
“Changing Landscapes”: Ecocritical Dystopianism in Contemporary Indigenous SF Literature

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In a time when modern settler-invader colonialism continually pushes a hyper-extractive demand for fossil fuels, minerals, and water at the expense of landscapes, ecologies, and traditional land use, what are often matriarchically-driven Indigenous sovereignties offer different ecological models, from Standing Rock to Wet’suwet’en and beyond.¹ These movements work to ensure that the land and water is healthy for those living now and in the future—both for Indigenous peoples and otherwise.² Invasive, ecocidal modern human activities are particularly troubling given a 99% scientific consensus around anthropogenic climate change (Watts) or other human-exacerbated environmental problems like ocean acidification (Resnick). Our actions raise the question of what kind of environmental spaces will be left behind. What will a specific place look like after it has been changed by modern social processes; will affected landscapes ever fully return to previous states? Environmental disruptions cannot be averted by the very means by which they are being perpetuated, and hyper-extractive processes, energy policies, and industrial practices do not preserve the spaces and places of the world as they are organized into modes of greater efficiency. Such an approach will result in a future of devastating change to places we value, and acutely accentuate social and ecological disparities. Speculative narratives about the future, however, are key elements in imagining both the detriments to such “business

as usual" models and the potentialities of more environmentally-conscious societies emerging instead—especially ones modelling Indigenous teachings.³

In their 2017 "Environmental Ethics Through Changing Landscapes: Indigenous Activism and Literary Arts," an introduction to the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature's* special issue on Environmental Ethics and Activism in Indigenous Literature and Film, Warren Cariou and Isabelle St-Amand point to the fact that some "Indigenous... futurescapes are envisioned with intricate connections to pasts characterized by major upheavals and to presents shaped by" (14) what I call elsewhere "a sense of ongoing crisis" (Scott as qtd. in Cariou and St-Amand 14; Scott, "(Indigenous)" 77). A strong example of this is with the Residential Schools reborn in Métis writer Cherie Dimaline's 2017 novel *The Marrow Thieves*—which is also a novel of excessive urban populations and the dreamlessness of modern living exacerbated by climate change processes and the destructive, continued cultural and environmental devastations perpetuated by the self-serving desperation of the authoritarian, colonial state. But a work like Dimaline's *Marrow Thieves* is also one of hope for the future. Cariou and St-Amand articulate this drive to "create, envision, and dream Indigenous futures" (14) in terms of Vizenorian survivance; they remind us that, "[i]n many ways, grim, disturbing, and seemingly hopeless realities have inspired Indigenous narrative artists to investigate, make sense of, and create hope out of disruption and destruction" (Cariou and St-Amand 14). Despite the alteration of traditional living spaces, for instance, that accompanies environmental changes like those seen with increased storm frequency and intensity (Atleo 9), accelerating sea-level rise, and rampant desertification or other biome shifts, many contemporary Indigenous science fiction (sf) works imagine community adaptation and resilience into speculated futures, and thus resonate with what I coin "ecocritical dystopianism."⁴ By grounding the social changes of a narrative written about the future in the environmental changes to an

understanding of place, writers of the ecocritical dystopia are more tangibly connecting imagined future events with the concerns of those living in the present, in the real world. Near-future events or processes are therefore no longer upcoming or even imminent, but instead feel immanent and ongoing. This subgeneric approach is particularly useful to Indigenous sf writers, who often harness the sense of a crisis that has not ended instead of “an upcoming one” (Scott, “(Indigenous)” 77) as fallout from the continued catastrophe following European Contact. Importantly, while the ecocritical dystopianism of Indigenous sf writers is deeply rooted in a connection to traditional place and society that has been adversely affected and will continue to change into the future, ecocritical dystopianism also encompasses the possibility for utopian irruptions, and thus fosters Indigenous hope for the future. To help illustrate the ecocritical dystopia in practice through the lens of contemporary Indigenous sf writing, further into this paper I will discuss the case studies of Harold Johnson’s 2015 novel *Corvus* and Louise Erdrich’s 2017 novel *Future Home of the Living God*.⁵

The “Ecocritical Dystopia”: Changing Lands and Environments

The terminology of ecocritical dystopianism encapsulates my argument that a subgeneric inflection has developed in recent sf writing about the future that features dystopian themes and elements. In part, the wording pays homage to the “critical dystopia,” for which Tom Moylan highlights the social drivers of “the hard times of the 1980s and 1990s” (182).⁶ But critical dystopian works, as Ildney Cavalcanti argues, “depict fictional realities that are, to different degrees, *discontinuous* with the contemporary ‘real’ (although such realities are drawn *in relation* to, and as a critique of, the world as we know it)” (“Articulating” 12-13, my emphasis). As I explain elsewhere through a discussion about the real-world, tangible, lived, and ongoing effects of climate change, the critical dystopia is not a term that does the same work

because, while it certainly reflects how we might *feel* about what is a complex and often distressing problem, it does not focus on geographical and social changes related to an extrapolation of environmental shifts between the present and the future (Scott, "'Everything'" 409). Critical dystopian sf narratives involve a use of what we might call representative or symbolic places as critiques of a social moment, and therefore are not direct extensions of the real-world into the near-future. A strong recent example of this is the fictional Gibson in Anishinaabe writer Waubgeshig Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow* (2018), which is said to be a "small northern cit[y]" (Rice 20) in Ontario, Canada, "about three hundred kilometres to the southwest" (75) of the "semi-fictional" (Guynes) Gaawaandagkoong First Nation (Rice 139). Though the novel also names Toronto (75), a real-world locale, the fictionality of Gibson⁷ is employed to stand in for any urbanized place in the region that might succumb to "chaos" (74) during the societal collapse occurring south of the Anishinaabe community of Gaawaandagkoong—rather than Rice making the choice of having a near-future crisis altering how we might understand the nature of a specific place recognizable in the present of the real-world. Ecocritical dystopianism, that is, instead demonstrates that contemporary dystopian fiction is employing ideas of places and geographies differently than in critical dystopias, or even in earlier dystopian works.

Settings connected with the real world are obviously present in earlier sf literature, and it is tempting to retroactively apply an ecocritical dystopian reading to some of them rather than to focus the genre on the present moment in sf writing. But while the example of E.M. Forster's 1909 novella "The Machine Stops" involves a futuristic society living beneath what are, in the narrative, the former places of the world, like Wessex and Brisbane, the focus is not on the environmental alterations to the landscape, but on the social alterations to the underground society. The difference with more recent, ecocritical dystopian fiction is that society's adaptations to the near-

future, physical changes in environmental conditions and landscapes are a main factor in the plot. The problems encountered in the ecocritical dystopia are of the real world for a reason, and no longer adhere to the Jamesonian explanation of “a ‘near-future’ novel [that] tells the story of an imminent disaster... waiting to come to pass in our own near future, which is fast-forwarded in the time of the novel” (*Seeds* 56). Instead, the ecocritical dystopia resonates with what Joshua Gunn and David E. Beard call *immanence*, with its “collapsing linear temporality onto a prolonged experience of the present” (Gunn and Beard 272). That is, the effect of the ecocritical dystopia is to bring us closer to the crises involved, rather than to underline an idea that catastrophe will happen sometime in the future: we are, after all, connected to these stories through our relationships (however tenuous) with the real-world landscapes altered within the narratives. Such sf writing relates to what Gerry Canavan outlines as “the reality principle that adheres to our real conditions of existence” when he describes Suvinian “cognitive estrangement” (“Suvin” xviii); instead of a narrative juxtaposing how we understand our geographical reality with a place and time that involves “science fictional difference” (xviii), like a story set on Jupiter, ecocritical dystopian texts fold the inherent “difference” into a connection with the present day. The ecocritical dystopia channels the reality principle of the dystopian now in formulating its ensuing future societies, environments, living concerns, and physical places.⁸

Ecocritical dystopianism parses our disharmony with our lived environments as an extrapolation of the present into the future. Since its modes of place-based environmental crises create a node for exploring political pressures, cultural shifts, and resource and infrastructure needs, among other categories, ecocritical dystopianism offers a conflation of the near or even further future with the time of the present. In this time of “global weirding” (Canavan and Hageman), with what Claire L. Evans calls a “need [for] an Anthropocene fiction,” we are more acutely able to see the inequalities

reminiscent in colonial thinking: Rob Nixon opines that "the dominant mode of Anthropocene storytelling is its failure to articulate the great acceleration to the great divergence... It is time to remold the Anthropocene as a shared story about unshared resources" (Nixon).⁹ The self-reflexivity of recent sf writing,¹⁰ which includes Indigenous sf, indeed invokes such Anthropocenic issues,¹¹ and the ecocritical dystopia demonstrates that, at least sometime after the first critical dystopias, sf has been engaging with elements of realism in a very concentrated manner that entangles environmental concerns with socio-cultural processes. This generic form presents societies extrapolated directly and tangibly forward from the present, and insists that environmental imbalances are the root of social dystopia.

Indigenous sf writing often imagines modern human society as out of sync with the natural world, which echoes how Shelley Streeby argues that "people of color and Indigenous people use science fiction and other speculative genres to remember the past and imagine futures that help us think critically about the present" (5). One such example is with the extension of knowledge from the book found in Chickasaw writer Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* (1994), which has "diagrams of plants" with "[a]rrows point[ing] to parts of them that were useful for healing, a root, a leaf" (256) and "symbols for sun and moon which depicted the best times of day to gather the plants" (257). The discovery of such a repository of experiential ecological understandings promises to extend cultural legacies, and echoes a call in many Indigenous sf narratives for a reconnection with the land. But in some of these narratives, traditional and modern Indigenous engagements with the land are complicated by alarming ecological degradation as current social processes increasingly drive future changes. *Solar Storms*, for instance, features a massive flooding as a "result of... damming" (334), and, "with the terrain so changed, the maps" from the book "would have been no use" (348); reengaging with what was once known about the landscape becomes

impossible. In another example, Laguna Pueblo writer Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) presents "prophecies [that] said gradually all traces of Europeans in America would disappear and, at last, the people would retake the land" (631-32). These prophecies offer an end to the ongoing impacts of colonialism, but also warn "that Mother Earth would punish those who defiled and despoiled her. Fierce, hot winds would drive away the rain clouds; irrigation wells would go dry; all the plants and animals would disappear. Only a few humans would survive" (632). Even in these prophecies, the damage wrought by human activities is drastic and potentially difficult to return from: survivance does not seem to be a guarantee.¹² Yet, while texts like Silko's, with its apocalyptic stone snakes, celebrate a return to where the non-Indigenous element is removed from what is now called North America, the genre is also divided. Spokane-Coeur d'Alene writer Sherman Alexie's "Distances" (1993) indicates a resurrection of older cultural elements from which no one really benefits—as does Dogrib (Tłı̨chǫ) writer Richard Van Camp's expanding "Wheetago War" narrative, if we read the overarching antagonist simply as the environmental return of a punitive, elder god aspect. But in a text like Thomas King's novel *The Back of the Turtle* (2014), which contains ecocritical dystopian elements, in coastal British Columbia, Fort McMurray, and Lethbridge, the very near-future permutations of current real-world environmental issues emerge, and water shapes the cultural and survival landscapes of local and regional communities. Despite some critical dystopian moments elsewhere in the text,¹³ this proximity to the real-world is noteworthy because it suggests a sense of urgency not only in relation to the environmental catastrophes that occur, but in terms of the healing necessary. That is, the end of *Turtle* suggests that a world can be built anew, and thus a cultural return can occur—which are lessons applicable to those living in the real world and imagining forward into the future.

In similar ecocritical dystopias resulting from social and environmental imbalances, a focus on geographical remnants recognizable today allows Indigenous sf writers to further speculate about the nature of living spaces. Social dynamics affect and are affected by the alterations to places within such works, and the ecocritical dystopian body of fiction underscores how concerning the future is—not only within these imagined narratives, but also for those in the real-world present who have relationships with a sense of place. But ecocritical dystopianism also engages, in this context, with what Grace Dillon (Anishinaabe), the scholar of Indigenous speculative and science fictions, has coined "Indigenous futurisms": ecocritical dystopian Indigenous sf work is also involved in thinking forward in a manner that hopes for better futures. Both Erdrich's *Future Home* and Johnson's *Corvus*, though ecocritical dystopian narratives, ultimately imagine hopeful possibilities for communities learning to reengage with their environmental landscapes.

Ecocritical Dystopianism in *Future Home* and *Corvus*

Like Dimaline's *Marrow Thieves*, both Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* and Johnson's *Corvus* are indigenous sf novels that feature future climate change processes extrapolated forward from the present moment.¹⁴ The first novel is partly set in a future Minneapolis, in an America where not only human offspring but the rest of the natural world seem to be devolving as part of a global weirding related to climate change, and a theocratic, authoritarian regime enforces bodily control over women still able to bear "regular" or "original" (Erdrich 245) human babies to term. But the protagonist's Ojibwe family also begins to reassert control over their traditional lands and to rethink human engagement with them. By imagining changes into the future, both *Future Home* and *Corvus* therefore comment upon how our modern society engages in disconnected ways with the land—such as with Johnson's parody of social attention

given to receding glaciers, where British Columbia mines “the last of the Columbia ice fields” to transport to Vancouver so “it won’t go to waste” while others consume fossil fuels and spew greenhouse gases as they drive up to see “the last of the great glacier” disappearing “because of climate change” (Johnson 178). This is a narrative of sweeping social alterations as weather patterns and regional climates shift—producing a society of people aspiring to live in “sky cities,” since “[a]t forty thousand feet there are no storms” (11). However, in both *Corvus* and *Future Home*, while climate changes occur from the time of the present, it is the accompanying social changes related to the resulting environmental and place-based alterations that indicate ecocritical dystopian elements.

Erdrich’s *Future Home* is an interesting example of a text where the background of environmental changes is only briefly hinted at, but is also extrapolated in dramatic and tangible ways even unto the genetic re-ordering of flora and fauna—an alteration that begins to affect human progeny and, because of these changes, rapidly destabilizes “Western” society. Though the connection in the narrative is tenuous, the environmental disruptions are very likely tied to anthropogenic climate change, since “the fallout of events” is linked to the “first winter without snow, among other things,” as well as the interrelated “political idiocies and wars and natural disasters” (Erdrich 9). In fact, this disappearance of winter weather emerges as the final focus of the novel, which is mostly organized through journalistic entries that a pregnant mother, Cedar Hawk Songmaker, aka Mary Potts (3), writes to her future “son” (265) amidst the irrupting flurry of biological alterations. The journal’s final contribution is in February (265)—a somewhat unspecific marker that not only indicates a partial loss of a sense of time as nearly *all* other entries, starting on August 7th (3) of the previous year, contain a month and a date, but also helps articulate most clearly the last of three entries given after her son’s birth on December 25th (264). This February contemplation considers

"the way it was before," when "the lake froze" (265), and before "the snow came one last time" when Cedar "was eight years old" (266); after, "the cold *didn't* burn your lungs" (266; my emphasis), "freeze the snot in your nose," "frost your eyelashes," or "hurt," and the "[n]ext winter, it rained" (266). But this change is also notably resonant with a specific sense of place extrapolated into the near future, as the very last line of the novel asks the son where he will be "the last time it snows on earth" (267)—reminding us that future changes will not be consistent globally.

Cedar's narrative of locale and region altering through climate, ecology, and biology is focused on what is now called Minneapolis and Minnesota (260),¹⁵ though specific streets are renamed "overnight" under a theocratic, "joint entity," decentralized governmental amalgamation of the "United States Postal Service" and "the National Guard" that, "within some states" (94), maps "everything" by "'Bible verses'" (101). Ostensibly, this is a novel of what happens as Western society breaks down in the area and is reorganized through the control of an extreme faction somewhat à la Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985).¹⁶ But it is *also* a novel in which the "original treaty grounds" (Erdrich 227) of traditional Ojibwe land are reclaimed. Previously, as Cedar's step father-figure Eddy puts it, "like almost every other reservation, [theirs] was lost through incremental treaties and then sold off in large part when the Dawes Act of 1862 removed land from communal ownership" (213). The enterprising Eddy awakens from his previous nihilistic stupor and says he "'think[s] about seventy percent of [his] depression was [his] seventeenth-century warrior trying to get out'" (227). But, in organizing the reclamation of land, Eddy explains they are "not taking back ... all [their] ancient stomping grounds," and are instead focusing on "the land within the original boundaries of [the] original treaty" (214).¹⁷ Their efforts are, in fact, more geared toward what the community can accomplish, as Eddy "wants to make the reservation one huge, intensively worked,

highly productive farm" (226). After all, as Eddy puts it, Indigenous people "'have been adapting since before 1492 so [they will] keep adapting'" (28). This statement is the fundamental heart of the novel.

Though "church billboards" read "*End-time at Last! Are You Ready to Rapture?*" (13) early in the narrative, with the tribal renewal, altered use of the land, and efforts at adaptation, this ecocritical dystopia also uncovers the embedded utopian hope of the subgenre. The sign from which the novel takes its name¹⁸ "is planted" "[i]n one enormous, empty field" that is "bare... fallow and weedy, stretching to a pale horizon" (13), and marks where ground-breaking will occur for one of the authoritarian, uber-religious pregnancy detention complexes called "'Future Home Reception Centers'" (90). The welcoming tone accompanying the advertisement of these centers, where, in a coup-state television broadcast, the cyberpunkesque Mother figure promises "chefs... waiting for" pregnant "Womb Volunteers to gestate... embryos" (90), is undercut by the reality of what are really just jails repurposed to house pregnant mothers and extract children from them as many times as possible. That is, as Cedar notes, "[a] sign above the entrance says Stillwater Birthing Center, but it is only a painted piece of canvas that covers Minnesota Correctional Facility Stillwater" (249)—a factor further adding to how a sense of place is altered in Erdrich's ecocritical dystopia. Tragically, and ironically, these centres result in the stifling of life, and the one where Cedar ends up is most probably where she dies alongside the many deceased mothers whose pictures come to adorn "the wall of martyrs" (254) in "the dining room" (253) and who are buried in the "vast field filling with tiny white crosses... for both mother and baby" (259). However, despite focusing on the dystopian fallout in this post-democratic America, the end of this novel of Indigenous Futurism shows both compassion for "the Big Knives, the white people" (227), who have "'all removed themselves'" to go "'back to the Cities'" (214), and celebrates a resurgence of "what

came before," even as it acknowledges what has been lost and can never be regained. As Dillon asserts, "[i]t might go without saying that all forms of Indigenous futurisms are narratives of *biskaabiiyang*, an Anishinaabemowin word connoting the process of 'returning to ourselves'" (10). Fittingly, the real "future home," past the text of Erdrich's narrative, is that which Eddy and his people are rebuilding on their traditional lands.

The rebuilding of traditional community and learning to live with the land and its ecologies is also important in Johnson's *Corvus*. Lessons about this are primarily delivered through the overarching textual fragments that both bookend the novel and progress the Trickster Raven's voice and agency in the narrative: with the first fragment before Chapter 1, which is told *about* Raven, there is a contemplation about his loneliness, a historicization of what humans have done to the "boreal" (7) forest, and a decision to re-engage with human culture. But the novel also demonstrates its ecocritical dystopian credentials immediately with environmental changes such as desertification and erratic, intensified weather, and specifically the changes to place that occur for real-world locales like Kenilworth, Illinois, Gladwyne, Pennsylvania (11), and La Ronge, Saskatchewan (16). With the latter, "too much nitrogen, too much heat," and "not enough species that ate algae" could mean that Lac La Ronge "would become a stinking green slough" (20) in the further future. In fact, there are socio-environmental alterations to several geographically-recognizable places in the near-future of the novel—including with how people in San Diego do not "come out in summer" but instead remain "huddled in air-conditioned spaces" while waiting "for a cool breeze off the Pacific," and "places like Phoenix and Houston" have become "completely empty" (16). Arizona, for instance, is "too late" in getting "its solar power projects up and running" while "sand and dust from the desert c[o]me on the hot wind" and people realize they cannot "live without water" (17). Later, in a nod to how regional climatic disruptions will vary, the "jet stream... dip[s] south" to bring "down

colder Arctic air” just as “warm wet Pacific weather move[s] in from the west,” and instead of just “a heavy spring rain, with perhaps some localized flooding” (249), or “nothing more than the last visit of winter,” an unexpected “heavy snowfall” (250) occurs in a time that only knows rainfall. This is a novel that catalogues not only continental socioenvironmental changes, but also those happening to specific regions and locales.

One of the main arcs of speculative future-history that we see in *Corvus* rests in memories of a North America generally drying out, the conflicts that arise, and a mass migration of many towards the North: “there were so damn many of them and more came from the south every day” (11). As the character Katherine says, “[s]he’d chosen La Ronge because La Ronge had water. She’d left Saskatoon because Saskatoon didn’t” (176). La Ronge is near the 55th parallel within a swath of lake land, and roughly 343.58 km (213.49 mi) north-northeast of Saskatoon—certainly an area ripe with water. The South Saskatchewan River, which currently runs through Saskatoon, has its headwaters in the Rocky Mountains, and seemingly because of anthropogenic climate change in the narrative, “became the South Saskatchewan Creek and then... stopped flowing altogether” (177). Such drying up of water flows creates a situation in the past of the narrative that precedes Dimaline’s use of the “Water Wars” in *Marrow Thieves*,¹⁹ where America extracts freshwater resources from mostly Anishnaabe “lakes [and rivers] with a great metal straw” (24).²⁰ In *Corvus*, the colonially-named provinces Alberta and British Columbia are at each others’ throats, but also Eastern Canada and Western Canada; in a parallel, in the United States, “[i]t wasn’t so much Red States and Blues States, Democrat or Republican,” “but a difference between dry states and wet states” (Erdrich 190). The continent is consumed by what are called the First and Second Intra wars. Yet Johnson also cleverly inserts satire when he first has people praying for “[a] little rain, PLEASE, enough to settle the dust” (176), then also features

the colonial province of British Columbia physically removing glacial remnants from the icefields of the Continental Divide while perpetuating modern society's climate change exacerbating activities. Ironically, the desire for rain is followed by a sense of regional change where "it... started to rain" and then "rained, and rained, and rained, until the Saskatchewan River flooded its banks and bridges washed away" as "people began to pray for the sun again" (178).

The outcome, even in La Ronge, is that the ecological cycle is disrupted and the land becomes mostly infertile. Though there are elements in the novel that are meant to lead these humans towards a more sustainable entanglement with the environment—life and death being parts of that conversation—still the majority of humans ignore or can no longer access the teachings involved. The La Ronge city lawyer George crash-lands while out flying his biotech, "three meters tall" (28) Raven-wingsuit Organic Recreational Vehicle (ORV), which repurposes cellular level material for human entertainment. This crash puts him in proximity with the camp of the "'medicine man'" (105) Two Bears, who attempts to teach George the city-dweller about living a fulfilling life.²¹ The satisfaction of community building is also apparent in the character Isadore's memories (104-105) of coming to the multigenerational Two Bears Camp (76),²² though he carefully acknowledges George's "'powerful world,'" which "'pulls people back'" (105). This futuristic, magnetic world is still paved with "concrete" (7), still ruled by the loopholes of modern legal systems, and still hierarchical, privileged, and capitalistic in the sense that social status means hoping to invest in condos "in the sky cities" (11). Tellingly, at the start of the novel, "George... needed three more good years" (11) of an "expected 12%" pay increase, "maybe even a bit more" (12)—which he does not get. It is still a world built on individualism and greed. But, in the novelistic structure, the later, bookending portion of Raven's narrative, despite the Trickster's decision to go "back to the forest... before it's all

gone" (277), still shows a progression, still portrays some hope as demonstrated through George, "this one human [Raven] know[s]," who is "learning... starting to get it"—as well as another character who "[t]alks to" the natural (and spiritual!) world (275). Raven says, "[o]nce in a while I hear her pray for the earth" (275), and there is also a hope "that she's going to teach her kids to love the earth too" (276). Notably, this sequence underscoring the importance of a natural life cycle where "it all worked the way it was supposed to," "the wolves ate... buffalo," and the ravens "clean[ed] up after them" before "spread[ing] them around on the prairie" (276) is also the only non-numbered chapter in the novel, and is denoted by the title, "Said Raven." Here, even Raven's voice demonstrates progression in the narrative, since the earlier, distanced, story about the Trickster has become, by this end-point, a first-person monologue that, while somewhat skeptical, also contains hope for humanity. *Corvus*, like many novels featuring both Indigenous Futurisms and ecocritical dystopian elements, leaves the final lessons to be taken up by the reader and brought into the present of the real world.

Healing of and by Community

In *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) concludes that he is given "hope that the future world will be an improvement on the one we've inherited, that different stories will mean different possibilities, that we can live, love, and imagine otherwise, and that we can do it together" (210). It is in this forward-imagining sense that much Indigenous sf aims for communal healing from centuries of settler colonial violence to not only Indigenous peoples, but also to the land, waters, plants, and animals—and not just a healing *of* community, but a healing *by* community. This is true of even narratives that we categorize as "dystopias" in following the word's Ancient Greek roots where "dys-" means "bad, difficult" (Montanari, "δυσ-") and

"topos" means "place" (Montanari, "τόπος"). The role of characters inhabiting such "difficult" landscapes—like those in the ecocritical dystopias of *Future Home* and *Corvus*—is to present narratives where it is possible to not only overcome, adapt to, or otherwise survive such conditions, but also where the conditions themselves have the potential of starting a healing process. Indigenous ecocritical dystopias, in particular, entangle the solutions for the characters with solutions for their lived places and environments.²³

The example of King's *Back of the Turtle* also engages in an ecocritically dystopian fashion with realism through environmental changes to settings such as the city of Lethbridge and the Alberta tar sands. Here, the storyteller puts the onus of his teachings on those listening, on those who are asked to carry forward community-making into the real-world in opposition to current hypercapitalistic overdrive through the co-opting of science towards profit and petromodern ways of living that disconnect us from the environment and contribute to the ravaging of land and waters. King's narrative ends with the renewal of the biotic lifeforms in and around a damaged creek and oceanfront, and community buds again alongside the ocean's resurgence after the industrial, biochemical impact of a defoliant. The natural world's resilience to overcome this modern ill becomes intertwined with the characters' communal healing. King's novel is called *The Back of the Turtle*, after all, and this clear reference to the Anishinaabeg's and others' name for North America—that is, Turtle Island—implies that we are all involved in and required to engage in healing practices. For the Anishinaabe, at least, the history of the Turtle Island term ties into the creation story of their people, the history of their engagement with the land, and an understanding of how the world is now.²⁴ The turtle from these teachings bears the weight of the continent, at least, and like the living turtle escaped from a corporation's tank in King's novel, which has "a strange indentation in its shell, as though it had spent its life

bearing a heavy load" (King 22), is an apt metaphor for the anthropogenic pressures that have been applied to not only North America, but the entire world. Healing of and by community is indeed required.

Johnson's *Corvus* and Erdrich's *Future Home* can be taken together to demonstrate an opportunity to engage with human-caused environmental catastrophe from a common standpoint. As Nuu-chah-nulth hereditary chief Umeek (Ahousaht) indicates with his discussion of *tsawalk*, or a sense of oneness,

The ancient Nuu-chah-nulth assumed an interrelationship between all life forms—humans, plants, and animals. *Relationships are*. Accordingly, social, political, economic, constitutional, environmental, and philosophical issues can be addressed under the single theme of interrelationships... existence, being, and knowing, regardless of seeming contradictions, are considered to be *tsawalk*—one and inseparable. They are interrelated and interconnected. (Atleo ix).

In a fitting parallel, *Corvus* asks us "[w]hat... it mean[s] to be human" and "what [one's] role [is] as a human" (203; my emphasis): ultimately the novel is about the entanglement of humanity with the greater ecological community. But so is *Future Home*, as both books contemplate where and how we humans will live tomorrow, and the next day. As the character George concludes in *Corvus*, "we are more than human. The species is greater than the individual. Everything is made up of something smaller" (205). These novels, taken together, teach us that, as readers, we are bound together in contemplating the present, and moving towards the future.

The rebuilding of sovereign Indigenous community and engagement with the land in *Corvus* and *Future Home* demonstrate deliberate, focused modes of learning to live with the land and its ecologies. This echoes how Potawatomi scholar-activist Kyle Powys Whyte argues, for real-world relationships with the natural world, that

"indigenous conservationists and restorationists tend to focus on sustaining particular plants and animals whose lives are entangled locally—and often over many generations—in ecological, cultural, and economic relationships with human societies and other nonhuman species" ("Our Ancestors" 207). Today's interconnections with the land and waters are often complicated by concerning ecological rifts and absences, but an emphasis on landscape-based traces relatable to the present day allows writers of ecocritical dystopias to further speculate about the availability and viability of both living spaces and resources. In its role of imagining ecological, geographical, cultural, and other shifts from the time of modern society, the ecocritical dystopian body of fiction enriches contemplations about the future and ponders why current social undertakings matter in grave ways. These narratives ask the world to carry forward community-making into the real-world in opposition to things like hyper-extractive invasions of natural spaces in search for more and more resources. The ecocritical dystopia, as seen through narratives like Johnson's *Corvus* and Erdrich's *Future Home*, asks us to contemplate seriously and carefully what our future real-world places will look like, and how we will interact with them and with each other. It asks us whether we can only expect the emergence of bad places and deplorable social conditions, or whether we can perhaps work towards a reality formed by more positive communal imaginings and practical engagements with each other, as well as the lands, waters, and other non-human persons with whom we co-inhabit the world.

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Notes

¹ Here I do not mean the notorious Wet’suwet’en Matrilineal Coalition, which was formed by the colonial government alongside industry to undermine negotiations with hereditary governance (Turner).

² The Water Protectors and extended community at Standing Rock demonstrated an understanding that everyone is affected. This was the message when Madonna Thunder Hawk (Oohenumpa/Cheyenne River Sioux) travelled from the South Dakota camp to talk with the 2016 Under Western Skies conference attendees, who had gathered to weigh in on “water” from various angles (Thunder Hawk). Audra Mitchell notes that such relationships should be reciprocal, though; as Kyle Powys Whyte catalogues, “some allies of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in the resistance against the Dakota Access Pipeline participated vigorously in the Tribe’s ceremonial and direct actions. Yet they do not participate on an everyday basis to undermine educational, economic, legal and cultural conditions that made it possible in the first place for the Tribe to even be in the proximity of the Dakota Access and other pipelines” (“Indigenous science (fiction)” 237).

³ Consultation, permission, and inclusion are, of course, essential here; as Kimberly R. Marion Suiseeya and Laura Zanotti have pointed out, Indigenous peoples have markedly been made invisible in “contributions to global environmental governance” and global climate discussions.

⁴ To date, the “ecocritical dystopia” concept first appeared in my article “‘Everything Change’: Ecocritical Dystopianism and Climate Fiction,” which was published as part of *Paradoxa’s* 2019-2020 special issue on *Climate Fictions*, edited by Alison Sperling. The term also appears in my chapter “Post-Anthropocenic Undying Futures: The Ecocritical Dystopian Posthuman in Lai’s *The Tiger Flu* and Bacigalupi’s ‘The People of Sand and Slag’” as a part of editor Simon Bacon’s *The Anthropocene and the Undead* (2022). I further theorize “ecocritical dystopianism” in my Ph.D. dissertation, “Here, at the End: Contemporary North American Ecocritical Dystopian Fiction” (2019).

⁵ Johnson is of Cree and Swedish descent, and Erdrich is an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians (Anishinaabe).

⁶ Ildney Cavalcanti, Raffaella Baccolini, and Lyman Tower Sargent also notably contributed to an understanding of the "critical dystopia."

⁷ Though Gibson Lake and the Gibson River exist in the real world near the Township of Georgian Bay ("Gibson Lake"), Rice's city of Gibson does not.

⁸ A sense of the dystopian now certainly fits with how Brett Josef Grubisic, Gisèle M. Baxter, and Tara Lee suggest that contemporary dystopian texts feature the "ends of water, oil, food, capitalism, empires, stable climates, ways of life, non-human species, [or] entire human civilizations" (11).

⁹ Elsewhere, Nixon refers to the "environmentalism of the poor," following Joan Martínez Alier and Ramachandra Guha; see also Isabelle Anguelovski and Joan Martínez Alier on a revisiting of this terminology with more contemporary circumstances and "glocal" movements.

¹⁰ Contra Amitav Ghosh (*Great Derangement* 72), see Shelley Streeby (5).

¹¹ Heather Davis and Zoe Todd's interventional work into the process of the Anthropocene Working Group's discussions supports placing a "1610" (763) Anthropogenic "'golden spike'" (762) in terms of colonialism; earlier, Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin also suggest a 1610, "post-1492" "'Orbis spike'" (175). Given this, perhaps a more useful term than the "Anthropocene" could be the "Plantationocene" (Haraway), since it involves the ongoing effects of colonialism, and thus how "plantation logics organize modern economies, environments, bodies, and social relations" (Perry and Hopes). However, while Whyte agrees that "'Anthropogenic climate change' or 'the Anthropocene'... are not precise enough terms for many Indigenous peoples" because of the unequal implications and effects of "colonialism, capitalism and industrialization" ("Indigenous Climate Change Studies" 159), he asserts that "Anthropogenic (human-caused) climate change is an intensification of environmental change imposed on Indigenous peoples by colonialism" (153), and instead offers "Indigenous Climate Change Studies" as "a field that opens up [Indigenous] interpretations of [their] own histories and futurities, with the goal of supporting Indigenous capacities to address climate change and the continuance of flourishing future generations" (160). Whyte later contends that "[s]ome Indigenous peoples... offer the idea that [they] confront climate change having already passed through environmental and climate crises arising from the impacts of colonialism" ("Indigenous science (fiction)" 226); more importantly, he argues against situating Indigenous experiences "in some time period like the Holocene or Anthropocene" (237). Part of this argument against prioritizing concepts like the Anthropocene or even

climate change over other factors involves how “Indigenous perspectives on mobility support an understanding of colonialism itself as a major cause of what today is understood as ‘climate’ resettlement” (Whyte et al. 320).

¹² The key, here, appears to be the ability to continue storytelling, since Gerald Vizenor (Minnesota Chippewa/White Earth) teaches us that Indigenous “survance is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent” (“Aesthetics” 1).

¹³ One example is the fictionalized Smoke River area.

¹⁴ Note that I do not refer to these as “climate fictions”; see the special issue critiquing this generic terminology in *Paradoxa* number 31, edited by Alison Sperling.

¹⁵ The lake Cedar mentions (see above) is likely either Lake Minnetonka or Lake Harriet, since Cedar says the “house where [she] grew up” is in “a pleasant part of Minneapolis near a wide green lake invaded by quagga mussels and purple loosestrife” (53)—though the lake is never actually named in the book.

¹⁶ On “SEPTEMBER 8[th],” the father of Cedar’s child, Phil, comes home and says that there’s a new “‘church government’” called “‘The Church of the New Constitution’” (108).

¹⁷ They are not reclaiming “‘the whole top half of the state, or Pembina, Ontario, Manitoba, or Michigan’” (214).

¹⁸ That is, the sign “reads *Future Home of the Living God*” (13).

¹⁹ However, *Corvus* was published the same year as Paolo Bacigalupi’s 2015 *The Water Knife*, with its armed tension over water resources between southwestern States and other interests in an extension of the recent mega-drought (Meyer, “Mega-Drought”)—a mostly non-Indigenous commentary on near-future freshwater scarcities, though Bacigalupi underscores the action of his narrative with a document signed between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Pima (the Akimel O’odham people), a river people whose cultural ancestors, the Hohokam, had mastered the agricultural practice of canal irrigation.

²⁰ In *Marrow Thieves*, the polar ice caps’ “Melt [then] put[s] most of the northlands under water” (25), creating part of the fundamental backdrop for Dimaline’s narrative.

²¹ George’s crash is prompted by a curious, oddly-directed storm that passes from east to west (72-75).

²² This camp is said to be near one Long Lake Pass (77, 80), which is “at the end of a very long narrow lake that filled the mountain valley floor for miles north of Two Bears” (80), and “west... straight as the crow flies” of “what remained of” Edmonton “after the oil had run out” (107). It is highly possible that Long Lake is therefore Kinbasket Lake in the Canadian Rockies.

²³ Such solutions are not only the realm of fiction—which is also why ecocritical dystopianism's relationship with realism is so potent—but also interconnect with real world examples, such as the Yurok Nation and its people's revitalization of the Klamath River as a means of self-healing (Mozingo).

²⁴ Anishinaabe academic and writer Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair (St. Peter's/Little Peguis) generously shared this cultural history and worldview during his keynote address to the 2016 Under Western Skies conference on "water," while speaking of the importance of "the everyday throughout Turtle Island."

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