#HonouringIndigenousWriters: Visiting with and through Indigenous Literatures in the "Digital Turn"

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On March 15, 2022, as part of the fourth annual #HonouringIndigenousWriters Festival, Joshua Whitehead read from his forthcoming book, *Making Love to the Land* to an international audience collected on Zoom. The appearance marked one of the first public readings of *Making Love*, which was still months away from its official publication date. Whitehead's reading was a historical moment for #HonouringIndigenousWriters. Hosting Whitehead, the festival served as a platform for one of Indigenous literature's most innovative and popular authors reading from unpublished work. It also gathered an international audience online, with attendees logging in from Canada, the United States, New Zealand, Australia, the U.K. and India.[1] Despite taking place on Zoom, the reading was quite intimate, sending, as one attendee put it on Twitter, "soft, warm, friendly yet uncomfortable shivers" through cyberspace (@LenaRemyKovach). Via video conferencing, the audience was welcomed into the inner workings of Whitehead's writing process, but also into his home, including glimpses of his writing space, art collection, and his dog. It was evident that the reading blurred the boundaries between online and offline, public and private when someone requested that Whitehead show his dog on camera, to which he politely and humorously responded, "I am wearing sweatpants, so I won't be getting up right now."[2]

In the six years that it has been running, #HonouringIndigenousWriters has played a vital role in bridging the gap between online and offline spaces, working towards better representation of Indigenous literatures in the digital realm. I have co-organized #HonouringIndigenousWriters with Erin Fields, the Open Education and Scholarly Communications Librarian at the University of British Columbia, since we established it in 2018. Originally inspired

by Daniel Heath Justice's hashtag of the same name, the event began as a Wikipedia edit-athon and a contribution to Open Education Week (O.E. Week).[3]

Since 2018, #HonouringIndigenousWriters has blossomed into a modest literary festival, uniting scholars and Indigenous authors in a unique celebration of culture and art. The festival features engaging readings and discussions, as well as unique editing challenges that not only foster community and collaboration but also enable participants to enhance public understanding of Indigenous literatures. Thanks to social media and platforms like Zoom, #HonouringIndigenousWriters extended its reach globally during the pandemic, allowing audiences to tune into readings like Whitehead's from the comfort of their homes all over the world. In some aspects, the festival mirrors the success of established edit-athons, such as Art + Feminism, by offering digital literacy training and improving the online representation of underrepresented communities.[4] Nonetheless, #HonouringIndigenousWriters has carved out a unique place within the edit-athon community, emerging as a lively forum for performance. It creates platforms, both digital and physical, where emerging and seasoned authors can share their works with receptive and knowledgeable audiences.

My contribution to this special issue of *Transmotion* serves as both a retrospective glance and a theoretical intervention. In what follows, I delineate the processes and strategies underpinning #HonouringIndigenousWriters, while also utilizing its events and procedures to probe deeper into the 'digital turn' within Indigenous literary studies. In examining #HonouringIndigenousWriters in conjunction with writings by the authors that have participated in it, including Whitehead, I hope to illustrate critical spaces that may allow us to 'visit with stories,' a concept advanced by Warren Cariou (Cariou 10). This approach illuminates the theoretical complexities and nuances of 'visiting,' offering readers a more relational and ethical means of

engaging with Indigenous literatures through digital technologies, which builds on our strengths as literary scholars while opening opportunities for collaboration.

Hospitality and "Virtual Visits"[5]

Of course, bringing online and offline spaces into closer proximity comes with complications, many of which were thrown into relief during the pandemic. Daniel Heath Justice frames the impacts and intimacies of Zoom culture in the terms of relationality. As he aptly put it during Whitehead's #HonouringIndigenousWriters event (which he moderated), the all-too-quick-shift to online instruction during the pandemic made instructors and students "guests in one another's homes" where we were privy to some of the more personal details of one another's lives. Indeed, the transition to online instruction introduced an unprecedented level of intimacy within professional environments, including classrooms, something that university administrations largely failed to acknowledge. This disparity was especially pronounced for students living in cramped accommodations (an all-too-common occurrence in Vancouver). As education moved online, bedrooms underwent a rapid conversion into classrooms, while kitchens, living rooms, and even bathrooms seamlessly transitioned into offices.[6] Astutely identifying this shift, Justice argued that we must all, students and instructors alike, "think of ourselves as guests and honour that relationship".

Justice's take on Zoom culture acknowledges the presence of risk in online education, but it also gestures toward the potential for connection. Through the framework of guesthood, he illustrates how the merging of public and private spaces in online classrooms opens up possibilities for intricate and multifaceted encounters with friends, family, colleagues, and students. Many teachers and students experienced these moments in digital classrooms. During my own online classes, I encountered children and pets, engaged in conversations around kitchen tables, and

shared insights with mothers, fathers, and grandparents. These encounters, while complex and sometimes stressful, carried a sense of the sublime, as they relied on vulnerability, relationality, and hospitality beyond the typical student/teacher encounter. Encountering ourselves as guests in Zoom classrooms disassembled some of the authority that we, as teachers, carry into our educational practices and, in some instances, made space for pedagogies grounded in kinship and care.[7]

What I want to suggest about these encounters is that they throw into relief the potential (and the pitfalls) of *visiting* in digital Indigenous literary studies. In critical theory, visiting is framed within the discourse of hospitality, the tension between the right of the stranger, or *arrivant,* and the host's sovereignty. While hospitality entails a sense of obligation to the guest, offering them space and refuge, the relationship is defined by certain conditions. These conditions encompass the safety and well-being of both host and guest, adherence to the rules and norms of the host's space, and an expectation of mutual respect and civility. In this way, hospitality becomes a delicate balance of openness and constraint, where both parties acknowledge their responsibilities and shared values. If a host deems a visitor to be undeserving of hospitality, however, their well-being is often at stake. Without the 'invitation' inherent in hospitality, individuals entering a space—whether a home or a country—are framed as a potentially harmful or disruptive presence. This, in turn, can lead to precarious living conditions, increased vulnerability, and a lingering fear of deportation. The cycle of marginalization and hardship that ensues as a result of inhospitality not only reinforces the host's perception of the 'other' as a threat but also justifies restrictive policies. It paints those seeking refuge as undesirable or unworthy of care, perpetuating stereotypes and emboldening a narrative that aligns with exclusionary practices. In this way, the very act of denying hospitality contributes to a broader discourse that serves to dehumanize and alienate vulnerable populations.

Interactions between parties in the host/guest framework are characterized by their intensity. Hospitality involves opening oneself to the other, navigating unfamiliar territory, and confronting both the joys and challenges of human connection in a context where roles, boundaries, and expectations are uniquely intertwined. The French philosopher and psychoanalyst Anne Dufourmantelle portrays the emotional dynamics of hospitality as an "unbearable orb of intimacy" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2), effectively conveying the complex and contradictory nature of the relational experiences that constitute the relationship between guest and host. Dufourmantelle's "orb of intimacy" highlights the vulnerability and tensions that arise as hosts and guests navigate intense points of connection in high-stakes environments. Pointing to the ways in which hospitality threatens sovereignty and privacy, Jacques Derrida identifies hospitality as "the effacement of the limit between private and public, the secret and the phenomenal, the home [...] and the violation or impossibility of home" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 65). Through Derrida's lens, hospitality becomes a space where vulnerability is not merely a risk but also a potential strength. By allowing for the possibility of transformation, hospitality creates opportunities for more authentic relationships and the realization of a shared humanity. The idea of hospitality as an ethical stance invites us to think more critically about our relationships with others, our responsibilities, and how we can foster connections characterized by empathy, compassion, and care.

Of course, hospitality also opens up the possibility of radical violence. Opening up the home to strangers leaves us at our most vulnerable, exposing our family, values, and way of life to risk. As such, the right to offer hospitality, to provide asylum, may seem an unequivocal act of goodwill, but it is also a question of power, sovereignty, and the authority to bestow care. This is where Derrida locates a deeply rooted aporia in the ethics of relationality: where an unconditional welcome opens the possibility for its collapse. One need only look to the ongoing

legacy of settler colonialism for evidence of this. Opposed to franchise colonialism, which focusses on economic development through resource extraction and labour exploitation, settler colonialism "is a persistent social and political formation in which newcomers/colonizers/settlers come to a place, claim it as their own, and do whatever it takes to displace the Indigenous peoples that are there" (Arvin et al. 12). Initially welcomed as guests into Indigenous territories, settlers leveraged the hospitality shown to them by their Indigenous hosts to usurp sovereignty and establish themselves as gatekeepers. By manipulating Indigenous hospitality settlers gradually repositioned themselves from guest to host, exploiting the tension between welcome and power to assert their own sovereignty and thus guarantee their own right to administer hospitality.

Settler colonialism manipulates hospitality, transforming an opportunity for relationship-building into a means of undermining Indigenous sovereignty. This process illuminates the dual nature of hospitality as both an offering of trust and a potential avenue for exploitation, where the very mechanisms intended to forge connections can be co-opted to further colonial objectives. Through the opportunistic invasion and exploitation of goodwill to assert control, settlers reveal themselves not just as flawed guests but as stark embodiments of the hostility that underscores hospitality, a concept that Derrida captures in the neologism "hostipitality".[8] Articulated from this point of view, hospitality, in its purest form, is not an agent of violence but a structure that opens doors for profound and transformative connections rooted in vulnerability and mutual care. Yet, because hospitality is defined by a vulnerability—opening oneself or one's space to others—it always carries with it the potential for violence, as the trust extended can be exploited or betrayed. As such, it's crucial to recognize that hospitality's potential is contingent on the choices of those who inhabit its structure. In the context of settler colonialism, the choices made by settlers are illuminating. Their deliberate decision to exploit the invitation and welcome offered to them reveals two contrasting realities. On one side, there is the relational possibility of hospitality—an

opening for understanding and connection. On the other, there is the harsh reality of exploitation and domination that forms the foundation of sovereignty in colonial nation states. This contrast is a testament to how settlers can twist the potential transcendence of hospitality into something altogether contrary.

In research contexts involving academics and Indigenous participants, the dynamics of hospitality can become distorted in ways that raise serious ethical concerns. Researchers may initially arrive as guests, but often they take on a mantle of "expertise" that effectively positions them as hosts within the Indigenous communities they are studying. This power dynamic reflects Derrida's concept of "hostipitality," a situation in which the guest usurps the host's authority and control. Billy-Ray Belcourt describes this phenomenon as the “Singularity of coloniality,” where “Indigenous people sit stilled in the role of the described” within their own homes and communities. Researchers, in their hunger for "racialized simplicity," reduce Indigenous individuals to mere objects of study. This analytical approach treats Indigenous people as something to be fed through “the poorly-oiled machine of analysis,” a process that Belcourt likens to vampirism. In this way, the complexities of hospitality and the relationships it entails are reduced to a tool for exploitation and misunderstanding."

The challenge then becomes recognizing and resisting this form of "hostipitality," ensuring that research practices deconstruct scholarly authority while amplifying Indigenous voices. By actively seeking collaboration, consent, and a more balanced power relationship, researchers can work towards a model of engagement that “bring[s] into play,” as Orin Starn, argues, “multiple, overlapping fields and scales of geography and social life” (195). Indigenous studies work to disrupt settler articulations of “hostipitality,” as it is articulated in research dynamics through the relational practice of visiting. As a methodology, visiting is a means of reconceptualizing how researchers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, conduct research with community, transitioning away

from the colonial imperatives that often frame the researcher as "host" (i.e., expert) to embracing a relational dynamic grounded in care and accountability. In "Keeoukaywin: The Visiting Way - Fostering an Indigenous Research Methodology," Janice Cindy Gaudet writes about the political implications of visiting, both as a research methodology and as a means of being in relationship with Indigenous peoples. For Gaudet,

> The visiting way unsettles historical inaccuracies about Indigenous people… and restores diplomacy by asserting an ethics of care, transparency, and accountability to our kinship relations… being accountable to our relations signifies a call to build trusting relationships and to uphold respectful connections beyond the duration of our research. We must continuously ask ourselves how we can give back and uphold respect, receptivity, and reciprocity while being mindful of what our research may unsettle. (Gaudet 58)

Gaudet situates the concept of visiting within the same frameworks that Justice advocated for in online Zoom encounters. Rather than expecting to be welcomed into a space unconditionally, the "visiting way," encourages researchers to build trusting relationships and maintain respectful connections with Indigenous collaborators. It restores relationality through principles of care and transparency, emphasizing the host's authority and the guest's (i.e., the researcher's) accountability to their hosts.

Opposed to hospitality, visiting is grounded not in an unconditional welcome, but in the acknowledged presence and responsibility of the guest. It foregrounds and privileges the "orb of intimacy" but also how to respectfully engage within it. In "Visiting as an Indigenous Feminist Practice," Eve Tuck, Haliehana Stepetin, Rebecca Beaulne-Stuebing and Jo Billows assert that "being a visitor is showing care and being responsible for our impact and presence" (Tuck et al 1). For Billows, showing care means actively engaging, preserving, and nurturing the places and relationships that researchers encounter as guests in Indigenous communities. Rather than being

passive observers, visitors actively participate in the places they visit, preserving and honoring histories, thoughtfully engaging with their hosts' perspectives, interacting with the land and its stories, while respectfully acknowledging their hosts' boundaries and protocols. In *Hungry Listening,* Dylan Robinson writes about the centrality of careful listening in his visiting practice: "Whether explicitly or implicitly, visiting is a process of affirming our varied responsibilities as Indigenous people to each other, our responsibilities to the communities we are part of, and asserting this… through a process that has careful listening at its core" (177). Through listening, Robinson argues, individuals strengthen their relationships with others, promote reciprocity, and embody the values of empathy and support that underpin their responsibilities within the communities they are welcomed into. Read through the interpersonal dynamics and responsibilities described by thinkers such as Billows and Robinson, visiting becomes a transformative practice that cultivates reciprocal care while centering the Indigenous host's voice within their communities and territories.

The relationship between visiting and storytelling also transcends mere social interaction, revealing a profound connection in which stories become a means of sharing, engaging with, and welcoming others into our homes and experiences. According to Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, visiting is "a sharing of oneself through story, through principled and respectful consensual reciprocity with another living being" (18). Tuck, Stepetin, Beaulne-Stuebing, and Billows argue that "stories invite and invoke relationships" while communicating values "associated with subsistence processes, practices, and protocols" (145). Warren Cariou articulates the power of visiting in terms of literary sovereignty, as developed by Robert Warrior. He proposes that in order to fully engage many Indigenous stories, one should study the community they originate from and the people associated with it. Engaging with stories from this perspective, Cariou suggests, facilitates a hermeneutic approach to visiting, where critics also visit with the text itself:

> Visiting the text, like visiting a friend or relation, would mean showing up without an agenda or preconceived notion of what we want to gain from this encounter. It would involve opening ourselves to the story in a humble way. Visiting as a mode of reading is an antidote to the all-too-common practice of extractive criticism. (10)

Here, Cariou foregrounds humility and vulnerability as central means of visiting with Indigenous literatures. As readers and scholars delving into Indigenous literatures, we are urged to pay close attention to not only the content provided by the host within the text but also to the specific methods of engagement they extend. This approach to interacting with a text requires us to set aside conventional literary theories we may have been trained in, such as close reading and study of a text's internal structure, which often disregard the author's intent, the reader's response, historical and cultural contexts, and other external factors that might influence interpretation. Instead, we must be willing to navigate the text by embracing and employing the unique perspectives and ways of understanding that the author, community, or text itself put forth. By aligning our reading and analysis with the intentions and cultural insights inherent in the text's ecosystem, we do more than just interpret a story; we enter into it through a "respectful acknowledgment of a relationship, an opening of the self to the possibilities that can arise in this relationship" (Cariou 8).

In the terms of visiting, storytelling can be seen not just as a creative expression or a means of preserving culture, but a profound gesture of relationality. Stories are shared spaces where principles, ethics, and values are interwoven, forming an invitation that can illuminate the relationship between "host" and "guest." In what follows, I illustrate what the #HonouringIndigenousWriters edit-athon helps to articulate in terms of visiting with Indigenous literatures. What I attempt to surface through my analysis of the festival's history, context, and, most particularly, its programming, is an outline for considering visiting within the "digital turn" of

Indigenous literatures. Or, to put it differently, I use #HonouringIndigenousWriters' digital infrastructure, collaborative editing practices, and (cyber)spaces of encounter to outline modes of literary engagement that centre relationality, care and listening over close reading, argument and dissection.

#HonouringIndigenousWriters

In December 2015, Cherokee scholar and author Daniel Heath Justice launched a Twitter campaign to raise awareness about Indigenous literature and Indigenous authors. His initiative involved tweeting information about an Indigenous author every single day for an entire year, showcasing the richness and diversity of Indigenous literary contributions. The campaign began without a container, but Leanne Betasamosake Simpson proposed the hashtag #HonouringIndigenousWriters as a way to effectively organize the campaign's content while also encapsulating the core essence and purpose of the project (*Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* 214). In the end, Justice compiled tweets featuring 366 Indigenous authors, all of which are documented in his book, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*.

In 2018, Erin Fields and I, along with a small but dedicated group of volunteers, began consulting with Justice about extending the reach and influence of the #HonouringIndigenousWriters hashtag on Wikipedia. Fields and I had partnered previously to create Wikipedia assignments for my courses and resources for other instructors.[9] Building on the success of our co-designed classroom assignments, we envisioned a new home for #HonouringIndigenousWriters in an event that channelled the energy of edit-athons such as Art + Feminism and leveraged the community that had rallied around the #HonouringIndigenousWriters hashtag. With a small budget in hand, we enlisted the support of graduate students and volunteers from the First Nations and Indigenous Studies Program, UBC Library, and the Centre

for Teaching and Learning Technology. Collaborating with the First Nations House of Learning, we successfully organized and hosted the first #HonouringIndigenousWriters event in the Sty-Wet-Tan Great Hall, situated within the UBC Longhouse, which is on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded terry of the hən̓q̓ə́min̓əm̓-speaking xʷməθkʷəy̓əm people.[10]

The expressed goal of that inaugural event, drawn from Justice's Twitter campaign, was to "improve the coverage of Indigenous writers on Wikipedia and to encourage diverse community editors to actively work to dissuade assumptions about Indigenous literature by raising their profile in this increasingly influential information source" (Wikipedia: Meetup/HonouringIndigenousWriters). In its inaugural year, with a dedicated group of twenty-three participants, we collectively added 4,250 words to Indigenous literature articles. In the two weeks following the event, these articles were viewed 197 times.[11] It was a modest, but not insignificant contribution. That said, while our outputs did make some impact, what we found most inspiring was the overwhelming interest and dedication we received from the community that joined us. Attendees included faculty, staff, students, and librarians from X̱wi7x̱wa Library, our university's centre for academic and community Indigenous scholarship. The Indigenous-owned bookstore Iron Dog Books also participated, setting up a book sale on-site and advertising our event through their website and social media. Indigenous authors, including Samantha Nock, Jules Koostachin, and Dallas Hunt, added to the festive atmosphere of the event, reading poetry from newly published collections and works-in-progress. The collective involvement brought a sense of solidarity and celebration to the event, facilitated by a few snacks and music pumped through the Sty-Wet-Tan sound system.

During the entire four-hour event, volunteer instructors worked diligently, teaching attendees how to register a Wikipedia account, add their edits, and respond to editor feedback and deletions. The latter point illustrates that volunteer work required more than a working

knowledge of digital humanities. Adding content to Wikipedia about Indigenous authors often means confronting Wikipedia editors who erase content based on the platform's "notability" standards. In the context of Wikipedia, "notability" means that an author must be verifiable through significant coverage on a range of reliable sources. However, as Siobhan Senier illustrates, "notability" is hardly apolitical given that it "mimics the centrifugal force exercised by literary canons" in which Indigenous voices are often erased. Challenging editors who erase content based on "notability" means understanding the structural violence that occludes Indigenous histories, aesthetics, and politics. This is to say, the work invested into #honouringIndigenousWriters is specialized and nuanced, requiring guidance from Indigenous scholars, such as Justice, who hosted the inaugural event and Indigenous information scientists, such as the librarians at X̲wi7x̲wa.

At the time of this writing, the #HonouringIndigenousWriters Edit-athon is entering its sixth year. Since 2018, it has evolved to include panel discussions, book clubs, performance art, and a variety of workshops. We have partnered with various Canadian academic institutions and organizations, including the Institute for Critical Indigenous Studies, the Public Humanities Hub, Indigenous Programs and Services (UBC Okanogan), B.C. Campus, the University of Calgary, and the NEOS Library Consortium. Satellite events have been held at BCcampus, the University of Toronto Digital Humanities Lab, Kwantlen Polytechnical University, Langara University, Simon Fraser University, and Capilano University. Over the years, the annual event has led to substantial improvements in dozens of Indigenous author pages on Wikipedia. More than 12,112 words have been added, and a total of forty-nine articles have been edited or created, featuring authors such as Billy-Ray Belcourt, Jordan Abel, Kim Senklip Harvey, Lisa Bird-Wilson, and many more. In 2023, Donna Langille, Christian Isbister, Kayla Lar-Son, and Karleen Delaurier-Lyle took over the

event, uniting the UBC Vancouver and UBC Okanogan campuses in honouring Brian Thomas Isaac and Jessica Johns.

Building a sustainable community of editors, volunteers, and Indigenous authors has been a central element of our work developing #HonouringIndigenousWriters. Fields and her team created documentation that could be used by satellite groups and individuals looking to participate, including an organizer kit, editing and research sprint workshop materials, and the #HonouringIndigenousWriters Challenge Bank.[12] We also published information on how to work in good faith with Indigenous authors, and developed a database of articles that need editing and improvement.[13] During the pre-planning stages, we ensured that all the articles that we would put forward for revision or creation were consented to by the respective authors and we collected and compiled information that the authors themselves wanted to include on their Wikipedia pages.[14] This approach demonstrated to editor participants that #HonouringIndigenousWriters is, despite its online mediation, constructed with and for Indigenous authors. By foregrounding consent and reciprocity in our editing guidelines and events, we established care and active listening as the foundation of our community of practice and built trust so that in our later years authors felt comfortable reaching out to us for help writing or editing their Wikipedia articles.

Given that our edit-athon focuses on stories, storytelling naturally became a rich source of inspiration and connection for our community. Over the years, #HonouringIndigenousWriters has featured many Indigenous poets, novelists, scholars, playwrights, and even performance artists, starting with the first edit-athon in the Sty-Wet-Tan great hall. Featured authors/performers over the years include Samantha Nock, Jules Koostachin, Dallas Hunt, Carleigh Baker, Jessica Johns, Billy-Ray Belcourt, Tenille Campbell, Richard Van Camp, Smokii Sumac, Marilyn Dumont, Joshua Whitehead, Kateri Akwenzie-Damm, Peter Morin, Kim Senklip Harvey, Brian Thomas Isaac, and

Aubrey Hanson. As it grew over the years, #HonouringIndigenousWriters became a distinctive platform for engaging directly with new and established Indigenous authors. Exceeding the digital space of Wikipedia, it evolved into a dynamic and collaborative community, fostering dialogues and building relationships that bridged virtual and physical spaces. Through the intersection of literature, art, and culture, #HonouringIndigenousWriters creates not only a repository of knowledge but also a living network that celebrates and elevates Indigenous voices, embodying storytelling as a reciprocal act of sharing, connection, and empowerment.

Of course, along with the rest of the world, the pandemic significantly altered how we thought about community and relationality at #HonouringIndigenousWriters. By centering Indigenous authors, serving food, and encouraging conversation and peer-to-peer support, #HonouringIndigenousWriters was a "digital" event that was originally deeply grounded in place, people, and IRL relationships. With that grounding, we were able to nurture learning environments that appropriately supported the work and the content the edit-athon produced. Shifting to an entirely digital format considerably altered how we thought about community, particularly in our relationship to place. Rather than cancel the event, however, we decided to embrace online learning and use Zoom to bring authors into participants' homes. Following the guidance of digital humanists such as Cathy N. Davidson and Jaqueline Wernimont ("Teaching in the Time of Covid-19"), we consciously opted for asynchronous content in #HonouringIndigenousWriters in 2021. This choice was made to improve the sustainability and accessibility of the initiative while protecting the health of authors and participants. By moving away from a single live event, which could inadvertently exclude potential participants and strain our volunteer resources, we sought to create a more inclusive and flexible learning experience that expanded our reach and community. To facilitate the adoption of an asynchronous model, the planning committee curated a comprehensive resource suite, linking users to static Wikipedia

documentation and pre-recorded training videos like the Art + Feminism "Get Started: Learn to Edit!" series. Additionally, based on our ongoing discussions with Indigenous authors, we shared the list of articles with consent for editing, accompanied by preliminary research materials for editors to utilize.[15]

Despite our interest in asynchronous elements, however, we were not prepared to abandon the synchronous content associated with #HonouringIndigenousWriters, leading us to embrace Zoom, the cloud-based communications software. We understood that moving to digital author readings would sacrifice some of the place-based relationality we valued, but our commitment to live, interactive storytelling remained a central element of our pedagogy. There were also clear advantages to moving online. The flexibility of online readings, coupled with an asynchronous approach to editing Wikipedia, allowed us to engage Indigenous authors from diverse global locations and broaden our audience far beyond Vancouver. Utilizing Zoom, we were able to facilitate 'live' readings that authors and audience members could access from their own homes, whether in Musqueam territory, Treaty 7, or even Australia or India.

We mobilized the benefits of online events to the best of our abilities. Instead of conducting live editing sessions during the readings, we strategically spread the readings throughout March, encouraging participants to engage with asynchronous content after connecting with the authors during the live sessions. This approach afforded us the opportunity to dedicate more time to author readings and Q&A sessions, providing participants with valuable insights to use as inspiration for their Wikipedia contributions. Throughout the live readings, we guided participants towards the training materials and encouraged them to utilize our documentation and examples when editing pages. As a means to further entice would-be editors, the organizing team also created a weekly challenge bank with interactive activities for each event week. These activities were scaled across five difficulty levels, ranging from attending a live

#HonouringIndigenousWriters reading (level one) to researching and developing a "stub" article about an Indigenous author (level five).[16]

The journey of the #HonouringIndigenousWriters Edit-athon has been an inspiring testament to the power of community, storytelling, and collaboration. From its inception, the event has blossomed into a multifaceted platform that celebrates Indigenous authors, bridging the gap between the virtual world and real-life relationships. The transition to a digital format, necessitated by the global pandemic, presented challenges but also opportunities to expand our reach and deepen our impact. By embracing both synchronous and asynchronous engagement models we were able to make space for a more robust inclusivity, fostering a connection with Indigenous authors and readers across the globe. Through collaboration and creative approaches to knowledge mobilization, #HonouringIndigenousWriters has not only enriched Wikipedia's content but has also shaped a vibrant and caring community committed to, well, honouring Indigenous authors. It stands as a vivid example of how digital tools can be wielded to facilitate understanding, respect, and the celebration of Indigenous voices.

Visiting the Text

The accelerated development of #HonouringIndigenousWriters' digital infrastructure, facilitated by the pandemic and Zoom culture, liberated the online components of the edit-athon from Wikipedia's flat and relatively non-relational interface.[17] For instance, via Zoom, #HonouringIndigenousWriters, in partnership with the University of Alberta Library, brought Marilyn Dumont to audiences in both British Columbia and Alberta during an afternoon discussion of *The Pemmican Eaters* and Indigenous poetics. Through online infrastructure and a partnership with Iron Dog Books, #HonouringIndigenousWriters also developed an online book club in support of Tenille Campbell's second book of poetry, *nedi nezu*. Participants' engagement with

#HonouringIndigenousWriters expanded to various digital platforms, including Twitter, Instagram, and Tik Tok. The hashtag #HonouringIndigenousWriters regained traction on social media, with users participating in an #HonouringIndigenousWriters Tik Tok campaign inspired by the #passthepencil hashtag challenge.

Contrary to the notion that online culture is inherently alienating, the shift to online #HonouringIndigenousWriters events during the pandemic actually enabled more intimate encounters with Indigenous authors and their stories. The 2021 and 2022 iterations of the festival, conducted almost entirely in cyberspace, emerged as two of the most vibrant and dynamic events in our brief history. The extended author readings, spanning from 60 to 90 minutes, provided digital spaces where authors and audiences could virtually visit with stories and come together from various parts of the world. These immersive readings fostered deep and meaningful connections between authors and participants, breaking through geographical barriers to create a global community centered on Indigenous stories and storytellers.

Contributions from Smokii Sumac and Richard Van Camp were particularly striking in these regards, demonstrating how authors extend hospitality, even in an online setting. Rather than falling into the detachment often typical of virtual events, both Sumac and Van Camp used their skills as storytellers to make their readings engaging and resonant, forging connections that felt intimate and impactful. Sumac's reading, presented from his bedroom, became an immersive experience as he skillfully wove his poetry together with the objects and cultural items surrounding him in that intimate space. His unique approach, which included a reflection on the painting that hung behind him, "Kwe loves herself despite all odds," by Anishinaabe artist Quill Christie, created a unique connection between his personal space and his poetics, adding depth and context to poems about his journey as a Ktunaxa Two-Spirit person. A few days later, on a Saturday morning, Van Camp started #HonouringIndigenousWriters' first children's reading by

drawing attention to a familiar piece of pop culture hanging above his head in the Zoom: an elaborate Millennium Falcon model. The Falcon was artfully situated in the mise-en-scène of Van Camp's Zoom, but it was more than just set dressing; it became the launching point for a very funny story about him and his family. Van Camp recounted the model's journey to its perch above the door, including his own frustrations attempting to hang it and the heroic assistance of his partner, who eventually came to his rescue. Like Sumac, Van Camp engaged his environment in ways that productively blurred the lines between story and place, folding his (digital) environment into his storytelling. In doing so he welcomed his audience into his home, bridging the gap between the digital space of the reading and the physical spaces of both the author and the audience.

Still, while all of the readings offered during the 2021 and 2022 #HonouringIndigenousWriters events introduced enacted visiting at different levels, none did so with the specificity of Joshua Whitehead's *Making Love with the Land* event. During the interview that Daniel Heath Justice conducted with Whitehead during this reading, Justice adeptly delved into the themes of guesthood and relationality that Whitehead raises in the book. He asked, "What are the protocols and approaches that readers need to take up when they are approaching Indigenous literature?" This question provoked a deep and nuanced conversation on the ethics of Indigenous literary studies and the relationship between authors and readers which informed how we imagined the work of #HonouringIndigenousWriters more broadly.

The primary text activating this discussion, aside from *Making Love with the Land,* was Whitehead's second book and first novel, *Jonny Appleseed*. *Jonny* tells the story of a young, two-spirit Indigenous person who makes a living "camming," performing sex work (or "fantasy" work [Whitehead 45]), online. The novel received significant acclaim and recognition, as it was longlisted for the 2018 Scotiabank Giller Prize and shortlisted for both the Governor General's

Literary Award for fiction and the Amazon Canada First Novel Award. The pivotal moment for the novel and for Whitehead came, however, during the 2021 *Canada Reads* competition. *Canada Reads* sets itself apart from traditional literary competitions by adopting a unique approach to evaluation and awards. Like the reality TV show *Survivor*, celebrities on *Canada Reads* champion books and vote titles off the show, aiming to boost their authors' star appeal by engaging a broad audience in dynamic discussions about the power of storytelling. The competition loudly celebrates literary voices, leaving a lasting impact on the Canadian cultural zeitgeist. Through spirited debates and advocacy, *Canada Reads* has propelled a number of Indigenous authors to the forefront of mainstream readers' attention, including Eden Robinson, Richard Wagamese, and Jesse Thistle.

Amidst the pandemic, winning *Canada Reads* catapulted *Jonny Appleseed* to national prominence, making it appear on the landing page of bookstore and library websites all across the country. However, the 2021 contest not only familiarized Canadians with Whitehead's work, it subjected his writing to new levels of scrutiny and appreciation, often at the expense of the author's privacy. Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs, the Mohawk actor and filmmaker known for her role in *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, was the celebrity chosen to champion *Jonny Appleseed*. Jacobs passionately advocated for the book, highlighting its profound impact on young, queer, Indigenous folk, and its emphasis on Indigenous, queer, and Two-Spirit narratives. Her campaign also emphasized the story's unique and intimate narrative style, shedding light on the complex and sometimes extractive ways that readers engage with the book.

During an interview conducted with Whitehead for *Canada Reads*, Jacobs began by sharing that *Jonny Appleseed* "felt so personal… that I kept forgetting that it wasn't a memoir". She wasn't alone in this assessment. Whitehead crafts Johnny's narrative in a quasi-autobiographical manner, blurring the lines between fiction and reality in ways that were difficult

to grasp for many readers and critics. A few journalists even went so far as to refer to Whitehead as "Jonny" during their interviews (*Making Love* 84). Whitehead is clear that the novel does indeed have autobiographical elements, but he is also careful not to identify those moments too specifically ("I'll let you guess," he tells Jacobs). The result is a sophisticated and nuanced act of hospitality that many readers overlooked. In creating a narrative with Jonny Appleseed that feels intensely personal and quasi-autobiographical, Whitehead opens a door that invites readers to traverse the blurred lines between fiction and reality. This choice, however, does not grant a license to presume or exploit the personal life of the author. The confusion between character and author betrays a disregard for the complexity and sophistication of the novel, a trespass that echoes the intimate boundaries that the book seeks to interrogate, for instance through Jonny's camwork.

The sticking point for most critics was genre. By imposing autobiography onto the book, they elided the unique generic formulations that Whitehead plays with in *Jonny Appleseed*. That the novel lives outside of the boundaries of Western genre theory is part of what defines it as a sovereign text: "I have become tired and bothered by these classifications," Whitehead writes in *Making Love,* "which I read as both boundary and border" (85). While Whitehead resists the boundaries of Western genre in his writing, critics are quick to ascribe them, ignoring the guardrails delineating "guest" from "host." This is exemplified most explicitly in critics' tendency to conflate the author and protagonist, disregarding the work's fictional nature and treating it as autobiography. This misalignment of hospitality and sovereignty, what we might also identify as "hostipitality," reflects a colonial refusal to read Indigenous literature on its own terms. The failure to recognize the borders and boundaries of *Jonny Appleseed* exposes a wider refusal to engage with Indigenous literatures as sovereign entities. The misstep is not merely a literary faux pas; it

symbolizes a deeper failure to overcome the colonial reading practices that occlude or appropriate Indigenous voices.

What is at stake in *Jonny Appleseed* is the acceptance of an invitation and the delicate boundary that separates respectful engagement from predatory intrusion. The novel feels autobiographical, Whitehead told Jacobs, because of Jonny's ability to "be in the world and invite you in" (Jacobs and Whitehead). With invitation in mind, the ethics of visiting and hospitality help to further illuminate the costs of *Jonny Appleseed*'s *Canada Reads* win. Whitehead elaborates on the stakes of Jonny's invitation in *Making Love with the Land:*

> While in Toronto, a reporter, having researched me thoroughly, asked: "So Josh, can you tell me how the death of your grandmother influenced your novel?" Being a fledgling writer at the time, I accommodated the request and reluctantly retold the story of my grandmother's murder in the sixties—at which the reporter nodded, jotted down notes, quickly thanked me, and said goodbye. What has shaken me about this experience is that it was not the first time that type of extractive questioning about personal histories and my experience with trauma has cropped up, and while the reporter maintained their agency and left unencumbered by wounds, all set with fresh insight into their critical angle about my book, I found myself in downtown Toronto racked with grief and holding myself through a particularly intense anxiety attack. It was a slaughtering. (84)

As this story illustrates, the success of *Jonny Appleseed* opened a very public, if not misguided, window into Whitehead's private life. Here lies the double bind of hospitality, at least as it plays out in a Derridean framework: when a host welcomes guests into their home, they "accept the risk of the other coming and destroying the place" (Derrida 71). That said, while *Jonny Appleseed* does indeed offer an invitation, ascribing agency to the relational formulation (i.e., to hospitality itself) distracts from the bad faith with which that invitation is taken up by critics and literary

scholars. The evidence illustrates that journalists and scholars welcomed themselves into Whitehead's "home" by willfully misconstruing the subjectivity of *Jonny's* "I" and then wielding it, much like a crowbar, to extract details about the author's most private life. The act of interpretation in this modality of literary engagement is therefore indicative of hospitality only inasmuch as it animates the colonizing intentions of the reader/guest. What Whitehead illustrates in the example above is not visiting, but cat burglary: brazenly creating points of access to a work in order to bolster a previously defined argument.

As scholars and journalists, we are at a critical juncture in Indigenous literary scholarship. Where the idea of being "unwelcome" in a text may have seemed preposterous two decades ago, Indigenous authors are now publicly renouncing literary hospitality, and for good reason. Decrying the reductive interpretations he has witnessed in readings of Indigenous authors such as Beatrice Mosionier, Maria Campbell, and Terese Marie Mailhot, Billy-Ray Belcourt loudly refuses entry to non-Indigenous critics: "You are not invited into our tent. We are not yet at that point of hospitality. I will not tell you when this time has come." Audra Simpson foregrounds scholarly writing that "acknowledges the asymmetrical power relations that inform the research and writing about native lives and politics" and in turn she refuses research and researchers that compromise Indigenous sovereignty (104-105). Digital tools, like the Mukurtu CMS, mean that it's possible for community members and authors to control who can visit a text and on what terms, if it is not commercially published. By refusing uncontrolled access and instead requiring engagement with community-defined protocols, Mukurtu reinforces the idea that Indigenous knowledge is not an open resource to be freely mined, but something that requires careful, respectful engagement. In sum, as I argue elsewhere, Indigenous literary scholars operate out of a moment defined by closure, a justified response to the "open" research cultures that have facilitated theft and erasure for centuries.[18]

As readers engaging with Indigenous literatures, we must recognize that our welcome is not automatic or unconditional. Despite this, there is a tendency to publish work that perpetuates negative stereotypes, encourages superficial and invasive reading practices, and unapologetically performs colonial identities. Billy-Ray Belcourt highlights a troubling aspect of this approach, noting that the colonial archive is filled with descriptions that deny Indigenous peoples "the right to be unseen and unseeable." In essence, Belcourt points out the consequence of an assumption that many non-Indigenous readers make when engaging with Indigenous literatures: that they are entitled to full access, even when it infringes on privacy or undermines sovereignty. Whitehead's experience with a journalist gives life to Belcourt's observations, illustrating a scenario where the journalist appropriates Whitehead's voice for his own purposes. Whitehead's encounter with the journalist further animates Belcourt's assessment, capturing the moment when his interlocuter extracts Whitehead's voice and installs it in his own. After the critic departs, "set with fresh insight," Whitehead is unmoored from his own story and left adrift amidst a cacophony of sound: "I felt disembodied, I reeled amongst an onslaught of noise pollution: honking cars, pedestrian babble, sirens, the heavy rumble of a train" (84). Within this chaotic setting, even Whitehead's expression of grief after the encounter is swallowed up and overshadowed. The irony lies in the fact that, in a piece meant to celebrate the author's distinct voice, the result leaves Whitehead unheard.

Conclusion

In his essay "On Critical Humility," Warren Cariou writes that "visiting as a mode of reading is an antidote to the all-too-common practice of extractive criticism" (10). Cariou argues, convincingly, that Western approaches to literature can be overly clinical, rendering a story "as an object, a thing" (Cariou 10). By re-conceptualizing the text as a dynamic, living entity, both receiving and

giving life through the act of reading, Cariou advocates for literary scholarship grounded in humility and relationality, as opposed to mastery and expertise. Building from Cariou, I argue that "visiting the text" is more than a literary methodology or even an ethical stance; it's a spatial epistemology that fundamentally reorients our understanding of and engagement with Indigenous literatures. It assumes relationality and guesthood as a baseline for scholarship, transforming the text from an arms-length object into an invitation into a home or territory. In 'visiting' the text, we acknowledge that we are entering—temporarily—a sovereign space defined by its own integrity, history, and protocols, and we commit to engaging with it through those terms. As visitors in the textual homes of Indigenous literatures, we find ourselves in unique positions of responsibility. Our presence is not merely passive; it involves a relationship with our host—the text and, by extension, the Indigenous community it represents. This relationship requires accountability and attentiveness, not only to the words on the page but to the cultural context, traditions, and voices they carry.

Undoubtedly, some of my readers will see "visiting the text" as obsequious and uncritical. My rejoinder is simply that literary criticism, as it stands, is causing harm. We have evidence of this. Whitehead testifies to this harm. So does Belcourt. For too long, literary studies has assumed its position at the perimeter of research ethics and therefore beyond what research ethics boards refer to as "risk and vulnerability assessment." Designating text as a static, lifeless object has promoted public dissection and detached autopsy. This approach has also reinforced the dominance of single-author scholarship in our field, where individual interpretations often take precedence over collaborative or communal insights. Rather than employing our analytical tools to carve new windows into the 'home' of the text—a process that may inadvertently dissect, objectify, or harmfully misrepresent—our approach as visitors is guided by a distinct set of principles. Our role transforms into one of amplification and partnership, a conscientious

engagement rather than intrusion. We strive to understand and highlight the protocols, interpretative practices, and cultural wisdom that the host establishes, embracing the hospitality extended without overstepping the boundaries set within and around the text.

Embracing visiting as a methodology for Indigenous literary studies does not signify a relaxation of academic or journalistic rigor; rather, it represents a deepening and enriching of that rigor. It's a nuanced approach that requires a synthesis of careful close reading, thoughtful research, robust conversation with stakeholders and collaborators, and a genuine willingness to engage with the text's intrinsic values and cultural context. In this, visiting requires us to engage skill sets that literary studies have prepared us quite well for: through an education that emphasizes the close examination of texts, an understanding of cultural contexts, and a reflexive critique of one's own reading/writing practices, literary scholars are primed to approach texts with both rigor and empathy. For literary scholars, embracing visiting as a methodological approach means applying our training in ways that resonates with an ethic of care, reciprocity, and respect. I would go so far as to argue that it is a natural extension of our expertise, reimagining the traditional scholarly relationship with text and making space for new engagements and understandings. By shifting the critical lens through visiting, we're not abandoning our critical faculties but sharpening them, attuning them to a richer, more holistic understanding that honors the integrity of the text and the voices it carries.

#HonouringIndigenousWriters demonstrates how visiting as a methodology can gather momentum in Indigenous literary studies. The edit-athon is not merely an academic endeavor, but a collaborative community-building project. By incorporating panel discussions, workshops, performances, and more, it fosters spaces that invite scholars, readers, and Indigenous authors into dialogue. It transcends the traditional landscape of literary scholarship, creating a shared space where territorial integrity is respected, and reciprocity is foregrounded. This approach

echoes the principles of "visiting the text," treating Indigenous literatures as living territories to be navigated with care, respect, and sensitivity. Storytelling occupies a central role here, acting as a vital bridge connecting various stakeholders and collaborators and fostering a shared sense of understanding, purpose, and connection. This celebration of the dynamism of stories resonates with the concept of the text as a living entity, one that invites engagement, reflection, and mutual exchange.

As it has evolved over the years, #HonouringIndigenousWriters has become a distinctive stage that uplifts and celebrates Indigenous voices. By spotlighting Indigenous authors and providing a space for them to critically engage with literary scholars and scholarship, it emphasizes the importance of consent and amplifying Indigenous voices rather than dissecting text. This approach fosters a sustainable and empowering network that recognizes, respects, and actively collaborates with Indigenous authors. It moves beyond the act of editing Wikipedia to forge a living network that honors Indigenous literatures by foregrounding their complexity, nuance, and sophistication.

Notes

[1] Attendees included faculty and students from Macquarie University and The Centre for Canadian Studies at Jadavpur University.
[2] I am very grateful to Joshua Whitehead for reading a draft of this essay and giving me permission to share this story.
[3] Open Education Week, initiated in 2012 by Open Education Global, is an annual event that promotes open education globally. It raises awareness, showcases innovation, and inspires practitioners, educators, and students to engage in and explore open educational practices, fostering collaboration and inspiring accessibility and collaboration in education.
[4] Art + Feminism represents one of the most enduring and successful Wikipedia editathons, with a track record spanning since 2014. This global movement has engaged over 20,000 participants across more than 1,500 events, leading to the creation and enhancement of over 100,000 articles on Wikipedia and related projects (www.artandfeminism.org).
[5] I borrow the phrase “virtual visits” from my colleague Daisy Rosenblum, who details the ways in which the Gwa’sala-’Nakwaxda’xw Language Revitalization Program, facilitated virtual collaboration through a practice of Bagwa̲nsap’a̲ns la̲x̲a Zoom (‘We visit with each other on Zoom’).

[6] Working with kids at home meant requisitioning any room quiet enough for online meetings or classes. On a few busy mornings, the only quiet space in our house was the bathroom off of the main bedroom in our apartment. My partner and I arranged the *mise-en-scene* so that it might appear we were in an office during calls, but the acoustics often gave us away.
[7] Teaching during the pandemic, particularly through platforms like Zoom, was fraught with challenges and often felt unrewarding and draining. The experience of lecturing to a virtual sea of unresponsive, camera-off students was both draining and disheartening, casting a pall of alienation and loneliness over many educators. Yet, it's important to recognize that amid these frequent moments of isolation, there emerged occasional glimmers of connection. For every handful of disheartening encounters, there were singular, relational moments that served as a poignant reminder of our collective vulnerability and shared experience of isolation during those trying times.
[8] Derrida derives this word from his reading of Kant: "the word for 'hospitality' is a Latin word (*Hospitalität*), a word of Latin origin, of a troubled and troubling origin, a word which carries its own contradiction incorporated into it, a Latin word which allows itself to be parasitized by its opposite, "hostility," the undesirable guest [*hôte*] which it harbors as the self-contradiction in its own body…" ("Hostipitality" 3)
[9] Along with Tina Loo, Christine D'OnofrioFields, and Amber Berson, Fields and I helped to create the Wikipedia Toolkit for the Public Humanities Hub: https://sites.google.com/view/wikipedia-toolkit/home For more on the classroom-based Wikipedia assignments Fields and I created see Erin Fields and Adair Harper "Opening Up Information Literacy."
[10] Sty-Wet-Tan was an evocative home for the event. Built out of Western redcedar logs, the space reflects Coast Salish longhouse architecture and features four house posts and two support beams carved by northwest coast carvers. "Sty-Wet-Tan" is a hən̓q̓ə́min̓əm̓ or Musqueam phrase, meaning "spirit of the west wind."
[11] We collected this data using the Wikipedia Event dashboard tool: https://outreachdashboard.wmflabs.org
[12] These resources are collected here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Meetup/HonouringIndigenousWriters
[13] The database is available here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Meetup/HonouringIndigenousWriters/Articles
[14] While this practice goes against Wikipedia's guidelines, it aligns with the accountability approach emphasized by Senier in "Indigenizing Wikipedia." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Meetup/HonouringIndigenousWriters
[16] Weekly activities: https://hiw.open.ubc.ca/activities
[17] Wikipedia does, of course, have talk pages where editors can interact with one another. However, as Senier has demonstrated, those spaces are often hostile, particularly so when the article in questions deals with race, gender, or social justice.
[18] Gaertner, "Closed, Open, Stopped: Indigenous Sovereignty and the Possibility of Decolonial DH."

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