

Scalability in Indigenous Queer Futurism:Eco-Spiritual Healing in the Young Adult Dystopian Novel *The Marrow Thieves*

Escalabilidad en el futurismo queer indígena: sanación eco-espiritual
en la novela distópica para jóvenes adultos *The Marrow Thieves*

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Abstract

This paper applies a queer indigenous reading of the concept of scalability in the novel *The Marrow Thieves* in consideration of the telling of *Story*, the oral story-telling tradition of climate change, residential schools, Native American history, and the healing power of dreams in eco-spirituality, as told from the perspective of the queer/Two-Spirit Elder, Miigwan. It unearths some matters of space and time within the novel in the role of Native American residential schools, climate change, indigenous history and eco-spirituality in a scalable queer speculative future by demonstrating the inseparability of time (present/past/future), space (the local/national/global/cosmic) and matter (physical/metaphysical/spiritual) to provide both a warning and hope for the future. The paper argues that the novel scales Indigenous dystopian lived and imagined hauntings without falling into a fatalistic trap that many non-Indigenous anthropogenic speculative climate change novels fall into. Likewise, it posits that the novel, unlike many non-indigenous novels, scales in and out of space, time and matter throughout the narrative without disrupting the frame: hence, as the planet requires, the text itself is adaptable to the scales of the past, present and future anthropocene and the speculative futures they invoke.

Key words: Native American literature, queer, speculative fiction, climate change, scale

Resumen

Este artículo aplica una lectura indígena queer del concepto de escalabilidad en la novela *The Marrow Thieves* teniendo en cuenta la narración de Story, la tradición de narración oral sobre el cambio climático, las escuelas residenciales, la historia de los nativos americanos y el poder curativo de los sueños en Ecoespiritualidad, contada desde la perspectiva del anciano queer/dos espíritus, Miigwan. Descubre algunas cuestiones de espacio y tiempo dentro de la novela en el papel de las escuelas residenciales de nativos americanos, el cambio climático, la historia indígena y la ecoespiritualidad en un futuro especulativo queer escalable al demostrar la inseparabilidad del tiempo (presente/pasado/futuro), el espacio. (lo local/nacional/global/cósmico) y la materia (física/metafísica/espiritual) para proporcionar tanto una advertencia como una esperanza para el futuro. El artículo sostiene que la novela escala las apariciones distópicas vividas e imaginadas por los indígenas sin caer en una trampa fatalista en la que caen muchas novelas antropogénicas no indígenas sobre el cambio climático. Asimismo, postula que la novela, a diferencia de muchas novelas no indígenas, entra y sale del espacio, el tiempo y la materia a lo largo de la narración sin alterar el marco: por lo tanto, como lo requiere el planeta, el texto mismo es adaptable a las escalas del planeta. pasado, presente y futuro del antropoceno y los futuros especulativos que invocan.

Palabras clave: literatura nativa americana, queer, ficción especulativa, cambio climático, escala

Introduction

Many tribes, nations, and traditions have influenced the production of diverse Indigenous¹ literatures carrying a shared history of and resistance to settler colonialism² beginning in 1492, or “Indigenous anti-colonialism” (Coulthard, 2010), within the North American context (though not determined solely by these experiences). Within their writing, Indigenous literatures often center place as Indigenous worldviews developed experientially in sacred reciprocity with the land and animals that reside in specific geographic locations (Deloria, 1972; Coulthard, 2010; De Vos, 2020). In addition, Indigenous literatures continue to embody oral and written traditions to weave captivating works of autobiography, historical fiction, poetry, and novels representing Indigenous struggles, spiritualities, and politics that honor the sacrifices of their ancestors, bridge human/non-human relationships, and affirm Indigenous presence through time (Justice, 2018, p. xiv). As Justice (2018) argues, these stories shape “our existence and help us understand how to uphold our responsibilities to one another and the rest of creation, especially in places and times so deeply affected by colonial fragmentation” (p. 2)³. While increased numbers of Indigenous peoples educated in English, both forced and elected, and the increased Indigenous activism in the 1960s and 70s such as the resistance to the Federal White Paper (1969) in Canada and the American Indian Movement (AIM) (1968) in the United States may have inspired the first broad, collective body of North American Indigenous written literature (Lincoln, 1985), Indigenous

peoples have always used story-telling and literature as the basis and maintenance of identity, culture and relationships (Tillett, 2014). Currently, Indigenous writers have been turning towards speculative fiction and Indigenous futurism to carry Indigenous knowledges to futuristic settings (Cornum, 2015). For instance, Dillon (2012), who coined the term Indigenous futurism, published the first anthology of Indigenous science fiction *Walking the Clouds*, and Nicholson et al. (2016) published another specifically Two-Spirit or Indigiqueer collection *Love Beyond Body, Space and Time*. The authors in these collections integrate their distinct cultural understandings of the cosmos and spirituality merged with historical traumas of the colonial apocalypse to transform “the politics of Indigenous death” in an imaginative future Anthropocene (Mo’e’hahne, 2021, p. 253). This essay explores another such futuristic “world-making” in Cherie Dimaline (2017)’s (Métis) novel *The Marrow Thieves*.

The young adult novel *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) contests oppressive histories and policies towards Indigenous communities by scaling the historical trauma of the “Indian residential schools” (Canada) to a near-future dystopian world devastated by pollution, climate change, and the mistakes of current and past Anthropocene. It underscores the memory of nearly 150,000 Indigenous children forced into residential schools in the 19th and 20th centuries by the Canadian government (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), a practice initiated and concurrently implemented by the United States. While different in scale and policy, both governments stole

children from their homes, separated them from their parents and tribes, denied them access to their languages and traditions, and subjected them to terrible conditions, starvation, sickness, and physical/sexual abuse. Many children never returned home evidenced by the mass unmarked graveyards still being unearthed. For those ones who did, they arrived with broken spirits and ruptured cultural ties that still haunt Indigenous communities working tirelessly to heal wounds and reclaim the lost parts of their identity, often through literature.

In the novel, *The Marrow Thieves* (2017), an apocalyptic landscape devastated by climate change is taking away the settlers' ancestors' ability to dream, threatening their sanity and their lives. The settlers' ancestors, then, reinstate these "death" schools to extract Indigenous peoples' bone marrow and reactivate the dreams they destroyed. The novel employs Indigenous story-telling traditions through a modern creation story called *Story*, narrating Indigenous history, climate change, and a dystopian Anthropocene to reconstruct traditional knowledges. *Story*, told by Miigwans, an Anishinaabe Two-Spirit/Queer Indigenous⁴ Elder and the holder of ancestral knowledge and "old-timey" things, along with the Elder woman Minerva, provides the Indigenous youth with the connection to their past that they need to survive in the present and hold on to their dreams. As Mo'e'hahne (2021) illustrates:

As the pandemic deaths increase, ecological devastation continues, and threats of White supremacist terrorism loom in the United States,

the healing impetus articulated in femme-centered and queered Indigenous speculative futures might offer paths to healing through alternative forms of collectivity and solidarity. A politics of refusal through "returning to ourselves"... is a politics of turning to our communities and to one another, through compassion, beyond the organs of the settler state. (pp. 256-257)

Hence the novel demonstrates how an Indigenous "returning to [them] selves" reveals the inseparability of time (present/past/future), space (the local/national/global/cosmic) and matter (physical/metaphysical/spiritual) to warn and provide hope through eco-spirituality. Likewise, Medak-Saltzman (2017) explains how Indigenous futurism explores "dystopian possibilities" to contemplate our dangerous realities critically and "imagine our way out of our present dystopian moment to call forth better futures" (p. 143). While reading this coming-of-age novel, the reader matures with the protagonist, a teenage boy named Frenchie, guided by a Two-Spirit man and a female Elder instilling their values, as he becomes the type of human we need in our past/future/present Anthropocene providing hope in the ruins of a dying Earth and a map for scalable co-existence and survival for readers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike.

Theoretical Foundations

This theoretical framework relates the concepts of "spacetime-mattering" of quantum physics (Barad, 2017), "Spirallic temporality" within

Indigenous eco-spirituality (De Vos, 2020), and dystopic Indigenous history (Whyte, 2018) to set the foundations of scalability within the novel. It then relates these concepts to scalability as theorized by Clark (2012) in his ecocritical approach, forming the basis of the argument in this text: the novel adapts to the past, present, and future Anthropocene without distorting the scope of vision. Finally, it supports this conclusion through the application of the Seventh Generation Principle (Wilkins, 2015): the novel spans seven generations, evoking both ancestors and descendants within the narrative of the story.

Karen Barad (2017) proposes the concept of spacetime-mattering which questions concepts of scale through quantum physics mirroring many Indigenous spiritual beliefs of the cosmos, ecology, and humans' role in the universe. In this worldview, both scientific and spiritual, each life form and every aspect of the universe interconnects in an inseparable net of wholeness, rather than "otherness." Barad (2017) writes:

We are stardust—made of atoms cooked inside of stars through a process of nuclear fusion—all the while, a brilliance 'brighter than a thousand suns' resides inside the nucleus of an atom. The largest of space-time-matter measures, the smallest of space-time-matter measures: each contained inside the other. (p. 109)

In many Indigenous cultures, as reflected in the Anishinaabe, Métis, Cree and other Indigenous cultures represented in this novel, each of us are

at once tiny specs of stardust and the entire cosmos itself. Likewise, De Vos (2020), proposes the concept of "spiralic temporality" in which relationships with lands and their seasonal cycles simultaneously contain our relationships and responsibilities to our ancestors and descendants, making time secondary to place, in a spiralic dance of life. This directly opposes Western conceptions of linear time and history. She writes:

The novel's spiralic temporal structure invites a heuristic of spiralic temporality to see the communities in *The Marrow Thieves* in relation with historic and contemporary Turtle Island Indigenous communities and the issues and values they have been and are currently experiencing, defending, and living. [It] illustrates how the spiral of Indigenous life is still moving into the future, settler violence and oppression be damned. (pp. 4-5)

As such, quantum physics now mirrors Indigenous knowledges passed down for centuries through stories. As revealed by Barad (2017): "Entire worlds inside each point, each specifically configured. Infinitesimals are infinite. Matter is spectral, haunted by all im/possible wanderings, an infinite multiplicity of histories present/absent in the indeterminacy of time-being" (p. 113). Even the minute details and absences represent the love and grief which spiral in and out of time and space indefinitely linking stories and lives together.

Likewise, the hauntings in the novel of the not-yet-here but already past bring forth ancestral memories

demanding healing action in the now. Barad (2017) explains “hauntings” as:

...the dynamism of ontological indeterminacy of time-being/being-time in its materiality. And injustices need not await some future remedy, because “now” is always already thick with possibilities disruptive of mere presence. Each moment is thickly threaded through with all other moments, each a holographic condensation of specific diffraction patterns created by a plethora of virtual wanderings. (p. 113)

Hence, through a spiraling of time, the fictional novel re-members real-life hauntings, from the beginning of settler-colonialism in Turtle Island to the residential/boarding schools where mass graveyards of Indigenous children are currently being uncovered, as well as the present possibilities of dreams for the future of Indigenous communities. Whyte (2018), likewise, affirms the spiralic temporality in Indigenous science fiction, writing: “The spiraling narratives unfold through our interacting with, responding to and reflecting on the actual or potential actions and viewpoints of our ancestors and descendants” (p. 229). In many Indigenous understandings of life, ancestors and descendants unite in present incarnations of life and, thus, they live indebted to them reciprocally: the present, past, and future fuse in “spiralic temporality” related to quantum physics’ theorization of spacetime-mattering, each webbed together through intricate non-linear connections. As such, in *The Marrow Thieves* (2017), these spiraling time-being/being-time ontologies bring together the attempted

robbery of the dreams through oppressive policies that led to the destruction of Indigenous languages, religions, traditions, and identity in the imagining of a queer and ever-changing Indigenous future that reclaims these same knowledges and centers on the present potential of dreams for survival.

Furthermore, Whyte (2017) avers that Indigenous peoples are already living in the dystopian future of their ancestors. For example, he writes about the Anishinaabe people:

settler colonial campaigns in the Great Lakes region have already depleted, degraded, or irreversibly damaged the ecosystems, plants, and animals that our ancestors had local living relationships with for hundreds of years and that are the material anchors of our contemporary customs, stories, and ceremonies. (p. 3)

The novel, set in the polluted shores of the Great Lakes before the group of Indigenous climate change refugees continue North, simply extends past dystopian conditions and projects them onto a dystopian future. Whyte continues, “It would have been an act of imagining dystopia for our ancestors to consider the erasures we live through today...Yet we do not give up by dwelling in a nostalgic past even though we live in our ancestors’ dystopia” (p. 3). Hence, as many climate change theorists and activists project fears of a dystopian future or “the end of the world” scenario due to anthropogenic global warming, many Indigenous peoples have a different perception based on survival and healing as seen in the novel: the creation of community,

rituals and ceremony that enable a slow healing of the lands and, hence, of self and the people, which make life viable even within dystopian conditions.

Furthermore, eco-critic Clark (2012) questions the blindness to questions of scale within hegemonic literary and cultural criticism. He defines scale as a tool to extend and analyze information between space or time dimensions where moving in or out requires a recalculation to avoid “*scale effects*” or derangements (p. 148). He writes that for climate change, “we have a map, its scale includes the whole earth but when it comes to relating the threat to daily questions of politics, ethics or specific interpretations of history, culture, literature, etc., the map is often almost mockingly useless” (p. 148). Nevertheless, Indigenous literature, such as *The Marrow Thieves* provides a different yet invaluable cartographic representation. To understand these literary maps in Clark’s eco-critical approach, he proposes reading texts “through a series of increasingly broad spatial and temporal scales, one after the other, paying particular attention to the strain this puts on given critical assumptions and currently dominant modes of reading” (p. 157). Nevertheless, the short story he conducts his experiment in scalability represents a typical white working-class *Americana* story where “plots, characters, setting and trivia that seemed normal and harmless on the personal or national scale reappear as destructive doubles of themselves on the third scale, part of a disturbing and encroaching parallel universe, whose malign reality it is becoming impossible to deny” (Clark, 2012, p. 162). Indeed, the lifestyle represented is not sustainable on an

individual nor global scale in terms of levels of consumption, levels unthinkable for much of the world.

At first glance, “Elephant” (1988) reveals a close-up view of one disconnected family positioned in linear time and space within a personal and national context, yet within a spiritual eco-critical reading or from the third scale, as proposed by Clark (2012) “Elephant” shows no sustainability within the characters themselves, their emotional/spiritual lives, their individual economies in a capitalistic world, nor at the global/cosmic levels in their consumerism. As such “zooming out” on the short story, as Clark (2012) proposes, reveals an individualistic lifestyle within a working-class context in the US, who consume less the national average, which, undoubtedly, could lead to the very dystopian future affected by climate change represented in *The Marrow Thieves* (2017). Nevertheless, the application of this compelling question of scale yields quite different results when applied to *The Marrow Thieves* (2017). Whyte (2018) explains this distinction: “Indigenous peoples challenge linear narratives of dreadful futures of climate destabilization with their own accounts of history that highlight the reality of constant change and emphasize colonialism’s role in environmental change” (p. 225). Thus, *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) does not represent dystopia as a faraway, worst-case scenario or a simplistic warning but instead projects existing settler colonialism to the future while offering hope for the same future. It reminds the Indigenous reader that they have survived before and will survive again with the help of their ancestors/descendants despite the

settler-colonial intent on erasing their existence and destroying the lands. Hence, the analysis in this paper will “zoom in and out” in scale, which, unlike the reading of “Elephant,” will not radically change the meaning of the novel but show a repeating call to heal the lands and people in the past, present and future.

In his literary eco-critical approach Clark (2012) proposes a reading of a scale of six centuries (three hundred years before and after the time of the story) in a linear conceptualization of time where the future may be inhabitable (p. 152). He states that, at first, reading “Elephant” (1988) in this way may seem illogical but shows how, through this scale, the text becomes “a peculiar kind of gothic, a doppelganger narrative” but reading stories of Indigenous futurism in this “third scale” seems not only logical but necessary (p. 151). Indigenous futurism gains its vitality precisely because it remembers the beginnings of the colonial settler project and the effects it has on Indigenous peoples yet projects lessons of survival into the future through “spiralic temporality”: it resists “the limited vision offered by linear settler temporality—where Indigenous people can only ever be “authentic” in some faraway past—and instead evidences the possibilities for Indigenous futures informed and embraced by their relations across time” (De Vos, 2020, p. 4). However, this paper uses the scale of Seventh Generation Principle to read the story *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) to honor the seven generations spoken of in many Indigenous communities. This principle does not, as commonly cited in conservation discourses, refer to Indigenous peoples as all-knowing

romantic visionaries looking into the distant past and future, but rather the immediate seven generations closest to them: their great grandparents, grandparents, parents, themselves, children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren (real or imagined) (Wilkins, 2015). In this worldview, “each generation was responsible to teach, learn, and protect the three generations that had come before it, its own, and the next three” (Wilkins, 2015). Although Indigenous peoples commonly invoke more distant ancestors/descendants, the main concept is less abstract than often used by the non-Indigenous sustainability movement yet carried communities through centuries. If we honor and protect these immediate seven generations, sustainability also follows (Wilkins, 2015), which Dimaline (2017) illustrates in *Story*’s telling of residential schools (parents/grandparents/great grandparents) and climate change (children/grandchildren/great grandchildren). Furthermore, even this concrete version of the Seven Generation Principle incorporates “spiralic temporality”: the seven generations spiral in time incorporating previous and later generations: for instance, the lives of one’s great grandparents include previous generations and the lives of one’s great grandchildren includes future generations: thus, the analysis easily expands beyond six hundred years.

In sum, this paper applies queer and Indigenous theory to the concept of scalability in the novel *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) in consideration of the telling of *Story* and the healing power of dreams in eco-spirituality. It unearths some “spacetime matters” in “spiralic temporality” (De Vos, 2020) within

the role of residential schools, climate change, Indigenous history, and the sacred roles of the Two-Spirit/Female Elders. It includes a broad analysis of scale through the application of the Seventh-Generation Principle, as an Indigenous eco-critical methodology, to explore how past dystopic realities affect dystopic imaginings of the future.

Textual Analysis

As argued in the theoretical foundation, scalability forms an integral feature of the queer, Indigenous speculative fiction novel *The Marrow Thieves* (2017). This section analyzes the concept of spiraling time and scale within the telling of *Story* by applying three Indigenous concepts: Wahkohtowin (Cree), or laws governing reciprocity between humans, animals, and the land, Aanikoobijigan (Anishinaabe), the invocation of both ancestors and descendants for decision making, and the Seventh Generation Principle (Iroquois), the consideration of previous and future generations for sustainability. It argues that the novel resists Indigenous death (physical and cultural) promoted through settler colonialism, including the residential schools and climate change, through the healing power of dreams and language within space and time. To exemplify this, it “zooms in and out” on Anishinaabe culture and livelihood and activism in Great Lakes in relation to the telling of “Melt,” a story within *Story*, and the queer and female Indigenous Elders who lead the young Indigenous climate change refugees to safety.

In the novel, when the group’s leader Miigwans first introduces the

importance of understanding and remembering *Story*, an oral rendition of Indigenous history whose telling traverses centuries, he highlights the concept of scale through a metaphor of spatiality:

We needed to remember *Story*. It was his job to set the memory in perpetuity... every week we spoke, because it was imperative that we know. He said it was the only way to make the kinds of changes that were necessary to really survive. “A general has to see the whole field to make good strategy,” he’d explain. “When you’re down there fighting, you can’t see much past the threat directly in front of you.” (Dima-line, 2017, p. 24)

By expressing the importance of perspective through centuries of experience, he shows how *Story*, which the young people in the novel have only lived a small portion, contains lessons, physical, emotional, and spiritual, on survival in this near-future dystopian world. *Story* recognizes that life, death, time, and space spiral cyclically: if one “zooms in or out” on it remains undistorted: it is simultaneously deeply intimate and immediate to the characters while also spanning much more than seven generations into the past and future.

Miigwans begins telling *Story* as a narrative of resistance and survival for those too young to remember the residential schools to show how they will once again survive and thrive through remembering and mourning the past and returning to their traditions:

We suffered there. We almost lost our languages. Many lost their innocence, their laughter, their lives... There were a lot of years where we were lost, too much pain drowned in forgetting that came in convenient packages: bottles, pills, cubicles where we settled to move around papers. (Dimaline, 2017, p. 23)

He then continues explaining how the Indigenous people brought back Indigenous knowledges, songs and stories to the streets, their communities, and within their own schools. Miigwans declares: “once we remembered that we were warriors, once we honored the pain and left it on the side of the road, we moved ahead. We were back” (p. 23). *Story*, then, tells of Indigenous agency giving tribute to their ancestors who rebuilt their communities after so much pain and tragedy: it provides a blueprint of survival through singing, storytelling, and honoring of the past, including the pain. Hence, the telling of *Story*, like the telling of many Indigenous oral traditions, guide and inspire future generations while honoring past ones. As Whyte (2018) claims, both Indigenous ancestors and future generations hope for more “sources of agency... to empower protagonists that can help us survive the dystopia or post-apocalypse” (p. 231). These survival stories scale/spiral generations and repeat in many Indigenous communities. They are as constant as trees, rivers, and the air itself: while settler-colonialism has tried to exterminate the environment and Indigenous cultures and stories, they remain a secret source of agency that unites generations across place and time, even if they must go into hiding for a while to survive.

Likewise, the complete disregard toward Indigenous life and dignity also persists in its imaginative haunting across more than seven generations through the residential schools. The story centers around the reimplementing of the “death” schools to extract the bone marrow of Indigenous peoples so the settlers may dream again after the loss of their own dreams. As Miigwans explains to the children, “Dreams get caught in the webs woven in your bones. That’s where they live, in that marrow there” from which the settler colonials would “pluck” the dreams “caught” in the webs (Dimaline, 2017, p. 18). He wants the children to value their dreams as they value their own bodies, which the settler-colonialists saw as pure objects for exploitation, as they did with the land itself. While the settler-colonialists separated themselves from the natural world, destroyed it and in the process destroyed their own dreams and lives, the Indigenous characters in the novel view the natural world, dreams, and their own lives as intricately connected and are attempting to save and honor them together.

Dimaline, a member of the Georgian Bay Métis community in Ontario, Canada, includes members of different tribes and Nations from various parts of North America banding together to create community together. Two characters critical to the climax of the novel and the survival of the group, Minerva and Isaac, both belong to the Cree nation, one of Canada’s largest First Nations, and still dream in their Indigenous language. Within Cree worldview, the concept of *Wahkohtowin* shows the Cree people their obligations towards all of creation, both human

and non-human (Wildcat, 2018, p. 14). In this view of *Wahkohtowin*, the natural world is also animate, imbued with spirit, and all existence has clear rules of reciprocity allowing for sustainability across space and time that extends beyond out individual needs and instincts (Wildcat, 2018). In the novel, Minerva resists the marrow-harvesters by transforming her dreams in her native Cree language into a powerful weapon, sacrificing herself: then, Isaac, Miigwans' husband, a half-Cree poet/linguist, finishes what Minerva began by transforming his dreams, also in Cree, for the groups' survival. While Dimaline does not directly address *Wahkohtowin*, both characters' actions represent this worldview based on reciprocity towards all relations for a sustainable future (p. 14). As the Elders take on the responsibility of leading the youth, they also lead them in their reciprocal responsibility of *Wahkohtowin* with the Earth and each other.

Likewise, Dimaline (2017) incorporates an analysis of scale, and *Wahkohtowin*, in *Story* in the story of climate change and (dis)connection to the lands, water, and air around the Great Lakes and Turtle Island. Here, past actions affect future generations locally and globally:

The Earth was broken. Too much taking for too damn long, so she finally broke. But she went out like a wild horse, bucking off as much as she could before lying down... It changed to violence in some cases, building tsunamis, spinning tornados, crumbling earthquakes, and the shapes of countries were changed forever, whole coasts breaking off like crust. 'And all

those pipelines in the ground? They snapped like icicles and spewed bile over forests, into lakes, drowning whole reserves and towns. So much laid to waste from the miscalculation of infallibility in the face of a planet's revolt.' (pp. 68-9)

While this speculative future traverses centuries of the Anthropocene, it simultaneously scales down to the locality of the Indigenous tribe centered in the book in this moment of spacetime-mattering within a personified (or as a holistic organism) Earth that settler-colonists are killing. Thus, instead of "zooming out" to see how the climate change scales through centuries, this analysis "zooms in" to show how *Story*, in its expansiveness, can also represent a locality in a moment of time. Whyte (2018) explains:

Water is sacred for Anishinaabek. Though the Great Lakes region has a high proportion of the world's fresh water supply, things have changed in recent times. The waters are now the dumping ground of numerous pollutants. Agricultural runoff, sewage disposal, and contamination from industry, such as mercury, become entangled in the food chain and affect habitats for species important to Anishinaabe, such as fish. (p.7)

As the Anishinaabe culture and livelihood, the Indigenous cultures represented by the main characters Miigwans and Frenchie in the novel, depend on the health of the Great Lakes (which hold 20% of the Earth's fresh water and also depends on them), the Anishinaabek people have been

and are currently involved in a range of activism. They have worked towards stopping polluting pipelines to protect the Nmé (“the largest and oldest living fish in the Great Lakes basin, sometimes exceeding 100 years in age”), the conversation of wild rice that grows near the lakes, education through events like the Mother Earth Water Walk and more: As Whyte (2017) explains, “the focus on native species puts in perspective the convergence between deep Anishinaabe stories and histories and the more recent industrial settler degradation of the environment” (p. 7-8). In the novel, the same issues the colonist settlers ignore in our current Anthropocene have ruinous repercussions on the future: “The Great Lakes were polluted to muck. It took some doing, but right around the time California was swallowed back by the ocean, they were fenced off, too poisonous for us” (Dimaline, 2017, p. 24). This view of the Great Lakes and its effects on Anishinaabe peoples and lands reveals both a broad and precise perspective, and in both ranges of vision the story remains intact as an extension of the whole.

Hence, through the telling of “Melt” in *Story*, Dimaline projects the current effects of pollution on fish, waters, Indigenous peoples, climate change, other environmental disasters, and climate migrations into the future in the novel:

...The Melt put most of the northlands under water, and the people moved south or onto some of the thousands of tiny islands that popped up out of the Melt’s wake across the top of our lands. Those northern people, they were tough,

though, some of the toughest we’ve ever had, so they were okay, are still okay, the tales tell. Some better than okay. That’s why we move north towards them now. (Dimaline, 2017, p. 24)

The Anishinaabe people have their own migration stories, and like many Indigenous tribes globally, which include both enforced migrations as well those voluntarily chosen to best meet the needs of tribe and the land. Indigenous peoples further North in Canada and the United States (Alaska) have lived through and fought against the effects of over-fishing, nuclear waste, oil pollution, melting lands and more yet continue to protect their lands and traditions:

Anishinaabe/Neshnabe peoples often relate their histories through concepts of constant migration and motion occurring at different scales. Historically, Anishinaabe peoples root themselves in a complex migration story through which their societies changed homelands repeatedly as they moved from what is now called the Eastern U.S./Canada region to the Great Lakes region (Whyte, 2018, p. 228).

This, likewise, as reflected in the book: “Anishnaabe people, us, lived on these lands for a thousand years. Some of our brothers decided to walk as far east as they could go, and some walked west, and some crossed great stretches of narrow earth until they reached other parts of the globe” (Dimaline, 2017, p. 23). These migrations then, too, repeat stories of survival where the people made new connections with the

land and kept their ceremonies alive in their new home. Thus, zooming in or zooming out, the narrative of the Melt, the Water Wars and climate change remains both mutable and stable in the novel's spacetime mattering.

Yet unlike many other non-Indigenous dystopian climate change novels, the focus of *Story* revolves around adaptation and healing through an eco-spiritual connection to the land, scalable from each bodily cell to a tree, the planet, the cosmos, like the concept of Wahkohtowin:

I mean we can start healing the land. We have the knowledge, kept through the first round of these blasted schools, from before that, when these visitors first made their way over here like angry children throwing tantrums. When we heal our land, we are healed also. We'll get there. Maybe not soon, but eventually. (Dimaline, 2017, p. 145)

For Miigwans, the process of healing the land also heals his people like has been done in the past: rather than panic and chaos, he provides faith, calm, and order even in the ruins of the Earth to the young people who need his direction. Furthermore, like the scaling from the infinite to infinitesimal in space, the novel also considers scale in terms of time in its inseparability from space. When Frenchie first falls in love, through all the loss and tragedy he has lived through, he questions "How could anything be as bad as it was when this moment existed in the span of eternity?" (p. 120). Life continues and the beauty, celebration, and gratitude shines through the tragedy: even during a breaking point on

the Earth, we can find balance in our smallness, our dreams, and through love in time and space in the larger scale, with larger meaning.

Likewise, when the Elder Minerva is captured so the rest of the group may escape, the young people gather her things and find traditional "jingles" for making sound while dancing which confuses the children as they must always be silent as to not get caught by the recruiters, but one of the older boys clarifies: "Sometimes you risk everything for a life worth living, even if you're not the one that'll be alive to live it" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 116.) As Whyte (2018) explains in Anishinaabe culture: ancestor and descendant can be invoked in the same expression "aan-ikoobijigan" (p. 229). Likewise, he says that in conversations with Indigenous peoples or in Indigenous literature we will often hear two questions: "How do we return the gifts from our ancestors?" and "How do we become a good ancestor ourselves?" (p. 229). He explains that the first question invokes the gifts and wisdom of his ancestors to think about current situations while the second "opens dialogue with the coming generation" to consider on how our actions could benefit generations in the future (p. 229). This reiterates the seventh-generation principle simultaneously honoring the past and future in our present lives. Hence this sense of scale, united through "aan-ikoobijigan," dictates what actions are considered correct and desirable by projecting ourselves into the past and future. In Anishinaabe culture, as well as many Indigenous cultures, these questions guide individual and collective decisions through speculation of what would honor our ancestors and

descendants, linking with speculative fiction and storytelling as way of guiding actions situated within scale.

Finally, Dimaline positions the two leaders, the sacred grandmother/grandfather, as incredibly powerful Elders: the female Elder, Minerva, who dreams only in her Native language Cree, teaches important lessons, particularly to the young women, and Miigwans, the wise Two-Spirit/queer Elder, guides the group and passes along *Story*. This analysis focusses specifically on the telling of *Story*, but Minerva plays a fundamental role as a sacred female elder in the novel. Indeed, her dreams along with Miigwans's captured love, Isaac, hold the key to destroying the residential schools. The power of their dreams in their Native language Cree, undisrupted by settler-colonialism and colonial languages, have the power to stop the "schools" where the settlers first tried to eliminate their languages. Minerva's songs and prayers contain so much power that when the settlers tried to connect her to the machines to extract her bone marrow:

Minerva hummed and drummed out an old song on her flannel thighs throughout it all. But when the wires were fastened to her own neural connectors, and the probes reached into her heartbeat and instinct, that's when she opened her mouth. That's when she called on her blood memory, her teachings, her ancestors. That's when she brought the whole thing down. (Dimaline, 2017, p. 131)

These two Elders empower Indigenous women and those from the LGBT2+ community to re-imagine

their sacred role in tribal societies and harness their own power to make their communities even stronger.

As the first residential schools imposed Christianity and heteronormative patriarchy on Indigenous populations, Dimaline's choice of queer and female Indigenous elders as catalysts within the story proves powerful. As Whyte (2018) explains, speculative fiction allows for "intergenerational dialogue" that can "[empower] those protagonists who can inspire and guide us through the Tribal ancestral dystopias we continue to endure" (p. 233). As Brayboy (2017) explains the Church and settler-governments imposed a patriarchal understanding of gender and criminalized and stigmatized sexual diversity in Indigenous cultures:

The Jesuits and French explorers told stories of Native American men who had "Given to sin" and "Hunting Women" with wives and later, the British returned to England with similar accounts. George Catlin said that the Two Spirit tradition among Native Americans "Must be extinguished before it can be more fully recorded."...the Spanish Catholic monks destroyed most of the Aztec codices to eradicate traditional Native beliefs and history, including those that told of the Two Spirit tradition. In 1530, the Spanish explorer Cabeza de Vaca wrote in his diary of seeing "soft" Native Indian males in Florida tribes dressing and working as women. (para. 3)

Furthermore, the same residential schools engrained homophobia and heteronormativity within the youth and much of the sacred role of gay, bi,

transgender and non-gender conforming (to use today's language) tribal members held within many Indigenous tribes was lost. Hence, LGBTQ2+ Indigenous people have had to work arduously to reeducate their tribal communities and reclaim their place in tribal culture. As such, this paper uses two-terms, queer and Two-Spirit to describe Miigwans in the novel although he does identify himself with either: he is accepted and honored within the group without the need for a declared identity. We only know Miigwans has a male-partner, Isaac, whom he adores and misses tremendously: "No, I'm more tired of missing Isaac, is all. Just an old man with an old love, I guess.' All this talk about Minerva and the schools must have brought up a lot of unresolved feelings for him. I thought about him pouring a hundred vials into the ground, one by one, mourning his partner" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 137). While each tribal society had their own concepts and language for gender and sexual identity and diversity, Whyte (2018) expounds about Anishinaabe heritage which:

has more gender options, greater gender fluidity, and a culture of respecting diverse leadership capacities and roles across different genders. Identity fluidity has an important role in these traditions, where historical accounts show that people constantly transformed their identities in other humans and nonhumans to form new strategic kin connections and to take projects of ancestors who had walked on. (p. 228)

Thus, figuring Miigwans in this sacred ancestral role connects his own

life and the settler-colonial denial of queer/Two-Spirit identity within the residential schools and before. This is also part of *Story* even if not directly explained within the book as Miigwans tells *Story* to the younger generations, which is appropriate as, from the perspective Frenchie, he told "too many metaphors and stories wrapped in stories" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 20). The honored position of these protagonists represents another spiraling metaphor within stories of the novel.

In this queer Indigenous young-adult speculative fiction novel, Miigwans, as a Two-Spirit man and Elder, mourned his partner, thinking he had died, and poured vial after vial of Indigenous peoples' dreams into the water to literally and physically set them free as the rain came down. He did this to mourn the passing of these spirits and release their dreams from captivity; thus, the past, present and future are not written, as they mutate in our living planet. Actions in the present can alter *Story* for all generations involved. When we lose sight of this and treat Earth, her resources, and time itself as inert objects, we become functional, or in the case of the dreamless settlers, non-functional machines, who can lose their dreams and just turn off. As the young protagonist Frenchie reflects that death may be like a dream, "That made me feel sorry for a minute for the others, the dreamless ones. What happened when they died? I imagined them just shutting off like factory machines at the end of a shift: functioning, purposeful, and then just out" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 16). This critiques the capitalistic ideology the settler-colonialist thrust upon the "New World," for which they cling

even amidst the destruction of the very land they stole. In this worldview, even dreams become collectable objects regardless of the cost.

The novel ends with the two men, Miigwans and Isaac, embracing as they reunite representing the ultimate healing and hope:

I heard it in his voice as Miigwans began to weep. I watched it in the steps that pulled Isaac, the man who dreamed in Cree, home to his love. The love who'd carried him against the rib and breath and hurt off his chest as ceremony in a glass vial. And I understood that as long as there are dreamers left, there will never be want for a dream. And I understood just what we would do for each other, just what we would do for the ebb and pull of the dream, the bigger dream that held us all. (p. 171)

The dream of family, community, love, traditions, respect and the survival of their tribes, and ancestors/descendants unite all the characters throughout the novel and give them the courage to keep fighting for a viable future for Indigenous peoples within an infinite and infinitesimal scale. This novel does not just warn of the future consequences of human-created climate change as the consequences of environmental destruction have been felt by Indigenous communities for centuries, it gives us a blueprint for how to survive it with dignity and harmony in the face of unimaginable difficulty and violence: how to keep dreaming as a form of prayer to honor the past/present/future, the Earth and all its relations.

Conclusion

In sum, the novel *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) demonstrates the concepts of *Wahkohtowin* (Cree), obligations of reciprocity within relationships on the Earth, and *Aanikoobijigan* (Anishinaabe), the consideration of our ancestors/descendants to guide our current actions, which link in a spiralic temporality spanning more than seven generations within the novel. These principles resist the dystopic pessimism reflected in much of the current climate change literature while indicating the same impending danger. The difference is that this threat of extinction has existed since the beginning of the settler colonial project setting a dystopic apocalypse in action for Indigenous peoples, not just in contemporary culture or in a near/distant future, but starting in 1492. Thus, in much Indigenous futurism, as demonstrated through this novel, scale has always existed within dystopian Indigenous narratives as it does within Indigenous narratives of hope and survival. Even through the death, rape, destruction of a dying Earth and her Indigenous peoples, the novel posits resilience and adaptability through stories, worldviews, and traditions as virtues that can sustain them through the challenging times without losing their dreams and hope for the healing of the lands and her people. Survivability scales in and out of space, time, and matter throughout the narrative without disrupting the frame: hence, as the planet requires, the text itself is adaptable to the past and present Anthropocene and the speculative futures they invoke. As Justice (2018) proposes stories can be good or bad medicine, but when they are good medicine, they “drive out the poison, heal the

spirit as well as the body, remind us of the greatness of where we came from as well as the greatness of who we're meant to be" (p. 4). The stories in this novel interconnect within a scalable spiralic temporality: just as *Story*, "Melt," and "Water Wars" provide good medicine to the young characters in the novel and remind them of previous stories of Indigenous greatness that they are heading towards, *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) provides good medicine for readers, Indigenous and settler alike, by providing a cartography of community and eco-spiritual healing for the planet and humanity so we might thrive together.

Notas

1. This paper uses the term Indigenous to refer to "the First Peoples of North America, the Aboriginal, American Indian, Native, Inuit, Métis, and otherwise identified peoples who remain in relation to the land, the ancestors, and the kinship networks, lifeways, and languages that originated in this hemisphere and continue in often besieged but always resilient forms" (Justice, 2018, p. 6). Likewise, it "affirms the spiritual, political, territorial, linguistic, and cultural distinctions of those peoples whose connections to this hemisphere predate the arrival of intentional colonizing settlers and conscripted and enslaved populations from Europe, Africa, the Pacific, and other regions" (p. 5). Finally, Indigenous is capitalized as a proper noun to assert agency and a "political status of peoplehood, rather than describing an exploitable commodity, like an "indigenous plant" or a "native mammal" (p. 5). [»]
2. Settler colonialism describes "the settler population's creation of a new social

order that depends in part on the ongoing oppression and displacement of Indigenous peoples" (Justice, 2018, p. 9). Likewise, this paper uses the term "settler" (not unproblematically) to refer to a wide range of non-Indigenous people who "settled" in Turtle Island for various reasons, some by force or necessity and others to colonize the land, resources, and people. The latter will be referred to as settler-colonists while "settler" refers to a broader heterogeneous group of people. [»]

3. The author of this paper identifies as gender non-binary and queer but not as Indigenous but rather an ally of Irish settler ancestry honored to humbly learn from the writing from Indigenous perspectives and experiences. Any reference to "we" or "us" is from the perspective of the author of the quotation and not of the author of this paper. [»]
4. This paper uses the terms both Indigenous queer and Two-Spirit: queer as an adapting oppositional identity that resists stagnation, critiques heteronormativity and celebrates gender and sexual fluidity and Two-Spirit to refer to Indigenous peoples in the LGBTQ+ community who wish to reclaim their members' honored role in Native societies, resist the colonial language of anthropology and assert pride in gender/ sexual variance in tribal societies. As Driskill (2011) explains: "When linked queer and Two-Spirit invite critiquing heteronormativity as a colonial project, and decolonizing Indigenous knowledges of gender and sexuality as one result of that critique" (p. 3). [»]

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