-indigenous-medicine-wheel.

“Joseph Boyden’s Statement about His Indigenous Roots Doesn’t Address Main Controversy, Academics Say.” *National Post*, January 13, 2017. https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/joseph-boydens-statement-about-his-indigenous-roots-doesnt-address-main-controversy-academics-say.

Justice, Daniel Heath. *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

—. *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018.

Kassam, Ashifa. “Canadian Journalists Support ‘appropriation prize’ after online furore.” *The Guardian*, May 13, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/13/canadian-journalists-appropriation-prize.

Keeshig-Tobias, Lenore. “Let’s Be Our Own Tricksters, Eh.” *The Magazine to Re-Establish the Trickster: Magazine of New Native Writing*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1988): 2-3.

—. “Stop Stealing Native Stories.” *The Globe and Mail*, May 19, 2017. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/cultural-appropriation-stop-stealing-native-stories/article35066040/.

Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013.

Kinew, Wab. “Wab Kinew Discusses Joseph Boyden.” Interview by Shaneen Robinson. *APTN News, YouTube*, January 4, 2017. Video, 08:23. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ChSiP8Qe54.

King, Thomas, editor. *All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native Fiction*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990.

—. “Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial.” *World Literature Written in English*, vol. 30, no. 2 (1990): 10-16.

—. *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*. Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2012.

—. *The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2003.

Klein, Verena. "Healing the Native Canadian Soul: Three Accounts of Spiritual Homecoming." *Litteraria Pragensia*, vol. 15, no. 30 (2005): 35-50.

Kolinská, Klára, editor. *Čekání na kojota: současné drama kanadských Indiánů.* Brno: Větrné mlýny, 2007.

—. "Moc slov: Vypravěčství a příběhy v ústní a literární tradici kanadských prvních národů." *PLAV*, vol. 10 (2016): 2-6.

Kroeber, Karl (ed.). *Native American Storytelling: A Reader of Myths and Legends*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

Krotz, Sarah Willie. "Productive Dissonance: Classical Music in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*." *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en Littérature Canadienne*, vol. 34, no. 1 (2009): 182-203.

Lacombe, Michèle. "On Critical Frameworks for Analyzing Indigenous Literature: The Case of *Monkey Beach*." *International Journal of Canadian Studies,* no. 41 (2010): 253-276.

Lang, Anouk. "'A Book That All Canadians Should be Proud to Read': Canada Reads and Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*." *Canadian Literature*, vol. 215 (Winter 2012): 120-136.

LaRocque, Emma. "Preface, or Here Are Our Voices – Who Will Hear?" In *Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada*. Edited by Jeanne Martha Perreault and Sylvia Vance. xv-xxx. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1990.

—. "Reflections on Cultural Continuity through Aboriginal Women's Writings." In *Restoring the Balance: First Nations Women, Community, and Culture*. Edited by Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, Madeleine Dion Stout, and Eric Guimond. 149-174. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2009.

—. "Teaching Aboriginal Literature: The Discourse of Margins and Mainstreams." In *Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literatures*. Edited by Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra. 55-72. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016.

Laronde, Sandra. *Sky Woman: Indigenous Women Who Have Shaped, Moved or Inspired Us*. Pentincton, British Columbia: Theytus Books, 2005.

LaVallie, Carrie. "Healing from the Addictions through the Voices of Elders." *Reconciliation through Research: Fostering miýo-pimātisiwin*, presented by CINSA and UAKN, June 23, 2016. Lecture. Regina: First Nations University.

Leggatt, Judith. "Quincentennial Trickster Poetics." In *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations*. Edited by Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra. 221-238. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010.

"Longread: Consultation, permission and Indigenous protocols." *CBC Radio*, April 13, 2018. https://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/who-gets-to-tell-indigenous-stories-1.4616308/longread-consultation-permission-and-indigenous-protocol-1.4616581.

Lutz, Hartmut. *Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native Authors*. Markham, Ontario: Fifth House Publishers, 1991.

Makarenko, Jay. "The Indian Act: Historical Overview." *Mapleleafweb*. Accessed April 24, 2020. https://www.mapleleafweb.com/features/the-indian-act-historical-overview.html

Maracle, Lee. *Memory Serves and Other Essays*. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2015.

Marano, Lou. "Windigo Psychosis: The Anatomy of an Emic-Etic Confusion." In *The Culture-Bound Syndromes: Folk Illnesses of Psychiatric and Anthropological Interest*. Edited by Ronald C. Simons, C.C.Hughes. 411-448. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1985.

Martens, Reuben. "Petromelancholia and the Energopolitical Violence of Settler Colonialism in Waubgeshig Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow*." *American Imago*, vol. 77, no. 1 (2020): 193-211.

McAdam, Sylvia (Saysewahum). *Nationhood Interrupted: Revitalizing nêhiyaw Legal Systems*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2015.

McCall, Sophie. "Intimate Enemies: Weetigo, Weesageechak, and the Politics of Reconciliation in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*." *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, vol. 25, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 57-85.

McFarlane, Christine. "Trickster Plays with Small-Town Minds in Otter Lake." *Windspeaker*, vol. 29, no.3 (2011): 16-16.

McGonegal, Julie. "Reimagining Canada: A Conversation with Joseph Boyden on Metis Identity, Storytelling, and Public History." *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2012): 1-9.

McKegney, Sam. "From Trickster Poetics to Transgressive Politics Substantiating Survivance in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*." *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, vol. 17, no. 4 (2005): 79-113.

McLeod, Neal. *Cree Narrative Memory*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2007.

—. *Songs to Kill a Wîhtikow*. Regina: Hagios Press, 2005.

Methot, Suzanne. *Legacy: Trauma, Story, and Indigenous Healing*. Toronto: ECW Press, 2019.

Million, Tara. “Finding Contemporary Understandings of Wetiko Legal Principles in Cree and Anishinaabe Literature.” *ILSA conference*, June 8, 2021.

Morra, Linda. “A Conversation with Christopher Kientz.” In Troubling *Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations.* Edited by Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra. 125-133. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010.

—. “Introduction: Imagining beyond Images and Myths.” In *Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literatures*. Edited by Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra. 113-127. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016.

Morrall, Peter. *Madness: Ideas about Insanity*. London: Routledge, 2017.

Morrison, Irene M. “Stories to Stop the Apocalypse: Indigenous Mythmaking as Solidarity-Building Practice in Thomas King’s *The Back of the Turtle*.” *South Atlantic Review*, vol. 83, no. 3 (Fall 2018): 44-62.

Moses, Daniel David, Terry Goldie, and Armand Garnett Ruffo. *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Neuhaus, Mareike. *The Decolonizing Poetics of Indigenous Literatures*. Regina: University of Regina Press, 2015.

New, W.H. “Aftermath 2001.” *Canadian Literature*, no. 175 (2002): 191-203.

“NFB at TIFF 2020. World premiere for Michelle Latimer’s Inconvenient Indian at the Toronto International Film Festival.” *Media Space, NFB*. Published August 13, 2020, https://mediaspace.nfb.ca/comm/nfb-at-tiff-2020-world-premiere-for-michelle-latimers-inconvenient-indian-at-the-toronto-international-film-festival/.

Nicholas, Andrea Bear. “The Assault on Aboriginal Oral Tradition: Past and Present.” In *Aboriginal Oral Traditions: Theory, Practice, Ethics*. Edited by Renée Hulan Renate and Eigenbrod. 13-43. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2008.

—. “Medicine Wheel Teaching a Hoax.” *Kisikew*. Accessed September 12, 2017. http://kisikew.blogspot.com/2012/12/medicine-wheel-teaching-hoax.html.

Niedzviecki, Hal. “Winning the Appropriation Prize.” *Write*, May 2017.

Noodin, Margaret. *Bawaajimo: A Dialect of Dreams in Anishinaabe Language and Literature*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014.

—. “Megwa Baabaamiiaayaayaang Dibaajomoyaang: Anishinaabe Literature as Memory in Motion.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American literature*. Edited by James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice. 175-184. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Nurse, Donna Bailey. “Way of the Warrior.” *Quill & Quire*, vol. 71, no. 3 (March 2005): 16-17.

Our Story: Aboriginal Voices on Canada's Past. Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2004.

Palmater, Pamela. *Indigenous Nationhood: Empowering Grassroots Citizens*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2015.

Petrone, Penny. *Native Literature in Canada*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Pimentel, Tamara. "'I Feel Like Such a Dupe': Author Eden Robinson Reacts to Latimer's Indigeneity Issue." *APTN News*. Published December 23, 2020. https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/michelle-latimer-trickster-inconvenient-indian-indigeneity/.

Pitawanakwat, Brock. "Anishinaabeg Studies: Creative, Critical, Ethical, and Reflexive." In *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies: Understanding the World through Stories*. Edited by Jill Doerfler, Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark and Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair. 363-374. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2013.

Pulitano, Elvira. "'Introduction' from *Towards a Native American Critical Theory*." In *Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literatures*. Edited by Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra. 255-266. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016.

Reder, Deanna and Morra, Linda M. *Troubling Trickster: Revisioning Critical Conversations.* Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010.

Rice, Waubgeshig. "Interview with Waubgeshig Rice." *Canadian Notes & Queries*. Interview by Sharon English, vol. 106 (Winter 2020): 36-38.

—. "Meet the Writers: Waubgeshig Rice." *Monocle*. Interview by Georgina Godwin. July 12, 2020, https://monocle.com/radio/shows/meet-the-writers/240/.

—. "Moon of the Crusted Snow Discussion." *Facebook*. Video. March 22, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/waubgeshigrice/videos/1372931792909389.

—. "Storytelling with Waubgeshig Rice." *Kobo Writing Life Podcast*. Interview by Joni Di Placido and Stephanie McGrath. Audio. 31:05. October 8, 2019, https://kobowritinglife.libsyn.com/storytelling-with-waubgeshig-rice.

—. "Waubgeshig Rice Balances Historical Accuracy with Dystopian Future in New Novel." *Unreserved, CBC Radio*. Interview by Rosanna Deerchild, January 25, 2019. https://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/they-don-t-know-what-they-don-t-know-teachers-reach-out-for-tips-on-integrating-indigenous-content-1.4990312/waubgeshig-rice-balances-historical-accuracy-with-dystopian-future-in-new-novel-1.4992026.

Ridington, Robin. "Coyote's Cannon: Sharing Stories with Thomas King." *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 22, no. 3 (1998): 343-362.

—. "Got Any Grapes: Reading Thomas King's The Back of the Turtle." *Canadian Literature*, issue 224 (Spring 2015): 163-168.

Roberts, Duffy. "Versions of History." *Canadian Literature*, vol. 209 (Summer 2011): 164-165.

Robinson, Eden. "The Door to Personal and Magical Transformation is Darkness: An Interview with Eden Robinson." Interview by Anita Bedell. *PRISM magazine*, March 2, 2017. https://prismmagazine.ca/2017/03/02/the-door-to-personal-and-magical-transformation-is-darkness-an-interview-with-eden-robinson/.

Rose, Hilary A. "Son of a Trickster." *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2018): 494-499.

Ruffo, Armand Garnett. "Introduction." In *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature*, ed. Daniel David Moses, Terry Goldie and Armand Garnett Ruffo. xix-xxxiii. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Russell, Lena Heavy Shields and Genee, Pitáákii Inge. *Ákaitsinikssiistsi: Blackfoot Stories of Old.* Regina: University of Regina Press, 2014.

Salamoun, Jiri. "Where Did All the Water Come From? How Water Crosses Boundaries in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*." In *Weaving New Perspectives Together: Some Reflections on Literary Studies*. Edited by María Alonso Alonso. 203-217. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012.

Sarris, Greg. *Keeping Slug Woman Alive: A Holistic Approach to American Indian Texts*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Schingler, Michelle Anne. "Moon of the Crusted Snow." *ForeWord*, October 19, 2018, https://www.forewordreviews.com/reviews/moon-of-the-crusted-snow/.

Scott, Conrad. "(Indigenous) Place and Time as Formal Strategy: Healing Immanent Crisis in the Dystopias of Eden Robinson and Richard Van Camp." *Extrapolation*, vol. 57, nos. 1-2 (2016): 73-93.

Scott, Simeon. *âtalôhkâna nêsta tipâcimôwina: Cree Legends and Narratives from the West Coast of James Bay.* Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1995.

Sexton, Bob. "Q & A with Joseph Boyden." *Outdoor Canada*. February 13, 2012. https://www.outdoorcanada.ca/interview-with-joseph-boyden/.

Simpson, Audra. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2014.

Simpson, Leanne. *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing Books, 2011.

—. *Islands of Decolonial Love*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing Books, 2013.

—. "Land As Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2014): 1-25.

—. "Reviving Indigenous Spaces: Echoes of a Native Spirit. An Interview with Leanne Betasamosake Simpson." *Writers in Conversation*. Interview by Sayan Dey and Jonnelle Walker, vol. 5, no. 1 (February 2018): 1-3.

—. *The Gift Is in the Making*. Winnipeg: Highwater Press, 2013.

Sinclair, Niigonwedom James. "Trickster Reflections." In *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations*. Edited by Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra. 21-58. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010.

Skawennati. "She Falls for Ages." *skawennati*. Accessed July 20, 2019. Video, 20:59. http://skawennati.com/SheFallsForAges/index.html.

Smith, Carlton. "Coyote, Contingency, and Community: Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* and Postmodern Trickster." *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 515-534.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books, 2012.

Smith, Lindsey Claire. "'With These Magic Weapons, Make a New World': Indigenous Centered Urbanism in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*." *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, vol. 29, no. ½ (2009): 143-163.

Song, Chengcheng. "The Residential School Experiences in Drew Hayden Taylor's *Motorcycles & Sweetgrass* and Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, vo. 8, no. 12 (2018): 1575-1581.

Sugars, Cynthia. "Strategic Abjection: Windigo Psychosis and the 'Postindian' Subject in Eden Robinson's 'Dogs in Winter'." *Canadian Literature*, vol. 181 (Summer 2004): 78-91.

Sung, Hannah. "Video: Opinion: What Is Cultural Appropriation?" *The Globe and Mail*, May 18, 2017. Video, 06:15. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/video-video-opinion-what-is-cultural-appropriation/.

Sutcliffe, J.C. "Spirited Away: Transforming Birds, Fireflies and Weed Cookies in Eden Robinson's British Columbia Outpost." *Literary Review of Canada*, December 2017. Accessed February 12, 2018. https://reviewcanada.ca/magazine/2017/12/spirited-away/.

Switzer, Maurice. "Opinion: Indigenous Cultural Police and Joseph Boyden." *Anishinabek News*, September 5, 2018, https://anishinabeknews.ca/2018/09/05/opinion-indigenous-cultural-police-and-joseph-boyden/.

Tallbear, Kim. “Playing Indian Constitutes a Structural Form of Colonial Theft, and It Must Be Tackled.” *Kim Tallbear*, published May 10, 2021. https://kimtallbear.substack.com/p/playing-indian-constitutes-a-structural?r=dv6ay&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&utm_source=twitter&fbclid=IwAR2wmSGin3XV12jc3fnfVN-zSKeFp9R9XqNy0GImqIEQo1PecQ47RJJGAx4.

Taylor, Drew Hayden. “Alive and Well: Native Theatre in Canada.” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 31, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 29-37.

—, ed. *Me Funny*. Madeira Park: Douglas and McIntyre, 2013.

Teichler, Hanna. “Joseph Boyden’s *Three Day Road*: Transcultural (Post-)Memory and Identity in Canadian World War I Fiction.” In *The Great War in Post-Memory Literature and Film*. Edited by Martin Löschnigg and Marzena Sokołowksa-Paryż. 239-253. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014.

Teuton, Christopher B. *Deep Waters: The Textual Continuum in American Indian Literature*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2010.

—. *Cherokee Stories of the Turtle Island Liar’s Club: Dakasi Elohi Anigagoga Junilawisdii*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

—. “Indigenous Orality and Oral Literatures.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American literature*. Edited by James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice. 167-174. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

—. “Theorizing American Indian Literature: Applying Oral Concepts to Written Traditions.” In *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective*. Edited by Craig S. Womack, Daniel Heath Justice and Christopher B. Teuton. 193-215. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008.

Teuton, Sean Kicummah. *Red Land, Red Power: Grounding Knowledge in the American Indian Novel*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2008.

“The Creation Story.” *Onondaga Historial Association, YouTube*. April 28, 2016. Video. 03:31. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WSzDM7Jmg94&t=105s.

“The Indigenous Voices Awards,” *Indigenous Voices Awards*, https://indigenousvoicesawards.org/about-the-awards.

Truchan-Tataryn, Maria and Gingell, Susan. “Dances with Coyote: Narrative Voices in Thomas King’s *One Good Story, That One*.” *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 2, no. 3 (2006): 1-23.

Van Camp, Richard. “Aboriginal Day Live 2017 Vignette Featuring Richard Van Camp.” *APTN, YouTube*. September 28, 2017. Accessed 28 April 2019. Video, 03:15. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4g6EMrASDrY.

—. *Godless but Loyal to Heaven*. Winnipeg: Enfield & Wizentry, 2012.

—. *Night Moves*. Winnipeg: Enfield & Wizentry, 2015.

Van Essen, Angela. “Bending, Turning, and Growing: Cree Language, Laws, and Ceremony in Louise B. Halfe / Sky Dancer’s *The Crooked Good*,” *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, vol. 39, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 71-93.

—. “Nehiyawaskiy (Cree land) and Canada: Location, Language, and Borders in Tomson Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen*.” *Canadian Literature*, vol. 215 (Winter 2012): 104-118.

Visvis, Vikki. “Culturally Conceptualizing Trauma: The Windigo in Joseph Boyden’s *Three Day Road*.” *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en Littérature Canadienne,* vol. 35, no. 1 (2010): 224-243.

Vizenor, Gerald. *Earthdivers: Tribal Narratives on Mixed Descent*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981.

—. *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1994

—, ed. *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993.

—. *Shadow Distance: A Gerald Vizenor Reader*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1994.

—. *The People Named the Chippewa: Native Histories*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Vowel, Chelsea. *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis and Inuit Issues in Canada.* Winnipeg: Highwater Press, 2016.

—. “Pan-Indianism, Pan-Métisism.” *âpihtawikosisân*. Accessed September 12, 2017. https://apihtawikosisan.com/2011/05/pan-indianism-pan-metisism/.

Vranckx, Sylvie. “The Ambivalence of Cultural Syncreticity in Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and Van Camp’s *The Lesser Blessed*.” In *Old Margins and New Centers: The European Literary Heritage in an Age of Globalization.* Edited by Caroline De Wagter and Marc Maufort. 291-306. New York: Peter Lang, 2011.

Wagamese, Richard. *Embers: One Ojibway’s Meditations*. Madeira Park, British Columbia: Douglas & McIntyre, 2016.

Waldram, James B. *Revenge of the Windigo: The Construction of the Mind and Mental Health of North American Aboriginal Peoples*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004.

Watts, Vanessa. “Indigenous Place-Thought & Agency amongst Humans and Non-Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go on a European World Tour!).” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2013) 20-34.

Weaver, Jace. *Other Words: American Indian Literature, Law, and Culture*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001.

—. “Splitting the Earth: First Utterances and Pluralist Separatism.” In *American Indian Literary Nationalism*. Edited by Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack, and Robert Warrior. 1-90. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006.

—. *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Wente, Jesse. “Jesse Wente Reacts to the Appropriation Prize Controversy.” Interview by Matt Galloway. *CBC News*, May 15, 2017. Video, 02:38. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/jesse-wente-appropriation-prize-1.4115293.

Wilson, Shawn. *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2008.

“windigo psychosis.” *APA Dictionary of Psychology*. Accessed June 25, 2020. https://dictionary.apa.org/windigo-psychosis.

Womack, Craig S. *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

Yellowhorn, Eldon. “Naapi in My World.” In *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations*. Edited by Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra. 169-176. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010.

Younging, Gregory. “Conflicts, Discourse, Negotiations and Proposed Solutions Regarding Transformations of Traditional knowledge.” In *Aboriginal Oral Traditions: Theory, Practice, Ethics*. Edited by Renée Hulan and Renate Eigenbrod. 61-78. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2008.

—. *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples*. Edmonton: Brush Education, 2018.

9 LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 The Medicine Wheel 32