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Transmotion

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Special Issue – Stephen Graham Jones, guest edited by Billy J. Stratton

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CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Transmotion will publish new scholarship focused on theoretical, experimental, postmodernist, and avant-garde writing produced by Native American and First Nations authors, as well as book reviews on relevant work in Vizenor Studies and Indigenous Studies.
The broad use of Vizenor-created theoretical terms in many different academic fields (e.g. law, literature, anthropology, sociology, museum studies, etc.) highlights the fact that Vizenor Studies represents a significant interdisciplinary conversation within the broader field of Indigenous Studies. As such, the editors of *Transmotion* will look for submissions that do any of the following:

- Look at Vizenor's work directly, as well as the work of related authors and theorists in the field
- Employ Vizenor's theory to look at other writers
- Continue Vizenor's project of bringing together traditional indigenous knowledges and Asian or European continental philosophy
- Explore the inter-relation of image and text, art and literature, in Vizenor's work
- Contribute to recent developing conversations in contemporary Native American art and literature, in relation to questions of visual sovereignty, visuality, and ethics.
- Offer innovative, surprising, unexpected and creative critique of American Indian literatures or other creative arts
- Emphasize experimental, theoretical, and avant-garde Native North American work

The journal will also accept creative or hybrid work, provided that such work aligns aesthetically with the aforementioned editorial emphasis. The editors particularly welcome submissions of innovative and creative works that exploit digital media.

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Enquiries regarding submission are welcome and may be sent to the editors at transmotionjournal@gmail.com Scholarly articles should be 20-25 pages in length, prepared according to the MLA Style Manual. Creative work can be of any length. We are also very keen for scholars to put themselves forward as potential book reviewers and to volunteer to be anonymous peer reviewers.

Information regarding on-line submissions of full drafts can be found at:
http://journals.kent.ac.uk/index.php/transmotion/about/submissions#onlineSubmissions

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CONTENTS

On the Fictions of Stephen Graham Jones and the Stories that Made Him, and well, Us Too

BILLY J. STRATTON

Since being honored in 2017 with a Bram Stoker Award for superior achievement in *Mapping the Interior*—his 17th novel—by the Horror Writer's Association, the work of Stephen Graham Jones has exploded onto the national scene as so many of his readers have long anticipated. Jones has gone on to amass an impressive number of additional awards and honors, including three more Bram Stoker Awards, along with three Shirley Jackson Awards for outstanding achievement in the literature of horror, the dark fantastic, and psychological suspense, and a Ray Bradbury Award by the LA Times Festival of Books for Science Fiction, Fantasy & Speculative Fiction. Given such impressive accomplishments, one can only wonder about what he might come up with and put down on paper next.

The sheer number of awards Jones has received since 2017 is itself remarkable, but what makes these accomplishments even more impressive is the diverse range of genres and literary categories for which the excellence of Jones' work has been recognized. For those who have been following the trajectory of Jones's writing, however, the wide-ranging nature of his writing across so many disparate landscapes, themes, forms and genres, marks the continuation of the steady thrust of innovation, innate fearlessness on the page and seemingly limitless imagination that typify his fiction. And as the most recent cluster of works indicate, it seems clear that he will only continue to push and prod at the boundaries of his literary potential, while continuing to revolutionize and enliven native and indigenous storytelling forms.[1] Thus, whatever shape Jones's next novels may take, we can expect them to be bold experiments in

fiction presented in the same uncompromising style that has become his signature—and powered by a language that burns like a white-hot flame through the stagnant expectations and fugitive poses that some readers and critics just can't seem to relinquish.

In another way, Jones has also done more than any other writer to take up the call first articulated by Gerald Vizenor, through the cackle of a clown crow beseeching readers to "listen ha ha ha haaa" for the voices that lead out of the darkness of oblivion and victimry to a world defined in native terms, and then, "laughing, ha ha ha haaa," within his own boldly experimental novel of apocalypse and survivance in *Darkness in St. Louis: Bearheart* (vii-ix). This is a function and a motive that pours from the page, regardless of where one had the good fortune to first stumble into Jones's storied world.

Odds and chances that emerge from the span of a career that has produced around thirty books and more than three-hundred short stories, beginning with a set of stories in the mid-90s including "The Parrot Man," "The Ballad of Stacy Dunn" and "Paleogenesis, Circa 1970." These are interesting works in their own right, but ones that only hinted at what was to come and that burst onto the literary scene in novel form with the phantasmagoric speed trip of *The Fast Red Road*. From here one was free to choose their own adventure between a tornado-tracking slasher imprinted with the Land of Oz, or the spiraling narrative labyrinths meticulously constructed in *Demon Theory*. Or perhaps, it might have been a renegade father's uncanny return to his daughter in the riotous form of a bunny-headed lord of the chupacabras, wreaking havoc along the southern borderlands of Texas that drew you in.

To these peerless works establishing the boldness of Jones's literary explorations and experimentations early on, writing as if channeling the energies and spirit of Gilgamesh and Dr. Frankenstein, we can add the blurred temporalities

collapsing back upon themselves in *Ledfeather* and the cartographic escapes playing out on different planes of reality in *Mongrels* and *Mapping the Interior*. And, more recently to the sublime and phantasmagoric mingling of slasher and survivance, guilt and comeuppance dispensed to us in the intertwined stories of four Blackfeet friends that make up the core of the story contained in *The Only Good Indians*, or in the unsinkable character of Jade Daniels in *My Heart is a Chainsaw* and the soon-to-be second novel of his Jade trilogy, *Don't Fear the Reaper*. One of the great things about Jones that is reflected in this sampling of works, and what has helped him build such a large, diverse and loyal readership, is that the pathways and portals are voluminous while the routes to get there are many.

And even with the consideration of such a dazzling body of texts, just as we've all seen rehashed in innumerable PowerPoint presentations including that stock Titanic-sinking image, these works represent merely the tip of the iceberg of Jones's ever-expanding body of work. Given this extraordinary archive, I would wager that Jones has his sights set on at least thirty more novels and hundreds more additional short stories—lovers of story can dream too, right? And who knows, in a world that seems on the verge of being overtaken by the soullessness of AI writing from programs like ChatGPT, or are they entities?, who better to have on our side fighting it out *Terminator 2* style for the future of human stories than Dr. Jones?

As I've always been taught that it is important to acknowledge and honor with a generosity of spirit those who came before us to create or make possible the spaces and opportunities we enjoy, whether ancestors, mentors or colleagues, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the roles of those who were so influential in helping to shape me into the teacher, writer and scholar, but also the person, I am today. These Include Luci Tapahonso who taught me the ways of poetry and how the past can be made present through story and that places remain alive so long as there are memories to hold them.

With vital relevance to this current work, my first encounter with the writing of Stephen Graham Jones was in a graduate course I took on native fiction around 2004. It was a class taught by a newly-hired professor who would go on to produce some deeply affecting novels in her own right, Franci Washburn—a Lakota woman I am honored to call *hankasi*—that highlighted the work of "lesser-known" native writers. While that theme may now seem odd, few in that class or reading literature during that time had read anything in the realm of native fiction besides maybe a few stories by that writer who, I guess, has since become an astronaut or something. Whatever the case, the subtitle imparted the class with an added sheen, while promising to lead us down some literary paths not taken into what were still largely unexplored territories of form and genre.

What graduate student, especially at the start of one's studies, wouldn't want to take a class like that, right? In addition to novels from Mourning Dove, Zitkala-Sa, John Joseph Mathews, and Gerald Vizenor, Stephen Graham Jones's 2000 novel, *The Fast Red Road*, was also included on the reading list. I'd be lying if I were to say I was able to appreciate the innovations and narrative risks Jones was taking at the time, as I was soon lost in the circuitous plot and complex relations between characters that drives the story. But, as I read and struggled to finish the novel, I felt as though some extraordinary and magical world had been revealed, a narrative realm charged with what I would later hear one of my colleagues, Selah Saterstrom, call "alchemical effects," which were activated both on the page and in those ethereal spaces in the imagination where stories take shape and form. Still today, *The Fast Red Road* remains one of the most challenging and exhilarating books I've ever experienced as a reader, and the spiraling of narratives Jones conjures there will never cease to call me back in search of the storied treasures that remain unnoticed in each previous reading.

From a review of the articles included in this special issue, I get the distinct feeling that something similar is afoot in the hearts and minds of this esteemed group of scholars, both in the process of writing and the enthusiasm for Jones's works that inspired them. For each contributor displays their own unique passions for story in the ideas and insights they offer us in their literary uncoverings, while invigorated by the determination to share this common passion with others. The keen perceptions offered in the five articles making up this feature take us back to *Ledfeather*, and, from there, explore a range of Jones's more recent works including *Mongrels*, *Mapping the Interior* and *The Only Good Indians*, while highlighting the wealth of scholarly interests and disciplinary knowledge of our contributors. Then we close with a conversation I had with Stephen focused on his experiences as a writer and insights on contemporary publishing organized around his latest fictions and the turn to horror displayed in his work since *Mongrels.* Beyond what we might learn from this writing, my hope is also that the more elemental and instinctual passion for stories and their capacity to change the world which Jones has often spoken of shines through.

Afterall, and as scholars especially, it is critical to remember that regardless of how vital our work may be to our careers, our sense of professional or personal identity, or even our livelihoods, at the purest and most fundamental of levels, everything always goes back to story—as the origin and source of all of these matters and concerns, and not only that, but so too the material out of which of our very lives are animated.

Notes

[1] In following Gerald Vizenor's conventions on the use of capitalization in reference to the terms *indian* and native, but more importantly what this usage signifies in terms of

colonial representation and simulation, "native" and "indigenous" are rendered in lowercase throughout this essay.

Works Cited

Vizenor, Gerald, *Darkness in Saint Louis: Bearheart*. Truck Press, 1978.

Photos in Transmotion: Images of Survivance in *Ledfeather*

ALISON TURNER

Stephen Graham Jones' *Ledfeather* (2008), a semi-epistolary, semi-historical novel, poses questions about how historical knowledge is made and what to do with it. While scholars have studied the novel's postmodern attributes as methods for subversive critiques of historiography in Indigenous colonial contexts, as of yet no study prioritizes the novel's use of photographs toward these aims. After situating Gerald Vizenor's framing of "the *indian* [as] poselocked in portraiture" in histories of photography and Indigenous colonization, I illustrate through postcards archived at the Montana Historical Society how *indian* images work symbiotically with written text (146). I then examine the rhetorical role of photos in *Ledfeather*, showing how the photos enact Vizenor's sense of transmotion, or "the tease of creation in pictures, memories, and stories" (173). I argue that the photos in *Ledfeather* expand how postmodern historical fiction can push native art beyond the frame of "poselocked portraiture."

Early photographs sent east from the American West were feats of tenacity as much as art: photographers hauled heavy equipment in wagons and to the tops of mountains and used snowmelt to clean glass exposure plates. In *Photographing the Frontier* (1980), Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler describe how Louis Daguerre and Nicéphore Niépce's 1839 invention was believed to "make permanent images from life," giving consumers of photographs the possibility that "A moment in history could be permanently recorded, accurate in every detail" (11). This sense of "accuracy" has since been challenged by postmodern theorists: in the words of Susan Sontag, "A photograph changes according to the context in which it is seen" (106). A snapshot

from a vacation stacked in a shoebox compels a different effect than the same image framed over a mantel or printed in a gift book. It is due to these multiple contexts, Sontag suggests, "that the presence and proliferation of all photographs contributes to the erosion of the very notion of meaning" (106). The wide-reaching roots of photographs as a site of "permanence" and accuracy" have not, however, been erased (Hoobler 11). To the contrary, photographs continue to support attempts to understand the past as something that is fixed and factual.

In Stephen Graham Jones' *Ledfeather,* photographs contribute to a narrative world in which the past overlays with the present and one narrator's perspective overlays with a dozen others.' The novel is set in Browning, Montana in both the present, through several narrators whose stories loosely circle around a young man named Doby Saxon, and the years following the Starvation Winter in the 1880s, from which the letters of a fictional Indian Agent named Francis Dalimpere eventually reveal his role in 600 Piegan people starving due to colonial conditions. Several scholars explore *Ledfeather's* postmodern aesthetic, which is readily identified by characteristics including multiple and "fractured" storylines (Gaudet 23); a structure that contains a "level of signifiers," such as the use of *sous rature* to "add a sense of direction, metafiction, and *différance*" (Baudemann 161); polyvocality and a "heteroglossic" narrative that moves "down corridors of event, memory, language itself—English, French, Blackfeet" (Lee 81-2); and a narrative structure that builds "a relationship between the past and the present that does not center on possession" (Pennywark 90). Building on these explorations, I trace how photographs contribute to the text's postmodern aesthetic and epistemology that questions meaning and values uncertainty.

Photographs contribute to the complex structure of *Ledfeather* as objects in the narrative in three forms: ID cards, postcards, and snapshots.[1] Gerald Vizenor describes

the expectations for permanence and accuracy in photographs as *indian* images, which can exist in the same space as photos that are in transmotion, moving stories of native survivance.[2] *Indian* images, which Vizenor also describes as simulations, are produced for viewers who are not native as "public evidence of dominance, not the private stories of survivance" (157). While orienting the novel in contexts of photography's relationship with colonialism, tourism, and commodification of natives in the American West—an orientation that I supplement with material from postcard collections archived at the Montana Historical Society—I examine how photographs in the novel complicate these historical relationships. Just as the narrative itself moves between narrators, time, and protagonists, photographs do not provide "permanence" or "accuracy" but complexity, storytelling, and survivance.

I. *Indian* images and the "army of tourists"

In *Fugitive Poses* (1998), Vizenor shows how images have been used since the earliest settler colonies as rhetoric that establishes an idea of *indian* that erases native presence. Spanish and Portuguese "narratives of discovery" often included "drawings of natives" that were engraved and reproduced, creating "iconic enactments of the other" that "are seen with no sense of a native presence" (150,146). With the development of photography, Vizenor continues, images from drawings and engravings could include "captured countenance and action" (155); Vizenor's word "captured" aligns with how the Hooblers describe early excitement around photography as an invention that could "make permanent images from life" (11). *Indian* images are attempts by non-natives to freeze the stories of natives into "permanent" interpretations.

The coinciding development of railroad infrastructure and photographic technology ignited a tourist campaign that fed on *indian* images. Photos of natives in the nineteenth-century show natives as "separated" from community, land, and presence, surrounded instead by objects that make up "the obscure simulations of *indianness,*" such as beads, leather, pipes, and feathers (Vizenor 157, 160). Photographs of natives were constructed into *indian* images through several methods, including photographers paying natives to "pose and . . . revise their ceremonies to provide more photogenic material" (Sontag 64) and provision of costumes for any chief who arrived to be photographed in "white man's clothing" (Hoobler 24). It is these strategies, among others, that contribute to Vizenor's claim that "The *indian* is poselocked in portraiture," which is a "simulation of dominance" over "native presence" (146). Work from photographers such as Edward Curtis, who produced more than 40,000 images, continues to shape scholarship today, even among researchers (Vizenor 160-1). Zachary Jones shows how what he calls "contrived photos," which include staged scenes and non-Native impersonators, have been used in "academic conferences presentations, publications, and exhibits without knowledge of these images being contrived" (8-9, 13).[3] The early understanding of photography as accurate and permanent becomes more ironic over time.

As colonial settlers moved west in the United States, *indian* images contributed to a campaign of tourism promotion and broader forms of white identity building. Philip J. Deloria explores the complex and paradoxical ways that natives have been implicated in white identity building: "There was . . . no way to conceive an American identity without Indians. At the same time, there was no way to make a complete identity while they remained" (37). In *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (2001), Marguerite Shaffer details how this identity-building manifested in the West through what she calls "national tourism" (4), a phenomenon starting in

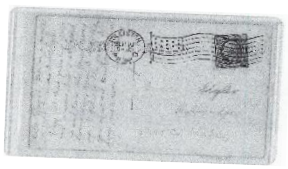
western lands newly available by rail. Tourism promoters, including railroad owners and hotel builders, "encouraged white, native-born middle- and upper-class Americans to reaffirm their American-ness by following the footsteps of American history" (Shaffer 4). Sontag describes the role of the camera during this process as "colonization through photography," as "an army of tourists," so "eager for 'a good shot' of Indian life . . . invaded the Indians' privacy, photographing holy objects and the sacred dances and places" (64). Photographs gave potential and active tourists "an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal . . . [helping] people to take possession of space in which they are insecure" (Sontag 9). Promotional campaigns used photography to sell not only vacations but participation in the formation of national identity.[4]

This booster campaign relied not only on *indian* images, but also on *indian* descriptions. When J.C.H. Grabill described one of his photographs as "The great hostile Indian camp on River Brule near Pine Ridge, S.D," for example, the Hooblers suggest that the word "hostile" was a deliberate attempt to "stimulate sales of stereo cards in the East" (161). Just as *indian* words like hostile might be added, so could native words be taken away: Morgan Bell shows how photographers deliberately erased native names, replacing them with titles such as "an unidentified Comanche woman delegate to Washington, D.C." when the photographed person's name was known (88). This relationship between *indian* images and text is particularly visible on postcards, which were one of the most successful devices of booster campaigns. By the late 1890s postcards emerged as one of the most popular categories of souvenirs, "allowing tourists to document and preserve a visual record of their journey and send personal messages to friends and relatives back home" (Shaffer 266-7). Later versions of similar postcards are archived in the Montana Postcard Collection and among the Thomas Mulvaney real-photo postcard collection at the Montana Historical Society.

The written messages on many of the postcards in these collections show how *indian* images furthered *indian* rhetoric. For example, the text accompanying a postcard of Chief Eagle Calf explains, among other information, that "Many of these native Americans spend their summers in the park and add much interest through their colorful tribal dress" ("Chief Eagle Calf"). The phrase "spend their summer" is an *indian* description of hotels employing natives to entertain tourists. Or, on the back of an image titled "Blackfoot Chief, Last Star or Weasel Feather," the postcard explains that "Blackfoot Chief, Last Star or Weasel Feather, proudly displays his elaborately fringed and beaded buckskin tribal dress" ("Blackfoot Chief"). The word "proudly" is an *indian* simulation, inserting characteristics that will be consumed by recipients.

Postcards also reveal the perpetuation of *indian* rhetoric by consumers: text is produced not only by publishers creating the product but by the tourists who purchase the images. While many of the cards in these collections do not have writing on the back (they were perhaps purchased with similar intents as *Ledfeather*'s fictional tourist, not to send but to keep, a desire I explore below) several of those that are marked show text responding to *indian* images.[5] Below I share four examples of *indian* images on postcards and the corresponding note on the back, transcribed from the handwritten text.[6]

"Blackfeet Squaw and Papoose":	"Untitled":
A woman with her back to the camera, her head turned over her shoulder as she carries a baby on her back in a cradleboard.	A white man in a tuxedo stands between two chiefs. A sticker labels the image: "Glacier Nat'l Park Jul, 1930: Chief Two Guns White Calf at left."

 *Partial Transcription: "This baby seems to enjoy his queer carriage + is quite comfortable. Wish you could be with me to enjoy the beautiful flowers etc."*	 *Partial Transcription: What do you think about our being right around these Indians? They wanted us to dance with him last night; but we thought it more fun to watch the others do it. We are having the grandest time."*
"Blackfeet Indians, Glacier National Park, Montana." Six Blackfeet people pose in front of a teepee: the men wear feather headdresses and the women wear long dresses.	"A Council of the Blackfeet Indians In Glacier National Park" Six Blackfeet people gather in front of teepees in front of snow-capped mountains: one man stands in a headdress pointing at the others who sit on the ground.
 *Partial Transcription: "We have seen quite a few Indians. Have had a very nice time and the weather has been fair. Love Grandma".*	 *Partial Transcription: "Here is a bunch of wild Indians I [licked?] They all had guns and bows and arrows but I [skipped?] up and took the guns away from them, then I beat them up. I got all the guns if you want one. Write and I will send one to you."*

These notes range from trivial comments about the picture to violent *indian* fantasies. Both forms of commentary respond to and extend the *indian* images on the front. The tourist-author of "Blackfeet Squaw and Papoose" suggests that the baby is "quite comfortable" alongside the words "enjoy" and "beautiful flowers," portraying an idyllic experience. Or, in the postcard signed "Grandma," this woman includes having "seen quite a few Indians" alongside polite notes about having a "very nice time" with "fair" weather: everything, she seems to say, is going how they had hoped. No less dependent on *indian* images but more aggressive in the extension of *indian* rhetoric, the authors of the two postcards in the right column invent interactions with the people photographed. In the untitled image, the author conflates "these Indians" in the image with people who wanted them to "dance last night"; the question "What do you think about our being right around these Indians?" suggests that this proximity is both an event that is (literally) worth writing home about *and* an event the author expects to put him or her in high esteem with their audience. Finally, the last image puts into words violent fantasies that emerge without incitement, as the image itself portrays no hostility or guns. This last photo shows how quickly *indian* rhetoric can accelerate from image to text.

Native peoples resisted, and continue to resist, *indian* images through a variety of methods. The Hooblers list among the most insistent resistors Red Cloud and Crazy Horse: the first was "reported to have chased away a photographer who tried to take his picture" and was not "captured" by a photograph until visiting D.C. in 1870; and the second "always resisted capture" by photographers, so that "No authentic photograph of him is known to exist" (122, 133). Vizenor argues that *indian* images themselves show resistance: "Watch the eyes and hands in fugitive poses to see the motion of natives, and hear the apophatic narratives of a continuous presence" (165). While costumes and poses can be directed, eyes and hands are a person's own. Bell

explores how native photographers such as Benjamin Haldane (1874-1941) and Jennie Ross Cobb (1882-1958) contributed to early movements of photography in the American West (95-6), and Kimberly Blaeser explores techniques used by contemporary photographers to "re-vision . . . early colonized representations" (164). Blaeser identifies collections of "alter-native" photos as those using multi-temporal and sometimes multi-spacial compositions as a form of "humanizing" rather than "museumizing" people in the photos (164). The three materialized photos in *Ledfeather* are not revisionist in their own compositions but add to dimensions of the "alter-native" composition of the novel at large.

II. "His own": ID cards and naming colonization

The first photos that the reader encounters in *Ledfeather* are not described but are implied as images on a spread of ID cards. An unnamed narrator drives Doby Saxon, the protagonist of the contemporary half of the novel, to the casino and watches how Doby "spread all his ID cards out on the dash of my car, then picked out his own" (20). The narrator explains that

> The rest were for the liquor store, for videos, for off-rez, for wherever one Indian was the same as all the rest.
>
> The casino's different, though.
>
> If their shiny new gambling license gets pulled, then fifty or a hundred people lose their jobs like that, come looking for whoever let that minor in the door. And then they go looking for that minor. (20)

These documents narrow Doby's age to over 18 but under 21: he uses "his own" license to enter the casino, where the legal age is 18 and over, but needs a fake ID to buy alcohol. While using fake IDs is perhaps an American pastime for young adults on-

and off-rez, this passage emphasizes how the colonial context of the reservation shapes Doby's practice. He leverages his invisibility off-rez, where people will not distinguish him from other *indians*; this invisibility is countered by the hypervisibility of the "shiny new" casino where a license can be pulled by an off-rez authority. Doby's age range is framed by legal categories determined by off-rez laws; ID cards negotiate this framing and his identity within it.

Though this short scene is the only place in the novel in which ID cards are physical objects in the narrative, they engage with the power systems surrounding Doby and his community. Sontag explores how photographs became "enrolled in the service of important institutions of control . . . [I]n the bureaucratic cataloguing of the world, many important documents are not valid unless they have, affixed to them, a photograph-token of the citizen's face" (21-2). Further, that the ID cards are shown to the reader in front of the casino is no coincidence. The casino is next door to a museum that is described later in the novel as "The one that's shut down most of the time now, since the casino opened, like they can't be that close to each other" (89). In her exploration of how gaming functions in contemporary Native American literature, Becca Gercken interprets this relationship between museum and casino as indicating that "the museum's . . . version of Blackfeet history is not available for those who might choose to learn on their own. The energy and funds that could be supporting the museum have been diverted to the casino" (9). After Doby enters the casino, he goes on an early winning streak at the blackjack table and then loses everything before starting a fight. His mother, Malory Sainte, appears and physically defends him. Gercken suggests that "While Malory is indeed protecting her son, she is failing as an elder: she is encouraging Doby to escape the consequences of the gambling habit he learned from her" (8). While Malory's role as an "elder" is complex, interpreting the scene in the framework of Doby's many IDs emphasizes not the "failure" of Blackfeet

elders but a misalignment between the Blackfeet community and government-imposed systems.

III. "Achingly Beautiful": Postcards of the GLACIER PARK INDIAN

After Doby enters the casino with "his own" ID, the perspective switches to that of an unnamed, middle-aged tourist who witnesses Doby's rise and fall at the gambling table. Soon after the fight between Doby's mother and a security guard, the tourist retreats to the casino gift shop. She narrates,

> I finally bought. . . a pack of postcards made from old brown and white pictures. Each one had a little history entry on back. It was the least I could do. The girl smiled when she gave me my change, and her teeth weren't perfect, no, but they were achingly beautiful, gave her just such personality. I hope she never fixes them. (26)

The phrases "the least I could do" and "achingly beautiful" (in the context of "imperfection") expose the tourist's perspective as not only an outsider, but an outsider who patronizes and commodifies locals. Sontag writes that "Photographic seeing meant an aptitude for discovering beauty in what everybody sees but neglects as too ordinary" (89). The gaze of a tourist can share the gaze of a photographer, both perspectives seeking the feeling of capturing beauty in what is "ordinary." Further, the tourist has specific plans for the postcards she has purchased, and her detailed description of these plans reveals their emotional role. She explains:

> I wasn't going to send any of them, I'd decided. Instead I was going to leave them on the coffee table so Charlene's kids could find them, carry them to me, ask if I really went there, their little voices so pure and so hopeful. What I'd do then . . . would be to let the children look at each photograph while I read them

> the historical entry from the back. That way the Indian on the front could look back at them, and they could know his story a little bit. The good one, I mean. (26-7)

These postcards, depicting what Vizenor would describe as natives "poselocked in portraiture" offer the narrator a way to engage with her grandchildren (146). The striking phrase "The good one, I mean," is both a postmodern acknowledgment that there is more than one story to tell about history as much as it is an attempted erasure of the stories behind the postcards. The tourist's idea of a "good story" likely differs from one that the person on the postcard would tell, just as it would have one hundred years earlier.

After the tourist's purchase of *indian* postcards, she encounters Doby in the parking lot. He startles her and she drops her postcards; as she stoops to pick them up, he offers for sale what she describes as "just a bundle of crunchy animal skin tied together with rawhide" and "black with age" (27, 31). The scene continues:

> "I--I--" I said, lowering myself all at once to the postcards.
>
> He helped . . .
>
> When we stood again, the bundle was on the ground between us.
>
> He understood, nodded to himself about this and handed me the cards back, just stopping at the last instant to look at the top one, laugh a little.
>
> . . .
>
> "If you-- if you want I can…" I started, digging in my purse for the money anyway, for all of my money, but the boy was already shaking his head no, backing away, into the night. (32)

Though the reader does not know it yet, this "bundle" is an object that Doby has stolen from the neighboring museum of Blackfeet artifacts; in this bundle are letters written in the 1880s by the fictional Indian Agent Dalimpere, whose pages compose

nearly half of the *Ledfeather* novel. The reader also learns later that the postcard on top of the pile that makes Doby "laugh a little" is an image of Yellow Tail, Doby's ancestor. Between them, then, are the *indian* postcards of Blackfeet chiefs and a bundle that has been stolen from a museum of Blackfeet history and artifacts. That the tourist desires the postcards and not the bundle—indeed, she would rather give Doby money than take the bundle when he offers it—emphasizes the desire for *indian* images as "possessory" (Vizenor 16). She desires something beautiful to remember her trip to Blackfeet territory, in the sense of the salesclerk's "imperfect" teeth that the tourist hopes never change, rather than something "crunchy" and "black with age." She wants to possess memories of this trip that will contribute to her own imagined identity as someone who is surrounded by her grandchildren, telling the "good stories" instead of the stories of the Starvation Winter, or about how Doby's mom will go to jail for defending him when he lost her money at the casino.

However, history in this novel is superimposed with the present, so that this tourist brings with her alternatives to the "good stories," too. As she and her husband drive their RV out of the parking lot, her desires are rejected. She looks down at the postcards on her lap:

> On top was one of the old time Indians, his skin brown and greasy, the fingers of his right hand wrapped around some spear or staff. What he was doing was staring hard into the camera like he knew what I'd done, what I hadn't done. The sign at his feet said GLACIER PARK INDIAN. Scratched into the print beside it like they used to do, his name, Yellow Tail.
>
> I had to turn that postcard over. (32-3)

The tourist's reaction to this postcard enacts Vizenor's emphasis on the eyes as "the secret mirrors of a private presence . . . [that] hold the presence of the photographer

on the other side of the aperture" (158). More directly for the reader of the novel, the image "staring hard" at the tourist anticipates the way that Yellow Tail stares at Indian Agent Dalimpere, as described in his letters: "he watches me even as I write this"; he "is still watching"; "then Yellow Tail was watching me" (48, 50). Though the tourist participates in national tourism that depends on *indian* others, her purchase will not sit still with the "good stories" that she expects: the *indian* images are pasted over native stories, and after her experience with Doby, the edges of the image begin to curl.

IV. "I had to say yes": The photo from Kalispell

The third photograph that appears in the novel is taken by a white couple with a Blackfeet character called only "the boy" (who can later be identified as Robbie Cut Nose, a friend of Doby's).[7] The boy recalls being taken to Kalispell as a child with an adult woman he didn't know: his mom's boyfriend left him with an ex-girlfriend, who had to go to Kalispell "for some reason" so took the boy with her (125-6). Sixteen years later, after what appears to be an attempted suicide that puts the boy in the hospital, the boy's nurse is the very woman who took him to Kalispell. This chain of relationships is confusing, and it is tempting to dismiss the connections; however, when the photo appears in the narrative, this list of peripheral characters and their relationships to one another is a form of storied presence behind an *indian* image.

When the nurse recognizes the boy in the hospital, she explains to him that her brother was dating a girl and that her brother "came back from her place once with this smelly old bundle, and hid it in my room"; but he owed her money, she continues, so "I took that pack, that bundle thing...and sold it in Kalispell. Forty dollars, yeah?" (136-7). This "bundle thing" is likely the same bundle that Doby tries to sell to the tourist outside of the casino, going by the bundle's index card listing it as "reclaimed from pwnshp [sic] (Kal)" as well as the parallel price of forty dollars offered to the nurse back

in Kalispell and forty dollars asked by Doby from the tourist (31). The nurse says, "We used to sell all that stuff back then . . .. It was in every closet, yeah? Oh, and some people wanted to take a picture with you too . . .. A white couple . . .. I had to say yes. They thought you were mine, I mean. It was all like a joke" (137). This moment brings the history of tourism and commodification through *indian* images to the present. More specifically, it implicates the photo from Kalispell in various *indian* economies, including white appropriation of *indian* images for their own identity building, and, more locally, commodification of Blackfeet objects in exploitative and coercive contexts.

Though it is not made explicit, it is likely that the white couple were tourists, so excited to see *indian* people that they want to take a photo. Their desire for this photo re-enacts Shaffer's notion of "national tourism." This kind of tourism, Shaffer observes, "allowed white, native-born middle-and upper-class Americans to escape the social and cultural confines of everyday life to liminal space where they could temporarily reimagine themselves as heroic or authentic figures" (5).[8] One imagines the white couple flipping through photos from their trip to Montana, pointing out, *and here we are with some Indians….* A photo taken with local *indians* provides tourists proof of their presence in foreign space, a frontier that remains wild and unknown in the U.S. white imagination.

Though the nurse says that "it was like a joke" for the white couple to take a picture with her and the boy, she also says that she "had to say yes," attaching this interaction to a century of coercive collecting of Blackfeet objects by white collectors. Bob Scriver's gift book *The Blackfeet: Artists of the Northern Plains* (1990) illustrates not only his family collection of Blackfeet objects but also the historical relationship in Montana between white and Indigenous communities. Scriver explains:

> Artifacts that museums and collectors of today deem extremely desirable were thought of in my dad's day as worthless 'old' things by the Indians themselves and were discarded in exchange for newer items . . . As this evolution occurred, there came to be many Indian items on the reservation that could be acquired. (xv)

Hugh Dempsey, author of the foreword to the book of the Scriver collection, frames colonial-settlers as saviors of Blackfeet artifacts who are now wrongfully charged with taking these objects. He writes that in the 1960s, "Indians suddenly became aware that their culture was rapidly disappearing and a whole era of spiritual renewal began," so that some began to "object" to Scriver's collection of artifacts (vi). Dempsey's word "suddenly" stands out, as does his final presumption that "As time passes, more and more Blackfoot will come to appreciate what [Scriver] has done in seeing that their artifacts are preserved in a museum for the benefit of future generations" (vi). The dismissed status of the museum in *Ledfeather* suggests otherwise.

The white couple's sense of entitlement to a photo with local *indians* emerges from these systems and impacts the boy's relationship to the photo. The boy had no memory of the photo before the nurse told him of it; yet, when a few days later he wakes up in his hospital bed with "two crisp twenties folded into his hand," the narrator confides that "What he really wanted was the picture" (137). For the boy, this photo is a form of evidence in the sense that Sontag proposes: "Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it" (5). Though the trip to Kalispell is seemingly small in the boy's life, his knowledge of the photo emerges sixteen years after the photo was taken, so that his memory comes only from the photo. Sontag writes that "To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have;

it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed" (14). This visiting white couple has information about the boy that he does not have.

A few pages later, the boy's desire for this photo clarifies: "What if that white family in Kalispell had just taken him, back then? He hated himself for even thinking it, but thought it all the same, on accident" (139-40). Because this thought occurs while the boy is in the hospital after attempting suicide, his desire for the photo is connected to his suffering; it also reverts the tradition of white appropriation of Indigenous identities. While the white couple desires an *indian* image and the nurse senses that she "had to say yes," the boy desires the photo to understand his own stories. Before the scene with the nurse, the boy remembers a man in town whose face is disfigured by the boy's father: "The way that he was broken meant that the boy's dad loved him, the boy. That he'd been mad the kid had gone to Kalispell that day. That he was protecting the boy, just after the fact, as best he could, the only way he knew" (130). Though the photo from Kalispell may no longer exist, it is part of the story of the boy's trip to Kalispell, which in itself is part of the story of how his "dad loved him." The snapshot is not only evidence of coercive historical relationships but also a detail in the story of how a boy understands his own identity.

V. "Posterity": native photos of survivance

By the end of *Ledfeather,* characters continue to be affected by the forms of colonialization explored above, among others; but the final photo in the novel reclaims the history of photography and dis-embeds it from colonialist systems. The novel ends back with Doby on the side of the road trying to get hit by a car, a scene that is related by several narrators, first by Gina (43) and later by Twice (193), who drives around with

two other young men. Near the end, Twice describes how Luther and Dally propose that he, Twice, takes a picture next time they try to hit Doby. Luther drives:

> 'Posterity,' Dally said . . ..
>
> 'His or ours?' Luther said.
>
> Dally shook his head at this, smiled, and said 'A *camera*, man. Twice can push the button just right before--"
>
> He finished with his hands, so that Doby Saxon exploded against the front of the Caprice.
>
> Luther smiled, liked it, and we cut back to Browning for a camera, but never could find one that worked, until Luther remembered Chris.
>
> She'd bought one special for the game, had had it in her purse all week. (195)

The reader has already met Chris from Gina's section, when Chris ran after Doby trying to get him out of the road. Now, when Luther, Dally, and Twice find Chris, she rides in the back of their car, initially unaware of their intentions. After the car almost hits Doby, Chris becomes upset. Luther is also upset, because Twice, who holds Chris's camera, did not take a photo of this attempt, as tasked. Luther says, "Tim would have [taken the picture]", evoking Twice's dead brother; Twice responds "I can take the picture" (197). For these boys, taking the photo is an act of bravery that compels Twice to prove to the others that he is as brave as his brother was.

Unlike the other images in the novel, the photo that the boys desire is outside of commodification—but not outside of violence. Their desire to record hitting Doby anticipates what might come after they hit Doby: evidence that they hit him. Bell writes that "Photographs . . . do not simply represent history; they are themselves historical objects. The way we perceive the world is shaped largely by not only personal experience but also . . . by our experience of, and our exposure to, visual images"

(102). When Dally has the idea to take a picture of this moment, he says "Posterity"; he does not answer Luther's question "his or our own?" (195). Their desire for this photograph is a desire for power in the present *and* a power that can inform how the future understands the past.

But Chris will not let them have that power. After Twice assures the others that he "can take the picture," Chris takes the camera and runs with it, "flitt[ing] away into the night like a deer, cutting across the pasture back to Browning, maybe" (197). Chris is soon seen by the reader again through the perspective of Junior, who narrates the next section and drives the daughter of his former love home from a basketball game. He and his ex's daughter see Chris running with the camera after she has left the boys in the previous scene. Junior describes seeing

> a flashing out in the pasture.
>
> Like somebody was taking a picture out there.
>
> Of us?
>
> I let my foot off the gas, said it: 'What the hell?'
>
> Twenty seconds later it was a girl, the Cut Nose girl who's a Sainte, too, and so can run forever.
>
> She had a camera in her hand, was holding it ahead of her.
>
> I stopped and she popped the passenger door open, fell in, nodded ahead, fast.
>
> 'Get my good side,' I told her holding my chin up for the next picture, and she looked over to me for a long time then finally smiled, let herself start breathing hard like she needed to. (203-4)

Chris runs to prevent boys from taking a picture of hitting Doby and, in a sense, from hitting Doby; Junior's joke that follows her run does not make light of the young men's

desires but responds to it. Vizenor writes, "How should we now respond to the photographs that have violated the privacy of the natives? Cover the eyes? Whose eyes should be covered?" (163). It is as if the novel asks a similar question: how should we respond to the possibility of a photograph that would record one suicide in a narrative world that is saturated with suicide attempts? Chris refuses the history that leads Vizenor to describe photographs as "possessory, neither cultural evidence nor the shadows of lost traditions," and cameras as "the instruments of institutive discoveries and predatory surveillance" (154). Chris's camera flashing through the pasture documents not possession or lost tradition, but Doby *not* being hit by a car; her camera is not a tool of predatory surveillance but of native survivance.

The novel's final narrator is Chris's mom, recalling her conversation with Doby's mom, who is in jail following the event at the casino. In a chain of discourse that recalls the link of actors involved when "the boy" is taken to Kalispell, Chris's mom describes to Doby's mom what Chris told her about the night with Doby on the side of the road and the camera:

> What I told her was just cut and dried, pretty much the way Chris told it to me when I picked up her film for her, asked her if that was who I thought it was?
>
> At first she pretended like she didn't know what I was talking about, but I used to be fifteen too. (206)

The reader cannot be certain who Chris did and did not photograph, though the likely candidates are the young woman who turns out to be Claire, or Junior, as her mom might find it strange that she was driving with Junior. Further, the reader does not know how much time has passed (it is however much time it took for Chris to turn in her film to be developed, plus however long it took for her mom to pick it up). At this point in the novel, the reader is practiced in proceeding with uncertainty.

Chris's mom then describes the last photograph on the developed roll of film, as Chris has described it to her. Chris took the photo from the front seat of Junior's car, looking back at Doby and Junior's ex's daughter in the backseat:

> In the picture . . . the girl's sitting close enough to Doby in the backseat that the sides of their hands are touching like they know each other, like it was a date they were on, and what she was saying to him about the elk right then was that he was going to shoot them all, wasn't he? Bam, bam, bam.
>
> Doby smiled his dad's smile, that he was caught but didn't care either, and looked over to her, careful not to move his hand that was touching hers, and asked how she knew that? (210)

This scene recalls Vizenor's argument that the stories of natives, despite appropriative photographs, "are in the eyes and hands" (156); Doby and Claire's hands tell a story of what will happen. Seamlessly, Chris's mom continues to describe the scene, so that the reader feels that they are there, in the story that the photo tells rather than with Chris's mom describing the photo to Doby's mom in jail. The image in the photo exceeds the photograph, spilling into the final paragraphs of the novel with only one last reminder that Chris's mom speaks ("and what I told Malory happened next is that when he looked at her . . .."), until Doby speaks Claire's name for the first time and their hands touch again (211).[9] The photos on Chris's roll of film do not document Doby's suicide attempt as they might have; what they do document is not easily known to the reader, i.e. "is that who I thought it was?" The photos on the roll of film are not permanent but dynamic, not stillness but stories, not suicide but survivance.

Many of the major themes in *Ledfeather* can be traced by the photos in the narrative, but it is what surrounds and connects these photos—writing—that employs the photos as objects that incite movement toward native stories. Counter to tourists'

written responses to *indian* images on the front of archived postcards, photos in the novel are written into survivance. It is only fitting then, that *Ledfeather* was inspired by a photograph. In the Author Note following the novel, Jones shares two source-origins for the story: first, a report about the Blackfeet Reservation; and second, a photo pinned to the bulletin board at a Game office, an "old yellowy snapshot of a moose skeleton and a human skeleton mixed together. And there was no story for it. It had just shown up in some old file. But there was a story – *is* a story" (214). Sontag writes that contrary to the early expectations for "accuracy" in photographs, "photographers are always imposing standards on their subjects. Although there is a sense in which the camera does indeed capture reality, not just interpret it, photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings are" (6-7). Just as photographers interpret their subjects, so do authors writing with, to, or from images interpret the photographer's interpretation. In *Ledfeather,* describing photos through words prevents a stopping on images: to see them better the reader must keep moving, keep reading, stay in motion.

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Notes:

[1] In addition to employing photographs as physical objects, the novel occasionally alludes to photographs and photography metaphorically, a compelling use of language that I do not have the space to explore here. For example, Doby pieces together his fraught and complex memories of his father like a "slideshow" (83).
[2] In this chapter, I follow Vizenor's use of *indian* as distinguished from native. He writes, "natives are the presence, and *indians* are simulations, a derivative noun that means an absence" (15).
[3] Zachary Jones posits that many archivists are "not trained to address the complexities of these types of historical photographs" (13). He suggests that archivists provide "historical transparency" by identifying such photos as contrived, providing context, and engaging in "constructive dialogs" with tribes (18).
[4] This need for a distinct American identity was advertised by images, but also embodied for tourists. Promoters of tourism produced performances of *indians*, such as the promoter who arranged for a "mock raid" of Pawnee natives so that early and wealthy railroad travelers could witness the promoter "pacify" *indians* with small gifts; "Unbeknownst to the admiring travelers," the Hooblers write, this promoter had paid the Pawnees an advance of one hundred dollars in gold for the show (48). More explicit was the employment of "show Indians" such as Sitting Bull, who toured with Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show (Hoobler 135).
[5] There are postcards on which the author does not pick up on the objectified image and extend it, though these are rare and the sender nevertheless participants in systems of *indian* commodification. For example, on one postcard labelled "Blackfeet Indian Encampment, St. Mary Lake," whose note on the back is co-authored, neither author discusses natives from the image. One author asks, "Doesn't this make you a wee bit homesick for St. Mary's?" A second author adds, "The mosquitos aren't so bad this summer, but the tourists are worse than ever. Come to help us answer their ridiculous questions."
[6] Rather than showing the *indian* images of these four examples, I follow Morgan Bell's practice of refraining from "reinforcing the already prolific stereotypes" (88). This practice also emphasizes scrutiny of the author's comments over *indian* images.
[7] It is arguable that "the boy" is Robbie Cut Nose. I continue to call him "the boy," as he is called in this section of the novel.
[8] Shaffer emphasizes that the roots of this "detached tourist gaze" that helped tourists to shape their own new identities by distinguishing them from others that they encountered during their travels was not limited to natives: African Americans, Mexican

Americans, Chinese Americans, and Mormons were also subject to this "gaze," so that many groups of "social others became an extension of the tourist spectacle, further allowing tourists to define and distinguish their social status" (280).

[9] This scene spills out of the photograph much like Blaeser describes happening in the photograph "Mabel Mahseet, Comanche" by the Irwin Brothers. Mahseet's head is placed within a picture frame—within the composition of the photo—and her hair and forearm "spill into another dimension" when they exceed this frame, "breaking the illusion of illusion" (170). Blaeser suggests that this "clearly intends to disrupt the boundary between image and reality," a statement that might easily be made about the world of *Ledfeather*, not to mention Jones' oeuvre in general (170).

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A Bridge through Time: Epistolary Form and Nonlinear Temporality in Stephen Graham Jones's *Ledfeather*

ZACHARY PERDIEU

In an essay on Stephen Graham Jones's third novel, *The Bird Is Gone* (2003), Birgit Däwes explores the colonial politics of linear time. Däwes argues that *The Bird Is Gone* "destabilizes linear hierarchies of chronology and thus radically challenges previously established discourses" through an "intricately transversal structure" wherein "events and characters are interrelated across centuries through unique narrative and symbolic techniques—back to Columbus and beyond, to Quetzalcoatl and the migration from Siberia, and forward into an unspecified future" (113). For Däwes, the resulting "densely woven web of nonlinear semantic and structural crossings" of *The Bird Is Gone* "powerfully defeats western historiography, poses creative alternatives to linear time, and thus effectively engages Indigenous systems of knowledge" (113). Six novels later, Jones continued this project of structural experimentation in an exploration of nonlinear temporality in his novel *Ledfeather* (2008), turning this time to the epistolary to create a hybridized literary form capable of representing nonlinear, spatialized time.

The epistolary "has a broader function than many other modes" in that its ""very looseness" permits integration with other literary forms (Kauffman XIV). This inherent looseness offers a logical entry point as Jones experiments with literary

hybridizations to contend with multiple distinct but interconnected narratives in a single text. Jones's initial introduction of the epistolary in *Ledfeather* establishes two seemingly independent narratives; the epistolic narrative of Francis Dalimpere, Indian Agent for a Montana Blackfeet reservation in the 1880s; and the non-epistolic narrative of Doby Saxon, a Blackfeet teenager living on the same reservation one hundred years later. As the novel progresses, however, the barriers between the two primary narrative timelines of Saxon and Dalimpere began to wane. Jones's subversion and deconstruction of the epistolary form mirrors the collapse of the novel's two independent narratives as they conflate to become a single, interactive, and cohabitated temporality inhabiting the same textual space, where each narratives' respective form slowly collapses, as well, until the Dalimpere sections become less epistolic, and Saxon's sections become increasingly more so.

The result of this hybridization is the introduction of a new atemporal textual paradigm capable of replicating an Indigenous perspective where space is the vessel of memory, history, and narrative more so than time. In this new atemporal textual space, historical and ancestral trauma is addressed and exorcized by Jones's characters through the interaction between past, present, and future. Jones uses the epistolary form to present two distinct narratives containing separate temporal moments coexisting within the same textual structure simultaneously, undermining Western

concepts of linear time and giving space primacy over time in mapping history, memory, and narrative. Jones then demonstrates the authoritative nature of Indigenous systems of knowledge by deconstructing his epistolary narrative to chart the assimilation of its colonial perspective into that of an Indigenous one. This process of hybridization, deconstruction, and assimilation contributes to a return to what Mark Rifkin has called "Indigenous temporal sovereignty" (2) by creating a textual paradigm capable of replicating Indigenous temporal and spatial ways of knowing.

The divide between Western and Indigenous ways of knowing, especially as it pertains to concepts of time and space, has long been discussed by Indigenous studies scholars, with many calling for new forms or approaches aimed at reclaiming Indigenous ontological sovereignty. In his highly influential work *God Is Red* (1994), Vine Deloria Jr. argues that "American Indians hold their lands—places—as having the highest possible meaning," while Euro-Americans "review the movement of their ancestors across the continent as a steady progression of basically good events and experiences, thereby placing history—time—in the best possible light" (62). The separation results in a foundational divide between conceptions of history between the two groups, wherein "statements of either group do not make much sense when transferred from one context to the other" (Deloria 63). In light of this divide, Däwes summarizes how "Deloria calls for a reconceptualization of history in spatial terms,

whereby, 'the story itself is important, not its precise chronological location'" (Däwes 115). This return to space and place-based models of time and history has become a central tenant of conceptualizing Indigenous futures. Daniel R. Wildcat notes how the very foundations of many "different tribal identities" are "fundamentally spatial in character" and considers an Indigenized future where "humanity has reached a 'time' when spatial or place-centered considerations are emerging around the world" (431, 438). Responding directly to Deloria's work, Glen Coulthard argues that such an understanding of "land and/or place… anchors many Indigenous peoples' critique of colonial relations of force and command, but also our visions of what a truly post-colonial relationship of peaceful co-existence might look like" (80).

As I argue below, this conflict between Western and Indigenous temporal understanding, and the disenfranchising impact it has on the depicted Blackfeet people, plays a central role in *Ledfeather*. In his influential work *Blackfeet Physics* (1994), F. David Peat locates concepts of spatialized and nonlinear time directly to the Blackfeet culture which Jones takes as his subject in *Ledfeather*. Regarding Western conceptions of temporality, Peat writes, "time… was an ever-flowing stream that moved, without resistance or change of pace, from the past into the future… Bodies are immersed in the constantly flowing river of time and nothing that we can do can alter the speed or direction of this flow. Time is linear and totally independent of us

and of all the workings of the cosmos" (199). Conversely, Peat argues that the Blackfeet conception of temporality sees time as "animate," "alive," so that "all of time can be accessed from within the present moment" (199). In the modern history of the United States, however, the two perspectives have hardly been on equal footing, as Mark Rifkin explains:

> U.S. settler colonialism produces its own temporal formation, with its own particular ways of apprehending time, and the state's policies, mappings, and imperatives generate the frame of reference (such as plotting events with respect to their place in national history and seeing change in terms of forms of American progress). More than just affecting ideologies of discourses of time, that network of institutionalized authority over 'domestic' territory also powerfully shapes the possibilities for interaction, development, and regularities within it (Rifkin 2).

The result of this institutionalized authority over both time and space is the systemic denial of what Rifkin calls "Indigenous *temporal sovereignty*" (Rifkin 2). Jones's hybridized novel allows for an obvious textual divide between these opposing worldviews. The letters from an Indian agent within *Ledfeather* demonstrate an attempt to achieve such a dynamic of institutionalized authority over Indigenous temporality, wherein the white Indian Agent works to catalog events, Indigenous spaces, and

Indigenous figures within a U.S. settler colonialist temporal formation. As I will demonstrate, however, Jones deconstructs this portion of the narrative and slowly assimilates the Indian agent into an Indigenous spatial and nonlinear temporal worldview, simultaneously dissolving the assumed U.S. settler colonialism temporal formation and replacing it with an Indigenous one. This process works toward Indigenous temporal sovereignty and acts as a response to calls for spatialized conceptions of history and memory from the likes of Deloria, Wildcat, and Coulthard.

Ledfeather is a hybrid text, where the epistolary narrative is contained and framed by a more traditional prose narrative. When reading a hybrid text like *Ledfeather*, the reader is presented with two narrative timelines; the timeline of the main narrative where the reader of the correspondence physically exists, and the timeline encapsulated within the text of the letter. Such is the case in *Ledfeather*, which opens with six sections set in the late 20th century on a Blackfeet reservation in Montana, where Saxon, the reader of the letters, is the central figure. Dalimpere's letters physically exist within the broader narrative of the novel as objects that Saxon can carry around from place to place to be visited as "islands of the day before," a phrase used by Russell West-Pavlov to discuss postmodern time but is useful in informing Jones's depiction of Indigenous temporality (137).[1] The sixth section ends with Saxon tossing the stack of Dalimpere's letters, which he had retrieved from a

museum, at a passing car, before gathering them back up and beginning to read them. The section ends abruptly mid-sentence, and the reader is transported to around one hundred years previous, on the same Blackfeet reservation, where the last sentence of the previous section, "but he was stuck right at the first of it, sounding it out, just saying," is completed with the opening word of the first epistle—"Claire" (46-47). Upon the letters' appearance in Saxon's narrative, a second narrative timeline is introduced.

This arrangement creates a disruption of linear temporality, as the main narrative is suddenly broken, and the reader is presented with a new narrative "present"– one that has theoretically already passed within the timeline of the main narrative, but which is conveyed in the present tense, as the writer of the letter was "inhabiting the present" at the time of writing (Visconti 299). Janet Altman similarly notes how the "letter writer is anchored in a present time" which is encapsulated and contained within the epistle (117). The represented "I" narrator of the correspondence and the reader of that letter do not, therefore, exist at the same moment, in the same "present," but both "presents" exist simultaneously, as Melanie Micir explains: "The temporal divide present in the initial composition and reception of the letters—that is, the separation of the time of writing from the time of reading—expands into the necessary duality of time" (Micir 44). In the space of one shared sentence, Saxon is

sitting on the side of the road in the 1980s reading the letters "in his stupid way, where his lips followed what was on the page" (46) and Dalimpere is sitting in his federal quarters writing to his wife, Claire, on October 15. 1884. The duality of time expands across the landscape, as the present moment of the two narratives layer atop one another in *Ledfeather's* Montana.

The permanence of the represented moment in the letters permits the "present" of each correspondence to be revisited across time and space, as "the letters, deposited in one generation, are available to be interpreted… by subsequent generations" (Micir 44). This is precisely what Jones does in *Ledfeather*, opening with a narrative in the 1980s before disrupting it by depositing "islands of the day before" in the form of Dalimpere's letters. The sudden break in Saxon's narrative initiates a run of eleven consecutive epistolary chapters where, presumably, Saxon remains in his own time reading the letters. Each of these two primary narratives—that of Saxon's and Dalimpere's—then unfold in fits and starts throughout the novel, each simultaneously possessing their own "present," despite happening one-hundred years apart, before subsequently collapsing into a shared textual space. Inherent in the epistolary form where both epistles and narrative prose exists, therefore, is a representation of a nonlinear timeline that jumps back and forth chronologically, presenting the reader with a frequently changing "present." After taking advantage of the inherent

nonlinearity of hybrid epistolary texts, Jones then turns to subverting standards of the epistolary form to further complicate concepts of linear temporality and establish his dual narratives as more beholden to the physical space of the reservation than to chronology.

Disrupting the Epistolary Pact

When the earliest letters enter into the narrative of *Ledfeather*, Jones establishes many standards of the epistolary form only to subsequently subvert them. The first letter retains all the basic structural components of the epistolary form, beginning with an addressee, a first-person address of that addressee, and ending with a signature and full date—"October the 15th of 1884" (Jones 48). Dalimpere's first correspondence to his wife, Claire, who remains back East, acts as the initiator of what Altman calls an "epistolary pact," in which the writer of the letter sends out a "call for response from a specific reader within the correspondent's world" (Altman 89). The addressee of this first letter paired with Dalimpere's signature that closes it establishes an "I-you relationship," through which the "'I' becomes defined relative to the *you* whom he addresses" (Altman 118). Jones then strengthens this epistolary pact by turning to one of the oldest and most common genres of the literary epistle—the love letter.

In her highly influential study on the epistolary form, Altman notes that the "letter form seems tailored for the love plot, with its emphasis on separation and

reunion" (14). Altman highlights this aspect of the form by analyzing several of the letters in Ovid's *Epistulae Heroidum*, a collection framed as correspondences between mythological female figures like Dido, Briseis, and Penelope, and their respective absent lovers. Many of the letters in *Epistulae Heroidum* "repeatedly bemoan the distance separating [the mythological women] from their lovers" (Altman 13). In an analysis that could be of the letters in Jones's novel, Altman continues to break down the archetype of the love letter:

> The lover who takes up his pen to write his loved one is conscious of the interrelation of presence and absence and the way in which his very medium of communication reflects both the absence and presence of his addressee. At one moment he may proclaim the power of the letter to make the distant addressee present and at the next lament the absence of the loved one and the letter's powerlessness to replace the spoken word or physical presence (Altman 14).

Dalimpere regularly embodies these yearnings, writing laments like "the absence of you, the resulting incompleteness of myself. I should never have left your embrace. I should never have left you alone" and "I was wrong to ever leave you. I feel it more every day, every night" (Jones 52 and 77). The romantic lean of Dalimpere's early letters solidifies the call for an epistolary pact which would traditionally serve the role of closing the spatial divide for the members of the pact. Altman explains how the letter

"function[s] as a connector between two distant points, as a bridge between sender and receiver," which allows "the epistolary author […] to emphasize either the distance or the bridge" (13). The "distance" Altman introduces here is a spatial one—that between the physical location of the sender and that of the receiver—as well as a metaphorical one, where the letter "is seen as facilitating a union" bringing two individuals together (Altman 14). In his first letter, Dalimpere makes clear the bridge he hopes to establish adheres to similar concerns of spatial and romantic reunion, when he imagines the space between he and Claire collapsing, writing of a day dream where his wife arrives at the reservation on a nonexistent trainline, before flipping the fantasy to consider his own return to the East (46-47).

Despite these persistent romantic calls, however, Jones disrupts the epistolary pact by denying the intended response, repurposing Dalimpere's letters as a temporal bridge instead of a spatial one. Dalimpere repeatedly expresses doubt that Yellow Tail, a Blackfeet man who Dalimpere regularly interacts with and an ancestor of Saxon's, is carrying out the delivery of these correspondences. The first mention of this arrangement in Dalimpere's letters is when the Indian Agent notes that a Blackfeet man who is watching him "even as [Dalimpere] writes… knows something" (Jones 48). This, Dalimpere explains, "is the man I've been reduced to entrusting to deliver my correspondence to the stage" (48). Dalimpere's trepidation goes beyond his own

letters being intercepted, however, as he speculates in the second intended correspondence that he is "dead twice over," which "would explain why none of [Claire's] letters have found [him]" (Jones 50). This revelation of no incoming letters implies another fear of Dalimpere's—even if Claire is not receiving his letters, why would she not send her own?

In a lament that encapsulates the duality of presence and absence in Dalimpere's letters, he writes, "Claire. Clair. Clare. If I spell your name in every way will that force the world to give you to me, or will it make it seem I'm a stranger who doesn't deserve you, an admirer who has never received a missive from you in all this time and thus knows not the letters that make you up?" (77). The disruption of the epistolary pact repositions Dalimpere's letters as what Altman calls an "emblem of separation" (Altman 15), the opposite of the bridge Dalimpere hopes them to be. The space between the two distant points grows, and the union between man and wife is called into question by the disruption of the call and response. This disruption figures prominently into the narrative, as Dalimpere goes so far as confronting other readers in his letters, writing "Yellow Tail, if you can follow my hand, know that in his indirect, shuffling ways, Marsh told me about your wife, whom you refused to name" (52).

The fractured epistolary pact is complicated further through the dramatic irony of the reader understanding that the letters likely were never delivered, due to their

presence in the museum where Saxon found them decades after Dalimpere's death, making Saxon, not Claire, the eventual receiver of the correspondence. The dramatic irony of the undelivered letters is eventually alleviated in the sixth letter, when Dalimpere notes that "it's not as if I'm even addressing [the letters] anymore" (66), confirming for both Dalimpere and the reader that the letters now serve as more of a journal for Dalimpere—a call to his absent lover which will never receive a response. The letters, like Dalimpere himself, remain isolated in the space of the reservation. Jones thus subverts the traditional function of the epistle "as a connector between two distant points" across space, and instead facilitates a union between two individuals inhabiting the same space, one hundred years apart from one another. Even Dalimpere eventually sees the failure of his epistolary pact and the new function it will serve, as a sort of historical document, a bridge between his moment in time and the future, writing "I leave you this only as a record… I keep these missives to you rolled tightly in a burlap sack in the hollow post of the frame to my bed" (Jones 72).

Denying this call and response highlights how the memory and historical narrative embedded in the letters are dependent on the land, the space which the memory inhabits, just as the Blackfeet "anchor the story to the land" in the novel (Jones 109). Given the option "to emphasize either the distance or the bridge" (Altman 13) of the epistolary form, Jones subverts both, having the letters remain in stasis as

they slowly march across a time bridge to a future generation. When Saxon accesses the letters, he unleashes the present-of-the-past onto the landscape and a layering effect takes place. The deployable nature of the epistolary "present" and the duality of time created as a result provides Jones with raw material to create a new textual structure where the memories of many moments simultaneously cohabit the same textual space. The Montana landscape that acts as *Ledfeather's* setting holds the memories of both Dalimpere and Saxon's narratives, so as the book moves forward, a single space is populated by the ghostly memories of both characters.

Ghosts of the Past and Future

When the narrative returns to Saxon, a similar transition between sections occurs, with Dalimpere's narrative ending mid-sentence, "so that all I can see is," and Saxon's section completing the thought with, "his back" (79, 80). This time, however, the abrupt change acts as more than a simple disruption of narrative, but as a fusion or overlaying of the two. The object that links the sections, the "back," exists physically in each of the character's narratives. Mikhail Bakhtin defines his theory of the literary chronotope as the instances where "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole" (Bakhtin 84). In the following sections, a specific plot of what was historically Blackfeet land but is now divided between reservation and federal lands, acts as a shared literary chronotope for Saxon and Dalimpere, where

their individual memories and experiences, as well as other memories contained by the land, all collapse in the same temporal space.

In the next several sections, both Saxon and Dalimpere are traversing the same landscape during a snowstorm, one-hundred years apart. Saxon wanders the landscape through various experiences of his life; following his father, Earl Yellowtail, into the National Park on the day of his father's death, or running out of the casino the day his mother attacks the pit boss, who was trying to cut Saxon off from gambling. Other moments are partially his memories and partially belong to other eras tied to the land, such as when Saxon steps out of the museum after taking Dalimpere's letters and the land he walks into contains the "windswept grass" of Dalimpere's time *and* the "blacktop" of Saxon's own (Jones 91). Saxon's movement through this space begins the process of creating what György Lukács's calls a literary cartograph, a theory of literary spatial mapping closely related to Bakhtin's chronotope. Lukács's concept of literary cartography considers the writer as mapmaker, and the character of a narrative as "surveyor of spaces" (Tally Jr. 48). As the character moves through the textual space, they "sew these spaces into a new unity" and "ultimately 'invent' the world so surveyed and stitched together" to create something much like a narrative map—a textual structure which orients the reader and makes sense of the textual world (Tally,

Jr. 48). Robert Tally, Jr. notes the growing primacy of space to narrative driven by this process:

> Narrative… would seem more closely tied to time, as *narrative* by definition retains a powerfully temporal aspect. That is, narrative entails the temporality of the plot—a beginning, a middle, and end… whereas, arguably, a short poem maintains a 'spatial form' in which all parts are present at once (see Frank 1991: 18). However… narrative is also spatial, and the beginnings middles and ends of a given story may refer as much to sites or locations in a particular spatial organization as to moments in time in a temporal one (Tally, Jr. 49).

Both Saxon and Dalimpere create such a literary cartograph in their movement through their shared space. At issue for Jones, however, is the centrality of space in containing a *multiplicity* of Blackfeet narratives, histories, and memories. A literary cartograph charting a single narrative moment would not suffice to replicate Blackfeet temporality. To return to Deloria Jr., space holds primacy over a narrative's "precise chronological location" (Deloria 112). Peat notes how similar, layered mapping functions in Blackfeet culture, where a "map in the head" is created which acts as an "expression of the relationship of the land to The People" (Peat 86). This internalized map "transcends any mere geographical representation, for in it are enfolded the songs, ceremonies,

histories of a people" and contains "cycles of time that, while stretching back into the distant past, can be renewed in the immediate present" (Peat 86).

To replicate this atemporal space, Jones depicts a literary cartograph where several moments, past, present, and future, all exist within the same literary chronotope, made possible by the layering of disparate "present" moments in *Ledfeather*. The surveys of space carried out by Saxon and Dalimpere are not separate—they are not a map laid over a map—instead, they are like the charting of two journeys on the same shared map. Times collapse on space, on land to create a textual space that is "animate, processual, and part of a shared consciousness" (Baudemann 172). These two journeys are the pertinent ones to this particular literary cartograph, but they are crisscrossed with eons of similar tales on this land by the Blackfeet.

In what is perhaps an attempt to create a "'spatial form' in which all parts are present at once" (Tally, Jr. 49) like that of a poem, Jones signifies the duality of time collapsing on the same space simultaneously by blurring the lines between his two forms and structurally replicating the presence of two narratives. The transition between Dalimpere's letters and Saxon's narrative (79-80) which uses "his back" as a hinge, holds some structural resemblance to the epistolary mode; the two words that cross over, "his back," open Saxon's section above the rest of the text in the way the

addressee does of Dalimpere's letters. Saxon then begins to blur his memories with Dalimpere's experience when he mistakenly laments the lost "horses" instead of the lost snowmobiles (81). The next time Saxon accidentally thinks "horses" instead of "snowmobiles," the word is crossed out on the page, "to the ~~horses~~ *snow*mobiles" (81), creating a structural representation of the presence of both Saxon and Dalimpere in a single textual space, despite the temporal divide. These crossed out phrases and replacements, a technique termed *sous rature* by Martin Heidegger, create what Baudemann calls "time-slipping" within a given section, instead of just between sections (166).[2] Other narrative slips and fixes continue to appear throughout Saxon's experience, such as "head lanterns" being crossed out and replaced by "headlights" (91), extensively connecting both narratives in a shared textual space. Leah Pennywark explains these moments as, "Doby and Francis's shared consciousness… trying to hold together two different times and two different identities that cannot exist together and yet do" (104). Jones's hybridized textual structure makes this seemingly impossible duality possible by layering various moments of time atop the land which anchors it.

We see the density of these various moments in time collapsing on Jones's literary cartograph when the narrative again turns to Dalimpere, whose next section, beginning on page 93, discards the epistolary form to mirror the form of Saxon's section. The section opens like Saxon's previous one, with a single word acting as a

hinge to the preceding section's final sentence. While the word that opens the section is "Claire" it is not in the traditional addressee form, where the name is followed by a comma. Instead, it is finished with a period akin to the "his back" which frames Saxon's section starting on page 80. Furthermore, the "I-you" relationship of the earlier letters, which is essential to the epistolary form, is absent. The fracturing of the epistolary pact limits Dalimpere's ability to define his "I" by Claire's "you." As a result of this fracturing, the "I-you" relationship falls away in this section and Dalimpere is dislodged from the "pivotal present tense" of the epistolary form, and instead navigates the textual space of this section as Saxon does—an evolution of epistolary narrative time which I will cover in greater depth shortly. The merging of both form and narrative acts as a spatial form where two moments are present at once and past, present, and future subsequently interact independent of linear chronology.

Much has been said by critics about the past's impact on the present in *Ledfeather*. Frances Washburn notes how "references to the land… in *Ledfeather*… hold the trauma of the past and bring it, literally, into the present" (Washburn 66), and Pennywark writes that "the seemingly dead past haunts the living" (89) in the novel. But the future plays an equally haunting role in *Ledfeather*. When the narrative returns to Dalimpere, he is lost in his own blizzard of the 1880s, looking for Yellow Tail, who had been leading time to the dugout home of Catches Weasel where a young Piegan

boy named Lead Feather is suffering from a grievous, self-inflicted injury. As he wanders through the wilderness, Dalimpere stumbles upon several ghostly forms from the future; he enters Browning, the town on the reservation from Saxon's time, where he encounters Earl Yellowtail, descendent of the Yellow Tail he had been following through the storm moments before. As he walks through the future town, Dalimpere leans against a building only for it to "waver and dissipate, the storm blowing through as if it wasn't there at all" like an apparition (107). Shortly after, Dalimpere crawls into what he believes to be Catches Weasel's dugout but is in fact the concrete shelter of Saxon's time (Jones 108), where he again meets another figure from the future—Saxon's cousin, Jamie, who overdoses in that same structure decades after Dalimpere's life. Dalimpere imagines this place as an "encampment of the dead" (104) and "ghost ridge," but they are not ghosts of the past which haunt the Indian Agent; while he is certainly traumatized by his actions in the past of denying the Blackfeet their federal rations as a form of punishment, Dalimpere's true ghosts are the Blackfeet in the future who will continue to pay for those actions. In Jones's atemporal literary cartograph, just as the past does to the future, the future creeps back into the past, into Dalimpere's present, creating what might be called islands of the day after, and they are populated by ghosts of the future dead.

The literary cartograph that Jones creates in *Ledfeather* is a space where the past, present, and future all interact with one another. The result is a new textual space which answers Deloria's call for a spatialized history, where land is privileged over chronology as a vessel for memory. Completing his definition of the literary chronotope, Bakhtin explains how "time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (84). Peat cites a similar metaphor specific to Blackfoot conception of the landscape, writing "the Blackfoot say that to walk on the land is to walk on your own flesh" where "the memory of this landscape transcends anything we have in the West, for its trees, rocks, animals, and plants are also imbued with energies, powers, and spirits" (Peat 86). In Jones's literary chronotope, the Blackfeet landscape has the flesh of many moments layered atop it. If "the chronotope is the place where the knots of the narrative are tied and untied" (Bakhtin 250), then Jones brings the knots of all moments from centuries of Blackfeet to bear in one space in his new hybrid textual space. This fusion and hybridity of forms and narrative is mirrored by the same process in Dalimpere and Saxon, as they come together to share a consciousness. Jones demonstrates the continuation of this assimilation of Dalimpere through the continued subversion and deconstructions of Dalimpere's epistolic narrative.

Escaping the Pivotal Present

Jones's subversion of the epistolary form reorders the power structure between Dalimpere and the Blackfeet people. Dalimpere is traumatized by his guilt grounded in his actions that led to the Starvation Winter where 600 Piegan died.[3] The event acts as a sort of apparition, just on the margins of Dalimpere's letters throughout. In moments when Jones is closest to confronting the trauma, the epistolic standards are most tenuous. Jones's continued subversion and evolution of the epistolary form positions Dalimpere's perspective as a trauma narrative as that perspective copes with the trauma of its colonizing decisions. In the process of this coping, Dalimpere is indoctrinated into a spatially minded understanding of time which dislodges him from his linear temporal reality and disrupts the epistolary form in which he documents this assimilation.

By presenting the tragic events of the historical Starvation Winter through the eyes of the perpetrator of these events instead of the victim, Jones turns to what René Girard calls the "perspective of the persecutors" (6). Girard explains how persecutors of massacres "are convinced that their violence is justified; they consider themselves judges, and therefore they must have guilty victims" (6). Dalimpere's actions take place in a broader scheme of persecution, as both his supervisor, M. Sheffield, and his predecessor, Andrew Collins III, play a pivotal role in crafting the

circumstances of Dalimpere's decision-making. It is later revealed that Collins is actually responsible for the inciting incident, the theft of a blanket, for which Dalimpere decides to punish the Blackfeet, contributing to Dalimpere's realization that he has persecuted a guiltless victim for the transgressions of the network of persecution. In spite of his subsequent guilt, Dalimpere still firmly places himself in the role of the self-righteous persecutor when he finally gets around to confirming the extent of his own role in the Starvation Winter, as he callously recounts, "I had no choice. It was about discipline. If a child misbehaves, should he not be chastised?" (Jones 174).[4] Jones opens his letters with the perspective of the persecutor before depicting the "traumatic disintegration" of Dalimpere's identity, which causes his "consciousness to become increasingly hybrid" (Pennywark 101) reversing the process of assimilation of Blackfeet to Western values and systems of knowledge. Jones repositions the Indian Agent as a traumatized voyager in a strange land, and through his immersion in the land, he is slowly indoctrinated into the Blackfeet systems of knowing, so that his "very self, his identity as both a white man and a representative of the colonizing power, is gradually erased with each successive letter he writes for Claire" (Baudemann 154).

In Dalimpere's earliest letters, he exists firmly within the linear temporal understanding of Western thought. As Dalimpere realizes his isolation, however, completed by the fracturing of the epistolary pact, his grasp on linear time slips.

Sequentially, the first six letters are dated, "October the 15th of 1884," (48) "1884" (53), "21 d'octobre" (55), letter four has no date (60), "10 novembre" (63), and "novembre 1884" (66). Dalimpere also demonstrates a grasp of linear chronology in the early epistles through inter-letter references and comments like "it's been three days since I last wrote you" (49), a claim which opens the second letter. In the same letter where Dalimpere writes that he is no longer addressing the letters, thus confirming to himself that the epistolary pact had been broken, the Indian Agent reflects on the land's ability to reshape an individual: "Perhaps… personality or cultural attitude is in fact defined by the land one is immersed in" (Jones 66). Once Dalimpere realizes he is isolated on the Blackfeet land, his grasp of linearity slips, a fact evident in the following letter, which Dalimpere dates, "1883, 1884, 188-" (67), demonstrating his inability to grasp on to a set date. Dalimpere begins to accept how his immersion in the landscape slowly redefines his system of knowledge, writing that he "would rather be Indian than Indian agent" and he slowly becomes "a product of" the land, and his path to assimilation begins (Jones 77, 106).

As Dalimpere attempts to assuage his guilt, he dedicates himself "completely in the survival of one Indian boy, this Lead Feather" (Jones 152), who Dalimpere had witnessed attempting suicide instead of suffering the reality of the harsh winter brought on by the botched decisions of the Indian Agent. But this is not an entirely

selfless venture as "Francis's attempt to save a Piegan boy… is an attempt to rewrite his own history" (Pennywark 96). Dalimpere's immersion in the land has a profound impact on his outlook, however, and as he navigates the Blackfeet landscape, he is not only sharing a textual space with a Saxon from one hundred years in the future, but a consciousness with him, as well. This potentiality, seen in the mirroring between the two characters' trek through snow, the strike-throughs which replicate both Saxon and Dalimpere's consciousnesses simultaneously as previously discussed, and through Dalimpere possessing "memories not [his] own" (147) when he is traversing the future town of Browning, is later revealed to be a product of an agreement between Dalimpere and Yellow Tail (155). Dalimpere frames this agreement as penance, purgatory in the "Pagan landscape" (155):

> It was his punishment, to become Blackfeet, to be Piegan. To live on the reservation he'd created, the situation he was already leaving behind. To replace his own life with an Indian one, and thus know firsthand the end result of his policies. An end result generations away from last Winter, just so he could see the scope of what he'd done, that it still had traceable effect. So that, in a sense, he could be inflicting it upon himself (117).

Dalimpere's immersion in the landscape and guilt from his "role as a tool of colonial oppression" that "leads to his psychic destruction" (Pennywark 100) set the stage for

the Indian Agent's assimilation, but his new identity is fully initiated when he makes this deal with Yellow Tail. The letters become a ceremony, through which Dalimpere dislodges himself from Western linear chronology and begins to understand history's dependency on the land and forcing him to address his impact on the Blackfeet. This process acts as the "sacred space of the ceremony" where "one can enter the flux of time and move within its vastness" which Peat argues is a "fundamental component of Blackfeet temporality" (199). To replicate this process in his hybrid literary form, Jones depicts Dalimpere finally breaking free completely from the linear restraints of the epistolary form.

Altman explains that the letter writer writes in a "pivotal and impossible present tense" which acts as "a pivot for past and future events" (117-118). This results in the letter writer being "highly conscious of writing in a specific present against which past and future are plotted" (Altman 122). In his early letters, Dalimpere is firmly grounded in this present tense, referring to the past but not engaging with it.[5] In the earliest letters, the past operates just as Altman explains it does in the pivotal present tense—as "interloper, intervening to shed light on the present" (Altman 123). As Dalimpere assimilates into an Indigenous nonlinear and spatially based system of knowledge, his epistles break from the chronological restraints of the "pivotal present" wherein the past and future can only be addressed from a fixed "present," mirroring the

reconfiguring of his understanding of temporality. This is first seen at length in the previously discussed section, where Dalimpere moves through the wilderness in an active present tense (93). While the epistolic standards return in some subsequent letters, the deterioration of the pivotal present continues in Dalimpere's final letters. This deterioration of epistolic standards mirrors Dalimpere's own willingness to accept his pivotal role in the Starvation Winter. When he is most distant from understanding his own guilt, he presents the events firmly grounded in the "I-you" relationship, in the passive, writing "by my rude count… the Piegan numbers were nearly halved last winter, after they'd already been halved by pox" (Jones 66). As he approaches the reality of his role, however, the final vestiges of the epistolary form which had represented his attempt to catalog his experience in Blackfeet land in the temporal and historical framework of U.S. settler colonialism deteriorates, representing his final conversion to an Indigenous temporal model.

When Dalimpere finally gets to his confession, he opens the letter maintaining the "I-you" relationship: "I would need no pen, Claire" (159). He also starts this letter existing firming in the pivotal present tense, referring to past and future moments in relation to his letter-writing present: "When I woke it took me long minutes to place myself in this dug out" (159). When Dalimpere finally decides "it is time" (159) to provide his ceremonial confession, however, the "I" narrator recedes to give way to the

third-person "Indian Agent" and the absolute nature of the epistolary present tense similarly gives way to what instead resembles a memoir, where the reader "is transported to the world of a distant past, experiencing as his new present scenes from the life of the actor in the story rather than experiencing the present of the narrator telling the story" (Altman 122-123). This turn is evident immediately as Dalimpere works through his confession: "The Indian Agent for the Blackfeet was mucking the ration meat out of the tack house when the post came from his superior" (Jones 165). When the "I" narrator appears in this altered narrative, it initially serves a separate role than the "I" narrator of a letter. As Altman explains regarding memoir, "Even when the voice of the narrator interrupts momentarily our involvement in a past-become-present, the present of the memoir narrator intervenes only to shed light on the past that interests us, to add the illuminating perspective of now's reflections to the obscurity of then actions" (123). We see precisely such an intervention by the "I" narrator in Dalimpere's confession, when he returns briefly to lament again the fractured epistolary pact which shaped the decisions of the "Indian Agent" from which he has removed himself: "But allow me if you will how alone with myself I was… I longed for you, or, in lieu of you, just someone to remind me I was alive" (Jones 163). By returning to a memoir-like past-become-present, the letters themselves become a hybridized text, where Dalimpere can step lightly back and forth between his traumatic past and his

epistle present. This narrative movement mirrors his interaction across time he experienced in his trek across the snow, where the past and the future were experiential—pasts-and-futures-become-present. The disintegration of the "I" figure and the final liberation from the confines of the epistolary present are completed in Dalimpere's final letter.

The "I" narrator makes no appearance in this final letter, and the temporal relationship between letter writer and third-person subject makes it impossible for them to co-exist. Despite the presence of a clear addressee "Claire –" (181), and signatory, "Francis Dalimpere" (186), none of the "I-you" language which defines the epistolary form is present. The writer of the letter describes events that could only happen in a future separate from the pivotal present of Dalimpere-as-letter-writer, as the final letter describes how Dalimpere hands the very epistle which the scene is dictated in over to Yellow Tail before he "straightened himself atop the horse… and then this Indian Agent man rode away from his first federal posting, and was never seen again" (186). In these final letters, the necessary pivotal-present of the epistolary form "from which all else radiates" (Altman 122) is gone, and the letter writer writes of past and future moments in a more traditional narrative prose, living them instead of addressing them from a pivotal-present. This final deconstruction of the epistolary mode demonstrates Dalimpere's assimilation into a Blackfeet system of knowing where

he is liberated from the chronological temporal standards of the form so he can navigate both a past and future to address and exorcize his trauma.

Jones's *Ledfeather* offers a unique and evolutionary depiction of Indigenous conceptions of space and time. Evidenced by Däwes's work on *The Bird is Gone*, this is a project that Jones has revisited throughout his career, but it is also a project many other Indigenous writers have engaged with, as well. In an essay on Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) and Craig Womack's *Drowning in Fire* (2001), Joseph Bauerkemper argues how "Nonlinear characteristics… are crucial to their narrations of Indigenous nationhood" (28). Laura Maria De Vos examines how Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) depicts spiralic temporality, which "refers to an Indigenous experience of time that is informed by a people's particular relationships to the seasonal cycles on their lands, and which acknowledges the present generations' responsibilities to the ancestors and those not yet born (2). These novels and many others work to reclaim Indigenous temporal sovereignty by introducing nonlinear and/or spatialized histories through the simple and radical act of depicting various Indigenous ways of knowing. They respond to calls by Deloria and Wildcat for spatialized and Indigenized futures. Jones's *Ledfeather* offers a unique contribution to this facet of Indigenous literature by hybridizing two traditionally Western literary forms to create a new atemporal textual structure, allowing him to both depict a nonlinear

and spatialized view of history and reverse the process of assimilation into a new temporal formation.

Ledfeather ends with Saxon symbolically resolving the long disrupted epistolary pact by delivering Dalimpere's letters to a girl named "Clairvoyant," as Saxon finally abandons his suicidal intentions he has fostered most of the book. The letters filled in much of Saxon's history for him, but in the final scene, he, too, adds to the long historical narrative by symbolically completing the delivery of the letters and contributing to the myth of a man surviving inside of a dead elk during a snowstorm—a story which figures prominently in Saxon and Dalimpere's shared history. The letters thus become more than just an extant historical document—they are themselves a new hybridized textual form which helps Saxon understand and cope with his own trauma, allowing him to continue on to that final temporal frontier which had not yet been traversed in the novel—his own future. By ending with the hopeful move toward a modern Blackfeet individual's future, *Ledfeather* speaks to an Indigenized world where Indigenous ontological and temporal sovereignty is again possible and a process of healing and renewal can take place.

Notes

[1] *Ledfeather*, like many other Indigenous novels, simultaneously "fits within many of the traditional tenets of postmodern literature and Native American Renaissance" (Gaudet 30).

[2] Baudemann offers "Spivak's translation of Derrida's adaption of Heidegger's term" of sous rature as "under erasure." See Baudemann's essay for more on Jones's use of sous rature as a means of narrative and historical erasure.
[3] Jones based this on historical events where hundreds of Blackfeet died during the winter of 1883-1884 due to mismanagement of federal supplies by federal employees. See Pennywark (p. 90).
[4] Pennywark importantly notes that, historically, the supplies Francis was withholding were "neither rations nor gifts but payment for a piece of land the Blackfeet sold the federal government in 1865 in exchange for $50,000 worth of goods annually for twenty years (Wise 68)" (Pennywark 92).
[5] Jones compares this quality of the epistolary form to Sándor Márai's novel *Embers*: "It's just about two old dues at a remote estate, just sitting by a fire and talking about things that happened fifty-eight or sixty years ago. And nothing happens. They're just talking about old stuff from forever ago, trying to figure out the past" (Stratton and Jones 28).

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W(h)ere There's a Wolf, There's a Way: The Lupine Gothics of *Mongrels* and *Where the Dead Sit Talking*

JOHN GAMBER

> "I started looking wider and I realized that everybody … was drawing American Indians as some form of wolf. And I thought, what's the attraction there? Why do people do this? And also I was disgusted by it, not that a wolf isn't a cool animal, but just in the way it's been memorialized on a thousand truck-stop blankets." --Stephen Graham Jones

In this excerpt from an interview with Billy J. Stratton, Stephen Graham Jones (Blackfeet) muses about the conflation of Native America with wolves across mainstream representations. Here he's speaking specifically about why he's relieved Art Spiegelman didn't have any Native characters in *Maus*, "because I know he'd draw him or her with a wolf head" (Stratton 52). While such tired cliches of Indigenous people serve as a source of frustration for Jones, his conversation with Stratton stems from a discussion of his own werewolf novel, *Mongrels* (2016). Jones reclaims the wolf in his own work in ways that trouble facile associations of the lupine with the Native. Nor is Jones alone in this unsettling reclamation; consider for example the recent release of *A Howl: An Indigenous Anthology of Wolves, Werewolves, and Rougarou*, edited by Elizabeth LaPensée, which offers stories from the past, present and future. This essay places the lycanthropic representations in Jones' text in conversation with those (and the more broadly lupine) in Brandon Hobson's (Cherokee) novel, *Where the Dead Sit Talking* (2018, hereafter, *WDST*).

These texts may seem, on their face, very different: Hobson's is a realist novel about a Cherokee adolescent in foster care living with a white family in rural Oklahoma and Jones' is a tale about a boy from a family of werewolves who mainly live on the run.[1] Yet, the two texts share a number of similarities. Specifically, both take the form of Southern Gothic bildungsromans (narrated by their protagonists); both wield werewolves (in their main texts and epigraphs) as devices for coming-of-age stories about male adolescents who are specifically working to construct their notions about masculinity; both protagonists attempt to configure those masculinities while being raised by people other than their biological parents; and, due to their familial situations, both protagonists are often on the move while longing for a kind of stasis or stability that they deem "normal."[2] In this article, I contend that both novels wield their lupine imagery (of werewolves and wolves) within Gothic traditions replete with secrets variously withheld and revealed as devices to interrogate the tensions and overlaps between a series of apparent dichotomies, notably: the (masculine) wild and the (feminine) domestic; solitude and community; and motion and stasis.[3]

Sequoyah, the narrator/protagonist of *WDST*, lives with the Truett family (for the bulk of the novel) in Little Crow, "near Black River, in rural Oklahoma" (11). He is estranged from his biological mother because "she finally landed herself in the women's prison for possession of drug paraphernalia and driving while intoxicated. She got three years since she already had a record" (5).[4] Sequoyah's mother remains incarcerated throughout the novel. He explains, "My mother and I were alone, too. My father had left us, packed up his jeep and headed west to find God. I never knew him" (3).[5] Sequoyah's mother does appear in the novel in both present scenes and past remembrances, though their relationship is fraught and increasingly emotionally distant. Two other foster children are also living in the Truett home, "A seventeen-year-old girl named Rosemary and a boy who's thirteen… His name is George" (11). We

learn that Rosemary is Kiowa and that she "had attempted suicide, twice," a fact that becomes important as the novel progresses (105). Sequoyah quickly becomes obsessed with Rosemary, but while she is initially quite interested in getting to know him, she grows decreasingly so over the course of the text (to his consternation).

Mongrels' unnamed narrator (who I will refer to as The Nephew, the last persona he adopts over the course of the novel) lives with his deceased mother's sister Libby and brother Darren, his aunt and uncle, both portrayed throughout the majority of the novel as werewolves, albeit mostly in human, not wolf, form.[6] While Libby does the bulk of the raising of The Nephew, he idolizes his uncle, explaining, "Every boy who never had a dad, he comes to worship his uncle" (20), and later, "I wanted to be him so bad (38). By contrast, The Nephew contends that Libby "wanted me to be the one who got to have a normal life, in town. / We're werewolves, though" (35).[7] The Nephew reflects on his years between the ages of eight and sixteen as he and his aunt and uncle crisscross the southern tier of the United States between New Mexico and Florida. The Nephew waits (impatiently) to discover whether he will ever turn into a werewolf (like his aunt, uncle, grandfather, and, we learn, father), or if he will not (like his mother).[8]

Both texts demonstrate their attention to were/wolves from their very beginnings, and I offer readings of their respective epigraphs to frame the contexts into which each situates itself. The context of these other texts, I argue, mirrors the ways the young protagonists emplace themselves either in physical space or within their relationships and/as responsibilities. *Mongrels* begins with an epigraph attributed to James Blish: "Eventually I went to America. There no one believes in werewolves" (np). Jones frames his Southern werewolf story within this broadly US national context, but it requires a bit of a tweak of Blish's original, which reads, "And then I came to this country. Here no one believes in the werewolf" (45). Blish's "There Shall be No

Darkness," from which this epigraph obliquely derives, however, is set, not in the US, but Scotland—Jones' epigraph, like The Nephew's narrative itself (as we will see), tells the truth, but tells it slant. Jones recasts the nation that, in Gothic tradition, denies the ghouls and ghosts that haunt its landscape.

Moreover, like "There Shall Be No Darkness," *Mongrels* also deals with the science behind werewolves—it theorizes both their history and evolution as a mode of fleshing out issues of belonging in both community and in place. In Blish's text, lycanthropy is regarded as a disease and a mutation (specifically of the pineal gland), and, as such, a possible evolutionary step toward something new. Jarmoskowski, the werewolf in the story, opines just prior to his demise, "Someday the pineal will come into better use and all men will be able to modify their forms without this terrible madness as a penalty. For us, the lycanthropes, the failures, nothing is left" (44). Werewolves then represent a potential hope for a kind of transforming humanity which comes with a maddened bloodlust, which represents too great a curse.[9] That curse, likewise, takes the form of isolation—and it is this isolation that leads Jarmoskowski to "come to this country." He laments, "It is not good for a man to wander from country to country, knowing that he is a monster to his fellow-men…I went through Europe, playing the piano and giving pleasure, meeting people, making friends—and always, sooner or later, there were whisperings, and strange looks and dawning horror" (45). Much like the protagonists of *Mongrels* and *WDST*, Jarmoskowski is always on the move, longing for but never finding, never even really hopeful for, a sense of community or belonging. To that end, Joshua T. Anderson notes that in *Mongrels*, "traveling from 'state to state' across geographical borders is a necessity, and … transforming from 'state to state' across the lines of species (human and wolf) and monstrosity (human and werewolf) is a condition of lycanthrope life" (127). Similarly, Jarmoskowski continues, "Sometimes, I could spend several months without incident in

some one place and my life would take on a veneer of normality. I could attend to my music and have people about me that I liked and be—human" (45). In each of these novels, as in Blish's story, this unfulfilled longing to remain in one place and/or find belonging with/in community is likened to human normalcy, while those who cannot attain that stasis, for whatever reason, become excluded from humanness (and aligned with the lupine).

Of course, such a phrase as "human normalcy" requires its own canon of stories by which to contextualize it (as its meaning will vary wildly across different histories, locations, trajectories, and intersections). As Daniel Heath Justice explains in his chapter "How Do We Learn To Be Human?" from *Why Do Indigenous Literatures Matter* "Although we are born into human bodies, it's our teaching—and our stories—that make us human" (33). Both *Mongrels* and *WDST* are stories about the importance of stories, particularly stories about home and community, in shaping the kinds of humans we become.[10] Justice continues, "the role of experience, of teaching, and of story [is] to help us find ways of meaningful being in whatever worlds we inhabit, whatever contexts we've inherited" (34).[11] Such, then, I argue, are *Mongrels* and *WDST*: stories about characters becoming human and navigating the spaces between humanness and inhumanness that wield lupine images as symbols of both the dangers and possibilities of those seemingly disparate states. These are not, however, how-to guides; they are stories about pitfalls and dangers, messy tales about the incompleteness and the contingent nature of that becoming and of very human fallibilities.[12]

Hobson's novel likewise begins with a pair of epigraphs replete with (were)wolf references or allusions. The first reads, "'A starving man will eat with the wolf.' –Native American proverb." Those of us who work in Native American Studies are apt to read the provenance Hobson provides for this aphorism with some distrust, of course; the

phrase "Native American proverb" is dicey. We regularly encounter memes, for example, like this, vaguely interspecies inspirational quotes associated with particular creatures—wolves, eagles, and buffalo—that seemingly can't be traced to any particular Native nation or community. It's hard not to read some tongue-in-cheek play from Hobson here. The Jones passage I use as the epigraph to this essay wields this pairing, as Jones continues, "It gets so annoying to see. I get so tired of that stuff—and I *say* that, but if you keep getting tired of every little thing like that you're going to spend your life fatigued, so you finally just allow yourself to be amused by it" (Stratton 52). Hobson's epigraph conjures this wolf/Native American pairing, and we can picture it emblazoned across the "truck stop blankets" Jones mentions above. Yet, this rendition relies on a peculiar manifestation that maligns the wolf, suggesting that eating with them could only come about because of starvation (we might contrast such a negative reading of this canid with Jones' "not that a wolf isn't a cool animal"). This alleged proverb certainly parallels settler constructions of wolves as dangers to be eliminated across North America.[13] And, as such, the wolf *qua* Indian *qua* wolf motif further reminds us of settler elimination of Indigenous peoples.[14] In contrast to these defaming and violent views toward wolves, though, Hobson elsewhere asserts, "Though hunting was a profession, a Cherokee would not kill a wolf, as wolves were messengers to the spirit world ("How Tsala" 22).[15] All of this to say: we might read an irony in Hobson's epigraph *and* attribution, but each also signals a bit toward understanding the text's protagonist and his tendencies to lupine ideation, as I will demonstrate below.

Hobson follows this broadly attributed proverb with something far more particular; the second epigraph to *WDST* reads, "'Poor strangers, they have so much to be afraid of.' –Shirley Jackson" (np). In this instance, as with Jones's epigraph, we encounter a passage by a specific author, though without the text from which that

passage comes. Hobson lifts this quote from Jackson's gothic novel, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, which his text in some ways mirrors.[16] Jackson's novel famously and richly begins, "My name is Mary Katherine Blackwood. I am eighteen years old, and I live with my sister Constance. I have often thought that with any luck at all I could have been born a werewolf, because the two middle fingers on both my hands are the same length, but I have had to be content with what I had" (1).[17] The protagonist/narrator of Jackson's novel, called Merricat by most of its characters, laments having not been born a werewolf, displaying a longing that both Sequoyah and The Nephew mirror (and contrasting Jarmoskowski's portrayal of lycanthropy as a curse).[18]

The Blackwood family in Jackson's novel is collectively reclusive, and the townspeople mock and jeer Merricat when she takes her biweekly trips from their isolated house to town to buy groceries and to get books from the library (Merricat is particular to "fairy tales and books of history" (2). She explains, "The people of the village have always hated us" (4). In order to drive out a newly arrived relative who is attempting to attain the family's wealth, Merricat sets fire to the house. The fire department puts out the fire, but the townspeople proceed to loot and smash the remains of the house. Thereafter, Constance and Merricat remain in the relatively undamaged ground floor of the house, visited only by occasional townspeople who, out of guilt or fear (the young women are imagined to be witches), leave food for them. In the final vignette of the novel, a young boy, spurred by his friends, makes his way to the porch and calls out, "shakily," a taunt the townspeople had earlier directed at Merricat (146).[19] That night the sisters find "on the doorsill a basket of fresh eggs and a note reading, 'He didn't mean it, please.'" In response, Merricat, in the third to last line of the novel, states, "Poor strangers…They have so much to be afraid of" (146). Similarities abound between Hobson's novel and Jackson's: in both we encounter odd and maudlin young people, similarly odd adult caretakers, a town full of creepy people,

a family living in relative isolation out in the woods, family stories of dubious veracity, and deaths that may or may not have been accidents.

Adding layers of referentiality to Hobson's epigraph, Merricat explains that she likes three things in particular: "my sister Constance, and Richard Plantagenet, and Amanita phalloides, the death cup mushroom" (1). Richard Plantagenet might refer to any of a number of people, but likely gestures to the great-grandson of King Edward III of England. As Jamil Mustafa contends, "The inclusion of Richard III among Merricat's favorites is…illuminating…because Richard was supposedly guilty of the same crime that Merricat commits, the murder of blood relations—in particular, of male heirs" (135). While Constance is found to have killed the family, she is not convicted of any crime. The reader later learns that it was in fact Merricat who killed the family, and quite intentionally—like Hobson's novel (as we will see), Jackson's opens with a death foretold, and possibly, with the protagonist/narrator, a murderer.[20]

WDST includes its own specifically werewolf narrative of sorts, constructed, like that of *Mongrels*, as a fiction within the larger fiction of the novel. Sequoyah explains to George, "I once got a boy to believe I was a werewolf" (205). He explains that the other boy was in a shelter with him and had asked him about the burn scars on his face: "I told him I was attacked by a wolf in the woods in the middle of the night" (205). The reader is well aware that Sequoyah received these burn marks from his mother; he explains very early in the novel, "I was burned by hot grease once when I was eleven. My mother was drunk, but it was an accident…Hot grease stung my cheek and neck…The scars are small but noticeable enough" (4). We read multiple layers of storytelling in this passage. Within this work of fiction, Sequoyah, named for the creator of the Cherokee syllabary, crafts another fiction. Nonetheless, we see a kind of wish fulfillment in this werewolf tale. Rather than explaining the true source of his scars, he decides for a less domestic, and a much more wild, injury.[21] Instead of being scarred by

his mother in a kitchen, he opts to claim a wolf attack. Outwardly, Sequoyah parallels The Nephew's rejection of the feminized domestic space as the foregrounding element of his autobiography. Yet, Sequoyah, as I discuss further below, will ultimately embrace both his own feminine elements and an idealized, if individualized, notion of domesticity.

The trick here is that Sequoyah gets this other boy to believe him. He creates a story about himself to make himself seem dangerous, to protect himself from a variety of encroachments: intimate, physical, violent. As Jones notes, "Truth is in the rhetoric of me convincing you and you saying, 'I believe that. I feel that to be true'" ("Observations" 24). But, this entire novel is really working to do similar work. It's a story about a character telling a story about himself that doesn't quite add up and seeing who is going to buy it. Throughout the text, the reader occupies a position similar to that of both the other boy and of George in this vignette. Sequoyah is telling a story about having told someone a story that was meant to create distance and fear, and that in this case is also meant to generate intimacy and respect, if not trust.

Furthermore, Sequoyah sexualizes his werewolf self-fashioning. He asserts, "I told him sometimes I wake up in the mornings naked with scratches and blood and mud all over my body. I told him other wolves gave me a hard-on" (205). Sequoya's wielding of sexual arousal as part of his mythos blends a rough-and-tumble machismo with a bestial sexuality that means to create distance between himself and this other boy. He crafts himself as feral, unbound by the rules of society that disallow these manifestations of wildness. He proceeds to tell the story of telling this same boy a story of stealing a pickup truck and driving to Galveston, Texas, where he was found and arrested, "I told him they threw me down and handcuffed me just off the freeway. I told him a coyote came out of the brush and started to attack the trooper, ripped into him. Bit his leg so that blood sprayed everywhere. The coyote smelled my blood, knew

I was part wolf. The coyote ripped out the trooper's organs and we started eating it. The kid believed every word" (205). Sequoyah's story turns on the wild coyote recognizing his wildness and power, where the emblem of authority—masculine but civilized law enforcement—fails to do so, a failure that ends in his death.[22] Given this tendency toward telling tall tales, Sequoyah's role as a reliable narrator is in doubt throughout the novel.[23]

Indeed, this story and the epigraphs of the text are not the sole references to wolves in the novel. When we first meet George, we learn that "He was reading fairy tales mostly…stories of wolves and children, and also science fiction stories" (26). Sequoyah tells us that he had "won honorable mention in a contest at school one year when I'd drawn a cartoon wolf with bandages on his nose and a patch over one eye. The inscription underneath it read: 'Do What's Right! Don't Fight!'" (167).[24] Rosemary explains that as a child, "The stories I liked to read all dealt with children escaping wolves" (190). As Sequoyah goes on a bicycle ride that he remembers as one of his "most invigorating experiences" while living with the Troutts he recalls, "I imagined wolf tracks under my tires" (193-94). While he waits in a hospital room for a diagnosis after having vomiting spells and headaches, he imagines, "They would tell me I was part animal, part human, some other entity" (263). And, finally, of a meal he consumes after being released from the hospital, he explains, "I devoured everything, wolfing it down with my hands, eating like an animal. I was so sated in that moment, so freshly and newly awake, I didn't even notice until I got home that all the rooster sauce and ketchup on my shirt looked like blood" (266). These passages might seem to lack a single coherent thread, but the sheer repetition of wolf imagery in the text coupled with its epigraphs begs analysis. Beginning with the first epigraph's starving man, we note the ways Sequoyah likens the wolf to voracious and self-concerned feeding. Included in the second epigraph lies his longing toward lycanthropy (which he shares

with Merricat). Finally, he imagines wolf tracks as part of a liberty he feels on his bike ride. In all of these conjurings, Sequoyah, like The Nephew, valorizes as imagination of wolves as lone, rather than, for example, as members of a pack.

These lycanthropic tendencies point toward ways in which both novels participate in gothic traditions. As Eve Sedgwick famously contends, the Gothic novel is "pervasively conventional. Once you know that a novel is of the Gothic kind…you can predict its contents with an unnerving certainty" (9). In her thesis, "The Indigenous Gothic Novel," Amy Elizabeth Gore summarizes Sedgwick's conventions as consisting of "a melodramatic and foreboding setting, a woman in distress, manifestations of the supernatural or uncanny, reference to that which is unspeakable, and a haunting of the past upon the present" (3). Both Jones' and Hobson's novels contain each of the elements Gore enumerates. Moreover, these narratives are littered with monsters, with references to dark magics, with families festering in rural isolations (which is not to say all rurality is such), with brooding, disturbed, and disturbing folks. Such modern wielding of the Gothic is hardly surprising. While Gothic once referred to literature that fits Sedgwick's model and derives specifically from Eighteenth and Nineteenth-century England, contemporary usage expands its meaning self-consciously as Gothic becomes a particular mode for (among other things) contesting narratives that uphold national and nationalist hegemonic norms. In his book-length study of the Gothic, Fred Botting explains, "In the contest for the meaning of 'Gothic' more than a single word was at stake. At issue were the differently constructed and valued meanings of the Enlightenment, culture, nation and government as well as contingent, but no less contentious, significances of the family, nature, individuality and representation" (43). In short, Gothic has always served as an artistic mode for the contestation of fixed, often mainstream, values. Botting continues,

> The contest for a coherent and stable account of the past…produced an ambivalence that was not resolved. The complex and often contradictory attempts either to make the past barbaric in contrast to an enlightened present or to find in it a continuity that gave English culture a stable history had the effect of bringing to the fore and transforming the way in which both past and present depended on modes of representation. (23)

If the Gothic represents a counter-response to or problematized wielding of the Enlightenment—replete with its scientific rationalism and positivism—and one that specifically calls into question the hierarchical or progressivist dyad of civilized/barbaric, then Indigenous communities and communities of color (among others) possess a vested interest in wielding it.[25]

Indeed, this move to (re)claim Gothic traditions and aesthetics manifest in Native American literary critical approaches specifically. Louis Owens, a key figure in such conversations, writes against the United States' constructions of the "Frontier Gothic," offering instead modes by which, "The gothic Indian, that imagined construct imprisoned in an absolute, untouchable past, is deconstructed, and the contemporary Indian is granted both freedom to imagine him/herself in new and radical ways, as well as responsibility for that self-definition" (77). Owens recalls Faulkner's Chief Doom character as a clear example of the Frontier Gothic Indian to be deconstructed. Annette Trefzer offers a reading of Choctaw author Leanne Howe's novels *Shell Shaker* and *Miko Kings* to articulate the ways they "sound gothic resonances and engage with the region's traumatic wounds as spirits ill at rest point at Indigenous dispossession and disrupt official historical narratives" (200).[26] Trefzer hones in on intersectional representations of Indigenous women specifically. Meanwhile, Michelle Burnham likens Windigo stories to the Gothic as a tradition to be reclaimed, and Billy J. Stratton terms *Mongrels* a "neo-Southern gothic werewolf novel" (1). Hobson notes that while he sees

the capacity to read *WDST* as a realistic portrayal of a wounded mind, it might also be read as "a horror novel" (Brennan).[27]

Hobson's novel's setting of Little Crow itself contributes to the gothic vibe of the text. When Sequoyah asks George why the "entire towns seem[s] to have such strange habits," George replies, "'Little Crow is just a really weird place…The police promote prostitution. There's a brothel out by the lake. The police know all about it and they don't care…You could probably get away with murder here'" (118). We note of course that Sequoyah may have done exactly that: he may (like Merricat) have gotten away with murder. Meanwhile, the high school is abuzz with rumors of teens engaging in "strange sex acts and witchcraft" and "similar adult sex parties, where people dressed like mannequins…and they all wore flesh-colored bodysuits" (117). Not all of Little Crow's oddities are of overtly sexual natures, though. Sequoyah notes, "backyard birthday parties involved a game in which children were blindfolded and had their wrists tied behind their backs. They bobbed for dead snakes from a tub of water"; these same families use snakes in their church (117, 118).

In a further manifestation of an anti-positivist uncertainty and general secret-keeping common to the Gothic, each story offers a narrative that it, sooner or later, undercuts. While over the course of the novel the reader comes to accept The Nephew's werewolf narrative, *Mongrels* begins, "My grandfather used to tell me he was a werewolf" (1). This opening offers at least a layer of doubt to the grandfather's story, a layer that remains throughout the first chapter of the text. Still in the first chapter, The Nephew relates, "none of Grandpa's stories were ever lies. I know that now. They were just true in a different way" (25). The Nephew's grandfather is relating stories that convey messages, values, morals, etc. As such, that the details of the stories may never have happened doesn't necessarily make them untrue. Of course, what The Nephew communicates here might just as easily be said of Jones' novel

itself, or of all fiction, or of all stories. Elsewhere, Jones explains, "Truth isn't in verifiability. Truth is always in the narrative; truth is how well it coheres together and how it makes you feel" ("Observations" 24). We are reminded here of a host of canonized Native authors (if Native American literature can be said to tend toward canonicity). Leslie Marmon Silko's (Laguna Pueblo) famous introductory words in *Ceremony* explain, "I will tell you something about stories…They aren't just entertainment./ Don't be fooled. / They are all we have, you see,/ all we have to fight off/ illness and death" (np). In a scene in Chris Eyre's (Cheyenne and Arapaho) *Smoke Signals*, Victor asks his mother whether he should bring Thomas with him on his journey and she launches into a story about making frybread (the message of the story conveys the importance of community).[28] Daniel Heath Justice describes stories that "give shape, substance, and purpose to our existence and help us understand how to uphold our responsibilities to one another and the rest of creation…good stories—not always happy, not always gentle, but good ones nonetheless, because they tell the truths of our presence in the world today, in days past, and in days to come" (*Why* 2). In short, there is a long-established precedent of the ways that Native stories carry both power and message, what we might teach in our literature classes as the "theme" of a work. The narrator of *Mongrels* goes on to declare that such a practice runs in the family, stating that his uncle "Darren was just like Grandpa, telling me one story, meaning another" (100). As such, the werewolf narrative of *Mongrels* takes on a self-consciously metaphorical significance.

Among the secrets that *Mongrels* keeps from the reader is the racialization of The Nephew and his family. One evening at a convenience store, The Nephew runs into some kids from his grade, one of whom, gesturing at The Nephew asks, "He Mexican?" (61). Another follows, "What are you really?" (62). Jones' choice of "Mexican" in this instance is itself rich. Mexico and its denizens are, of course,

profoundly diverse, and that nation celebrates (rhetorically, at least) its diversity in the form of the mestizaje in ways that counter the US's historical anxieties over racial mixing. Placed in the context of the werewolf narrative, especially one called *Mongrels*, we are reminded of ideas of purity and the ways those ideas fail in the face of the complex mixings that life creates (and requires).[29] Yet, of course, for many in the United States, the term "Mexican" is very specifically racialized. It denotes a particular, but flexible, range of brown skin along with whatever other phenotypic elements happen to exist—or not—in the eye of the beholder. It likewise connotes foreign-ness, and the classmates in this scene echo these stereotypes as they say to The Nephew, "Still wet…piso mojado, right?" (61). Jones turns the joke back on these boys (who our narrator names simply and tellingly "Yellow Hair" and "John Deere Hat"), by having them conflate the slur "mojado" with "piso mojado" (wet floor). Moreover, Yellow Hair stands in contrast to werewolves broadly, as we learn later in the novel; Libby tells The Nephew, "I don't think there ever *has* been a blond [werewolf]" (112). "'The only place you could hide would be a wheatfield, I guess. Or a stack of gold.' This is funny to her. Hilarious. Werewolves never get the treasure" (112). The fact that werewolves are never blonde offers another potential reading of racialized phenotype, but since people with (naturally) blonde hair make up a tiny fraction of the world's population (something around two percent), this isn't as big a tell as one might think. The Nephew's addendum that Libby's laughter stems from the thought of the werewolf getting the treasure returns the reader to a more ambiguous sense of alterity.

The Nephew further hints but does not reveal, "The same way animals and cops know werewolves, so do security guards and salespeople and clerks. If you asked them why, they might not say 'werewolves,' would probably just shrug, say there's something shady about us, isn't there?" (90). Of course, Jones' narrator expresses the vague sentiments of unconscious bias (or obfuscated conscious bias) in this "something

shady." All of this is to say that we *can* read a racialized marginalization into these werewolves, though one that needn't necessarily mark them as, say, Indigenous. In the same conversation with Stratton that I use as my epigraph above, Jones explains, "people are always asking me, 'What's Indian about this' So I started writing about zombies and aliens to stop getting that question because I hate that question. That question means people are going into this book with their miner lights turned up too bright looking for just one thing (Stratton 52-53).[30] Lycanthropy in *Mongrels* might signal any of a number of forms of alterity (racialized, classed, or based on status within governmental structures of naturalization to name a few), but whatever it is standing in for in whatever reading someone has, it is clear that to be a werewolf in this novel is to fall outside of the mainstream. It's to come from a population whose story is not told.[31] Paul Tremblay refers to such moments in Jones's work as his "beautiful sentences that both tell and keep secrets" (357).

And that telling, or not telling, of werewolf stories or secrets lies central to Jones' novel. Significantly later in the text, The Nephew explains the family's lack of connection, community, and concomitantly, history: "The reason we don't know where we come from, it's that werewolves aren't big on writing things down. On leaving bread crumbs" (215). There might be any number of reasons why this family has either been elided from official and unofficial record keeping or has obfuscated itself therein, as is true with many marginalized communities. The grandfather tells a story of his participation as a soldier in World War II during which he learns the history of werewolves (the novel offers multiple, sometimes complementary and sometimes competing—if not contradictory—werewolf origin stories). The Nephew contends, "*Maybe* grandpa did go to war, and he *did* make it back…but those years in between, those years between shipping out and straggling back home, those are story years. Years without any photographs or paperwork or newspaper articles to prove them"

(216). Again, the record of this family and their ilk is sparse, both in terms of personal memorabilia (photographs) and official and historical documentation (paperwork or newspaper articles). What they have instead, what all communities maintain, are their stories.

These secrets represent a classic Gothic mystery that The Nephew intends to unveil and chronicle. But, in so doing, he also ultimately explains that werewolves are an image, a device, or an allegory. Libby tells him, "I know you've been writing it all down in that shoe box you keep in that old blue backpack…About us" (292). In reply, The Nephew explains, "'We never had a camera,' he says. It's his only excuse" (292).[32] But, as with all the stories in the family tradition, he explains, "'It's all different anyway,' the nephew tells her. 'The way I did it, I mean. Nobody would know anything, if they found it'" (292). He continues, "You may have fought a bear," referring to a moment earlier in the novel when Libby-turned-wolf does exactly that. It is at this point—in the final pages of the novel—that the reader is reminded that this isn't *really* a werewolf novel at all. Werewolves are a cover, a disguise, for something else that this family is.[33]

Mysteries likewise abound particularly in the vexing and unresolved endings in *WDST*, as we realize that the story we are reading might not be exactly what happened. The final sentences of *WDST* create a new kind of doubt in the reader as Sequoyah concludes, "As the weather grew warmer, Harold [Sequoyah's foster father] helped me build a tepee in the backyard, where I spent most of my time….I started writing my own stories, about Indians and monsters, about brainwashed killers, about mysterious deaths in a mythical Oklahoma town" (273). Of course, we wonder if *WDST* is one of those stories about a mysterious death in a mythical town (particularly since Little Crow seems to not actually exist). But, more than that, the novel's treatment of its own dramatic conclusion, Rosemary's death, is deeply ambiguous. As Sedgwick reminds us of the Gothic, "The story does get through, but in a muffled form" (14).

Of course, for the reader to be aware that secrets exist in a text, the narrative must both reveal and withhold certain details. To that end, *WDST* establishes itself as a chronicle of a death foretold; as Carnes notes, Hobson's novel is "retrospective" (239). The third sentence informs the reader of the details we will soon encounter, "The period of my life of which I am about to tell involves a late night in the winter of 1989, when I was fifteen years old and a certain girl died in front of me. Her name was Rosemary Blackwell" (1). From the beginning, the reader knows the novel's ending, or at least, the story's dramatic height.[34] What is left is the slow unveiling of how these events came to transpire. We know the narrator's age; we know the year. And yet, while the novel's outset begins with this foreshadowed denouement, the as-yet unnamed narrator denies the reader any mystery or revelation, continuing, "I'm alive and she's dead. I should tell you this is not a confession, nor is it a way to untangle the roots and find meaning. Rosemary is dead. People live and die. People kill themselves or they get killed. The rest of us live on, burdened by what is inescapable" (1). And, yet, untangling the roots and finding meaning are certainly what the reader finds themself doing. Such a quest seems precisely among the burdens of what is inescapable—indeed the quest to make meaning of this story might be precisely what *is* inescapable, it might be exactly what stories demand, and what readers do. Moreover, returning to the passage above, I want to examine two key elements: the assertion that this is "not a confession" and Sequoya's note that "people kill themselves or they get killed," because while Rosemary's death is ruled a suicide, the novel leaves it quite unclear whether that is the case (did she kill herself or did she "get killed"—a phrasing rich in its passivity). *WDST* is not only, as Hobson notes, a horror story, but also potentially, a murder mystery, though one that remains unsolved.

The central mystery of *WDST* takes the form of the specific mechanics of Rosemary's foretold death. She tells Sequoyah that "There're taking me out of here.

They're sending me back to rehab," and then tells him "just leave me alone. I don't like you any more" (245). Finally, Sequoyah narrates:

> "You never listen," she said, and these were her final words. In the dimly-lit room I couldn't tell if she was laughing or sobbing. A surge of anger struck me. It stopped me cold, seeing her standing there. I noticed the gun in her hand. Beyond that, I remember hearing a slight hum that seemed to vibrate from somewhere in the room. The vibration moved across the floor and entered me, my body, my mind. The vibration was its own malicious presence, some isolated entity that existed only in that moment. I knew I was not myself, and it felt stimulating and good. I was someone furious, someone hurt, someone blighted by infectious rage. A split second later I could not contain myself and sprang from the bed and placed my empty hand on her gun-gripping hand, my hand on her hand, and we held on, both confronting ourselves, both relentless. (246)

Thus ends the chapter, as the reader grapples with what has happened. Early in the next chapter, Sequoyah recalls, "They found Rosemary's suicide note…It was her handwriting, there was no question…Nobody even suspected murder" (247-48). Between Sequoyah's implanting of the possibility of (unsuspected) murder, his rage, his understanding that he was "not himself," and the malicious presence of the vibration he sometimes thinks he hears and feels in stressful situations, the reader encounters much uncertainty as to how Rosemary died.

When we read the gendered nature of these dark revelations of possible, even likely violence and Sequoyah's feelings of entitlement to Rosemary's interest alongside The Nephew's rejections of Libby, we note the cautionary elements of these stories in regard to certain brands of isolationist masculinities, particularly in terms of these disassociated adolescent boys who long to flee, whether in the form of running—a theme repeated throughout *Mongrels*, or flying—a theme repeated throughout *WDST*.

After all, the specific masculinities of these two adolescents are central to these novels. The Nephew seeks out a particular brand of machismo that he mimics from his uncle. Sequoyah, on the other hand, pairs a hyper-masculine and violent self-narrating with androgyny. He likes to wear Rosemary's clothes and make-up, for example. Hobson reminds the reader of the temporal setting of his novel to underscore these elements of Sequoyah's character. He explains that Sequoyah is "exploring identity issues with his gender and with this overall appearance. In 1989 not many boys wear eyeliner to school…Sequoyah is a little more androgynous" (Michal).[35] With these tendencies in mind, we must recognize the lionization of Darren and Rosemary, respectively in these texts. Both novels frame the domestic sphere as feminine. That is, The Nephew spends the majority of *Mongrels* rejecting the domestic and what he frames as its feminization, as well as his female role model, Libby, while Sequoyah longs for the domestic, replete with specifically, but also not entirely gendered elements, embracing it, along with his female role model, Rosemary, albeit to an unhealthy degree. The Nephew comes around to the importance of his aunt and the dangers and harm of the brand of masculinity he has been privileging, but I argue that both texts tell of fraught formations of marginalized masculinities.

The Nephew gradually reveals the damage of his individuated ideology and ideation to both the reader and to himself. He ponders, for example, what he would do if his family were to stay in one place long enough for him to have what he describes as a normal life, staying at a single school long enough to graduate. He declares, "I liked reading enough, but what was I supposed to do with a diploma? Getting a degree would be like I was deciding to trade in my heritage, my blood" (56). For this boy, formal or institutional education represents a betrayal of family and community, a trade-in of marginalized sub-culture for hegemonic over-culture. But it is also more than that. For him, it's about foregoing ever truly being a part of that community, never

coming of age. He continues, "And if I started making those kinds of gestures, then that was the same as asking to never change, to just stay like this forever, not need all Darren's advice" (56). The fraught and interstitial masculinity that The Nephew craves exists always and only on the run. To stay in one place means to never become the kind of man he, as a boy, hopes to be. Moreover, it means that his bonds with his beloved and idealized uncle would come to naught. The Nephew, then, at the same time he declines certain kinds of community, privileges his homosocial and homofamilial ones. These masculinist relationships are further underscored by the novel's contextualization of this particular passage. Namely, in privileging Darren's advice, he simultaneously negates Libby's advice. This negation glares in light of the fact that Libby has just given The Nephew a multi-page and, within the narrative, ten hour long "werewolf version of The Talk," covering topics ranging from the dangers of driving-while-werewolf, eating from garbage cans, the delicious but addicting and always human-related smell of French fries, pantyhose and stretch pants, and, of course, silver poisoning (37-46). Libby's advice takes the form of "ways to not die"; these are all critically important tips for the protagonist. But, because of his gendered priorities, he undervalues them, and, in truth, Libby as well, despite the fact that she serves as his primary caregiver and the only steady and stable figure in his life.

The Nephew's revelation regarding masculinist ideology becomes pinpointed by the matriarchal Libby. Specifically, The Nephew realizes that when members of the family leave, that means that the rest of the family is being left, being abandoned. When it seems as if Darren has left the family, The Nephew asks, "Do werewolves do that, just leave?" (250). It is telling that this question arises from a protagonist who has been emphasizing the fact that werewolves do that, just leave, for over eighty percent of the novel at this point. The Nephew realizes he might not be the one who leaves, but the one who is left; he is realizing what it means to be a member of a community

that another member opts out of, and he doesn't much like it. In her response, Libby clarifies the gendered nature of The Nephew's approach to glorifying running as he has done throughout the novel. "Her eyes when she looked up to me, they were ancient and tired and sad and mad all at once. '*Men* do that,' she said" (250). It turns out that the quality of werewolves that The Nephew has been celebrating all along is not a quality of werewolves after all, but rather one of human men.

Sequoyah, by contrast, reveals a strong longing for home and stasis, seeing his one constant moving as an *unheimlich* mode of being. He explains, "Moving from place to place, from shelter to foster home, almost always took its toll, and at fifteen I'd never gotten over the crippling anxiety of sleeping in a new room, a new bed, living in a whole new environment" (37).[36] We note the ways that each character, despite privileging motion and flight, nonetheless feels and communicates the ways they suffer from that motion.[37] For Sequoyah, moreover, that longing for flight even comes in the form of his relationship to selfhood. He explains, "I recall the desire to become someone else completely" (220). We are reminded of the "shift" that the narrator of *Mongrels* similarly longs for (and of Sequoyah's fantasy diagnosis in the hospital), a fundamental transformation of self that he hopes lurks somewhere within him.[38]

Both protagonists eventually understand the appeal of staying in one specific location, though Sequoyah, living as he has on the move but without a sense of community seems to long for it more. He explains, "This was the type of life I always dreamed about living someday, being alone in a house deep in the woods somewhere. To be happy, safe…To live alone, without a wife or kids" (18). We note that while he pines for a house in the woods, he also craves solitude. He describes the Troutt homes in idyllic terms, "A house in the country, gleaming in the light that slanted through the trees. I saw a tall oak tree in the front yard with a tire swing" (19). The oak with its tire swing offers both an icon of stability and a welcoming of children and play that belie

the fact that this house, with its foretold untimely death (among other things) is absolutely haunted.[39]

The domestic security of the Troutt's rural home comes forth in Sequoyah's imagistic description of their kitchen in particular, a room (as we've seen with his burns) with rich significance for his character. He narrates:

> The kitchen had a white enamel sink and wooden cabinets painted light blue. The wallpaper was light blue with pictures of small baskets of vegetables and fruit. The room gave off a country kitchen feel. It was a reminder I was in a rural area, a few miles outside of town. I'd never lived in the country before, so looking out the kitchen window at night was like looking in a mirror—there was a vast darkness as far as you could see without any porch lights on. (34)

The rurality of his setting manifests both inwardly in the country style of the wallpaper and sink, outwardly in the darkness all around, and back inwardly as the window becomes not a thing to be seen through, but a thing by which Sequoyah looks upon himself. Gazing outward, he gazes inward, or at his own exteriority, burns and all. The reflection he sees is not only of himself, but of himself in this country kitchen, in the most domestic of domestic spaces in this home that mirrors, so to speak, his idealized eventual existence. He longs to be alone in precisely the kind of place where he finds himself. Where The Nephew rejects such domesticity, Sequoyah privileges it—but while the former locates a need for community in other people—regardless of emplaced stasis, the latter longs only for the constancy of place itself.

The theme of who belongs and who does not, and where, lies central to these two novels, and both wield specifically gendered constructions of a confounded human/lupine distinction or indistinction to think through that theme. The adolescent male narrators search for a sense of self in community through their respective lupine ideations. Both at some points long to emulate the lone wolf of heteromasculinist lore.

Yet, while Sequoyah maintains a longing for solitude, he likewise pines for a feminized domestic space that even in his dreams remains an endangered fantasy. The Nephew, in glorifying a homosocial idea of community that is forever fleeting, forever on the run, eventually realizes the damage such an approach inflicts. Where Sequoyah understands the importance of place and the community it can foster, The Nephew comes to understand the importance of community as place itself.

Notes

[1] Hobson's follow-up novel, *The Removed*, also features a child in foster care. Hobson has noted that, having worked for roughly seven years as a social worker, he is drawn to telling such stories (McDonnell).

[2] The werewolf as metaphor for puberty (gaining body hair, trying to understand new impulses and lusts, etc.) might be a bit on-the-nose. However, Jones notes, "the age that I'm most comfortable writing a character is sixteen, and seventeen and a half, or eighteen…what I want to be drawing from somehow is that hopefulness you have at that age. You always keep the future inside like a secret, when you grow up you're going to be a Blue Angels pilot or Conan, or a superstar. And that's all still inside you. You haven't been disabused of those dreams yet. I like to write about characters who are on the cusp like that" (Stratton and Jones 22-23). This age cusp alongside the potential, but not-yet-realized changes of lycanthropy parallel in *Mongrels*.

[3] Both novels also, and I don't think this is as unimportant as it might seem, feature Chevrolet El Caminos prominently. These neither-car-nor-truck vehicles mirror the in-betweenness of the protagonists.

[4] While the town in question seems fictionalized, the novel tells us that Broken Arrow is "nearby," which would put it about fifteen miles southeast of Tulsa and roughly fifty-five miles west of Tahlequah, the capital of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma (163).

[5] I read a play on the "him" here, the lack of capitalization notwithstanding, between never having known his father and never having known the specific manifestation of God in question.

[6] *Mongrels* alternates longer chapters narrated by the protagonist with shorter ones told in the third person about the protagonist wherein he adopts a persona (vampire, reporter, criminal, biologist, mechanic, hitchhiker, prisoner, villager, and nephew) that

is mentioned at some point in the previous chapter. While "the nephew" is not capitalized in the novel, I do so here to indicate the specific character.

[7] The line break in this passage represents a new paragraph. Jones' novel makes use of these throughout, with many sentence fragments, continued thoughts, and punch lines suspended as paragraphs of their own. These create an effect whereby the novel's form reflects the kind of frenetic, breathless rush of the family's life, of The Nephew's adolescence, and of his perception of his uncle Darren's persona.

[8] The fact that his mother does not change reemphasizes the gendered nature of The Nephew's perception of lycanthropy.

9 At the same time, though, the narrative offers a counter point, "Maybe God is on the side of the werewolves…Maybe God had decided that proper humans had made a mess of running the world, had decided to give the *nosferatu*, the undead, a chance at it. Perhaps the human race was on the threshold of that darkness" (42-43).

[10] Lalonde notes a different work by Jones, "*The Long Trial of Noaln Dugatti* is resolutely centered on writing," a statement that applies to much of his work, including *Mongrels* (230).

[11] While I'm placing these texts within Southern Gothic traditions, Justice's creative work most notably comes in his fantasy trilogy, later combined as *The Way of Thorn and Thunder: The Kynship Chronicles* (another example of the excellent "genre fiction" being produced by Native authors).

[12] This inconclusive nature stands central to the aesthetics of these texts. Carnes notes of *WDST*, "what I find refreshing about this novel is that it does not try to be something it is not. Rather than an awakening novel where a young Cherokee and a young Kiowa become closer to their identities and Native individuals, this book focuses on the problems that teenagers face in an especially tumultuous time in their lives" (239).

[13] Here we might recall Aldo Leopold's "Thinking Like a Mountain" from *A Sand County Almanac* in which the famed naturalist recalls a moment when he and his cohort see a pack of wolves from above. He recalls, "In those days we had never heard of passing up a chance to kill a wolf" (130). They all open fire, mortally wounding two of the wolves, mother and pup. He further relates, "We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes…I was young then…I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunter's paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view" (130).

[14] Patrick Wolfe famously demonstrates, "The logic of elimination not only refers to the summary liquidation of Indigenous people, though it includes that. In common with genocide…settler colonialism has both negative and positive dimensions. Negatively,

it strives for the dissolution of native societies. Positively, it erects a new colonial society on the expropriated land base—as I put it, settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event" (390).

[15] The story Hobson narrates in this piece of a deceased ancestor who learns how to shapeshift from a wolf reappears in *The Removed* (237-45).

[16] Lee lists Jackson among authors whose work Jones's reflects, along with H.P. Lovecraft, Cornell Woolrich, and Stephen King (259), while the Kirkus Review notes of Hobson's text, "As in a Shirley Jackson story, everything seems perfectly ordinary until it doesn't" (*Kirkus*).

[17] This tie between finger length and lycanthropy also appears in Blish's story.

[18] Unlike those of vampires and zombies, werewolf narratives, while emphasizing transitions between types of existence, do not always allow for a transition from someone born a human into a full-fledged werewolf. Such a move is impossible in Jones' construction.

[19] The boy's taunt is "Merricat, said Constance, would you like a cup of tea?" The full version continues, "Merricat, said Constance, would you like to go to sleep?" "Oh, no, said Merricat, you'll poison me" (107).

[20] Moreover, as is the case for the protagonists of *Mongrels* and *WDST*, as Eunju Hwang notes, in Jackson's "Gothic fiction…Home…is not a safe place that secures one's happiness" (119).

[21] We can also read a verisimilitude in a character being tired of explaining such a thing.

[22] Even the roadside location of this telling reflects the boundary between the tamed road and the wilderness just outside of its reaches, another cusp.

[23] As such, we find ourselves wondering if he is truthful about the source and accidental nature of his facial scars.

[24] Sequoyah continues, explaining that he now "drew landscapes, objects of my desire, things to represent my longing for companionship in my time of sickness. This is how I remember it. I drew buildings on fire. I drew a clown holding a machine gun, and a dog frothing at the mouth. I drew an old man dead in a rocking chair. His head was slumped over and he was bleeding from his chest" (167). These disturbing images are fairly common for Sequoyah, who admits to a violent sexual fantasy regarding Rosemary as well. To that end, Hobson has noted that most [readers and interviewers] just ask how disturbed [Sequoyah] is and how dangerous. They tend to think he's a bad, bad person and that's he's a super psychopath" (Michal). But, having spent years working with Native foster children, Hobson explains his complex sentiments for the

round character he has constructed, "I feel sorry for him at times, but other times not so much" (Carroll).

[25] Jarlath Killeen similarly celebrates the "generic openness of the Gothic and its ability to migrate and adapt to formal circumstances far removed from its 'original' manifestations in the late eighteenth century" (3).

[26] Kristin Squint's 2018 monograph, *Leanne Howe at the Intersections of Southern and Native American Literature*, takes a similar regional approach.

[27] A great deal of scholarship works to place Jones's work particularly within various genres, though he asserts, "The only genre is fiction" (Washburn 79). In discussing Jones's *All the Beautiful Sinners* and *Growing up Dead in Texas*, Waegner notes "gothic and postmodern thrusts are profoundly interconnected" (194). Quinney avers that *Demon Theory*'s "multimedia effect" "explicitly position[s] the novel within a genealogy of gothic literature" (291). LaLonde gothically reminds, "one is rarely far from death in the fiction of Stephen Graham Jones" (218). Nor are these connections unique to Jones's work. As Lush notes, "gothic tropes have long supported the literary representation of Native peoples" (306). Meanwhile, Stratton places "the truly malicious descriptions of Native people in the journals and sermons of colonizers and land-takers such as…Increase Mather" in the context of "pregothic horror" ("Come for the Icing" 6).

[28] The screenplay for this film is written by Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d'Alene), and based largely on stories from his collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, particularly "This is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona."

[29] We might relate Vizenor's term "crossblood" here, which he offers in lieu of "mixed-blood" as well as more pejorative terms like "half-breed." Vizenor contends, "Crossbloods hear the bears that roam in trickster stories, and the cranes that trim the seasons close to the ear. Crossbloods are a postmodern tribal bloodline, an encounter with racialism, colonial duplicities sentimental monogenism, and generic cultures" (vii). But, I'm also thinking of Stacy Alaimo's trans-corporeality. Alaimo explains, "Imagining human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment'" (2).

[30] At the same time, Van Alst asserts, "Unless I'm told otherwise, all the characters [in Jones's work] are Indian. But best of all, very best of all, they're incidentally Indian" (xiv). Similarly, Lush avers, Jones "does not emphasize the 'Nativeness' of a character, and that lack of emphasis actually places the reader in a Native-centric world" (310).

[31] Where *Mongrels* offers an awareness of its own narrative as a deflection from something else but leaves that something else unnamed and its racialization obfuscated, *WDST* provides clear references to its protagonist's Indigeneity. Being

Cherokee is important to Sequoyah, and being Native forms much of the bond between himself and Rosemary that will drive the narrative. I would go so far as to contend that *WDST* can be read as an allegory for Cherokee relations to the US federal government, particularly growing out of Cherokee removal (the much more direct topic of *The Removed*) and the ruling in Cherokee v. Georgia that imagined the relationship between Native nations and the US to be like "that of a ward to his guardian." In such a reading, we can further place Sequoyah's absent mother at the hands of settler juridical structures as a manifestation of the US's attempts to undermine Indigenous matriarchies broadly (see Piatote). That reading lies beyond the scope of this essay, but I hope and trust such a reading of Hobson's novel is forthcoming. Here I will simply note that Sequoyah places his movements as a foster child as part of a larger history of movement, one that he traces through his mother (2) and the Cherokee Nation (1). Of this tendency to not stay still he ponders, "Maybe it was in our Cherokee blood" (2).

[32] Libby tells him this chronicling (or his compulsion to do so) is both "sweet" and "stupid" (292).

[33] As Baudeman notes, "In Jones's novels, human history is represented as the sum of individual decisions and causal connections that readers can never fully make sense of, but that in fact only surface here and there as nodes in a structure of gaps, breaks, silences, and discontinuities" (151-52).

[34] The text tells of two other deaths, those of Simeon Luxe (103) and of his nemesis "dumb Nora Drake, who later died on January 19, 2003 of strangulation" (143). Sequoyah feels jealous that Rosemary chooses to spend time with Nora rather than with him.

[35] Moreover, Sequoyah's sexuality remains somewhat ambiguous, but people in Little Crow routinely address him with antigay slurs, taunts, and innuendoes.

[36] *Mongrels* asserts a similar toll that being a werewolf takes its toll on one's body. The Nephew's grandfathers tells him "We age like dogs…You can burn up your whole life early if you're not careful. If you spend too much time out in the trees" (10). Later, we learn from a non-werewolf who is married to a werewolf and knows considerably more about werewolf health, "You're supposed to drink as much water as you can before you shift…If you don't, your skin—you can start to get old before your time" (266).

[37] The concept of belonging in place is central to *The Removed* as well; that novel's final sentence reads, in its entirety: "*Home.*"

[38] Interestingly, Sequoyah notes, "When I was little I wanted to be someone else" (189). But we have seen throughout the novel that he has this want throughout the entirety of our familiarity with him. As such, the reader comes to understand that Sequoyah is

frequently not an entirely self-conscious or self-aware narrator, an understanding that leads the reader to question key elements of the story of himself that he presents. [39] Liz, Sequoya's case worker, explains "how safe it was out here in the country" (23). There's an irony here, since we know that Rosemary is going to die.

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"In the Shallows of a Lake that Goes on Forever": Reconstructing Native Becoming in Stephen Graham Jones's *Mapping the Interior*

ZACHARY S. LAMINACK

> father of ash. father of a past without a mouth. he who ate too much of / the sunset.
>
> What is it to live, to suffer, and, above all, to love in an emotionally inflexible world fashioned to produce men who eat "too much of the sunset?" We are haunted by that turning point, brought back to it again and again. But it doesn't once and for all consign us to a ravaged life. There is more to be said; there is another mode of life to inhabit.
>
> - Billy-Ray Belcourt

In the introduction to *Masculindians: Conversations about Indigenous Manhood*, Sam McKegney offers the title concept in an attempt to capture reductive representations of Indigenous masculinities within settler culture.[1] As McKegney explains, settler stereotypes produce images of Native men as "the noble savage and the bloodthirsty warrior" and their offshoots: "the ecological medicine man, the corrupt band councilor, and the drunken absentee" (1). Such figures, as Sarah Kent observes, have always been marked for death. "The *masculindian* is always dead before he arrives," Kent claims, because "there is no futurity for the figure of the *masculindian*" (123). Taiaiake Alfred likewise sees such figures as "meant to be killed" because they fuel settler fantasies of violence that in turn perpetuate the violent erasure of actual Native men (79). The line

between the "actual" and the image in these discussions reflects their grounding in the concept of simulations.[2] McKegney sees the "masculindian" as a tool for revealing settler cultural simulacra, akin to Gerald Vizenor's conception of the Indian as simulation from *Manifest Manners*, and offers it as a way to meet the "urgent need" to "grapple with both Indianness and masculinity" (3).[3] Robert Alexander Innes and Kim Anderson, in their introduction to *Indigenous Men and Masculinities*, contextualize the urgency of these critiques within statistical evidence of health disparity, victimization, and violence and argue that negative and limiting representations of Indigenous men stem from "the hegemonic masculinity that is perpetuated through white supremacist patriarchy and conveyed by education, news, and entertainment institutions" (9).[4] "As a result of the colonization of their lands, minds, and bodies," Innes and Anderson continue, "many Indigenous men not only come to accept these perceptions but also come to internalize them" (10). As these arguments make clear, Native masculinities as imagined within settler fantasies of violence and erasure are unlivable. The question that rises to the surface among all of these arguments, then, is how to repair masculinities in order to locate, as Kent puts it, "a liveable ontology for Indigenous masculinity" (122).

However, to the extent that questions of repair posit a "deficit model" of masculinity, as Jessica Perea argues in her essay on Iñupiaq men and masculinities, they reflect an animating sense of crisis that pervades the field of men's studies.[5] The notion of a deficit within contemporary masculinities, Perea suggests, tends to "assume that there was once one universal and honorable way to be a man" (127). Expressive of the orientation of men's studies toward deeply essentializing notions of gender that index masculinity to qualities supposedly inherent to bodies understood as male, the universalizing discourse of men's studies belies a fundamentally conservative orientation toward "past" models of masculinity within which one might find an

"honorable way to be a man" that could be recovered and redeployed.[6] Such deficit models arguably animate Innes and Anderson's thinking about how to break from "cycles of dysfunction" that they see as endemic to "white supremacist heteropatriarchal masculine identities" while retaining masculinity as a core concept that can be disarticulated from narratives of "indigenous deficiency," in Daniel Heath Justice's terms (2).[7] McKegney's "cautious commitment to the ongoing prescience of masculinity" likewise suggests that deficit models animate some discussions of recovery throughout the collection, particularly when such concepts are grounded in "traditional" conceptualizations of gendered roles that one can recover or "dig up" (4).[8]

As McKegney notes, however, such questions are fraught from the outset with concerns over "the pull of gender essentialism, biological determinism, and what Vizenor calls the 'faux science' of 'race'" (3). Added to these problematics, in his recent *Carrying the Burden of Peace*, McKegney further cautions "vigilance" against the threat of what he calls "corrosive inheritances" of heteropatriarchy: "homophobia, misogyny, and/or hypermasculinity" (xxii-xxiii). Considering McKegney's cautions, how might the notion of "corrosive inheritances" further complicate efforts to recover past masculinities or to reawaken gendered knowledges imagined as flowing through one's blood? In the context of a discussion regarding recovering rites of passage into manhood, Richard Van Camp, whose novel *The Lesser Blessed* is often cited in conversations about Indigenous masculinities, explains "I love to ask people . . . 'When did you know you were a man? When did you feel that body wake up inside your blood?'" (188). Offered as an alternative to settler stories of becoming gendered, Van Camp's sense of a body "waking up" in the blood suggests a view of the body as what Lisa Tattonetti has recently called a "somatic archive of Indigenous knowledge" (78). Drawing on studies of trauma and affect, Tattoneti reads "N. Scott Momaday's trope of

memory in the blood" as an early encapsulation of more recent scientific studies of affective inheritance that suggests "historical trauma persists within the body at a cellular level" and that as a result we might also speculate that "survival mechanisms" likewise persist and flow as "memories in the blood" (78-79). Van Camp's sense of manhood "awakening" in the blood may suggest "blood memory" as a kind of sociosomatic inheritance that one's body and oneself becomes. Though Van Camp imagines the body waking up in one's blood as a "survival mechanism," in the sense of waking up to the potential knowledges carried in one's blood, how might this way of imagining blood also work to solidify conceptual links between masculinity as a "lived cluster of meanings" in McKegney's phrasing (5), and "manhood" as a supposedly essential biological quality lying in wait in one's blood?

The "masculindian" or other ways of naming colonialist formations of Indigenous manhood, imagined as simulacra of settler culture or as distracting and damaging layers of settler history that have accumulated around and thus obfuscated core notions of Indigenous manhood beneath, appear as different versions of Van Camp's image of a masculine body in one's blood waiting to be awakened. Though not always presented through such metaphors, arguments that one's experience of life is an experience of aberration that has thwarted the potential to become otherwise posit that an otherwise nevertheless exists but has not yet found the catalyst that will precipitate its actualization. From a perspective oriented toward deconstructing and dismantling the permeation of settler heteropatriarchy and racialized formations within which Indigeneity becomes "Indianness," such lines of critique are necessary interventions into the continual barrage of misrepresentations and their effects on everyday ways of living. But how might those same ways of thinking about gender, particularly with respect to "manhood" and "tradition," flow alongside settler chronobiopolitical narratives wherein "failure to become" is viewed as an aberration

that, to paraphrase Billy-Ray Belcourt, consigns one to a ravaged life? How are the imagined "failures" variously configured within notions of futureless Native masculinities also stories of "squandered potential" as Junior, protagonist of Stephen Graham Jones's *Mapping the Interior*, imagines them (16)? And what happens when such narratives are fused with notions of dormancy, and "squandered potential" becomes a way of figuring masculine "failure" in terms of heredity and biology, as something that "awakens" in one's blood? What lies in wait "inside" within these ways of storying Native masculinities?

Mapping the Interior is a narrative of "squandered potential," but not in the ways those terms are typically deployed. Junior tells the story of his adolescence as being shaped around his father's absence from his life and the stories of "squandered potential" (16) offered to explain that absence. The main narrative sequences take place between Junior's twelfth and thirteenth birthdays. Throughout them, Junior experiences sleepwalking episodes during which he begins to see a silhouette figure he believes to be his father returned from the dead. Junior theorizes sleepwalking, however, in a way that destabilizes his—and readers'—certainty as to the content of his vision:

> To sleepwalk is to be inhabited, yes, but not by something else, so much. What you're inhabited by, what's kicking one foot in front of the other, its yourself. . . If anything, being inhabited by yourself like that, what it tells you is that there's a real you squirming down inside you, trying all through the day to pull up the surface, look out. But it can only get that done when your defenses are down. When you're sleeping. (12)

The "real you" Junior imagines bears striking resemblance to Van Camp's images of dormant masculinity and through that image Jones situates Junior's experience of the silhouette figure he sees as the beginnings of a "dim shape" he feels himself becoming

(99). That dim shape—a silhouette outline of a fancydancer that recurs throughout the narrative (14, 52, 62, 69, 88-89, 91)—is drawn around details from stories that color Junior's imagination of his father's life. As his aunts tell it, Junior's father wanted to be a fancydancer as a boy but the world got in the way. Instead of becoming a dancer, Junior's father kept "living [his] high school years five years after high school" (30), and was found dead in a lake on the reservation by the time Junior was four. Recalling his aunt's description of his father as being "how you talk about dead people… especially dead Indians," Junior notes that such talk is "all about squandered potential, not actual accomplishments" (16). Junior's reflections frame the narrative of his becoming-masculine as a process of becoming a silhouette story of "squandered potential" and cast his adolescence as a period in which that "potential" begins to wake up. Unfolded through metaphors of "life cycles" and chrysalides (107, 46), Jones imagines Junior as living through determinist models of Native masculinity that posit "potential" as a hereditable content that one will perpetually fail to actualize as one "develops" into an adulthood shaped by talk about "dead Indians" (16). Through Junior's story and the storyworld in which Jones wraps Junior's experiences, Jones highlights the relationship between story—how one narrates the possible and the impossible—and becoming. Talk about "dead Indians" forecloses on futures in which one might *live* otherwise, Jones suggests, because living otherwise appears impossible to actualize within stories of "squandered potential" (16).

Although *Mapping* may appear to follow the general shape of critiques of Indigenous masculinities as overdetermined models that nevertheless "produce very real men," in Brenden Hokowhitu's phrase ("Taxonomies" 81), the silhouette figure Junior imagines himself becoming challenges notions of "internalized" colonial models of masculinity and deeply problematizes the search for reparable and recoverable models of manhood. The figure Junior imagines first as the fancydancer his father

always wanted to be in life eventually takes on monstrously vampiric form and feeds on Junior's brother Dino's blood (88-89). *Mapping* illustrates that this figure, decidedly not a figure of repair, likewise lies dormant in stories of "blood." Stories in which possible masculinities are narrated as "either penetrative or extractive," as Daniel Heath Justice observes, represent a "catastrophic failure of the imagination and a huge ethical breach" ("Fighting Shame" 145). It is out of this kind of "tradition," storied through narratives of "squandered potential" as a "life cycle," that Jones suggests vampiric silhouettes emerge. Cast through a father who feeds on his son's blood, Jones links the critical frame of an absent future to the notion of potential as something one inherits through blood and then actualizes into "accomplishments" or "squanders" into the next generation's inheritance. *Mapping*'s dark portrayal of Native masculinity as a vampiric cycle of self-destruction nevertheless holds out peoplehood and kinship as possible alternatives to the self-sustaining cycles of extractive violence that try to drain those concepts of their future.[9]

In this vein, *Mapping* imagines living and feeling through the conceptual knots of masculinity, Indianness, and blood in ways that foreground the inescapable tethers of such concepts to essentialist and biologically determinative racial constructs. Throughout the narrative these constructs figure as a generic "Indianness" with which Junior identifies and through which Junior apprehends the silhouette figure he believes to be his father's rematerialized potential. As already dead or death-bound, the silhouette figure Junior perceives suggests the influences of "masculindian" constructs. The narrative's conceptualization of generic Indianness as patrilineal inheritance, however, complicates such readings. Junior remembers his father as a man who "never danced. He didn't go to pow-wows" was "neither a throwback nor a fallback. He didn't speak the language, didn't know the stories, and didn't care that he didn't" (14). In terms of relations to land, Junior recalls his father joining fire crews "not to protect any

ancestral land" but because he could sell the fire service-issued pants to hunters in the fall (14). Of his father's childhood, Junior imagines that "When you grow up in Indian country, the TV tells you how to be Indian" (15). He recalls his aunts explaining that when "his eyes were still big with dreams" Junior's father had been "really into bows and arrows and headbands," "the exciting part of your heritage" that Junior wryly observes "you can always find at the gift shop" (15). Of specific stories or tribal traditions, Junior recalls them only in terms of stories from the "old-time Indian days" (107), which he often dismisses as childish in the same breath (101). Taken together, these details suggest that the stories of "dead Indians" Junior inherits, and out of which he tries to discern the shape of the man he feels himself becoming, profoundly shape Junior's retrospective narration of his becoming-masculine.

Stories that take shape within structures of assimilative erasure, as Jones illustrates, foreclose on the ability to talk about the dead's "actual accomplishments" because such accomplishments appear otherwise unremarkable against "tradition"— speaking the language, dancing, and relating to one's ancestral territory— as a horizon of expectation. However, that Junior imagines *these* traditions as uninheritable further underscores the narrative's critique of blood metaphors in relation to masculinities and Indigeneity. *Mapping* here suggests that inheritance and Indigeneity (at least as imagined through language and land as important orientations of peoplehood) are not equivalent; but generic "Indianness" and the discursive frame within which it becomes a way of talking about impossible futures is imagined to flow through patrilineal lines of descent.[10]

What gets in the way of the "future" and what creates the conditions within which Junior imagines his father's return as a vampire who feeds on Dino is presented in the narrative as simply "the world" that finds and "does its thing" to Native men (98). At once an image of ambient and free-floating violence, "the world" also suggests

quotidian routines. In this vein, simply living—growing into adulthood—"does its thing." Junior's world is filled with detective shows (56, 81), bus stop and school violence (26, 39, 57-58), ferocious, rabid dogs (29, 42-55), an enraged and potentially homicidal neighbor who Junior may or may not have murdered in self-defense (70-75), an abusive sheriff's deputy (74-75), and the threatening rematerialization of his father-as-vampire (80-89). "The world" thus presents Junior with a near constant barrage of extractive and violent models of masculinity that become the background against which he perceives his father's return and his relationship to his father's silhouette form. The background, as Mark Rifkin develops the concept in *Beyond Settler Time*, "serves less as an inert setting than as the condition of possibility for registering action, change, survival… Absent a background, nothing can figure in or as the foreground and be available for attention, perception, or acknowledgement" (11). To the extent that violence is "the background," in this sense, of the world in which Junior lives, his father's "squandered potential," suggested by the fancydance regalia the figure appears to wear, figures in the foreground as the shape of Junior's becoming. In contradistinction to the tendency to assume "internalization" within critical discussions of Indigenous models of masculinity, *Mapping* suggests settler violence is the background condition of possibility against which masculinities in general can figure. Jones thus critiques notions of "tradition" as a recuperative well for Native masculinities because the concepts of "tradition" and "masculinity" appear inextricable from the background violence against which they take form.

Part of what the "world" of broader settler violence does, Jones suggests, is reproduce a patriarchal orientation toward women and, in *Mapping*, toward stories of peoplehood, kinship, and land. Junior's family lives in a modular home "down in the flats" off the reservation (100). Noting the difference between a modular home and a "trailer," Junior explains that a modular house "stays there, more or less" while "a

trailer. . . can still roam if need be" (18). Junior's mother, though, refers to "home" as the reservation, explaining at one point that "if we were back home, everybody would be saying" that Junior looks like his father (37). Despite her fear for what her sons might become on the reservation, she remembers it as a place of kinship and peoplehood. "Unlike Dad," Junior recalls, "she wasn't still living her high school years five years after high school. But she did have her own sisters, and one brother still alive, and aunts and uncles and cousins and the rest, kind of like a net she could fall back into, if she ever needed them" (30). "The rest" suggests a broad "net" of relations and relationships. However, the background patriarchal violence against which her sons' futures appear fated to follow their father's also does its thing to her memories and sensations of kinship. As Junior narrates the memory, his mother felt these relations to have become a form of currency she was compelled to trade if she wanted to keep her sons alive: "But she cashed all that in. Because, she said, she didn't want either one of us drowning in water we didn't have to drown in, someday" (30). The scene suggests that the broader world of settler violence in which Junior experiences himself is the world in which his mother experienced her networks of relations as fungible for her son's potential futures. The narrative ironically casts these choices as likewise subject to "talk about… dead Indians" (16), though, because such potentials as might have been possible on the reservation remain obfuscated against the violence of dispossession.

Though Jones is not explicit about *Mapping*'s relationship to specific stories or lands, the narrative action resonates with Blackfeet story in ways that suggest an alternative "background" for the narrative action, one that is obscured, or rendered in "silhouette" through the "world" that "does its thing."[11] Junior recounts experiences within, between, and across what Rosalyn LaPier describes as "three dimensions" of the universe within Blackfeet knowledge: "the Above world, the Below World, and the Water world" (26). LaPier explains that these dimensions are understood to be

"parallel… existing side by side and separate. But they were also interconnected and permeable" (26). Junior's experiences in various spaces throughout the narrative including in a lake on the reservation at the narrative's conclusion (91-92), a scene to which I return below, may allude to Blackfeet conceptualizations of multidimensionality. Further, it is also possible that *Mapping*'s plot alludes to Blackfeet stories of supernatural beings who, as LaPier writes, "transcended" the three dimensions, "such as Napiwa, Kotoyissa, and Paie" (27). LaPier explains:

> Napiwa, or Old Man, is a supernatural being who as far as we know has lived forever. He was foolish, petty, and greedy. He lived life in the extreme, always wanting too much or too little. Katoyissa, or Blood Clot, was a superhero who travelled the Below world, ridding it of monsters to make it safer for the Niitsitapi, or humans. And Paie, or Scar Face, played a similar role in the Above world. He became a superhero for his role in travelling the Above world, ridding it of evil beings to make it safe for the beings in the Above world. (27)

The superhero, whether as an image or as an action figure, recurs throughout *Mapping* (26, 32, 69, 82-83, 90-91, 106),[12] and is often figured as a bridge between moments set in different "levels" of the house—whether below or above—as well as being represented as a key element of Junior's transportation to the lake in which he confronts his father (90-91). Additionally, Junior recalls his father in terms similar to LaPier's characterization of Napiwa or Old Man through a story of "the old-time Indian days" in which "a father died, but then he came back. He was different when he came back, he was hungry, he was selfish, but that's just because he already had all that in him when he died, I know. It's because he carried it with him into the lake that night" (105). Junior, likewise, suggests LaPier's characterization of Katoyissa because he imagines himself as "the one who fought the monster" for Dino, "for all of us" (104). Similarly, in a scene where Junior lays outside at night and feels for the moment an

urge to fly his brother Dino's superhero action figure against a backdrop of stars (69), Jones may be alluding to Blackfeet stories of Paie, or Scar Face that LaPier describes as a "superhero" of the above world.

To the extent that Blackfeet notions of multidimensionality and entities within Blackfeet story might make up the structure of Junior's experiences they suggest the superimposition of competing backgrounds. Yet, when such suggestions appear in the text, Junior dismisses them as childlike fantasy: as when he resists the urge to fly Dino's superhero against the stars because he "wasn't a kid anymore" (69); or when following Junior's description of encountering his father in the lake, he imagines a conventional close to "a lot of Indian stories"—in which his mother "gathers [the boys] in her arms" and "the moon or a deer or a star" comes down "making everything whole again"—as being from "a long time ago" "before we all grew up" (101). Junior's consistent dismissals of the potential resonance of Blackfeet story echo his earlier sense of the way one talks about "dead Indians" (16). Through the suggestion that knowing Blackfeet story, or more generally the stories of one's people, might help Junior re-narrate and reframe his sense of himself in relation to his people, Jones offers dismissal of that potential as a kind of deadness. Whether in the sense that something within Junior that would be otherwise receptive to story has been killed by a world hostile to it or that through growing into adulthood Junior was encouraged to become "dead to" potentialities in excess of settler framings of "the world," Jones casts this sort of deadness as the orientation of "properly" acculturated Native men—"dead Indians" in the novel's idiom—who believe their potential to become otherwise has already been "squandered."

To the extent that such stories *could* have provided a sense of the world as existing otherwise than as represented in the broader settler imaginary, they represent talk of "squandered potential" against the reality of "actual accomplishments" (16).

The "actual" in this sense refers to the "real world" (103) in which causal connections between actions and outcomes appear self-evident and discrete. The contrast between "real" and childlike ways of placing experience within a broader narrative framework—such as Junior's sense of "reality" as an unfolding forensic narrative juxtaposed to "Indian" story as childlike fantasy one grows out of as "the world" "does its thing" (98)—points to the dramatic irony between Junior's story and the storyworld *Mapping* wraps around him. Through Junior's ambivalent relation to Blackfeet storying, Jones highlights the extent to which he experiences becoming-masculine as a process that requires distancing himself from "story" in ways that translate the potential of Blackfeet storying to help situate his lived experience into a relic of outdated "Indianness" "from a long time ago" (101).

Given the suggestion of Blackfeet story as a possible background against which to orient Junior's experience of becoming-masculine, his distance from those stories stands out in sharp relief. He imagines that distance spatially—as being "nearly a whole state away" from the reservation—and temporally as stories emanating from a past long ago (101). Junior's feeling estranged from place and story suggests the narrative's presentation of masculinity and generic Indianness unfolds in part through a critique of settler time. Within settler timelines, lived relations to place, people, and land are often narrated as "of a past" incommensurable with a present understood as "a neutral, common frame" against which other ways of conceptualizing or sensing time appear either as aberrations or as different ways of conceiving of what is ultimately the same temporal plane (Rifkin, *Beyond* 3).[13] Part of Junior's struggle to understand his father's potential reemergence throughout the narrative and to reconcile it with his own feelings of becoming the silhouette he perceives comes from his difficulty reconciling the possibility of their occurring simultaneously in different places and times. Viewed from a temporal frame of reference in which the present always succeeds the past and

moves toward the future, reemergent figures such as the silhouette Junior experiences appear to "haunt" from a past that breaks into or disrupts the present.[14] However, Junior's experience of space and time collapses when he confronts the materialized silhouette and attempts to drown it by plunging Dino's superhero action figure into the kitchen sink. "It slipped into the cold water, and then—" Junior recalls, "—and then the water, it was lapping all around us. Around both of us… We were on the reservation… We were in the shallows of the lake" (91-92). Breaking the section on either side of the em dash, Jones graphically illustrates Junior's experience of moving through space and time. Notably, the water and the superhero figure—suggesting allusions to elements of Blackfeet story and multidimensionality—combine to transport Junior to a lake on the reservation where he experiences mysteriously having become an adult confronting his father's conventionally human form in the moments before he drowned (90-92). Within the temporal frame of Junior's story, this sequence of events would have taken place at least nine years earlier when Junior and Dino would have been four and one respectively. At the time, Junior was in the hospital "nearly dying of pneumonia" (13). As such, reconciling the experience through the rubric of the conventional present appears impossible. However, the event is narrated as though it occurs in "real time" in the same way as any other scene, and thus suggests that Junior experiences this moment as a moment of multidimensionality.

From this frame of reference, the events within the sequence in the lake become possible turning points that present alternative ways of inhabiting one's relationship to land and peoplehood. In the lake he sees his father, "'Park' in this memory," who recognizes him as "Junior" (92, 94). Junior is determined to drown Park in order to "save Dino. No matter how much it hurt" (95). As Junior pummels Park, he is interrupted for a moment by Park's striking question: "'What are you… What are we *doing*, Junior, man?'" Despite the question, Junior presses ahead with the actions he

believes to be fated, and drowns his father "in the shallows of a lake that goes on forever" (103). However, Jones leaves open the possibility that the question Park poses is part of the central structure that tethers Junior to this moment and keeps the determinative cycle going, a structure reproduced as Park's and Junior's "spitting image," Collin (103).

The feeling of being tethered to a place one is compelled to revisit and a moment one is compelled to relive is another way of signaling the determinist conjunction of racial formations and discourses of impossibility Jones describes as "squandered potential" and the way one talks about "dead Indians" (16). Through the image of a tetherball pole (33), which Junior years later finds still standing near the site of their burned-down-years-ago modular home when he returns with Dino in hopes of re-cycling the process (105), Jones illustrates the scene of Junior's memories as an anchorage that ensures his eventual return. Importantly, this anchorage is off reservation, and within the terms through which the book presents something like landedness in relation to peoplehood, it is "outside" the boundaries of the "net" of people and relations Junior's mother imagines there (30). Thus, in geopolitical terms, Junior is tethered to a place that appears to keep him away from his people. However, despite not knowing the precise location of "the flats" where *Mapping* takes place, the extent of Blackfeet homelands encompasses the better part of present-day northern Montana, the majority of which was recognized by the U.S. as Blackfeet territory in an 1855 treaty with the Blackfoot Confederacy.[15] The contrast between "the reservation" and "the flats" highlights the clustered effects and affects produced by the successive encroachments on and dispossessions of Blackfeet territory since the 1855 treaty, including especially the "ceded strip" that today makes up part of Glacier National Park.[16] In this vein, figuring the reservation as "home" as opposed to imagining "home" to extend beyond the reservation boundary suggests that the confluence of

settler geopolitics, jurisprudence, and dispossession has severed Junior's experience of relations to family and kin from his experience of land and territory. In other words, as a policy object and geopolitical boundary the reservation is not equivalent to homeland, but the homelands on "the flats" don't feel like home. The image of the tetherball pole that keeps Junior anchored to a space he experiences as a home that is less than home figures this disjuncture, and through it Jones suggests that among the "things" the world does as it stories "dead Indians" into being is deaden the sense of connection to land and place by tethering the notion of authentic and authenticating peoplehood to the reservation in ways that allow for re-narrating off-reservation space as devoid of relations that sustain peoplehood.

Imagined as, in Billy J. Stratton's terms, "a spectral frontier landscape" where the neighbors are murderous and their dogs are even more so ("Habitations"), the tetherball-poll-as-anchorage further suggests that this off-reservation space has become an origin point from which models of vampiric masculinity emerge and remerge. Try as he might to get away, the strings attaching bodies to unlivable lives anchored to a landscape storied as a zone of erasure and disappearance will always pull Junior back to the center. Temporally, returning to the scene suggests a cyclical story in orbit around a fixed point, but the temporal fixity I would argue actually straightens the temporality of the scene around patrilineal descent in a way that sees "return" as successive rather than cyclical. In this sense, Jones presents the two settings, "the reservation" and the modular homesite, as different temporal backgrounds against which Junior's experience of time likewise shifts. Jones thus illustrates the ways in which the notion of the "background" as that which enables figures to appear in the foreground can also be applied to time as, in Rifkin's terms, "the conditions of emergence for particular temporal sensations" (*Beyond* 24). In the "shallows of a lake that goes on forever," Junior experiences multidimensional realities

in which choices affecting the sensation of duration ("forever") in relation to becoming can be made. At the modular homesite, in contrast, Junior experiences a unidimensional present that is "tethered" to a past which in turn determines the rhythms and sensations of the future to the extent that a future can be imagined beyond the story of "squandered potential."

Shifting frames of reference thus shift the ways temporal sequences can be imagined, and from which multidimensionality and multiple temporalities can be imagined as coextensive but not co-determinative nor mutually exclusive. Jones illustrates this possibility through expanding the notion of inhabitance Junior experiences as sleepwalking earlier in the narrative. After being transported into the water, Junior recalls: "And then it hit me: the same way that, when sleepwalking, I was kind of inhabiting *myself*, that's what I was doing here. Just, now I was inhabiting someone *else*. Someone before… I had access to this truck owner's memories, too, and remembered them like they'd *happened* to me" (92). The lake and the water enable Junior to experience forms of collective temporal sequence as potentially expressive of a collective sensation of peoplehood. Jones imagines this element of *Mapping*'s alternate temporality through Junior's sense of relation to "Every fourth person on our reservation," who also is named "Junior," "like the same stupid person is trying life after life until he gets it right at last" (94). From this frame of reference, "life after life" suggests an expansive network of mutually unfolding attempts to live otherwise that Junior experiences and seemingly inhabits collectively. Through the moment of collective temporal experience, Jones suggests that Junior senses a connection to peoplehood otherwise unavailable to him from other frames of reference and against other temporal backgrounds. Park's question, "What are we *doing*?" stands out as a moment in which Junior *could* have recognized the "we" as stretching beyond paternal lineage, and thus beyond fathers and sons and blood, to encompass a

broader "net" of people represented in the narrative as "the reservation" but figured throughout as suggestive of kinship that transcends the boundaries imposed on Native space.

To the extent that something like a Blackfeet surround might be understood to form an alternative temporal and phenomenological background in *Mapping*, Jones suggests that recognizing it depends on the stories and memories to which one has access. As I have argued throughout, the language of "squandered potential" is the story through which Junior apprehends and imagines his father's absence and his relationship to it as he recalls becoming-masculine. That story narrates Junior's life as a "cycle" that turns within the racial formation of generic Indianness. Within that formation, "potential" is imagined as inheritable through blood and inevitably "squandered" through the ways the "world" "does its thing" in situating masculinity against a background of settler violence where Native becoming appears in silhouette, an outline suggestive of hopelessly obfuscated content. Within such storyscapes, notions of "tradition" appear anchored to the past in ways that cannot be actualized in the present and sensations of peoplehood and land feel epiphenomenal. Figures such as McKegney's "Masculindian" appear as already marked for death, signifying in Kent's terms a kind of living-as-walking-dead inextricable from "colonialism's reliance on necropolitics" or "the governmental determination of the disposability of certain subjects" (122). The search for ways to live through such stories—to find liveable ontologies, to recall Kent's phrase—appears bound to the genre conventions of settler storytelling, as Junior's forensic search for clues that might help him solve the mystery of his father's absence and yield new facts with which to reconstruct his life illustrates. As Glen Coulthard notes, discursive formations are "not neutral; they 'construct' the topic and objects of our knowledge; they govern 'the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about.' They also influence how ideas are 'put

into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others.'" (103). Hokowhitu reminds us that "the construction of masculinities through the discursive terrain of colonial masculinity produces very real men, who inhabit history, who embody and thus make real the discursive field, who bring to life the world of forms so to speak" ("Taxonomies" 81), and that such constructs often "conceal [their] genesis" as "cultural fictions" ("Producing" 31). When such fictions take as their terrain heteropartiarchal "discourses and policies," Rifkin argues, they "generate the impression of a sphere of life whose contours are biologically determined (since they supposedly are necessary for human reproduction itself) that exists independently of all forms of political determination, negotiation, and contestation" ("Around 1978," 173). As *Mapping* illustrates throughout, stories figuring Native masculinities through a language of "squandered potential," including critical narratives in which "death" is the outcome for the "simulations" that stalk settler imaginaries, are inevitably stories of violence against becoming otherwise because such stories aim to reconstruct becoming around the supposedly self-evident neutrality of heteropatriarchy.

Violent settler storyscapes like these are a part of how the "world" "does its thing" through the language of "squandered potential," an everyday form of biopolitics which Jones clearly couches as a critique of racist narratives of Indigenous deficiency. Jones imagines the violence of such narratives viscerally through a father figure returned to feed on his son's blood. Importantly, the son on which the father feeds is imagined as "already slowing down, or, really, topping out" (87). The silhouette figure needs Dino because, Jones suggests, the figure's feedings have arrested Dino's cognitive abilities and as such he has retained his childhood imagination against the world that has "done its thing" to Junior and Junior's father. Dino's "blood" is thus pure potential, in the narrative's frame, from which men who haven't become in life what they'd hope to become as children, like Junior's father, can

return to find energy for a new beginning. Couched throughout as a heroic effort to save Dino from the monster, Junior's choice to sacrifice Dino in hopes of bringing back his own son Collin betrays Junior's intentions (106). Junior makes this decision at the site of the modular home, anchored to the geotemporal location from which his frame of reference forecloses on his ability to acknowledge notions of connection or peoplehood that lie outside the lines of patrilineal descent. Jones offers the scene through another indictment of the "world" that does its thing. Junior explains:

> in the movies, after you beat up the bad guy… then all the injuries it inflicted, they heal right up. That's not how it works in the real world. Here's one way it can work in the real world: the son you accidentally father at a pow-wow in South Dakota grows into the spitting image of a man you remember sitting in the shallows of a lake that goes on forever. Like to remind me what I did, what I'd had to do. (103)

Junior's sense of what he "had to do" is another way of representing the notion of a phenomenal background of experience. Against the background of broader settler violence, erasure, and dispossession, what presents itself in the foreground is further violence construed as a painful and impossible zero-sum choice.

Focused on "life cycles" as images of biological determinism, *Mapping*'s imagined return of the father to feed on the son illustrates the ways blood metaphors rely on the presumption of biological essentialism for their meaning. Through a sustained cycle of emergence, violence, and absence, the men in *Mapping* offer a dark illustration of what it might be like to live through essentialist narratives of "Indianness" as blood. The recurrent motif of "squandered potential" likewise plays into rhetorical tropes of tragedy and the vanishing Indian embedded in notions of blood and racialized forms of kinship and family. The threat that one's blood will "run out" makes blood a valuable resource. Imagining a vampiric father figure who needs Dino's blood,

"something inside him" (87), "inside of Dino's bones" (84), to get solid enough to live as he was supposed to, Jones illustrates the ways in which bodies and blood can be situated as resources whose "content" becomes "extractable" as sustenance for a future that seems otherwise impossible without it. Junior recalls a moment when he began to realize what the silhouette figure wanted and what it would eventually take:

> I always thought—I think anybody would think this—that when you come back from the dead like he had, that you're either out to get whoever made you dead, or you're there because you miss your people, are there to help them somehow.
>
> The way it was turning out, it was that you could maybe come back, be what you'd always wanted to be, but to do that, you had to latch on to your people and drink them dry, leave them husks. After that, you could walk off into your new life, your second chance. With no family to hold you back. (80)

The passage illustrates the conceptual translation of kinship into blood that is part and parcel of the discursive production of "Indianness" as a racial formation that abets processes of dispossession and removal. Part of the ways the structures of dispossession perpetuate themselves, the passage suggests, is through mapping colonial models of extraction onto paths to becoming "what you'd always wanted to be" when whatever one wants to be appears impossible to become in life (80). The sense of the impossible is sustained, Jones suggests, through "cycles" of vampiric heteropatriarchal relationships configured as the past returned to drain the future of life. Reconstructing the same set of facts reproduces the same set of assemblages. To break from such "cycles," one has to tell a different story. As Jones has written elsewhere, "If you wrap yourself in the right story, everything makes sense" ("Werewolf" 7).

Mapping highlights the tension between settler stories of futureless becoming and the potential of Blackfeet story to ground narratives in an otherwise actualizable set of conditions within which different stories than those of vampiric fathers and drowning sons might be told. Junior's father "didn't know the stories, and didn't care that he didn't" (14). "Stories," writes Louis Owens, "make the world knowable and inhabitable. Stories make the world, period… Silence a people's stories and you erase a culture. To have graphic evidence of this phenomenon, all we have to do is look at a map" (210-211). *Mapping the Interior* closes with this sense of story as what makes the world inhabitable and how the topography of one's map can detail the ways dispossession shapes the contours of bodies and experiences. Junior's map charts violence, dispossession, and dislocation as stories of erasure and "squandered potential." *Mapping the Interior* calls for different stories than those in which Native men appear already marked for death. Jones suggests that these different stories are not found in "tradition," nor in "blood," but in the way the water in a kitchen sink might lead to the "shallows of a lake that goes on forever" (103).

Notes:

[1] For the first epigraph, see Belcourt, *This Wound is a World*, p. 9. For the second epigraph, see Belcourt, *A History of My Brief Body*, p. 14. McKegney has also developed and applied the notion of the "masculindian" in other essays. See McKegney, "Masculindians"; "'pain, pleasure, shame. Shame.'"; and "'Beautiful Hunters with Strong Medicine.'"

[2] McKegney's sense that the "masculinidian" is a simulation reflects Jean Baudrillard's conceptualization of the simulation from *Simulation and Simulacra* as the "generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (1).

[3] For Vizenor's elaboration of simulations and hyperreality in relation to settler representations of Native people(s), see "Postindian Warriors," in *Manifest Manners*, pp. 1-44; for definitions of Vizenor's terminology, see *Fugitive Poses*, pp. 14-17; for a useful reading of the complex philosophical structure within which Vizenor deploys these terms, see Hume, "Gerald Vizenor's Metaphysics."

[4] "Hegemonic masculinity" as Innes and Anderson use the term refers to the dominant representation of idealized masculinity within a given cultural formation, in this case settler whiteness in the U.S. and Canada. Australian sociologist R. W. Connell is widely credited with having coined the term in the 1980s. For Connell's articulations of the concept, see *Masculinities* and *Gender and Power*.

[5] Perea alludes to a lengthy body of scholarship that has since the 1980s announced and theorized a "crisis" in masculinity, particularly (though often unnamed as such) white heterosexual masculinity in the U.S. For selected examples of this work, see Faludi; Kimmel, *Angry* and *Manhood*; Kaufman; and Malin. For a consideration of how U.S. fiction has represented white masculinity in crisis, see Robinson.

[6] For an example of this line of inquiry within studies of euromerican masculinities, see Kimmel, *Manhood*.

[7] In *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Justice gathers damaging settler narratives through which Native peoples have been characterized under "the story of Indigenous deficiency" (2), which he writes "seems to me an externalization of settler colonial guilt and shame" (4). For an elaboration of the many narratives Justice gathers under the phrase, see pp. 2-4.

[8] Considering tradition as outside of or apart from the structures through which settler superintendence is articulated raises difficult questions over the meaning and "content" of tradition. As Mark Rifkin argues in *When Did Indians Become Straight?*, "The citation of tradition does not itself guarantee that whatever is being designated remains unaffected by or exterior to settler socialities and governance; moreover, such formulations of tradition can function as a way of legitimizing native identity in ways that ultimately confirm, in [Taiaiake] Alfred's terms, liberal 'values and objectives.' Native feminists have explored the ways that contemporary articulations of peoplehood can rely on heteropatriarchal ideologies which are inherited from imperial policy but cast as key elements of tradition" (21). For the further elaboration of the critique, see pp. 17-25. Also see Barker, *Native Acts*; Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, pp. 79-103; and Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*.

[9] I use the term "peoplehood" to describe the novel's imagined alternative social formation in response to the novel's explicit avoidance of tribally specific markers. "Peoplehood" in its broadest sense also names social formations that are not dependent on lineal descent, federal recognition, geopolitical boundaries such as reservations, proximity to settler cultural imaginaries and figurations of "Indianness," nor to ethnological or anthropological imaginaries of cultural authenticity. For a discussion of peoplehood in this sense as a way of theorizing sovereignty, see Holm,

Pearson, and Chavis; for a discussion of peoplehood as a hermeneutic for Native literary studies, see Stratton and Washburn.

[10] Though not explicitly framed or addressed as such, *Mapping*'s critique of blood metaphors as ways to understand Native masculinities may also offer an implicit critique of blood metaphors as deployed within policy frameworks, especially blood quantum policies, used to determine Native identity. The Blackfeet Nation, of which Jones is an enrolled member, currently sets one-quarter Blackfeet blood as its enrollment criteria; however, this requirement has been challenged in the mid-1990s and again in the early 2010s as members of the Blackfeet Nation and "descendants," a term designating those without sufficient ancestry to enroll under extant blood quantum requirements, petitioned to change the policy from blood quantum to lineal descent. For reporting of these protests, see Redman, "Blackfeet—Fractioned Identity"; and Murry, "Tribe Split Over Blood Quantum Measurement." In his history of Blackfeet political organization since allotment, Paul Rosier notes that "blood" has been a key axis of factionalism among tribal members; see *Rebirth*. See also McFee, *Modern Blackfeet*. On the broader relationship of "blood" and blood metaphors, race and racial science, and Native peoples, see Tallbear.

[11] *Mapping* does not reference a specific location nor specific people(s). Some elements of the setting, however, suggest references to the Blackfeet Reservation, the boundaries of which border northwestern Montana to the east and south, the Canadian province of Alberta to the north, and Glacier National Park, a part of Blackfeet homelands and a continually contested boundary, to the west. Lakes within Glacier National Park, as LaPier writes, are prominent spaces within Blackfeet story. On Blackfeet lands and the political history of Glacier National Park, see Spence, *Dispossessing*, especially pp. 71-100; and Craig, Yung, and Borie, "Blackfeet Belong." *Mapping*'s ambiguous setting resonates with Jones's writing and comments regarding Indigenous identity and the critical reception of his and other Native writers' work. In "Letter to a Just-Starting-Out Indian Writer—And Maybe to Myself," Jones is sharply critical of the ways Indigeneity can overdetermine a work's literary value, foreclose on analyses of craft, and lock Native writers into exoticized market constructions (xi-xvi). However, Jones has also said, as Billy J. Stratton writes in "Come for the Icing, Stay for the Cake," that "because he is a Blackfeet person, his writings are necessarily Blackfeet and, more broadly, Native in their composition and literary significance. All of the stories he writes and shares emerge out of and draw significance from just such a Native understanding of the world, articulating a consciousness inextricably informed by his ancestry, travels, and experiences" (11).

[12] See also Jones's graphic novella, *My Hero* (2017).

[13] In *Beyond Settler Time*, Rifkin explores the relationship between theories of time and duration and conceptualizations of sovereignty and self-determination. In an effort to move beyond the supposed impasse of "modern" and "traditional," as one such way of naming temporal incommensurability, Rifkin argues for a conceptualization of temporal multiplicity that allows for "discrepant temporalities that can be understood as affecting each other, as all open to change, and yet as not equivalent or mergeable into a neutral, common frame—call it time, modernity, history, or the present." (3). For further elaboration of the concept, see esp. "Indigenous Orientations," pp. 1-47.

[14] Reviewers of *Mapping* have read the text in terms of haunting almost exclusively. For example, Sean Guynes reads *Mapping* as tracing "cycles of poverty, violence, and colonialism; of place, space, and time; of genre; of the expectations placed on contemporary Native authors—of being (and being made to be) Indian" (71). John Langan sees the novella as a "ghost story" as much as a "tale of haunting" and the "absences that bend and warp our lives" including especially the paternal absence at the core of the narrative, which Langan notes through reference to Junior's name, which "describes him in relation to someone else." Mark Springer likewise situates *Mapping* as a ghost story about "the ways in which the past forever haunts the present," and couches such haunting in terms of intergenerational trauma and "old wounds" that "never heal." Billy J. Stratton, in his review of the novel for the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, sees the novella's "haunting" as central to its representation of the lines between past and present and the inhabitances that such temporal clashes engender, and reads its characters as living on "the margins of a spectral frontier landscape" that suggests an "uncanny, almost Gothic American West."

[15] On October 17, 1855, members of the Piegan, Blood, Blackfeet, Gros Ventre, Nez Perce, and Flathead tribes and a delegation of U.S. officials and Indian Agents signed the "Treaty with the Blackfoot Indians." Article 4 of the treaty designates Blackfeet lands as follows: "the tract of country lying within lines drawn from Hell Gate or Medicine Rock Passes, in an easterly direction, to the nearest source of the Muscle Shell River, thence down said river to its mouth, thence down the channel of the Missouri River to the mouth of Milk River, thence due north to the forty-ninth parallel, thence due west on said parallel to the main range of the Rocky Mountains, and thence southerly along said range to the place of the beginning, shall be the territory of the Blackfoot nation, over which said nation shall exercise exclusive control, excepting as may be otherwise provided in this treaty." For the full text of the 1855 treaty, see blackfeetnation.com/government/treaties.

[16] On September 26, 1895, members of the Blackfeet nation entered into an agreement to sell the mountain portion of their reservation lands, part of what is today

Glacier National Park, to the United States for $1.5 million. For the full text of the agreement, see blackfeetnation.com/government/treaties. For a history of the events leading to the agreement and its aftermath, see Spence and Rosier.

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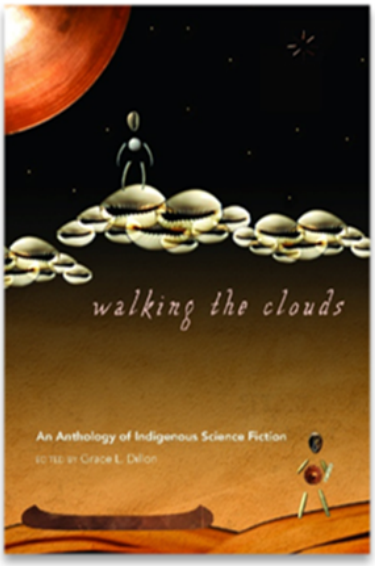
Speculative Possibilities: Indigenous Futurity, Horror Fiction, and *The Only Good Indians*

NICOLE R. RIKARD

A decade ago when Grace L. Dillon's *Walking on the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* was published, the term 'Indigenous futurisms' began to describe the vast body of work that had already been and would continue to be crafted by Indigenous storiers to create representations in visions of futurity. The term pays homage to Mark Dery's coinage of 'Afrofuturism' in his work, "Black to the Future," from *Flame Wars: Discourse of Cyberculture* (1993). In the 1990s, Dery sought to answer urgent questions surrounding speculative fiction, including why so few African American authors were composing in the genre, despite it being "seeming[ly] uniquely suited to the concerns of African-American novelists" who are "in a very real sense… the descendants of alien abductees" (179-180). Dery posed the question, "Can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of history, imagine possible futures?" (180). Since Dery's inquiry, scholars like Alondra Nelson, Ytasha L. Womack, and Greg Tate, just to name a few, have contributed to the growing body of scholarship on Afrofuturism and the immense possibilities it affords. It is not difficult to discern Dillon's inspiration—Afrofuturism is a vital critical movement that continues to influence Black activists, writers, musicians, filmmakers, scholars, artists, designers, and more, and it



Grace L. Dillon. *Walking the Clouds*. University of Arizona Press, 2012.

seeks to create spaces and futures "void of white supremacist thought and structure that violently oppress[es] Black communities" and to "evaluat[e] the past and future to create better conditions for the present generation of Black people through use of technology" (Crumpton par. 1).

Indigenous futurisms, like Afrofuturism, seek to explore the possibilities of alternate pasts, presents, and futures by decentering Western perspectives. The decentering of Western aesthetics and ideologies is essential and enables Indigenous futurisms to "offer a vision of the world from an Indigenous (or Native American) perspective," helping to address and explore difficult topics like "conquest, colonialism, and imperialism; ideas about the frontier and Manifest Destiny; about the role of women within a community; and about the perception of time" (Fricke 109). As we continue to address and advocate for change regarding the histories and atrocities of conquest, colonialism, and imperialism worldwide, decentering the Western narrative of these events—and therefore the narratives of how these events continue to impact individuals and communities—is crucial.

Decolonizing ideals and aesthetics is a theoretical and political process essential to decentering Western-normative notions and, for Indigenous studies, recentering Indigenous knowledges, cultural practices, and identities. Indigenous futurisms enable Indigenous activists, authors, musicians, and more to decolonize the narratives of the past, present, and future, and because the "Native American novel has been experimental, attracting and modifying subgenres to seek Native cultural survival and development… Native writers have made the novel their place of both formal and social innovation" (Teuton 98). To qualify, I am not suggesting that all Indigenous authors have or *must* use their works in the same ways or to achieve the same goals; to do so would be a gross misstep and extreme miscalculation of the literary and artistic

possibilities afforded when literature by individuals spanning 570+ federally recognized and unique Indigenous tribal nations in the contiguous United States alone are often combined into the category of Indigenous or Native American literature. Unfortunately, though, there is often a misconception about these possibilities. As Indigenous Literature scholar Billy J. Stratton states in a recorded interview with Stephen Graham Jones, prolific novelist, short-story and essay-writer and member of the Blackfeet Nation, "the notion of engaged readers and writers and the recognition of good art has a strong bearing on Native literature because it is not really allowed to be just entertainment. Gerald Vizenor has long been advocating the production of literature as a function of what he calls "surviv[ance], as a means to both persist and resist colonialism and its legacy" (34). Jones responds:

> When you're an American Indian writer, it's like you have all this political burden put on you—that you have to stand up for your people. You have to fight for this, and you can't depict people this way or that way… my big goal, one of the things I've been trying to do is to complicate the issue... (qtd. in Stratton 34)

The Only Good Indians (2020), a recent novel by Jones, exemplifies many strategies and characteristics of Indigenous futurisms while also functioning as an inventive work of horror fiction, a genre that has long been associated with popular culture and stigmatized by literary studies' establishments. Jones is a prolific author of many works of horror fiction including his most recent, *Don't Fear the Reaper* (2023), *The Babysitter Lives* (2022), *The Backbone of the World* (2022), "Attack of the 50 Foot Indian" (2021), "How to Break into a Hotel Room" (2021), *My Heart is a Chainsaw* (2021), "Wait for the Night" (2020), *Night of the Mannequins* (2020), and "The Guy with the Name" (2020), and scholars like Billy J. Stratton, Rebecca Lush, Cathy Covell Waegner, and John Gamber have contributed fruitful conversations concerning Jones and his work. Similarly, scholarship on Indigenous futurisms continues to grow, with

artists, scholars, and authors like Lou Catherine Cornum (Navajo), Suzanne Newman Fricke, Elizabeth LaPensée (Anishinaabe and Métis), Jason Lewis, Darcie Little Badger (Lipan Apache), Danika Medak-Saltzman (Turtle Mountain Chippewa), and Skawennati (Mohawk) cultivating the movement. This article seeks to further both conversations—on Jones and *The Only Good Indians,* as well as on Indigenous futurisms—by exploring the novel as a work of Indigenous futurism, specifically as it relates to rewriting the past, present, and future through various methods of Native slipstream. Jones combines fictional newspaper headlines and articles, a concentrated insistence on rationalization coupled with the inability to achieve such measures, and various points of view in this novel. The result is a depiction of resiliency and possibility for an alternative future in which Indigenous worldviews replace the damaging cycles created and perpetuated by Western ideologies. *The Only Good Indians* is an exceptional contribution to the field of Indigenous futurisms, and it substantiates that both horror and futuristic fiction can serve as an effective medium of decolonization.

Stephen Graham Jones.
The Only Good Indians. Saga Press, 2020.

Science Fiction, Horror, and Possibilities for Futurity

Indigenous futurisms are largely prominent in the speculative fiction subgenres of science fiction and fantasy, but they are certainly not mutually exclusive with these genres; in previous work, I have illustrated how even poetry is an effective and insightful genre being utilized by Indigenous poets to reflect futurity (Rikard). Science fiction is the literary genre that has received the most attention within the movement,

though, and this is due to several factors. First, like other subgenres of speculative fiction, science fiction allows for considerable imagining with technology and worldbuilding. In our innovative, technology-dependent contemporary moment, there is no question that science fiction enables authors to bridge our everyday obsession with and reliance upon technology with fictional world building. Additionally, science fiction has always been and continues to be a medium of alternate perceptions regarding our contemporary moment. In *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, and Dystopia* (2000), Thomas Moylan acknowledges that the genre is often misunderstood in two primary ways: many people understand it as a medium for depicting an inevitable and undesirable future caused by our contemporary flaws and damaging behaviors (usually classified as 'dystopian' or '(post)apocalyptic' fiction), or that it is simply a metaphorical retelling of the present moment. Moylan argues that the purpose of the genre is actually to "re-create the empirical present of its author and implied readers as an "elsewhere," an alternative spacetime that is the empirical moment but not that moment as it is ideologically produced by way of everyday common sense" (5). For Indigenous futurists, science fiction is used for more than just recreating the current moment in new spaces. Indigenous futurists craft new futures and spaces for Indigenous lives and communities by critiquing and modifying both the contemporary moment and the past. They illustrate how Western knowledge systems and values control the present and how history has been omitted and reconstructed to construe false narratives of Indigenous histories and lives.

Given considerably less attention than science fiction is how Indigenous storiers are using the horror genre to explore Indigenous futurity, especially in literature and literary studies. In recent decades, many works of horror have been acknowledged as critical formations (literary and experimental horror) instead of mere mediums of entertainment (genre horror), though the genre still struggles for legitimacy in many

literary spheres. Compare, for example, Toni Morrison's 'L'iterary *Beloved* (1987), Mark Z. Danielewski's experimental *House of Leaves* (2000), and Stephen King's highly popularized *The Shining* (1977) and the ways in which these novels have been received by popular culture and scholarly discourse. My intention is not to define literary horror and/or genre horror or sort titles into these categories; this is a fraught debate in literary circles that often leads to the blurring of lines between the two forms and an overall dispute to be settled elsewhere. What I argue, instead, is that genre horror fiction, literary or otherwise, often gets overlooked as a well-suited method of exploring contemporary issues and decolonizing Western modes of thinking and knowledge.

Horror fiction has become seemingly easier to define over time, though as already mentioned, it can be difficult to assess and agree upon which novels/stories bend genre conventions and still function as part of the genre. Despite a few misconceptions, horror fiction does not necessarily have to be concerned with the supernatural, but "rather with forces, psychological, material, spiritual, or scientific, that can be 'supernaturalized' and made into a force that threatens the living with annihilation" (Herbert par. 1). Spanning centuries, horror fiction has evolved to be categorized into two types of tales: those determined by an external threat or force, either supernatural or logically scientific, and those determined by an internal, psychological threat. There are, of course, times when stories blend these two types of horrors, such as in the case of *The Only Good Indians.* Whether internal or external threats abound, horror fiction:

> asks us to step back from any straightforward historical realism and read at the very core of what literature and the arts are about, that is, representation and interpretation, the symbolic, and the use of strategies of estrangement and

> engagement to explore and challenge cultural, social, psychological, and personal issues. (Wisker 404)

Horror fiction, like other speculative fiction genres, allows for a revisioning of recognized knowledge and the very Western normative ways in which this knowledge has been enforced and proliferated. This work is not intending to claim that Indigenous horror is new, but instead, that it is overlooked, especially within the literary arts and scholarship in Indigenous studies. And, like Dillon, this work advocates for the continuing use of horror fiction by Indigenous authors and works to subvert Western notions of normalcy regarding knowledge, history, time, and identity. As Blaire Topash-Caldwell states:

> Counter to research on the negative effects of Native American stereotypes on youth, positive representations of Native peoples observed in Indigenous SF portray alternative futurisms to those represented in mainstream SF and celebrate Indigeneity knowledge while making space for Indigenous agency in the future. (87)

As the Indigenous futurisms movement continues, Indigenous authors can use horror fiction to achieve similar possibilities afforded by science fiction and Indigenous futurisms.

Indigenous Horror and The Elk Head Woman

A discussion about *The Only Good Indians* is not possible without recognizing that the novel is a telling of the Elk Head Woman. Known by other Indigenous storiers as Deer Woman, Deer Lady, and in Jones's novel, "Ponokaotokaanaakii," Elk Head Woman is a figure present in many Indigenous tales across North America, including (but certainly not limited to) those from the Muscogee, Cherokee, Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Choctaw, and Pawnee nations. These tales vary from one culture to another, but

according to Carolyn Dunn and Carol Comfort in *Through the Eye of the Deer* (1999), "the traditional Deer Woman spirit… bewitches those who are susceptible to her sexual favors and who can be enticed away from family and clan into misuse of sexual energy" (xi). Though not always sexual in nature (Evers 41), these stories are usually didactic and intended to warn youth of the consequences of "losing social identity" through "promiscuity, excessive longing for one person, adultery, and jealousy," ultimately underscoring their responsibilities within the tribe (Rice 21, 28-29).

More recently, Indigenous storiers have been revisioning Elk Head Woman to represent female strength, sexual agency, and the fight for the thousands of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women across North America. *Deer Woman: An Anthology* (2017) showcases various Indigenous authors' and artists' renderings of the figure.

Elizabeth LaPensée. Cover of *Deer Woman: An Anthology*. Native Realities, 2017.

Elizabeth LaPensée. Illustration of Deer Woman in *Deer Woman: A Vignette*." *Deer Woman: An Anthology*. Native Realities, 2017.

Elizabeth LaPensée. Cover of *Deer Woman: An Anthology*. Native Realities, 2017.

Despite the many variations of this figure in tellings and retellings, the blending of the animal and human forms is consistent. This is unsurprising, because as Vine Deloria Jr. states in *God is Red* (1973):

> Very important in some of the tribal religions is the idea that humans can change into animals and birds and that other species can change into human beings. In this way species can communicate and learn from each other. Some of these tribal ideas have been classified as *witchcraft* by anthropologists, primarily because such phenomena occurring within the Western tradition would naturally be interpreted as evil and satanic. What Westerners miss is the rather logical implication of the unity of life… Other living things are not regarded as insensitive species. Rather they are 'people' in the same manner as the various tribes of human beings are people… Equality is thus not simply a human attribute but a recognition of the creatureness of all creation. (88-89)

Jones adds to the revisioning of the Elk Head Woman in *The Only Good Indians,* depicting Ponokaotokaanaakii as a figure seeking retribution for a violent attack that took her life. Ten years before the novel begins, the four narrators—Ricky, Lewis, Gabe, and Cass—decide to break the rules of the reservation and drive their truck through to the section preserved for elders, where they come across a herd of nine elk. Lewis recounts that he "remember[s] Cass standing behind his opened door, his rifle stabbed through the rolled-down window… just shooting, and shooting, and shooting…" (62). Realizing that the smallest elk (still just a calf) is still alive, they shoot her again—and again after she still does not fall. The entire scene is horrific and haunts the men for the rest of their short lives. The game warden finds the men shortly after the slaughter and gives them an ultimatum: throw the entirety of the meat down the hill and pay a high fine for breaking the rules of the reservation or consent to never hunt on the reservation again. The men agree to the second option, apart from entreating to take the body of the calf, which Lewis silently swears to make complete use of so that her horrific death is not in vain. The intended plan is successful for ten years—until Gabe

throws out a package of her meat that was stored in his father's freezer, initiating Ponokaotokaanaakii's vengeance.

Rewriting and Reclaiming History and Narratives in *The Only Good Indians*

Native Slipstream

Jones's tale of the Elk Head Woman exemplifies many characteristics of Indigenous futurisms. *The Only Good Indians* insists on rewriting histories, current realities, and crafting a better future, and it does so by introducing elements of what Dillon terms *Native slipstream*. This is an area of speculative fiction that "infuses stories with time travel, alternative realities and multiverses, and alternative histories" (3), a captivating tactic in Indigenous futurisms. In Native slipstream, characters are seen as "living in the past, future, and present simultaneously" (Cornum par. 2); time flows together, as Dillon notes, "like currents in a navigable stream… [replicating] nonlinear thinking about space-time" (3). In the first few narratives, the reader comes to understand that its temporality is not stable or linear; it is distorted because of how much the past influences the present, and ultimately the future, of each character. In short, Jones utilizes narrative techniques to create temporal distortion which allows him to jump around in the timeline of many years, sometimes neatly and with elaborate transitions, and sometimes unexpectedly and suddenly.

Native slipstream is not entirely synonymous with *slipstream*, a term used to describe all speculative writing that simply defies neat categorization and timelines. Coined by Bruce Sterling and Richard Dorsett in 1989:

> slipstream is an attitude of peculiar aggression against 'reality.' These are fantasies of a kind, but not fantasies which are 'futuristic' or 'beyond the fields we know.' [Slipstream] tend[s] to sarcastically tear at the structure of 'everyday

> life…' Quite commonly these works don't make a lot of common sense, and what's more they often somehow imply that nothing we know makes 'a lot of sense' and perhaps even that nothing ever could… Slipstream tends, not to 'create' new worlds, but to quote them, chop them up out of context, and turn them against themselves. (78)

Native slipstream in Indigenous futurisms is a way to reorient Indigenous ways of thinking and assessing the world; it is the act of decolonizing time as a linear, progressive model and understanding it as a myriad of possibilities. This concept has been around since time immemorial and integrating it into speculative literary genres such as horror and science fiction creates the potential not to disorient the reader and create distrust in the timeline of events, but to exemplify that Western ideology of time is arbitrarily formulated and perpetuated. Indigenous storiers had been crafting slipstream narratives far before a term was created to categorize it, with authors like Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe), Sherman Alexie (Coeur d'Alene), Joseph Bruchac (Abenaki), Louise Erdrich (Ojibwe), N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa), Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), and of course, Stephen Graham Jones (Piegan Blackfeet), contributing.

In *The Only Good Indians,* Jones uses Native slipstream to contradict 'official' narratives and the ways in which they are retold, warping interpretations of time and events. He begins by integrating extra-textual materials, specifically news headlines and articles. The reader does not have to wait long to realize this will be a reoccurring and important tactic, as the novel briskly opens with one such headline: "The headline for Ricky Boss Ribs would be INDIAN MAN KILLED IN DISPUTE OUTSIDE BAR" (1). Then, immediately following the headline, the narrator tells the reader, "That's one way to say it" (1). In these first two sentences, Jones is outlining his approach not only to use headlines to explain situations, but also his insistence on using them to tell an

important truth: no one, except the person(s) living in the moment and experiencing the situation—and sometimes not even then, completely—truly knows how situations unfold.

Throughout the novel, we realize these headlines are often misconstrued, written by someone who has perceived the situation or would potentially perceive it from a different angle without all the details. For example, in Ricky's case, there is much more that happens outside of the bar that night than a simple news article can explain. Ricky's chapter is a short one, and the ending of the narrative sees Ricky witnessing an elk running full speed in his direction, demolishing cars in the parking lot outside the bar where Ricky stands. He seems to know that this must be some sort of delusion or supernatural occurrence, reminding himself that "elk don't *do* this" (8), but he nonetheless tries to flee from the terrifying animal. Jones weaves perceived realities and delusions here, presenting Ricky as a narrator who might not be the most reliable source for the truth of the situation. Ricky remains self-aware, however, able to understand the bizarre nature of what he is perceiving versus what other bystanders perceive. As the men from inside and outside the bar move to the parking lot and see the damage done to the cars, Ricky "saw it too, saw *them* seeing it: this Indian had gotten hisself mistreated in the bar, didn't know who drove what, so he was taking it out on every truck in the parking lot. Typical" (9). Jones employs temporal distortion throughout this scene, leaving readers unsure whether what Ricky is experiencing with the elk is real or a fabrication of his mind, and this is left ambiguous as Ricky's story ends. (This reliability is examined in more detail later.) After running as far as he can, Ricky sees "a great herd of elk, waiting, blocking him in, and there was a great herd pressing in behind him, too, a herd of men already on the blacktop themselves, their voices rising, hands balled into fists, eyes flashing white" (12). Ricky realizes then that

he is not going to survive this encounter, and Jones integrates the news headline that tells only part of the truth, here. This headline will forever depict Ricky's futurity—whenever people speak of him or his death outside that bar—as a different story from the reality he actually perceived and experienced.

In the next section of the novel, titled "The House Ran Red" and centering Lewis, Jones more elaborately lays emphasis on the importance of perception. Most of the headlines occur in this section; in fact, besides the headline on the first page that has already been mentioned and the two full-length news articles introduced later, this section introduces the only other extra-textual materials, totaling ten headlines in all (16, 22, 36, 39, 45, 88, 121, 127) that compile Lewis's "mental newspaper" (16). He constantly rewrites his situations as they unfold in front of him, giving each situation a headline that would break if anyone else were to find out about his predicament. For example, when explaining why he and his wife Peta will not have any children, the reader learns that Peta doesn't want her children to have to "pay the tab" from the chemicals she put into her body before she met Lewis (38). Lewis thinks to himself that, instead of the headline reading, "FULLBLOOD TO DILUTE BLOODLINE," like he initially thought it would when he married a white woman, the headline would now read, "FULLBLOOD BETRAYS EVERY DEAD INDIAN BEFORE HIM" (39). The truth of the matter is obviously more complex than a single-line newspaper heading could ever convey. With these short newspaper headlines seemingly redefining and limiting the scope of Lewis's everyday situations and realities—and therefore his future (as he will be remembered by others)—Jones is exemplifying the complexity of perception and how simple the process of disseminating inaccurate realities and histories is. When readers realize that Lewis's full name is Lewis A. Clarke and he is the character mostly responsible for crafting these inaccuracies, it becomes even more obvious that his

narration is unreliable: a nod to the many inaccuracies in Captain Meriwether Lewis and Lieutenant William Clark's recording of their nineteenth century expedition.

As mentioned, Jones also weaves two full-length news articles into the narrative. One occurs at the end of Lewis's section, after he has brutally murdered a co-worker named Shaney, who is also of Indigenous, Crow, identity, along with his loving wife. The headline reads, "THREE DEAD, ONE INJURED IN MANHUNT" (129). There are many inconsistencies in Lewis's and the newspaper reporter's accounts, leaving the reader unsure whether to trust Lewis's narrative or the article. Leading up to the news article, the third-person narrator reveals that Lewis is found by four men with rifles; the news article reports that these men were the ones to find Lewis are unconfirmed. It is then stated in the news article that Lewis was apprehended by police, but later chapters reveal he was actually killed. Lewis's chapter ends with him focusing on the elk calf before being shot, though in his account it is unclear whether it is by the hunters or someone else. Additionally, there is no mention of a teenage girl—the form Ponokaotokaanaakii has taken on—though in the news article it suggests the men were attacked by this teenage girl while Lewis and the calf were in the back of their moving truck. Discrepancies such as these highlight how unreliable news articles can be when reporting on complex situations, in addition to reflecting how misinformation and lies are common in the creation of written history, or, as termed by Gerald Vizenor in *Manifest Manners* (1999), the literature, language, and narrative of dominance. Jones uses these 'official' articles, in essence, to rewrite the characters' histories from a dominant ideological point of view; everything must be rationalized through Western norms and presented to the public in easily understandable ways, but often times, this information is inaccurate. These news headlines and articles effectively integrate

elements of Native slipstream into the novel, as they outline the truth, or rather, the lack thereof, about how histories are told and information is disseminated.

(Un)Reliability: The Splitting of the Westernized Mind

Jones's use of newspaper headlines positions the present as a space and time that also exists in the future, as Lewis (presently) predicts how the situation will be perceived by others (in the future). This usage also exemplifies how the past can be recorded imperfectly due to incomplete information, differing perspectives, and intentional falsehoods at play in colonial discourses. As such, Jones challenges notions of Western, scientific thought. Lewis represents this ideology and continually tries to rationalize events that unfold before him. Everything in the novel is centered around that day in the clearing when they killed the elk. These men cannot go back and erase what they have done in their past, and consequently, Ponokaotokaanaakii returns to rewrite their present and futures, reclaiming her own history she never had the chance to experience. Ricky and Lewis spend most of their narratives thinking about this past that cannot be undone, and Jones introduces elements of implausibility in each of their stories. For example, Lewis continuously diminishes the abilities and possibilities of Ponokaotokaanaakii, explaining that the elk *shouldn't* have been able to conceive that young and at that point in the hunting season; how even if she didn't encounter the hunters that day, she *couldn't* have carried full term (73); that he *couldn't* have seen her in his home (20), that she *wouldn't* even have fit in his living room (37); that "of *course* and elk can't inhabit a person…" it had to have been "a shadow he probably saw wrong" (82). Gabe also exemplifies this type of perception where, if logic cannot explain it away, it cannot be true. For example, when Gabe and Lewis are discussing the possibility that the elk herd could remember them from that fateful day ten years ago, Gabe laughs it off and tells him, "they're fucking elk, man. They don't really have

campfires" (27). And when Gabe is about to enter the sweat lodge with Cass and Nate, he thinks he sees a glimpse of black hair in the mirror of Cass's truck, "[e]xcept that couldn't have been" (195). Lewis, Gabe, Ricky, and Cass obsessively rationalize their every encounter and almost always from a Western perspective, trying to explain what *could not* and *should not* have been possible, yet there are obviously things they are not able to explain or fully rationalize. As such, an uneasy tension of unreliability builds between these narrators and readers, challenging the latter to assess the truth with *all* of the information available from the omniscient narration.

To complicate this process, Jones weaves elements of internal and external threats together throughout the novel, challenging the reader to decide if the real antagonist in the novel is an external threat (Ponokaotokaanaakii) or internal ones (the men's psychologies, internalized colonial ideologies, and emotional distress). This is exemplified from beginning to end, with Ricky's narrative indicating that there is indeed an elk responsible for the destruction of the vehicles outside of the bar (as already explored); to Lewis's paranoia, ostensible unraveling, and double homicide of Shaney and Peta; to Gabe's and Cass's gruesome murder-suicide outside of the sweat lodge. Jones's masterful use of indirect characterization—most fruitfully, each character's internal dialogue and external dialogue with others—engages readers and challenges them to determine the truth of the narratives. Toward the end of Lewis's section, this type of characterization reveals that Lewis's mental state has deteriorated significantly and his paranoia is controlling his emotions and actions. Leading up to and after the murder of Shaney, his thoughts become jumbled and panicked, filled with questions and desperate rationalizations for his thoughts and actions:

> She didn't know about the books, he repeats in his head.
>
> *Meaning?*

Meaning she was Elk Head Woman.

Because?

Because she was lying.

That means she's a monster?

…no, he finally admits to himself. It doesn't mean *for sure* she's that monster, but added together with the basketball being so alien to her, and her knowing where to stand in the living room, and to turn the fan off, and, and: What about how she wouldn't touch her own hide on the kitchen table?

Lewis stands nodding.

That, yeah.

She could have been lying…" (118-119)

Lewis can't stop himself from calculating the logic in his and Shaney's actions, breaking it down to modus ponens (If A, then B; B; therefore A) and modus tollens (If A, then B; not B; therefore not A) arguments. By the end, he estimates that "[h]e's not even really a killer, since she wasn't even really a person, right? She was just an elk he shot ten years ago Saturday. One who didn't know she was already dead" (117-118). Lewis's paranoia engages a sort of distortion where it is difficult for the reader to assess if he is losing his ability to accurately assess and engage reality, or if there really is a supernatural, external force manipulating him and the people around him and he is beginning to *see* the world as it truly is—that is, from an Indigenous worldview. His thoughts do become frantic, but in later chapters, it is revealed that at least some of Lewis's assumptions and explanations are true, such as when Gabe confirms that he *did* indeed throw out the elk meat stored in his father's freezer.

In Lewis's, Gabe's, and Ricky's chapters, they struggle with what is *real* and what simply cannot be, and they use Western notions of regularity to do so. When confronted with the unexplainable, their minds seem to crack down the middle. One

side confirms that it is indeed impossible for Ponokaotokaanaakii to exist and be responsible, because Western notions of science cannot explain such an entity and its reign on the real world. The other side reinforces Blackfeet ideology, insisting on a clear, supernatural connection. Blackfeet ideology has always emphasized strong ties with the supernatural and unique ways of seeing the world in relation to it. William Farr asserts, "the Blackfeet world possesse[s] an extra dimension, for amid the visible world, [is] an invisible one, another magnitude, a spiritual one that is more powerful, more meaningful, more lasting. It [is] a universe alive'" (qtd in LaPier xxxi). The invisible dimension is, according to many Blackfeet histories and stories, the real world—and the visible dimension is a mere partial experience of that world (LaPier 25). If these characters' brains have indeed split between Western and Blackfeet ideologies, the 'distortion' of sorts is a battle of principles regarding the supernatural, space and time, and the classification of the 'real.'

Indeed, "this confounding of divisions… between the animal and human—challenges western ways of thinking" (Dunn and Comfort xiii); as such, Lewis, Gabe, Ricky, and Cass cannot accept the events occurring around them as they exercise Western notions of science, nature, and the perception of the Elk Head Woman. "While the non-Native cultural product makes Deer Woman a monster, thus evincing the colonial(ist) impulse of consuming the Indigenous… Native works… interpret Deer Woman as symbolic of the Indigenous worldviews" (Vlaicu 3; Dunn and Comfort xiii). Jones exemplifies the unreliability of Lewis's, Gabe's, Ricky's, and Cass's thoughts as they depend on limiting notions of Western thought to try and understand the Blackfeet world around them. Western ideologies simply cannot account for the strange circumstances that befall the characters throughout the novel, insisting on a more traditional explanation and one that allows a space for supernatural events. If we

attempt to understand the world using Blackfeet cosmology, what does Ponokaotokaanaakii truly symbolize, as the partial experience of the real, invisible world?

Point of View: Perspectives and the Construct of Time

Another tactic Jones utilizes to build upon Native slipstream principles is point of view. The novel begins in third-person narration following Ricky, then Lewis—and then there is an abrupt shift in the point of view to second person. In the second section, "Sweat Lodge Massacre," the first chapter inserts readers into the mind of Ponokaotokaanaakii. The narration reveals the elk's short life and horrendous death, outlining the events of the day she was killed in her own perspective. In horror fiction, it is unsurprising to see through the eyes of the antagonist. However, in Jones's novel, this perspective shift occurs nearly halfway through the entire novel, surprising readers with a fresh, new perspective on the incident that took place ten years ago, the progression of time, and the deaths of the main characters. Beginning in that second section, Jones begins weaving instances of second person into Gabe's and Cass's chapters, reminding readers that there is always more than one perspective of every situation. Ponokaotokaanaakii is always watching and assessing these men, stalking them like prey to attain vengeance. While Lewis becomes obsessed with figuring out why, ten years later Ponokaotokaanaakii has chosen to come after them, she asserts, "for them, ten years ago, that's another lifetime. For [Ponokaotokaanaakii] it's yesterday" (137). Additionally, the ways in which Ponokaotokaanaakii transforms illustrates that she is beyond the understanding of Western notions of time. She recounts:

> Just a few hours ago you [Ponokaotokaanaakii] are pretty sure you were what would have been called twelve. An hour before that you were an elk calf being

> cradled by a killer, running for the reservation, before that you were just an awareness spread out through the herd, memory cycling from brown body to brown body, there in every flick of the tail, every snort, every long probing glared down a grassy slope. (134)

The way in which Ponokaotokaanaakii perceives time indicates that time is an arbitrary construct, at least as the four men perceive it—indeed, the entire construction of time as a linear ideal is deconstructed as their views on time are juxtaposed. In interviews, Jones has described himself as a "Blackfeet physicist," creating timelines that reflect "a Blackfoot framework of loops, glitches, and the constant experience of Indigenous time travel: living in the past, future, and the present simultaneously" (Cornum qtd. in Fricke 118). This is exemplified throughout the novel with the revisioning of the past, present, and the future (with news headlines and articles); the merging of past and present with each character hyperfixated on that fateful Saturday ten years gone, which ultimately defines their futures; and the past and present becoming intertwined as dead characters interact with those that are still alive—Ponokaotokaanaakii throughout, and Ricky and Lewis in the sweat lodge. These revisionings fashion space and time as interconnected and non-linear, a direct contradiction to notions of Western knowledge regarding time. Such a pushback against dominant modes of thinking offers an alternative reorientation of Indigenous knowledge and perception.

Decentering Western Ideologies and Crafting Indigenous Futurity

Ultimately, Denorah, Gabe's daughter, ends the destructive, murderous cycle that has defined and controlled the lives of her father, Lewis, Cass, Ricky, Ponokaotokaanaakii, and more symbolically, everyone controlled by Western perceptions of knowledge, history, time, and identity that has been engrossed in this same cycle. Although it

might appear that this cycle began with the slaughtering of those elk in the clearing ten years ago, it is indeed more complex. Lewis clarifies this when he reflects:

> That craziness, that heat of the moment, the blood in his temples, the smoke in the air, it was like—he hates himself the most for this—it was probably what it was like a century or more ago, when soldiers gathered up on ridges above Blackfeet encampments to turn the cranks on their big guns, terraform this new land for their occupation. Fertilize it with blood. (75)

Lewis explains that he has contributed to a centuries-old cycle with the slaughtering of those elk—one that continues to control him and others because of the hands they continue to play within it. However, Denorah refuses to let the destruction of the past define her present and future, and she takes a courageous stand, ending the long cycle of murder and retribution. Denorah chooses a new path where she, Ponokaotokaanaakii, and everyone else can move on from the atrocities of the past into a new future of possibilities. In this way, Denorah represents and practices an Indigenous worldview. She accepts Ponokaotokaanaakii's existence and, by doing so, the possibilities for a better, alternative future for her generations and the ones to follow, which is illuminated in the final lines of the novel: "It's not the end of the trail, the headlines will all say, it never was the end of the trail. It's the beginning" (305).

Stephen Graham Jones's *The Only Good Indians* is a powerful and timely contribution to the Indigenous futurisms movement. Jones experiments with various forms of Native slipstream tactics, weaving a narrative that attempts to rewrite the past, resituate the present, and create possibilities for the future. Newspaper headlines and articles, an intense focus on rationalization coupled with the inability to achieve such measures, and varying points of view combine to illustrate futurity and possibilities created by breaking the cycle of Western perceptions and dominant ideologies. According to Danika Medak-Saltzman, Indigenous futurist imaginings "create

blueprints of the possible and [provide] a place where we can explore the potential pitfalls of certain paths," enabling us to "transcend the confines of time and accepted "truths"—so often hegemonically configured and reinforced—that effectively limit what we can see and experience as possible in the present, let alone imagine into the future" (143). With *The Only Good Indians,* Jones uses the horror genre to decenter dominant ideologies and to offer potential futures in which Indigenous knowledge systems and practices are centered in Indigenous lives. As Sean Teuton posits, "[t]he Native American novel has become increasingly aware of itself as an art with real world consequences for Native lives" (99), and further, *The Only Good Indians* and other fiction by Jones supports horror fiction, specifically, as an effective medium for subverting Western notions of normalcy regarding knowledge, history, time, and identity. As the Indigenous futurisms movement continues to develop and Indigenous creators continue crafting new spaces and possibilities for representing Indigeneity, scholarship must recognize and address how horror fiction is being used to imbue Native sensibilities and knowledge.

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A Conversation with Stephen Graham Jones: Horror, Weird Fiction and the Way of Slashers, with Sopapillas for Dessert

BILLY J. STRATTON & STEPHEN GRAHAM JONES

While I initially planned for this to be an interview, it was really a conversation, and one that occurred at a pretty cool Mexican joint in Denver near DU's campus before Stephen visited one of my classes to talk about *Ledfeather*. Be sure to check out El Tejado if you're ever in the area—they make a mean michelada! The transcript included here follows the conversation as it took place—minus the food orders and background conversation, which any postmodern writer would usually revel in, as well as the divvying of sopapillas—while being faithful to the cadence of language. Only a few minor changes were made for clarity and context. Given the occasion for the meeting and visit, the focus touches on *Ledfeather*, and then moves on to a discussion of Jones's more recent works. My primary interests were in the turn towards the genre of horror since *Mongrels*—a subject he is always eager to discuss, while also delving into other related matters such a weird fiction, the publishing industry, the function of literature, and as always, the future of humanity. You know, as Blink 182 calls it, "all the small things." Anyway, enough of my blathering, so let's get on to the reason you are here and reading *this*: the incomparable Stephen Graham Jones.

Stratton: I want to talk about the trajectory of your work from *Mongrels* to the present, but also through *Demon Theory*, how do you see the horror stories you've written as developing from your own point of view?

Jones: Well, *Demon Theory* was the second novel I ever wrote. I wrote *The Fast Red Road* and then *Demon Theory*, so I've been doing horror forever, but didn't get *Demon Theory* published until 2006. And then, even before 2006 I felt like I had been forced, but it was really my own response to the response to my books. . . for a lot of years I became like two writers on two different tracks. *Demon Theory* was the beginning of the horror track, and I went on to *It Came From Del Rio*, *Zombie Bake Off, The Last Final Girl,* all that stuff. So, for a lot of years it was tricky to maintain, being on two, like, separate tracks, if that makes sense.

Stratton: Yes, for readers too, there seemed to be a strange dividing line between those two groups of novels where readers of one set were often not all that aware or experienced with the other.

Jones: It almost made me feel like I should be like Brian Evenson, be like him and his real name for some readers and then BK Evenson for other projects, or . . . Iain Banks and Iain M. Banks, right? I never did that because I was afraid I would do my good work under one name and my so-so work under another name. I don't know if I trusted myself, I mean. But, you're right, *Mongrels* was the point where I was able to knit myself back together, be one writer instead of two. It felt good.

Stratton: Definitely, you were able to be the whole 'you' as a writer.

Jones: With that, I was able to use horror in a . . . I don't know, a less "normal" way, the werewolf, I mean, but *Mongrels* was really about family, just, through this weird delivery method—stories mixed with flash fiction to create a novel, and things not necessarily moving in a casual way. More associative, I guess. But, ever since *Mongrels* I felt like I was one writer again. So, from there I wrote *Mapping the Interior*, *The Only Good Indians*, *Night of the Mannequins* and *My Heart is a Chainsaw*, so those are all works I've done as a single writer.

Stratton: That's where there is a key difference from a book like *Ledfeather*, which is very literary, challenging and postmodern in a sense, to *Mongrels* which really opened your work up to a whole new set of readers.

Jones: Oftentimes, in literary fiction the stakes can be kind of low, too, dealing with questions like 'will I not get over my parent's divorce from fourteen years ago,' stuff like that. But in my work, like when my wife reads it after we've been together for thirty-one years, she recognizes all the little parts of biography I put in there and she says it gets hard to tell where the real stuff stops and the make-believe starts.

Stratton: That could be especially disconcerting with your horror stuff. Because you do a lot of first-person narration in horror as any good crafter of horror does, as that's among the core things a horror writer must be able to do. But the question almost becomes, well, how do they know how to do these things, in some uncomfortable sense?

Jones: Yeah, the person writing this sure does seem to know a lot about hiding bodies . . .

Stratton: [Laughs] that's the craft. And you watch a lot of horror movies, but I don't feel like your early readers were always aware of that. I did want to go back to your references to weirdness, though, so how do you think your latest writing fits with or challenges the writing being put forth under the banner of weird fiction?

Jones: You know, I like to read weird fiction, but I don't know if I can write weird fiction all that well. Probably the closest weird fiction story I've come up with was "Brushdogs."

Stratton: Hmm, I kinda feel like *Mapping the Interior* fits into that category too, in some ways.

Jones: It's possible with weird fiction—it's possible I'm making one subgenre such as "cosmic horror" stand in for the whole genre, here. But weird fiction to me, the story pattern, it's somebody finds an old book or artifact or whatever the thing is, and because of that brush with this whatever, they peel up a corner of the wallpaper of their life and look behind to see the vast terribleness of everything, but all they can do is try to close it back. You can't fight Cthulhu; you can't fight these cosmic entities. And so, the story is, 'I now know my own insignificance in the universe, and I have to live the rest of my life knowing how little I matter.' The horror I usually write, and prefer, I guess, is the horror that ends with "I made it." There's hope in the world.

Stratton: Survivance.

Jones: Exactly, weird fiction doesn't have the same kind of hope to me. But? If all fiction on the horror shelves was hopeful, that'd actually be kind of a bummer, I think. What's fun about horror is that you never know if it's going to end up, down, or in the middle. Takes all kinds to round the genre out, let it keep on living.

Stratton: That's right, it's more the acceptance that there is no hope. The world is absurd and has no meaning or worse, but it's not that one doesn't have agency. It's more that we are caught up in a larger web of processes [Jones: yeah, correct] so much greater than us that it limits our agency and becomes the source of terror.

Jones: Exactly, I think that kind of stuff is fun to read but I don't think I can write it 'cause I don't want my fiction to bring people down, if that makes sense?

Stratton: Thinking about it in that way, this takes me back to *The Fast Red Road* and the Goliards. That's similar, but instead of peeling the corner back on something supernatural or from the beyond, you're finding something in the world that you never knew about before. [Jones: Yeah, that's true]. And then there's a kind of shock like we also see in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* with Oedipa Maas trying to figure out what WASTE and the Trystero might be.

Jones: That's totally right, I never thought about it like that. So yeah, *The Fast Red Road* really does conform to that story arc.

Stratton: Yeah, and *The Bird is Gone* and *Ledfeather*, too.

Jones: If we look at *The Fast Red Road*, *The Bird is Gone* and *Ledfeather* as three books in a series, I do see the first two as more in the realm of weird fiction, but *Ledfeather* is where I was . . . well, let's go back to 2005. When I'd written those first two, I was just working at an instinctual level and hadn't really thought through the differences between weird fiction and horror. I feel like by 2007, and *Ledfeather*, I was starting to get more of a sense that I wanted to end with an up-ending rather than just bleakness, you know. "Bleak" is easy, I think. Staging an up-ending is a lot more difficult. At least to me.

Stratton: What you were just saying seems also to reflect a similar distinction between general readers and academic readers. In the former, you're just in it; you're just reading the story in the moment without trying to attach all sorts of theoretical models or philosophical ideas to it. And while you may be engaging with the weird, it's more on a visceral level, you're not thinking about the parameters of weird fiction or whatever defines it. You're liberated from that apparatus when you can be a reader who reads without a pen in your hand, underlining or writing notes in the margins. There's a liberation in that, I think.

Jones: That's right; there is. I don't know how to do it, but it must be great.

Stratton: [laughs] I don't really know how either. But connected to that, so for those familiar with your earlier works there is a natural development in the trajectory of your writing that can been seen over

time. But can you share your insights on this theme for those who may be less familiar with your body of work and haven't read a lot of your earlier novels or for those who found you later through novels such as *Mongrels*, *Night of the Mannequins*, *The Only Good Indians*, *My Heart is a Chainsaw*, and who discovered your works after that?

Jones: Yeah, I always feel like the readers who came to me after *Mongrels*, *The Only Good Indians*, *Chainsaw*, or whatever, I'm always worried when they're going back to my earlier stuff, especially *The Fast Red Road*—which ,my whole heart is still in those books and I love them and I don't wish to dismiss or diminish them—but I do always wonder if I am ever going to hear from those people again. Because those books, they're not the same at all. To me they're totally different.

Stratton: They are, but that's because there was a particular thing you were trying to do in those works, I think. With *Ledfeather* you were able to say I've done that kind of narrative how I wanted to and now I can move forward to other interests.

Jones: Yeah, definitely, with *Ledfeather* in 2007, I had a two-and-a-half-year dry period after that. I don't think I had another book come out until 2010.

Stratton: It was a little while, and then you started cranking out with a lot of horror that sort of presaged *Mongrels*, but the difference was through that you were able to get the attention of bigger presses, and then land deals with Tor and Morrow. I'd like to hear you talk about what that shift has done for you career, but also your writing process in which your books started getting into the hands of so many more readers.

Jones: Well, you're right. I started hitting hard and heavy between 2010 and 2014, with a lot of books in that period. The indie press scene and the commercial publishers, well, it's the same and different, I guess. The commercial presses have marketing and distribution, and it's amazing and wonderful and you really need that. What I like about all the indie stuff I did, and I really recommend that to all writers, I got to figure out what kind of writer I was. There was nobody saying don't do this, or even if they did, I just went to another publisher. So, I got to try crazy stuff like *The Long Trial of Nolan Dugatti*, that's a ridiculous, wild book. And *Zombie Sharks with Metal Teeth*, I couldn't have done that with a commercial press. I see so many writers who their first book is a big hit and then they are on that career path, but they can never play. And play is where we learn how to do stuff.

Stratton: Are you still able to sneak "playing" into your current works? You seem to be a master of that process now [the sopapillas arrive], but in a way that maybe you couldn't have done if you had written *Mongrels* at the beginning of your career, in say, 2004.

Jones: Yeah, if *Mongrels* had caught on with a readership that early, I think I would have gotten locked in. Since 2016, all my book contracts have been for horror novels, which is fine with me as I love writing horror, but I wonder if I would've been in that corner in 2005 or 2006 and by 2015 I would've been trying to break out and push out of those walls.

Stratton: It's clear that you love writing, just writing in its purest form, do you see those lines of division? Or, is it all a cohesive development—from your perspective?

Jones: Yeah, to me it's cohesive. Even if it's not cohesive content-wise, they all have the same amount of heart. They all come from the same place. Content doesn't really matter; genre doesn't matter.

Stratton: That's interesting when you apply that to the category of native/ indigenous literatures, as there are critics and scholars for whom content is the most important thing. Almost as if writers are being read to see what list of boxes are being checked, whether that be sovereignty, treaties, or land. But if you think about something that's far from that kind of thing, whether *Growing Up Dead in Texas* or *Mapping*, the whole story about where those characters are in the world is itself a commentary on the processes of displacement, the nature of sovereignty, or the lack thereof. Can you comment on that?

Jones: When *Growing Up Dead in Texas* was about to come out, I did one final read of it. Not for the publisher but for me. And I was asking myself—like to me, everything that I had written before *Growing Up Dead in Texas* was Native whether it was explicitly stated or not, but I was wondering about *Growing Up Dead in Texas*. So, I went back and reread it, and to me it's really the same as *Mongrels*, which deals with pressing Native issues all the way through.

Stratton: And you always have the shadow of Palo Duro Canyon in your West Texas novels.

Jones: Hopefully, by the time this comes out we can talk about my next West Texas novel . . . *I Was a Teenage Slasher*.

Stratton: Hopefully! So, for the last question, no rules and you have complete freedom, what novel would you write.

Jones: *I was a Teenage Slasher* **is** my dream novel.

Stratton: Wow, so you've done it.

Jones: Yeah! It's written very much in the voice of *Growing Up Dead in Texas*, but it's got bodies left and right.

Stratton: Well, and as you know, that's the foundation of America, really, bodies left and right. But those bodies, unlike the bodies we find strewn about in horror, are swept under the rug and hidden in history.

Jones: But they come back in all the horror stories.

Stratton: For someone who is such a prodigious writer, especially as we talked about all the books you wrote from 2010 and 2015, how has the process been different since you started working with Morrow, Tor and Simon & Schuster, but also since getting all these awards and accolades?

Jones: I mean, it's changed in that there's more deadlines. And it's changed in that—at the indie level when an editor tells you to 'change this,' you can always put down your flag and say, 'literary integrity, I'm leaving it in.' With a commercial press, I can plant that same flag if I want, but I've got to understand that I'm planting it through the foot of somebody who's got to argue with marketing, production, distributors and

salespeople, so they might fight less hard for me at those meetings if they've got a flag stabbed down though their foot.

I'm lucky enough to work with an editor who never tells me to do something. He just tells me how he thinks it should be. He'll always qualify it by saying, "you don't have to do this, but I think the story's better if you do this." And so, I'm always like, I'm not going to do it and then I try it out two or three weeks later and it's better [laughs]. It's nice to work with somebody like him. Because, I think, if I were working with the kind of editor who says, "it's got to be this way," I would probably just go somewhere else, you know. I react poorly to people telling me how something should be, rather than saying that there might be another way, and that other way might be better. What if I just give it a try, see if it works?

Stratton: Let's return to that previous question. Why is this upcoming novel, the one with bodies everywhere, *I Was a Teenage Slasher*, the quintessential Jones novel?

Jones: First, it's set in West Texas, which is *Fast Red Road* territory and where I started out. And it's high school, for some reason—and maybe it's a failing on my part—but it's an era and age that I write well from. Also, it's West Texas, it's high school, set in 1989, and I know 1989 pretty well. And it's the slasher genre, but I'm not just enacting the slasher genre. It's, and I don't know, but meta is the wrong word and I hate to call everything that . . .

Stratton: Self-reflective?

Jones: Maybe, that's it yeah.

Stratton: Or self-aware?

Jones: It is self-aware, yeah.

Stratton: Self-referencing?

Jones: A little bit, but there's no movie titles in it. I use . . . like in *Chainsaw* where I use titles on every page, there's not a single title in this one.

Stratton: So, are those titles the map? And if so, maybe you don't want to give that map to readers in this one.

Jones: Yeah, well there's characters who know all the slashers. There's two characters who do, anyway. And then everybody else has to learn the slasher as well. Just, not in the way they would have chosen, were they given a choice.

Stratton: Final question, what is your world, the world Stephen Graham Jones is trying to recreate is his fiction?

Jones: I dream of a world that's fair. Evil is a dangerous word, I think, but a world where bad stuff is punished, and where kids don't go hungry. I can't do that in the real world. I can't seem to change things so that's going to be the case, and maybe that's for the best, nobody should have that power, or you end up with a Thanos. And, too, I worry sometimes that if everything was a *Star Trek* future, we'd just stop growing and moving. Because we're not actually as good and sterling as those *Star Trek* people.

Stratton: Something that gives hope through the bleakness, like you were saying about *Ledfeather* earlier. But a hope that has to come out of suffering and loss.

Jones: It does, but the trick is, you have to remain receptive to it. Like in the end *Ledfeather* when the side of Doby's hand touches the side of Claire's hand. He's had a lot of terrible stuff happen to him, but he hasn't given up. That's one of my favorite endings I've ever done, and I sort of think all my endings before and after are some version or take on that. I want to believe in good things, I mean. In possibility. In "maybe." Without "maybe," I don't know . . . why even try, right?

Little Books, Big Horror: Review of *Night of Mannequins, Taaqtumi,* and *Anoka*

Stephen Graham Jones. *Night of the Mannequins*. Tor, 2020. 128 pages. ISBN: 978-1-250-75207-9.
https://publishing.tor.com/nightofthemannequins-stephengrahamjones/9781250752062/

Neil Christopher, editor. *Taaqtumi: An Anthology of Arctic Horror Stories*. Inhabit Media, 2019. 184 pages. ISBN: 978-1-77227-214-7.
https://inhabitmedia.com/2019/08/21/taaqtumi/

Shane Hawk. *Anoka*. Black Hills Press, 2020. 140 pages. ISBN: 9798674225195.
https://www.shanehawk.com/anoka

Not to be overlooked amid Stephen Graham Jones' ongoing winning streak is a little book with the unassumingly *Goosebumps*-flavoured title *Night of the Mannequins*. The first-person narrator and antihero in *Mannequins* is Sawyer, a teen who is caught up the dark and uncertain months between the end of high school and the start of quote-unquote adulthood. The choice of the given name Sawyer is a playful reminder of Jones' unparalleled horror cred. For one, it signals the ways in which *Mannequins* straddles genres and canons by evoking the not-so-disparate worlds of Mark Twain and Tobe Hooper, if not James Wan and Leigh Whannell too. For another, it raises subtle questions about gender and national identity when it's revealed that the other teens call him "Saw" for short, which for all we know could be pronounced as spelled or instead as "Soy."

The premise of *Night of the Mannequins* is deceptively simple; where it manages to subvert our expectations is in the convoluted intricacies of Sawyer's (psycho-)logic as he embraces his role as antihero. Sawyer is obsessed with the possibility of losing his friends—either to the passage of time or, more pressingly, to Manny, the department store mannequin that he and his friends had salvaged from a ditch, played around with for years, and then forgotten about once the joke had worn off. Following a prank gone wrong, Sawyer becomes convinced that Manny, scorned and abandoned by his old friend group, has come alive to seek revenge. When the first member of the group turns up dead in a freak accident, Sawyer's paranoia escalates to the point where he starts to believe that the only way to stop the cycle of violence before it's too late is by beating Manny to the punch—to be clear, this means murdering his own childhood friends.

As preoccupied as it is with nostalgia and melancholy about the end of innocence, *Mannequins* ultimately shares less with King's *The Body* or the aforementioned R.L. Stein series than it does with Jones' own *The Only Good Indians* (2020). In that novel as well as *Mannequins*, Jones mines horror from an unthinkable scenario: the compulsion to kill your loved ones. The mental gymnastics it would require in order to arrive at that point are an endless source of page-turning suspense and black comedy for Jones. But whereas *The Only Good Indians* signalled its ties to coloniality and Indigenous kinship principles right from the title, *Mannequins*, which does not identify its characters as Indigenous or otherwise, takes an approach that is perhaps easier to miss. Chapter 9 of *Mannequins*—which begins with the whopper of an opening line, "Over dinner the night I was to kill Danielle, my dad told a wandering-all-over-story about *his* dad taking him fishing" (73)— is where the book's concern with violated kinship obligations comes into full focus. Jones' conversational, almost stream-of-consciousness prose style is the connective tissue that binds Sawyer with his friends, his family, and even his own neuroses. Consider the fluidity with which he transitions from the dad's innocuous "wandering-all-over-story" to the chilling violence of the central murder plot:

> This time through the story I was just watching how tight that deep-sea fishing line of Grandpa's probably was before it snapped. And how it was probably bright green, and how nobody except me would ever know how that mattered, how that matched up with a certain coil of line in my pocket that I kept having to sneak touches down to, to be sure it hadn't slithered away, to be sure it wasn't going to go killing without me. (74)

Here, not only do we get an implied familial origin for Sawyer's scatterbrained way of relaying an otherwise simple story, but we also get a hefty dose of psychological black comedy when our antihero's thoughts abruptly drift back to the murder weapon hidden in his pocket that, as with Manny the mannequin, he fears will come alive and abandon him.

One of the final pieces of the twisted puzzle that Jones lays out for us in *Mannequins*, lastly, is the ubiquity of superhero narratives in contemporary media. Both the aborted prank that triggers the novel's events and Sawyer's eventual killing spree center on a superhero movie—the third and final installment in a trilogy that Sawyer and the gang have been following throughout their adolescent years. Jones is tactful enough not to name the franchise in question or to belabour the underlying point about how the genre's current fixation on flawed, violent protagonists might feed into Sawyer's delusions about heroism and sacrifice. Rather, it is the matter-of-fact tone of Sawyer's

narration that teases out these delusions, such as when he rationalizes that "All I'd been doing ever since Shanna [died], it was saving lives left and right. Yeah, the superhero movie was on DVD in my bag, but I was also *in* a superhero movie, *as* that superhero. Not the one everyone wants, no, but real life isn't always like the movies" (110). Jones' verbal irony in moments like these is devastating, as is the cosmic irony he invokes with the realization that the novel's events are triggered by a single unpaid movie ticket. In the grander scheme of the Hollywood production-distribution system, as Jones seems to suggest, it all centers on the insistence that audiences *pay* to see these movies in the cinemas. For the teens in *Night of the Mannequins*, the price of the ticket is literally their lives. Truly scary stuff!

Speaking of scary stuff: *Taaqtumi: An Anthology of Arctic Horror Stories,* compiled by settler educator and Inhabit Media co-founder Neil Christopher, is a collection of short stories by authors spanning the Dene, Inuit, and Cree peoples of the north. Canada, whether as a political or geographic framework, is tellingly absent from the anthology, which instead centers the ancestral narratives and the everyday terrors of those who have traditionally made their home in the unforgiving Arctic. In addition to the nine collected stories, *Taaqtumi* also includes a brief pronunciation guide and glossary of the Inuktitut and Northern Athabaskan terms used throughout the body of the anthology. Back matter aside, Christopher does not include any prefatory material in *Taaqtumi*. While the stories are rich enough to speak for themselves, the lack of a critical introduction or accompanying essay is unfortunate, not just because Indigenous horror is an increasingly vital topic of critical discussion and teaching, but because the specificity of Arctic horror certainly deserves more generous contextualization for those of us on the outside.

Arguably the centerpiece of *Taaqtumi* is "Lounge," a speculative fiction novella by the prolific Cree-Inuit-Scottish-Mohawk team of Rachel and Sean Qitsualik-Tinsley. "Lounge" is close kin with Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu* (2018), another hallucinogenic and often elliptical tale of life beyond humanity. The protagonist, Talli, is an Italian-Inuit particle physicist who arrives in the Arctic territory of Avvajja to study a series of cosmic anomalies—namely, that the Earth's continental plates all seem to be converging on this one northern location. She is disturbed to find that the other members of her research team are skeptical of, if not completely uninterested in, the strange phenomena in Avvajja. Hoping to break the ice (pun intended), Talli, along with her mushroom-shaped cybernetic companion Drashtr, organizes a virtual reality "lounge" party that quickly goes awry when the energy emanating from the land begins to manipulate the team members' senses and emotions. As she struggles to make sense

of the otherworldly imagery that seems to absorb and pacify her teammates, Talli is forced to reconcile her family's tragic history with the supernatural forces that are pulling her deep into the mystery of Avvajja.

"Lounge" is more than just a slow descent into sci-fi weirdness. For one, its story structure is cyclical, beginning with a flash-forward to its denouement before tracking the hours that lead up to the titular virtual reality party. In this sense, "Lounge" is less a slow burn than it is a trial-by-fire for the reader who, not unlike Talli herself, must gradually learn the story's technical and emotional vocabularies as the narrative progresses. For another, the story thus raises illuminating questions about the ways in which human and beyond-human forms of consciousness might (fail to) interact. Talli and her team's lack of communication contrasts with Drashtr's unique ability to "debate" with, and thereby assimilate to, Avvajja's foreign environment. The novella also plays on the fetishistic imperialist vision of the Arctic as a final threshold of discovery; ironically, it does so by affirming that the Arctic and its ancestral custodians are, in fact, located at the center of the universe. Talli often repeats a joke told by her late Uncle Charlie which claims that the Arctic is "a place where people go to *become*" (103). From a colonial-extractivist perspective, this sense of becoming is rooted in a belief that exceptionalism and meritocracy will elevate humanity—rather, certain privileged pockets of humanity—beyond its "savage" origins. By this logic, to conquer the harshest environment on the planet is to rise above all else on said planet. As Talli ultimately discovers, though, even the process of becoming itself is cyclical and contingent. After all, "to become" only works as a transitive verb or as a link between objects—one has to become *something*. In Avvajja, you simply become what you always already were.

In the same ontological register, Uncle Charlie's backstory is also where "Lounge" takes some of its most provocative turns. Just as the characters in Lai's *The Tiger Flu* grapple with the dubious promise of life beyond the human body when a tech company offers to upload its users' consciousnesses to a planet-sized hive, the world that the Qitsualik-Tinsleys create in "Lounge" is one where individuals with terminal illnesses can pre-emptively "sell" their deaths to the research industry in exchange for cash and a digital copy of their medical records to be inherited by their next of kin. For Talli, her uncle Charlie's legacy is therefore complicated. Not only do the proceeds from the "sale" of his dying days help to fund Talli's education and research, but his death file—which may or may not hold secrets to their family history and to the cosmic anomalies in Avvajja—sits on her computer desktop like an archive that she dares not

touch. Talli's alternating hesitation toward and obsession with both the land of Avvajja and her Uncle Charlie provide the emotional backbone of "Lounge."

While "Lounge" takes up more pages and lofty concepts, the surrounding tales in *Taaqtumi* are no less compelling. Aviaq Johnston, author of the wonderful *Those Who Run with the Sky* (2017) series of young adult novels, delivers arguably the best old-fashioned chills in the entire volume with the cliff-hanger ending of the opening story, "Iqsinaqtutalik Piqtuq: The Haunted Blizzard." Gayle Kabloona's "Utiqtuq" is a post-apocalyptic Inuit zombie story (did you know, by the way, that there's a word for "zombie" in Inuktitut?) that, like all great survival-horror narratives, dwells on the impossible life-or-death decisions that the living must make, including whether or not and how to abandon those we love. Jay Bulckaert's "The Wildest Game," if I may name just one more favourite of mine, is a first-person confessional that fleshes out (again: pun intended) Jim Siedow the Cook's notorious line from the original *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*: "I just can't take no pleasure in killing. There's just some things you gotta' do. Don't mean you have to like it."

In contrast with *Taaqtumi*¸ Cheyenne-Arapaho writer Shane Hawk's inaugural collection of short stories, *Anoka*, is packed with supplementary material. In his introduction to the volume, Hawk explores the personal and political significance of his creative choices, including the (mostly nominal) decision to base the stories in the real-life community of Anoka, Minnesota, which advertises itself as the "Halloween Capital of the World." The name "Anoka" derives from the Dakota word "anokatanhan," which Hawk translates as "on both sides of the river" by way of an explicit reference to his own mixed settler-Indigenous parentage. Even more illuminating are Hawk's "Story Notes," which he of course recommends reading only *after* one is finished with the stories themselves. There, the author briefly sketches out his inspirations and motivations for writing each of the stories, pointing out specific intertextual allusions or talking shop about the precision craft of flash fiction. These endnotes are arguably unnecessary (at least in a world where we've effectively "killed the Author"), yet I am thankful that they're included if only so that we can measure Hawk's initial expectations for each story against their final products. Hawk's "Story Notes" are an intriguing peek behind the curtain of the author-reader divide, offering unique levels of insight into the creative process of an emerging master of the short story. I would love to see more authors take up this practice, regardless of whether they're career veterans or first-timers.

It is worth mentioning too how Hawk's own Black Hills Press has brought *Anoka* to life as a pocket-sized print edition. Tiny as it is, *Anoka* is presented gorgeously—a perfect little book, whether your intention is to carry it around, to assign it to students, or just to display it. Seweryn Jasińsky's black-and-white cover design is a striking marriage of Saul Bass's poppy all-caps lettering and Stephen Gammell's notorious illustrations from the *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* series. The back cover blurb, attributed to "My skeptical, yet supportive grandma," tells us everything we need to know about the book: homespun, crafted with love, and loath to take itself too seriously.

Anoka's status as an attractive-looking book is fitting, because many of the stories contained therein deal specifically with the inherent spookiness of collecting rare books of obscure provenance. There is a mysterious leather-bound volume called simply "the Book" that features in the opening story, "Soilborne," in which two prospective parents try (and fail) to conjure up a child straight from the earth. Creepier still is the book in "Wounded," which seems to delight in subjecting its current owner to all manners of supernatural and psychological horror. When our Lakota protagonist Philip Wounded first discovers the book stashed among the liquor bottles under his late grandfather's workbench, it is coated with ice and grime "as if it had been sitting in the freezer next to his venison all winter" (7). Its pages are cluttered with Spanish text and English marginalia (the latter centering on a repeated imperative to "KILL, KILL, KILL"). When Philip brings the book to a Spanish-speaking friend for translation, it mockingly transforms itself into a copy of David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, complete with the iconic blue-sky dust jacket of the first edition. It bleeds and oozes pus-filled worms when Philip tries to destroy it. Worst of all—and here is where the psychological terror comes into play—it plagues Philip's dreams with intrusive, suicidal thoughts. These thoughts, which stem from an adolescent drinking binge during which he neglected to watch over his younger sister on the day she was kidnapped and murdered, are some of the most brutal and disturbing content that Hawk commits to the page. Coupled with the book's dedication "to all missing indigenous girls and women," it's clear in moments like these that the subject matter hits close to home for the author, in one sense or another.

So too are the joys, expectations, and terrors of kinship central to the stories in *Anoka*. In "Imitate," a middle-aged father with a history of substance abuse and an unfaithful marriage discovers one day that his child, Tate, has been replaced by a doppelganger with charcoal eyes. The imitation child has cravings uncharacteristic of a ten-year-old: he demands coffee, peanut butter without bread, and plenty of broccoli. In the scenes where Tate is the object of dinner-table fights between father and mother over what

the child should and should not be eating, I was reminded of my own childhood experience as a picky eater and how those running arguments fundamentally shaped my relationship to food. As the conflict in "Imitate" escalates to violence, meanwhile, its mysteries only deepen. The story resists any straightforward allegorical reading (is the doppelganger a manifestation of infidelity, of guilt, of addiction, of abuse?) by foregrounding the kinship violation of a father killing his son. The doppelganger stresses this visceral sense of transgression with its final line, "Killed the real son?" (45).

Lastly, I should point out that Richard Van Camp and Shane Hawk each take the step of including genderqueer characters, in the stories "Wheetago War II: The Summoners" from *Taaqtumi* and "Transfigured" from *Anoka*. Neither writer is overzealous or self-congratulatory on this topic, which is worth commending. Van Camp's character Dove is known as much for their heroic deeds as for the uniqueness of their genderfluidity. We even get a sympathetic take on the elder narrator's clumsy efforts to treat Dove with courtesy and respect, as evident in the lines "No, I do not know what Dove is, but I am here to nominate them for the Mark of the Butterfly. You bet your ass, I am. Dove goddamned saved me. I pray he and she wakes up soon" (31). It's a lot of characterization packed into a few simple pronouns. Hawk, who explains in his "Story Notes" that "the modern werewolf is a perfect allusion to some people in the queer community" (78), identifies the unnamed lycanthropic narrator of "Transfigured" as genderfluid too. While I find that the narrator's joking identification with *Silence of the Lambs*' Buffalo Bill errs on the insensitive side, I can't help but appreciate Hawk's ability to convey sincere gender euphoria when the narrator thinks to herself, after being called "Sweetest woman I ever seen" by a flirtatious stranger, "*Woman*. There was the word again, floating in and out of my brain" (64). It's a great little flourish in a book full of great little flourishes.

Looking at *Night of the Mannequins, Taaqtumi,* and *Anoka* as an ensemble, I'm reminded of Lillian Gish's fourth wall-breaking line in another famous "Night of the…" story, *The Night of the Hunter*: "It's a hard world for little things." Like the young characters in the stories themselves, these books are easy to underestimate on the basis of their size and recency. As Jones, Hawk, and the authors collected in *Taaqtumi* each illustrate, though, it's the little things that stand to teach us the most about power and resilience where we least expect them.

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Louise Erdrich. *The Sentence*. HarperCollins, 2021. 386 pp. ISBN: 978147215699.

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Cracking open a novel by Louise Erdrich has always meant entering a rich world populated with complicated characters who share witty banter as they build, explore, test, and cultivate their communities. Achieving justice, exploring Indigenous identity, and finding one's way as a mixedblood individual are common themes of Erdrich's novels, and *The Sentence* (2021) is no exception. What sets *The Sentence* apart from Erdrich's other novels, however, is its relative temporal immediacy to the atrocities – and the haunting histories they expose – that Erdrich depicts and centres as the tension of her work. Set in 2019-2020 Minneapolis, Minnesota, *The Sentence* follows bookseller Tookie, her husband Pollux, stepdaughter Hetta, and Tookie's friends and co-workers from Birchbark Books, Louise Erdrich's real-life independent bookstore. Together, they navigate the explosion of social, economic, political, and racial tensions that erupted with the rise of the pandemic and then the murder of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin, sparking protests nationwide against police brutality. Amidst all this external chaos, Tookie is also being haunted by the ghost of a 'Wannabe Indian' bookstore customer, Flora, who suddenly died after reading a particular sentence from a hand-written diary entitled: "The Sentence, An Indian Captivity, 1862 – 1883" (71).

Thus, the mystery of why Flora died haunts Birchbark Books, and Tookie in particular, underpins all the material chaos of the pandemic and the reaction against police brutality in Tookie's life. In fact, the inadequate governmental response to the pandemic and the horrors of police brutality are framed as manifestations of Minneapolis' haunting history of colonialism. In this way, the entire novel is a ghost story, not just about an individual haunting, but the haunting quality of colonialism in mainstream American discourse. Imagining the potential identities of the Indigenous woman who wrote the eponymous diary, "The Sentence," and the number of atrocities she could have encountered, Tookie reflects:

> Like every state in our country, Minnesota began with blood and dispossession and enslavement […] Our history makes us. Sometimes I think our state's beginning years haunt everything: the city's attempts to graft progressive ideas

> onto its racist origins, the fact that we can't undo history but are forced to either confront or repeat it. (72)

The Sentence, then, is clearly interested in the material effects of colonial haunting and how they manifest in the American justice system as police brutality, vigilante justice, Indigenous resistance, or carceral punishment.

Building on the theme of justice is Erdrich's choice of the title, *The Sentence.* The title takes on a trickster quality, resistant as it is to singular, absolute definition. There is, of course, the diary "The Sentence"; there is also the sentence which killed Flora *within* "The Sentence." There are watchword phrases chanted as part of the police protests, like "I can't breathe" and "Abolish the police" (253 – 254). There is also "sentence" in the sense of a punishment for person convicted by the US court system – a meaning to which Tookie has intimate connection as she spent ten years in prison. There is also the love of sentences and books in general, which Tookie discovers while in prison. When reading a dictionary, she looks up the definition of the word "sentence" and finds as examples "*The door is open. Go!* They were the most beautiful sentences ever written" (24). Like the haunting history of colonialism, the myriad meanings of "sentence" affect Tookie's self-understanding and identity as she is forced to grapple with her own memories of incarceration. Furthermore, Tookie's husband, Pollux, is an ex-tribal cop and is, in fact, the person who arrested her, leading to her decade-long incarceration, most of which was in solitary confinement.

A fascination with justice and memory is, unsurprisingly, found over and over again in Indigenous literature. Hauntings and the memories they invoke of lived colonial atrocities illuminate and complicate understandings of identity and "what it means to be Indian." The intersection of memory, haunting, and justice are central pillars in Erdrich's Justice Trilogy (2008, 2012, 2016) and *Tracks* (1988), as well as Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead: A Novel* (1991), Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer* (1996), Martin Cruz Smith's *Nightwing* (1977), and Stephen Graham Jones' *Mapping the Interior* (2017), to name just a few examples. In these stories, it is common for ghosts to be both materially and psychologically manifested. For example, Mooshum in *The Plague of Doves* serves as a living reminder of the three other Anishinaabeg men who were murdered by a lynch mob when he was a young man; their ghosts follow him, and it is impossible for him to fully escape his association with these dead men. Similarly, the killer in *Indian Killer* retains both corporeal and incorporeal qualities that allow

them to commit and then escape from murders that are committed ostensibly in revenge for colonisation.

The hauntings in *The Sentence* share these psychological-yet-material qualities. On the one hand, ghosts like Flora can influence the physical world which leads to a psychological reckoning and change at the individual level. At the same time, the haunting memories of colonial violence manifest in the figure of Derek Chauvin-as-murderer, so, while George Floyd is not a ghost in the same manner as Flora, his memory influences the masses to enact – or try to enact – material change in the form of protests for police reform. The multiple layers of haunting, like the multiple layers of the meaning of the title, keep Erdrich's exploration of how the past influences the future fresh in the mind of the reader. One is left with the impression that if Flora was missing from the narrative, the novel could come off as moralistic or even exploitative of the George Floyd tragedy, while if the novel was set in a time period that did not include the mayhem of 2020 Minneapolis, it would risk becoming a stale restatement of Erdrich's previous works that also are concerned with justice and identity. Therefore, while Erdrich's use of ghostliness and its connection to injustice in 21st-century United States is not new, *The Sentence* remains relevant and fresh.

In an interview with Neal Bowers and Charles L. P. Silet, Gerald Vizenor described the process of survivance as being akin to balancing in a canoe: "I don't mean balance in a political sense, but balance in a symbolic healing sense […] You have to stay alive, and if you're tipping in your goddamn canoe, you seek the balance. You don't know in advance what structure works: you have to seek balance that'll keep the thing afloat" (49). Ultimately, *The Sentence* is a ghost story about how, after experiencing and confronting trauma, Tookie and her loved ones find empowerment and self-discovery through this process of seeking balance. As is also common in Erdrich's works, Indigenous identity is not prescriptive, and every character comes to find their peace in different ways: Pollux through traditional arts and ceremony; Hetta through participating in protests; Asema the bookkeeper through protest but also through academic research into history; and Louise Erdrich, who is a character herself, through writing. *The Sentence* continues the common thread in Erdrich's works that memory and the confrontation of the past is the key to finding this balance.

Tookie, however, resists memory at first, largely because of the trauma of her childhood and incarceration. As the turmoil in Minneapolis grows, however, so too

does Flora's power, forcing Tookie to confront that which she would prefer remains buried. Once again connecting the material to interiority, the narrative voice reflects, "Something in the diseased air, something in the trauma of the greater conversation, something in the ache of the unknown […] was giving her [Flora] more power" (188). Erdrich connects the individual haunting of the fictional Tookie by the fictional Flora to the greater haunting of the real United States and to the *need* to remember in order to find balance. Again, confronting the past and making peace with it in order to find happiness as a colonised individual is a common outcome of Erdrich's novels. However, that these characters are able to find a balance in one of the most chaotic and uncertain times in modern American history – and that their peace is hopeful rather than gimmicky – is remarkable in and of itself.

This is a great strength of *The Sentence*. Although it tackles some of the most polarising cultural moments of our times, it is not prescriptive or didactic in its response to these moments. Erdrich's characters experience real pain in response to the traumas of 2020 Minneapolis, and all the characters' disparate responses to these traumas are given the complex space they need in order articulate their places within this trauma. For example, Pollux is an ex-tribal cop and complicit in Tookie's incarceration. However, in addition to being Tookie's husband and her strongest support for the majority of the novel, he also volunteers to help his community by participating in food drives and helping to defend against looters during the riots in Minneapolis. Pollux is also haunted by what he calls a "crooked thing," which are the memories of some of the horrible events he saw and experienced during his time on the force (283). The narrator observes, "Pollux had known good people, seen lives saved by his fellow patrol officers. So who was doing the beating […] How was it that protests against police violence showed how violence police really were?" (284). In raising questions, rather than providing answers, Erdrich shows the complexities of finding the balance of which Vizenor speaks when an Indigenous person has participated in a colonial arm of the state. Unlike, say, Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* which can read as totalising and essentialist regarding Indigenous participation in colonialism, Erdrich resists painting Pollux as a reactionary symbol of the evils of the police, and therefore avoids prescriptive answers to difficult and life-altering socio-political problems.

This is just one example of how Erdrich capably reflects what it means to be haunted, materially and psychologically, by the effects of colonisation in the 21st century. For this reason, readers for whom Erdrich's historical works are just a bit too temporally distant

to be explicitly linked to more contemporary discourses, like the movement to abolish police and the reaction against the rise of the far-right in mainstream American politics, will likely find *The Sentence* a relevant and engaging read. At the same time, readers who enjoy how Erdrich engages with questions of injustice and identity will find nothing new in the philosophical underpinnings of *The Sentence* but will still be able to enjoy the rich characters and communal landscapes for which Erdrich is known. In essence, while not ground-breaking in its use of ghosts to highlight colonial trauma or the ways in which her characters confront this trauma, it is difficult not to be spellbound by Erdrich's prose and nigh impossible to not fall in love with Tookie, Pollux, and their tightly knit, deeply devoted community.

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Peter H. Russell. *Sovereignty: The Biography of a Claim*. University of Toronto Press, 2021. 192 pp. ISBN: 9781487509095.

https://utorontopress.com/9781487509095/sovereignty/

Peter H. Russell opens *Sovereignty: The Biograph of a Claim* with two occasions that would bring him into conversation with the Dene Nation. The first occurs in 1974 when James Washee, then Grand Chief, contacts Russell seeking consultation on Canada's constitutional government and Dene efforts to draft a declaration asserting their rights as a sovereign nation. Russell accepts the invitation to visit Dene leaders, where he is stumped by the question from a Dene woman, who asks how Canada established sovereignty over the Dene. For Russell, this question spurred his investigation into European sovereignty and its dominance as a political instrument over Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Moreover, it leads to him to conclude that sovereignty is a claim, which should be understood as a "a relationship, not a thing" (10). And, as he states, in the context of the nation-state, this claim works to legitimate an absolutist form of governing power based on (internal and external) territorial recognition.

The second event that Russell describes occurs in 1999 when he is asked to serve as "Canada's envoy" to the Dene Nation. As envoy, he is tasked with producing a statement of shared environmental and governing principles that would be supported by both the Deh Cho Dene and Canada. While twenty-one principles could be agreed upon, it was the disagreement over sovereignty that returns Russell's attention to this subject, stating that sovereignty does the "pernicious work of preventing an Indigenous people from sharing its territory with Canadians in ways that take into account its interests and respect its principles" (9). Here Russell goes on to argue that the solution to limiting these harmful consequences is a robust federalism that can check the claims of absolutism by dividing governing power.

As these two arguments suggest, the biographical subject of the study is a European form of sovereignty that is in stark contrast with Indigenous articulations of self-determination. This focus on Western governance is reflected in the structure of the book, with early chapters swiftly moving from the medieval disputes between kings and popes to the eventual reforms of liberal democracy before turning to the adoption of sovereign claims by colonial governments. Chapter three opens on the conventional origin story of European sovereignty with Jean Bodin and Thomas Hobbes, whose major works on feudal governance loosely bookend the Peace of Westphalia in 1654.

The discussion on liberal democracy in chapter four continues its movement through European thinkers – specifically John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau – to show how *the rule of the people* came to replace the divine right of kings as the legitimating logic underwriting nation-state sovereignty.

While this European story is well-worn territory, Russell offers a critical approach to "liberal sovereignty," which he suggests serves as a unifying force in the mythic construction of Europe's Democratic Age and aids in solidifying imperial power over colonial peoples. But as Russell notes, the blatant contradictions of "liberal sovereignty" not only emerge in the historic violence and oppression of colonial governance but in an illusory democratic nation-state where *rule by the people* persists as an imaginary construction. It is not difficult to recognize in this story the crucial role liberal ideals play in the articulation of nation-state sovereignty; yet the chapter does not fully draw out the consequences of this critique. Instead, the argument softens in the conclusion by stating that this liberal form of popular sovereignty "has had the benign effect of advancing equality by widening opportunities of all people to participate in politics and governance" (52-53). Such statements reflect the limits of the biography since "liberal sovereignty" may have the upshot of paving the way toward equality, an arguable claim in-itself, but the realization of this potential would need to account for Indigenous peoples, and other oppressed groups, actively organizing and calling for participation. Instead, the argument shifts from this general story of the birth of European liberal ideals to distinguishing between different forms of sovereignty as they take hold in colonial settings.

In the next three chapters, which respectively cover European imperialism, "settler sovereignty," and federalism, the implications of this implied progress toward equitable governance come into tension with settler colonialism (a concept not used or referenced by Russell). This is especially evident in the fact that colonial practices predate European democratic reforms, which means Russell must return to the discursive justifications that denied Indigenous sovereignty, thus disrupting the historical trajectory established in the first four chapters. For example, chapter five focuses on European imperialism as a set of 17th- and 18th-century colonial logics and practices – such as *terra nullis* and the *doctrine of discovery* – that legitimized the dispossession of Indigenous land by framing Indigenous peoples as barbarous (less than human) and/or in need of civilization. In these moments, the book reveals what is at stake in articulations of sovereignty which, as in the case of "liberal sovereignty," can foster the illusion of a more equitable future in one context while in another denies the basic humanity of populations it deems as an obstacle to absolute power.

Therefore, the effort of *Sovereignty: The Biography of Claim* to provide a full biography can feel compromised by the centering of European forms of governance and legal precedents which structure this typological account of sovereignty. Take, for example, the distinction between "imperial" and "settler" sovereignty, which is problematic when considering the *long durée* of settler colonialism. Such distinctions yield interesting points worth considering, such as how sovereignty was not always claimed over colonial settings but was instead denied to Indigenous people for the purpose of global positioning and economic ends. But the lack of historical grounding for such distinctions ultimately results in conclusions that attempt to salvage "liberal sovereignty" against what it views as the more egregious abuses of "settler sovereignty." Such distinctions lead to claims – for example, "Indigenous people in colonial Canada did not experience the force of settler sovereignty until the 1830s" (72) – that seem out of step with contemporary scholarship on settler colonialism that emphasizes the structural impact of early settlers on Indigenous communities.

The critique of sovereignty as an absolutist form of governance that must be blunted by federalism (or shared governance between local and national entities) is further obscured in the final chapters where Russell argues for a global governing body capable of externally checking nation-state sovereignty. From this, the book concludes on a cautionary note that emphasizes the failure of nations to address the existential crises precipitated by global issues such as climate change. But here too, the limits of the critique – which cannot think outside the preservation of Western forms of sovereignty – become apparent when considering how little attention is given to the active role Indigenous and other local governing bodies play in attending to these global issues. As Russell argues, "it is only they [nation-states] who have the capacity to deal effectively with three gravest issues facing our planet…threats of nuclear war, climate change, and migration of people" (116). In an epilogue aimed at addressing the global pandemic brought about by Covid, these conclusions are pushed further with an almost full vindication of nation-state sovereignty alongside the clear need for international governance.

The early remarks on the "pernicious work" of sovereignty are eclipsed by the ability of nation-state sovereignty to police borders and impose national lockdowns. Russell still calls for international governing bodies, like the World Health Organization, to coordinate and guide the response to this global crisis, but federalism, he states, is more an obstacle than a possible solution. In a striking contrast to the introduction, Russell states that the claim of "sovereignty over territory and people has not had any

major harmful effects in addressing the pandemic" (143). It is important to note that Russell was writing in the early stages of the pandemic as control measures took precedence, but many will find the claim of "no harm" difficult to parse with unequal rates of mortality among Indigenous populations, increased numbers of migrants being denied asylum, and international inequities in necessary medical equipment and treatment.

Sovereignty: The Biography of a Claim ultimately offers an ambitious intervention into the study of sovereignty that takes a wide-ranging scope – from medieval to contemporary global politics – to foreground how European governance has come to dominate large portions of the world's population. The advantage of this approach is in telling a story of governance that coheres around the articulation of *sovereignty as a claim*, thus providing a useful overview for scholars and students new to this subject. Those familiar with this historical emplotment of European governance may find this structure less compelling and may look to studies with more historical and/or theoretical specificity. To Russell's credit, he provides a useful list of suggested readings at the end of the book for those seeking to delve deeper into this subject. For those engaged with and aware of Indigenous (and other non-state actors) articulations of sovereignty, the biography may seem to stop short of contemporary scholarship that decenters the state. As Russell mentions briefly, questions of sovereignty no longer rest solely with the nation-state (or territory) and now encompass people and movements whose works speak to a range of self-determined ontologies and practices: from food production and distribution of care to migration and autonomy over one's body. For this reason, *Sovereignty: The Biography of a Claim* provides a nuanced, even if at points conflicted, approach to nation-state claims of sovereignty that serve as a useful contrast to Indigenous and emerging articulations of self-determination, thus underscoring the relationships at stake in such claims and the practices these claims foster.

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Daniel Heath Justice and Jean M. O'Brien, editors, *Allotment Stories: Indigenous Land Relations Under Settler Siege*. University of Minnesota Press, 2021. 333 pp. ISBN: 978-1-5179-0876-8

https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/allotment-stories

Allotment Stories: Indigenous Land Relations Under Siege, edited by Daniel Heath Justice and Jean M. O'Brien, gathers thirty stories of allotment (the process by which settler colonists render communal land as private "property") into a multi-genre volume that is equal parts moving and necessary. At times devastating and at others deeply hopeful, every essay in the collection carries a weight atypical in scholarly anthologies; readers are made to feel a sense of responsibility and gratitude for the often-personal narratives, which adds productively to the vast expanse of allotment-related articles, monographs, and edited collections in Native American / Indigenous Studies and related fields. Although it is structured in parts and chapters reminiscent of other edited academic anthologies, the book reads as much as memoire or nonfiction prose as it does a teaching volume, and, indeed, it is easy to imagine the text having wide circulation both in popular bookstores and classrooms.

Editors Justice and O'Brien introduce the volume by pointing to the evergreen timeliness and urgency of conversations about Indigenous land dispossession, citing, in this moment, the immediacy of the McGirt decision (2020) in the United States, devastating fires in the Amazon, and the ongoing "settler siege" of the Wet'suwet'en and Sipekne'katik First Nations in occupied Canada (xii). The concise introduction summarizes settler attitudes that figure Indigenous land relations as "antiquated, primitive, antimodern, [and] impoverishing" (xiv) in ways that helpfully orient readers who are new to the topic of allotment and Indigenous dispossession. Extended quotes from Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Dawes, and Carl Shurz contextualize settler philosophies of allotment in broader discourses of Calvinism and Protestantism, speaking to the many ways that allotment is imbricated in the violence of assimilation and unfettered capitalist desire—which is perhaps more recognizable as violence to an introductory reader. The U.S. emphasis of this summary reflects the titanic global impact of the Dawes Act (U.S. 1887) on settler privatization strategies and the areas of focus in the volume—namely North American, although contributions also include stories from the Pacific, Sápmi, Palestine, and Mexico. Justice and O'Brien acknowledge this focus and also note the silences present in the volume, "for example, Five Tribes Freedmen experiences of dispossession by both whites and non-Black

Native people" (xx). In reflecting on the presences, absences, and potentials of the current collection, the editors invite "further interrogation of how U.S. models of privatization have been taken up and customized for Indigenous expropriation elsewhere: Latin America, Fiji, Japan, Australia, and beyond" (xiv).

This capacious invitation for engagement is facilitated by the volume's structure which intersperses its four parts—"Family Narrations of Privatization," "Racial and Gender Taxonomies," "Privatization as State Violence," and "Resistance and Resurgence"—with creative interludes, including poetry and short stories (Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's "Amikode" is not to be missed!). The multi-genre interludes underscore the inherent multi-genre nature of narrative and support the radical sense of community cultivated in the text by creating bridges between the sections, which are more loose groupings than they are hard and fast indicators of content or method.

"Part I: Family Narrations of Privatization" gathers seven narratives of allotment that are deeply personal to the authors, who recount parallel stories of allotment as told in their extended family networks and in colonial documents. Beginning with Sarah Biscarra Dilley's poetic mediation on a "cartography of collusion," this opening gathering implicitly asks readers to be intensely present in their reading and to carry the stories shared therein with a particular reverence. Dilley recounts the story of her grandmother, Louisa, sharing the story as it is told in her family and augmenting it with colonial documentation to illustrate Louisa's savvy navigation of contested cartographies in California. Similarly, Jean O'Brien and Sheryl Lightfoot share stories of matriarchs and other family members who made calculated and complicated decisions to stay on and sometimes sell their allotment lands, speaking to the inherent mobility of Indigenous peoples on the land and through settler colonial structures. Also in this section, contributions by Nick Estes and Joseph Pierce speak to allotment and its constituent processes of adoption and relocation as an "arithmetic of dispossession" (Estes 49), highlighting the many ways that allotment worked to dispossess Indigenous peoples, not just of land, but of kin, stories, and connections. More so than the others, Part I keeps a focus on U.S. allotment policies, with each author explaining an aspect of allotment that specifically affects their family—the Dawes Act, the Land Buy Back Program, and relevant court cases, to name just a few. The centrality of the Dawes Act, which is briefly summarized in each essay, to so many of these stories can feel a bit repetitive when read all at once, but such repetition also serves the purpose of illustrating the nuances of allotment programs and their widely differing deployments across the United States.

The U.S. focus of Part I gives way to a broader North American lens in "Part II: Racial and Gender Taxonomies." Darren O'Toole and Jennifer Adese address the role of allotment in creating Métis racial identities and the legal nuances therein. Both chapters usefully narrate scrip systems (a kind of coupon system wherein scrips worth 160 acres or $160 were distributed to individuals to then be turned into the correct government agency in exchange for their recorded value) unique to Métis-Canadian relations, illustrating how land scrip and money scrip served to dispossess Métis peoples from their land and their Indigenous identities. Jameson R. Sweet takes up similar concerns of mixed-race dispossession in Dakota lands before the Dawes Act. In all three cases, Indigenous peoples, figured as "mixed race" by colonial forces, are uniquely dispossessed both in terms of the allotment process and in terms of their connections to larger kin networks that are not understood as products of "mixed ancestry." The futility of such colonial distinctions is underscored by Candessa Tehee's story, which illuminates the failings of colonial records to account for how "clan and ceremony were inextricably intertwined in what made a person Cherokee" (132). Despite white and Creek paternity in her family's ancestral line, Tehee beautifully articulates, in English and Cherokee, what it means for her to be "full-blood Cherokee"; when understood through clan and by ceremony, it has very little to do with blood. Also in Part II, Susan Gray's contribution resonates with Dilley's from Part I, detailing Na-ji-we-kwa's story to illustrate how Anishinaabe women manipulated the allotment system to maintain their relations to the land, keeping up gendered seasonal rounds that "merge landownership and some wage labor with more traditional ways of living on the land" (120).

Widening the focus, "Part III: Privatization as State Violence" includes stories of privatization from Guåhan, Aotearoa, Hawai'i, and Alaska. In addition to expanding the geographic reach of *Allotment Stories*, Part III also shifts the temporal scope from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Ever evocative, Christine Taitano DeLisle and Vicente M. Diaz open this section with a reading of roads in Guåhan. Figured in Diaz's section metaphorically and concretely as enablers of sexual(ized) violence against Indigenous peoples and lands, the roads in DeLisle's story are also paths for Indigenous feminist resurgence and resistance. J. Kēhaulani Kauanui and Dione Payne detail recent court cases in Hawai'i and Aotearoa, respectively, narrating settlers' contemporary legal strategies for Indigenous dispossession through privatization. In "'Why does a hat need so much land?'" Shiri Pasternak takes up similar concerns with a focus on narrating the legal landscape surrounding the Unist'ot'en blockade as it relates to Wet'suwet'en land rights and "Crown land." Closing Part III, William Bauer and Benjamin Hugh Velaise

story the complex tensions within Indigenous communities as nations and individuals navigate the present conditions of dispossession, capitalism, and environmental change in the United States (Bauer) and in Alaska (Velaise). Both authors deftly characterize multiple approaches to sovereignty in Indigenous communities, some of which have been critiqued as "selling out," while others are accused of unrealistic traditionalism. What is clear from each essay is that Indigenous articulations of sovereignty are multifaceted, polyphonic, and ongoing even in the face of colonial dispossession, assimilation, and privatization.

As promised by Heath and O'Brien in the Introduction, "Part IV: Resistance and Resurgence" gathers stories that inspire and remain hopeful despite ongoing settler colonization. Tero Mustonen and Paulina Feodoroff open Part IV with a history of Sámi-Finnish relations as they relate to land in Sápmi since 1542. Their detailed accounting will likely be of great interest to Indigenous Studies scholars in North America and the Global South who may be unfamiliar with the details of Sámi histories and land relations. The co-authors close with stories of rewilding efforts that have not only invited Finland to reconsider nature conservation efforts, but also encouraged Sámi farmers to join collective efforts towards language and cultural revitalization. More meditatively, Ruby Hansen Murray, tells the story of bison coming home to the Osage nation, returned to their land by way of a $74 million dollar exchange between the Osage nation and Ted Turner. Their arrival, for Murray, punctuates several realities all at once, realities of capitalism and poverty, of dispossession and cultural resurgence, of oil and death, and of the past and the future. Also interested in resurgence and the conditions that make it materially possible, land among them, Megan Baker tells the story of Choctaw language revitalization. Kelly S. McDonough invites us to think across the North-South border in the Western hemisphere, narrating shared "creative tactics employed by Native peoples affected by settler colonial policies and practices" in both Anglophone and Hispanophone contexts, with the specific example of "primordial titles" (245). In a similar geographic context, Argelia Segovia Liga traces the efforts of settler colonization in Mexico City from the sixteenth century to the twentieth, the effects of which, Liga argues, "led directly to the events that would spark the landless movements that clamored for access once again to communally administered lands during the Mexican Revolution of 1910 (255). In "After Property," Munir Fakher Eldin narrates the Palestinian social history of property. The story of Sakhina, a small village in the Beisan valley, presents a variety of definitions and experiences of "property," teaching us that "communal life [is] possible after the loss of official titles" (264). More stories of Indigenous success in the colonial courts are recounted in Khal Schneider and Michael P. Taylor's contributions, which detail both individual and collective

petitions for land and rights in Hawai'i, California, Haudenosaunee Territory, and Alaska.

The volume closes with an afterword wherein Stacy L. Leeds reminds us that, although allotment has done unquantifiable damage to Indigenous peoples the world over, it was not a wholly successful endeavor. The stories collected in this volume are testaments to the failure of allotment as an engine of Indigenous erasure, and as we continue on in our languages, on our lands, with one another, we create opportunities to return property to land; as the editors claim in the Introduction, "the engine stops where community begins" (xviii).

Allotment Stories is a vital collection for teaching and research. It is one of few volumes that puts transnational and transhistorical dispossession tactics in direct conversation. The utility of stories about the Dawes Act, land scrip, militarization efforts in the Pacific, global contemporary court cases, and historic accounts of land-relations in Hawai'i, Sápmi, and Palestine being put together in such close proximity cannot be overstated. This is as true for students as it is for researchers, who often have expertise in one or two of these geographic, temporal, or legal contexts and would benefit from being able to engage in a more comparative approach. The glossary, collated by the contributors and editors, as well, is an excellent stand-alone resource for students as well as interested readers with varying degrees of experience in Native American and Indigenous Studies. It is a text of our moment that does the hard work of telling stories for the future.

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Eileen Tabios. *Dovelion: A Fairy Tale for Our Times.* AC Books, 2021, 309 pages. ISBN: 978-1-939901-19-4.

https://www.acbooks.org/dovelion

Eileen R. Tabios' *Dovelion* is a slipstream work of fiction. It has characters, and a plotline develops, slowly, in the background, like a novel. Some of this work is fictional, some autobiographical. The central site is in an imagined place, Pacifica, which is supposedly connected to the Philippines (where Tabios was born before moving to the United States). But rather than autofiction, the narrative is a work of Indigenous futurism as it shifts among strands of transcolonial experience. "Transcolonial," not postcolonial, is the better term to describe the book's political critique, to suggest how imperial powers have dominated Indigenous peoples like those of the Philippines and how their influence continues and will continue in myriad guises globally. The author is simultaneously a rebel against erasure of Indigenous sovereignty and a visionary who offers new expressions of cultural traditions and personal wholeness.

Indigenous futurisms writers generate literary and other artifacts that revise western European literatures. With her textual inventions, Tabios disrupts the expectations of English-language genres. Poetry, geography, political science, dialogue, prose poetry, culinary arts, visual art critique—all wend their way through the sequential and gradual unmasking of the characters in *Dovelion*. This is Tabios' method of character development. There is a through-line present in the novel-like book: a Marcos-like dictator and his family terrorize the populace and exploit the environment, until overthrown. Two lovers are children of enemies. The woman's pregnancy results in a child and then grandchildren who commingle bloodlines of the feuding families. Events occur and recur in the narrative fabric, like revisited memories.

Tabios' body of work includes other experiments with form, including invention of the tercet form hay(na)ku. Several of these are embedded within the work: "When I bleed / I camouflage / tears" and "When I weep / I camouflage / blood" (71-2). Each diary-like section begins with a day and month, but no year. The dates are not sequential, but instead seem random. Tabios created a random language generator for her project *Murder Death Resurrection: A Poetry Generator* (2018), so the nonlinear system for dates in *Dovelion* is consistent with the author's modus operandi. Jumbled dates suggest entry into an alternative time, where linear sequence is irrelevant. Like oral tradition stories, the same incidents repeat with varying emphases. Point-of-view shifts

among characters. Thus, *Dovelion*'s underlying scaffolding is a three-dimensional clothesline upon which to hang moments of all shapes and sizes.

All entries begin with the fairy-tale phrase "Once upon a time." The chapter entitled "12 April" illustrates one of the unexpected directions of the prose; it begins with reflections on the love affair and proceeds to a quotation from "the poet Eileen R. Tabios," who is, the narrator avers, "a strong influence on my work" (60). The book's narrator and author separate here and elsewhere and re-engage, as Tabios interrogates the act of authorship.

Sequential chapters, one through twenty-five, order the book, an overlay on the randomly dated subsections. And Tabios further divides the book into three overarching sections that create another mapping: "There ~~Was~~ Is," "There ~~Became~~ Is," and "There ~~Will Be~~ Is." English verb tenses collapse into a single tense of presence. Time is a recurring concern of the book.

Decolonization through restructuring of language and genre is one dimension of *Dovelion.* Another is revitalization of Indigenous values. Tabios writes about her book *Murder, Death and Resurrection: A Poetry Generator*:

> I also wanted to deepen my interrogation (and disruption) of English which had facilitated twentieth-century US colonialism in my birthland, the Philippines. . . . I wanted to develop a consciously closer link to the Filipino indigenous value of "Kapwa." "Kapwa" refers to "shared self" or "shared identity" whereby everyone and everything is connected." (*Jacket2*, June 2, 2019)

Dovelion defines, explicates, reveals, and dramatizes the timeless value of "kapwa." A "nanny" first explains the term in the book as "despite diversity, *One is All and All is One*" (57). In another embedded quotation from the author's own writings, she explains a poetics that expands on the meaning of kapwa:

> The human, by being rooted onto the planet but also touching the sky, is connected to everything in the universe and across all time, including that the human is rooted to the past and future—indeed, there is no unfolding of time. In that moment, all of existence—past, present, and future—has coalesced into a singular moment, a single gem with an infinite expanse. (*DoveLion* 60, originally published in *The Awakening*, 2013)

The author also explains kapwa in terms of the science of physics, explaining that "it's not only a cultural belief. Various physicists have long proposed time is not linear. Some call time a dimension of spacetime and, thus, [time] does not pass because spacetime doesn't" (156). The theory is a praxis. The restoration of the intact, healthy

culture is predicted by its onetime existence in the past. The Filipino child's tale "An emerald island sits upon a blue sapphire ocean and both glow under the beam of a 24-carat sun" is a continuous refrain throughout the narration and a continuous expectation.

Islands are a motif in *Dovelion*, from the invented island country of Pacifica to the Philippines to a "large grey building" where the two lovers meet in isolation. Each individual is a discrete "island" of individuality, which links to others through sex, children, and social relationships. Kapwa links each person. Unspoken is the John Donne poem, "No man is an island," but it is present nonetheless as all writings in all time exist simultaneously in Kapwa time.

Tabios does not allow decolonization principles to devolve into rhetoric without action. Rather, she previews a future where enemies reconnect in alliances against dictatorships. She shows how the restoration of a continuous concept of time corrects the fallacy of linear time, where the past falls off the left-hand edge of the page and can be ignored (like nineteenth-century US treaties with Indigenous nations). Tabios offers options. She recognizes June 12, the day the Philippines overthrew Spanish rule, through an imaginary website *June12.com*. She restores Indigenous values in new form. *Dovelion* is a blueprint for further investigations into a future where Indigenous knowledge structures the narratives.

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Elissa Washuta. *White Magic.* Tin House, 2021. 424 pages. ISBN : 9781951142391

https://tinhouse.com/book/white-magic

Magical. Mystical. Haunting. These words describe Washuta's non-fiction essay and memoir collection *White Magic*. These words could equally be used to describe New Age clichés and stereotypes about Indigeneity that Washuta astutely identifies and critiques. The careful attention to the multiple meanings and contexts that live in every word, turn of phrase, and cultural reference makes Washuta's work a spellbinding (pun-intended) read which addresses the interconnected legacies of land, family, gender, and sexual violence.

Washuta positions what it means to be a Cowlitz woman navigating myriad layers of cultural expectations, violence, and stereotypes while considering historical and on-going questions about agency and survival. Magic, and whether it is cosmic, an illusion, or something that one can cultivate, frames the range of cultural references throughout the book and allows Washuta to produce a work of non-fiction that, as she describes, makes insights over plot. More specifically, Washuta tells the reader early on that the goal of the non-fiction writer is to "shape the recollected by how the remembering changes us. The mind wants to understand what's done but not settled" (25). Settling and unsettling as concepts appear in various contexts in this collection: the unsettling experiences of daily life that create anxiety or reckoning with the violent history of U.S expansion and how to unsettle this legacy of settler colonialism today.

The essays in this volume meditate on cultural artefacts associated in some way with magic: whether it's the witchy aesthetic of Stevie Nicks, or the supernatural narrative of *Twin Peaks,* or the uncanny ability of computerized settlers in the game *Oregon Trail* to continually resurrect themselves in their pursuit of westward expansion and displacement of Native peoples. The cultural touchstones – from music, film, and popular culture – function as a lens through which to see the magic and power of such works as narratives that weave their own kind of spell on audiences, but also provide a way to create a new narrative forged out of intertextuality that recenters the interconnectedness of time, place, and space. Intertextuality allows for an exploration of the limits of familiarity and relatability and raises questions about the intended audience for the narratives that permeate the dominant cultural imagination. The textual interrogation that comes with this intertextuality also highlights when new narratives are necessary to overturn harmful cycles of repetition.

White Magic is a work of non-fiction that arranges its chapters into three acts, each defined by titles that come from Tarot cards. By opening each act with a three-card Tarot spread to establish the direction, themes, and experiences explored in the essays, the author blends form with subject matter and exemplifies a common thread throughout that "[a]ny narrative is a magic trick" (400). The organization of the book also emphasizes the dramatic features of the text; like acts in a play, Washuta teases that her narrative has a rising and falling action, but these narrative trappings are ultimately ones she invites us to question and reconsider as she suggests time and again that the human experience cannot be neatly folded into narrative conventions or even be viewed linearly. Washuta plays with form and style, revisiting experiences, scenes, and places from different perspectives and in a different chronology. In the book's third and last act, Washuta experiments with form the most in a series of diary-like entries that resist chronology, with some entries summarizing scenes and plot points from *Twin Peak* and *The Prestige* that function as interpretative commentaries on her own lived experiences.

Another notable topic in the book is Washuta's discussion of digital games *Oregon Trail* and *Red Dead Redemption*, which immerse the player in a narrative world to replay historical narratives (and traumas) from the nation's past. It is in the discussions of these games that the implication of the title "white magic" feels most prominent, as Washuta describes the cognitive dissonance of being a Native woman immersed in the disorientating experience of playing the role of the white settler in an act of settler sleight of hand. Simulated realities versus historical realities versus living realities blur in these moments of gameplay and serve as reminders of how the past and the narratives and myth of the American west (the white magic ur-text of national mythology that excuses settler colonialism) haunts the present.

Washuta's *White Magic* is a rich volume full of metatextual and intertextual playfulness that addresses topical and significant issues in U.S. American and Indigenous cultures today. It's a book that ultimately explores the things that hold power over us and how we can hold power via narrative. Washuta may write about traumas, but she always resists narratives of victrimry and terminal creeds. Feminist scholarship and theory has long considered how the figure of the witch can be a symbol of cultural and patriarchal resistance, whether in the work of Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993) or the more recently translated work of Swiss theorist Mona Chollet's *Sorcières* (2018) (English title: *In Defense of Witches*). Yet, these explorations often privilege Eurocentric and Western notions of magic and witchery. Washuta's essays acknowledge the

pervasiveness of Western and pop culture witches and magic but don't let these tropes and approaches dominate. Washuta's essays, instead, provide an alternative way of viewing witchcraft and gender that brings a much-needed Indigenous perspective. These essays will stay with you long after you've read them.

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I recently heard a poet pose the question, what is the justification for a life devoted to poetry? What I appreciate most about poetry is how tools of craft—a carefully placed line break for example—can raise multiple angles of proposition. Or, to expand the term, preposition. That is, the relationships called and made manifest in poems. For example, if I were to put that line into a poem, I might break it so: what is the justification for a life / devoted to poetry?

What is the justification for a life? A question of the utmost relevance to the disenfranchised, the oppressed, the colonized, even as the answer is obviously to insist there isn't and needn't be one. Through *Creeland*, Dallas Hunt weaves a lifeline from the ancestors through the present to a future as beautiful as it is messy. The poems in this collection are a reckoning of what it is to be at once violent and tender, to contain multitudes. In these poems, "trees speak to one another with vocabularies that could burst the grammars that house us roots and tentacles spreading reaching unfolding" (Hunt 9). This language of the land could "topple empires if we would just get out of the way" (9). Small. Unassuming. But burrowing. Not dormant. Not vanished or passive. They seek and manifest a change in perspective and therefore being, so that smallness, too, becomes a position of strength. It's all in what the gaze can and does behold. These poems defy a singular or monolithic existence, celebrating contemporary Indigenous presence in its multiplicity. As Hunt reminds readers of this work, the language we use—and how it is understood—is key.

The language of these poems is the language of the land and body, of lived experience, description as apprehension, as not defining but transformative: "the Cree word for constellation / is a saskatoon berry bush in summertime" (11). There is generosity. There is gratitude. But gratitude does not free one from accountability. And at times Hunt's poems are pointed, as when a poem of thanksgiving ends with the admonishment to "be clear that / trying is / not the/ same as / doing" (15) without breaking the persistent, percussive cadence by which poet and poems continue to beat.

The use of Cree language throughout *Creeland* emphasizes strangeness even as it returns the colonizing language of English back to readers as strange: "the (colonial)

gateway / to the northwest // a benevolent misnomer / Portneuf Gap more of a maw" (24). In "Mahihkan," the slipperiness between language(s) is invoked through proximity: "rarely do you see / wolves by / the highway, / i say, and for a moment / it looks like / he might believe me" (27). Mahihkan. Wolf. Colonized. Colonizer. What is revealed between language? Hunt's use of language is as deliberate as its placement, from the level of vocabulary to the arrangement of the poems within *Creeland*. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard comments that "to put just anything, just any way, in just any piece of furniture, is the mark of unusual weakness in the function of inhabiting" (100). Such accusations of weakness cannot be made against the arrangement of these poems, where "Mahihkan" (translated as "Wolf" in the glossary at the back of the book) is followed immediately by a poem of kinship, in which the self indeed spills over into language and landscape and kin. We as readers search for ourselves where such networks of being meet. We reflect so often on the self voicing the poems but forget the gift poetry offers the reader who becomes, or at least momentarily inhabits, the speaker. Language becomes charm, becomes an article of protection.

If these poems are concerned with politics and settler tensions, their sights are still ultimately broader than that. In "No Obvious Signs of Distress," though problematic institutions are called out each in turn, one cannot ignore the tenderness of the poem's supplication—what can we do against the fear of dying alone? Indeed, there are moments in these poems that are simply devastatingly tender. From "I Was Born Blue":

> it was worth it,
> being born blue,
> to be outside
> of history
> for a moment
> to relate deeply
> to a mother
> who will not have
> the vocabularies
> to relate
> to you otherwise
> in the future (38)

Poems such as "Tracks" ask what if our continued presence is not in fact the solution? What if the answer is somewhere between here and not here, the said and unsaid,

earth and sky, the heartbeat of language insisted in each poem? Hunt's poems do not shy from their position of the impending moment of reckoning they at once herald and summon. Rather they demand we pause and consider a broader web of relations and consider the network of kin outside of the immediate. Just as they question our understanding of language, they compel us to question our understanding of the self, teasing self out of its own confines. After all, "flooding is love / (to be) made in / overflowing, pipes / bursting" (54).

What is the work of the poem? The poems of *Creeland* simultaneously prod and sow the hurts that nourish, while seeking—perhaps not to bridge the gap between home and wound—but to navigate the space of becoming between them. In "A Prairie Fire that Wanders About," for example, language and form invoke an enigma of becoming, a history of sowing, of harvest and cleaning by fire and flood. Hunt is a poet who knows the many possible gestures of a poem's intent—not least of which is, from time to time, a clear, earnest, plaintive call to act differently. Similar to Ada Limon's ability to tease revelations from observations of the mundane, in "Main Street and Sixth Avenue," Hunt recognizes the obvious lesson in bird cannibalism in regard to the resource extraction industry in Northern Alberta. But if we beg the question of what a poetics of accountability might look like, the answer Hunt suggests is a poetics of relations.

How is a poem, is language, an act of care and love? *Creeland* is arranged as an arc to this question. These poems are not interested in performing to meet preconceived expectations. Writing about "economies of / care and relation" (108) that defy voyeuristic settler desires for more culture entertainment, Hunt writes, "I know that acts of care and love / are supposed to be noisy / declarations, to draw attention to both / the recipient and giver of love" (109). If "an ill-fitting / shell is consignment / to death" (101), Hunt has found in the shapes of these poems forms capable of growth, of surviving and thriving, lamenting and yes, laughing—enough to not merely be consumed. Hunt's poems poke at the irony undergirding the unexamined language of settler colonialism, a language spoken by (unwashed) mouths "full of splinters" (99). If metaphor is a language of abstraction and overlay, perhaps it is through metonymy Hunt's poems reveal that which carries on in the gaps and the between.

Hunt understands and demonstrates the power of language and stories to imagine and manifest alternative realities. In "Narrative Trap(ping)," for example, Hunt revisits tropes of ongoing Indigenous extinction to show what is possible if we simply look longer, if not harder. Following the usual scene of wounded Indigenous bodies left presumably to expire on the beach:

before the cut
to darkness
to black
to the credits,
the settler protagonist,
gazing
intently toward
the horizon,
has a brain
aneurysm,
dying
instantly
the Indigenous guide
sits on the beach
alive
help heard
in the offing
in the distance. (110)

Of course, the outcome cannot be assured. Language is as much a living body as those still to be revived on the beach and always becoming where/as it is spoken. Still, perhaps Hunt is right that a lot of poems these days are different ways of writing pain and longing:

form obscures,
language obfuscates,
but longing clarifies,
longing sharpens,
while stealing focus,
until all you have
is something pure
and painful:
yearning (113)

But if what Hunt says is true, that "desire is / a struggling river" (114), poetry reflects our efforts to keep afloat. The "cure for existential angst" (116) cannot be bought in smudge kits at your local grocer or shopping mall. But perhaps it can be found in

poetry. Cheesy, I know. And my words, not Hunt's. But at the end of it all, the power of language, Dallas Hunt reminds us, cannot be denied where it is spoken.

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