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Rebecca Lynne Fullan

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EATING THE HEART OF WEETIGO WORLD: DECOLONIAL IMAGINARIES IN THE
STORIES OF LOUISE ERDRICH AND TOMSON HIGHWAY

by

REBECCA LYNNE FULLAN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, the City University of New York

2020

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Tomson Highway
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in
English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

Eating the Heart of Weetigo World: Decolonial Imaginaries in the Stories of Louise Erdrich and Tomson Highway

by

Rebecca Lynne Fullan

Advisor: Kandice Chuh

My dissertation asks what the decolonial possibilities of fiction are in the context of the settler colonial imaginaries particular to the United States and Canada. The ongoing process of settler colonialism demands various forms of conversion from Indigenous people: ecological/land based, religious, educational, legal, familial, but the construct of “conversion” obscures Indigenous worldviews, and indeed worlds, which function according to different principles. I interpret Erdrich and Highway's work in the context of Anishinaabe and Cree narratives and story-structures. These offer examples of what can constitute broader decolonial imaginaries, through which perception and creation of other, more liveable worlds is possible. Fiction by Indigenous writers, I argue, acts as the expressions and creative tools of worlds that *do* exist, but, according to the truth claims of settler ontologies, are disavowed and suppressed.

The first chapter exposes weetigo institutions of Euroamerican settler colonialism through analysis of *Kiss of the Fur Queen* by Tomson Highway and *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich. Wihtikowipayi, the process of absorbing, accepting, and enacting cannibalistic

appetites, with its gross misrecognition of others and insatiable violent greed, is a conversion demanded and created by settler institutions. The wîhtikowipayi of settler colonial institutions, then, facilitates not just individual persons becoming wîhtikow, but the production of settler colonial society itself as a process of weetigo worlding, which is how I name the creation and maintenance of an ongoing network of political structures, nations, and epistemologies sustained precisely, if paradoxically, by these self-and-other-destructive greeds.

In the second chapter I look at the figure of Jesus and how people relate to him in Erdrich and Highway. In Highway, Jesus' role as an instrument as well as a victim of violence, as well as the potential grotesquerie of the invitation to be "like" him, is more present than in Erdrich, while in Erdrich the potential variety of Jesus as enfleshed is slippery and startling, always in flux. Since orthodox Christianity assumes an all-encompassing worldview that contains, explains, and ordains all of space and time, literary interactions with Jesus according to radically different terms can make perceptible Indigenous worlds that are not contained by nor comprehensible within settler ontological assumptions.

The third chapter explores the how both Highway and Erdrich feature the Eucharist as a model of consumption that both diverges from and intersects with weetigo consumption. The relationship I am tracing centers around Eucharistic miracles: In scenes in Erdrich and Highway's novels, the bread and wine change into edible meat. In both novels, though in very different ways, the person who experiences the miracle is on a gradual trajectory *away* from Catholic orthodoxy, and will eventually recognize and celebrate their immersion in Anishinaabe and Cree cosmology, respectively, as more significant than their Catholicism.

The fourth chapter looks at Erdrich's latest novel, *Future Home of the Living God*, which

describes a combined ecological, reproductive, governmental, and evolutionary dystopia. *Future Home of the Living God* is a narrative of and about inheritances—cyclical, punctuated, eruptive—nested within each other and operating on wildly different scales in terms of space, time, and impact. *Future Home* demonstrates how settler colonial nations depend upon a cycle of inheritance that is punctuated and eruptive. It halts along in repetitions that are both remarkably consistent in their ideologies and impacts, and remarkably flexible in how those ideologies and impacts are framed.

Through the stories of these Indigenous writers, I find a relationship of conversation that is counterposed to the transformative and destructive conversions demanded by Christian rules and by settler colonial institutions and imaginaries. The potential of conversation among incommensurable and disparate worlds that cannot be collapsed together at all without violence, nor fully even with genocidal violence across centuries, is itself small, partial, and particular. These attributes, I claim and hope, also make it potentially powerful, efficacious, and outside of the way coloniality continually frames and thinks about itself, and thus can make perceptible that which always exists outside of that world.

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The journey through this project and degree has been made worthwhile, pleasurable, and possible by many people, and my gratitude for you all is real, warm, and ongoing. I could not possibly thank everyone by name, but I will list a few here, and hope the rest also know that they have contributed a great deal.

My dissertation advisor, Kandice Chuh, always sees in me the scholar and person I would most like to be, and always perceives and speaks to the thing just beyond the work I am yet capable of doing—the thing I really *want* it to be. She believes in that, fully, which allows me to believe in it as well, and she is undaunted by the inevitable unfinishedness of all the work we attempt, which allows me to be slightly less daunted by it, too. When I worked with Kandice in my first years of the program, I came to see that I wanted her to advise me pretty much no matter what I wrote on, because I wanted to keep talking and writing and thinking with her about most things in the world. I have had countless striking and useful and beautiful conversations with her while looking out her office window and munching on something from her bucket of chocolate; Kandice is also, and deeply, an excellent and gracious host, and always feeds her advisees when we meet, with real food as well as good thinking. I am very lucky in her.

My other committee members have also been very good hosts to my ideas and to me. After my first semester in the program, I met with Steve Kruger to discuss the courses I was planning for the next one, and, in regard to grad school so far, I said something like, “I feel like I am on a very fast train,” and he said, “You are!” This helped me relax about the whole thing. This encapsulates for me his gifts as a committee member for me, too, and specifically his contributions to my intellectual work— he is always incisive, clear-sighted, and lets me know

with a bit of humor and a bit of wonder that I am right, everything is as strange and complex as it seems. Ammiel Alcalay shares his store of knowledge without sacrificing either its breadth or its specificity, and he does it with grace and good will and gentleness.

There have been many other faculty throughout CUNY who have taught and supported me, and I shall not be able to name them all here, but I will mention a few more. Robert Reid-Pharr gave me real, interesting, and deeply rewarding research to do as his research assistant in my first year, which meant so much both in terms of what I learned and in finding my way as a scholar. Phyllis Van Slyck at LaGuardia Community College guided me through the excoriating process of beginning to teach with confidence and joy in my progress. Tim McCormack welcomed me into the writing program at John Jay, and Tara Pauliny ran the Writing Across the Curriculum fellowship with a real belief that writing can be useful and worthwhile no matter what you are learning. Alexander Schlutz put to use my writing and teaching skills to help the Sustainability and Environmental Justice minor at John Jay cohere and grow, always with thoughtful, passionate engagement. Joe Ugoretz and Lisa Brundage created a wonderful working environment at Macaulay Honors College for us Instructional Technology Fellows.

I am grateful to the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race at Columbia University for including me in their Indigenous Studies Summer Program in 2017, and especially to all my fellow participants. I do not think I have ever learned so much in such a short time, and it is in this context that I experienced what it might be like to be in a space that was truly international and truly centered around Indigenous people. It was a space of many worlds, and one of the best accolades I have received for my work was this group of people finding it useful and engaging.

I am grateful as well to all the scholars and editors who chose my abstracts for

conferences, engaged me in conversation in various formats, and published my work. Each time I did one of these things, I found my understanding of some piece of my work expanded in ways I could not have anticipated before. I received several fellowships and awards from the Graduate Center, which have made the work possible. My sincere thanks to everyone who invited me to and engaged me in these conversations.

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Mondello, you are true companions and I can't wait to journey on with you. Kaitlin, I can think of no better compliment than to be occasionally mistaken for each other and even get some of the same interviews—thanks for the last almost-decade of almost-weekly meetings.

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The students I have had throughout my time at CUNY have, in the truism that is in fact true, taught me more than I could express. I thank many of them for trusting me with their curious, vibrant minds and hearts and spirits, and every single one of them for making me a teacher.

Word Up Community Bookshop came into being the summer before I started this Ph.D., so they have run through my life in continual, mostly parallel tracks for a long time. Word Up is an amazing, flexible, resilient community, and volunteering there weekly for years gave me balance and connection throughout a time that can be lopsided and isolating. I care deeply for each of the people I have worked with and known there, and I have learned a great deal through and with each of you, sometimes directly about my Ph.D. work, sometimes about every other thing. To all of you, I hope to always be the person you respect, love, and believe in; I like and trust the world we create together, even in the worst times. One of my fellow volunteers did a tarot reading for me about my Ph.D., and he told me about some European country where, upon earning your Ph.D., you are given a sword. As I tried to formulate my question for the reading—not exactly, would I finish, or would I succeed, but—he suggested “would I earn my sword.” That goal has stuck with me.

To my dear friends who believed in me before, during, and after this degree: Liz

Hartman, my fellow reader and Syracuse refuge, along with her lovely husband and snuggly animals. Rebekah Hoefling, my tireless cheerleader through every fifteen days and beyond. Nathaniel Wood, appearing from across the sea whenever I need you. My Bryn Mawr darlings, whose constant contact keeps me grounded and joyful: Lilah Rahn-Lee, Maddie von Baeyer, Chelsea Phillips, Holly Kelly, Kirstin Snyder, Katie Kaczmarek Frew. Thanks to Maddie for affirming every bit of academic and writing angst I felt, with perfect confidence that I would surmount it. Rachel Hochberg is both my forever friend and my everyday everything friend, for big things and small things, and carries me through when I cannot find my footing.

My friend Katie Rutledge, took me to get my undergraduate thesis bound. She was one of the few people at school with a car, and she took many people to get theses bound, and then made us little cards that said we had lifetime memberships in the Katie Rutledge Thesis Binding Service. It's time for me to use that service again, but her lifetime recently and suddenly ended. At least her name and this remembrance can be bound in these pages.

My entire family has been a great support and inspiration through this process, including my wonderful in-laws. I especially want to thank my grandmother, Alta Chiappone, for always valuing education in her own life, and my aunt, Chris Chiappone, for all the cards and all the love for my writing.

My father, Patrick Fullan, would talk to me on the phone about once per week for many years while I worked on this Ph.D. Invariably, he would remind me, unprompted, that I belonged and deserved to be there. His illness, from Parkinson's disease, and his death in 2018 are central to how my project and I both have meandered, stumbled, halted, and continued to this particular end. In the early fall of 2017, I took a three mile walk with him at Beaver Lake Nature Center in

Baldwinsville, NY, a place that is part of some of my very early memories. He asked about this project, and I tried to describe it, to tell him the ideas and the things I cared about in it. He was not always completely clear of mind at this point in the progress of the disease, but as we walked and talked, I could perceive his attention like I perceived sunlight coming down through the leaves. He seemed to understand what I was saying, and to find it genuinely interesting and worth caring about. Many years prior to this, he taught me to always tell and listen and give my respect to stories, so his work is the foundation of mine in many ways. I love you, Dad, and I miss you very keenly.

My mother, Linda Fullan, has believed the best of me throughout my life. Her support, her cards and care packages, her phone calls, and especially her presence have been indispensable. She, too, has been engaged in a long and difficult project of a totally different shape, but each time we talked we would remind each other that every step was a part of the whole, and that carried me through a lot of tiny-step days.

Iris Elsie Fullan-Lee is my daughter and my joy. She is one year and one month old at the time I write this, and does not have a great interest in dissertations, but she does love to pull all her books off the shelf, open each one up to a different page, and surround herself with them, which is also how I work, especially at the end of a project. Her ferocity and delight fill me with inspiration and fear and love, and watching her grow and contributing to her growth are immense gifts to both receive and offer.

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when they are barely formed, and reads them at the 11th hour when I am afraid they are still barely formed, and always thinks they are worth attention. When I was actually done with this project, I told her I wasn't sure til that moment that I was really going to do it, and she told me she never doubted that I would, which is a big part of why and how I did.

CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE	19
You Are Who You Eat, Part 1	
Weetigo Cannibalism and Settler Colonial Appetite	
CHAPTER TWO	66
Who Do You Say That I Am?	
Christian Rules and Protean Jesus	
CHAPTER THREE	112
You Are Who You Eat, Part 2	
Indigenous Eucharistic Miracles Dis/Entangle Christian Rules	
CHAPTER FOUR	129
What Do You Say the World Is?	
Pluriversality at the End of the World in <i>Future Home of the Living God</i>	
CONCLUSION	160
WORKS CITED	165

INTRODUCTION

“So high, can't get over it.
So low, can't get under it.
So wide, can't get around it.
You must come in at the door.”

– “So High,” Elvis

“So wide, you can't get around it.
So low, you can't get under it.
So high, you can't get over it.
Da-yee do do do do do do.

...

Here's a chance to dance our way
out of our constrictions.

...

Feet don't fail me now.”

--“One Nation Under a Groove,” Funkadelic

In this dissertation, I show how Louise Erdrich and Tomson Highway use fiction in ways that illuminate the exercise and elaboration of colonial power and the settler colonial imaginaries particular to the United States and Canada, and to seed decolonial imaginaries rooted in Anishinaabe and Cree story forms, worldviews, national identities, and ways of being. Louise Erdrich and Tomson Highway, as contemporary Anishinaabe and Cree writers, create stories that radically disidentify from the assumptions of settler imaginaries. My study draws on and contributes to the vibrant stream of Native American¹ literary criticism that insists that stories create possible worlds, both by their mobilization in the service of indigenous dispossession, and by providing entry to worlds alternative to those crafted by settler colonialism. In this critical tradition, stories are understood to be multivalent, sacred, flexible, and, sometimes, alive. My

1 When possible, I will use specific tribal/national affiliations to identify Indigenous people in the Americas; when writing more generally, I will use the terms Native, Native American, First Nations, and Indigenous, depending on the particular context of a sentence or phrase and generally using whatever term the writers I am currently referencing use.

study demonstrates how Erdrich and Highway affirm and particularize this understanding of the nature and power of story through their respective Anishinaabe and Cree literary and cultural worlds, and that fiction, as a kind of story that does not ask for belief, does particular work to make decolonial imaginaries perceptible as the expressions and creative tools of worlds that *do* exist, but, according to the truth claims of settler ontologies, *cannot* exist.

I approach Erdrich's and Highway's novels, plays, and poems as Anishinaabe and Cree literary expressions, and explore the ways in which these authors immerse readers in Anishinaabe and Cree worldviews. Louise Erdrich and Tomson Highway are popular and canonical Indigenous writers; Erdrich is Anishinaabe, specifically Turtle Mountain Ojibwe, and from the United States, and Highway is Cree and from Canada. They are contemporaries, were both born in the 1950s, and have been publishing since the late 1970s/early 1980s. Louise Erdrich has written many novels for adults, a series of novels for children, some memoirs, and some books of poetry. Tomson Highway has written many plays, one novel, some picture books, and a book cataloging First Nations literature in Canada. I am writing about them because of the length and depth of my own experience reading their work; I first encountered Highway's work as a teenager and Erdrich's work as a college student, and thus I have been engaged with and by them for about twenty years now.

While these authors have been considered, tangentially, in connection to each other, very little extant critical work puts them directly in conversation with one another. Doing so not only sharpens apprehension of the strong and intricate decolonial imaginary each creates, but also affords critical reflection on the impact of settler colonial geographies to the production of knowledge. Specifically, doing so allows for analyses that follow the boundaries not of the

modern nation-state (Canada and the United States), but instead consider the distinctions and connections among Anishinaabe and Cree nations. Anishinaabe is a term for a large group of Indigenous nations and bands whose homelands stretch from the Great Lakes to the Plains of North America (Noodin *Bawaajimo* 5). Groups that are officially recognized by the governments of the United States and Canada as Ojibwe/Chippewa, Potawatomi, and Odawa nations, among others, may all be included in the designation “Anishinaabe” (Doerfler et al xvii), which is an older, self-designed historical and political name for these nations (Noodin *Bawaajimo* 4). There are also many Cree nations and tribes who make their homes across Canada and the northern United States, stretching from Northern Manitoba to the Great Plains. The languages and cultures of the Anishinaabeg and the Cree are related, and the overarching linguistic and cultural group they share is called Algonquian, which I will use when I want to refer to a shared word, idea, or experience.

I've been thinking a lot about the overall goal of this project being to both demonstrate and enact the possibility of seeking a without (the outside or non-being) of coloniality from within the experience and worldview of it. Fundamentally, I am doing this project to seek a without from within. I cannot be formed by something other than what has formed me; I cannot un-know the narratives that shape my being into something I recognize. I assume that nobody else can do this either, though out of respect for the variety and autonomy of other people, I won't say this for sure. Unfortunately, some bleak and violent things have formed me, particularly coloniality/modernity as a frame of mind and world, and United States settler colonialism. Not only are these world-frames alarming and appalling in their consequences, they create worlding narratives that are woven according to a pattern of lies. They cannot describe

enough to allow for a pluriversal and grounded perception of our own lives and experiences and the places and contexts we (consistently, for a long time, and also very weirdly) call America. It's dangerous to live according to narratives that do not describe the landscape, people, animals, nations, etc., with whom you are interacting in ways that can lead you to interact effectively, justly, and safely with them. It's dangerous to have a map to one place and try to navigate somewhere else with it—you will prepare to climb a mountain and wind up in the bog.

While I was thinking about these things, I got a part of a song in my head. I could remember “So high, can't get over it, so low, can't get under it, so wide, can't get around it,” but for the life of me I could not remember what came next, what I was supposed to do, in the song, with this huge obstacle. When I tried to look it up, I found a surprising array of songs based on this spiritual.² Sometimes, the high-low-wide thing is “heaven,” and sometimes, it is “Jesus's love,” or even, in a version by Elvis, “He,” God Himself, while Lavern Baker did a version where the huge thing is “my love,” presumably offered inescapably to a romantic partner. The answer to what, if anything, to do about this thing you can't get above, under, or around also varied. Gospel singer Ccioma has a version in which the unavoidable nature of Jesus's love, its ubiquity and inescapability, is a feature and not a bug: after the litany of ways she can't get away from it, she finishes, “Jesus, You give me wonderful love.” A lyric repeated in many versions is “You must come in at the door,” which one of Elvis's versions phrases as “You might as well come in at the door.” In these versions, the ubiquity of the heaven-love-god thing seems to be a

2 It's clearly an African American spiritual, but in my brief foray into researching it, I did not find specific information about its origins, even in a general sense. However, all the artists working with it whom I cite are Black, except for Elvis, whose relationship with Blackness is a whole tangle of white appropriation. Funkadelic, reworking the song in ways I find so generative, is a Black group too. It's not incidental or coincidental that Black music and musicians are offering this imagery which, for me, describes, and, in the case of Funkadelic's song, helps me imagine the undoing of, the overarching colonial universalizing of the planet! I don't have the time, space, or knowledge to explore this significance here, but I want to flag and honor it nonetheless.

bit of a trick, because—surprise!—there's a door, your only option for proceeding and therefore compulsory.

What interests me in all these versions is that it sounds like trying to escape from, or not be bounded by, the big thing is, at least for the space of some of the song, imaginable. The point is that this imagination is wrong-headed, I guess, but it is there. Escape itself may *not* be possible, but the idea that one is trying to escape is conceivable, because the universality of this thing, taking up all the routes a person might choose, is something that makes it a little bit like a prison or a trap, even while it is identified with something theoretically good. The line between “it's just what it is,” and “it's inescapable” and “it's wonderful,” is intriguingly thin. In some way, the thing *has* to become wonderful by virtue of being so ridiculously large and inescapable. You “might as well” come in at the door, because what else are you going to do? You are trapped. So maybe just lie back and enjoy it? Maybe the trap is actually a super good home? But there were moments, just lines ago, when you tried to get over, under, and around it—when maybe, perceptually, it was not quite so wonderful.

I'm playing with this song because it reminds me of the work of trying to find a without from within—it in fact describes that work, even if most versions range from eventually rejoicing within or at least acknowledging that a without is not possible due to the bigness of the big thing. It reminds me of this search for the without from the within while describing and enacting Christian universalism, which is one of the worlding tools I am most engaged (perplexed, excited, angered, trapped) by, and whose entanglement with and re-creation through colonialism I would most like to trace and trouble.

As I listened to various versions of the song, I came across a surprise: “One Nation Under

a Groove,” by Funkadelic. This song begins with the “so wide, so high, so low” litany, but then branches out in an entirely different direction. There are no doors, no acquiescence to the wonder of what cannot be overcome and has no without. Instead, the singers repeat, “Here's my chance to dance my way out of my constrictions.” In later repetitions, it's “our chance,” and the constrictions are also “ours.” Another line repeated throughout the song is “Feet don't fail me now.”

This is exciting. The wide-high-low thing, the big thing, the compulsory door thing is still there, but in this song there's a chance to sidestep it, literally, to dance out of its constriction. It's my chance but it's not just mine. Bold refers to this as “seek[ing] an exit strategy from modernist ontologies” (23), something particularly needed as we find those ontologies continuing to consume other worlds as in other ways of being, Indigenous people and their nations, many other racialized people, and much of the planet itself, at least in a recognizable life-supporting form. This dance is hopefully fun, but it's also important—“Feet don't fail me now.” It might work. It might not work. It will probably do both at different moments. Feet, don't fail me.

In writing about how Louise Erdrich and Tomson Highway, as Indigenous writers, make perceptible withouts from within, I am asking what we do about the big thing that can have many names, but is definitely a world. If a world defines the boundaries of what is possible and what is not, and stories both define and interpret or provide tools for interpreting worlds, then other worlds can provide ways out of the double-bind logics and pathways of violence and destruction that one world may create. Worlds can also be the totality of relationships among selves and communities within some perceived boundaries. One action worlding describes is drawing boundaries to make sense of selves in relation—the boundaries can be armed or open, sketched

or solid, playful or angry. I do not think human beings can ever live in only one world, nor is that a goal—we must share worlds with other humans and also with non-human beings. Returning to this particular world, then, the high wide low thing. A world of coloniality/modernity. A weetigo world. A constant worlding and re-worlding. It's so high, so wide, so low. It is perhaps full of wonders, but it is not wonderful enough to make me (only or always) forget its compulsory universality, what it demands for the wonderful love, which is, for one thing, to be always named as wonderful love, whatever it is doing and creating and undoing and killing. But I have been made in terms of the thing's dimensions, so to me, it will probably always in some way be too high to get over, too low to get under, and too wide to get around. I am a white settler, a United States citizen from birth. I have inherited the settler colonial nation as a literal birthright, and it has made me and my body and my thinking brain that make this project and write these words. I was born in Syracuse, New York, on Onondaga territory, with the reservation of the Onondaga Nation close by. I used to ask about the sign on the highway, why it said "Nation." Was there another nation here, just off the highway? My family comes from Ireland and Italy and Scotland and Germany. I don't know much about them or their origins, partly because of the systems of settler colonialism that processed them and then produced me into the structures of American whiteness. I'm a Catholic. I mean, I was baptized as a baby and grew up with great enthusiasm and weird mysticism in the Church, and then a lot of stuff happened and I recognized and/or named myself queer, and/or was always queer, and/or started having sex with a woman, and began to learn about colonialism and was like, well, holy shit, there's a lot going on here.

I'm getting into this because it's important that I introduce myself. That's something among the many things that I have learned from Indigenous people. Usually in academic writing

we do this introduction by talking exclusively or primarily about how our thinking has been shaped by other writers, but to obscure my body and my beingness is, as you've probably heard, a cover for the assumption that the high wide low thing is the whole damn thing. You should know who is talking to you and telling you these things. It's me, a daughter of the wide high low thing. And I am always seeing the door and hearing, in stereo, both that I *must* go in and that I *might as well* go in, because what else is there? I want to be able, at least a little, to trace the dance that gets us out of our constrictions, the constrictions, certainly, of this big thing/world. I want to be part of such a dance, to contribute my wiggles, contortions, and moments of perception. I want to show how and where and when I have noticed both the world of coloniality that I am in, and the other, Indigenous worlds that exist in exactly the same times and places. I hope that my dance with words and stories can allow some bits of time to occur when you feel other worlds around you, that offer more life, more relationality, less violence and destruction than this cannibal colonialism that subsumes, seduces, attacks and invites us. I also will contribute my lack of understanding, the places where I can't get over it, and therefore I shrug, or grimace, or sigh, or wince, or smile—and go in at the door. If you notice those places, maybe you can dance around them. I hope you will.

The stories I read and write about in this project are ones I perceive as creating the chance to dance our way out of our constrictions. Not even the dance itself, but the chance—opening a space in which such a thing can happen. Describing what I mean here gets tricky, because it's partially something I see all stories as having the potential to do, and also more specifically something particular to fiction, and even more specifically, something Native American fiction can do precisely within settler colonialism, as practiced and re/created and made in the United

States and Canada. I don't know how to move nimbly among these levels, and I also don't—entirely—have words for the “what” or the “how” in “what do these stories do?” and “how do these stories do that?” But here are some words and ideas that feel like they approach these questions usefully.

This project is about universality and pluriversality. Pluriversality is a description of cross-cultural experience—a way of describing relational webs, and therefore culturally determined/inflected *worlds* that cannot be reduced to one, or made commensurate with each other. No matter how well one understands across the cultural boundary, there remain two ideas, concepts, ways of being, worlds. Pluriversality, in the simplest sense, is the idea that what applies in one circumstance doesn't apply in all. But it is also more, I think, than simple relativism. The incommensurability of disparate worlds and the relations that take place among them nonetheless builds or makes perceptible a pluriverse (Strathern 34ff). It contains an expectation that connection is possible, communication without violence or flattening of either “verse”. As a concept, pluriversality arises to counter colonial understandings of the world and of history, in particular the inseparable coloniality/modernity theorized by Mignolo and friends (e.g., Mignolo and Walsh 108-116). I understand coloniality/modernity to be temporally specific *and* expansive. Coloniality is big and ideological—related to consumption and being consumed—as opposed to colonialism as a more bounded practice. Coloniality persists as forms of government may shift and change. Coloniality is a way of worlding in which possession becomes a facet of individual and group identity, forming white racial identity and codifying and justifying grasping and violence (Moreton-Robinson). This concept places the high wide low thing I am trying to describe in time and also shows its range across time, as well as indicating

space for various knowing/unknowing interactions with the high wide low thing. Coloniality can be a thought container for the action of colonization. Many worlds, and pluriversality, then become a counterpoint to coloniality. Pluriversality is both the practice and the experience of existing beyond the terms of this one-world world, the universality that coloniality thinks, makes, and demands. I believe pluriversality is an accurate and useful description of human interactions with each other, with other beings, with the planet, that to relate in a real person-to-other-being way, especially across great differences from those of culture to those of species, we must enter and recognize the pluriverse. One reason fiction can be powerful is that, even within coloniality/modernity, which of course is the context in which we have specific story categories like “fiction” and “non-fiction,” fiction, as a story that does not claim or attempt to be truthful while remaining a narrative, engages the world in an pluriversal way, or, perhaps, engages as though it exists within a pluriverse.

What I will theorize as *weetigo* world, and the actions I often describe as making universal demands or claims, Blaser and de la Cadena describe as “a world that has granted itself the right to assimilate all other worlds, and, by presenting itself as exclusive, cancels possibilities for what lies beyond its limits” (3). So high, so wide, so low. Within this pluriversal imagining of worlds, my project is specifically about coloniality and its universalizing and consuming world—the worlding in which it engages and through which it (re)creates itself, the violence that it engenders, invites, and employs, and its flexibility between very large and very small scales. It is also about how the worlding of coloniality is and can be disrupted and changed by Indigenous stories that reveal and shape worlds that do not emerge or behave according to coloniality's strictures, epistemologies, and imaginaries.

Indigenous dispossession and settler colonial violence may appear spectral in North American history, in that these histories are often hidden, minimized, and disavowed, but they are both the ground of reality and the reality of the ground. Often, this means that those of us who live here, especially non-Indigenous people like myself, are neither where we think we are, nor who we think we are. At best, the relationships we're having to other people, other beings, and everything around us have insufficient grounds for relation. Settler colonialism crafts and rewards its subjects for insatiable appetites that ignore relationality, and creates a population that is never at home on the land, that never lives as though relationships with other people and other beings are mutual, real, powerful, and contain real mutual obligations and possibilities of requited love and pleasure, as Robin Wall Kimmerer (Citizen Potawatomi Nation) points out. Thus, coloniality's worlding requires the dispossession of Indigenous peoples in material, cultural, and metaphysical ways.

So: to attempt to make one world out of many is a process of aggressive world-reduction. If the settler colonial process I will describe as *weetigo* worlding involves world reduction, through the imposition of a singular world in which consumption of objects and objectified others is central and the prime experience of appetite and desire, what does it look and feel like to exist in world multiplicity, in pluriversality? To begin with, I think it feels like life—I believe that it is not possible to live outside of pluriversality. To go deeper, in the Indigenous literature I am writing about, I can perceive what it looks and feels like for this experience of multiplicity to not be a crisis, a rupture, or a haunting.

Decolonial imagining, for me, is not a return to the past, nor primarily a dismantling of structures (though it could/should lead to the latter)—it's understanding that structures are *there*,

and changing one's understanding of those structures, and being able to perceive other structures that transform, destabilize—or deny the foundation of—the colonial ones. The image I have is of some overarching filter, like a huge tent that is between you and the whole sky. Maybe any worldview at all is creating a tent like this, which we might call epistemology or ideology, but the tents are very different in terms of material, opacity, etc. And the decolonial act that I'm interested in is about finding or making and then widening fissures in this tent.

There are many containers and expressions of the drive to make universal, to create a one-world world, such as imperialism, colonialism, settler colonialism, and several of them have a place in this project, nested and layered within each other. Settler colonialism arises within a large, long imperial context, and imperial reverberations are thrumming out from the details of settler colonialism right here and now, as well as in the past (Byrd). Something that compels my attention, in issues of imperialism and colonialism, is how they flatten the world on so many scales, from literal lands to cultural structures, to how minds work and perceive the world, and how people relate to one another in body, mind, and spirit. The pasts we know and don't know, and carry and don't carry—and maybe we carry them all, knowing or not (Keller; Erdrich *Future Home*).

In each chapter of the dissertation, I follow different spiritual figures and human characters through Erdrich's and Highway's stories, to demonstrate what happens to settler concepts and demands when they are interpreted within Indigenous imaginaries. I include religious and mythical figures, and also institutional structures and laws, all of which have a storied context outside of literature as well as within it, in order to more precisely understand how these figures and structures are transformed by the possibilities of fiction. Institutions and

mythical beings can de-and-re-construct each other in the worlds of fiction and stories.

Throughout each chapter, mythic beings and processes that transcend the scale of human lifetimes do particular work in each of the stories I am considering. What they all are, from the windigo to Jesus, and even including the felt experience of evolution, is outside of the expected boundaries of realism. The common sense that universality and coloniality demand, the what-is-supposed-to-happen which encompasses settler colonial worlding, and makes it sensible to people despite and within its enormous violence, is not realized when these beings and processes are engaged. Common sense expectations are altered and made nonsensical, and the mythic beings act as signposts, doing the work of shifting the expected terms of the world.

The scale of these forces and beings is important—they are very large-scale in terms of time, often in terms of space, and definitely in terms of cultural influence. It is partially on this large-scale level that they interact specifically with various colonial institutions. Institutions seek and create consistency and continuity. They are designed to make themselves legible and perceptible over time. Institutions of settler colonialism thus establish, explain, and stabilize the world being built around settler colonial epistemologies—by deepening and widening the fault lines of coloniality. Mythic figures and processes beyond human life span all can act as carriers of time, or even stand in for time itself. Coloniality reshapes both space and time, declaring that places, peoples, and histories can all be both iterative and universalized—i.e. *this place* becomes part of *that place*, and in settler colonialism, *that place* consumes *this place*, metaphorically, conceptually, and physically. And *these* (colonizing, settler, white) *people* consume *that* (Indigenous) *people*—through all sorts of shape-shifting methods over time. It is this process of consumption that is internalized and enshrined, carried through time through the past and into the

future, by colonial worlding. Settler colonial institutions help to create an appearance of continuity and an expectation of continuance for this consumptive world. Settler institutions make overtures toward time and offer or impose a particular temporality which solidifies their power and meaning.

Mythical beings and cycles beyond the human, though, do not move on this same time scale, and so may appear both in and beyond time, recurring in flashes or erupting in punctuated rhythm through the expected temporality of settler colonial worlding. I think that mythical beings redefine the institutions via their own relationship to temporality—both institutions and mythical beings in some ways constitute themselves both outside of time and within time. Thus, they have the potential to disrupt institutional overtures toward continuity and belie their claim/desire to extend always into the future and the past.

So, my overarching argument, hope, or ongoing dance move, is that fiction interacts with existing worldview filters and creates new ones, or pieces of new ones. The storying actions of the texts offer other worlds, as fiction, poetry, and drama are expected and allowed to do worlding. Fiction has the capacity to do this because it is perceptually immersive and interprets the relational world, but it doesn't claim even one reality for itself, let alone an ultimate, exclusive, or universal one. Fictional stories can have a particular effect or set of effects on people's worlding processes, which have individual shapes but are never individual projects—they are the work of whole societies, cultures, and ideologies. Also, while these pieces of writing are classified for publication as fiction, poetry, and plays, there are categories of story in Anishinaabe and Cree worlds that also shape and inflect Erdrich's and Highway's work.

Neal McLeod offers the concepts of Cree narrative memory and spiritual history as

frameworks for understanding the world through *nêhiyâwiwin*, or Cree-ness. Cree narrative memory connects people and other beings in relationship across long periods of time and through various forms of kinship, and McLeod conceives of spiritual history as a manner of understanding time that is distinct from Western linearity and empiricism, through a vast multiplicity and continuity of stories and relationships. Both of these form and inform Cree stories and specifically Highway's work.

I am also holding in my mind and heart the work of Anishinaabe scholars who have written about *aadizookaanag* and *dibaajimowinan*,³ two kinds of Anishinaabe stories. *Aadizookaanag*, often defined as sacred/mythical narratives, are usually classified as animate, living beings, in the grammar of *Anishinaabemowin*;⁴ *dibaajimowinan*, often defined as histories, news, or personal stories, are more often classified as inanimate. Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark describes *aadizookaanag* as the spirit of a story which can be “recognized and uncovered” through the “transmission of stories from one person to another” (Doefler et al xxi), and she and Jill Doefler and Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair (all Anishinaabeg) emphasize that the interplay between *aadizookaanag* and *dibaajimowinan* in all Anishinaabe stories creates “maps ... that teach us how to navigate the past, present, and future” (xviii). Noodin calls *aadizookaanag* “the core means of communicating the complexity of life” (21), while Mary Siisip Geniusz (Cree, Anishinaabe, Métis) explains that *aadizookaanag* are living beings among the first in creation, along with rocks and all beings that make up the weather. These beings, as a group, are uniquely self-sufficient and given the task of caring for the rest of us, plants, animals, and humans. I find it deeply fascinating and instructive that certain stories, in Anishinaabe worlds, are alive. I do not

3 As with many words in Algonquian languages, different writers sometimes spell these words slightly differently. I will use the spelling I have here primarily, but will shift when describing the work of an author who uses a different spelling.

4 *Anishinaabemowin* is the word for the Anishinaabe language, also known as *Ojibwemowin*.

think it makes sense for me, as a non-Anishinaabe person and a non-speaker of Anishinaabemowin, to try and delineate how, precisely, Erdrich's work relates to aadizookaanag and whether and when her stories touch and perhaps awaken these stories that are living beings. But I am instructed by this understanding, and aware of it; as I try to talk about what stories do, there are worlds in which they *really do*, worlds in which they are alive, worlds in which they care for human beings. I invite you to this awareness with me, and hope to succeed in greeting the stories that have come into this project with respect and gratitude.

What, then, can Indigenous stories and fiction by Indigenous writers do? Specifically, in the settler colonial states of the United States and Canada, they can reveal and disrupt the settler colonial worldview that animates and sustains those states through both their institutions and the way people keep imagining them into further being.

In chapter one, I follow the cannibal spirit called windigo (Anishinaabe), weetigo or whîtikow (Cree), and other similar names through Erdrich's and Highway's work. The weetigo reflects, infects, embodies and is embodied by settler culture and its genocidal projects. In Algonquian stories, the weetigo is a monster that eats humans, and ordinary people can become weetigo, in a usually irrevocable transformation. Within settler colonialism, the formation of a culture rooted in appropriation and consumption can be understood as expressions of the weetigo spirit. I examine explicit weetigo figures in the novels *The Round House* by Erdrich and *Kiss of the Fur Queen* by Highway, including abusive human beings, and also settler institutions, such as Indian boarding/residential schools and the law, whose desires for wholesale conversions for Native people and settlers undergird many of their devouring and destructive policies. Through all of this, weetigo world becomes a description of the world that the settler imaginary creates,

empowers, and makes desirable (though it cannot make it just or liveable).

Chapter two applies my understanding of Anishinaabe and Cree imaginaries and worlds to the protean images of Jesus in the works of Erdrich and Highway. Simply in relationship to the character of Agnes/Father Damien in Erdrich's novel *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, Jesus appears as a man, husband, lover, woman, *and* friend. In Tomson Highway's work, crucifixes wear funny booties and serve as instruments of rape, while in the works of both authors, many different characters play with, rework, eroticize, inhabit, and disavow Jesus-like identities, pageants, and behaviors. In this chapter, through this multiplicity, I demonstrate that it is a mistake to see Jesus, and the Catholicism in the stories, and assume that we are also seeing a finished conversion process according to settler imaginaries, or even that these stories are within fundamentally Christian contexts and obey what I term, following Thomas King, Christian rules.

The third chapter cycles back to the questions of appetite and the relationships that produce cannibalistic but also appropriate, reciprocal forms of eating, and considers them in the context of Eucharistic miracles that occur in Highway and Erdrich's work, in which characters perceive and eat meat rather than bread in the transubstantiated host. Because the Catholic ritual of the Eucharist is centered around both eating and the highly significant process of the eater recognizing and relating to the one being eaten, it functions in a space more connected to Algonquian ideas about eating and relationship than most non-religious and ritualistic meals in Eurowestern cultures. However, as with the portrayals of Jesus, the way that the Eucharist exceeds the normal physical experience of the sacrament in these books does not bring characters who experience it into a more orthodox Catholic faith. Instead, the characters through whose

senses readers perceive these miraculous events are each on a distinct journey away from Catholic orthodoxy and toward more Anishinaabe and Cree understandings and spiritual practices, respectively, and the Eucharistic miracles themselves contribute to these journeys.

The fourth and final chapter turns to Louise Erdrich's novel *Future Home of the Living God* as an example of how various worlds and worldviews, both settler and Anishinaabe in origin, pass through time and through people, repeating and re-emerging in sometimes startling ways. The book presents a near-future dystopia in which evolution has shifted dramatically, causing species to seem to evolve backwards and beings from the past to re-emerge; pregnancy and birth are tightly controlled and pregnant people imprisoned. In a context of settler colonial violence that continues to resurrect itself even as the government of the United States fails, Anishinaabe understandings of creation and relationships among people, plants, rocks, and other beings help characters continue to exist and care for each other.

CHAPTER ONE

You Are Who You Eat, Part 1: Weetigo Cannibalism and Settler Colonial Appetites

“We are already eating each other. We are already part of this.” This is the refrain of Heid Erdrich’s⁵ (Anishinaabe: Turtle Mountain Ojibwe) videopoem “Undead Faerie Goes Great with India Pale Ale.” Throughout the film, the viewpoint widens and narrows on a restaurant scene, across which an animated undead faerie flits, while an illustration of a woman who looks like Heid Erdrich, placed on one of the café tables, opens her mouth to reveal sometimes a swirling abyss, sometimes a huge tentacle that behaves like a tongue. The poem lists various versions of “each other” that “we” are eating and have already eaten, ranging from people, to the oil and minerals of the earth, to fruit, beer, and the titular undead faerie. It’s a disturbing litany, an orgy of appetite in which there is no space between the eating of luxurious food and the eating of “tender children.” The imagery shifts between a cozy restaurant and a sea of what appears to be oil. The viewer is moved from eater to eaten both in visual perspective and grammatically—the words variously say “We are ... eating each other,” “We are eating you all right now,” “We ate them,” and “I myself have eaten you all already,” and the visual perspective shows us the tabletop and the inside of a mouth with equal frequency. In this videopoem, there is no possibility of a stable perspective or a position in which one will not be eaten, but there is also no exemption from the role of destructive and inappropriate consumer: “We are already part of this.” After the speaker places herself in the role of this eater, she continues: “You did not satisfy.” The consumption in Erdrich’s videopoem changes in scale and in familiarity, but the

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Heid and Louise Erdrich are sisters.

shared, never-fulfilled appetites are unsettlingly similar to one another, whether “we” are consuming “pomegranate syrup” or “plaid-skirted co-eds.”

Dissatisfied and insatiable consumers, eating the earth, other people, animals, mythical beings—what is “this” cycle “we” are part of, and who are “we” involved in “this” consumption? Also, from what perspectives is it possible to perceive consumption, of others or oneself? As the videopoem shows, the consumptive “this” moves, smoothly and dizzily, from the micro to the macro, and the “we” likewise shifts—which makes sense, because if “we are already eating each other,” everyone must be both consumer and consumed. The cycle of consumption happens on the smallest and the largest levels, simultaneously and not coincidentally. The idea of consuming human beings or ripping open the earth to achieve “gorgeous umami” is extremely disturbing and also does not take much work to apply directly to actual practices in the world.

Unsustainable consumption and insatiable appetites are the bedrocks of global capitalism, of colonialism, and of the rampant degradation of the natural world. It is a manifestly bad bargain, the destruction of a habitable world to maintain (at greater and greater cost) a particular way of life. This idea— (potentially) trading human life itself, as well as (definitely) the lives of many other species, for the maintenance of particular cultural, economic, and political formations, seems absurd and utterly beyond reason and imagining—why would anyone make this deal? Yet, this deal has been made, is being made, and is consistently argued for in tones ranging from the confused and apologetic to the strident and aggressive.

What concerns me very deeply, then, is how the unimaginable has become the imaginable, how it generally does so, and what alternatives to unimaginable consumptive destruction people can learn to imagine. The scale of these questions is, as Heid Erdrich’s

videopoem shows us, simultaneously very large and very small, and the stakes are perhaps too high to easily imagine or encompass with the tools offered by the dominant cultures in which we live. To know whom one can and cannot ethically consume, to make the distinctions that have, disconcertingly, been undone in “Undead Faerie,” position is critical. You have to know *who* you are, with *whom* you are interacting, and *where* you are, or you cannot say you are eating an “undead faerie” with any more certainty than you can say you are eating “fries and a beer.”

Here, in North America, it is a basic condition of living within the settler colonial states that claim the continent that many of us who live here do not know where or who we are. Understandings of history, space, time, and ourselves are overmastered by what Ann Laura Stoler refers to as “colonial aphasia,” that is, a blockage or loss of historical memory and present understanding that is simultaneous knowing and unknowing. Colonial aphasia perceives what has happened but cannot recognize it, re-enacts it but cannot speak it, and/or speaks it but doesn’t understand the meaning of the words (122-128). This phantasmagoric experience of space and time—in which moments and memories haunt and double back and re-emerge without ever having actually been forgotten—is, as Stoler argues, a deep psychic *function* of colonial empires, not a departure from their purported order or reason.

“The genre of the new world is horror,” Jodi Byrd (Chickasaw) writes, “the story of America a crime” (xii). Let us say, then, that those of us living in America are living within and from the genre of horror as our history is made and perceived, while the experience of colonial aphasia means that the particular horrors are remembered anew over and over again, without ever having ceased. Many Indigenous peoples of the Americas live in this understanding. Lawrence Gross (Anishinaabe) uses the term Post Apocalyptic Stress Disorder to describe the

cultural and personal experiences of the Anishinaabeg under the current and past regimes of settler colonialism known as the United States and Canada. He clarifies that the “postapocalyptic environment” in which Native Americans live does not negate their cultural worldviews prior to colonial apocalypse, but “means Native Americans are in the process of building new worlds, worlds that are true to their past history, but cognizant of present realities” (33). Kyle Powys Whyte (Potawatomi) reminds us that people in North America are currently living in the dystopian nightmare of his ancestors, and the utopian dream of European settlers—speculative non-fictions, as it were, that have already come to pass, but which, per colonial aphasia, are often projected into the future or cycled through repeatedly with murky awareness, or non-awareness, of the repetition. He asserts that awareness of this—of which kind of dream/nightmare we each and all have inherited—is foundational for any kind of true allyship between Native people and settlers (“Our Ancestors’ Dystopia Now” and “Let’s Be Honest”). The “basic right” of settlers “not to have to acknowledge or take responsibility for ... murder and displacement” of Indigenous peoples necessitates inhabiting a queasy unreality, constantly out of step with what is happening in the physical world we inhabit, constantly re-writing and re-creating the land and all relationships through and on the land (Hurwitz and Bourque 28-29). This horrific American cycle is both accomplished through and perpetuated by grotesque patterns of violent consumption and insatiable appetite. For people of the Americas, then, the dizzy shifts in perspective that occur in “Undead Faerie Goes Great with India Pale Ale” can be seen as baldly descriptive of reality, rather than surreal.

To bring together the concept of the horror we live with/in and the resulting dangers of inappropriately violent appetites and consumptions, let us turn to some monsters *of* violent

appetite. The weetigo⁶ is a cannibal monster featured in the stories of many Algonquian peoples. Euroamerican settler colonialism, as realized through the institutions of the United States and Canada, is another storied monster, but the power these institutions have to shape and impose their own stories creates very different, un-monstrous impressions. A monster that calls itself “Education” or “Law,” for example, is all the more dangerous for being named as a cohesive or necessary social mechanism. When dealing with monsters like the weetigo, clear recognition and establishment of relationships are especially important, because (mis)recognition and (distorted) relationship are the means by which weetigo appetites (and the victims of those appetites) live and die. A person who has become weetigo is a cannibal, someone whose recognition of others is violently distorted, and who eats and insatiably craves human flesh, sometimes including their own. This chapter exposes weetigo institutions of Euroamerican settler colonialism through analysis of *Kiss of the Fur Queen* by Tomson Highway and *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich. As literary texts, these novels have the generic license to directly invoke monsters like the weetigo in relationship with personal experiences and institutional structures, illuminating connections that are often elided by presumably factual, less figurative writing and storytelling.

In the introduction to his volume of poetry, *Songs to Kill a Wíhtikow*, Neal McLeod (Cree) offers both a description of the cannibal monster wíhtikow and a Cree verb: wíhtikowipayi, which describes the process of becoming wíhtikow. One of the fundamental characteristics of the wíhtikow is the potential contagion of its hunger, and so wíhtikowipayi emphasizes that while wíhtikow itself is sometimes a menacing spirit, sometimes an inhuman,

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There are many variations on this word in different Algonquian languages. I will use whichever is used by the source I am referencing at the time, and default in my own analysis to weetigo or wiindigoo, the spelling used by Highway and Erdrich, respectively, in the novels I am discussing.

huge monster, wíhtikowipayi is a process that can happen to anyone, a greedy, disordered hunger and misrecognition of a person's relationship to others that may initiate a monstrous transformation in anyone who experiences this misrecognition and succumbs to this hunger. Therefore, while the wíhtikow can and does terrify people in its monstrous form out in the world, equally terrifying are the ways in which a person may feel wíhtikowipayi happening to them or observe the process in others: through sudden or gradual misrecognition of other humans as animals that are appropriate for humans to eat, through a feeling of freezing and ice around the heart, and/or through dreams in which human flesh is mistakenly consumed.⁷ Wíhtikowipayi has been connected to Euroamerican settler colonialism for centuries. One Ojibwe creation story predicts European colonists bringing the monster with them across the ocean; Shawn Smallman cites this story as it was told by a Cree storyteller in the late 1700- early 1800s,⁸ in which the Eastern Spirit boasts of the tools and wares that will come to Cree lands when he causes Europeans to arrive, and the Rabbit replies, “ ‘yes, you will introduce many useful things... but you will introduce the Weedigoo who will cross the Atlantic and consume human flesh’ ” (63).

As these stories show, wíhtikowipayi, the process of absorbing, accepting, and enacting cannibalistic appetites, with its gross misrecognition of others and insatiable violent greed, is a conversion demanded and created by settler institutions. The wíhtikowipayi of settler colonial institutions, then, facilitates not just individual persons becoming wíhtikow, but the production of settler colonial society itself as a process of weetigo worlding, which is how I name the

7

Windigo tales abound and are collected and mentioned in many sources. One collection of these tales is *Where the Chill Came From: Cree Windigo Tales and Journeys*, edited by Howard Norman. Another is *Windigo: An Anthology of Fact and Fantastic Fiction*, edited by John Robert Colombo. For a discussion of the role of dreams in wíhtikowipayi specifically, see Robert A. Brightman's *Grateful Prey* (101-102, 155)

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This story was told in 1823, heard by the teller 60 years before that, recorded in 1880, and first published in writing in 1977.

creation and maintenance of an ongoing network of political structures, nations, and epistemologies sustained precisely, if paradoxically, by these self-and-other-destructive greeds. Weetigo worlding describes wîhtikowipayi as it scales up from individuals to whole societies, governments, and worldviews. In his anthropological study of Rock Cree hunting practices and relationships with animals, Robert A. Brightman writes, “it is in the witiko image that killing and eating are most strongly associated with hierarchy, exploitation, and domination” (197). Hierarchy, exploitation, and domination are foundational to colonial power, specifically within the Catholicism that protects and shields Father Lafleur, the weetigo-identified predator-priest in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, and also the legal structures that Linden Lark, Erdrich’s wiindigoo-rapist, exploits in *The Round House*.

Both *The Round House* and *Kiss of the Fur Queen* connect the weetigo with rape and sexual violence. The individual figures in each novel most identified with and as weetigo are both rapists rather than literal cannibals. Characters in each novel who have been sexually assaulted and raped come to understand their experience through stories of weetigo attacks, and, in some cases, find possibilities of justice and healing through stories of how people have defeated wiindigoog⁹ in the past. As Sarah Deer (Mvskoke) asserts, rape can be simultaneously metaphor for, microcosm of, and essential tool of colonization (51, 113). In her conception, rape and colonialism have a fractal relationship with each other, and weetigo violence is another version of this same violent perception and use of other people. Weetigo consumption, like rape, begins with misrecognition of or refusal to acknowledge another person’s humanity and to treat them according to the obligations of that recognition and acknowledgement. Sexual violence and weetigo violence function as both deeply personal and expansively communal violations,

9 Wiindigoog is the plural of wiindigoo, as Anishinaabeg (or Anishinaabek) is the plural of Anishinaabe.

impacting a whole family, community, and/or nation by striking at the intimate, particular human identity of one or more of their members. Framing sexual violence in a wiindigoo story, as both of these novels do, also offers a space to understand and imagine Indigenous laws that, unlike the English property laws that serve as the basis for American rape law, respond to rape as a deep attack on human selfhood, rather than an usurpation of one man's right to a woman or child as his property (Deer 23-24).

With so great a destruction of relationship, what kind of justice is possible in a constantly re-created weetigo world? What could it look like to seek justice in relation to the victims of a weetigo? These are questions Louise Erdrich takes up in her fourteenth novel, *The Round House*. In this novel, a buffalo woman tells a boy she has saved, with her body, from starvation, that “wiindigoo justice must be pursued with great care” (187). She never tells him, however, what wiindigoo justice is, or what it will look like once carefully pursued. What wiindigoo justice is and can be is a central question of the book, though not a definitively resolvable question. The buffalo woman's statement about wiindigoo justice emerges from a dream-story of the past, nested within the main narrative, which is itself framed as the childhood memories of a now-adult narrator. In the flow of this story, Erdrich demonstrates how Anishinaabe law functions to facilitate reciprocal relationships, even (or especially) in the violent relational contexts of killing and eating other beings, and also how, in the face of wiindigoo appetites and settler law, destructive misrecognition of who is and is not wiindigoo remains a problem that Anishinaabe law cannot always solve. What social repair is possible after and within the context of wiindigoo violence and the weetigo world it upholds and creates? Wiindigoo justice, then, as I extrapolate it from the novel, is both the process of recognizing and killing a wiindigoo (or *not* killing a non-

wiindigoo), and also the impossible question of how the people who have experienced wiindigoo violence return to appropriate relational patterns—impossible because while it cannot be answered in a programmatic way, it must be lived, and must be understood to be livable, or the entire process of trying to deal with wiindigoog becomes futile.

The Round House follows a family's quest for justice after rape, as one legal option after another fails, partly due to jurisdictional issues that the rapist deliberately exploits. This novel was published in October 2012, during a moment of escalating political pressure and frustration over the high percentage of Native American women who are raped, and the inability of United States law to make justice likely for these women (or, more precisely, the structured exclusion of Native American people from what justice United States law provides). When discussing the novel's attention to structures of law and jurisdiction that often prevent crimes against Native Americans from being prosecuted, Erdrich references the Tribal Law and Order Act of 2010 and the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2012, which, at the time of *The Round House*'s publication, had stalled in the House of Representatives due to Republican obstruction of the bill (Williams). The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act was signed into law on March 7, 2013, and returns more jurisdiction to Native nations in cases of domestic and sexual violence. This jurisdictional shift took effect for most Native American nations on March 7, 2015 (“Violence Against Women Act ...”).

Given the immediacy of the legal changes being sought at the moment of the book's publication, it's significant that the rape in the novel would certainly have been un-prosecutable in 1988, when the bulk of the novel takes place, and would probably *remain* un-prosecutable under the 2013 act as well. Erdrich explicitly frames her novel as one part of her political

advocacy for specific legislation, and yet that law would be unlikely to address the injustice that shapes the whole story of *The Round House*. The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 (VAWA 2013) gave tribal nations the authority to prosecute crimes of domestic violence committed on tribal lands (Deer 8). “Domestic violence” only includes rape and other forms of sexual violence when they are committed against a current or former intimate partner (Deer xviii). So, under VAWA 2013, the rape that is central to the novel would not be prosecutable tribally because the people involved were never intimate partners, and, even if this were different, the tribal right to prosecute might be called into question because of the jurisdictional ambiguity of the location of the crime. Wiindigoo justice is, in some ways, a paradox—when wiindigoo behavior upends and violates all appropriate relationships, as it does in United States and Canadian settler colonialism, how can there be justice concerning it? And yet, how can justice *not* be pursued, at least to stop the wiindigoo from doing more harm and devouring more lives?

In *The Round House*, thirteen-year-old Joe Coutts tries to discover who raped his mother, Geraldine, tried to kill her, and left her in a state of disconnection and depression. As he pursues justice for his mother, his grandfather, Mooshum, tells him a story of a woman who was unjustly accused of being a wiindigoo. The woman is Akiikwe, Earth Woman, the mother of Nanapush.¹⁰ This story from the past, nested in the larger narrative, offers one specific vision of how Anishinaabe law acknowledges and fosters relational patterns of consumption, in which beings can live and die and eat and feed each other without violation and relational rupture, and it contrasts this possibility with the threat of wiindigoo violence and misrecognition. Mooshum, in

10

Nanapush is an important living character in many of Erdrich’s other books and a dream-presence in this one.

his sleep, describes the starvation that accompanied being forced into reservation land, and how Akii and Mirage, her husband, had always been good at finding food “until the year they forced us into our boundary. The reservation year” (179). Thus, in this story as in the larger novel that contains it, settler law creates unlivable boundaries for the Anshinaabeg.

In this reservation winter, starvation, orchestrated by United States law and border restrictions, threatens Akii and Mirage and their children, and Mirage responds with misogynistic violence in the guise of wiindigoo recognition and wiindigoo justice, pretending that he perceives his wife becoming wiindigoo and convincing others that she must be killed, since consensus about recognizing and killing a wiindigoo is required by Anishinaabe law (180). The first wiindigoo accusation we encounter in the narrative, then, is a false one, a dramatic *injustice* that unfolds in accordance with Anishinaabe law, in circumstances created by United States law. Thus, it is clear that there is no guaranteed way to achieve wiindigoo justice, though there are many fairly certain ways to increase the possibility of wiindigoo violence. In this dream-story, the attack on Akii *as* a wiindigoo parallels the attack on Geraldine. The attack on Geraldine, in its turn, is framed by the book as an attack *by* a wiindigoo, Linden Lark. Linden Lark is eventually killed, as a wiindigoo, by Joe and his friend Cappy. The interwoven intimacies and explosive violence of this tangle emphasize the difficulty and necessity of discernment when it comes to wiindigoo justice.

In Mooshum's story, Nanapush¹¹ is chosen to kill his mother, and instead, certain that she

11 Ok... I didn't actually say everything relevant about Nanapush, because if I start then I have to confess that there are beings haunting and playing and doing stuff in this text that I'm simply not prepared to discuss as fully as they deserve. Some people call them tricksters, some culture heros, some elder siblings to human beings. I had intended to write a whole chapter about them, and the further I got, the more of a mess it became, and the more I realized that I do not know. Tricksters, so called, have always been pretty popular, but were especially popular from the late 1980s through the 1990s—right when Highway and Erdrich were writing some of their more famous books (Reder and Morra xi). Indigenous people, especially Highway, who explicitly (and favorably) compares the Trickster to Jesus, do and did tons of art featuring this kind of being. Non-Indigenous people,

is not a wiindigoo, he works to save her and they both escape. They engage in a difficult search for food in which Akii communicates with a fish and a rabbit who both offer her a buffalo song, while the rabbit also offers its body to eat by being trapped in their snare, creating a radically non-wiindigoo context for killing and eating and the violence these things require. Here, Akiikwe demonstrates not only a proper decision about whom to eat (a rabbit, not a human), but also kills-to-eat in a relational, reciprocal way involving the consent of the rabbit. She instructs her son to “throw every single one of its bones into the snow, so it can live again” (183). The obligation to the rabbit, engendered by its gift of life through its death, continues beyond the act of eating, and allows it to continue, even as eating its body allows the human beings to continue.

The buffalo song leads Akii to understand that Nanapush¹² can find a buffalo, even though this seems absurd to them at first, as the buffalo have at this point largely been exterminated through settler over-hunting, including deliberate large-scale slaughter designed to make buffalo extinct and thereby leave Native people who depend on the buffalo without food and a viable ecosystem. “All the animals miss the buffalo,” Akii tells her son, “but they miss the real Anishinaabeg too. Take the gun and travel straight into the west. A buffalo has come back from over that horizon. The old woman waits for you” (182-183). Nanapush finds and kills the

settler people, however, went especially nuts for the trickster in the 1990s, and often subsumed all such beings into one happy postmodern rebel (Fagan 9). I don't know how to sort out and do justice to McLeod's elder brother, transformer, and teacher *wîsahkêcâhk* (17) *and* Sinclair's amazing, angry, funny, violent, nasty-and-destructive-as-fuck shadow-being who nevertheless stumbles into a creation story (“Trickster Reflections Part II”). I feel that they relate to each other. But my feelings on the matter feel a little dangerous now that I understand how powerful these beings are and how seductive to settlers to find, categorize, and name. (It's true. Pretty much *everything* is seductive to settlers to find, categorize, and name.)

12 So. What's to be done with Nanapush and the other (maybe) tricksters who are here, there, and everywhere in the stories we'll be looking at together? I am going to try greeting them, here in the footnotes, and letting them off the analyzing hook, for now. Maybe another time I will be ready to say more. Nanapush is related to the Anishinaabe trickster, sometimes called Nanapush or Nanabush, sometimes called Nanabozho. Hello, Nanapush! Thank you for being in this story and on this page.

improbable buffalo, using the song the other animals have given to his mother. The killing of the buffalo is presented as a reciprocal dance of grief and giving between the young man and the buffalo woman: “Nanapush sang the [buffalo] song again because he knew the buffalo was waiting to hear it. When he finished, she allowed him to aim point-blank at her heart” (185). In a storm that arises immediately after he kills the buffalo, Nanapush climbs inside the buffalo's body for warmth and “[t]his buffalo adopted Nanapush and told him all she knew” (186). The violence of killing is not evaded. The relational context of that violence, however, is reciprocal and transformative—Nanapush is adopted by the buffalo through the gift of her body. This series of tender, intimate, though still violent, killings and eatings provides a dramatic contrast with the wiindigoo accusations that precipitated them, showing acts of relational killing-and-eating that contain and contextualize the violence of those acts within intimacy and consent.

In *Plants Have So Much to Give Us, All We Have to Do is Ask*, Mary Siisip Geniusz describes the relational structure out of which Anishinaabeg can ask for the lives of other beings to nourish their own: plants, as well as animals, must be asked directly for their lives, they should be given the honor of an explanation as to whom they will be feeding, strengthening, curing with their gift, and all of this must be done in a context of mutual care, in which the person taking the plant to eat will care for future generations of that plant (22). This kind of relationship, of deep mutual care and humility in the act of killing, where the creature whose body is being taken is more powerful than the creature whose body is taking, makes the experience of Nanapush with the buffalo woman coherent, even as it occurs in a moment where such relationship has been ruptured because of the overall destruction of settler colonial violence and its incoherent wiindigoo hungers. In *The Round House*, settler massacres of the buffalo and

the confinement of the Anishinaabeg in reservations disrupt the deep relationality of hunting and killing and eating, creating an opening in which Mirage can incite violence against his wife in the name of wiindigoo justice. Simultaneously, collaboration among various kinds of beings allows Akii and Nanapush to survive and Nanapush to learn from the buffalo in a relationship that goes beyond death. This reinforces the idea that anyone a person eats has given that person a gift of their body, which the giver/being-who-becomes-food can choose to offer or to withhold, demonstrates how Anishinaabe law encodes this process, and simultaneously shows that settler colonial institutions and the imaginaries that create and empower them make these relationships far more difficult and unlikely, leaving the way open for the disordered greed and destruction of wiindigoo appetites.

After the experience of intimate, relational killing and eating, the buffalo woman makes explicit the lesson of discernment necessary for recognizing and dealing with wiindigoog: “This buffalo knew what had happened to Nanapush's mother. She said that wiindigoo justice must be pursued with great care” (187). This story, and other wiindigoo stories, are what teaches the whole Coutts family to recognize the wiindigoo who has attacked Geraldine and is still threatening them all. The adult Joe looks back through the narration of the novel and says, “it was beyond me at the time to think of Mooshum's sleeptalking as a reading of traditional case law” (307). By saying this, Joe implies that as an adult, he *has* come to see this story as “a reading of traditional case law”: he insists upon the legal power and precedent in Akiikwe and Nanapush’s experience, demonstrating that it is not just United States laws that may be read as stories, but also Anishinaabe stories that may be read as laws.¹³

13

Sarah Deer offers several examples of how to use Indigenous stories to create more culturally appropriate tribal rape laws (119-121). See also the work of John Borrows, which we’ll discuss further later in the chapter.

Out of the lesson in law, hunting, discernment, and wiindigoo justice that he receives from his grandfather, Joe is left with the quest to find Geraldine's attacker. Immediately after Mooshum finishes the story of Akiikwe and Nanapush, Joe learns that Linden Lark has been arrested for raping Geraldine, a short-lived, ultimately unsuccessful moment of potential justice through United States law. Joe, along with readers of the novel, is given this tale of incorrect wiindigoo discernment that runs parallel to Joe's correct assessment of Linden as a wiindigoo, while Linden manipulates United States law to escape accountability for his acts of self-and-other consumption.

Linden is framed as a consumer of human flesh when his mother, Grace, persuades Linda, his estranged twin sister, to donate a kidney to him. Grace attempted to have Linda killed at birth because she was born with a "crumpled head, arm, and leg" (115). Instead, Linda was rescued and adopted by the Wishkob family and raised as Anishinaabe, though the Larks are white settlers. Out of this complex web of relationship, violence, and obligation, Linda donates her kidney to Linden once they are reunited as adults. She is told by the doctor who declares her a match that Linden has deliberately destroyed his own kidneys (124). In his senseless self-destruction, Linden reveals himself as wiindigoo, though Linda does not yet recognize this. In some stories, wiindigoog consume their own lips in their passionately destructive, never-satiable appetites for human flesh, and become recognizable because of their lipless faces; in consuming his own kidneys and poisoning his own body, Linden reveals the equivalent of chewed-off lips: the absurd and horrifying appetite that, in its hunger for its own species, also consumes itself. Despite these warnings, Linda goes through with the transplant.

Given that deeply reciprocal gifts of the body can be appropriate and empowering for

many beings in Anishinaabe law and custom, Linda's behavior in donating her kidney makes some sense: she has been asked, she has what is needed, and she knows for whom it is intended. Wiindigoo appetites—here explicitly connected to white settler identity—mimic the appropriate cycle of bodily offerings and consumption. Linda is born of a wiindigoo family, and, in the reverse of Nanapush's experience, she is temporarily unable to see her blood relatives for what they really are. The Larks-as-wiindigoog cannot be separated from the racial and cultural category Linda identifies as “white despair.” When she is three years old, Linda is briefly removed from the reservation by the government and temporarily placed in a foster home because her adoption by the Wishkobs is not recognized under United States law. In the foster home, Linda is terrified by “the smell of disinfectant and . . . *white despair*” (116, emphasis in text). White despair, for Linda, involves being “chosen” into violence, given an inheritance of destruction and wiindigoo appetites as the foundations of kinship and connection. White despair is whiteness and white settler identity, which Linda is able to perceive as horrific because of her adoption into the Wishkob family and Anishinaabe culture. The legal categories offered by the United States government for kinship and adoption are destructive categories for Linda, cooperating with her wiindigoog family members to bring her into violent relational circuits. She perceives Linden's wiindigoo violence consuming him and everything around him, but, in a parody of the reciprocation that could make Linda's gift appropriate, she gives her flesh to her brother to consume as he has consumed his own. Linda is made sick by this intimate consumption until her real family, the Wishkobs and other Anishinaabeg on the reservation, work to heal her. Linda's gift of her body does not create relationship in the way that the animals' giving of their bodies does with Akii and Nanapush, because Linda is feeding an insatiable

wiindigoo. Wiindigoo justice must be pursued with great care: Akii and Nanapush demonstrate the danger in misidentifying someone *as* wiindigoo, leading to attempted murder, but Linda demonstrates the danger in *not* recognizing the wiindigoo when the wiindigoo is present. Because of her non-recognition of Linden as wiindigoo, Linda's gift of her kidney becomes a destructive sacrifice that creates no benefit or real gift: Linden remains violent towards himself and others, until he is finally killed.

Linden attacks Geraldine at the round house, an Anishinaabe sacred space which was built according to Nanapush's instructions from the buffalo woman, and the shape and construction of it is patterned after her sheltering, saving body, and designed to remind the people of their relationships and obligations, particularly in the context of wiindigoo justice and the care it requires (187, 215). The round house is a holy *and* legal space which Linden exploits and perverts through his violent acts. Linden's attack, then, is a layered violation in keeping with his wiindigoo nature. The space of the round house, made to recreate the protection and revitalization offered by the buffalo woman's body, is remade as a space of danger by the laws that demarcate reservation boundaries and say who has jurisdiction over which area of land—the same process of demarcation and limitation that originally precipitates Mirage's inappropriate wiindigoo accusation, endangering Akiikwe. Linden uses the further reshaping of this space as a space ambiguously between United States and Anishinaabe jurisdiction to make his violence difficult to classify or punish in U.S. legal terms.

Geraldine, who has been closest to Linden's wiindigoo violence and survived it, is also the first one to name him directly as wiindigoo, which pushes Joe to enact revenge (248). Geraldine's identification of Linden as a wiindigoo demonstrates how wiindigoo recognition can

occur in ways that are not unjust, as is Mirage's incorrect "discernment" that his wife Akii was becoming wiindigoo. The trauma of Linden's attack has removed Geraldine from emotional reach for much of the novel (88). When she names Linden as wiindigoo, however, Geraldine is able to take actions again and to engage the world more fully. The recognition and naming of Linden separates her, on a spiritual and emotional level, from the violence that has left her with little appetite for food or life. United States law fails to hold Linden as a criminal, precisely because of the particular ways that federal Indian law is constructed, leaving Native people, and Native women in particular, vulnerable to attack. If Linden is a wiindigoo, it is possible that he can be defeated as one, and this possibility animates both Geraldine and Joe. Joe begins his work toward killing Linden, specifically because he believes Linden will succeed in killing his mother if left alone, and also because U.S. law has been unable to stop or contain Linden. As Joe moves toward this act of violence, he learns more about both U.S. and Anishinaabe law, creating various contexts and precedents for his understanding of how wiindigoo justice should proceed. This education is both comprehensive and, by necessity, incomplete—because Joe is a child, because the structures of Anishinaabe law, while extant, are violently subordinated to the structures of U.S. law, and because Anishinaabe education often lacks a goal of finality or completion, and wiindigoo justice is only possible to comprehend outside of the terms of such a goal.

Joe's father, Bazil, is deeply and desperately knowledgeable about U. S. federal Indian law, and also lays out a foundation for understanding Anishinaabe law. Bazil tells his son about the clan system as "the first system of Ojibwe law," in which "you knew your place in the world and your relationship to all other beings" (153). Bazil reads law in many simultaneous directions,

culturally and temporally, and tries to understand and change the structures that create it. He is a United States judge, and his work as a judge is rooted in his ability to see law as an undergirding story of social relations, wherever and however that story is told, rather than as a talisman of what is true or how people ought to behave. Bazil's definition of the clan system as law demonstrates that Bazil has learned to perceive and work with/in Anishinaabe law as well as with/in U.S. law.

When Joe confronts his father about the seeming futility of his legal work in the aftermath of the attack on Geraldine, Bazil pulls out a moldy casserole from the freezer and begins a bizarre lesson, stacking silverware all over the inedible mass and balancing Geraldine's good knives carefully on top. Finally, he explains: "That's Indian Law" (227-228). With the disgusting, precarious casserole starting to stink between them, Bazil walks Joe through a brief history of federal Indian cases, their rotten noodle foundations in dispossession, and then the silverware of sovereignty-strengthening decisions balanced on top of the spoiled food (229-230).

Through this disturbing demonstration, Bazil shows that his legal work is not based on a belief that federal Indian law, within its larger context of all United States law, has a basis that can be redeemed, but instead is about building upon and replacing, eventually, the irrevocable rot. Bazil is trying to make his son aware that the failure of settler law to be just is actually its success according to its own terms, but that he and other tribal judges are trying to change those terms, build something new upon the rot, and even use the rot to their ends.

This is not only a defensive process—responding to the rotten casserole that already exists—it is also a creative process, which John Borrows (Anishinaabe) defines and elaborates as the process of "drawing out law," in his book of the same title. Through an immensely layered

text about law that swirls together a surprising number of genres, Borrows, a Canadian law professor, offers elaborations of Anishinaabek law, through narrative, analysis, ideograms, dreams, and stories, and thereby creates a complex set of meanings for the phrase and project of “drawing out law.” In various moments throughout the book, the phrase is used to describe “drawing out” harmful laws from Canadian jurisdiction, as though drawing out poison from someone’s body (25), and as renewing and preserving traditions and stories across time and for the future—drawing out law across time for other generations (40). “Drawing out law” is also described as a process of creative problem solving and interpretation, specifically from holistic Indigenous, largely but not exclusively Anishinaabe, perspectives (138)—drawing out law is making something that was not there before. A few pages after this interpretation of the phrase as a process of creation, it’s offered as a joke about the antagonism and skepticism of a person in the text: “ ‘Draw, outlaw,’ ” a friend teases him, miming a gun with his fingers (141). This multiplicity of meaning is playful and also encapsulates Borrows’ project and process of thinking and writing through Anishinaabek law in a way that any one of these meanings would be incapable of on its own. Anishinaabek law is conveyed holistically, in interwoven interactions of experiences, traditions, and ideas, and this is presented by the grandmother of a law professor figure in the text who seems to mirror Borrows himself. Nokomis says: “Our traditions are abused when they aren’t cross-referenced and woven together. Their meaning should be drawn from how they interact with one another. They should be wound tightly around their subject, not scattered here and there. Since our ideas embody a world view, they must interact with all parts of the world” (219-220). Obviously, drawing out law is one aspect of many to follow through the book, but it nicely illustrates the way that the book’s generic complexity and layered storytelling

are essential to its project, and allow understandings of Anishinaabek law that are not possible according to the usual parameters of what law writing looks like and how it is structured in Canada and the United States.

Erdrich acknowledges *Drawing Out Law* as a resource for *The Round House*, and it makes sense to understand the embodied processes of justice-seeking that Joe, Bazil, and Geraldine engage in throughout the novel as aspects and manifestations of Borrows' project of drawing out Anishinaabek law. Prismatic complexity in both texts makes any one interpretation of what is drawn out impossible, and, according to Borrows, who emphasizes personal agency and interpretation as necessary elements of Anishinaabek law and storytelling, this kind of singular, resolved interpretation is not desired, useful, or possible.¹⁴ Returning to Bazil's rotting casserole of Indian law with this understanding in mind, it is possible to perceive the convergence of drawing out the poison (or building around the rot) of settler colonial law and drawing out new legal creations through existing Anishinaabe traditions. Bazil's suspension of Geraldine's good knives in the casserole becomes something with real creative potential, despite the unfixable inability of this casserole to ever be the food it was intended to be. Similarly, the drawing out of Anishinaabek law has the potential to transform settler law even as the parameters of settler law cannot be extricated from their roots in violent dispossession of Indigenous peoples.

In this particular, intimate situation of wiindigoo violence and the pursuit of justice, however, the structure Bazil is trying to build is insufficient to actually circumvent Linden's violence; no legal actions he takes have any impact on Linden for very long. Joe and his friend

¹⁴ Many additional sources I have encountered about Anishinaabe, Cree, and other Native American forms of education, storytelling, and learning emphasize this relational, individual interpretive experience, including the aforementioned McLeod and Gross, and also Sylvia Moore.

Cappy plot together to kill Linden, and, although Joe tries to do it alone, in the end Cappy must finish it for him, and Linda helps conceal the evidence of her brother's killing (280-283, 300-301). Is this the way to kill a wiindigoo, according to Anishinaabe law? Perhaps—especially as Joe does not do it alone. Perhaps not—no open decision was made as a group that this should be done. Also, according to the process of drawing out law, of education, of stories, and of justice-seeking that we have seen so far, Joe, Cappy, and Linda's actions become their living of the story/law/teaching. By attempting wiindigoo justice, they draw it into a new shape.

Bazil is concerned with how these actions—which he doesn't fully admit to knowing about—can be interpreted in both Anishinaabe and U.S. law. He tells Joe that he has developed a defense for the killer of Linden—a defense based upon Anishinaabe law, in which he identifies Linden as a wiindigoo, and says that in this capacity it is appropriate for Linden to have been put to death, and that therefore he would not turn in Linden's killer to United States authorities if asked to do so (306). This is a complex intersection of United States and Anishinaabe law, and what does it tell us about wiindigoo justice? The buffalo woman tells Nanapush that wiindigoo justice “must be pursued with great care,” in the context of teaching him how to build the sacred space of the round house using the pattern of her body. She does not say wiindigoo justice can, necessarily, be achieved. Appetites can be fed through sacred relationship or wiindigoo violence, and although a wiindigoo must be killed, there is no indication that this killing, itself, *is* the wiindigoo justice being sought. After Joe and Cappy kill Linden, Geraldine is physically safe. Geraldine, Bazil, and Joe can resume life as a family. But, as Bazil points out, the consequences of killing do not dissipate because of its necessity. Cappy and Joe are haunted by nightmares and start drinking more heavily, eventually leading to a car accident in which Cappy is killed. This

death is shocking, sudden, and never processed in the text, as the book ends very shortly after. Although we know Joe has lived on for decades and become an adult who is telling this story, the narrative ends almost immediately after Cappy ends. The aftermath of this death—certainly not justice, not exactly violence, not in a cycle of relational consumption, just an accident—is not accessible in *The Round House*, and yet it also cannot be ignored. The final lines of the book describe Bazil and Geraldine and Joe riding home in their car on the night that Cappy died: “We passed over in a sweep of sorrow that would persist into our small forever. We just kept going” (317). The end of the book literally lacks completion or finality; it is all movement, emotion, continuance. This ending-without-finitude does not imply that Joe and his family have arrived at justice through their pursuit of it, even though Linden the wiindigoo is dead, and therefore their lives are less immediately threatened by the wiindigoo-making processes of U.S. law. What it does imply, though, is that, in the absence of the wiindigoo, life can continue—not without violence, not without killing or death, but with the relationships that make the actual processes of life meaningful, and, in the deepest sense, lawful. Wiindigoo justice cannot be achieved as a final or fixed end, and yet it must be pursued, carefully, especially in the context of settler colonialism’s weetigo world.

The weetigo and the processes of wíhtikowipayi also haunt and saturate Tomson Highway's first and so far only novel, *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, and are manifest in individuals and institutions. *Kiss of the Fur Queen* was published in 1998, after a long journey to print via many potential genres and media: it was first written as an autobiography, then a play, a movie, a much longer novel, and finally as the version of the novel that was published (McKengey 138). Highway describes his process coming to the novel as his genre as “the only way possible” to

convey what he wished to about residential schools, partially because the parts of the story that were directly based on his life and his brother René's life were often seen, when he tried to write about or otherwise present them, as fantastical and fictional (152). While many Canadian settler institutions show their weetigo teeth in this novel, one exposed as organized around weetigo appetites is the Indian residential school.

Since Canada's Indian residential schools closed, Indigenous people who attended them as children have made claim after claim of sexual abuse perpetrated by the white settler school administrators, teachers, and staff. Indeed, Bruce Feldthusen, a law professor at the University of Ottawa, argues that the project of the schools themselves, by separating children from parents, violently divesting children of and punishing them for language and culture, and creating an environment that was physically and emotionally unhealthy, nurtured conditions in which sexual and other kinds of abuse flourished. While sexual abuse was not explicitly allowed by the schools, this pervasive pattern of sexual abuse fits very neatly into the schools' overall project, which I refer to as a project of ontological unmaking: taking apart the children's selves in the context of their relationships, their languages, their homes, and, here, the autonomy of their bodies and spirits. Jennifer Hamilton, also writing about indigeneity and the law, asserts that “[r]esidential schools implemented a well-established technology that targeted the spirits, minds, feelings, and bodies of its wards” (38). The destructive “technology” of the schools is created in explicit effort to destroy the political and governmental efficacy of Indigenous nations via the re-education of their children. Mark Rivkin folds the United States Indian boarding schools into an imagined narrative of domesticity and family life designed to negate the threat that Indigenous forms of kinship and government pose to the settler state (*When Did Indians ...* 37-40). Sexual

abuse, then, can be seen as one enactment of the particular demand of how kinship, and thereby also politics, and thereby also the settler state-in-its-permanent-crisis, shall be articulated and formed. Abuse becomes not aberration, but fulfillment of the demand on which residential schools were founded; this is what makes them classifiable as weetigo institutions. Widespread recognition and discussion of abuse of all kinds in residential schools became an aspect of public discourse in Canada in the 1980s, when some survivors of abuse in these schools initiated lawsuits against the Canadian government and the churches that ran specific schools. Through the early 1990s, the official responses of the Canadian government were mostly evasive and disbelieving about the existence of this abuse. In this context, Indigenous people, including Tomson and René Highway, made art of all kinds to make residential school abuse visible, noticeable, socially present.

In the 1980s, René Highway choreographed and performed in *New Song ... New Dance*, for which Tomson Highway composed and performed the music, and when he spoke about this piece, René Highway emphasized its intricate relationship to both autobiography and residential school: ‘On some level it is autobiographical.... But it is more like a general autobiography of not just myself but of other native people who have been through the whole boarding school experience’ (Schudeler 10). Thus, the dance piece, like his brother’s eventual novel, has a generic flexibility, pulling the intensely individual account required by a “real” autobiography into something more expansive and communal. Using René Highway’s choreography notes, June Schudeler connects the dancing in *New Song ... New Dance* to the same intense tangle of sexual abuse, sexual desire, and Catholic imagery that Tomson Highway makes inescapable in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (11). René Highway died of AIDS-related meningitis in 1990, eight years

before the publication of *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, which McKegney describes as “very much an elegy,” citing the Cree dedication, “Igwani igoosi, n’semis”—which translates approximately to ‘this one’s for you, little brother’” (136). In this dedication, the novel is offered as something akin to the artistic collaboration between Tomson and René Highway in *New Song ... New Dance* and other projects they did together, and also to the artistic collaboration the two main characters of the novel (also brothers, also a dancer/choreographer and pianist/writer) engage in over and over again, in almost every moment and aspect of their lives. This collaborative essence is not expected in a novel, which is usually presented as a singular artistic project produced by a single author. Yet if *Kiss of the Fur Queen* is a collaboration, it is a collaboration with a dead person, with an artist whose work was through and with his body, and whose bodily existence has been fundamentally transformed by death. No “non-fictional” collaborations are possible with the dead in a Eurowestern cultural framework, but a novel, within that same framework, is explicitly “unreal,” and so it has access to otherwise inaccessible people, from the dead to the never-living. Cree narrative memory, on the other hand, is an explicit, constant collaboration between the dead and the living (McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory*).

Knowing this background, we come to *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and find a story that has existed in many genres and artistic contexts, resolving finally into the novel, but always shadowed by its layered relationship to truth (i.e., it is the life of René Highway, in all his realness, after death, *and* it is a fictional story, *and* it is a testimony to Tomson and René Highway’s lived experiences *and* it is outside of the realm of factuality demanded by biographical testimony). The novel comes to exist within an expansive Cree cosmology that envelopes the Euro-Canadian, settler colonial, and Catholic imaginaries that make their violent

bids for supremacy. This multiplicity parallels the many genres of weetigo stories: Are weetigos unreal beings, “only stories?” Are they the products of psychosis with real cannibalistic behavior? Are they a spiritual manifestation of settler colonialism and settler colonists? Are they opportunistic monsters that attach to whomever and whatever they can? Is *Kiss of the Fur Queen* fiction? Is it autobiographical account? Is it created by one Highway brother or by two? These unresolvable riddles speak to the whole project of re-conceiving the ontological and cosmological and political and social narratives that settler colonialism offers in the context of Indigenous imaginaries. This novel, like many Indigenous texts, exemplifies the inadequacy of settler colonial epistemological order in the very multiplicity of its possible genres and forms.

In *Fur Queen*, the protagonists are two brothers, Jeremiah and Gabriel Okimasis, whose lives parallel and intersect with the experiences of Tomson and René Highway. Despite the inability of weetigo people and institutions to recognize the brothers as human, Cree, and not-to-be-devoured, Jeremiah and Gabriel find survival and selfhood in their abilities to accurately and clearly recognize the weetigo in all its monstrosity. The problem of the weetigo rests upon incredibly high-stakes questions of proper discernment and recognition: who is morally edible, who is human, and who is really weetigo. In the weetigo world of settler colonial governments and societal structures, this recognition is made more difficult and complex by the interest and efficiency of various settler institutions engaging in and encouraging wîhtikowipayi. For Jeremiah and Gabriel, this recognition is made possible through their connection to Cree stories and people, a version of Cree narrative memory, but it is also truncated and hindered by their experiences in the weetigo institution of residential school and the abusive priest Father Lafleur. Even as their experiences at school teach them to surrender themselves to weetigo appetites,

perceived as legitimate authority rather than (or in addition to being) monstrous violence, the stories told to them by other Cree people persist, keeping the idea of weetigo in their minds until they are able to recognize the monsters with whom and under whose power they have been living.

The weetigo is first mentioned early in the novel as Abraham Okimasis, Jeremiah and Gabriel's father, comes home to his village of Emanapiteepitat in Northern Manitoba after his heroic victory in a dogsled race. Abraham, riding into town on his sled, recognizes his home in a whirlwind litany of relationships and associations, including "the house of the widow Jackfish Head Lady, who once had a near-death encounter with the cannibal spirit Weetigo just off Tugigoom Island" (15). Weetigo as "cannibal spirit" is connected clearly to both person and place, and Jackfish Head Lady, while introducing the weetigo as immensely threatening, also demonstrates that encounters with this monster can be survived. The description of Abraham's entry into Emanapiteepitat establishes it as a Cree place, laden with Cree narrative memory, which McLeod defines as relational, collective, and constitutive of *nêhiyâwiwin* (Cree-ness). It is the living process of Cree narrative memory that riddles the landscape with stories: as Abraham moves physically into his home-space, he also experiences the memories and stories that give Emanapiteepitat context and meaning. The introduction of the weetigo in this novel comes through Jackfish Head Woman's particular experience with it, which is narrated through her relation to Abraham, placing the beings of Enmanapiteepitat in a relational context that McLeod also theorizes in the context of Cree forms of kinship, or *wâhkȚhtowin*. Thus, the weetigo's interaction with people is described alongside interactions among people and between people and place. All of these webs of relationality, *wâhkȚhtowin*, clearly mark Emanapiteepitat as a Cree

home-space.

Most of the jubilant details given in this passage that create Emanapiteepitat as a place of nêhiyâwiwin/Cree-ness are about people we will never hear from again, however—a narrative framing that mirrors the way Abraham's sons, Jeremiah and Gabriel, are severed from their home by residential school and the school's abusive principal, Father Lafleur. Though the first is an institution and the second is a man, they work in tandem, consumed by and productive of weetigo hungers. If this severance was stopped, could Jackfish Head Lady have taught Jeremiah and Gabriel how to survive and escape the weetigo? She is one of many Cree and Ojibwe/Anishinaabe women associated with the brothers who demonstrate the mutually creative and protective kinship the brothers *could have* experienced with them, but which is made much more difficult (and in some cases impossible) by the boys' removal to residential school and the severance from their community that follows. The destruction and the persistence of wâhkȚhtowin and, more generally, various Native forms of kinship, are inseparable from political identity and power available to Indigenous peoples, which makes Native families and intimate relationships of all kinds political targets for settler governments.

Jeremiah and Gabriel are the youngest sons of Abraham and his wife Mariesis. Jeremiah is first named Champion, and Gabriel is called Ooneemetoo, which means Dancer in Cree. They are stripped of their birth names and given their biblical ones by residential school and baptism, respectively. The brothers are inseparable until Jeremiah is taken away to Birch Lake Residential School at the age of six, where first he, and, later, Gabriel, encounter a weetigo directly in the form of the abusive Father Lafleur.

Kiss of the Fur Queen offers an artistic testimonial, clearly demonstrating the connection

of residential schools as a colonial project with the abuse that was endemic within them. While the novel only shows us the perspectives of Jeremiah and Gabriel, it also gives us to understand that Father Lafleur sexually abuses nearly all the children he encounters (110). Weetigo hunger is insatiable, the appetite for human flesh breeding more desire for it, and the schools themselves invited and were structured to support and nurture that process of *wihtikowipayi*, which, in this book, is perceptible through sexual abuse and rape, rather than through literal cannibalism.

When Champion Okimasis arrives at Birch Lake Residential school, he meets Father Lafleur as his hair is cut according to the school's mandate. The haircut terrifies and disempowers Champion. During the haircut, the priest's first act is to strip him of his name and refigure him Jeremiah. In this meeting, Father Lafleur's predatory nature is both palpably present and disguised within the priestly authority Champion has been taught to respect.

Even Father Lafleur's voice is “fleshy,” tethered to his bodily appetites, while his eyebrows hint at his predatory nature even as they are comically described as “so black and bushy they could have been fishing lures.” He is explicitly framed as an animal and has a weird sensory Catholic sacramental residue, smelling of “sacramental wine” and with incense “appear[ing] to rise like a fog off...his cassock.” Through this imagery, his body seems to be physically constituted by the religion whose authority he wields against the children in his care. Once Champion's head has been shaven, cold air grabbing his head like a disturbingly physical hand, evokes the huge, sometimes-embodied, sometimes-spiritual weetigo of the winter, with an ice heart or skeleton. In this, their first encounter, Father Lafleur and Champion argue over what identity Champion will have and which of them gets to know him by name—in the end, the priest wins, and Jeremiah will be the name he comes to call himself, as well as the name the

book's narration calls him. The process of ontological unmaking is underway, and it is largely constituted by Father Lafleur's wíhtikowipayi, weaving the priest's particular cannibalistic appetites tightly together with the structures of the school and the religion itself. These structures are embodied here in the roster with the authority to override Champion's self-speech and the forced haircut that leaves him open to the cold grip hinting at the weetigo's threatening influence over this place (54-55).

Father Lafleur's predatory sexual appetites continue to reveal themselves in sinister moments before he is directly revealed as both weetigo and abuser. When Champion-Jeremiah hears a piano being played, he is transfixed with desire, and therefore he speaks “a complete sentence in the English” for the first time, telling Father Lafleur “Wan play piano!” (64-65). The priest’s hungry eyebrows are back, this time as “furry caterpillars arching for a meal,” and throughout the scene, Champion-Jeremiah reads Father Lafleur's body avidly, searching his eyebrows and lips for any sign of approval or disapproval, to see if he might get what he wants, access to the musical instrument. This scene is focused on awakening desires in both the participants, Champion-Jeremiah for piano and Father Lafleur for Champion-Jeremiah to sexually consume. Even prior to his sexual assault of Champion-Jeremiah, Father Lafleur and his body must be properly interpreted and interacted with for Champion-Jeremiah to get the music he needs and thereby the education he actually wants. Champion-Jeremiah already understands the authority of Father Lafleur's body over his existence at residential school, making its violent appetites particularly powerful and hard to deflect on a psychological, as well as physical, level. The moments in this scene in which Father Lafleur's sexual predation emerges are strange, funny, and disturbing:

‘Then sing for me,’ drawled Father Lafleur. Putting lighted match to a thick, brown cigar, he sank back into his giant leather chair...

‘Ateek, ateeek! Astum, astum!...Yoah, ho-ho!’

...The priest’s spine began to buzz, ever so vaguely, ever so faintly, but he was unaware that once—just once—his tongue darted out and licked his lower lip.

Champion-Jeremiah saw it ... And he knew then that he had the principal of the Birch Lake Indian Residential School squarely in the palm of his hand (66-67).

Father Lafleur's demand that Champion-Jeremiah sing is framed with villainously phallic imagery that is so extreme as to be funny, with his suddenly appearing cigar—and much that happens in this scene recurs throughout the novel: the juxtaposition of comedy and horror, the disturbingly direct images of Father Lafleur's sexual attraction to the boys, and the complex conjunction of abasement and power/desire that the boys experience in the shadow of the priest's desires and abuse. As he attempts to gain access to the piano, Champion-Jeremiah uses his most personal strengths and joys to demonstrate his musical ability, singing a caribou-summoning song he made up as his first composition, to accompany Gabriel’s dancing. It is in response to this core expression of Champion-Jeremiah's talents, relationships, Cree-ness, and self-understanding that Father Lafleur's spine buzzes, a marker of sexual desire throughout the novel. An important characteristic of the weetigo is that it is not satisfied by anything other than human flesh and can never get enough human flesh; while weetigo behavior sometimes begins in times of starvation, there are many stories in which the horror of the cannibalism is heightened by emphasis on other food being available for the person-becoming-weetigo to eat. Here, Father Lafleur's weetigo appetites for Champion-Jeremiah's body are actuated through the boy's

expression of cultural, personal, and familial identity; nothing about Champion-Jeremiah's particular selfhood is incidental to Father Lafleur's appetite for him, just as a person who has become weetigo desires to eat other human beings *because* they are human, though they may also mis-recognize their victims' humanness in the moment of predation. The fullness of Champion-Jeremiah's identity is, of course, precisely the target of the residential school's unmaking project: both the institutional and the personal weetigo appetites crave the personal *and* cultural specificity they are poised to destroy. Also, Champion-Jeremiah, in his survival-based analysis of Father Lafleur's body, sees the lip-licking that the priest himself is not aware that he's doing. Champion-Jeremiah is correct when he realizes the licked lips mean that he has power over Father Lafleur in some way, but has no idea that this power is predicated upon the priest's rapacious weetigo appetite, nor that the school routinely offers its students to satisfy this appetite at immense costs to their bodies and selves. The power of being desired becomes, here, the power of being consumed, of being the one for whom another's appetite is sharp. There is actual power in this role. In this case, however, that power is inseparable from self-destruction, or at least participation in the destruction that the weetigo bears in its monstrous appetite. Residential school education—in its physical structure, its removal from Emanapiteepitat and other Cree home spaces, its organizational rules, its religious framing—fattens the brothers and the other students for a weetigo's consumption and prepares them to attempt to accept it.

Eventually, Father Lafleur's weetigo identity and sexual abusiveness are made explicit when he molests Gabriel and Jeremiah witnesses it. The scene narratively pins the reader, along with Gabriel, uncomfortably close to Father Lafleur, whom we are reminded has dual authority as both principal and priest. Father Lafleur's face is “inches” from Gabriel's and he holds him

down with one arm while Gabriel and reader follow the other “under Gabriel’s bedspread ... blanket ... sheet ... pyjama bottoms” (ellipses in text). This progressive list of things that Father Lafleur’s hand is “under” inevitably lead to Gabriel’s body and genitals, forcing reader and child to awareness of what is happening explicitly and slowly. Gabriel describes Father Lafleur’s breath as “raw meat hung to age but forgotten”: food, but disgusting, no-longer-appetizing food that has been treated inappropriately, which could suggest to him that Father Lafleur’s appetites, in turn, are suspect, potentially rotten. Instead, because of the structures of the school and the priest’s religious authority, Gabriel decides, correctly in practice if not in explicit principle, that this abuse is “merely another reason why he had been brought here,” the “right” of Father Lafleur (as well as other “holy men”) to abuse his charges in this way (76). This *is*, in many ways, another reason he's been brought to school, a coherent piece of the project of ontological unmaking.

Throughout this scene, we are confronted with intense juxtapositions within the experience of abuse. The narrative focus shifts from Father Lafleur’s hand against Gabriel’s penis to the silver crucifix he is wearing, which rubs against Gabriel’s mouth as the priest rubs Gabriel’s genitals. The crucifix is personified as “fleshly”—almost the same word used, originally, to describe Father Lafleur’s voice—and emphasized as living several times, even while the silver metal it is made of creates particular sensations and tastes. The crucifix becomes a man, becomes Jesus as God-man, and also tastes like a food, “warm honey,” and *all* of these identities and sensations are subsumed into Gabriel’s sexual pleasure in the confusing context of Father Lafleur’s abuse. This section is inescapably sexual, not just for Father Lafleur, but for Gabriel as well, and in both pleasant and unpleasant ways: the priest’s “throbbing,” the “over and

over and over again” rubbing of the crucifix, Gabriel’s combined lack of strength and experience of “pleasure in his centre,” Gabriel’s consumption of the “achingly beautiful” Jesus all create a narrative rhythm of Gabriel's erotic arousal and perhaps orgasm. Again, the reader is held by the narration in Gabriel’s place and his experience, which highlights the violation of the abuse without denying Gabriel his own sexual life and range of sexual response, even as a child. Gabriel’s experiences of disjunction, ambivalence, childhood sexuality, and pleasure reveal that it’s not the responsibility of a victim of sexual abuse *only* to *suffer* in order for the violence to be read as such. The irreducibility of Gabriel’s experiences also draws readers into his selfhood that the school works hard to destroy. Like many weetigo encounters, this one occurs in the terrible, violent confusion of appetites that are powerful but not always harmful, not always violations, and in this misrecognition, it opens the possibility of further violence and confusion of appetite.

While Gabriel is being abused by Father Lafleur, Jeremiah witnesses what’s happening, and only through this does he briefly connect to his own experience of being abused, and explicitly name Father Lafleur as weetigo.

A dark, hulking figure hovered over [Gabriel], like a crow. Visible only in silhouette, for all Jeremiah knew it might have been a bear devouring a honeycomb, or the Weetigo feasting on human flesh.

...[H]e thought he could hear the smacking of lips, mastication....

The bedspread was pulsating, rippling from the centre. No, Jeremiah wailed to himself, *please*. Not him again ... When the beast reared its head, it came face to face ... with ... Jeremiah Okimasis. The whites of the beast’s eyes grew large,

blinked once. Jeremiah stared. It *was* him. Again.

[...] Some chamber deep inside his mind slammed permanently shut. It had happened to nobody. He had not seen what he was seeing (79-80).

The association of Father Lafleur's sexual attack on Gabriel with his *wihtikowipayi* is connected to patterns of *weetigo* stories in Algonquian cultures that span centuries and carry into the present. Smallman identifies a thematic pattern in *windigo* stories of the *windigo's* destruction of kinship, sometimes enacted through sexual violence, sometimes prevented through sexual violence against the *windigo* (47). The residential school system, directly and variously, assaults Native kinship. Father Lafleur, through his sexual violence, enacts *weetigo* kinship and *weetigo* sexuality. Jeremiah, though it will be years until he is able to open the shut door in his mind and recognize these actions of Father Lafleur as *rape* committed against him and Gabriel, *does* perceive Father Lafleur, in this moment of witness, as *weetigo*. Something of this Cree story has sunk into him and is available to him to recognize, despite the complex educational work that has attempted to make the residential school's abusive, *weetigo* kinship patterns the only ones these children can comprehend themselves within. Knowing and seeing the *weetigo* is possible when knowing and seeing the abuser is not, and this demonstrates the lifeline that Cree narrative memory provides for the brothers, and also the failure of the schools to do what they set out to do and ontologically unmake those they forcibly educated, despite the real and ongoing devastating impacts they have had. Instead, in the very moment of intense violation that we witness, Cree stories give Jeremiah a context for perceiving Father Lafleur as something other than a priest, a holy man, and a principal: he is also a monster perceptible *through* Cree stories, and a monster

that can be defeated, with the means of his destruction available in the same Cree narrative memory that has given them the knowledge of the weetigo in the first place.

When Jeremiah and Gabriel are reunited as teenagers in Winnipeg after leaving Birch Lake Residential School, they tell each other a story they know of the weetigo. As the boys explore a large mall, they are surrounded and seduced by the consumption of food, clothes, and sex, and weetigo imagery extends to the socks they consider buying: “[Gabriel] ... was scandalized to hear that Argyle was a Scottish earl who drank his enemies’ blood ... and then went home to eat their children. So brutal was the tale that Gabriel threw a curse at an entire rack of the lugubrious knitwear” (117). Here, European cannibalism and bloodlust are commodified, casually enshrined in objects that invite the boys’ consumer lust, drawing them towards wíhtikowipayi. In this moment, also, the novel reminds us that weetigo behavior is present throughout European history, turning the weetigo diagnostic lens toward the colonizers. Throughout this scene and others in Winnipeg, weetigo identity expands beyond its particular attachment to Father Lafleur, and is shown, therefore, as endemic to settler colonial society.

The mall itself is illustrated in weetigo terms, consuming Jeremiah and Gabriel as it entices them to consume: “[T]hey came across the belly of the beast—one hundred restaurants in a monstrous, seething clump....The world was one great, gaping mouth....The roar of mastication drowned out all other sound, so potent that, before the clock struck two, the brothers were gnawing away with the mob.... [T]he mall loomed behind them, the rear end of a beast that, having gorged itself, expels its detritus” (119-121). The brothers are clearly both being consumed by this mall-weetigo-thing and participating in its consumption. Weetigo world widens: not just Father Lafleur or the school have these appetites, but they are enshrined and

produced in a weetigo capitalism, which Kimmerer calls a windigo economy, fueled by uncontrolled consumption and artificial scarcity (Kimmerer 376). Here, shopping in the mall, the Cree weetigo story they have learned as children returns to the Okimasis brothers. The story is so integrated into the rest of the mall experience that it is difficult to pull out representative portions. Through this organization of the textual storytelling, Cree narrative memory is woven into all the details of life, and so this story emerges relationally in the context of the Okimasis brothers' experience of the weetigo appetites all around them. The boys recall their aunt's story of Weesageechak¹⁵ coming to earth disguised as a weasel and crawling up the weetigo's "bumhole," chewing up the weetigo's entrails, and coming out again covered in shit—which he is cleansed of by being dipped in the river, but left with a black tail. In *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, this story was first told by the boys' aunt, Black-eyed Susan Magipom. Abraham explicitly forbids his wife and children to visit with Black-eyed Susan, whom he calls wicked because his allegiance to Catholicism convinces him she should remain with the abusive husband she has left. Despite this prohibition, Mariesis brings her sister to their home when Abraham is absent, and so Black-eyed Susan knows her nephews and tells them stories. The networks of connection and kinship with women that so often are destroyed in this novel, are, in this crucial moment, salvaged enough that Black-eyed Susan can give her nephews the story they will later desperately need.

As Jeremiah and Gabriel work their way through the mall and the weetigo story simultaneously, they identify the story's profanity and combination of sexual humor and violence as inconceivable within the Catholic framework of Birch Lake and Father Lafleur, as

¹⁵ Weesageechak is a Cree hero. Some, including Highway, call him a trickster. Some, including McLeod, say this is a misnomer and call him elder brother. Sometimes, as we'll see in *Wakening*, Weesageechak is a woman. However it may be best to refer to this being, let's notice and greet Weesageechak. I am so glad Weesageechak is here, generally, and *here*, inside the buttole and entrails of the weetigo specifically.

well as within the English language itself. ““You could never get away with a story like that in English”” (118), and the boys relate how they were told by the priest that the words “bumhole” and “shit” were mortal sins—but only in English. In Cree, these words are speakable, and part of a complicated, violent, funny, heroic story of spiritual and physical (perhaps sexual) triumph over the weetigo. In fact, through their knowledge of Cree and having heard and understood the story in Cree as children, they are able to now speak the words and the story in English, in defiance of the priest’s rules.

As the brothers retell the story and approach the sexual violence that undoes the weetigo in it, they react strongly without explicitly recognizing the relationship to their own experiences of sexual violence and weetigo attack: as Gabriel examines some underwear with a sexualized “rapacity,” he also describes the weasel-Weesageechak “crawl[ing] up the Weetigo’s bumhole,” which provokes Jeremiah, “in spite of himself” to “explode[] with jagged laughter”(118). The forbidden scatological words and humor make space for laughter and sexual desire, two things made dangerous, sinful, and sometimes inaccessible for the boys through their experiences at Birch Lake.

In these moments, as at school, the boys are unable to name or discuss their abuse. But they *are* able, in the context of this story, to recognize the weetigo, and, through that recognition, to laugh at and gain power over their abuser. The story from childhood acts as Cree narrative memory for the Okamasis brothers, connecting their own personal histories to the much larger context of their people, and thereby it has a strong impact, pulling Jeremiah’s jagged, ambivalent laughter out of him. Jagged laughter is solicited by many parts of this novel—laughter that cuts, that goes in like a weasel up an ass, where a serious description of pain cannot reach or be

countenanced, and this kind of laughter both reveals and destroys something monstrous. The Okimasis brothers are not safe in the mall, in the sense of being freed from weetigo threat because they have left the immediate orbit of Father Lafleur. They are not safe in Winnipeg. The power of the weetigo is not just Father Lafleur's manifestation of wîhtikowipayi, it is the wîhtikowipayi of the settler colonial society crafted as and in Canada. Father Lafleur is a weetigo, and must be recognized as such, but the threat of the weetigo extends far beyond him.

This is weetigo world: the social context of settler colonialism that is so encompassing as to make weetigo appetites almost ubiquitous and in which wîhtikowipayi becomes a process expected, in various ways, as the activity of maturation, education, and/or becoming a recognizable citizen of a settler colonial nation. Nonetheless, and in fact precisely in this dangerous context—in which priests, churches, schools, governments, socks, food, malls can all contain and nurture weetigo appetites, the forbidden story of the abused boys' likewise forbidden and abused aunt gives them an escape route into and through their own maligned Cree-ness/nêhiyâwiwin. The weetigo in this story can be seen. This weetigo can be talked about, laughed at, and even conquered in the very realm of sexual violence that is so impossible for the boys to otherwise reckon with at this point in their lives. This process shows us Cree narrative memory as counter-narrative to settler colonialism, creating possibilities that are literally unimaginable within the “stories empire tells about itself” (Byrd). It is not just the existence of other possibilities that is elided in these empire-told, empire-contained stories. Rather, what these possibilities are and how they play out are *also* hard to articulate within the usual templates and rhythms of such stories. As *Kiss of the Fur Queen* unfolds within Cree epistemologies, it refuses to rest in the dichotomies of trauma as opposed to hope, or tragedy that is separate from humor.

These oppositions, and the storytelling expectations they carry with them, are part of colonial epistemology, and thus they are fatal even as they are fatally flawed.

This recognition of weetigo world and refusals of its dichotomies signal the possibility and action of Cree ontological *re*-making. It isn't just that the boys perceive the weetigo, it's that in so doing, they reconstitute their wâhkȫhtowin, the kinship that has been attacked and beleaguered, but which still exists and sustains them as particular, individual, relational Cree selves. *Kiss of the Fur Queen* lays open the rupture and violation of weetigo world and demonstrates Cree methodologies for its navigation and survival.

In both *The Round House* and *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, the windigo figure is defeated. In the former, he is actually killed, while in the later, the Okimasis brothers achieve their own escape from his appetite through their artistic collaborations and reconnections to their Cree story-worlds. What does windigo justice actually look like, feel like, what does it accomplish, in a settler colonial context that depends on ongoing cycles of weetigo worlding to maintain itself and grow its excessive appetites? There are two more contemporary Indigenous imaginings of the windigo interwoven with the destructive appetites of settler colonialism, that offer two pictures of what it might look like to transform windigo relationships and thus do a different kind of worlding; with what we have already explored in Erdrich and Highway's novels, they can help us approach the above question about windigo justice.

In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, biologist Robin Wall Kimmerer (Citizen Potawatomi Nation), uses the figure of the windigo to contain and describe the world-destructive greeds of capitalism, private property, and pollution, among other engines of windigo worlding. She asserts that while what she calls "windigo economics" will, through climate change, eventually destroy itself, it is

not sufficient to wait for this to happen, because (as we also have seen in *The Round House*), in the windigo's self-destruction, it also destroys many others. Through her study of Algonquian stories, she creates a story of her own imagined preparations to encounter and counter windigo: surrounded by powerful, self-aware plants who give themselves as medicine, she encounters the trickster Nanabozho, who encourages her to "think like the monster" in order to effect its defeat. So, she makes an extremely strong buckthorn tea. Buckthorn, Kimmerer explains is "a winner on the free market, a success story based on efficiency, monopoly, and the creation of scarcity" and "a biological imperialist" because it thrives by poisoning the soil to other species and depriving other plants of life and nourishment—the tea she makes with it, because of these properties of the buckthorn, is a powerful emetic. When the terrifying windigo shows up at her house, she gives him the tea, and he is so greedy for it that he drinks an entire kettle and immediately starts vomiting and having diarrhea. What comes out of him includes all kinds of industrial and economic waste. At this point, it seems that the windigo is defeated, and, perhaps, the story over, but instead Kimmerer offers him another tea, made with healing plants, and he is able to drink it in salutary moderation. As he recovers, she begins to tell him a Potawatomi creation story, which she describes as the final aspect of this medicine, and which is also the story that opens the book (377-379).

What Kimmerer plays out in this imagined scene is an iteration of windigo justice through a transformation of the windigo's relationship to whom it eats, and a re-worlding in which, instead of the windigo working to make the world in the image of its own appetites, it is re-incorporated into a Potawatomi world, quite literally by hearing a creation story—not just of how "the world" in some abstract sense began, but also as a beginning of the world the

transformed windigo must now be part of. By identifying the windigo as so deeply entwined with various colonial systems and/or systems of modernity—capitalism, rampant ecological over-consumption and destruction, devaluation and misrecognition of Indigenous knowledge—Kimmerer's vision is clearly one of the necessary disruption of a continuous process of windigo worlding. She also makes explicit that, while the windigo is inherently self-destructive, it is not enough to wait for it to consume itself, precisely because of the worlding process it constantly re-enacts: while the windigo is inherently in violently exploitative relation with others, the relation itself makes it impossible to simply ignore—the illusion of being able to completely separate from it adds to its contagion. Kimmerer's story posits the necessity of a windigo transformed, of wíhtikowipayi in reverse, un-windigo-worlding, which helps explain why it is a creation story that caps off the windigo's transformation process.

Another recent work by an Indigenous artist that invokes the weetigo is the short film "Wakening," directed by Danis Goulet (Cree/Métis), which was released in 2013. The film takes place in an urban landscape under occupation; soldiers patrol the streets while the sounds of helicopters and a disembodied loudspeaker announcement echo through mostly empty streets. The announcement details who can lawfully possess land, and declares that marriages between "citizens" and "non-citizens" will result in dispossession; in an interview, Goulet explains that this language is taken directly from Canada's Indian Act, except that "it changes the word 'Indian' ... to 'Citizen.' It was like, imagine if life under the Indian Act was just actually for all Canadians [sic]" ("Spotlight: Danis Goulet").¹⁶ Quickly, it becomes clear that the film's focus is

Weesageechak, here portrayed by a young woman, alert and armed with a modern bow-and-

¹⁶ The Indian Act refers to a law codifying the Canadian government's relationship to First Nations people, created in 1876 by the consolidation of several preceding pieces of legislation (Indian Act). Thomas King (Cherokee) describes it as "a series of pronouncements and regulations, rights and prohibitions, originally struck in 1876, which has wound its snaky way along to the present day" (*Inconvenient* 70).

arrow, and Weesageechak is searching for the weetigo, who in this film has taken the form of a monstrous, elk-like creature.¹⁷ She finds it in a largely-abandoned theater, where it has been trapping and killing people for what seems to be a long period of time; an elderly woman and a young boy are the only ones left in the theater, but the woman tells Weesageechak that "the seats were full" and that the weetigo has been consuming the people in them, "one by one." The image of the once-full theater and the old woman's testimony evoke the decimation of Indigenous populations through colonization, supporting the concept of weetigo worlding as a colonial process. When Weesageechak and the weetigo finally meet face-to-face, it threatens to eat her and she clearly fears this as a real threat, but has also come to tell it that the balance of power has shifted: the weetigo is forgotten, trapped in this theater by the occupiers, who have tricked it into believing it is a palace, while killing the forests that were his home before. The very real monstrosity of the weetigo, Weesageechak argues, has been imprisoned and co-opted by the occupiers.

This argument works. The last scene of the film shows Weesageechak coming face to face with heavily-armed soldiers, and weetigo rises above them suddenly and devours them, which is made clear by the sounds of them being eaten, and the horror and relief on Weesageechak's face, as well as a shot of weetigo's bloody mouth. Weetigo and Weesageechak make eye contact for several moments as the camera moves between them, and then weetigo runs out into the world beyond the theater. Weesageechak's expression slowly changes, as she smiles and nods very slightly, while never losing the horror at what she has seen. Goulet has imagined a weetigo who is not an agent or symbol or enactment of colonization, but rather a

¹⁷ Hi, Weesageechak! Welcome back! I'm so happy you are hunting the weetigo in this movie, and awed by the way you get it to do what you want, and I love that you are a woman.

monstrous and terrifying creature who is of a Cree world, who speaks Cree and who, even while continuing to victimize and eat Cree and Indigenous people, has also been hampered, tricked, and exploited by colonial powers, who have devoured the very forests the weetigo previously lived in. This colonial hunger, then, is shown to surpass the weetigo's cannibal greed, not to be a specific iteration of it. Unlike in Kimmerer, this weetigo has not been fundamentally transformed—its appetite is still dangerous, still violent, still for human beings. Instead, it has been reoriented, convinced to use its power against the occupiers, and Weesageechak's complex reaction demonstrates that while she has won a victory, the weetigo is not and will not be a tame ally, and perhaps only a temporary one. Salma Molani quotes Goulet as saying, in reference to *Wakening*, "freeing the Weetigo is a really dangerous thing to do"(19); so, in this story, the power of the weetigo can, perhaps, be harnessed and directed against a more destructive greed, but neither we as viewers nor Weesageechak know what the outcome of this will be. Today, though, it has saved Weesageechak's life to engage with the weetigo, and decreased the power of the occupiers.

So, in this chapter, we have seen versions of the weetigo and of a worlding rooted in and consumed by self-and-other destructive violence and greed, deployed by Cree and Anishinaabe writers and artists over the last twenty years. Heid Erdrich's "Undead Faerie" invokes everyone and everything in a cycle of exploitative appetite and eating that, while it does not invoke the weetigo directly, is an encompassing and troubling vision of an already-accomplished wíhtikowipayi operating on every scale at once, from the meal of one person to the destruction of the land. Her sister Louise Erdrich's novel, *The Round House*, demonstrates the pursuit of wiindigoo justice and its many failures and ambiguities, in both United States and Anishinaabe

law. Under United States law, we watch wiindigoo justice turned on its head, in which a wiindigoo/rapist can use the law itself to escape retribution for his crimes. Under Anishinaabe law, wiindigoo justice becomes *possible*, but extremely delicate and ambivalent; Mirage misuses the whole concept to try and murder his wife Akiikwe, while Joe is able to achieve some measure of justice by killing Linden, arguably in accordance with Anishinaabe law, but this justice is merely an end to his particular violence, and cannot restore what has been lost. In Tomson Highway's novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, the Okimasis brothers survive the deep ontological unmaking inflicted on them through Father Lafleur's sexual abuse and the w̄htikowipayi of the residential school through their connections to Cree stories and ways of being, while weetigo worlding continues around them and is, at times, undone and pulled aside by them and their art. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Kimmerer explores the necessity of healing and transforming the windigo by first exploiting its own hungers to weaken it, then re-orienting it toward reciprocal relationship in eating, and finally immersing it in a new process of worlding through the Potawatomi creation story, while, finally, in *Wakening*, Danis Goulet depicts an uneasy alliance with the weetigo against the greater devouring of colonization itself; in my formulation, this is encouraging the weetigo to devour the pieces of weetigo-worlding itself, short-circuiting their hungers through its own.

Each of these stories is a method of both demonstrating and doing world-making processes that interpret settler colonialism, its governments and laws, its schools and religions, the desires and ontologies it cultivates, through Algonquian cosmologies, laws, and ways of being. This interpretation is, precisely, how other worlds, and other world-making processes, become imagined and imaginable. The windigo, never losing its monstrosity, makes re-

imagining (and thus re-worlding) possible through the very terror and contagion of its appetite. It makes monstrous, with its horrifying presence, things that have been made un-monstrous in settler colonial narratives. Windigo stories alert characters in Highway's and Erdrich's novels to the devouring presences in their own lives, and offer concrete tools and strategies for subverting, surviving, and even destroying them. Weetigo worlding is a threat and a warning for readers, and its subversion, cooptation, and undoing an opportunity—to recognize, disavow, and fight against monstrous appetites, perhaps most especially at institutional and governmental levels, before the next ominous bite.

CHAPTER TWO

Who Do You Say That I Am? Christian Rules and Protean Jesus

The weetigo, as a being and as a world-making state of perception, is embroiled in appetite, misrecognition, and violence. So far, we have looked at how the weetigo offers a mode of understanding settler culture within a particular violent pathology and in the context of a powerful spiritual being, in terms created and elaborated by Indigenous writers and stories. Around the edges of the weetigo's appetite, destruction, and desire, and sometimes right there in the center with/around/through the monster, Jesus also exists, embodies and suggests violence, and, sometimes, offers rescue or salvation from harm. An often-explicit promise of Christian conversion is that Jesus will undo and remake the people converting as Christians—and in a converting relationship with Indigenous cultures, through the requirements and mythologies of settler colonialism, this cannot be separated from the questions of undoing and remaking cultures.

When I came up with the titular question for this chapter, I did it tongue-in-cheek, from memory, and gave no more thought to whether people reading would have their tongues in their cheeks or their memories activated by it until it occurred to me that a non-Christian friend, who was kindly looking over my work, would probably have no idea what this chapter title was about, and therefore it was just hanging out there, making a little self-referential circle. This tells you something about Jesus, and me, and the process of this chapter, which in turn, I hope, helps illuminate the functions of this chapter, or its invitations. There are things that live inside me, with regard to Jesus, that I don't often notice. That I lay out in patterns on the world, whether

scattershot, painstaking, defiant, or easy. When I first picked up books by Highway and Erdrich in my late teens and early twenties, these writers did notice these Jesus things. They made me notice these Jesus things. The Catholicism these authors described, which their characters lived, was more aligned with the reality of my experience of being Catholic than the religious education I'd received, certainly more aligned with what it felt like to be a Catholic Christian¹⁸ for me at that time than explicitly religious novels about religious young adults; that is, Erdrich and Highway's novels, like me, in their stance toward and working with Catholicism, felt mystical, queer, passionate, and angry.

At any rate, I remembered hearing the question “Who do you say that I am?” read at Mass. Jesus asked his followers who and what people in general were saying he was. They recounted various rumors going around, suggesting that Jesus is one of a number of recent and long-ago prophets. Then Jesus asks, “But who do you say that I am?” His disciple Simon Peter answers, with various phrasings and emphases, that Jesus is the Messiah, chosen by God. In each of the versions, Jesus admonishes those present not to tell anyone about this understanding of his identity (*The Catholic Bible*, Mark 8: 27-30, Luke 9:18-21, Matt 16:13-20). These stories are usually interpreted as Jesus's followers recognizing him correctly, while others have misrecognized him. The question itself, though, is pulled and replicated through time, a little fractal of Christianity's universalizing relational claims through Jesus, and presents itself

18 It's funny to say “Catholic Christian” because, at various times throughout my life, people, including at least one Catholic, have told me that Catholics weren't *really* Christians. This has a long history and its rehearsal by people in the 20th and 21st centuries represents a certain kind of triumph for Protestantism over the minds of people about what Christianity is—and since “what's going on in your mind” and “is it correct” are big parts of Christianity in general but even bigger parts of Protestantism in particular, perhaps there's a little Protestant in all of us moderns. But I don't love the idea, as while I'm hardly comfortable being Catholic in a full-throated way at this point, I certainly don't want to be a Protestant. This is funny too, because I could image tracing this feeling to roots in my family's Irish history—but I know almost nothing about that beyond its literal existence. Shades, I think, of Keller's cryptoapocalypse—we don't have to know or understand the past to live and feel ourselves within its worlding.

attractively to Christians or those who would make Christians out of others. By this I mean that books,¹⁹ articles,²⁰ tracts,²¹ songs,²² and sermons²³ titled or otherwise referencing “who do you say that I am?” are abundant. I am not the first to think maybe I should call my Jesus thing after this question. In most cases, the material that takes this question as inspiration is asking its readers, listeners, etc., to step into the role of Simon Peter and answer appropriately—relate to, recognize, and name Jesus. It's a bit of a test, and the test is of how you, in particular, relate to Jesus, and the answer is and must be universal and universalizing. (Not the *actual answer* recounted in the Bible: the word “Messiah” is not inherently universal or universalizing, but has a specific meaning within Jewish culture generally and in Jesus's time and place specifically, of a future king of Israel who would fulfill various of God's promises, particularly for national sovereignty. Jesus definitely did not do this last thing, and the idea of him or anyone as a redemptively suffering Messiah instead, or that this could be a use of the word, is a Christian thing—a thing that perhaps begins to be articulated in some of these “who do you say that I am?” passages (Ehrman 68). No, the answer that makes its relentless way through centuries is an indispensable retrofit, a “so high, so wide, so low” object that each person within Christian hegemony must

19 For example, *Who Do You Say That I Am?: A Fresh Encounter for Deeper Faith* by Becky Harling.

20 For example, “Who Do Men Say That I Am?” by Cullen Murphy, talking about the rise of interest in the historical Jesus from the 1960s-1980s.

21 Check out Jack Wellman's cartoon Jesus tracts at rhetoricaljesus.com. To me, Rhetorical Jesus looks smarmy, vaudevillian, and/or maybe like a grungy 90s surfer character.

22 The song “Who Do You Say That I Am?” by David Phelps has lyrics including “So you're a cynic,/ Oh well I get it” and “Two thousand years counting/The question's still mounting.” So high, can't get over it!

23 I found a copy of a sermon titled “Who do you say that I am?” given by Rev. Suzanne Personette at the First Congregational Church of Branford on September 16, 2017. One thing it is about is the experience of figuring out when to just listen to folks who aren't that into Jesus and when to jump in and explain the Jesus she knows. It, like most of these “who do you say that I am” things, demonstrates that most forms of Christianity and certainly Christian rules require a Jesus that is central and universal—always there, with all people and all things, and always the most important person-thing-divinity going. Otherwise, why would this minister, describing her experience attending a wedding of non-Christian or at least non-church-going people, be considering whether it was ok to just hang out and hear what people wanted to talk about without bringing up Jesus? And her decision—that it *was* ok because these mundane interactions are part of Jesus's work in the world—is something that places her in a somewhat permissive/progressive category of ministers. So wide, can't get around it.

enter in, must and therefore “might as well” acquiesce to. And this idea, that each person must have essentially the same (supremely high-stakes) relationship with Jesus nestles within, mirrors, and helps create the Christianity of conquest and colonialism, variously a tool of and a motivation for conversion and transformation of Native peoples into people, no s, who are (variously) more recognizable, worthwhile, destructible, manipulable, and plausible to Eurowestern worldviews. The universalizing demand in itself, however, pushes open space in which multiplicity of worlds and relationships can exist. If you have Jesus, who is assumed within Christianity to be stable, eternal, unchanging— *the* stable, eternal, unchanging God as he is/was embodied in human flesh, which is very clearly not stable or unchanging and may or may not be eternal in some form—*and* so much is required of Jesus, then the universality that is required of him, the portability from one cultural context and one place to all others, constantly, creates and opens a multiplicity that both is used as a colonial vehicle and belies the idea of universality itself. The question, “Who do you say that I am?” also holds an implied opportunity, to say something unexpected or different or unorthodox, a possibility that the answer could change Jesus, too. And if there's an unexpected Jesus, that may shift the world that Christianity makes and claims.

Novels, plays, and poems by Erdrich and Highway describe and create relationships with Jesus that do not assume these terms offered by a conquering, colonial Christianity. Since Christianity assumes an all-encompassing worldview that contains, explains, and ordains all of space and time, a universalizing truth-claim that is the ground of all existence, being, culture, and experience, literary interactions with Jesus according to radically different terms can make perceptible Indigenous worlds that are not contained by nor comprehensible within settler

ontological assumptions. Examining how figures that do not originate in Indigenous stories and cosmologies are made part of these stories and cosmologies is also important, as this examination demonstrates that beings, ideas, powers, institutions, etc. that are born(e) within settler colonialism may not exist only or always as what that cultural framework claims them to be. Just because you see Jesus (and/or his friends and family and various Christian symbols), don't assume the world in which he is appearing runs by Christian rules.

But what are Christian rules? I borrow the phrase from the Cherokee writer and scholar, Thomas King. It appears repeatedly in his novel *Green Grass, Running Water*, and has appeared repeatedly in my mind as I have tried to think about and write down what Christianities I am talking about. It's a tough question, "what do you say that *all this* is?" if you will, and while I talk and will continue to talk about the demands of Christianity on itself and on those it claims (all people!) to *be one thing*, to be universal and indeed to be the universe—and due to these demands, and their entwining with and role in the creation of coloniality, I discuss Christianity as though it is monolithic in a certain sense, of course it is not. It is seethingly, wildly multiple, and, as I discussed above, what I see revealed in the Jesuses of this chapter is a universalizing claim that seeds and needs its own multiplicity, even or especially when that multiplicity belies specific doctrinal ideas and undoes the conversions that are claimed and sought by colonial powers. But Christianity does claim many things from and in the worlds it inhabits, and these claims both make it an instrument of and an inspiration for coloniality. That is, Christianity and coloniality co-create each other partially by shaping the plural, heterodox, wildly many-worlded experience of stories and rituals and behaviors that can be called Christian and that gather around the figure of Jesus *into* a blunt weapon of universality. For a shorthand, let's call those claims and demands,

this process of shaping, Christian rules. In King's novel, Christian rules are evoked when characters, usually mythic figures from Jewish and Christian stories, rambling around a mythic landscape wish to get other characters, usually mythic figures from Native American stories, to do the things they want. Not eat food in a garden, for one thing (73), and have sex with them, for another (160-163; 300-301), and not talk if you are an animal (160), and if you are Jesus, be seen as powerful and self-sufficient when you actually need help (388-391). These rules certainly have a relationship to explicit claims made by official Christian doctrines, but they are not doctrines or dogmas or creeds. These rules also exceed Christianity by being invoked in so many words by Jewish figures like Noah.²⁴ King's Christian rules take themselves seriously, and they have impact, making a “Christian world” in which Captain Ahab can claim that because of being in this world, “We only kill things that are useful or things we don't like” (219), justifying the slaughter of many whales, an attitude that Kimmerer's windigo and its windigo economy of consumptive capitalism would certainly recognize. Nonetheless, Christian rules in this book are nonsensical and capricious and based on the random and often violent appetites of those who invoke them, and they are not the rules by which all things happen, and many of King's characters—and many others we will encounter in Highway and Erdrich's work—refuse to obey or live within the terms of these rules, and thus do not (exclusively or willingly) occupy the world these rules create.

In Erdrich and Highway's books, Jesus remains and relates, in ways ranging from the salvific to the oppressive, including eroticism, silliness, exploitation, and violence. I use these stories to exemplify how Jesus is engaged with by these writers in ways that expose and critique

²⁴ This is for sure a Christian thing to do, and entwines at the root with Christian anti-semitism—claim a universal story through Judaism and thus subsume all Jewish stories into the world of Christianity. So all-encompassing-of-time, can't exist before it!

the violent parameters of settler colonial institutions, encompassing what is ostensibly his own church. Jesus, then, is neither separable from nor exclusively definable by Christianity and Christian rules; he is often within but also not completely encompassed by Christian theologies, stories, ethical claims and demands, rituals, institutions, and partnerships with other institutions of settler colonialism. Erdrich and Highway expose the violence and foreclosure of relationship hidden even in some of the more friendly-seeming interpretations of what Christianity is and can be in relation to Native American people, while they simultaneously and insistently reveal relationships with Jesus that exceed Christian orthodoxy and its strictures, grounded in Indigenous worlds that do not operate by Christian rules.

In his novel and his plays, Tomson Highway's Jesus is an instrument of colonial violence on a large scale, and sexual violence on individual scales, and identifying with or embodying Jesus tends to make Native people more vulnerable to this violence, while it makes settlers more empowered to commit this violence. Highway's Jesus can be playful, fun, curious, or benign when he is decentered and placed among Native beings, figures, and beliefs. I will trace Highway's Jesus through his appearance on and as crucifixes, and through the invitations, accepted, rejected, and performed, that characters receive to embody and stand-in for him.

Crosses and crucifixes both stand in for Jesus and create him, mark and create Christians and Christian spaces, make and remake space and time, and this is consistent across missionary endeavors in the Americas. In a history of encounters between Jesuits and Illinois, Tracy Neal Leavelle describes the Jesuit practice of planting crosses to claim and transform land, people, and even the flow of time, bringing Jesus to a new place in a physical and temporal sense (57). Speaking of Franciscans in the early Atlantic, Julia McClure echoes this concept, recounting how

the cross was used to physically reorient the landscape, and, thereby, at least in the minds of the missionaries, also reorient the cosmological understandings of the Indigenous people, to align their worlds with the singular universal world the Christians understood and desired (106). When Highway brings us crucifixes, they do often reorient everyone, and in those instances they are violent. But also, sometimes, they are just there: silly, playful, or incidental—not the center, or the crux, of anything, *not* converting or reorienting anybody.

A crucifix, linguistically and visually, makes Jesus-as-body inseparable from cross-as-instrument-of-torture, the word itself fusing Jesus with the cross—you can't have a crucifix without both the man and the wood. In *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, we have already visited the scene in which Champion-Jeremiah meets the weetigo-predator-priest Father Lafleur; now let us return there and remember the role of the crucifix. When Jeremiah first sees the silver crucifix that Father Lafleur wears, he misinterprets Father Lafleur's voice, thinking it a miraculous manifestation of a voice from the metallic Jesus. He's excited about speaking with Jesus, but this possibility is supplanted by Father Lafleur's "giant, beaming" face (57). This same crucifix is present in the sexual violence Gabriel is subjected to and the weetigo appetites that drive that violence (78). Father Lafleur's crucifix, then, first seems to offer a possibility of relational joy but quickly becomes a vehicle for the embodied identification of Jeremiah and Gabriel with Jesus's victimhood and of the predatory Father Lafleur with Jesus's power. They split Jesus, as it were, and the Cree boys are left with his suffering while the white settler priest wears his authority. And around all of this, in ways that are uncomfortably tightly woven, sexual violence and sexual pleasure are also transmitted through the crucifix.

Much later, Jeremiah and Gabriel will argue about the crucifix: is it "a symbol of love"

or “an instrument of torture,” and Gabriel connects this argument directly to the sexual abuse they experienced at the hands of Father Lafleur, claiming that because of the tortured body at the center of this religion, its priest tortures bodies (184-185). When Jeremiah discovers that Gabriel, now a professional dancer, is having consensual sex with a choreographer he's been working with, Jeremiah feels what he sees as a repeat of the abuse he watched Gabriel endure, freighted again by the crucifix and its communication between bodies: “In the moonlight, Gabriel's face, his neck, were bathed by male breath, hot, minty. Until the silvery, naked Jesus that hung from the chain around this whiteman's neck came to rest across his own neck, hard, cold... Jeremiah stopped breathing but walked on anyway.... Gregory Newman hung nailed to his brother, by the mouth” (208). This time, Gabriel perceives, if not the crucifix as a symbol of love, at least its physical interaction with his body as a part of love and sexual desire, while Jeremiah takes it in as a part of torture and abuse, and even imagines both men as being part of a scene of crucifixion, their kisses nailing them to one another. There's also a confused or shared sense of physical experience between the brothers; Jeremiah is looking at Gabriel but seems to feel some of Gabriel's sensations, the heat and smell of Gregory's breath, the texture and temperature of the crucifix.

There's obviously a flow, some kind of double possibility and continual change in what Jesus and his cross can mean and do for the brothers. It facilitates abuse and torture, and simultaneously connects and bridges Jeremiah's and Gabriel's bodily experiences. Gabriel's baptism is another occasion on which the boys see a crucifix. Both Gabriel (then Ooneemeetoo), only two weeks old at the time, and Jeremiah (then Champion), three years old, remember the event. The tiny boys see the crucifix and interpret it in two different ways: “[A] naked, bleeding

man hung from a wooden beam. Years later, Champion Okimasis would insist that the man was dead, Ooneemeetoo that he was alive, that morning anyway” (36). This could be a Christian argument about faith—the brothers certainly have those—but here, we have the clue that Champion/Jeremiah, otherwise the more devout Christian, is arguing that Jesus is dead, and Ooneemeetoo/Gabriel that he is alive, which hints that something is being discussed outside of Christian rules. Cree, like Anishinabemowin, is a language in which nouns are categorized as animate or inanimate, grammatically, instead of as masculine or feminine, leading to significant linguistic decisions about these attributes, since many nouns can also change between being animate or inanimate, depending on the situation. We know that the boys are speaking Cree when they have this discussion, as they have not yet learned English. Here, then, before Ooneemeetoo is inducted into Christian ceremony, story, and name, he is placing Jesus in his own Cree world and language, and, later, when they argue over Jesus's animacy, the boys continue to understand Jesus within Cree-ness. Later, in the scene in which we witness Father Lafleur abusing Gabriel, Jesus on the cross is again alive: “The pleasure in [Gabriel's] centre welled so deep that he was about to open his mouth and swallow whole the living flesh—in his half-dream state, this man nailed to the cross was a living, breathing man” (78). In this moment, Jesus is alive, as he was in Gabriel's perception when Gabriel was baptized, and Jesus is the bait in a trap of potential *wihtikowipayi*—often, a dreamer who might become *weetigo* is tested with an offer of human flesh to eat. Gabriel is *not* saved from the abuse, but he is saved from this consumption by his brother's footsteps approaching. When Cree life is centered, spiritually, playfully, and linguistically, Jesus means something else, perhaps even is someone else, than in the context of violent Christianity as both an instrument and a manifestation of settler colonial

power.

At the residential school, the boys play at theatrical, sadomasochistic, religious violence in which Gabriel performs Jesus's embodiment, and they are encouraged in this endeavor by the staff of the school (83-85). There's even a cardboard sign that presents the performance, reading "The Okimasis Brothers present 'The Stations of the Cross' with a scene from 'The Wedding at Cana' thrown in" —this reads like a wink from Tomson Highway the playwright to René Highway the dancer,²⁵ or from the future Jeremiah and Gabriel, who will likewise create performances together, to their boyhood selves (86). The future communicating to and from the present. The fiction communicating to and from the reality. This pageant is described as Jesus moving through his journey toward crucifixion in a mishmash of violence and humor for almost two pages before this Jesus is specifically revealed to be Gabriel. This revelation comes from a memory with another performance embedded within it: he gets in trouble for singing a ribald Cree song while "hanging from the cross" and playing Christ crucified, and Father Lafleur beats him, which he finds intensely pleasurable and responds to in defiant Cree and enthusiastic English: "*Kimoosoom Chimasoo,*' Gabriel's little Cree voice rang out from the pit of his groin, even as a little English voice beside it pleaded: 'Yes, Father, please! Make me bleed! Please, please, make me bleed!'"(85). Gabriel has created an English voice alongside the Cree voice to allow the ambivalent experience of violence and abuse that is also sexually pleasurable to exist without overwhelming him. Both voices express sexual pleasure and wrangle for control of the situation, while Gabriel also wrangles a place for both of these selves at this Christian school, by playing Jesus on the cross at the same time as singing the risqué Cree song. Even within this

²⁵ Recall from Chapter One that Tomson and René Highway are real-life brothers, and that Tomson Highway built his novel from their experiences, and dedicated it to his brother.

context of abuse, punishment, and monstrous consumption, Gabriel continues to re-orient Jesus and thereby himself, to plant his Cree song, his humor, and his pleasure, within all the crosses, even as they are planted all over his landscape, from his hometown to his school to his body. First within Jesus, then out from Jesus, Gabriel steals back pieces of his nêhiyâwiwin²⁶ and his life.

These crucifixes—both Father Lafleur's and the play-crucifix Gabriel makes of himself—contain and enact a lot of violence, but Highway's most intensely violent crucifix appears in his play *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*. *Dry Lips* is the second play in an ongoing cycle of plays Highway has written about the fictional Cree and Anishinaabe Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve in Ontario, and focuses heavily on men and male violence. Spooky, an intensely religious Christian character, has a small crucifix which is present throughout the play. After a scene in which various characters toss and pass the crucifix around, playing with it, a character named Dickie Bird grabs the crucifix and rapes a young woman named Patsy with it in a horrifying sequence described in the stage directions:

[Patsy] stands there, facing the audience, and slowly gathers her skirt, in agony, until she is holding it above her waist. A blood stain slowly spreads across her panties and flows down her leg. At the same time, Dickie Bird stands down-stage...holding the crucifix and making violent jabbing motions with it, downward...The crucifix starts to bleed. When Dickie Bird lifts the crucifix up, his arms and chest are covered with blood (100).

The unrealistic physicality of this violence makes it all the more horrifying, since both Patsy and Dickie Bird's experiences are directly visible to the audience. The extreme amounts of blood appearing on Patsy, Dickie Bird, and the crucifix also increase the sense of a fantastical level of

26 Cree-ness.

horror—in some way, it’s all Patsy’s blood, but we see the crucifix bleeding separately from her body. This scene wraps everyone up in the violence together—Patsy, Dickie Bird, and Jesus-on-the-cross. Christianity is instrumental and also disturbingly inspiring of anti-Indigenous, misogynistic, and sexual violence—clearly delineated by crucifixes in both *Dry Lips* and *Fur Queen*.

It can feel like a strange disjunction, then, to encounter Highway’s crucifixes in much less intense scenes, being variously harmless, playful, active, silly, and objects of curiosity. When we first encounter Spooky’s crucifix in *Dry Lips*, it is on his wall “as subtly conspicuous as possible ... with pale blue knitted baby booties covering each of its four extremities” (35-36). Spooky is about to hold forth to Dickie Bird on the necessity of Christian salvation and the imminence of final judgement and the end of the world, which traces a lineage of thought for Dickie Bird’s eventual violence using the crucifix. At this moment, though, with booties on it, it is about as silly as a crucifix can get. In *The Rez Sisters*, which focuses on the women of Wasaychigan, the primary activity of the play centers around seven women of the reserve trying to get to Toronto to play bingo, and when they get there, the play’s lone crucifix appears: “Zhaboonigan (is) at the table’s center banging a crucifix Veronique has brought along for luck” (102). This bingo game is utterly playful, utterly serious, extremely funny, and intensely spiritual—and in the middle of it, the crucifix is a toy and a good luck charm (though not a terribly effective one—only one of the women wins any money) and creates no trouble. It’s possible, in Highway’s writing, for the crucifix to be a non-violent instrument and for Jesus to participate in the fun when the crucifix, Jesus, and Christianity are not at the center of the bingo scene. No one is trying to convert anyone, no one is doing Christian ritual—fun things are happening, people are playing—and

Jesus just happens to be there. To have Jesus present but not central functions as a recentering of Indigenous spiritual worlds—the spiritual multiplicity this implies counters the basic universalizing assumption of Christianity as it is practiced by Euroamerican colonizers and breaks some fundamental Christian rules.

There is a crucifix over the town of Emanapiteepitat that connects the Cree home of the Okimasis brothers, where they are well cared for and loved, and Birch Lake Residential School, where they are abused. It does the work that the crosses various missionaries planted upon various American landscapes are supposed to do: brings disparate stories and places into one Christian world. While Abraham Okimasis rides home from the dog sled race that opens the book, he notices the crucifix on the church as a sign of home (15), and when his sons Gabriel and Jeremiah visit home as teenagers, Gabriel sees it from the window of the plane. Christ is described as “bored,” “silvery white,” and a “corpse”—Jesus is dead, white, and bored, but not, at that moment, powerful. From up in the air, Gabriel feels like he could reach through the window and “pluck” the crucifix (186). Gabriel is working to divest himself of his Catholic identity, while Jeremiah clings uneasily to his own, but their parents are on the ground, not in the air, and they cannot pluck Jesus out of their sky, which makes it more and more difficult for the brothers to return home, as their father asks Gabriel if he still prays and their parents encourage Jeremiah to become the priest of their parish (189-191). Earlier, it is his father's evocation of Father Lafleur as a good caretaker and insistence on Catholicism as the one true religion that makes Gabriel understand “that there [is] no place for him in Emanapiteepitat or the north” (109). The cross bridges time and space to make Emanapiteepitat part of the same world as Birch Lake Residential School, and to bring some of its danger to the boys as well.

But Jesus does not mean only one thing or exist in only one world, and the back-and-forth about whether he is living or dead in Cree, on his cross, shows his mutability and multiplicity. Can Jesus exist outside of Christian rules? Does it matter if and when he does? There are two death scenes in *Fur Queen*, and both include a crucifix that is de-centered and transformed into a background accessory. First, the brothers return to Emanapiteepitat when their father is dying. During Abraham's death scene, a crucifix is described as being "wedged like a handgun in the sash of [another priest's] cassock" (226). This would be a dramatic, funny, and violent image at any time, but in this particular moment, the brothers have decided to tell their father on his deathbed that they were abused at school. Before they can, the local priest runs in with his cross-gun—he doesn't say it's a stick-up, but the feeling is close—and begins the Catholic rites for the dying. It seems as though an open conflict will play out between the brothers and the priest, but instead, the scene itself plays out as a surprising last-minute escape from Christianity, as Abraham interrupts everyone to tell his sons the story of the Cree hero (and weetigo-fighter) the Son of Ayash (226-228). Telling the story, Abraham recounts the mother in the story telling her son, "[W]ith these magic weapons, make a new world," and he speaks of an encounter with the weetigo just as the priest finishes the last rites (228). Suddenly, emerging separately from the crucifix-gun image and the singular, final sacrament, there are many weapons, much magic, and more than one possible world. Through Cree narrative memory, a new future can open and be created, and, while the Catholic rites still go on, they are not the only world Abraham lives in, and not all he offers his sons as he dies.

The second death scene is Gabriel's. He is dying of AIDS and has enjoined Jeremiah not to allow any priests near his bed (299). Again, things seem to be ramping up to a confrontation—

and there is a confrontation, as Mariesis tries to pull a priest into the room, burning sweetgrass sets off the fire alarm, fire trucks arrive, etc.—but it's a very funny confrontation, all chaos and slapstick, instead of a solemn moment of religious choice and repudiation of Christianity. The most jagged laughter, perhaps, a laughter with and around death. Ann-Adele Ghost rider, a friend to the boys and a holy Ojibwe woman, sets up the hospital room and makes a final choice about the place of the rosary, with its crucifix, in this moment: “Mariesis's rosary lay entwined in Gabriel's fingers. Ann-Adele Ghost rider's old, brown hand removed the beads and replaced them with an eagle feather.... About to throw the rosary into the trash can, she hung it, instead, on a Ken doll sporting cowboy hat and white-tasselled skirt. The medicine woman lit a braid of sweetgrass and washed the patient in its smoke” (303). In Algonquian cultures, sweetgrass is a plant that is used in offerings, for healing and to attract good things, and Ann-Adele uses it to acknowledge Gabriel as a Cree person in a Cree world, and also to build that world in the hospital (Kimmerer 27, Geniusz 179). Ann-Adele de-centers this crucifix as she de-centers Christian ritual, but she decides not to throw it out. There's a place (specifically, around the neck of the gender-crossing Ken doll) for a Jesus-on-the-side, and through that action, Christian universality loses its grip upon and its power to harm Gabriel in his death. Instead of dying with Catholic last rites, Gabriel dies within the story and images of his father's dogsled race that began both the novel and the story of his life, re-immersed in Cree narrative memory.

All of these crucifixes and Jesuses planted in Highway's work matter because they mark his accounts and accusations of Christianity's intense violence against Native people, and because they do not exist in the singular, universalizing world of Christianity, but in a world replete not just with Cree people, but with Cree and Ojibwe language, symbols, rituals, and

spiritual beings. To throw out the rosary, to fight with the priests and repudiate Jesus—these are acts that make sense in a Christian world and happen according to the universalizing terms of that world. They are harmful acts, damning acts perhaps—but they are legible. To play with the rosary and a doll, put booties on the cross, see Jesus as simultaneously alive and dead, or oscillating between those states according to the perception and relation of the person talking about him—these acts are something else, something outside of the world and the rules of Christianity. These make sense in another world, Highway's Cree world, which holds enough multiplicity to let Jesus be something without being everything. And when Jesus is not everything, he is not impossible to get around. He is just one story among many, and the colonial world that built him to be everything (or nothing) and that is fed by that dichotomy, also may be just one story among many. The anger and repudiation of the violence that Christianity carries and inflicts within and through colonialism, and the playful inclusion of Jesus around the edges of games, conversations, and rituals—these are not contradictory behaviors. Highway reveals them all as within the Cree world that he, and his characters, are also within.

Louise Erdrich's engagement with Jesus and with Catholic ritual is embedded in and runs wildly across her many books. In her work, the question of recognition looms large, in a “who do you say that I am?” and a “is *that* Jesus?” sort of way, as well as a question of whom Jesus recognizes. Jesus appears and disappears as protean, elusive, sudden, and multiple, as do Catholic rituals and practices, and these appearances cannot be fully described or understood without Anishinaabe rituals, practices, and people as well. For this chapter, I will trace some of these moments through her poetry collection *Baptism of Desire* and her novel *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*. There are speakers and characters who want to be recognized by

Jesus but are not. There are those who try to hide themselves from Jesus. There are Jesuses in many forms and as many people. There are rituals and sacraments, Catholic and Anishinaabe, inflecting and transforming each other, mediated through bodies of people, animals, and plants, and through the relationships and regard—in the literal, looking-back-and-forth sense as well as the respect sense—that beings have for each other. All of this mutability and transformation indicates to me that whatever Erdrich is doing with Jesus, it is not contained by Christian rules.

Baptism of Desire, a poetry collection that Erdrich published in 1989, contains many complex engagements with Catholic ritual, sacraments, and figures, and consistently refigures all of these in terms of Anishinaabe culture, women's bodies, and the bodies of animals and plants. The book begins with a poem titled "Fooling God," in which the speaker enumerates various strategies for avoiding or gaining God's attention, making herself unnoticeable or acceptable to God, in order to retain a selfhood that is not contained by God's rules and expectations. Here, God is a masculine power, who gathers women to him through power (his) and submission (theirs), and the speaker accumulates actions and behaviors that do not necessarily seem actively defiant, and are often defined by inactivity and silence, such as "I must remain this person and be no trouble. /None at all. So he'll forget" (3-4). The poem ends: "I must be a doubter in a city of belief.... On the pavement where his house begins/fainting women kneel. I'm not among them/ although they polish the brass tongues of his lions/ with their own tongues/ and taste the everlasting life" (4). What's going on with these brass tongues? Is this food—somewhat Eucharistic—offering life that lasts forever? Are the women starving, or weak with desire—is this sexual, a tongue kiss with a statue? In Erdrich's poem, there is tongue-to-tongue contact between "fainting women" and "brass ... lions" belonging to God's house—and the complexity

of this sensory description is strikingly similar to the crucifix in Gabriel's mouth in *Fur Queen*, creating a weave of both weakness and power for the taster. The taste of the metal lions' tongues is appealing, ineffable, and religious—but it is also precisely what the poem's speaker has been trying to reject and avoid. We don't know, at the end of the poem, what she is doing or tasting instead, but we know for sure that she is “not among” the fainting women tasting this metal, and that throughout the poem her evasions of God have felt compulsory: the majority of lines in the poem begins with the words “I must.” When embodied experience is demanded, dangerous, and entwined with desire, evasion is a powerful response indeed.

The baptism of desire, after which the book is named, is perhaps the most internal, unprovable, and flexible of Catholic sacraments, as it occurs when someone wants baptism but dies without receiving it. Though the baptism of desire is framed as a sort of failsafe, for a person who had made plans to be baptized but died before that could happen, it also opens up a theological situation in which a sacrament may occur without anyone knowing it has occurred. Karl Rahner, a twentieth century German Catholic theologian,²⁷ even put forth an idea of an “anonymous Christian.” To summarize briefly, this idea means that a person could never hear about or even actively reject Christianity, and still be eternally saved through Jesus, because of the internal goodness of their life and relationship with the God that must be the source and recipient of that goodness (Rahner 207). This idea is controversial within Christian theology, but I do think it's helpful to consider this attempt of Rahner to both follow and bend Christian rules, to maintain universality as the universe, in this case the multiplicity of human worlds, grows and grows and grows. If it is obvious that there isn't and cannot be only one fundamental way of

²⁷ In addition to being Turtle Mountain Ojibwe, Louise Erdrich is also a twentieth-and twenty-first-century German-American Catholic, and it's not unlikely that she's aware of Rahner's idea.

existing in and relating to the world, and Christianity must be universal to be justified to itself, *then what?* Rahner's anonymous Christian is one answer—"you might as well go in at the door"—but what it creates is a group of people who do not know they are Christians and yet are Christians, and it is folded within the concept explicitly evoked by Erdrich of a baptism of desire. A baptism beyond desire? But then what is that—forcible Christianity, one you might stumble or be dragged into? This concept, specifically trying to soften or manage the brutality of Christianity's universalism, quickly swings us around uncomfortably close to Highway's violent crucifix as an instrument of rape. Considering this adds resonance to the slippery, evasive context of "Fooling God," because God himself, in this poem, seems inclined to a sort of salvific trickery, and may force a person into his universe if they are not able to fool him. "Fooling God," as the opening poem in *Baptism of Desire*, implies that the rest of the poems must be engaged while keeping in mind the speaker who "must be a doubter in a city of belief," who is evasive and silent, and tries to slip under God's radar. Silence and evasion become relational acts, and powerful acts, when Christian rules demand speech, choice, belief, and specificity. This is deeply related to colonial structures and demands as well—an Indigenous person within settler colonialism must also "be a doubter in a city of belief," and the persistence of Indigenous peoples, nations, and cultures is, perhaps, the doubt itself, if the city of belief is the colonial nation. To fool God as this poem suggests and to fool the colonial state are not the same activity, but they definitely can involve a number of the same tactics.

A poem in *Baptism of Desire* called "The Sacraments" is subtitled with a list of the seven Catholic sacraments, "Baptism, Communion, Confirmation, Matrimony, Penance, Holy Orders, Extreme Unction," and divided into seven parts, which correspond to each of these sacraments.

Briefly, Catholic sacraments are holy rituals that every Catholic is either entitled or obligated to, depending on their particular path through life, and which more or less trace the life cycle, with Baptism (usually) happening soon after birth, and Extreme Unction happening shortly before death. In Erdrich's poem, each of these events is described through Anishinaabe rituals and the bodily sensations of animals, people, and plants, connected as well to cycles of human and animal life, though not necessarily or exclusively the same moments in life that the sacraments usually mark and punctuate. Here, I will walk through parts of the sections on Baptism, Communion, and Holy Orders to give a sense of the complex relationships Erdrich is creating among Catholic rituals, Anishinaabe rituals, and bodies. The first segment of the poem, which corresponds to baptism, includes a description of a Sun Dance:

As the sun dancers ...
stopped at the sun's apogee
and stood in the waterless light,
so, after loss, it came to this:
that for each year the being was destroyed,
I was to sacrifice a piece of my flesh.
[...]
... the sun, the life that consumes us,
burst into agony.
[...]
we hung by the flesh,
as in the moment before birth

when the spirit is quenched
in whole pain, suspended
until there is no choice, the body
slams to earth,
new life starts. (18)

If these stanzas were not positioned explicitly in the “baptism” slot of the larger poem, it would not necessarily seem like baptism were being referenced here—Catholic baptism is a ritual of initiation often performed on infants, it involves immersion or washing in water, and the presentation of a new Christian to the community at large. The Sun Dance is also a communal ritual of many Native American nations from the Great Plains of North America, including the Plains Ojibwe. Its overall purpose is for healing and renewal; people pledge to dance in order to renew the earth, ask for protection, and/or express gratitude for help they have been given already (Johnson 125). There are variations on the details of the ritual, but the basic structure involves finding and preparing a tree to which those who have promised to participate are attached by a skewer through muscles in their chest and ropes tied to that skewer and to the central pole. The dancing that Johnson describes is very similar to the imagery in Erdrich's poem: “they moved backward to the full extent of the ropes, stared up into the sun, and leaned backward in order to break the skewer through their muscle and chest skin” (128).

The rituals of baptism and the Sun Dance seem quite different, and while the Sun Dance is described in detail in the poem, there is nothing that clearly references a Christian baptism other than the overarching context of the poem. The only direct reference to water in the poem is to emphasize its lack: the dancers stand in “waterless light.” It’s also not as though the Sun

Dance isn't replete with easier-to-recognize parallels to Christian imagery: the central pole that dancers are attached to is sometimes referred to by participants as "'God's Brain,' 'Jesus,' or 'the Crucifix'" (Jorgenson 182). While crucifixion is not a sacrament²⁸ and would therefore not precisely fit into the schema of the poem, it would seem that there are much more obvious and already-present connections between Christianity and the Sun Dance than "baptism" provides. Catholic baptism, however, is and consistently has been legal in the United States, while the Sun Dance has not. The Sun Dance was banned by various branches of the U.S. government starting in the late 1800s. While Native people continued to practice the Sun Dance in secret, the law was not changed until the 1930s, and Native American religious freedom not encoded into federal law until 1978 with the passage of the Joint Resolution on American Indian Religious Freedom (United States, Congress Public Law 95-341). So, referencing Christian imagery and ideas in the Sun Dance itself carries both a potentially de-centered incorporation of Jesus into this ritual, *and* engages in fooling God and/or the colonial authorities. When Erdrich portrays through her title that this section of the poem is about Catholic baptism, and then all the imagery and description is about the Sun Dance, this also evokes the secrecy with which the Sun Dance, and many other Native American religious rituals, had to be practiced for decades, in specific contravention of United States federal law. Thus, to transform Catholic ritual through Anishinaabe ritual as well as personal bodily experience is a political assertion and an act of decolonial imagination.

In a note to the poem "Hydra," Erdrich explains: "'Hydra' and most of the other poems in this book were written between the hours of two and four in the morning, a period of insomnia brought on by pregnancy" (48). This adds to the sense of the poems emerging and taking place in a kind of secret, stolen time, perhaps evasive of sleep in the way that the "Fooling God" speaker

28 What a relief.

is evasive of God, and also makes Erdrich's pregnant body part of the condition of creation for the poetry, and invites readers to consider the experiences of the writer's body as we encounter the poems. "Sacraments," in this baptismal section, conflates the speaker with Sun Dancers, in the "sacrifice" of "flesh," and insists on carrying this through as connected to baptism, finally, though the act of giving birth and of being born. Birth itself encompasses both the Sun Dance and Christian baptism as they are interpreted here, larger than either and pressing them together in the poem. The sun, for the dancers and for the speaker of the poem, is "the life that consumes us"—the sun is a consumer in a large cosmological sense, the eventual consumer of the earth in the cosmic temporality of the sun's own life cycle, and the sun can consume by burning human skin or causing sunstroke. At the same time, the sun is also the necessary source of all life on earth—and this connects it, perhaps, to a pregnant body, full of a fetal life that is also consuming parts and aspects of it. This connection, of pregnant body to the sun and to the dancers' bodies, makes me wonder if "for each year the being was destroyed" might refer to miscarriage or abortion or perhaps just the menstrual cycle, the latter being the most mundane flesh-sacrificing aspect of non-birth-giving. In any case, the speaker's bodily experience is meshed with the dancers' bodily experiences of being "hung by the flesh," and finally this is revealed to be brought together—as all aspects of the poem are brought together—in birth.²⁹

In the end, the water of this previously very dry baptism is revealed to be pain—

29 When I first wrote this section analyzing the Baptism section of "The Sacraments," I had not been pregnant and I had not given birth. Now, as I finish this project, I have been pregnant and I have given birth. I keep feeling as though I should be able to explain something more or something different about the birth part of this poem, as though perhaps my reading should change. But I have not found a different reading that I can put into words, just an experience of assent that these metaphors be used—yes, giving birth is, like the Sun Dance, an experience of pledge, pain, endurance, and transformation. Like baptism, it is an emergence into a new way of being. Certainly, all rituals that renew and transform are appropriately considered with birth. Giving birth seems a simpler extremity than I realized, perhaps, before experiencing it: both—this is way beyond (my personal, previous) normal experience, and this is utterly and profoundly normal in the larger sense.

quenching the spirit—and the Sun Dance suspension is also the pain of birth. All these forms of pain push toward new life, which both rituals, and birth itself, promise in one way or another. These connections and juxtapositions demand that Anishinaabe ritual and Catholic ritual be considered together; or, more, that Catholic ritual be defined and given shape through Anishinaabe ritual contexts, that Catholic ritual cannot be understood or described in Erdrich's writing without Anishinaabe ritual as the embodied experience that gives it meaning. Moreover, all religious rituals are defined and given shape through bodily experiences, particularly Erdrich's pregnancy and her anticipation of birth, as she writes the poems in her woman's body.³⁰ In "Fooling God" the speaker says: "I must become essential and file everything/ under my own system" (4), which is something like what this sacramental reframing, this claiming of sacrament as and through the body, does. This process of filing everything under one's own system seems to me to be a kind of "baptism of desire," in which internal reality can shape and bend the rules of the world to respond to the experience of the person with the desire. It seems clear, through "The Sacraments," that the systems Erdrich is filing everything under include Anishinaabe understandings of the world and religious rituals, as well as her own physical life and body in the world and its intersections with other bodies, through birth, through eating, through listening and interacting in many ways. The poem is also pluriversal, an enacted experience in which at least three worlds—Catholic sacramentality, Anishinaabe ritual, and the body of Erdrich and/or other people who are pregnant and giving birth—do and in fact must coexist, to give meaning and shape to the others, to be one poem. People have called this kind of coexistence, in Erdrich's work and elsewhere, syncretism, hybridity, any number of terms with their own baggage,

³⁰ I want to acknowledge that not only women give birth, and that transmasculine people who experience pregnancy and birth are often excluded from both the depictions of pregnancy and birth and from gender-affirming care (or sometimes care at all) for their bodies during these experiences.

usefulness, and meanings (e.g., Freeman). I want to highlight, however, an Anishinaabe world which is pluriversal in and of itself, a world in which many worlds can exist without rupture.

In addition to the reworking of Catholic sacraments, Jesus himself is also reiterated several times through *Baptism of Desire*. Jesus is a bit of a shapeshifter in these poems and often doubled, appearing directly in “The Savior,” “Christ’s Twin,” and “Orozco’s Christ,” which are presented consecutively in the book. In each of these poems, Jesus either changes some aspect of his identity within the poem or is doubled by other, more disturbing identities.

“Orozco’s Christ” references artwork by José Clemente Orozco, a Mexican painter and muralist who lived from 1883-1949. Specifically, Erdrich's description clearly evokes a painting of Orozco's where Jesus stands in front of a huge cross on the ground, holding an axe in one hand and lifting the other fist above his head. This painting is called “Modern Migration of the Spirit” (Hood Museum 8). It is part of a large mural project Orozco did at Dartmouth College between 1932 and 1934, called *The Epic of American Civilization* (Stomberg and Mehrer 3). In this *Epic*, Orozco used Indigenous imagery from primarily Mayan and Aztec cultures and then mirroring or doubling images and ideas from contemporary American cultures to trace patterns of oppression and liberation across American continents. “Migration,” the ancient counterpart to this painting and temporally and spatially first panel of the mural, is described as “depict[ing] the origins of indigenous American civilization as a grimly determined and regimented march forward” (Hood Museum 10). The overall theme of the mural is not—explicitly not—a reiteration of the colonial ideas of colonization as replacement and improvement of Indigenous lands, cultures, and peoples, in that Eurowestern modernity is roundly critiqued in images that highlight its violent nonsense. “Modern Migration of the Spirit,” then, seems to refer to a pattern

of transformation and liberation that Orozco sees and traces across time and space. Yet, Louise Erdrich, in commenting on this work, zeros in on a Jesus whose aggression is often interpreted as working against the violent sacrifice Christianity is formed from and often repeats. This liberation is not what Erdrich describes in any way, nor does she directly comment on any of the Indigenous material that Orozco's mural includes—she focuses on the violence *of* his Jesus, not the violence he is supposedly overturning, and the violence she describes is brutal, misogynistic, and fuels war.

His Christ has taut, visible muscles and an intense, wide-eyed expression. The landscape behind him is littered with broken weapons and icons: in the forefront, his cross which he seems to have chopped down with his axe, many cannons, a tank, a marble pillar, a Buddha statue, the statue of a headless female body, with one breast whole and the other chiseled partially away. This damaged statue is the only image of a woman in this panel, and one of the few images of a woman in the mural as a whole. Louise Erdrich graduated from Dartmouth in 1976, and was a member of Dartmouth's first graduating class to have women enrolled all four years (“Louise Erdrich '76”). She would have encountered this mural as an Anishinaabe woman in a space entirely reserved for men until just a few years before her arrival, and this context feels present in her reading of the painting: Erdrich gives us Orozco's Christ as an angry, dominating figure full of masculine violence, which he directs at himself, at his father, at his mother, and finally, it seems, at people and the world generally. He is a person who “rips his own flesh down the seams,” “makes his father kneel,” and “rolls the stone from the entrance over his mother,/ ... pulls her veil out from under it .../ ties the stained cloth around his hips/ and starts out,/ walking toward Damascus, toward Beirut,/ where they are gathering in his name” (15). Certainly, many

people viewing this image see Jesus's ferocity and even something violent about him, but the sinister, disturbing, and deeply misogynistic atmosphere of "Orozco's Christ" is not the dominant reading of this painting. The visitor's guide to the mural provided by Dartmouth College describes "Modern Migration of the Spirit" as "an apocalyptic scene" in which "a defiant, resurrected Christ" with "a newly enlivened body" comes to "sweep away ideologies and institutions that thwart contemporary human emancipation and spiritual renewal" (Hood Museum 11). In contrast, in Erdrich's poem Jesus's violence is exacting, expansive, shocking and total, and the part about his mother pulls it into a realm of misogyny which is not directly depicted in the painting itself. This striking interpretation leads me to imagine that as a student at a school very newly open to women attending at all, Erdrich saw the blue cloth wrapped around Jesus and thought something like "that belongs to Mary," and "where *is* Mary?" and read Jesus's generally violent body for violence against a woman only seen through that act of imagination and her absence. Immediately after murdering his mother, this Jesus heads for some gathering crowds in Damascus, Syria, and Beirut, Lebanon. In the 1980s, when Erdrich published "Orozco's Christ," these cities were embroiled in violence and war. They are also biblical locations, and Damascus in particular evokes the sudden, striking conversion of Saul of Tarsus to St. Paul. It is a violent conversion experience for a violent man, as Saul has up until this point been actively persecuting followers of Jesus, dragging them from their houses, participating in murdering them, etc. As he heads to Damascus specifically to catch and imprison more Christians, Saul/Paul is knocked to the ground by a flash of light and the voice of Jesus, and does not see, eat, or drink until a disciple of Jesus comes and heals him, so that God can "show him what he will have to suffer for my name" (*The Catholic Bible*, Acts 9: 1-19) This is a rough

Christianity, and it is also an important piece of a universalizing one. By evoking St. Paul, the patterns of wide dissemination and conversion that bring Christianity across the world are evoked too—Paul escalates them himself in many ways, and much of the New Testament beyond the Gospels consists of letters from Paul to the many Christian communities he founded. Paul is a literal and figurative author of the zealous, global, conversion-oriented Christianity that eventually seeks to convert Native Americans and the New World itself. Erdrich's poem, like the Jesus striding off within it, draws a direct line between misogynistic violence and universalizing, colonizing conversion. Understanding all this, it certainly does not feel like these crowds that are gathering in the name of Jesus in Erdrich's poem are about to emancipate humanity, or at least, whatever results may or may not follow, the violence to be expected from them is overwhelming.

In “The Savior,” Erdrich presents a newly-born Jesus who is passionately human, angrily vulnerable, and defiant of God. This Jesus is summoned into a human body by rain that sounds like “prolonged/ human weeping,” and made into flesh, from “white stone” by his own tears, which give him “a mortal strength/subject to love.” Weakness, sorrow, pain, and love invoke and create a human body subject to death, and Jesus is both present within this suffering and angry about it. “I want no shelter” he declares to a silent heavenly father who the poem refers to as having “made the sacrifice,” “I deny/ the whole configuration./ I hate the weight of earth./ I hate the sound of water/ ... I will not stop burning” (12). This Jesus contains both transformation and a refusal to transform, each recursively feeding the other. He finds the terms of his humanity intolerable, and, paradoxically, his hatred of the experience of a human body, of gravity and of rain, leads to his pledge to keep burning rather than burn to ash, to refuse shelter from what bombards him, to be, in fact, more vulnerable than required. This is Erdrich's take on “the

Savior,” on a Jesus in his human body as a divine trap—for him, and for others. Jesus is the one, here, who first can't get around, over, or under the cosmological situation he is in. He's petulant—guess I'll go in the *DOOR*, then, *FATHER*—and there is no indication what the result of all this will be, no sense of whether his denial of “the whole configuration” changes anything about the shape of his world, makes Christian rules a little less universal since he himself does not want to be bound by them, even as he, perhaps, is. Does this petulant Christ bang the door a little on his way through, jostle the foundations of the inescapable world of Christian rules? Your guess is as good as mine, but it's worth the guessing, I think, and probably worth poking around a bit at the edges of the too-high thing once he's gone in, to see if anything has changed.

“Christ's Twin,” on other hand, presents a whole separate figure, who doubles Jesus with violent mischief, making messes of various biblical stories. This twin is explicitly “not the Devil,” but instead is “clumsy, and curious/ and like[s] to play with knives,” “hypnotized by boredom and betrayed by light” (13). Finally, while it seems like the regular Jesus is the one crucified, the twin emerges “first” from the grave, having wounded himself to appear like Jesus and “tacked” two halos, presumably his brother's and his own, “to the back of his skull.” This emergent twin and his emergent worshippers engage in mutual deception, each caught up in their own schemes:

He raised two crooked fingers; the extra die
tumbled from his lips when he preached
but no one noticed. They were too busy
clawing at the hem of his robe and planning
how to sell him to the world. (14)

This crafty, dangerous twin is a funny answer to “who do you say that I am?” a sort of, “hey, not *that* one, *this* one!” trick that dashes off an explanation for various issues with Jesus; even, a potential answer to a question one might ask about Erdrich's two Jesus poems that precede this one: how can the suffering and the violent Jesus both exist? The one who dies to save human beings, and the one who will condemn some of those human beings to eternal torment? The one under the colonial authority of Rome and the one in whose name whole nations will be colonized? It's all a bit of a tangle, which people with various relationships to Christianity have tried to explain and unwind across centuries, and which has in fact been part of what splits *this* Christianity from *that* Christianity in several iterations, but one knot among many in the tangle is the demand for universality. When Jesus must be central for all people and in all circumstances, he becomes so much that he cannot hold himself together, and in “Christ's Twin,” Erdrich makes this intriguingly literal. But it goes beyond a dangerously powerful and careless mischief maker twinned with the presumably benevolent and precise Jesus we've previously expected—the people who gather around this risen Jesus-twin could see that something was off in his behavior if they weren't so busy trying to make him a global commodity. They are unable to recognize who is before them (not-quite-Jesus) because they are so greedily eager for a payoff from the Jesus they expect. The mutuality of that bad-faith relationship, twin-Jesus obviously cheating at his tricks, and the nascent Christians absorbed in schemes of using him to profit and dominate, both evokes many a colonial bargain of conversion as a vehicle or cover for land theft and genocide, and allows for other experiences and motivations to exist. Perhaps the other Jesus twin will emerge eventually and have a message with more integrity. Perhaps some Christians will pause to listen and not be winding up a sales pitch. I do not say this, and I don't think the poem

hints at such possibilities, in order to rehabilitate or redeem Christianity as “not so colonial” or even colonialism as “sometimes well-intentioned” or something along those lines. Instead, I recognize through this poem and overall that multiplicity and pluriversality provide a much more real and grounded description of the experiences of human beings than universality can, despite or because of its inherent insistence that it is best and all. There's always a twin, clumsy and/or curious, doing something else within whatever is expected, and as we describe and try to understand large forces, be they Christianity, colonialism, or anything else, it is important to remember that whatever definitions and ideas we can imagine are more clusters of association and understanding than monoliths.

So, in *Baptism of Desire*, Louise Erdrich gives us a Christianity that is only comprehensible through Anishinaabe rituals and worldviews, and an extraordinarily multiple and multiplied Jesus. Jesus continues to both elude and multiply in her novel, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*. This is Erdrich's eighth novel, published in 2001, and she claims it as her favorite book she's written.³¹ In this novel, the character we follow most consistently throughout the approximately one hundred years that the novel spans is Agnes/Father Damien. Agnes is a white settler woman of German descent who first becomes a nun, then a farmer's lover, and finally a Catholic priest, when she takes on the identity of Father Damien, sent as a missionary to the Ojibwe at Little No Horse reservation. While both Agnes and Father Damien persist in the narration and as experiential identities, they are also both one person, and Agnes disguises her body (though not without being recognized/found out by quite a few people) throughout the rest of her long life as Father Damien. Jesus's forms in this novel are made

31 It is also my favorite, and the first of hers that I read. She told me it was her favorite when I met her, briefly, at a book signing, and presented my copy. She's also said this in an interview, so it's not just a thing she told me because the cover on my copy was falling off from use (Erdrich “Louise Erdrich: By the Book”).

present to the reader primarily through Agnes/Father Damien's shifting, slippery, powerful recognition. Throughout her life, at various points, Agnes recognizes and experiences Jesus. Whenever this recognition of Jesus occurs—in Agnes's rescuer from a flood at the river, in Father Damien's helper and friend Mary Kashpaw, it is transformative for Agnes/Father Damien. In the novel, Jesus's changing shape and unpredictable presences and absences place extreme demands upon Agnes/Father Damien, but also give shape and affirmation to her/his life and calling, while, sometimes subtly, and sometimes directly, moving that life and calling outside of Christian rules and toward relationships with Anishinaabe people and ways of being.³²

In a section of the novel labeled "Miracle the Second: Divine Rescue of Miss DeWitt," Agnes is rescued and fed by Jesus, and probably has sex with him, and this encounter inspires her transformation into Father Damien. This section is full of transformation: of Agnes's body as she first almost drowns and then chooses the identity of a male priest, and of Agnes's faith, which is described as being hitherto "without seeing ... without the deepest marks of conviction" (42). The information that the circumstances of Agnes's faith are about to change prepares us, as readers, to experience as divine and embodied everything that comes next. Agnes's rescuer is present to her first as provider of food, then as physical caretaker and probably lover, and later she uses these experiences to name him as Jesus.

In this section, Agnes's whole body is attuned to the details of her rescue and to her rescuer, and her hunger for the soup he feeds her and for his body arise together. Agnes's

32

The gendered pronouns used for Agnes/Father Damien throughout the book are worthy of their own project to understand and unpack their relationship to the character, the story, and questions of gender identity and gender as a whole. Here, I will follow Erdrich's lead and switch between Agnes and Father Damien and their respective pronouns, depending on what events or experiences are being described, while always referring to the same person. This is important because choosing either "Agnes" or "Father Damien" as the more real or true identity of this person obscures the complexity of what is really going on in the narrative.

appetite covers all her senses, and because there is someone to feed her good soup, this appetite can lead to immense pleasure in its satisfaction. Indeed, she asks who he is, but the question is never answered because she is too hungry for the soup to wait for him to answer, blurring his identity with the food itself. Once her hunger for food is satisfied, her sexual awareness awakens, and her bodily experience becomes more erotic and more spiritual simultaneously, engulfed in metaphor. Between her feelings of “hovering elation” and “bands of rippling lightness” and the relaxation and sleep that overtakes the man, there is a gap in which we are left to decide or imagine what passes between them—presumably, some kind of sex, and certainly, some kind of sexual pleasure for Agnes. It’s a significant moment of narrative omission, especially because this experience as a whole is what inspires Agnes to take on the identity of Father Damien and spend the rest of her/his life on the Little No Horse reservation (42-43).

In the disappearance of her rescuer and his hut, Agnes recognizes Jesus—as is often the case in post-resurrection biblical accounts of Jesus, it is his sudden absence that proves him to have been Jesus, as opposed to a more ordinary, mortal man. She awakens to “no sign of the man, no bowl, no track, no spoon, no sheepskin covering or blanket,” and in this context she comes to her understanding of the man’s identity and this experience: “Through You, in You, with You. Aren’t those beautiful words? For of course she knew her husband long before she met Him, long before He rescued her, long before He fed her broth and held Agnes close to Him ...” (43). Knowledge and recognition, proven in absence, stretch backwards through time, giving a sense of inevitability to what, for many people, would be a startling and unusual experience of physical and sexual intimacy with Jesus. In this context, where the disappearance of Jesus proves him to have been Jesus in the first place, the absence of clear or explicit sexual

contact also creates a kind of intimacy that proves transformative in a way that a bowl of soup, sex with a stranger, or even being rescued from a flood otherwise might not be. It's in the gaps that that narration does not fill that the miracles, the supernatural experiences, and the divine presence do very precise, unorthodox, and unexpected work: the work of remaking Agnes into a priest. More, it seems that it is also these gaps, in which Agnes tries but cannot always answer "who do you say that I am," that produce Father Damien as a priest who is capable of entering into relationships that will align him, eventually, with the Anishinaabe in his spirit and worldview, as well as with the Catholic priesthood in his body.

For Agnes/Father Damien, the next manifestation of Jesus in a human, embodied form occurs during the influenza epidemic of 1918, and in the context of Father Damien's relationship with Mary Kashpaw, an Ojibwe woman from a big and influential family on the Little No Horse reservation. Throughout her life, Mary Kashpaw expresses her emotional and spiritual experiences through her physical strength and work. When she is a child, the trauma of her parents' death and subsequent abuse at the hands of her uncle leads her to begin digging holes all over the place, which is confusing and disruptive for the other residents of Little No Horse. First Father Damien reaches out to her by digging with her, and eventually dreams of Mary's parents telling him to get Mary out of there (117).

These relationships—with Quill and Kashpaw, through dreams now that they are dead, and then with Mary—are part of a long process through which Agnes/Father Damien's relationships with Ojibwe people re-orient her/his worldview to include, and eventually be based in, Ojibwe spirituality and relationality. This conversion process is eventually made explicit in Agnes/Father Damien's thoughts, but it is not otherwise recognizable according to the pattern of

religious conversion modeled by Christianity: instead of a definitive change from one religion to another, Agnes/Father Damien's threads of relationship entwine with and create a variety of spiritual experiences, some identifiable as Christian, some as Ojibwe, some as both or neither.

So: in this instance, Agnes enters into what will be a lifelong, intimate relationship with Mary Kashpaw because of the dream-message from the girl's parents. This is a relationship in Ojibwe terms, since communication in dreams from the dead is expected and important, and it creates a relationship that is recognizable to the Ojibwe—that is, it establishes that Quill and Kashpaw see Father Damien as having responsibilities for Mary, and Agnes obeys the dream and immediately goes to take Mary Kashpaw home with her, which brings the two of them into a strong and deep relationship: “As Agnes approached and took the girl's hand, she understood, with a positive prescience, that Mary Kashpaw had come to shield her and heal her—how, there is no saying” (118). One way, it will turn out, is to embody Jesus for Agnes during the influenza outbreak, and another is through her lifelong physical care for Father Damien.

When the influenza pandemic of 1918 hits, Father Damien watches family after family succumb to the flu, while he and Mary Kashpaw work together to relieve the suffering.³³ Agnes is plunged into total spiritual crisis, which is described in counterpoint to Mary Kashpaw's physical work to help Father Damien and everyone who is suffering; while Mary breaks the trail before her, Agnes rails at God:

33 As with pregnancy earlier, I wrote this reading of the influenza pandemic section without having experienced a global pandemic. Now, in the summer of 2020, we are in the midst of a global pandemic of Covid-19. I am not a caretaker for people suffering from this pandemic, and in nearly every other respect as well, my experience is quite different from Mary Kashpaw's and Father Damien's. I will say that I have been aware in a sharper way that epidemics shaped the Americas we inhabit now, aware of the horrific level of disease that ravaged Native American populations, as I heard sirens again and again outside the window of my New York City apartment. The awareness does not mean I understand what that level of suffering is, or even the level of suffering that is happening now. It is more a thing that sits in the corner and watches me, and I sit and watch it back. The things I have learned in the process of this Ph.D. mean that I can, to some extent, have this awareness that I otherwise would not have. But what it means to regard it in this way, to feel that it regards me—I don't know.

God had brought [Agnes] there under false pretenses, after all, aiding her with huge compassion in the flood's aftermath, appearing in person as a man with a horn spoon ...Trudging to the homes of the stricken, Agnes wondered, where was the Trinity? Any one of them would do, she thought in exhausted fury, God the Father, God the Son, God the Son of a Bitch, God the Holy Ghost. But her prayers, said with increasing feverish despair, did not turn back the course of the disease. (121)

Mary Kashpaw's work in this pandemic has continuity with the rest of Mary's life and her previously inexplicable physical activity. She now must dig holes for graves, and all her seeming preparation comes to bear on this immensely difficult period, when her strength is needed by the whole community. Simultaneously, Agnes rejects her previous experiences of God because of the exhausting, unstoppable death all around them.³⁴ Specifically, she is angry at the embodied, caring Jesus man she met after her own brush with death in the flood, and her prayers, by including "God the Son of a Bitch" in the Trinity, have become bitterly angry, but also show a transition from focusing on a triune God to a more four-sided orientation in prayer. Prayer incorporating and oriented toward the four directions is an Anishinaabe form of spiritual orientation, and later on, this change in Father Damien's prayer life will become more specific, and given as a result of language study: "she preferred the Ojibwe word for praying, anama'ay, with its sense of a great motion upward. She began to address the trinity as four and to include the spirit of each direction—those who sat at the four corners of the earth" (182). What begins, then, as a profane outburst of exhausted anger unfolds into a true transformation of how Agnes addresses herself to the world and to whom she attempts to communicate. During the influenza

³⁴ So far, there is one person I know personally who has died of the coronavirus. His name is Tom Burgess (April 11, 1950- June 3, 2020). I knew him well enough that now that he has died, I keep seeing men who look like him wandering around the neighborhood, but not so well or so closely that my daily life is transformed by his passing. We volunteered at Word Up Community Bookshop together.

crisis, however, the fourth person breaks into the Trinity through Agnes' profane fury, and as the onslaught of death slows, Agnes recognizes a new embodiment of Jesus:

One day, as Mary Kashpaw walked before the priest, thrashing through slough grass ... Agnes finally saw the one she had hoped for and cursed ... beneath the girl's disguise. She saw that the face of her constant companion, Mary Kashpaw, was the face of the man with the horn spoon. Then she knew. Christ had gone before the priest, stamping down snow. Christ had bent low and on that broad, angry back carried Father Damien through sloughs ... Christ had fed him hot gruel from a spoon of black iron ... Christ was before him right now, breaking the trail. [Agnes] stumbled through the snow, reaching. Crying out, 'Wait, wait, I am coming!' she lunged for Mary Kashpaw. But the girl watched impassively and when the priest drew near enough she turned away, continued walking in her ordinary form. (123)

In Agnes' recognition, she connects all of Mary's physical care to the physical care of Jesus. The most precise continuity between Mary-Kashpaw-as-Jesus and horn-spoon-man-as-Jesus is that both feed Agnes, hand to mouth, with carefully described spoons. Here, Jesus is the one who feeds, and can be most precisely recognized as such—when her appetite is at the point of need, the person who feeds her may be understood by Agnes as Jesus by virtue of that care. Beyond this, Mary Kashpaw and the horn spoon man both use physical strength to protect Agnes. Mary-Kashpaw-as-Jesus, however, is quite different from the horn spoon man, because Mary is a person with whom Father Damien has an ongoing relationship, before, during, and after this perception of her as Christ. Given Mary's behavior in the passage above, she probably does not know that Agnes has suddenly decided she is Jesus, but at the very least, Mary would

see Father Damien suddenly calling out to her to wait and “lung[ing] for” her, which seems surprising, given that they’ve been walking together for some time and that Mary is already waiting for Father Damien. Mary does not suddenly name herself as Jesus and let Agnes know she got it right, and she also does not seem to find her priest’s behavior strange. Mary simply remains as she has been.

So, is this recognition of Mary Kashpaw a violent imposition of a totalizing Christian narrative in which all stories are subsumed in Christianity and the highest aspiration of any person must be to imitate and relate to Jesus upon an Ojibwe person who does not ask for or claim this Jesus-y identity? As soon as she sees Jesus-in-Mary-Kashpaw, Agnes refers to seeing through “the girl’s disguise,” which is an alarming way to refer to Mary’s whole self-presentation and lived identity. Is it part of Agnes’s process of recognizing that her relationship with Jesus is continually reinventing her engagement with Christianity, while her relationships with Ojibwe people like Mary reorient every aspect of her life? By recognizing herself as a priest, Agnes has already stretched Catholic orthodoxy into an unusual shape and broken Christian rules, but she is still seeking Jesus. That is, if Jesus is Mary Kashpaw, what or who is Jesus anyway, and can he be contained by the expectations Father Damien has of Christianity?

These questions are not precisely answerable, or perhaps simply not answerable as “ors” in opposition to each other, especially since Mary Kashpaw may not ever know that she has been recognized as Jesus, and certainly does not ever do anything to address this perception of Father Damien’s. Instead, Mary Kashpaw comes to recognize many things about Father Damien—including his woman’s body, and the process of Mary Kashpaw’s recognition of Agnes transforms Agnes’s recognition of Mary Kashpaw.

Years after the influenza epidemic, Agnes/Father Damien has a crisis of selfhood and vocation, bringing these identities into an almost fatal level of conflict. Mary Kashpaw is the primary and most intimate witness to this conflict, while Agnes, again, cannot see or engage with the version of Jesus that previously sustained her: Agnes's prayers are angry, and Mary Kashpaw sits “stonily ... snapping beans.... If only, thought Agnes, she could again see the divine in Mary Kashpaw, maybe that would help. But the girl hardened and retreated” (208). Again, the form of Christ that previously had meaning for Agnes fails to sustain that identity and meaning, and the comfort Mary Kashpaw once offered as a divine incarnation is not available to Agnes now. Agnes thinks that because she does not see Jesus in Mary Kashpaw, that Mary is not present to her, but that is not true. Mary is ready to assist when Father Damien is in terrible physical and spiritual trouble, partially because of the trances of physical work that she experiences, which help Mary traverse spiritual landscapes that Father Damien might otherwise get lost in. Eventually, Father Damien is found in a probably drug-induced sleep from which he cannot be woken, and it is Mary Kashpaw who tends to the priest, body and soul:

Mary Kashpaw stayed day and night with the priest from then on, keeping watch. She lighted his glass kerosene lamp and kept it going.

For although he appeared to be lying inert in one body.... Father Damien was, in truth, wandering mightily through heaven and earth. He was exploring worlds inhabited by both Ojibwe and Catholic. And had Mary Kashpaw not kept that beacon going, he might ... have become confused or even got lost. (211)

Mary Kashpaw becomes Father Damien's anchor through this journey, which seems first to be a transformation, and then a revelation of his spiritual life (i.e., it appears that he is

changing his allegiance from Catholicism to Ojibwe spirituality, but that is only in the terms of binary on-off, this-that conversion that Christian rules demand). Father Damien has entered not only a spiritual, but an explicitly pluriversal space. The first narrative account we get of Father Damien's journey is Mary Kashpaw observing and caring for his body, and, thereby, coming to understand that body in more detail: "Mary Kashpaw watched how his hands pierced the air, always moving. Fingers rippling on the covers, he smiled, humming endless, complicated, unrepeatable music that went on all night and made Mary Kashpaw sigh with radiant emotion" (211). First, Father Damien's body expresses the musical talent that has long been hidden inside that body: Agnes was an extremely talented pianist, but lost all memory of her talent upon becoming Father Damien, and Mary Kashpaw reads this truth of the priest's body and the connection of his psychic and physical journeys. From here, her observation deepens, she carefully and intensely watches Father Damien's face and is "rapt as an ice fisherman" as she does so. After much observation, she notices that he isn't growing any facial hair, touches his face, and then takes care to act as though she has shaved his face every day (212).

Through the very level of fixed attention that may make her appear withdrawn to Agnes as she seeks the version of Christ she had seen before, Mary Kashpaw finds and recognizes both Father Damien and Agnes, in body and spirit. Mary Kashpaw's observation and care is both physical and spiritual throughout Father Damien's sleep, and in fact these aspects are inseparable. The physical lamp guides and safeguards Father Damien's spirit. Mary's attention to Damien's body lets her know, gradually, many things about her priest. She observes and participates in Agnes's bodily memory of her lost music, which means that when she understands that Agnes is a bodily presence with/in Father Damien, she understands it through

more than the revelation of a female-appearing body. She follows the travels of Father Damien's spirit, and, tracing the path of the spirit through her focus on his body, she comes to understand that Father Damien has a woman's body, or at least, a body that is not normative for a white man and a Catholic priest. Mary Kashpaw also understands that Father Damien's unexpected body needs to be concealed, and therefore engages in the shaving performance. This level of attention and care for Father Damien does not end after his spiritual journey ends, or even after his death. After Father Damien's death, Mary Kashpaw continues to tend to his space, which has become a semi-public shrine as the idea that he might be a saint spreads. She keeps the razor and shaving mug well-cleaned and visible, and also changes his sheets, dusts and arranges papers on his desk, etc., and she also takes her rest in his space, and returns to a dream-space with him: "Sometimes she dozed off and followed Father Damien through the underbush. Sometimes she dug her way down with a teaspoon toward her priest, her love, through the layers of the earth" (355). Mary Kashpaw's love and care connect her with Father Damien whether he is living or dead, in a physical or spiritual world. Her care, in fact, bridges worlds and holds them together.

Clearly, the process of physical attention and recognition is inseparable from Mary Kashpaw's ability to journey with Father Damien spiritually when he is alive and suffering, and to guide him in that realm: "Impossible to say how many dreams within the dream before he met the one who followed him to guide him back: Mary Kashpaw" (213). Mary's attention is holistic—it moves between the body and the spirit with fierce attention for both, and thereby Mary can perceive Agnes within and as Father Damien without much confusion or disturbance, and this is precisely why she is able to guide and help the priest come home through his own crisis.

How does Mary Kashpaw's recognition of Father Damien's body relate to Agnes's

recognition of Mary Kashpaw as Jesus? Experientially, there are some similarities: a loved, intimate figure suddenly seen in a new way, evidence and experiences that existed before the revelation adding up to present a new picture: in Agnes's case of Mary as Christ, and in Mary's case of Father Damien as Agnes. Once Mary Kashpaw perceives Agnes's body, she can take better care of Father Damien, physically and spiritually. She can protect him from the discovery that would make his priesthood impossible through her subterfuge with the razor, and she can follow Father Damien on his spiritual journey and bring him back to the physical world when it is done. She becomes salvific to him. During the influenza epidemic, that means that Agnes sees her friend and caretaker as Jesus, because the one who saves her must be Jesus. In the dream realm, however, Father Damien sees Mary Kashpaw, not Jesus. And Mary Kashpaw sees Father Damien and Agnes, in one. Their recognition of each other becomes non-metaphorical and less mediated, even as it takes place in a spiritual world. Eventually, when Agnes is around one hundred years old, she decides to stage a gentle suicide on a nearby island, so as not to be found out as a woman-priest. At last, Mary Kashpaw reveals her deep and layered knowledge of Father Damien, including what he is about to do. She loses her balance because of how much she is feeling, and hugs Agnes around the knees. As Agnes strokes Mary's hair, she sees in the "whirlwind of hair at her crown" aspects of her earliest relationship with Mary Kashpaw, and then sees "how well Mary Kashpaw knew her and had kept her secret" (345). Through Mary Kashpaw's care for and perception of Agnes's body, Agnes comes to care for and even perceive their whole relational history through Mary's hair.

Mary Kashpaw, knower of secrets, bridge between worlds, able to travel in the flesh or in the spirit, whose love transcends death—she does *sound* like Jesus, or at least a certain, very

pleasant version of Jesus. But she doesn't do all this for the entire human race; she does it for Father Damien, referred to in the text many times as “her priest.” The relationship is anything but universal. Agnes puts Jesus at the center of everything in her life, but through her (at one point literal!) pursuit of Jesus-in-Mary-Kashpaw, as well as her other relationships with the people of Little No Horse, he steps to the side.

Let's return, briefly, to the spirit world where Father Damien is found and seen by Mary Kashpaw. In this moment, Mary pulls Father Damien not back—quite yet—to the physical world, but back to the path he needs to be on to survive, spiritually, which leads him to one of his best friends, Nanapush, and to a sweat lodge, a holy Ojibwe place of care, prayer, and transformation.³⁵ Here, Agnes encounters Anishinaabe prayer, not as a joke or a profane aberration from Christian practice, and is saved from her despair. Her understanding of Ojibwemowin, good enough to parse out the words just a little bit after they are spoken, allows her to hear Nanapush “addressing the creator of things and all beings to every direction and every animal.” While she knows and thinks about her participation in this ritual being against Church teaching, the combination of the ritual actions, the serious care of her humorous, tricky friend, the words she both knows and doesn't know, and the expansive relationality invoked, lead Agnes to experience surrender and comfort (215).

In these experiences, Father Damien is recognized, as Agnes, and as himself. Looking so intensely and sometimes desperately for Jesus, she finds, eventually, her Anishinaabe friends, and is found by Mary Kashpaw and Nanapush. This reorients the priest, but what impact does

³⁵ Remember Nanapush from that dream in *The Round House* where he saved his mother from a false wiindigoo accusation and then encountered and killed and received the teachings of that buffalo woman? Yes, it's the same guy! He's definitely a human being, an Anishinaabe, and also related in many ways to Nanabozho, a powerful being to the Anishinaabe (Elder brother? Trickster? Culture hero? Transformer?). Hello, Nanapush! You are the best friend to Agnes/Father Damien. You like to tease him, but he enjoys that and likes to tease you too, and you're so funny that he is able to have a good death as well as a good life.

this reorientation have? At a few points throughout her life, Agnes encounters a talking black dog, whom she first takes to be the devil and eventually decides is death. As the dog taunts her with all her dead loved ones, she thinks of Nanapush, who, she says, “sneaked past your two-way road onto the road of life,” and this reflection on her relationships leads her to make a declaration of conversion: “There is no one I want to visit except in the Ojibwe heaven, and so at this late age, I'm going to convert, stupid dog, and become at long last the pagan I always was at heart...” (310). It is still Agnes's desire to convert/escape from Christianity as she approaches, with intention and awareness, her death. She hopes that by secluding herself on an island she will not only achieve a private death that does not reveal her body, but can also “sneak by the hell gates and the pearly gates into that sweeter pasture, the heaven of the Ojibwe” (346). She speaks to the spirits she feels around her and asks them “cheerfully” to “[m]ake room' ” for her to become one of them (347). Her actual cosmological vision has changed because of her relationships with Ojibwe people, language, and stories: “She no longer saw the constellations as she had before knowing them in Ojibwe, but saw the heavens as her friends defined them” (348). In the end, Agnes thinks about Nanapush's funny death, and laughs until she bursts a blood vessel in her brain and observes herself begin to die with “amused wonder” (349). She perceives emptiness and reaches into it, and finds her hands grabbed by “a bigger, work-toughened hand,” which pulls her “across” the threshold of her life (350).

Whose hand is that? Who do you say that it is? Is it Jesus? It does sound like the horn-spoon river-rescue Jesus-man, whose hand is described as “brutalized and heavy from work” (43). Berndt, Agnes's lover after she is a nun but before she becomes a priest, is a farmer and probably has “work-toughened” hands. It could, I suppose, be the hand of Father Gregory, her

lover for a brief time in the middle of her priest-life, or even the hand of Nanapush, whose life and death inspired her conversion and her laughing demise. But my money's on Jesus—I say it's Jesus. I could be wrong. It feels joyful, that hand-grab and that yank. And yet—what does it mean, if it is Jesus? Did Agnes's conversion and escape from Christianity fail? Is she going to join her friends in the Anishinaabe heaven?

Just because you see Jesus, don't assume Christian rules are being followed in a Christian world. I think this strong hand belongs to a Jesus in an Anishinaabe world, or in a plethora of worlds that have no incompatibility with an Anishinaabe world, as none of them need to be universal. Jesus in the pluriverse with Anishinaabe cosmological leanings.³⁶ Agnes's journey has transformed both her and him—what else it may have done we will consider in the next chapter.

In this chapter, we saw an exposure of ways in which Jesus can be an instrument of colonial, sexual, and misogynistic violence through the very narrative that claims him for the entire universe and the entire universe for him. We also saw that when Highway and Erdrich decenter Jesus, though they do it in very different ways, his protean, non-universal possibilities come to play, and can be fun, sexy, and useful, outside of the Christian rules that Thomas King shows us as silly, but functional and violent, aspects of colonial worlding. It does, in fact, matter who everyone in these stories says Jesus is, but the choices are complex and woven through Anishinaabe and Cree worlds and imaginaries, and simply (or intricately, dancing out of constrictions) step outside what Christian rules claim Jesus to be in every place and with every person.

36 Uh-oh. Jesus in the pluriverse with Anishinaabe cosmological leanings is striking me as something of a trickster. He's already a culture hero and an elder brother of sorts! But even though I'm not going to analyze what these beings are, when you get him out of the center, he reminds me of others we have seen. Hi, Jesus. I like you on the side.

CHAPTER THREE

You Are Who You Eat, Part 2: Indigenous Eucharistic Miracles Dis/Entangle Christian Rules

In Catholic tradition, the Eucharist has the potential to be a space of ritual relational consumption, a space where “may I eat you?” is asked and answered; or, at least, a space in which some kind of reciprocal questions are being asked and answered around who eats and whom they eat. Since Jesus, the eaten, initiates the conversation, the questions are perhaps more in the vein of “will you eat me?” and “Will you enter into the reciprocal relationship of consumption with me, will you be bound to me by eating me?” This kind of exchange is present in the sacramental actions of the Eucharistic ritual in the Mass, and in the actual spoken dialogue that participants exchange, which involves the injunction to eat, the question of whether this eating is appropriate and the acknowledgement that it is only through the eaten’s consent that it may become so, and a careful recognition of exactly whom the eater is eating at the moment of consumption.

The injunction to eat happens when the priest who is leading the ritual recounts Jesus’ actions in offering his disciples bread and wine at the Last Supper, a seder meal before his death and resurrection, and saying, “Take this, all of you, and eat, this is my body; take this, all of you, and drink, this is my blood.” The question of whether this eating of Jesus is appropriate comes when the congregation recites in unison, “Lord, I am not worthy to receive you [that you should enter under my roof], but only say the word and I [my soul] shall be healed.” This is taken from a story in the gospel of Matthew, in which a man asking for healing for his servant spoke similar words to Jesus (*The Catholic Bible* Matthew 8:8), but in context of the Mass occurs in direct

preparation for the congregants to eat the Eucharist. It is the word of Jesus—here, manifesting as the consent of the consumed—that has the potential to make this act of eating appropriate and salutary, as opposed to monstrous and violent, that transforms the unworthiness of the eater to receive the eaten. At the moment when the priest consecrates and eats the bread and wine that will be host to Jesus’ embodied presence, he says, “May the Body (or Blood) of Christ bring me/us to everlasting life,” both explaining and entreating the results of the food from the one who gives his body as the food (usually, of course, the result of eating is just normally-lasting life from the consumption of other mortal beings, whereas the result of this meal is everlasting life from the consumption of an immortal God embodied as a human being—but the terms, someone’s body consumed by someone else for continued life, remain similar). Finally, when the congregants come to eat, the Eucharistic minister who gives them the bread or wine says “The Body (or Blood) of Christ,” and the congregant replies, “Amen,” and then takes and eats or drinks the food. In this dialogue, the participants both request and enact the recognition of whom is being eaten, essential here for the spiritual benefits of this meal, but also essential in other contexts of consumption to make sure a person is not eating someone they should not eat, as with the misrecognition that occurs in windigo stories. In both of these situations (receiving the Eucharist, making sure you don’t turn into a windigo), being able carefully and sometimes counterintuitively to recognize whom you are eating is the only way to gain nourishment, physical or spiritual, from the food, and to avoid doing a kind of harm that breaks relational boundaries (as opposed to the harm that is unavoidable in eating itself). These relationships, like the consumption itself, may be physical, spiritual, or both.

I outline this because this process of relational consumption is very similar to the process

of relational consumption outlined in the hunting scenes of *The Round House* and also in many descriptions of various Native American cultures and their relationships to beings that may be food (Geniusz; Brightman; Kimmerer). It is not, however, similar to most Eurowestern eating practices or concepts of proper relationship between the eater and the eaten. In fact, in tracing ideas of consumption and communion through Western literature and thinking from Ancient Greece to early America, Maggie Kilgour states definitively that the problem of eating is that it is fundamentally ambivalent, creating a radical intimacy that is “completely unreciprocal” (7)—in Kilgour’s assessment, the non-reciprocal nature of eating is obvious, is in fact its basic nature. In many Native American contexts, including the Anishinaabe and Cree ones explored by Erdrich and Highway, as we have seen, reciprocal relationships are essential to understanding and engaging in appropriate eating—reciprocity, here, becomes the basic nature of eating, or at least any eating that is not at worst monstrous and at best ill-advised. In this space, the Eucharist opens questions: Can *this* consumption be reciprocally relational? And, if so, what does that mean for all the rest of the eating done by communicants, or anyone in the world of which Christianity understands itself to be the arbiter and the story-map?

The possibility of relational consumption in the Eucharist arises out of the theological puzzle of the embodiment of Christ—one form of this embodiment involves God enfleshing himself as a man to experience human life and thereby transform it, and another involves Jesus transubstantiating the Eucharist to become his body, such that worshippers will eat it and thereby embody Jesus, both as every living thing embodies the others it consumes, and in a spiritualized sense that is special to this ritual. In “Consuming Christ: the Role of Jesus in Christian Food Ethics,” Laura M. Hartman specifically asks how the Eucharist does or can relate to all eating

done by practitioners of it, and highlights how contemporary Christian ethicists and theologians interpret centuries-old controversies about Christian eating to illuminate present day experiences; she describes both the topsoil and industrial agriculture being connected by theologians to Christ's body, to make the suffering caused by the depletion of the topsoil and the processes of industrial agriculture urgent and significant to Christians (49).³⁷ While creating an invocation of relationality and expressing both the hope and the imperative that what happens in the Eucharist, eating-wise, not be limited to that sacrament, the ideas Hartman and other contemporary Christian theologians put forth take for granted that eating *needs* to be sanctified, that the sacredness of relationship between consumer and consumed cannot necessarily be seen in itself, but rather through a divine manifestation of consumption reflecting back upon and revealing the ordinary practices of consumption. In this context, the difference between everlasting life and finite life is important; in much Christian theology, the former defines and creates meaning for the latter that it cannot have on its own. To put this another way, there is a theological assumption that without the association with Christ, respectful, reciprocal relationship is not possible among beings who consume one another. The idea that activities of human living can be sanctified through the embodiment of Christ, and without transformation through his incarnation are unholy, profane, and/or relationally disturbing, violent, or inappropriate, is a basic theological assumption of orthodox Christianity, so much so that it is not often questioned in contemporary theological and ethical works. On a basic level, this assumption is rooted in the need for redemption or justification through Christ that is a tenet of Christianity and drives its proselytizing desire for the conversion of as many people as possible, and within it is the concept

37

[□]Wendell Berry associates the topsoil with Christ and Michael Northcott's asserts that industrialized agriculture fits into one of the few categories of food biblically forbidden to Christians, that which has been offered to idols.

of Christ as the universal relator, the one to whom all must relate, and in basically the same ways.

In Louise Erdrich's and Tomson Highway's work, there are two particular Eucharistic miracles,³⁸ in which the assumptions fleshed out above are complicated, changed, or simply don't exist as a ground of meaning and interpretation for the supernatural events that occur in the texts. The Eucharistic miracles described in the contemporary novels by Erdrich and Highway share a few characteristics with their historical predecessors, mostly popular stories circulated in medieval Europe; specifically, they focus on physical recognition of the identity of the Eucharist as consumable flesh, and that physical experience creates or illuminates the meaning of the sacrament. The contemporary miracles in Highway's and Erdrich's work, however, create fissures and expose complications in the theologies Christianity offers.

In *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, the Eucharistic miracle involves the manifestation of the sacrament in bloody flesh, but the experience is not salvific in any sense, and seems to directly precipitate Gabriel's deconversion from Christianity, putting it in an intimate but slanted relationship with prototypical Eucharistic miracles that either create or reaffirm previously absent Christian faith. For Gabriel, the experience of Father Lafleur's sexual abuse is inseparable from ingesting Christ, since the priest's crucifix falls in and out of his mouth as Father Lafleur molests him, and Gabriel experiences his own sexual arousal—as a child and as an adult—as a taste of “warm honey” flowing over his tongue that originates from this crucifix. While this is not explicitly Eucharistic, it certainly resonates with many medieval Eucharistic miracles in

38

³⁸Here, I use Eucharistic miracle to describe an event in which the Eucharist manifests or is perceived in an unusual, excessive, supernatural way by someone in the congregation. This is in line with a long narrative tradition of accounts Eucharistic miracles, from the Middle Ages to the present.

which people with exceptional faith taste the Eucharist as honey or other delicious foods, but here, it is not faith that is rewarded but a connection between violation and desire that is codified.

The Eucharistic miracle described in the text is similarly ambivalent, and happens to Gabriel when he attends Mass as a young adult, now consensually sexually active with men. In the context of Gabriel and the presiding priest's mutual sexual desire, a miracle occurs:

The Jesuit's crotch was arrestingly level with Gabriel's line of vision... Rebuffed, Gabriel's gaze raked its way up the belly, chest, and neck to the face, where he knew he had induced a flashing spasm in the holy man's gaze. The Cree youth curled his full upper lip—and watched with glee as celibacy-by-law drove mortal flesh to the brink.

Flailing for his soul's deliverance, the priest thrust out a hairy, trembling hand. And by immaculate condensation or such rarefied event, a length of raw meat dangled from his fingers. What was a humble caribou hunter's son to do? He exposed himself. And savoured the dripping blood as it hit his tongue....

'The body of Christ,' said the wizard. But the instant the flesh met Gabriel's, a laugh exploded where his 'Amen' should have been. The laugh was so loud—the joke so ludicrous, the sham so extreme—that every statue in the room, from St. Theresa to St. Dominic to Bernadette of Lourdes—even the Son of God himself—shifted its eyeballs to seek out the source of such a clangour. (180)

This miracle seems to reverse the pattern of the story told of Saint Gregory and a laughing, doubting communicant, which I'll summarize here from the *Golden Legend*, written in

the mid-to-late 1200s by Jacobus de Voragine. While Gregory is celebrating Mass, a woman laughs at the consecration, because she cannot believe the bread she herself made and donated to the Church is Christ's body. The woman's laughter causes Gregory to stop the Mass and pray “for her unbelief,” and the result is a Eucharistic miracle: the host turns into a finger, and the woman's faith is restored, so Gregory prays for the finger to again be in the form of bread, and the woman eats it, properly, as communion (186). The woman's doubt, in the form of laughter, because of her own physical experience making the bread, is corrected by the miracle, and then everything is put back in its place—her faith is in the right form, and the finger goes back to seeming like bread.

In Gabriel's situation, his laughter comes when he takes the bloody flesh in his mouth, and is, on the one hand, not a doubt of the sacrament exactly, but a proclamation of its excessive presence, and, on the other hand, about the “joke” and the “sham” of being given this sacrament through the sexually desiring body of the priest—like the woman in Gregory's Mass, he feels a disjunction with the ritual because of his own bodily relation to what is happening. The sham/joke also goes beyond the priest's desire and includes Gabriel's embodied, sensually overwhelming experience of recognizing and eating the meat that is offered to him. This gets complicated, because the joke/sham experience is also the miraculous experience in which the communion host (the bread) takes on the physical form of meat in Gabriel's embodied perception. Gabriel encounters the meat bodily, with both grotesque descriptions of eating raw meat (“dripping blood” that Gabriel “savours”), and sexualized descriptions of Gabriel's body and his consumption of the Eucharistic meat. The joke is the combination and convergence of aspects that the theological and doctrinal explanations of the Eucharist precisely separate; the

joke is that Gabriel can recognize what he is eating while the priestly “wizard” does not recognize what he is offering Gabriel to eat. An experience in which the Eucharist is a “sham” according to its own theological terms would probably not include a miraculous transformation into and/or recognition as meat, but instead would be (and certainly has been) some kind of assertion that it remained bread without any transformation. Here, the sham is present in the supernatural event itself—demonstrating that the world here is not either exclusively Christian or devoid of miracles, but is a Cree world, specifically Gabriel’s world, which shapes his relationship to the Eucharist, to meat, and to sexuality, shifting and struggling against the demands and expectations of Christian sacramentality and doctrine.

Since recognition is both crucial to reciprocally relational, non-cannibalistic eating and integral to the Eucharistic ritual, let’s pause to try and figure out what (and whom) Gabriel is recognizing. First, he recognizes, enjoys, and encourages the priest’s sexual desire, which transitions directly into his surprised recognition that the communion bread is in fact “a length of raw meat.” Is this raw meat Jesus’ actual human flesh? Is it caribou meat perceptible to Gabriel because he is a “caribou hunter’s son?” Is it a manifestation of the priest’s penis, which the words at least evoke? This is not an answerable question, but it is an important question. It matters whose body makes the meat, from a Catholic perspective, in every Eucharist, where the spoken recognition of the body precedes the eating of it, and, from a Cree perspective, as we have seen, especially when there is a chance (as there certainly is here) that one is about to consume human flesh. What kind of “miracle” is happening here? One in which Jesus becomes extra-present in his Eucharist and effects a transformation of faith (in Gabriel’s case, a transformation *away* from the practice of and belief in Christianity)? Or one in which Gabriel is

given an invitation to consume human flesh and thereby is in danger of wîhtikowipayi?

Perhaps it is both, and perhaps that is both the danger and the joke, which are rarely separable for Highway. The act of recognition that Gabriel is experiencing when he laughs both propels his act of eating the Eucharistic meat, and pushes him out of the church, never to return to Catholic practice. In some ways, Gabriel has perceived a reality in this religious practice, but he takes it as both absurdity and warning. Gabriel's jagged (and loud) laughter here attracts the attention and exposes the embodiment of all the statues in the church, from saints to Jesus himself—the spiritual beings in the church are quite responsive and quite interested. Gabriel's behavior exists in a context of spiritual relationship with an array of non-human beings, which, as we have seen, has been part of his life from before birth and is a marker of his participation in and formation by Cree worlds and stories.

The act of recognition, consumption, and laughter catapults Gabriel into intimate relation and indeed identification with Jesus: “Up the aisle Gabriel bumped and clattered, his mouth spewing blood, his bloated gut regurgitant, his esophagus engorged with entrails. At every step he took, ghost-white masks and gaping mouths lunged and shrieked: 'Kill him! Kill him! Nail the savage to the cross, hang him high, hang him dead!’” (181). As is sacramentally expected, eating the Eucharist has connected Gabriel with Jesus on a bodily level, but this connection is disgusting, not nourishing—he's overfed, bloody, possibly close to choking—and dangerous: Gabriel's Cree identity merges with Jesus' sacrificial identity to lead to a disturbing call for racialized violence against Gabriel's Cree body by unpleasantly white people. To put it simply, the Eucharist works here, but the work it does is not salutary for Gabriel; the meaning of that work is not what has been promised, and it marks an end to Gabriel's practice of Catholicism.

While Gabriel decides not to return to church after the experience described above, he does have sex with the priest, described thus: “Gabriel Okimasis got to know the mouth-watering Father Vincent Connolly in a way that had him yodelling “weeks'chilooowew!” by nine that evening” (185). Here (probably) Gabriel or (not likely, but it’s fun to imagine) Father Connolly reacts to sex with a Cree yell of joy—the terms of engagement, sexually, have shifted from Gabriel’s experience of abuse, while remaining connected to that experience, just as Gabriel’s religious allegiances have shifted while not being completely separable from a Catholic landscape. In both of these shifts, Cree ideas and words begin to resurface in Gabriel’s mind, vocabulary, and body, a body that is vulnerable to violence, but also one that can seek and delight in pleasure and sexual appetite. The Eucharistic miracle that Gabriel experiences, by not confirming but severing him from the Catholic faith, also gestures in that severance toward relational possibilities outside of abuse and horror. The Eucharist, here, breaks its own rules, but Gabriel is not bound by it in the breaking or the following of those rules. Gabriel’s experience of the Eucharist-as-meat catapults him into a forced identification with Jesus that exacerbates his vulnerability to anti-Indigenous violence. Gabriel’s experience of the Eucharist-as-meat also frees him from the control of Catholicism over his thoughts and actions, and reveals intimate, strange, interpersonal relationships that remain, outside of the doctrinal reach of Catholicism, with ostensibly Catholic spirits, in the forms of the statues of saints and of Jesus who react to Gabriel’s laughter. Gabriel having sex with Father Vincent Connolly is a matter of appetite and joy—which does not mean that it is entirely free of the shadow of Gabriel’s abuse by a different priest, nor, as we know, can the fact that Vincent Connolly is “mouth-watering” be taken as a guarantee that he is salutary to eat. In all these juxtapositions, Gabriel is enacting a dangerous

and pleasurable world that is both very much his own and intricately connected with the Cree stories that gave him birth, and doesn't surrender the authority to make meaning of all that Catholicism contains while refusing to be bound by its strictures of meaning or action.

In Erdrich's *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, Agnes has recently become Father Damien and arrived at Little No Horse reservation when a Eucharistic miracle occurs. The newly-minted Father Damien finds that the people on the reservation, including the nuns he has specifically come to lead, are starving to death. In the throes of this realization, Agnes celebrates her first Mass as Father Damien, and experiences a Eucharistic miracle. This section of the book is titled "Miracle of the Meat," and it presents Father Damien at the moment when he will prove (or not) his priesthood, within the potential crisis of his body as Agnes's body. It is a miraculous success, especially at the moment of Eucharistic consecration:

And lifted his eyes and said the words 'Hoc est enim corpus meum,' and the bread was flesh.

Of course it was, as it always was.

'Hic est enim calix sanguinis mei novi et aeterni testamenti: mysterium fedi...'

The wine was blood.

[T]he strange girl in the front pew emitted a sudden croak of laughter.

On her lips, in her mouth. Real and rich, heavy, good. Agnes choked with startled shock. She hesitated, put the food to her mouth again. Real! Real! Hunger roared in her as she broke the bread. Ate the flesh. Delivering the communion meal to her starving sisters, Agnes was caught in a panic of emotion. She heard nothing, saw nothing, went through the rest of Mass on reeling instinct. Was it

really true and had they, as well, experienced what she'd felt? Was this something that happened, always, to priests? Did their part of the sacrament transubstantiate in real as well as metaphorical terms? Had the dry thin consecrated Host turned into a thick mouthful of raw, tender, bloody, sweet-tasting meat in the mouths of the sisters? And the wine to vital blood? And were they all full, as Agnes felt, satisfied and calm? (68-69)

Here, for Agnes/Father Damien, the miracle inaugurates Father Damien's priesthood in a spectacular and materially salvific way. As Miri Rubin highlights, the Eucharist's meaning is inseparable from its corporeality, and therefore the body of the person performing the consecration is particularly implicated and important. In Erdrich's novel, this priest's body is in question, and the manifestation of the Eucharistic miracle seems to respond to this question. There may be something "wrong" with Father Damien's body as a priest's body, since it is also Agnes's female body—but there's something excessively, corporeally right that happens in this miracle, with the sacrament becoming the meat they need to survive. The potential problem of Agnes's body making Father Damien unreal as a priest is transcended, in some way, if not fixed, by this miracle of the meat. The temporality of this is complex, creating shades of doubt and certainty about the level of strangeness present in this miracle. After the miracle occurs, the narration assures us that "of course" the bread was flesh, "it always was." The "always" of the narration contrasts with Agnes's bewildering experience, and perhaps that temporal space between "always" and Agnes's "panic of emotion" is precisely how and when her priesthood can happen. The whole experience of the miracle cements Father Damien in the priesthood, but also opens questions that lead him to make the first report on the miracles at Little No Horse, writing

to the pope to ask if this kind of thing had happened before. While there is a long and literary history of Eucharistic miracles, Father Damien gets no response and, indeed, has no respondent, no one (except, perhaps, another woman who has become a priest) who could navigate all the details of his confusion—but this, in itself, may also be a source or explanation of the miracle: Father Damien, in Agnes’ female body, exceeds what is thought to be possible for a Catholic priest, and therefore, Father Damien’s first Eucharist as a priest exceeds its expected boundaries of experience and embodiment as well.

At this moment of the Mass, as in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, the miracle turns the bread to meat—“raw, tender, bloody, sweet-tasting” and the wine to blood. Again, there is no discussion of what kind of meat this is—it seems harder here to imagine it is anything but the actual meat-body of Christ, but to Agnes, this manifestation is not disgusting, but literally life-giving. It does not put her at risk, but puts her out of the danger of starvation. We never hear if this happens again as Father Damien’s priesthood becomes more secure, his relationships with the Ojibwe people at Little No Horse grow, and the immediate danger of starvation recedes. Like Father Damien, readers get no response to such questions. Perhaps, the event itself is response, body to body, which moves the Eucharistic encounter deeply into the particular relationship between Father Damien and Jesus, between Agnes and her priestly vocation. It confirms Father Damien in an unorthodox and embodied excess of faith, and Father Damien’s holding to that faith will cause him to let go of many other things—including, eventually, his allegiance to Catholicism as religious institution, which he deliberately exchanges for his ongoing relationships to the Anishinaabeg at Little No Horse.

In Father Damien's first Mass, as in Gregory’s mass and Gabriel’s Eucharistic experience,

there is also a person laughing. and this person turns out to be Pauline Puyat, who will later become Sister Leopolda, and Father Damien's consistent, irritating antagonist. Pauline/Leopolda is a half-Ojibwe woman who tries to be as Catholic as possible through violent asceticism imposed on herself and others. On this day, she is the one person in attendance at the mass who is not Father Damien or one of the convent's nuns. She seems to embody the starvation that Father Damien has found at his first approach to Little No Horse: her face is described as "white and beak thin," her mouth, "a pale and twisted line," her eyes, "great, starved, black, disturbing" (67), and she is full of an energy the nuns lack, "seething" and laughing first when Father Damien begins by proclaiming that the mass will be as good, real, and meaningful as one held in a context of plenty. Pauline sees the poverty and pain of her own body as meaningful, and as something that cannot be transcended. Then, as we have seen above, Pauline laughs when the consecration has happened and the bread and wine are flesh and blood—though before Agnes experiences the taste that tells her a (possibly) unusual miracle has occurred. The cause of her laughter in this moment remains a secret: does she doubt the moment of transubstantiation, as the woman in Gregory's Mass does? Does she see the miracle but doubt its holiness and/or the fitness of the priest to perform it, as Gabriel does? Pauline's laughter seems, both times, to be inhuman and unpleasant: first a "screech" and then a "croak," and in both cases occurs when Father Damien asserts the faith-driven, Eucharist-freighted miracle of plenty, of sufficiency, in a context in which there is nothing to eat and in which the land is being depleted and transformed into the bounded reservation territory. Very literally, and on many different levels, it is not possible for Pauline and Father Damien to recognize the same things in the Mass or in the Eucharist, or, it seems, in nearly any aspect of the world.

Pauline and Father Damien meet for the first time through this miracle—in which Damien perceives and eats nourishing sacramental flesh, and Pauline laughs, splitting the signal of doubt and the experience of miraculous Eucharistic enfleshment that have a cause and effect relationship in some other miracles, including Gabriel's. The two will continue on a close but divergent trajectory—encountering many of the same signs, events, and experiences, but utterly split in their perception of them. This trajectory leaves Sister Leopolda a candidate for Catholic sainthood and Father Damien hoping to get to an Anishinaabe afterlife where so many of his closest friends have gone. Leopolda rejects almost everything around her, from her cultural relationships to her own body to the lives of most of the people she knows (she is described in several places as having a gift for death and dying people, but not being able to deal with them when they are alive and not about to die).

There is another unusual Eucharistic situation in which Pauline and Father Damien both participate, but it brings suffering and death instead of nourishment. Father Damien is carrying the host in a procession before a wagon driven by his friend Kashpaw, with his wife, Quill, and his daughter, Mary Kashpaw, riding as well, and bearing a statue of the Virgin Mary. Father Damien finds carrying the host in procession to be spiritually powerful and unifying to his identities:

Agnes and Father Damien became one indivisible person in prayer... Sometimes he held the Sacred Host aloft, feeling a soft power flow through his arms.

Sometimes he held the Host before him at a more intimate level... Each breath was sunlight. Green love surrounded him. Present on the hillside with the body of Christ, he breathed an easy adoration...

Then, he tripped.

Agnes thought, later, how odd—odd or typical—that she should stumble in the full flow of the gift, in the radiant immediacy of pure grace. What happened next, and next, followed from the first misstep. (109-110)

What happens next is that the Host goes flying into the air and Pauline throws herself in front of the cart, “[b]arefoot, dragging the [buffalo] skulls on thongs fastened somewhere within her habit, she raised her arms in horror to see the Host defiled” (110). This panics the horses, throws the Virgin Mary out of the cart and through the window of a house, mortally injures Quill and Kashpaw, and seriously injures and traumatizes Mary Kashpaw (109-111). The amazing religious unity that Father Damien is experiencing with not only his other self but with Christ’s body in the host, the sun, the hill itself, all gives way to terrible destruction through first Father Damien’s stumble and then Pauline’s desperate adherence to the idea that the body of Christ in the form of the Eucharistic host—described in the moments it flies through the air as “white as flowers and dead as bone” (109)—is more meaningful and more precious than the human bodies of the family in the cart.

In many ways, this scene elaborates the deep connection between Agnes/Father Damien and Pauline/Leopolda, while not collapsing their religious practices into equivalency with one another. While not being reducible to allegory or metaphor alone, this scene serves as a complex pantomime of colonialism, Christianity, and conversion. Precisely within his gift of spiritual joy and communion, Father Damien stumbles, and, laden both with the bones of buffalo and the starkness of her Christian beliefs, Pauline jumps forward, and these actions together bring death and suffering to the Kashpaws. There is no innocent act of conversion or even of Christian

religious feeling, at least for a missionary priest, in the context of settler colonialism, and the spiritual connections people feel, experience, and forge within that context can be life-giving, and can simultaneously engender a context of accident, mess, violence, and death.

Through the works examined in this chapter, we have learned that a potential for reciprocal relational eating, the ethical and spiritually salutary way to consume other beings in Algonquian understandings of the world, is present in the Catholic ritual of the Eucharist. The threat of *wihtikowipayi* is also present. These strands of Cree and Anishinaabe imaginaries intersect with Catholic traditions of Eucharistic miracles, and Erdrich and Highway both place their characters exactly at this intersection, so that Eucharistic miracles occur within Anishinaabe and Cree worlds. Unlike their medieval European counterparts, the miracles in these contemporary Indigenous novels do not bring the people who experience them into more orthodox expressions of Catholic faith and understandings of the Eucharist. Instead, they highlight systems of colonial violence that bring Indigenous characters into circuits of suffering alongside or through the body of Jesus, and move characters who experience the miracles closer to Cree and Anishinaabe understandings of what it means to eat other beings, and relate well to other beings, whether they are Jesus or not.

CHAPTER FOUR

What Do You Say The World Is? Pluriversality at the End of the World in *Future Home of the Living God*

We've talked a lot, in the preceding chapters, about worlds and worlding, and about how the various figures, beings, and rituals I've been drawing attention to create, disturb, or complicate settler colonial and Indigenous worlds. We've also looked at the importance of recognition, of accurately knowing whomever you are relating to, eating, doing religious stuff with, etc., and the dangerous of misrecognition. But how do these things go together? That is, in all these concepts of world-multiplicity and the creation of worlds, how can we know, recognize, or speak of the world(s) we are in? What are the consequences of what we recognize and misrecognize both as worlds and in worlds? It is the work of settler colonialism to remake the worlds it wishes to subsume, and also to remake itself, and that work is recursive and repetitive as well as violent and genocidal. In a sense, one of the things that settler colonialism must do is misrecognize the worlds with which it intersects again and again and again, always newly creating the “New World” of colonial space and self-conception. This is how the continued, never-actually-disappeared presence of Native nations can repeatedly shock or startle both individual settlers and settler institutions, over the course of centuries. But how, and by what, can that recursion be interrupted? If many worlds are undone at once, what possibilities remain in the colonial ruins? When the processes of life on the largest scale, those of evolution, become strange and alien, and the climate shifts to transform every aspect of life, can a decolonial present, or many, emerge, and what makes that possible? The violence of colonialism against the land and peoples of

North America precedes North American nationhood by centuries; will it outlast these formations as well?

To address these questions, let us consider Louise Erdrich's 2017 novel, *Future Home of the Living God*. Erdrich began writing this book in 2002, partially in response to the passage of the Patriot Act, which dramatically increased the government's allowed surveillance, and the re-institution of the global gag rule, which prohibits nongovernmental organizations in other countries from providing abortions if they receive funding from the United States, under United States President George W. Bush (U.S. Congress, House 2001, KFF 2019). She then set this book aside, wrote and published two other novels, and returned to *Future Home* after the 2016 presidential election of Donald Trump (Demkiewicz). Through the time span in which it was written and published, the book emerges as an imagined future dystopia created under and in response to cyclical Republican administrations and their legislative agendas, and it also reaches well beyond this context—displaying connections and cycles of settler colonial violence and environmental upheaval that stretch past the beginning and the end of the United States as a political body. While *Future Home* is Erdrich's sixteenth novel for adults, it is her first novel to be explicitly set in the future, a purposefully vague future in terms of how far it is from the present(s) of its writing or its reading.³⁹ The criminalization of dissent (via the Patriot Act) and of abortion and even a clear discussion of reproductive possibilities (via the global gag rule) grow beyond their origins in this novel and take new shapes of violence and control (U.S. Congress, House 2001, "The Mexico City Policy"). It is neither a "Bush" nor a "Trump" dystopia that Erdrich imagines, but rather something that emerges within and against the currents of political

39 While *Future Home of the Living God* has often been referred to as her first foray into speculative fiction, Erdrich emphasizes that this is not the case, reminding readers that her novel *The Antelope Wife* (1999) won the World Fantasy Award in that year (Demkiewicz).

power that produced and are produced by each of these administrations, and the specific governmental actions and biological/ecological circumstances that create the dangerous world of *Future Home* have a much longer lineage than any particular presidential administration of the United States. In fact, it becomes clear that everything that is happening has roots that are much older than the political formation of the United States itself—deep settler colonial worldviews and unexpected genetic pasts erupt together into the novel’s present, as do Anishinaabe/Ojibwe political and territorial identities, family histories and secrets, and complex biological relationships among human and non-human creatures, including the earth itself. Beyond political and legislative actions, *Future Home of the Living God* takes place in a world in which the climate is warming and is already substantially different than what we experience in our present, and, less familiarly, in which evolutionary shifts are happening in swift and destabilizing ways. As in *The Round House*, which also responds to specific U.S. legislation, Erdrich’s work in *Future Home of the Living God* is inspired by specific political and environmental situations, but the effects of these situations unspool in ways that cannot be contained or fixed by any single response, and on bodily, personal, familial, national, global, and mythic levels simultaneously. The inseparable connection of political, ecological, and genetic upheavals has been difficult for some readers to follow, accept, and digest,⁴⁰ but this multilevel storytelling is consistent with Erdrich’s body of work, and fits into a lineage of Anishinaabe literature as well as broader Native responses to and reworkings of settler colonial worldviews and cycles of inheritance.

Tracing Anishnaabe literature and language, Margaret Noodin (Anishinaabe) identifies

40 In a review for NPR, Michael Schaub calls the lack of reader knowledge of what is happening on an evolutionary scale “a problem” and Erdrich’s “vagueness” about it “intentional” but “inexplicable.” Stephanie Merrit, writing for *The Guardian*, praises aspects of the book but says “this novel feels as if it hasn’t quite fully evolved,” and Ron Charles of *The Washington Post* describes *Future Home* as an inadequate, confusing repetition of Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*.

patterns across writers, time periods, and genres, of “a way of looking at the world that resists stasis, defines existence and energy in motion, and requires constant observation for survival” (Noodin xx). As a novel, *Future Home* certainly requires constant observation from readers as well as from characters, and this observation is rewarded in the experience of being pulled through an ever-changing narrative situation that takes shape through a manifold understanding of the past and how it is re-emerging into the future, rather than a clear schema of what is happening exactly now, in the book’s present, as distinct from all other moments. In *Future Home*, settler colonial activities of land theft, control of women and reproduction, and violent political repression are all tightly woven with environmental degradation and upheaval. This is the situation that Kyle Powys Whyte makes plain by explaining that the utopia of settler dreams and the dystopia of Anishinaabe nightmares in fact constitute the world we are all living in right now, which must be understood in order to respond justly to a dangerously warming climate (Whyte “Our Ancestors' Dystopia” and “Let's Be Honest”). So, climate change, and environmental transformation generally, can only be comprehended accurately and in a way that allows a just response if they are seen in the context of what has already unfolded in history and what continues to unfold through the cyclical inheritance of settler colonial worldviews and power. The constant, inescapable flow in Erdrich’s novel among very different levels and scales of what emerges from the past and what shapes the future happens in a world in which some people already inhabit an apocalypse that others have dreamed up and created— an apocalypse all people live within and, in many cases, reproduce the contexts of, knowingly or unknowingly. Louise Erdrich herself, writing about her experiences at Standing Rock, says of the Lakota people’s prophecy that the Black Snake/Dakota Access Pipeline⁴¹ will “extinguish the world”:

41 For more information about the Standing Rock movement, which was organized in opposition to the Dakota

“For a people who have endured the end of their way of life so many times, who can doubt the truth of their vision, which coincides with scientific truth about the relationship of fossil fuels to catastrophic climate change?” (Erdrich “How to Stop”). Thus, the space of collision and confusion that holds much of the actual world in tension between political and environmental upheavals can only be fully understood through an excavation of settler colonial history and practices, which Native American experiences and worldviews illuminate. Correspondingly, the narrative atmosphere of collision and confusion that encompasses much of *Future Home of the Living God* is not actually “inexplicable” (Schaub) but instead is a rendering of and from the postapocalyptic dystopia that Native people have already lived, are living, and thus are particularly equipped to re-vision and shape in new ways. While Erdrich is responding to specific current and recent events in her writing, she is also commenting on a much larger span of time and experience than the current moment, and the diffusion and confusion of political cause and effect enables this larger scope of comment. Precisely within the dizziness of the narrative, the recursive, hall-of-mirrors cycle of violence, transformation, and absurdity that is the ground of settler colonial United States history becomes perceptible and experiential for readers.

The concept of inheritance is one tool we can use to consider the many levels of *Future Home* together, without reducing their complexity and diversity. Inheritance functions on many scales—there are genetic and biological inheritances, behavioral inheritances from family and from broader cultural groups, national inheritances, and the inherited consequences of trauma and violence. Inheritance comes from the past, and need not be known or recognized to function,

Access Oil Pipeline, starting in January 2016, see the #StandingRockSyllabus (NYC Stands with Standing Rock Collective), and *Standing With Standing Rock: Voices from the #NODAPL Movement* (Estes and Dhillon).

to have impact and play out in our bodies—or our families, species, or nations. I am thinking of inheritance, broadly defined, as receiving anything from the past that can be carried into the future, always in a way that transcends a human lifetime or operates on another timescale than that of human life, or, really, the life of any individual organism. If I keep something with me and carry it into my own living future, it is not made an inheritance by this movement in time—but if I leave it to someone else after my death, it becomes one. This transformation occurs as an object (or idea, practice, name, gene, etc.), persists beyond a death (or many) and carries meaning through one life and into another (or many). Inheritance, then, is a form of time travel, in that it consists of movement beyond the boundaries of time as they are usually lived by an individual. The dead travel to and through the living, and the living throw themselves beyond their projected deaths, and these movements are inheritance. Inheritance carries within itself loss, passage, and death, and also carries an insistence from the past on not being entirely past or gone—not leaving. The process of inheriting becomes a process of both reaching to the boundaries of human timescales of life and death, and an acknowledgement of the ways in which those boundaries are absolute. Inheritance can be completely volitional, or completely unwilled, and anything in between, and may not be predictable, but also is not random—inheritance is patterned, influenced, and sometimes traceable, sometimes not, depending on if one has the right knowledge or technology.

Future Home of the Living God is a narrative of and about inheritances—cyclical, punctuated, eruptive—nested within each other and operating on wildly different scales in terms of space, time, and impact. Intimate, small-scale forms of inheritance, pregnancy and birth, are central to the workings of a much larger-scale form of inheritance, evolution, changes in which

intersect with the persistent settler colonial inheritance of the United States as a nation and beyond its organized, governmental nationhood. The novel is written in the form of a diary kept by Cedar Songmaker. Cedar is a young woman who was adopted by white parents and has recently met her biological, Ojibwe family, whom she contacts because she is pregnant and wants to understand more about her genetic background.⁴² The story takes place during what seems to be the simultaneous ruin and recurrence of the settler colonial nation of the United States. Throughout the novel, Cedar writes the story we read as diary entries addressed to her unborn child. This diary recounts her experiences throughout pregnancy until shortly after she gives birth.

Cedar's life is made increasingly precarious and dangerous by a nightmarish governmental mutation in which a version of Christian theocracy is ascendant, spurred on by confusing evolutionary processes happening in the natural world, which are described by the baffled characters trying to interpret them as evolution running backwards. In environmental *and* social terms, past beings, patterns, objects, and cultural activities are re-emerging in the present—this is what I see as inheritance that erupts. The governmental response, which is as repressive and violent as it is chaotic and confusing, is to round up all pregnant people, imprisoning them, controlling their pregnancies, births, and babies, and, in some cases, forcing them to become pregnant again and again, in risky conditions, until they die. These activities spring from an expectation that strange, evolutionarily “backward” babies are becoming the norm—that humans as we know ourselves to be will much more rarely be born, if at all. It is unclear what sort of babies *are* being born, especially because people giving birth and their babies are increasingly

⁴² Her white parents named her Cedar Songmaker. Her Ojibwe mother intended to call her Mary Potts, which is her name and also the name of all the women in her family.

tightly controlled; there are no descriptions of this new type of baby in the text. There are glimpses of other animals and plants that people identify as evolutionarily earlier forms of these beings—a saber-toothed cat (Erdrich *Future Home* 104-105), a “lizard-bird” (92), a “weedy, wild, cabbagey kind of plant” growing from seeds of broccoli and cauliflower (98). Everything in the novel is known only through Cedar’s first-person descriptions and experiences, so, as her experiences become increasingly limited by the haphazard and intensely carceral government that rises from the ashes of the previous federal government of the United States, glimpses are all readers get of these creatures, and it is certainly not enough to form a clear picture of what is happening in this biological eruption.

The inheritances contained within the mysterious evolutionary changes and the persistence of settler colonial techniques of violence, control, and dispossession burst from the past into the present or future, loop back on themselves, reiterate strange patterns within but also without the conscious recognition of people enacting and/or working to change those patterns. Cedar is constantly aware of, and constantly questioning, what she is passing to her child, and the content of the book itself is written as a bequest that she creates throughout the process of coming-to-life that is the baby’s gestation. Her baby, like all babies, comes to be in a liminal space between conception and independent life, and the inheritance of writing she creates during her pregnancy attempts to speak simultaneously within and beyond that space—to press forward, relationally, into the time of her son’s life even while all control of being able to raise and know him is slowly taken away from her.

The heart of inheritance in this novel is that so much is passed on to everyone, and the processes of inheritance create and spring from experiences of simultaneous

awareness/nonawareness, knowing/not-knowing that are major components of living within settler colonialism, especially for those who receive home-space and identity *through* settler colonialism. This connects the settler colonial eruptions of the novel with the biological, evolutionary ones, all of which occur within and alongside the impact of climate change. Certainly, living under the threat and reality of climate change is also a dance of awareness/nonawareness, knowing/not-knowing (e.g. Norgaard). In combination, these inheritances allow readers to perceive the ways each of these forces moves from the past into the future, without ever being an inevitable or easily predictable process.

Future Home demonstrates how settler colonial nations depend upon a cycle of inheritance that is punctuated and eruptive. By this, I mean that the cycle is recursive, but not at all a smooth circle. Instead, it halts along in repetitions that are both remarkably consistent in their ideologies and impacts and remarkably flexible in how those ideologies and impacts are framed. It is the very violence and irresolvability of the settler colonial process that recycles these ideologies. Annette Kolodny poses a perennial American question and suggests that it is unanswerable: “By what right did those seeking new homelands for themselves take over the homelands of those already here?” (13-14). Because the question cannot be answered in a final way, it recurs over and over again—a repeated inheritance that conceals its own repetition. In the 1600s in New England there are Puritan ideologies about how Native peoples are disappearing because God is killing them and removing them from their unused/inappropriately used land on purpose to allow British colonists to inhabit, change, and control that land, and in the 1800s there are stories both about how genocidal violence against Native people in the midwest is justified by their presence and/or their defense of their homelands, which are desired for more colonists to

inhabit, change, and control, and a few years ago I had a conversation with a relative in Upstate New York who asked me why, if Native people were so concerned about nature and the environment, she saw dilapidated homes with trash in the yards on the Onondaga Nation reservation near where she lives. In each historical moment, these interpretations happen through a reading backwards through time of the inevitability of United States formations of settler colonialism, which Mark Rivkin describes as “treat[ing] the immutability of non-native occupancy and settler development as a given” (*Beyond* 65). What recurs and punctuates throughout time in this case is the idea that there is some reason—divine or governmental or civilizational or logical or ecological—that Indigenous peoples all over the land mass that is now called the United States cannot and should not stay on or have the freedom to live in relation to their ancestral lands, that they are inhabiting and using the land incorrectly and the correct use is however the colonizers generally interact with land, and that therefore Native people are disappearing and ought to disappear—even if this is achieved through genocidal violence. Obviously not *all* of these ideas are fully present in every expression I’ve mentioned here, but that variation is precisely how the punctuated and eruptive nature of settler colonial inheritance functions. Parts of the past can suddenly poke or burst through, after simmering below the surface for any period of time—recurrence of what has come before that is not neat or predictable, but rather surprising and sharp-edged; *that* it will resurface is predictable, precisely *how* it does so often is not. This eruption is not dissimilar to what Bergland calls the fundamental haunting of the United States by Indian ghosts, arguing “that the interior logic of the modern nation requires that citizens be haunted” (4). Haunting is, here, a disturbingly unavoidable inheritance. The ideas that allow the United States government (and its supporting ideologies

about what land is and who gets to involve themselves with land in what ways) to perpetuate itself, and that are consistently needed for its renewal, come around and work through whoever and whatever is present at any given time.

Settler colonial inheritance encompasses, creates, precedes, and, as we see in particular through this novel, may outlive a nation state founded upon it. The United States may cease to exist as a nation with the particular governmental structures that it currently has, but this will not in itself change or destroy the cyclical inheritances of settler colonialism, enacted by those who, knowingly or unknowingly, replay the dictates and behaviors of this system. It may feel a little strange to disaggregate nationhood from the mythologies and structures that create a particular nation, in this case, the United States from its settler colonial foundations—but doing so makes clearer how the nation is created and pushed backward and forward into times in which it literally does not and cannot exist. The punctuation of all times by the nation that does not exist in every time produces feelings of inevitability (so wide on the timeline, can't get before or after it). Time travel that punctuates and punctures is the form of continuity that is available for a settler colonial nation. It is the haunting, the endless re-enactment of foundational violence, with its ironic coat of forward-moving “progress.” In *Future Home*, the punctuation is still happening, the violence is still happening, but many aspects of nationhood claimed by the United States (including being called “the United States”) are not. This punctuated movement through time of violent nation formation is distinct from the “realist nationalism” that Scott Richard Lyons (Ojibwe/Dakota) advocates for Native peoples and describes as rhizomatic in its networked diversity (140), and we also see this kind of continuity in the Ojibwe nation in the novel.⁴³

⁴³ Mushrooms are rhizomatic, so picture subterranean, spread-out networks of connectedness rather than one vertical, neatly branching tree.

In *Future Home*, we observe the inheritance of settler colonialism enacted upon and through characters as the government of United States comes apart and attempts to reconstitute itself. This resurrection of an ostensibly collapsed U.S. colonialism can be thought of as a version of Cherokee scholar Jodi Byrd's "zombie imperialism ... the current manifestation of a liberal democratic colonialism that locates biopower at the intersection of life, death, law, and lawlessness" (228). In this context, settler colonial inheritance functions as a haunting and eruptive mechanism, with bizarre, disruptive repetitions of past events punctuating the present and reaching to shape—and possibly consume—the future. It is a version of Keller's cryptoapocalypse that earns her subtitle "apocalypse now and then." An event in *Future Home of the Living God* where settler colonial inheritance presses into the future even as the national structure falters takes place when Cedar is about five months pregnant. She is hiding out in her home, because the father of her child, a white man named Phil, has told her that pregnant people are being rounded up and imprisoned by the government. In this tense situation, a letter is shoved under her door with a tone that mixes friendly bubblyness and legalistic threats:

Please come to a picnic! Housing records indicate that you have not yet registered with your new residential authority regarding change of address, and we are concerned about the title to your house—a possible extinguishment of title is distinctly possible. This is a chance to clear up any problems with your residence permit and to meet new friends... Please bring your driver's license or other former United-States-government issued enhanced form of identification, as well as proof of home ownership... Under the tent in New Manna Park. (100)

The letter comes from men identified as "Uniters," a Christian theocratic group seizing

power in conjunction with the collapsing mechanisms of U.S. government. When Cedar shows Phil this letter, he informs her that in the last few days, all the street signs have been changed to Bible verses, and New Manna Park is what was previously called Manito Park. Manito is an Anishinaabe word⁴⁴ usually translated into English as spirit, god, or mystery, and used to refer to a variety of spiritual and religious powers and beings, while “New Manna” cites the biblical book of Exodus, in which manna is the food given by God to the Israelites traveling across the desert as they escape Egyptian slavery and move toward their promised homeland. So, an Anishinaabe name with mythic meaning is replaced by a settler name with mythic meaning, the latter marking desire for and entitlement to this place— this park is new, remade, its origins concealed, and, by analogy, given to the hungry settlers through divine right and relationship. This kind of renaming process has a long history— it is both the enacted inheritance of United States settler colonialism and the way U.S. settler colonialism enacts its future through changing what is labeled and defined as present to be inherited—and by and from whom.

Jean M. O’Brien describes a very similar process in the United States’ history of historical narration and renaming in the service of dispossessing Native peoples and establishing a story of justified colonial inheritance that stretches backward and forward beyond its actual time of existence. O’Brien excavates this process as it played out in New England in the 1800s, through written histories, place names, and commemoration ceremonies for various colonial towns and cities. She seeks to trace and understand one of the large paradoxes of U.S. settler colonialism—the idea, believed by many non-Native people, that Native peoples have “become extinct” even as they clearly continue to exist (xii). What the Uniters have done by renaming the

⁴⁴ For language resources for Anishinaabemowin, see *The Ojibwe People’s Dictionary* (Nichols) and *Ojibwe.net* (Noodin).

streets and lake fits in the category O'Brien refers to as "replacing," emphasizing that "[n]aming is deeply implicated in place making," and that renaming of places was (and is) about claiming Native spaces as belonging to colonists in an essential way that is proven through what they are called (56, 91). The biblical names echo biblical names that dot North America now, and also evoke entire processes of conversion of the land.

The letter and the actions of the Uniters show the past of the settler colonial formation of the United States erupting into *Future Home*'s present—behaving as an inheritance. As O'Brien's work helps contextualize, everything that is happening in this part of the novel functions as a temporally condensed repetition of what has happened throughout the history of the United States' formation: the sudden emergence of white settler government formations which claim the power to name, inhabit, populate, and depopulate the land where others are living. The absurdly vacillating tone of the letter, swerving between friendly promises of fun times, demands for documentation that are only partially clear or possible, and threats of dispossession, condenses a whole range of settler attitudes and acts of dispossession throughout the entire colonial history of America. These attitudes already exist in farcically close proximity outside *Future Home*: the education most settlers receive, in many venues, simultaneously glosses over, celebrates, and passively mourns the dispossession of Indigenous peoples that is the basic foundation of the nation's existence, and imagines/desires appropriative friendship with Native Americans as the full extent of just action that is possible or desired from settlers.

By projecting this process of replacing into the future through the Uniters' behavior and letter, *Future Home* makes perceptible to readers how bizarre settler colonial renaming and replacing feel, as well as how they create conditions for violent dispossession through the very

activities that seem the most nonsensical to the people actually being dispossessed. In *Future Home*, Cedar experiences the letter and the renaming of the places where she lives as disorienting and threatening. The demand that she suddenly needs different papers to prove that she can continue living in her home is nonsensical, as is the idea that people will show up for a picnic at a lake with a new name they've probably never heard before. Simultaneously, the threat of dispossession is a concrete threat based on a nonsensical claim, and its future orientation makes room for the queasy combination of neighborly pleasantries and the idea that this group has authority over all the land in the neighborhood, and, perhaps, elsewhere. The letter demonstrates how settler colonial worldviews function as inheritances with or without the knowledge of the people receiving and enacting them. In the Uniters' letter, their renaming process, and their land claims, the past of the U.S. happens again in the book's present, which is also the future, and this recurrence is effective inasmuch as it is not directly acknowledged to be a repetition. "Clark" and "Emeric," the signers of the letter, are reiterating and re-enacting traditions of dispossession that are older than the political formation called the United States; their names, too, speak their participation in this cycle. Clark's name evokes William Clark, of the Lewis and Clark expedition, and so, a very active participant in renaming and claiming parts of the continent as belonging to the United States. Emeric, as a name, comes from a German saint-king, and Amerigo Vespucci after whom the entire continents of North and South America have been renamed by European colonists, may be named after this king (Cohen). This connection of Emeric, Amerigo, and finally America, is speculative and tenuous, but speculative and tenuous connection to European people and places are favorite tools of United States settler colonial ideologies. Their very ambiguity gives them resonance and persistence to cycle through

and around the unanswerable and perennial questions of belonging, possession, and identity that we have discussed above. Whether or not these men have been renamed or know their names' connotations, they have become vectors of colonial American history as the streets become threatening biblical proverbs and the parks lay consumptive claim to Indigenous myths. What these Uniters know about the history behind what they are doing now and how they know it becomes less important than what they have inherited and what they are pressing into the future. Their names and their actions show their settler colonial inheritances working themselves out—out into the world, out against the bodies of others—through them.

The United States is not the only nation pressing for a future in this novel, which is itself named for and filled with a futurity that is carried (in pregnancy, genetically, in recursive history, etc.!) from the past. As Cedar meets her Ojibwe family on their reservation, they are beginning to expand into the space and time of the United States' ending. In this time of crisis and uncertainty in United States governance, the Ojibwe are starting to expand, take back their land, and, literally and figuratively, remake the map (215).

Clearly, inheritances of settler colonial national imaginaries are erupting all over the place in *Future Home*, and reanimating the remains of the United States' government. This form of inheritance exists in the middle of a much larger scope of hereditary processes that shape the book—with Cedar's pregnancy on one end, and the planetary-scale inheritances of evolution and climate change on the other. As we have briefly seen above, the evolutionary processes in this novel remain irreducibly strange and inexplicable throughout. At one point, Cedar hears a paleontologist discussing the situation on television, and he firmly forecloses comprehension of what is happening: ““ if evolution is going backward, which is still only an improbable idea, then

... [w]e wouldn't see the narrative we think we know....there was never a story moving forward and there wouldn't be one moving backward" (54). To say that evolution is running backwards implies that it is a process that moves according to a logical progression that has a right and wrong direction. Instead, evolution could be thought of as a wild accumulation of traits that interact with the environment and other species with their wild accumulations of traits, and through that process some traits continue and some are lost. Nothing is "adaptive" in the abstract; adaptation occurs only through relationship and interaction, and is entirely situational. So there is no possibility for evolution to "run backwards" because it isn't exactly "running forwards"—it is just running, occurring. Evolution is not a project by which species move toward an abstract perfection, but is a constant conversation between living beings and the world they inhabit. Cedar subsequently writes to her child, "I want to see past my lifetime, past yours, into exactly what the paleontologist says will not exist: the narrative. I want to see the story" (67). The evolutionary processes that Erdrich describes are inaccessible to readers' or characters' full comprehension because they exist at the collision between human hunger for story and forces that scale beyond what a human brain can hold as a coherent narrative. Evolution *itself* also exists, at least in terms of people attempting to understand and describe it, at this precise juncture. This space—in which a need for story presses against a process that both creates and undoes story-making— is an example of the layering in Erdrich's work that Noodin flags as part of an Anishinaabe literary tradition. Structurally, Noodin describes this kind of practice as relating to how words are formed in Anishinaabemowin, and thus a distinct Anishinaabe literary activity: "the action is placed in the center, the 'root verbs' begin to grow, bits of meaning clinging to the edge, telling stories within stories" (47). In *Future Home*, this outward-growing

web involves *all* levels of inheritance, which scale up and down simultaneously. Specifically, evolutionary disruption and the effects of global warming are, at the novel's end, revealed to be adjacent dystopias, one (climate change) already lived by characters and thereby more familiar, and one (evolutionary disruption) a new crisis in which the past seems to puncture through to the future. Erdrich narratively joins the eruptive inheritance of settler colonialism with the ungraspable story of evolution, the transformative normality of pregnancy and birth, and the immensely dystopian, but also more domesticated, losses of a warming climate.

The last line of *Future Home* is a question, from Cedar to her now-born baby: "Where will you be, my darling, the last time it snows on earth?" (267). Cedar writes this about two months after her son's birth, in a prison filled with women of childbearing age. These women are forced to keep bearing children in a quest to produce evolutionarily normal babies, and most eventually die in this grueling process. Both Cedar and her son survive his birth, but he is immediately taken away from Cedar. After a description of her son's birth, three more diary entries from Cedar make up the remainder of the book. The first two are one-line reports on Cedar's survival and condition. The last is an entirely different kind of account, one that pulls the future and the past into a narrative space that is both full of uncertainty and deliberately shaped as an inheritance from mother to son.

Cedar is no longer writing about her immediate conditions, and the questions of whether she and her baby will be rescued and reunited remain unanswered, yet she continues writing to her son, addressing what she anticipates will be his curiosity and wonder about "the *before*" (265). She continues the diary she has made for him as an inheritance from her—an inheritance she crafts and chooses, despite her lack of control of how, when, or whether he will receive it.

Cedar begins her final entry with her memory of her parents telling her about winter, because the kind of winter they are describing to her has mostly been lost. A cold, snowy winter is revealed as Cedar's *before*, an inheritance freighted forward by her parents' stories until a moment when, as an eight year old, she experiences snow for herself. Descriptions her parents offer about winter sound harsh and scary, and the shift in weather as the winter warms is mostly described as a lack of painful sensation (265-266). Nonetheless, when the snow stops, Cedar recounts it as "the year we lost winter. Lost our cold heaven" (266), and Cedar's description of winter is long, beautiful, mysterious, and loving. The frightening, inhospitable winter is recognized as "heaven" in its withdrawal and inaccessibility. This is the first time in the book that anything recognizable as climate change is talked about in experiential detail.

Up until now, the changes happening in the more-than-human world have been fantastical and unrecognizable in relation to actual events outside the novel. Casually, Cedar includes details of a very hot summer, and there is one mention of Glen and Sera (her adoptive parents) predicting when the first winter without snow would come, but this is within a brisk litany of geopolitical events in which none is given particular weight (9). This narrative style is the opposite of the wealth of sensory detail that Cedar brings in at the end while speaking about winter (266-267). As Cedar anticipates her continued imprisonment and probable death in future forced childbirth, she uses her parents' memories and her own sensory experience of snow to press an inheritance—of loss and elegy, but also of beauty and anticipation—into her child's particularly unknowable future.

Climate change here becomes a material of memory and time from which Cedar shapes her child's inheritance, while the specter of his potential evolutionary monstrosity recedes rather

surprisingly into the background. In this context, the evolutionary content of the book comes into an intimate, deeply personal focus of what it means to lose one's home in the world: the uncanny images of strange animals of which Cedar catches glimpses; the immense-but-familiar governmental violence in an attempt to control these changes; Cedar's sense, as she shares a beautiful summer meal with her parents, that everything around her is "terminal" because of the way evolutionary rupture will transform it (61). These experiences are simultaneously about the disturbed, imagined future in which evolution has shifted unaccountably, and about the disturbing present in which the warming climate both acts upon the world now, and promises a dystopic inheritance that cannot quite be predicted, yet which is particularly recognizable in the context of the world Native people have already had imposed upon them by settler colonialism's long and protean legacy. In *Future Home of the Living God*, Erdrich insists upon a novel of inheritance in which *all* layers of what makes the future out of the past are present and findable, though not always comprehensible or able to be changed. In Cedar's final question to her son, what is inherited seems bleak—she assumes he will see the last snow on earth—and also has a kernel of something indestructible that she works to pass on—she assumes he will be present to see that snow, and that snow, even in the catastrophic warming that has already occurred, will come again, at least once more. I wouldn't call this hope, but it is an Anishinaabe story of inheritance, a story that presses itself through ever-recurring and erupting apocalypses by naming the loving relationship that has been attacked through settler colonial violence: "Where will you be, my darling," and pulling it through time in whatever circumstances cycle and emerge: "the last time it snows on earth?"

In *Future Home*, society in what was once (and still imagines itself as) the United States is

strange, strained, and frightening, and the violence against and imprisonment of so many pregnant people leads to deep and intimate betrayals. Yet there are also surprising connections and solidarities that arise, as individuals move from the manifold particulars of cultural, genetic, ideological, religious, and story inheritances to patterns of relationship that give and support life, for people and other beings. How is this possible? What creates this kind of relationality or kinship? In all the stories we have looked at so far, it's clear that in Algonquian worlds, to engage appropriately with any being—from plants and animals and even humans you might eat to a friend who cares for you to a God you might worship—recognition is a key to relationships that can be reciprocal, non-abusive, and, eventually, decolonial, because coloniality is built upon misrecognition through universalizing truth-claims. And certainly, in *Future Home*, this process of recognition and connection involving family in many forms, change, the incorporation of new people and experiences, occurs both as Cedar learns more about her Ojibwe family and as she moves through the changed and threatening social world around her.

Recognition and deep relationality emerges throughout Cedar's pregnancy—for example with Hiro, the mail carrier who helps to protect and hide Cedar, and eventually, works to rescue her from a birthing prison. When questioned, Hiro says that he has done all this because Cedar is "on [his] route." Taking care of people "on [your] route" is a form of deep relationality, of taking seriously how and where we find each other. Hiro's actions are about proximity to others being treated as significant and as obligation. There is an official relationship between Hiro and Cedar created by structures outside them, but it doesn't contain the expectation that Hiro will risk his life for her—that comes from his understanding and choice about what her being on his route means.

Cedar also has a relationship with her biological mother's husband, Eddy, that both connects them very deeply and branches outward to illuminate their kinship with many other beings. Cedar and Eddy's relationship, of all of Cedar's relationships with her four parents, is the smoothest. They get along. They understand each other instinctively and well, and respond to each other generously. That's the part that is easy to describe. What's more difficult is the way that their generous, connected flow of relation, their conversation which occurs in person and in writing and in spirit, opens the novel outward and reveals many relationships, many currents of connection, among plants, rocks, human beings, within and weaving together aspects of Anishinaabe world-understanding.

Cedar and Eddy have a strong relationship that is not biological or based in genetic connection, nor in length of their acquaintance. Immediately as they meet, Eddy and Cedar's connection takes on rhythms that are hard to describe in explicit dialogue, and those rhythms shape the potential of their relationship. "He is the first person in this newly met family, and also, come to think of it, the first person including my adoptive family, who actually sits and just *listens* to me. 'Yes,' he says, nodding, or 'Hmmm,' he says, or 'More, more on the subject?' Or even, 'What do you think?'" (32). They also engage in a gentle tug of war with the check, which Eddy wins. Everything that passes between them is all about their responsiveness to each other, particularly Eddy's to Cedar. This includes a string of filler dialogue that wouldn't usually carry much weight in a story. Instead, here, with Cedar, Eddy's listening words and sounds create the conversation that leads her to tell him about her pregnancy before she tells anyone else in her expanding family.

Their conversation continues through the pages of Eddy's strange, excessive book: a

manuscript that is over 3,000 pages long, detailing what at various moments prevents him from killing himself, and why therefore others should also not kill themselves. The book is alarming and funny, and too long for most readers in most circumstances. It functions as more of a catalog of small daily events than anything else, and, were the stakes not so high as whether Eddy will or won't kill himself, it would probably be somewhat boring, in addition to its other qualities. As readers of *Future Home*, we do not see much of it, just the excerpts he gives Cedar throughout the novel. In this manuscript, it feels like there is mismatch, to some extent, between the life and death stakes and the casual storytelling, quite unlike in *Future Home* itself, in which the urgent storytelling and the high stakes mostly fit snugly together. Cedar reads pages of his book toward the beginning of their acquaintance, and then also, while she is in the first hospital-prison, receives an excerpt of his book as a letter. It is a description of how the biological unworking of the evolutionary process is helping Eddy be less depressed, because of his great curiosity to perceive it all: "I ... do not want to kill myself so that I can see more of the world's inner workings" (139). Cedar's immediate response to this letter is anger—she does not want to hear about Eddy's depression and the ways he finds to stay alive while she is being held captive: "I'm disappointed, then I shiver with anger.... I just met him. What do I expect? But I can't let go. I keep thinking of that feeling that I had, that true connection ... eventually, somehow, I know that there must be something else hidden within it" (139). Because Cedar and Eddy have already had the experience of conversing in a deep person-to-person way, Cedar can trust their relationship beyond the surface of what Eddy has written. His deeply idiosyncratic and exhaustive personal text expands outward, and Cedar spends the time and energy to figure out its encoding. She's partly able to notice that something must have a non-straightforward meaning

because she remembers that Eddy's book is already 3,000 pages long, so the label this page has “1019,” does not make sense for a new piece of writing. Through a combination of reading the document with intense attention an excessive number of times (appropriate for a part of such an excessive book), and understanding things about Eddy (his book is very long, his depression does *not* lead him to focus only on himself, and he is responsive and present to Cedar), Cedar cracks the code embedded in the letter, and learns that on 10/19 her “true family” plans to rescue her to “Indian Paradise” (141). It's still a cryptic statement—not exactly, “Come to this place on that day at this time,” but it proves true.

This encapsulates what I find compelling in Cedar and Eddy's relationship. Unlike Sera and Glen, Eddy has not raised Cedar. Unlike Sweetie and, as it turns out, also Glen, Eddy is not biologically related to Cedar. Despite lacking a specific, definable parental connection to Cedar, the way Eddy listens to Cedar at the beginning of their acquaintance convinces her and also prepares her to listen to what he has written her beyond its surface meaning.

The final segment of Eddy's book appears almost at the end of the novel itself. Cedar is in the second birth-prison she's been consigned to, this an actual prison that's been renamed and repurposed as a birthing center (249). Immediately before we read Eddy's pages, Cedar describes the green life in and around the prison: both potted and wild plants seem to be taking over the space. “[T]he plants are spreading from the pots of soil.... The leaves proliferate and already in some places here you can walk in the shade of the understory ... segmented bamboolike poles of purple and green are rising out of stairwells. Every day there is an even thicker green profusion” (258). This vibrant green plant life echoes Hildegard of Bingen's vision of all life, part of which Cedar quotes at the end of this description, from the former's *Book of Divine Works*. Hildegard of

Bingen, who lived from 1098-1179, was a visionary writer, an anchorite who became an abbess in a Benedictine order of nuns, a scientist, medical practitioner, botanist, composer, and theologian, among other things. She is one of Cedar's inspirations in her conversion to Catholicism and her own theological work. Throughout her writings, Hildegard uses the word *viriditas*, which is often translated as “greenness,” to describe a divine force that animates all things (Madigan). Cedar connects the plant life she sees in the yard of the prison with Hildegard's description of the force of all life: “When I walk around the yard, I see that even in December vines burst from the stomped ground and catch hold of the slightest ridge or frame to travel, almost visibly upward, thrusting skeins of waving leaves across the fences, across the razor wire, even along the glass towers of the guards, rearing into ferocious sunlight” (Erdrich *Future Home* 258). She describes Hildegard's childhood spent as an anchoress, in “complete enclosure” in a “stone hut” and, as Cedar herself is imprisoned, she sees this as a reason for Hildegard's visions, showing that “*Everything is penetrated with connectedness, penetrated with relatedness*” (257). The connectedness that penetrates Cedar's prison is literal greenness in the form of plant life, and it is relatedness to the other pregnant women imprisoned with her, and it includes Eddy and his manuscript. Hildegard's *viriditas* and Cedar's greenness also evoke an Anishinaabe connectedness, of plants and people creating life for each other, as Geniusz and Kimmerer describe.

Cedar does not expect to be rescued from this prison. She hopes for her child to be saved—and at least, she, and we as readers, are led to believe that he survives birth and may be cared for somewhere. But she remains “penetrated with relatedness,” and the bits of Eddy's manuscript that Cedar has with her explain and expand some of the possibilities for connection in an

Anishinaabe world. The pages of Eddy's manuscript that are present in the narrative here are titled "The Pebble," and describe Eddy being saved from a suicide attempt by a series of rocks, which variously trip him, get in his shoe, and cut his foot. At first, Eddy says that he is alive "because of a common pebble," but his narrative actually gives details about the formation, time of origin, and appearance of several rocks that save him in a coordinated effort. He describes the first rock as "a bit of earthy banded hematite ... strayed from the Mesabi Ridge, where one-third of the world's iron ore was at one time located ... laid down as a sediment in the Animikean Sea sometime during the Precambrian period in Minnesota, and was probably between 2.6 and 1.6 billion years old." The second rock is "a shard of graywacke or greenstone, a basaltic lava that was perhaps shoved to the surface of the earth 3.5 billion years ago during the Keewatin." "Howah!" Eddy remarks, "Lotta time." The third rock is "a dime-sized circle of black basalt shaped by lake waves and probably poured out at one time from a deep volcanic fissure under the sea that covered us ... The youngest pebble, it was probably no more than several million years old" (260). The final rock, the one that cuts Eddy's foot, is "[a]n agate, inexplicably shattered, it showed the grain of fossilized wood and algae it had once been.... There was a landscape within its features.... A living thing. It would make, I thought, a beautiful necklace for Sweetie" (260-261). While he catalogs these rocks, he also describes a progression in how aggressively they interfere in his suicide attempt, and in how he relates to them—first, he is throwing them over his shoulder and back onto the path. Eventually, he lays one of them "carefully" on a stump, and the final rock he walks away with in his hand, calling it alive and wanting to share it with his wife, after he gives up on killing himself. Eddy recognizes this as an ongoing relationship between him and the rocks, in which they are working to keep him alive: "I

don't know why they want me here on earth, the little rocks. I don't know why they care about me as they do. I only know that by the time I reached the tree I had no choice but to fling the rope away from me. I turned back, fingers rubbing the little agate. All the way back to the store not a single rock slipped under foot” (261).

In this whole process, Eddy recognizes the rocks—their places and times of origin—and comes, eventually, to value them and understand that they are relating to him directly, choosing to protect him. They recognize him, and/or his intentions—while he is trying to kill himself, they interrupt and stop him, but when he is not, they leave him alone. While Eddy may not know why the rocks choose to protect him, according to an Anishinaabe understanding of the order and purpose of creation, these rocks are fulfilling their instructions for how to be in the world, as part of the first, oldest order of beings: “Earth forces, the minerals, the rocks, the wind and the rain and the snow and the thunder beings and all of the rest of the beings we refer to as weather, and the *Aadizookaanag*, the Grandfathers and Grandmothers, our ceremonies, songs, and traditional stories” (Geniusz 15). This order of beings is the only one that can survive without the other three, which, from oldest to youngest are, plants, animals, and human beings. Human beings are youngest and “most vulnerable,” and need each of the others to survive (15). While the earth forces, including rocks, can survive without the other three orders of being, “if they had to survive alone they would not be happy, because they would not do as the Creator directed in the beginning of time. They could not take care to see that all life would continue as the Creator had intended” (15). The age of the rocks both separates them from human experience and gives them the obligation to help and care for human beings (as well as animals and plants), as Geniusz points out: “Their life span is so very much longer than ours; it is no wonder we are such

different beings,” and she goes on to recount a message that rocks gave to the people, which she heard about through her teacher: “ ‘You humans are so very slow to learn!’” (21). So, the rocks are acting from their age, their place in geologic time, and they are acting according to their original responsibilities, both enacting and creating a relationship with Eddy that comes through to him despite the immense gulf of experience and communication between himself and a rock. The rocks want Eddy alive, so Eddy lives. Eddy doesn't explicitly mention the Anishinaabe understanding of these fundamental relationships, but those relationships are happening, changing his experience and saving his life, and he acts out of that understanding, processing this experience in his writing in a way that assumes the agency of the rocks, and their relationality with him, as a given.

It's a fascinating relationship. And it's particularly fascinating at this moment in the novel, as a lifeline *of* relationship for Cedar when she has been forcibly severed from so much—all of her family, her child who she has been gestating and addressing throughout the book—in the birthing prison, instead, she has some spirits who visit her, she has the other people imprisoned with her, she has the plants and the greenness she finds, and she has this account, of Eddy being saved from suicide by ancient, solicitous rocks. Cedar's life and relationships, in all their complexity, make sense and fit within the inherently multiple world of Anishinaabe understanding.

Clearly, in the world of *Future Home*, stories, even ones that contradict each other or that people would like to disavow, have continuance. They all continue within and around people and cultures. So story is inheritance, stories are inherited without necessarily being chosen. It is possible to choose not to act according to a story, but it is not possible to erase that story, even in

an individual person's psyche. Remember the living aadizookanag, with purpose and will. Stories come along with us. We continue to have the imprint of the stories we have inherited, even if we refuse to believe them and wish not to use them. This is Keller's insight, when she describes cryptoapocalypse as the expectation of catastrophic world-ending, and even *taking action to create* such catastrophe, regardless of the absence or presence of belief in a particular apocalyptic religious story. A story-inheritance embeds itself in people and does not require their affirmative belief to impact their worldviews. This can be protective, as when the rocks and the story of who and what rocks are save Eddy from suicide, but when the story-inheritance comes from the one-world world of settler colonialism, it can also have strange and sinister effects. In *Future Home*, Phil, the father of Cedar's child, a white settler, and an extremely protean presence, enacts his ancestors' dream-world, as Whyte would call it, of betrayal, conquest, and dominance, all the while professing that he is trying to protect Cedar and other pregnant women, and live in an honest way.

Within *Future Home*, the concept of a story-inheritance is very similar to the way evolution is presented and working. Evolutionary processes contain all the stories of who has been and who is to come on the planet—these stories have limits and shape, but are not fully comprehensible or controllable. Evolutionary processes, through genetic inheritances, carry all of a creature's ancestors, but how those ancestral stories come through is not something creatures can choose, and is something that happens with or without an understanding of the processes. The interpretation and fear in *Future Home* that evolution is going backwards is actually not a possibility in the world, given how evolution and time function. Evolution is not something that unfolds according to a progressive timeline; instead, it *is* and *forms* a large-scale timeline of

living creatures. It is a common misreading of evolution to assume that all evolutionary changes are directly adaptive for each creature or for a species as a whole—somehow moving a species along a procedural timeline of movement from flaws to perfection. Social Darwinism is rooted in this kind of perception of evolution—an Enlightenment framework for the scientific exploration of how life unfolds on the species level. Social Darwinism is entwined with the idea of Native Americans as a “disappearing race”—both the “race” part and the “disappearing” part, and this has roots also in a sense of disturbing providential violence, God acting for some people and against others, removing Indians to make way for settlers. So—there is a persistent, protean story of settler colonialism that moves between and beyond ideologies and institutions, and indeed outruns and outlasts the state that has been created within and around this story.

There’s a haphazardness to the process of storying, and the action of it goes deeper than consciousness and choice, though need not be entirely divorced from either of those things. The haphazardness, in *Future Home*, seems to have a potential to be salutary, if not salvific. I think *not* salvific, actually—there are moments of rescue and reprieve, but in the end (at least of this narrative), no one is saved. But salutary and deleterious acts, thoughts, imaginings and storyings abound and emerge in all of the circumstances of the book. Evolution is the action of time upon living beings in the system of life on earth. So evolution is not itself a story— it’s like a dream in that way— but we can, perhaps must, make stories of it, through it, and with it. Evolutionary time acting upon and to create human beings, and human beings acting with/in time to form stories, or perhaps being formed by stories. Evolution is what time does with life, including human beings, and stories are what human beings do with time.

In *Future Home of the Living God*, Anishinaabe and settler colonial worlds exist in

plurality and mosaic—the novel holds and acts within a perceptible pluriverse. Our exploration of *Future Home* in this chapter makes unavoidable the nonsensical violence of settler colonialism's consuming weetigo world. Everything confusing, brutal, or oppressive thing that happens to Cedar, to others who are pregnant, and to Cedar's family has its parallels in the actual processes of colonial dispossession by which the United States came to be, and by which it must sustain itself, and which, the novel itself postulates, may outlive it. The most powerful acts of connection and relationship in the novel are possible through Anishinaabe worldviews, cosmologies, and ways of recognizing and relating to other beings, human and non-human. The sociopolitical world of *Future Home* is quite bleak—at the end, Cedar and so many others are trapped, separated from their families and their newborn children, their bodies abused and forced to birth until death. The evolutionary world is illegible, and a livable climate seems to be abandoning the beings made by that evolutionary world. But even within the novel itself, there are more worlds than this. Even as Cedar is imprisoned, she can recognize and enact them. It's hardly the promise of decoloniality that a universal world might imagine—complete, revolutionary transformation. But in a pluriverse, Cedar's persistence in relation to her son, to Eddy, to his rocks, to the plants and their greenness, her anchor in Hildegard's quote about relatedness itself, indicate that she is in an Anishinaabe world, even as she cannot be only or freely in that world. For readers, hopefully existing in slightly less foreclosed circumstances, this world opens a space beside weetigo world, offers connections that are not consumption, and shows Ojibwe relationality and nationhood, interrelated and reaching into even the most unknowable and unbearable futures.

CONCLUSION

Well, here we are at the end of this dissertation. I don't feel ready to end. I'm stymied and transfixed by how high, how wide, how low the reach of coloniality is, has been, and is likely to remain. I am worried that my feet are failing in their dance, perhaps simply by virtue of being able to only do one step at a time. There's such a problem of scale, in thinking and writing about these works of Native American literature and the enormous social worlds with which they are entwined and made. There's a problem of scale in most endeavors that engage with long trajectories of injustice and violence, I think—their apocalyptic, world-ending hugeness—compared with the possibilities of noticing the presence of other ways, other beings, other worlds, and centering what is not the big drama of an endlessly repeating apocalypse, while attending to the harm that big drama has done and continues to do. Gerald M. Sider describes the partiality of this work, in two senses, in a way that strikes me as I come to a close of this project: “Historical violence is thus both partial violence and partial coping, and to study it and most of all to engage it—to get our minds on it and our hands around it—we must be partial also: not try to do it all, and take sides” (14). Literature, stories, fiction—they are where many worlds are made perceptible and sometimes livable, for me, but they are also always small, even the long ones. I hope this project has participated, with the novels and stories dancing within it, in giving some familiar ideas and institutions of settler colonialism their visible monstrosity, and making—not a map, for heaven's sake, not a catalog, not a taxonomy—making an opening? I hope it is pointing the way to the many openings through which Anishinaabe and Cree worlds are clearly extant and creative and doing their worlding.

When I started this project, I had in mind a conceptual apparatus of conversion, as a settler colonial way of relating, in opposition to conversation, a way of relating I saw emerging in these Algonquian works, and which I connect to my understandings of Anishinaabe and Cree literature, storytelling, teaching, and being together. I drifted away from using these terms very formally, partly because I get disenchanted with my own scaffolding relatively often, but as I try to find a stopping place, I'm thinking a lot about conversation. I like the idea of conversation as a way of relating that I can see *in* the work of Louise Erdrich and Tomson Highway, *and* I'm drawn to conversation as a mode of reading, a manner of encountering and responding to the texts, a methodology I want to enact in my writing about them. Conversation is relational. Conversation is connection. But conversation, unlike conversion, consumption, or colonialism itself, begins and ends with two separate people (or beings, nations, etc.) Transformation is possible in a conversation, but not expected and not required, and not even usually what happens. Conversation is open in its goals—to connect, and to communicate, but how much and even how well is dependent on the particular event. Conversation can be deep and life-changing, can be a flow in which a relationship is formed or cemented—but it can also be quick and superficial. Conversation can be boring or annoying, and still be conversation. Conversation can be argumentative and contain conflict, but to call something extremely rageful a conversation would usually feel like a euphemism, not what the word can comfortably contain. Conversation can be confusing. It can be gentle. It can be intense. It can be—and very often is—unremarkable, words exchanged just to express being together. I'm particularly aware of this aspect of conversation in this time of social distancing due to Covid-19. Shortly before everything closed down to prevent the spread of the virus, I made a late-afternoon decision to go to a favorite pizza place and then a

favorite coffee shop. I can still get the pizza and the coffee delivered to me if I want. But I can't go there and talk to people there, and making the decision to go there when I was allowed, but also attempting to limit my outings and encounters, made me realize that what I craved was the very tiny, seemingly completely inconsequential conversations with the people in the stores. The words we speak to be polite and do commerce, to ask for and offer food for a certain amount of money, made enough of a difference in my day that I sought them out when it seemed uncertain and slightly risky to do so. Conversation does not need to be significant to signify. It does not need to be important to matter.

So, I do see an inherent potential moral relationality in conversing, in which I remain me and you remain you, and the object is fundamentally to express relation, with many other potential objects and experiences available. I think this can be a good way to relate to other humans, and perhaps to other non-human beings as well. But the reason conversation has power in a project about Indigenous fiction and decolonial storying is not just its generic potential as a thing people can do with others that is likely to be respectful and non-violent. Conversation matters because of the kinds of relationality and connection that are generally offered and imposed within coloniality, things like consumption and/or becoming a weetigo, and conversion that destroys your previous self. And it's there, in these stories—I see this non-coercive, non-colonial interaction between Eddy and Cedar, between Father Damien and Mary Kashpaw, between Jeremiah and Gabriel, between Nanapush and Agnes, between Joe and Linda. There is an openness to surprise, a possibility to recognize something unexpected in another person, that is foreclosed in all the cryptoapocalypses and manifest destinies and even the New World that must be made to fit within the Old. To be autonomous and to relate—these actions define and

create Anishinaabe stories and education, according to Gross, Borrows, and all those I've encountered who try to define and enact these processes. It is what makes Cree narrative memory function across generations. It feels so small, to converse and maybe change, maybe stay the same. But I think in a world of the high low wide thing, smallness and humility are necessary, perhaps particularly in the most violently universalizing contexts. Can you know someone or something, whether they are a person, a nation, an animal, a plant, a rock, a world, through their largest and broadest description? Settler colonialism says you can—land can be a thing for human use, peoples can be converted wholesale into whatever parameters we have imagined for human beings. Conversation, as I describe it here, says you cannot. Anishinaabe and Cree ways of thinking and imagining say you cannot, and to meet another in conversation in this sense means you must acknowledge and perceive that they may be coming to you from a different world. It's an activity that suits a pluriverse.

“Storytellers,” McLeod asserts, “hold the core of a counter memory and offer another political possibility” (100). Over twenty years of my life, Louise Erdrich and Tomson Highway's stories have brought me into a conversation that has slowly shifted my perceptions of the world until it no longer feels like one world, but many. Other theorists told me some ways I might talk about that, but it's the stories that did the work. I have offered these snippets of my conversation with and among these stories in hopes that it will give others, as it has me, a moment to step to the side of weetigo world. In hopes that, from our particular and different positions in the pluriverse we share, we can begin to discuss where and how and in whom and what we perceive that weetigo monster, that coloniality that demands to be the highest, widest, lowest, biggest, and only world—maybe some of us go up the ass, maybe some of us try an arrow to the heart, maybe

some of us use healing tea, while others go for really jagged laughter—will it melt? Will it change? Can we live apart from its appetites and rules? The stories say yes, and they have been trustworthy so far.

THE END

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