Women Writing Women: Native Female Authors Asserting Power Through Fiction

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ABSTRACT

Female Native authors are taking the literary world by force, producing many texts that challenge the patriarchal status quo. Utilizing their ethnic identities to add new perspectives on the problems facing Native American communities, these women frequently upend systems of power in their narratives. In a collection of texts ranging from speculative short fiction, true-crime novels, and dystopian science fiction novels, I will examine how Native women illustrate the power of knowing their history. These Native women create female characters that anticipate trauma and fight back before it can happen commenting on the gravity of the violence facing Native women in the United States. They create female characters who live at the crossroads of their identity but use that dual perspective to upend systems of health and justice in their communities. They also create female characters who heal and bind their communities with the stories they tell. In this analysis I will show how traditional Native elements can be woven into modern fiction to disrupt tropes and systems that have permeated society for too long, leaving Native women at the margins. In these texts they take center stage.

Women Writing Women: Native Female Authors Asserting Power Through Fiction

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Introduction

Literary traditions among Native Americans have always been rich and vibrant. Despite being almost exclusively oral in nature for much of their existence, it is a testament to their everlasting nature that even in modern contexts old stories and tropes continue to cycle through narratives produced by Native authors. Narratives of trickster characters, resisting oppression, and the power of community are just a few of the common ideas that can be found in modern Native literature. One of the most impressive commonalities is the portrayal of Native women in these texts; they take on nuances unique to their cultural identities. Native female authors in particular craft Native female characters whose depth and breadth often carry the story they exist within on their shoulders.

Native female authors can trace their written roots back to the likes of women like Zitkala-Sa (Yankton Lakota), who wrote her pivotal *American Indian Stories* back in 1921. Through her allegorical fiction, childhood stories, and essays she laid the groundwork for other influential Native women to follow in her footsteps. Many of these women discovered Zitkala-Sa's writings and in the 1960's a new movement began: The Native American Renaissance (Lincoln). Authors like Leslie Marmon Silko and later Louise Erdrich began writing novels that challenged the perspectives of the Euro-American society around them. In the past these kinds of novels were painted as "magical realism" because the interweaving of traditional narratives into the realities of their characters causes westernized readers to question the timelines and realities they have been taught to believe. For Native authors and audiences though these "magical" epistemologies are as real as the wind and the water.

In selecting the texts for this analysis there were many filters tossed around. At first this analysis was going to focus solely on the female characters in Indigenous science-fiction

narratives, but I found that I was more interested in how Native women were writing in a post-#MeToo era. The #MeToo movement began in October 2017 when the hashtag "blazed across social media when millions acknowledged personal experiences of sexual violence" (Gilmore 1). This movement emboldened women who had previously kept silent about their trauma to share it and be validated. Since Native American women face some of the highest rates of sexual violence, I wanted to look at texts published during and after the movement by Native women to see how they were responding to the social moment. I found a plethora of books to analyze, but ended up selecting four that contained a good cross-section across multiple genres.

There is a new generation of Native women authors taking up the mantle of the literary traditions. They continue to interweave Native epistemologies and perspectives into their modern texts. They also continue to create female characters who act as agents of societal change. This thesis seeks to not only contextualize these Native female characters, but also to explore the impacts they have on societal systems in their narratives. By exploring the works of newer Native authors such as Mathilda Zeller (Inuit), Phoenix Boudreau (Cree), Angeline Boulley (Chippewa), and Cheri Dimaline (Metis), I hope to show how these women continue the literary traditions laid out by the women before them. One way they do this is how their literature serves as a form of resistance and protest to many of the issues facing their communities today. The women in these narratives all seek to protect their communities from abuse at the hands of the Euro-American society that has surrounded their own. The authors utilize many strategies to empower their female characters such as employing Native epistemologies of time, emphasizing Native story telling as a source of power, and upending power dynamics created by the patriarchal Western society that surrounds Native societies in North America.

1. Make Time for Us: Female Native Authors Asserting Power Through Speculative Fiction

The trauma endured, in many capacities, by Native American and First Nation's communities is an often-discussed point of contention between Indigenous communities and the Euro-American society surrounding them. What is discussed with equal fervor is justice, and more notably the lack of justice that often occurs in the Native communities experiencing the traumas at higher rates than those around them. Native people are forced to assimilate to systems built for different understandings than their own. A key difference between the traumatological timeline of many indigenous groups and those of Euro-centric societies is the belief that time is not linear in Native communities. This distinction creates schisms in the perception of justice and healing approaches promoted by the dominant anglicized culture and those of the Native groups subject to their whims. One group who illustrates these differences the best are authors of Native fiction, and in particular speculative fiction where characters are given the autonomy to dole out justice in their own way, separate from the constraints of colonizing systems. In the recent publication *Never Whistle at Night: An Indigenous Dark Fiction Anthology*, edited by Shane Hawk and Theodore C. Van Alst Jr., speculative fiction abounds in realms both past and present. Two authors in particular, Mathilda Zeller (Inuit) and Phoenix Boudreau (Cree) write short stories that encapsulate two essential elements in Native speculative fiction. Their stories "Kushtuka" and "Hunger" demonstrate traditional approaches to time and justice while allowing for the female characters in the text to provide their own solutions to the problems they are faced with. In "Kushtuka" Zeller plays with the plotline, reimagining it from a more circular structure, on the other hand "Hunger" uses characterization of its antagonist to illustrate traditional timelines and perspectives on justice.

Indigenous groups in North America cannot be lumped together in all-encompassing statements; however there are commonalities that are present in a plurality of native groups that can be discussed at length. One of these commonalities is the trauma endured on many fronts by colonizing forces, a point to be discussed later. Another commonality is that their perception of time and space is often different than those of Euro-centric societies. Euro-American cultures are "clock-based" linear cultures, where time controls people, conversely, many Native groups are societies within which a more circular "event time" is the norm (Brislin and Kim 365). Clock-based time exists on a timeline in hours, days, and years that progress ever onward. World history in the West is a documentation of the progression of a nation-state, this model inherently marginalizes those who never achieve formal statehood and lessens their value and legitimacy. George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, an 18th-century philosopher, argues that those who have not achieved statehood are "without history," and therefore they have no place on the historical timeline (Bauerkemper 34). Opponents of Hegel's philosophies point out that employing his views amounts to an "unsavory complex of historical omission, misappropriation, and even ethnocide" (35). Therefore, when Native people are writing literature that encompasses a history previously rejected as legitimate by the dominating class, they are directly resisting their erasure from the hegemonic society around them.

Native storytelling is an important representation of "Indian Time." "Indian Time" as it is referred to by many scholars in the field runs in a circular, layered manner (Verbos et al 54). Once again, making an essentialist statement about a group is tricky territory, but before colonization "clock time" where minutes, hours, and days are measured as following each other in a linear progression simply did not exist. Instead of following Western storytelling norms where "stories begin with a foundational background, the middle holds the event, and it ends

with a summary conclusion," traditional oral stories are "nonlinear, natural, organic, and inductive as is other event-time" (54). For example, in many Native traditions there is a Trickster character whose stories are told to teach moral and communal lessons. This character is often Coyote but also sometimes Rabbit or Raven depending on the tribe's location. Looking at Coyote stories is a great way to see how Indian Time is reflected in the structure of traditional storytelling. The plot of one of these tales usually has "Coyote leave one event and [enter] another" with no concluding time markers. Instead, the openness of the narrative invites the audience to layer the story onto their own life anywhere they see fit. It provides multiple points of relation and often his stories are episodic, his character developing over several "chapters." The "focus on events and not when events occur" illustrates the traditional Native approach to thinking and contextualizing the world around them (55). They create a different relationship between the present moment and those existing within it. All of the texts throughout this analysis contain this element of circular temporality, though it is present in different ways.

By asserting their traditional ontologies into modern literature Native authors are inputting their histories into a greater narrative that has thus far been one or erasure for their people. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a Maori scholar, asserts that "coming to know the past has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization." She continues by saying "to hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges" which implies alternative approaches to problems (Bauerkemper 37). These alternative approaches are illustrated in the two short stories we will be analyzing when the female characters take justice and healing into their own hands. These two stories involve impending sexual abuse at the hands of a white man and address a larger issue within the Native communities of North America. In the texts the two authors twist the timelines of their characters to allow the female characters to reassert their own power because Native

storytelling and time work in a circular fashion as opposed to the linear Western model. Storytelling is a way for Native people to "teach [their] own truth about [their] experience" (Bull 1). Their manipulation of temporal realities helps to heal the gap created by trauma between "psychic temporality and the linear chronological timeline" because it helps them align their experiences with their reality (Wieskamp 76). This allows the Native female protagonists to confront and nullify the trauma before it even occurs in both stories.

Sexual trauma is a prevalent reality enacted on Native women every day, everywhere. In 2000 the National Violence Against Women Survey concluded that "one in three" Native women will experience rape, most often at the hands of a non-native perpetrator (Deer 4). In fact, the conclusion was "34.1 percent" which would be more than one in three Native women. There has not been a significant shift in this data in the decades following this survey, and more recent data has supported this claim. For example:

> 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey. . . 84% of Native American women report experiencing violence during their lifetime compared to 71% of Non-Hispanic White women, with 66% of Native women reporting psychological [interpersonal violence], [and] 56% reporting sexual violence . . . (Gilbert 2)

This data is the reality from which Native authors, particularly female writers' endeavor to create stories. Whether they are reaching into the future, grounding in the present, or reexperiencing the past this data is drawn from the enduring consequences of manifest destiny. Pan-Indian essentialisms are usually avoided in scholarly analysis, but in this case, the data is broad, encompassing, and unavoidable. The most aggravating aspect of this data for many Native women is the lack of repercussions and consequences for the perpetrators of the trauma in their communities.

Justice is a tricky word in a world of competing authorities such as the one many Native people live in. Best evidenced in Louise Erdritch's award-winning novel *The Round House*, federal law and tribal law often conflict, and even undermine one another. Most rapists are never identified whether due to fear, repression, or lack of faith in the system. It takes a community to support a victim, but also the crime must be acknowledged for that support to come. In their short stories, Mathilda Zeller (Inuit) and Phoeniz Boudreau (Cree) create young female characters who are threatened with rape. Both characters acknowledge the insufficient system of justice they exist within, and so they are forced to deal with the problem from traditional angles. These approaches include invoking traditional stories and medicines and acknowledging a different alignment with temporal understandings than those of the Euro-American culture.

Survivance rhetoric is often used by Native authors to illustrate different approaches to a traumatological timeline. In Western discourse "narrative" as a form of healing and justice is often dismissed as "anecdotal" (Wieskamp 82). The Native approach to storytelling however established space "for healing, tradition, and community" which are all essential elements of a decolonized approach to trauma. In the Euro-American traumatological timeline the past and present have a set relationship with one another, with trauma being viewed as "something one can (and should) avoid, leave behind, or cure" (76). This forces women to seek a definitive end point to their suffering, even if their original subject position cannot be regained. In the two short stories, we will see how the disruption of the linear time model creates space where before there would have been erasure. Both female Native authors invoke traditional storytelling elements. One such element is the use of beings (Kushtuka, Wehtigo) whose existence is immortal, and how those beings invoke the circular temporal reality whenever they appear.

In "Kushtuka" by Mathilda Zeller (Inuit) one of these beings is illustrated in a role that imbues power to the Native perspective. It is a gruesome story wherein a young Inuit woman, Tapeesa, is coerced into being a white man's servant/caterer for an evening at his handsome cabin where he is hosting his other miner friends and bigwigs in the community (Zeller 7). The audience is left to assume their whiteness. Earlier in the day Tapeesa had been speaking with her beau and grandmother about a tragic accident at the mine where men were attacked by a beast of unknown origins, at least it was unknown to those outside the Native traditions, but Aana, the grandmother, claims it is a warning from Sedna, goddess of the underworld for the miner's infraction into her domain (7). They have been digging out of greed and not out of need, so the mining operation is seen as a blight on the land. Here is the first invocation of a mythology that exists outside of linear time. The group also discusses how Tapeesa's Native beau, Pana, has been hired by Hank Ferryman, a rich miner with a reputation for being abusive to local women, to take Hank's son, Buck, out for a real "Native" experience. Tapeesa rolls her eyes at this information because she knows Pana and the other Native men will cater to Buck's every need and make him feel like "a big tough hunter," pandering to his ego (7). This scene illustrates the domineering status that the Ferryman men have in society; consequences are implied if they are not catered to by the Native people.

In true event time fashion, the story abruptly switches to a later event. At the start of the evening Tapeesa is being driven by Hank to his place, and amid hitting on her he asks for a "Native Story" (Zeller 8). The story she tells has more power than even she understands because in relaying briefly the formation of Sedna, goddess of the underworld, and the Kushtuka, a creature that appears as someone you love to take you away, Tapeesa's stories become reality. A Kushtuka appears looking like Tapeesa on the road and Hank tries to ram his truck through her.

This second invocation of the story brings action from the beings discussed into the current problem, that of Hank's advances and expectations. Also, the appearance of the Kushtuka as Tapeesa is representative of her love of her Native self, the one who is most at home with her elder Aana listening to old stories. The creature's appearance is the direct result of the story it exists within being invoked, keeping it alive in a timeline that does not force things into the past and leave them there.

Tapeesa's reaction to the creature is confusion and terror because here is truly a being from the darkness of the underworld; Hank's reaction is denial and disbelief. This creature from the Inuit mythology fractures the linear reality Hank subscribes to where old stories describe things long gone, but the nonlinearity of the creature "might be far more real than the facts" he believes in (Bauerkemper 41). Slippage occurs during this timeline, circling back to the beginning of the story, the bogeyman that attacked the miners has now taken shape. Aana's warning of Sedna and her messenger crystalize and inserts itself into Tapeesa's reality.

Hank's rejection of his senses is metaphorical for the rejection of the Native people by the dominant society; they are seen but not understood. Upon arriving at the cabin, the Kushtuka is in the bed of the truck, tapping away at the rear windshield, demanding the attention of Tapeesa. Hank strong-arms Tapeesa into the cabin, continuing to not acknowledge the creature's existence (Zeller 11). Inside of the cabin, Tapeesa sees Native "artifacts," items that Tapeesa recognizes from her family inventory, decorating every surface. Upset at the violation of traditional items, she proceeds to cook food for this party, but quickly becomes overwhelmed and uncomfortable with the void that exists between how she views this experience, and how the men are enjoying themselves. Running to the bathroom to escape she is overcome with fear at the sound of the Kushtuka slinking down the hallway past the door (11-13). What ensues is a

brutal slaughter of all the men, including Hank. Tapeesa's flight from the scene, pursued by the very creature she resembles has her "scalp prickl[ing]" in fear (Zeller 16). Justice is handed out via claws and teeth in the cabin, and now it has come to reckon with the one who invoked it. The traditional story returned to assert its power over those who sought to diminish its reality.

The creature Tapeesa has invoked is representative of true, powerful, encompassing justice. Not only does it chase the white men, but also turns to chase her because true justice applies to all parties, and she is not exempt from its judgement. Perspectives bounce around within the timeline of the narrative as the creature catches up with Tapeesa, close enough where she can smell her "fetid flesh" (Zeller 16). One second, she is being pursued by the Kushtuka, the next she is the Kushtuka being strangled by Hank's deranged son Buck who is coming off a killing spree of his own. The Kushtuka/Tapeesa rams one of the spear "artifacts" through Buck and ends the encounter. This inversion at the last second of the tale both makes Tapeesa the victim and liberator. On the one hand, she was threatened by the men in the story who wanted to push further into her than she would allow, just as they pushed too far into the mines. On the other hand, she is an ancient provider of her justice, saving not just herself but also other members of the community from these abusive outsiders. Women hold creationary and fatal powers in many indigenous belief systems, so it is appropriate that the story opens with Sedna, Goddess of the underworld and ends with one of her creations dealing justice to those who do not respect her and the land she protects.

The progressive linear history is at the heart of the problem in this story. Hank Ferryman and his son Buck are callous and indifferent to the traditions of the Inuit people in the community. Hank especially sees all the Native characters as secondary to his life and priorities, utilizing them as servants and sexual conquests. He obtains in dubious ways many traditional

items to adorn his luxurious cabin, much like mounted taxidermy trophies he hangs Tapeesa's Grandfather's spears up as conquered items to live in his linear past, *his* version of a history already written. Tapeesa on the other hand regards these same objects functional in the now, she tries to grab an ulu to prepare food with and is quickly admonished for using one of Hank's precious "artifacts" that are only to be used for "decoration" (Zeller 12). It is fitting that the death of his son Buck comes at the end of one of those same spears, reclaimed for their original use.

Another element of the circular structure in this story is the usage of Native mythology which in many indigenous traditions is ever present, never truly in the past. Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), a renowned Native author says that "time is an ocean. . .something that happened five hundred years ago isn't way off over there" (Bauerkemper 43). Looking at the story of Sedna (goddess of the Inuit underworld) and the Kushtuka (shape-shifting sea creature) we can see how the invocation of these two beings represents a resurrection for the sake of protection. In the story Tapeesa describes Sedna's creation story as follows:

> There was once a girl named Sedna. Her father threw her over the edge of his fishing boat. She tried to save herself by catching the edge of the boat, but he brought a knife down onto her fingers and cut them all off. They became the first seals, walruses, whales. She became goddess of the Underworld. (Zeller 8)

Tapeesa's Aana, is the one who first invokes Sedna as the cause for an accident at the mine, she says Sedna is angry for the white man's trespassing into the land and their (Native women's) beds (5). When Tapeesa relays first Sedna's, then the Kushtuka's story to Hank she is circling back to them subconsciously as beings who exist in her present reality. Despite telling them in a performative situation, the impact of releasing these stories onto the abusive white man is immediate, for directly following their telling is the first appearance of the titular Kushtuka.

Storytelling as a form of resurrection allows “women [to call] back the dead and dismembered parts of ourselves” (Estes 28). In this case the Kushtuka, who appears as Tapeesa, is an adversarial figure created from the dismembered parts of Sedna, a woman abused by a man. Here the Kushtuka arrives as the server of justice upon similar men who take what they want with no consequences in the broader society.

The story that Tapeesa tells creates both one of the problems and the solution in Zeller’s narrative. However, the solution that occurs in the death of all the destructive/abusive white men in the story does not fit nicely within the boundaries of the dominant society. Surely there will be an inquest into the deaths of all these men. Despite the slippage Tapeesa was the Kushtuka, or perhaps the Kushtuka was her. The ending of the narrative leaves opens these questions, which aligns with a traditional storytelling device for Native cultures. The audience has been put in the position of the learner, and the “learner reflects, which assists him or her to discern the lessons from the story” (Verbos 53). The lesson is never explicitly stated, but rather it is to be obtained through personal reflection upon the completion of a narrative. Modern Native writers often incorporate these traditional motifs not out of some sense of novelty, but rather as a natural reiteration of their schemas. Traditional storytelling elements continue in “Hunger” by Boudreau. Like Zeller’s story, Bourdreau incorporates a being from traditional narratives and illustrates how Native women can flip the usual power dynamic to assert their own form of justice.

“Hunger” from the beginning is a story told with a traditional cadence, this is due to the narrator being a Wehtigo who describes its own creation. This creature outlines its existence, which illustrates the circular nature of the time it exists within. The story opens with:

> It is always hungry. In the time Before the Other People came, the original People’s stories had it given its own form. The People wouldn’t dare to say its name in the dark;

> they whispered its stories to one another, and their reverent fear sustained it. The People had called it a spirit of evil, but it has only ever been hungry. The modern People have forgotten; Other People came and erased its stories, tried to pretend it didn't exist. But it has always been here and always will be. It is as inevitable as the Land itself. The People forget, but it does not. (Boudreau 83)

As previously stated, this resurrection of a story truncates a linear timeline to one where the reality of a thing is ever present, there is no beginning or end. It is from this place that the reader enters the story, existing with the Wehtigo on its ever-enduring hunt for a victim. The creature refers to all people in the story, but it distinguishes between *the* People and the Other People. *The* People represent the Native community, in this case people from the Cree Nation. Also, the cadence of the syntax reflects oral traditional story telling where short, simple syntax is easier for memorization and the meaning is clear.

In the narrative, the host that the creature selects reflects the empty nature of the dominant culture, because it is precisely this kind of greedy, empty, shallow existence that the Wehtigo is meant to warn Native people against in traditional stories. The creature finds a host, which would normally imply the host is a victim, but this host is only chosen because of their proclivity towards the Wehtigo's own desires. Violence, subjugation, and desire are all already present in the subconscious of the frat boy the Wehtigo finds to inhabit. Finding an "Empty" person like this frat boy means finding someone who "think[s] they are invincible" and that "their actions will have no consequence" (Boudreau 84). The Wehtigo "slither[s] into his consciousness" when the boy's "own dark hunger" is contemplating "violent sexual conquest" (85). Thus, one of the darkest forces, the force of consuming another person both physically and spiritually is given grounds to continue its cycle of abuse.

The creature is drawn to *the* People because they are its original prey. It wants to fill the emptiness with something fulfilling, in this case a Native woman, one of *the* People. At a party the Wehtigo/frat boy searches for its prey and finds a young Cree woman, Summer. To the Wehtigo "she is beautiful in a way the other people can never be, shining with the history of her People on this land" (Boudreau 85). Here the author is illustrating the connection between community and land as important to being a more complete, fulfilled individual. Again, it is important to explain that the inhabited boy is not the victim as his own desire to see Summer's "nakedness spread beneath him, braced for invasion" is swirling with the hunger of the creature (87). Summer leaves the party, and the creature follows. Quickly Summer faces the creature and reveals it is she who laid a trap for him, just like the tricksters in traditional narratives she has tricked the Wehtigo. This is the beginning of a shift in the story where the narrator, the Wehtigo, does not have the upper hand. It had exuded confidence in its conquest, but now realizes it underestimated its prey. Summer and another girl commence throwing traditional medicine at the Wehtigo and circling it in a Round Dance using Cedar branches as boundaries (91). By having another girl join the ceremony, Boudreau emphasizes the need for community in healing/justice approaches. Without the second girl the ceremony would have failed, because the Wehtigo almost escapes the circle partway through. The dance and medicine have their desired effect in banishing the Wehtigo from the ungrateful frat boy, but the narrative ends with "among the stars, the Wehtigo is already gathering itself together," leaving open the chance that if there are Empty people to inhabit, the cycle will continue. This circles the reader back to the beginning of the story where we are reminded of the Wehtigo's ever-present nature. This is also reflective of how the trauma women endure at the hands of men like this frat boy is an ever-present threat in Native communities.

The use of the Wehtigo, or Wendigo in some spellings, by Boudreau is metaphorical for the entitled, greedy nature of the dominant Euro-American society. Boudreau's choice is important because in the narrative the creature's hunger lines up perfectly with the already empty nature of the frat boy, a character whose very description invokes negative connotations from women everywhere. By layering the Wehtigo's ravenous hunger for human flesh with the frat boy's desire to violently dominate a woman, Zeller is illustrating how in this story the violence is especially centered on Native women. She allows the audience to see how in many circumstances is a Native woman is who is specifically sought out and prone to this kind of subjugation. This aligns with statistics on the matter regarding the prevalence of sexual violence in Native communities. It also illustrates how Native culture has established protocols for dealing with violence within their communities as evidenced by the medicines and rituals that successfully drive the Wehtigo from the frat boy's corporeal form. The messaging in this short story illustrates the need for more integrated healing practices in traumatological approaches. Many Native women struggle to achieve self-regulation in the aftermath of abuse because the traditional Euro-American approach to therapy is based on a linear timeline and not inclusive of Native epistemologies.

Both stories incorporate the portrayal of a white man, ignorant of Native tradition, haughty in their place on the social ladder, and disrespectful of women. Both stories also taint this man with the possession of something hungry, something cannibalistic, something like a Wehtigo from many native traditions. Interestingly, this hungry, greedy figure (Hank/Buck Ferryman, frat boy) is a victim in both stories. By the end of the tale, both have been preyed upon by an ancient force and receive no redemption. There is no sympathy evoked for these characters because the medicines and forces that the Native authors have chosen to use against

them are justified by their irredeemable qualities. A common trope in fiction is to create empathetic victims who the audience can relate to, and in these stories, the Native women who wrote them chose to make these men not just the victims but also perpetrators of their own evils. There are meta layers of who is considered the victim. On the first layer, the men are victims of a spawned ancient force, but it is *their victims*, the Native women they wish to prey upon, who serve them with traditional outcomes (spear to chest, Round Dance circle). In this way both texts are serving up a dose of "survivance," a term created by scholar Gerald Vizenor (Anishnaabe) but elaborated on by scholar David M. Higgins when he states "Indigenous survivance narratives embody a rejection of victimization" (70). Within these speculative zones, Native female authors reject the notion that they are damsels in distress, instead, they show they have ways of fighting back, it is just that some of these ways are not considered legitimate by the heteronormative and hegemonic societies they exist within. They use their voices to rewrite the power dynamics of the society they live within to be more equitable.

These two stories demonstrate the power of Native storytelling, not just to Native audiences, but to anyone who engages with the texts. The rejection of traditional victims and assertion of power on the behalf of the Native female characters upends a rhetoric that frequently portrays the opposite in Western media. Also, both Zeller and Boudreau refuse to allow the trauma to occur in the first place, rejecting the statistics as inevitability for their female protagonists. This reasserts power on their behalf and combats "...the vanishing race myth..." which "...imagines indigenous cultures as out of place in the march towards Euro-American ideals of progress" (80). Instead, these female authors have established the ever-present nature of Native people who are very much engaged with the same reality as everyone else, but from a temporal stance that invites their existence instead of relegating them to history. In the next

analysis of Angeline Boulley's *Firekeeper's Daughter* we will look at another Native female character who attempts to upend power dynamics and seek justice for traumas facing her community.

2. Two Sides of a Coin: The Power of Duality in Angeline Boulley's *Firekeeper's Daughter*

The United States is a cultural hodgepodge, but not all those cultures are allowed to take center stage or be recognized as having legitimate epistemologies by the hegemonic Euro-American society. It is interesting to consider the diversity of people living within the borders of this country while it yet maintains a monoculture in so many systems such as health and justice. One group who has dealt with this monoculture longer than almost any other are the Native American communities who have seen their way of life slowly and viciously forced to exist within tinier and tinier portions of the country. In the past century they have raised their voices in protest in many areas, one of which is literature. In the past few decades we have seen an explosion of Native authors drafting stories from their truths and not just giving alternative perspectives on issues but also giving alternative solutions. Newer generations of Native authors have effectively portrayed the battle with acculturation, and how they can reconcile their identities as both United States citizens and citizens of their unique tribal identities. One author who has expertly woven these two identities into a story is Angeline Boulley (Chippewa) with her novel *Firekeeper's Daughter (FD).* In the novel Boulley tackles the schisms between these two communities in the areas of health and justice and illustrates how ethnic identity is essential to the wellbeing of Native Americans living at the cultural crossroads. She does all this through her female protagonist.

Daunis Fontaine, the protagonist of the novel, is a character at a crossroads of identity. She is constantly combining her knowledge of both white and indigenous culture to produce nuanced decisions that affect her and her community throughout the narrative. She is the daughter of a white mother from a wealthy family in Sault St. Marie Michigan and a Native American father from the Ojibwe Sugar Island reservation nearby. The white side of her family,

especially its matriarch GrandMary fought hard to keep Daunis from her Native family, who fought equally hard to be a part of her life. Growing up she lived in the tense in-between space where something as simple as how to treat an earache created disagreements and resentment. Whereas her white family wanted her to take Western medicines, her Native family had her "pee in a cup and poured it into [her] ear" because this was the traditional method (Boulley 11). This scene opens one of the biggest points of duality in the novel, that of Daunis's obsession with traditional medicine and Western science. Daunis points out that one day she researched the pee method and discovered that not only is pee sterile, but it can also be used as a substitute for Hydrogen Peroxide. This reaffirms for her the importance of respecting traditional medicines. Daunis' investigative mind is what drives much of the novel and serves her well when she becomes an informant for a burgeoning drug investigation.

Two terms that illustrate the importance of ethnic identity, but also the struggles faced by many dual identity people are the concepts of *assimilation* and *enculturation.* Both words describe a possible effect of two cultures inhabiting the same physical and ideological spaces. Assimilation is something Native people in the United States have resisted for centuries. Historically the approach to Native Americans by the American government has been to "kill the Indian, save the man," derived from a speech by Captain Richard Henry Pratt ("Kill"). This concept permeated the boarding schools forced on so many Native families between 1819 and 1969. Boulley connects to this history in the novel by having members of the community reference their parents/grandparents having been in boarding schools and how negatively it impacted their mental wellbeing. Where assimilation is domineering and reductive, enculturation can be collaborative and productive. In enculturation the two cultures in question borrow from one another, sharing ideas and strategies. This has historically *not* been the case for Native

Americans because while the dominant culture is pushed on them, it is not interested in a two-way exchange of ideas. Native ideologies and approaches to many systems in our society such as health and justice systems would bring new ideas and valuable new perspectives on the issues being faced. In the novel Boulley includes both the dominant white culture and the Native culture in her character Daunis to show what enculturation can look like at its best; neither side loses. It is through these dueling epistemologies that Boulley shows the audience the validity of the Native approach to problems. One of the principal areas of conflict she addresses in the novel is the void that exists between the American approach to medicine/healing and the Native one.

The novel itself is divided into four parts that represent the four cardinal directions, or four components of a Native medicine wheel. These four directions correspond to the traditional pathway of a story which is key to many Native American healing traditions. Famous Native traditional healer Black Elk (Oglala Lakota) said "Behold the circle of a nation's hoop, for it is holy, being endless" which helps to explain how the circular structure of the novel is representative of the healing journey Daunis must undertake, not just for her own healing but also for her community's (Ryback 335). Something key to Native healing practices is their integrated approach, meaning emotional and spiritual well-being are directly tied to the physical. Boulley includes several "pan-Indian" healing ceremonies, such as smudging, prayers, powwows, and sweat lodges, at key places in throughout the novel to emphasize narrative points (336). Daunis is healing herself from the tragedy of losing her uncle as well as essentially losing her GrandMary to a stroke at the beginning of a novel. She explains to Jamie, her soon to be undercover partner in the investigation, at a powwow that she is not participating in the dances because she is "taking a break for a year, as part of grieving my uncle" (Boulley 69). This break also includes a pause on her gathering of traditional medicines at gathering parties. The period of

mourning she is participating in is part of the traditional approach to loss and is meant to help heal her soul. This ceremony is important to Daunis, and despite being raised by one half of her family to despise Native practices, she adheres adamantly to the practice throughout the novel. She never mentions seeking Western medical assistance regarding her mental health, only her physical due to their inherent focus on only one aspect of a person's trauma, not the whole issue. Throughout the text there is no mention of people seeking mental health help from the establishment systems because those systems often ignore and have no empathy for Native people's ethnic identities.

The health system in the United States has rarely allowed for practices outside of the Western worldview to be recognized as legitimate. This has led to great distrust among communities in the margins, and the statistics show that they have reason to be distrustful. For example, Native Americans and Alaska Native communities "experience a number of health disparities in relation to other racial/ethnic groups, leading to a life expectancy that is five years lower than the general population" (Fetter and Thomson 486). These disparities are created by centuries of systemic failures, economic turmoil, lack of recognition for traditional practices as legitimate, etc. In many places even having access to a culturally empathetic provider is impossible. In the novel Boulley demonstrates this disparity when Daunis is talking to her Aunt Teddie Firekeeper, a director at the Tribal Health Center and Teddie explains a problem she is facing at her job. Someone at the Tribal Health Center, which is not exclusively run by Indigenous people, ordered t-shirts for an immunization fair that "have an owl saying 'Be wise. Immunize!'" on them (Boulley 25). The problem, Daunis explains to Jamie, is that "In Ojibwe culture, the owl is a companion for crossing over when you die. . .not exactly the ambassador you want telling Nish parents to immunize their babies" (25). This simple mistake would have

caused many Native people in the community to refuse the immunization because it would have been seen as a bad omen. This scene demonstrates the necessity for culturally empathetic approaches and simple understanding on the part of the medical providers. This also applies to counselors and therapists who often apply reductionist linear approaches to issues such as trauma.

Daunis is faced with multiple levels of traumatic events in *FD*. At the beginning of the novel she has lost many family members, including her father at an early age. In the first part of the text, she loses her best friend Lily to an unthinkable crime, and then later she loses other friends to overdose. She feels traumatized by the losses in the Native community, and the lack of response/justice for the people caught up in the spread of methamphetamines. She is raped at one point in the text, joining the ranks of so many Native women who carry the burden of one of the highest rates of experiencing sexual assault of any ethnic group in America. She endures violence at the hands of people she viewed as friends when she discovers who is at the center of the drug problem, and through all these events she turns to her ethnic identity to ground herself.

The traditional approach in Native culture to healing from trauma is different from the traditional approach in Euro-American culture. In the latter victims are asked to process their trauma, often verbally, and reach a point where they can “move on.” Native American approaches incorporate more elements of a person’s overall well-being such as community ceremonies (powwows, sweat lodges) and spiritual reflection (pipe ceremonies, prayers, smudging). Daunis illustrates this approach when she is arguing with the FBI agent she reports to. He is asking for information about community members, but she gets protective over them during the interview. The FBI agent in this scenario represents the dominant white culture and its approach to problems: talk about it, investigate it. Daunis represents a broader approach often

associated with Native healing when she says: If the community were an ill or injured person, the FBI would cut out the infection, reset the bones. Amputate if necessary. Problem solved. I'm the only person looking at the whole person, not just the wound (Boulley 217). Her broader perspective of the issues at hand allows her to approach the problem with more empathy and work on multiple aspects of it, not just one. It is her dual identities as both white and Native that help her to work with the FBI, but also without them to find the cause and solution to the drug problem facing her community. She fights to maintain power in her relationship with the FBI, specifically in how much information she shares with them, because she knows they are not empathetic to the broader scope of the problems facing her community.

The empathy that Daunis has for her circle of loved ones is tied directly to her ethnic identity. Many people who are not directly related feel like family to her because of their shared connections to the tribe. This leads her to react viscerally whenever those community members are threatened or disrespected. Within *FD* the main issue facing the Sault St. Marie and Sugar Island communities is a sharp increase in the use of Methamphetamines by young people especially. This increase has also led to the death of many of those young people, including Daunis' best friend. Throughout the text, Daunis struggles with her role as an informant and as a go-between in the community. She continues to double down on her ethnic identity and find solace in the rituals and community of the Sugar Island tribal members. Boulley spends a lot of time in the novel having Daunis participate in small acts of homage, such as offering semaa (tobacco) every morning to one of the seven grandfathers (Humility, Bravery, Honesty, Wisdom, Truth, Respect, and Love), or making an offering of semaa to the river every time she crosses the ferry to Sugar Island because it is always a new river. These daily rituals are consistently illustrated throughout the novel creating a routine of spiritual maintenance on the behalf of

Daunis. In a study by Anna Kawennison Fetter and Mindi N. Thompson on the impact of "the protective role of ethnic identity" for young Native Americans, they conclude that a strong ethnic identity "can be considered a culturally relevant internal resource that may buffer the deleterious effects of stressors. . .[it] protect[s] well-being by providing a shared sense of belonging, community, and purpose" (493). Every morning Daunis selects one of the seven grandfathers to dedicate her day to pursuing, and this allows her to focus her emotions and give them purpose each day instead of feeling aimless, which is so easy to do in the face of horrific community events. She also finds comfort in the company of her tribal elders. It is no coincidence that the seven grandfathers are named as such because elders play a vital role in the Native community.

A pan-Indian truth that can be applied to this narrative is the importance of communal approaches to healing within Native traditions. It is the sense of community in Sault St. Marie and Sugar Island that drives Daunis' motives throughout the novel. When a community is suffering, all those who have a strong bond to it feel that pain. Daunis works within a transcultural sphere to bring about wellness and justice to everyone around her. One of the avenues she uses is through her work with the local hockey teams, center points for community gathering. The depth of the drug problem has even infected this sphere of her world, and we find out it is where the problem itself originates. It is members of the local semiprofessional hockey team that are creating and trafficking the meth into the community. When a friend and former teammate dies of an overdose, Daunis prompts the hockey team to act, spurring them to have a benefit game in the girl's honor (Boulley 338-246). By rallying both communities to come together, Daunis brings action and closure to at least one aspect of the swirling larger issues, that of the divide that so often separates the two communities. This communal approach to rectifying wrongs is essential for the progress of everyone's wellbeing. The hockey team represents one of

the few spaces where the Native community members and the white ones are on a level playing field, or in this case rink. While hockey is not specifically a Native American sport it is important to the Sugar Island community in this novel thus making it as much theirs as anyone else's. Boulley uses the hockey connection in the novel to demonstrate how community responses can lead to collaboration with the intent of eventually gaining cross cultural competency.

Achieving cross-cultural competency is something that drives Daunis, especially in her future career aspirations. She is obsessed with science thanks to her uncle who was a high school science teacher, but she is also obsessed with Indigenous medicines and traditional knowledge. It is the nexus of the two where she finds her passion of bringing recognition to the validity of traditional medicine in the sphere of Western epistemologies and approaches to medicine. Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete explains that "when speaking about Indigenous or Native science, one is really talking about the entire edifice of indigenous knowledge" and that this edifice can be inclusive of modern science (Brown xxv). An early example of this combined approach is when Daunis discusses a science fair project, she conducted that looked at how choke-cherry pudding "had cancer fighting properties" especially when "the seeds [were ground up] in a traditional way" (Boulley 110). This is even recognized by the FBI agent in charge of the investigation who explains to Daunis that she was chosen for a reason. They suspect a local mushroom with hallucinogenic properties is what made a recent batch of meth in the community so potent, and they need someone with traditional knowledge to investigate. They tell her: "You know science and you know your culture," which makes her the perfect candidate for this job (111). She realizes the meth did not contain hallucinogenic properties, but the hallucinations being

documented were from a source only within the Native community. Daunis is only able to crack this element of the case because of her ability to see things from a multilayered perspective.

Boulley created Daunis to represent multiple communities, but also to demonstrate how young Native people can layer their multiple identities to create new perspectives. Daunis' scientific mind is constantly weaving together her traditional knowledge and her scientific knowledge to create new outlooks. She demonstrates this when she explains how the Grand Entry, even at a powwow, represents all the moving parts of her community as a unified whole, much like atoms making up everything. She says:

> All these dancers. Imagine that each one is an atom, forming molecules of dancers for each category. . . .You see the whole entity. . . Now focus on just one dancer---say a Jingle Dress dancer. . . Every atom has subatomic parts. Her regalia includes a dress, belt, moccasins, and a lot of other items. Dancers do not start out with their full regalia; they get it bit by bit. Each piece is a connection to her family, her teachers, and even to the ancestors generations back. If you know the story of her regalia---who and where and why each item came to be---then you know her. (Boulley 68-69)

This metaphor helps the agent from the Bureau of Indian Affairs that she is talking to better understand the gravity of the powwow they are attending. He, Jaimie, was adopted as a child and so does not have the same level of cultural competency as Daunis with his Native heritage. For him it is a moment to glimpse the deeper meaning behind the ceremony of powwow, not just for himself, but so he can more empathetically investigate the problem facing Daunis' community. Throughout the novel Daunis acts as an agent of change in the investigation. She admonishes the agents she reports to for only looking at the negatives of her community and not embracing the complexity that lies behind every member of it. She consistently gives them insight into cultural

traditions and beliefs so that they can better understand the problem at hand. She knows that "there must be an equalization of power and valuing of both knowledge" (Walters 55). Without this power dynamic shifting the investigation cannot progress in the novel because Daunis brings traditional knowledge to the table, and this adds important insights into the running theories of the FBI behind the Meth operation.

Boulley places emphasis on the importance of traditional knowledge in her novel; a key place where this knowledge plays a significant role is what Daunis realizes about the connection between hallucinations in Native meth users and their ethnic identities. At one point a group of kids, all Native American, have a group "hallucination" of people chasing them when they take a batch of meth. This leads the FBI to suspect whoever is making the meth has local knowledge of mushrooms with psychoactive properties and put it in the batch. Daunis methodically scours the island suspected of containing the mushrooms but can find none that would produce the effect witnessed. Her breakthrough comes when she speaks to an elder and realizes that they had all seen "Little People." In some Native traditions the Little People live in the woods and when they perceive disrespect, either to their ways or the ways of the creator they will intervene (Ruml). Daunis realizes that they did not hallucinate at all, but rather "The little People had found the kids and scolded them" (Boulley 322). Instead of believing them, the FBI had assumed it was fake, imagined. To Daunis and her community however ". . .the Little People are real" and serve a role in their lives (322). She cannot bring that information to the agents in charge of the investigation however because they would never believe the ontology of the story. It would be dismissed as a myth only. Instead, this is the point in the narrative where she splits into her own investigation for the sake of the community because the FBI is pursuing false leads. She knows

that she cannot correct them without being seen as "crazy" herself, so she goes off in pursuit of her own justice.

Justice is a hotly contested topic in many Native American communities. Centuries of abusive colonizing practices on behalf of the United States government and its predecessors has left a deep-seated distrust of federal actions. Due to a litany of laws and court decisions many tribal governments struggle to be able to take definitive action when crimes occur within their sovereign borders. The "Indian Country Crimes Act" was enacted in 1817 to give the Federal government authority "against non-American Indians on [who commit crimes on] tribal lands "(Slaff 263). This leaves many cases, such as Native American versus Native American cases in limbo when the crime is heinous and above the power of the tribal government to punish. There are many times when the FBI is expected to step in but does not, or their actions are not satisfactory to the community. For example, at the end of the novel the FBI agent explains to Daunis who all will be receiving federal charges as a result of her assistance in the case. Only some of the perpetrators will receive them, and others are allowed to get away. One of those getting away is the man who raped Daunis. The reason Native people even seek Federal retribution in these cases is because many tribal courts have caps on what they can sentence, and many community members find them lacking. This is especially true in the realm of sexual assault. Unfortunately, The Federal government "[decline] to prosecute. . .in 65% of [rape] cases coming from Indian Country" (Owens 499). This leaves a gaping hole in the lives of victims who may have to face their perpetrators in the community due to them not being sentenced appropriately, if at all.

In 2010 President Barrack Obama signed the Tribal Law and Order Act of 2010, but even that did not do enough to protect Native women from abuse. The goal of the Act was to "to

reduce the prevalence of violent crime in Indian country and to combat sexual and domestic violence against American Indian and Alaska Native women," but numbers have not gone down significantly (Owens 500). This is in part because "The amendment does not recognize tribal authority to prosecute rape and other serious felonies and continues to restrict tribal courts' authority to adequately punish tribal members" (500). At the end of the novel Daunis realizes that despite all she sacrificed for the investigation, they still would not take up the case against her rapist because it took place on tribal lands, but neither does the tribal council have the authority to prosecute a non-Native perpetrator. Since *FD* was published in 2021 its contents may have reflected positive change, if any, had come from Obama's political action. Boulley chooses instead to tell a story reflective of these ongoing issues, of the systems that are and will remain broken unless meaningful change occurs on the federal side of things. Native Americans are left to eke out whatever form of justice and healing they can on their tribal lands and often they can only do so much in the face of systemic breakdowns.

In *FD* Boulley demonstrates this gaping hole in justice with the concept of "blanket parties." In the novel Daunis is staying at her Aunt Teddie's when the latter gets a late-night phone call. Daunis overhears her saying "because it's a blanket party, not a murder scene" and immediately wants to go with her aunt, who forcibly tells her no. Daunis wants to take part in this vigilante justice that her aunt calls "Nish kwe justice" which is an abbreviation for Anishnaabe women justice. Blanket parties are for "when a guy does something bad to a woman and her female cousins take him into the woods, rolled in a blanket, and beat the moowin out of him" (Boulley 34). No doubt this practice has deep roots, but its commonality is evident in the novel, demonstrating an ongoing problem of women not receiving proper justice when they are abused. This theme plays throughout the novel as Daunis, and others, are raped by a prominent

lawyer in the community who abuses his power to put them in compromising positions. This rape, as well as other crimes Daunis eventually uncovers, end up not being prosecuted because she is a tribal member on tribal land even though she helped the investigation. Upon discovering that no justice will come from the government on her behalf Daunis looks at her aunt at the end of the novel and says “Blanket party. . .you will bring me,” implying the lawyer will at least pay a little bit for the heinous act he committed (473). She takes control of the situation in whatever way she can, in this case by demanding a blanket party to atone for what happened. This is similar to how the two female protagonists in the short stories from chapter one take justice into their own hands because it would not be coming from anywhere else.

Throughout the investigation into the Meth ring taking over her community Daunis takes matters into her own hands. She recognizes early on that the FBI is focused solely on finding who is manufacturing and distributing the drugs, but the community being affected is secondary in importance. This metaphorically represents how policy making surrounding Native communities does not consider their voices. Instead, they are left to pick up the pieces with few resources of their own. At the end of the novel Boulley has Daunis and her aunt put pressure on the tribal government and they are successful in getting a “banishment referendum” on the ballot that the members approved (Boulley 479). This shows what community action can look like, and it is telling that a punishment for members of the community who break the laws surrounding drug abuse and distribution is to cut them off from that very community they harm. This policy of banishment is intended “to rid the reservation of dealers, while still showing compassion to members who are struggling with addiction” (480). By having an empathetic approach, the community is seeking to have a greater impact on its members than that of the systems in place from the dominant culture.

In the novel *FD* Boulley uses her life experience to craft an authentic representation of an Ojibwe community struggling with an epidemic of drug abuse. Her character Daunis is a strong female protagonist who strives to represent both herself and her community in the most authentic way she can. Throughout the novel Daunis' duality puts her at the focal point of several issues and she must face them with many considerations regarding her own versions of what is truth and what is erroneous. These competing truths set up many conflicts in the novel between the federal government, her people, and between her own identities. Daunis must reconcile her multiheaded perspective on every issue she faces, and it is a combination of the two that brings her story to its conclusion. Neither her insights into the dominant white culture nor her relationship with her Native culture is enough on its own, and instead they must work together to find some semblance of justice for her and her community. Boulley's novel straddles the two cultures many Native Americans grapple with every day and shows her audience not just the problems facing her Native community, but also how they can overcome and adapt to changing times. She also uses Daunis to show white audiences how Native culture is not outdated but that their epistemological outlooks can correspond with Euro dominant ideologies and enhance them into something new. This book demonstrates the necessity of enculturation, not assimilation, for progress; however, it is the dominant Euro-centric model that needs to adjust itself to meet the needs of Native American communities within the United States.

3. Continuing the Story: The Power of Native Women in *Marrow Thieves*

The science-fiction (sci-fi) genre in North America has been dominated by white men for over a century. Intrepid white, male protagonists abound in the typical science fiction work; take the original 1960's *Star Trek* for example. Whether it is contacting new civilizations, like the imperialist nations of history, or having a "penchant for lustful aliens [which] may derive from similar fantasies of interracial rape," the main character, Captain Kirk, is embodying settler mentalities (Testerman 43). The representation of minorities in the science-fiction genre has been lacking or deeply demeaning to say the least. Women tend to withstand the worst of the Judeo-Christian gender roles rife in Western sci-fi; whether it is pseudo-Pocahontas figures in Star Trek's episode "Paradise Syndrome," or the way women of other species in Star Wars are enslaved for sex work like Twi'leks, the feminine other is exoticized for the exploitation of men exclusively. One group in particular who have increased their presence in the world of science fiction is Native American authors. Voices like Louise Erdrich, Daniel Wilson, and Rebecca Roanhorse, to name a few, have put forth their imagined futures from an indigenous perspective, coined as "Indigenous Futurisms" by Grace Dillon in her anthology of Native science fiction. While this analysis will be looking at the work of a 21st century author, the foundations of Native Science fiction were laid in the 20th century. After a quick look at an example of "traditional" science fiction portrayal of Native American women, I want to explore a novel that falls into the Indigenous Futurisms genre: *The Marrow Thieves* (2017, henceforth referred to as *Thieves)* by Cheri Dimaline. This novel explores the role of women in the future in vastly diverse ways than traditional versions of the genre. Women in Indigenous Futurisms often play key parts in the production, processing, and healing of whole communities beleaguered by apocalyptic events and do so using the rhetoric of *survivance*.

Historically, science-fiction has been dominated by Euro-American ideologies. In the groundbreaking show *Star Trek* (1966-1969) by Gene Roddenberry, "the cast was . . . [racially] integrated, but liberally kept at the margins of narrative cause and effect" (Bernardi 224). This show followed closely in the footsteps of other shows such as "*Lost in Space* (*LIT*) (1965-1968), in which the characters are an all-white family, and the aliens are almost always villains—and dark . . ." (214). What separates *Star Trek* from *LIT* is that Gene Roddenberry, a self-proclaimed "liberal humanist," really wanted to break race expectations with his show in reaction to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's. However, the mostly white cast, white writers, and white network executives make *Star Trek a* settler narrative of the future. One of the many reasons why Native authors are turning to science fiction is because of shows like *Star Trek* horribly misrepresenting them in interpretations of the future. A great example of this misrepresentation is explored by Daniel Bernardi in his article "Star Trek' in the 1960s: Liberal-Humanism and the Production of Race".

Star Trek often lauded itself as progressive, and in many ways, it was, but not in its portrayals of indigenous people; for example many of the "aliens" they encountered mirrored Native ideologies and practices. In a case study of the *Star Trek* episode "Paradise Syndrome" (1968), Daniel Bernardi explains that Gene Roddenberry and the writers utilized harmful tropes such as "the noble savage" to portray an indigenous group that had been placed on a planet by a "super race" (Bernardi 220). When the crew of the Starship Enterprise (the protagonists of the show) arrive, they begin to study this tribe. Captain Kirk, the Euro-American captain, ends up hitting his head and getting separated from his crew, and when he wakes up, he finds himself among the tribe. From this point we can fast-forward through a Disney-Pocohontas-like storyline where a white man falls in love with a "squaw," marries her, only to realize that he cannot

remain among them because he is destined for more than their simple life. Bernardi points out that "the white man—not the native has evolved, and he must accept his role as a complex, civilized human" (220). The episode ends with the Indigenous woman dying and Kirk returning to his crew, able to move on in the *Star Trek* universe unencumbered by any emotional baggage. This case study by Bernardi is important because it elucidates how the show used stereotypes despite advertising itself as a progressive program. In fact, the "noble savage" shows up in many iterations of *Star Trek,* with the Klingon race in later series embodying aspects of the trope. The trope "functions as a sort of fetish" that can also be seen in other media from the times such as Western Films with countless actors portraying Native characters in red face (220). Writers like Cheri Dimaline have created sci-fi narratives that break away from the white-centered futures so popular until the past few decades.

The power of science-fiction comes from the created space that it occupies in a reader's mind. Working in the sci-fi genre allows creators and writers to work in a "mythical time and place in the future" (Bernardi 216). The upswing in Native authors in this genre is possibly due to the appeal of this created space. They can explore societal commentary that would normally be overlooked by a western readership had it been presented in a literal or more overt format. Unfortunately, the entertainment value of a work of fiction draws in more readership than a straightforward protest document may receive. This apathy towards the Indigenous voice is something ingrained in US and Canadian societies because it is easier to enjoy the present when the past is not layered on top. especially when that past is full of atrocities committed on the behalf of the dominant groups. Dimaline's novel, *Thieves*, establishes an imagined future where the dystopian setting layers past and future traumas on top of one another. Dimaline is considered a writer of Indigenous Futurisms; her texts contains elements of the subgenre "Native

slipstream fiction." Native slipstream is "a species of speculative fiction within the sci-fi realm, [that] infuses stories with . . . alternate realities and multiverses [as well as] alternative histories" (Dillon 3). What is so powerful about utilizing a narrative tool such as slipstream is that not only is this author imagining a future, but she also is imagining a future that elaborates on how the choices of the settler culture (Westernized) will have grave consequences on both humanity and the land. *Thieves* carries out the world's current timeline up to a point, maintaining the history that readers would understand until it diverges from the expected successes of Western, Judeo-Christian, capitalist models. In the text the dominant society crumbles under the pressure to have equal access to resources such as water; these pressures result in wars which leads to a fractured world. Also, this intense outcome affects people who are not indigenous by stripping them of their ability to dream. Dimaline is creating a world where the Indigenous populations maintain a power that the people who oppressed them lose, which gives them something to leverage and fight for. It also unifies the Indigenous characters in the novel around a commonality that despite all their separate tribal affiliations they can coalesce on. Dimaline writes the Indigenous characters this way to continue their sovereignty, which aligns with what another Indigenous Futurism writer believes the genre has the power to do. Rebecca Roanhorse, a new face on the Indigenous Futurisms scene, says "Indigenous Futurism also advocates for the sovereign. It dares to let Indigenous creators define themselves and their world not just as speaking back to colonialism, but as existing in their own right" (Brown xiv). Dimaline embodies this in her novel by allowing her Indigenous characters to exist separate from the main society, and despite being hunted, they organize and defend themselves. Sh also upends Euro-American patriarchal systems by having her female characters take on powerful and emboldened roles in the narrative.

It’s hard to discuss the role of women in scifi for an entire group who are only connected loosely in an ethnic/cultural sense. The voices of authors who identify as Native are often lumped together for little more than their claim of indigenous identity. To be mindful of not making broad strokes that are inaccurate, I will analyze the novel on the specifics of its tribal representations. For example, in Dimaline’s novel *Thieves* the Anishinaabe people (a grouping of many tribes from around the great lakes of Canada) will be referred to, and their specific beliefs will be utilized for discussion. It is a mistake on the behalf of outside voices to homogenize the experiences of indigenous people.

As discussed in the two previous chapters, the linear fashion of how society deals with trauma cannot be layered onto many Native people because their epistemology of temporality is different. Native groups in the Americas have always been tormented and subjugated by invading colonizing forces. This past is forever present in the psyches of many people of indigenous descent because the systems of today perpetuate these inequalities. Much like they are in *Firekeeper’s* Daughter by Angeline Boulley, the systems in this novel, such as the healthcare and social welfare structures approach problems from a cultural standpoint that is not based in Native practices. In the “Euro-American” model of trauma processing, things that happen in the past need to be healed in the present for a healthier future. This “traumatological timeline—a temporal imaginary that assigns a linear trajectory to the experience of trauma” does not coalesce with many Indigenous perspectives of time that are far more cyclical, existing in layers spherically which makes the past a much more poignant part of the present (Wieskamp and Smith 74). Also, trauma is theorized by Thomas Elsasser to create a gap between “psychic temporality and linear chronological time” allowing for “several temporalities” to “coexist within the same somatic field” (197). This means that what the body experienced may return as

memory in both physical and mental capacities, causing the body to react to non-present threats as if they were real-time. This aligns with Anishinaabe perspectives on time in that it is layered, ever present, cyclical. There is no implication that trauma is more relevant for this group of people, but rather having experienced many forms of trauma as a group has left a lasting impact, as it would any community subjected to settler-colonialism.

Another way Euro American models of processing do not function well is how they approach the victim individually, instead of approaching the community. Survivance, or survival, endurance, and resistance, is a key tenant in the academic studies of Native American topics, and within that term there is the understanding that one is not enacting survivance alone. Gerald Vizenor, who coined the term, states that survivance is "an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent. Survivance is greater than the right of a survivable name" (Vizenor 1). To have presence, Native people need to speak up, to avoid deracination, Native people need to take up space, and to continue stories, there needs to be a Native community to hear them. This is why being interconnected and focused on one's community is so central to many Indigenous ideologies. Trauma is a well explored topic in relation to native peoples because of the colonial atrocities enacted on their communities; where this paper differentiates its analysis is the focus on Native voices and how they perceive those traumas enacting themselves in future timelines. For example, Dimaline's utilization of survivance's key tenants in her novel is a prediction of how it can/will be used in the future. The idea of survivance is included in how women are portrayed in *Thieves,* where they are key to the healing of not just the small group at the center of the narrative, but to the healing of a community at large. There is significant data on the

disproportionate amount of sexual abuse and domestic violence perpetrated on Native women, and this kind of trauma along with others, rears its ugly head in *Thieves*.

In Dimaline's novel the role women play in presenting and processing trauma is key to the healing of the entire native community. Several female characters surround the main character Frenchie; each one represents a different aspect of the historical traumas forced on the Anishinaabe people that star in the center of the narrative. In her future Dimaline imagines that white people have lost their ability to dream, and only those with Native roots maintain the power to do so. By stripping the settler-class of their imagination, she is removing their ability to have ambition, drive, and real emotions. Also, by making her narrator a young Indigenous man who is hungry for knowledge of his people, the Story that binds them all, Dimaline is positioning her readers to engage with this future from an Indigenous point of view. It can be inferred that the ability to dream, engage in "Story" and survive on the land is tied to the close connection that the Anishinaabe people claim with the physical space, a character unto itself, in the backdrop of the novel. To establish how they reached this point in society, Dimaline has Miig, one of the elders in Frenchie's survival group, have a ritual where he tells "Story" to the younger members (Dimaline 22). He says that in the past the "Anishinaabe people lived on [the] lands for thousands of years" before they "welcomed visitors, who renamed the land Canada" (23). From this perspective the Indigenous narrative places the white settlers as temporary entities in their world, and this is key to the hope that the Native people in this story carry with them for a better future. Miig continues to discuss how Boarding Schools were established and how they were shut down eventually. This historical system is just one of many adding traumas to the history of the native characters. Where Dimaline slips into an alternate reality is when she has Miig describe the "Water Wars" that came after "The Melt" and the re-establishment of the

schools to round up the Anishinaabe people (25). So, in this future humankind has devolved into fighting over resources because they never addressed the threat of climate change, instead choosing to resort to violence and greed to covet what little was left. However, it is key to note that the outcome of all of this (white people losing the ability to dream) was not the same for those whose traditional practices and outlooks revolved around sustainability. The female characters in this story--Wab, Riri, Rose, and Minerva each in their own way represent various aspects of a healing journey. They each portray elements of trauma, the power of story, and the power of community as a means of progression for the communities they inhabit.

Wab is a powerful young woman whose story of survival is representative of so many Native woman in modern society. She is in the company of Frenchie and the group; she is portrayed as "practically a woman ... [with a] keloid slash that split her face nearly in two" (Dimaline 21). She bears the scars of a traumatic past, but also has the bearing of a warrior, "all tall and harsh" (77). Her ferocity is from a lifetime of hardship and survival. Within the healing journey she represents the moment where processing is necessary for progression. She clearly is bothered by her past traumas, as seen when she is triggered by the sight of men from her past in the woods. The community does not know how to help her in her silence. It takes her "coming to story," her journey of how she came to be in the small community she is in now, to open the gate for interpersonal healing and relief. It is important to note that her story is just one of many examples of storytelling being used as a "collective coping mechanism" and act of rebellion against a dominant narrative (Wieskamp 72). In this case that narrative is what the Recruiters (government) tell most people, non-native people, about what is happening to the indigenous groups in the schools and institutions. Stories of atrocities cannot be fathomed by the non-natives because their blindness to what is being done to people of indigenous descent prevents them

from witnessing or empathizing, and their inability to dream prevents them from imagining the atrocities.

Wab contains trauma all too common in modern day Native communities, that of sexual abuse and male domination. Her horrendous story begins with an absent mother who was "super shitty," and in a drunken state she tells the rest of the group how she was captured, tricked into entering an unsafe space where men were intimidated by her ability to be successful in a market they wanted to corner in the post-apocalyptic world (Dimaline 76). The way they saw fit to punish her for this infraction was by gang raping her over a period of time. By finally opening and telling her story to the group, Wab is "asserting [her] presence" in the narrative of trauma; she is empowering herself as a being worthy of acknowledgment, which is opposed to how those men would have seen her, an invisible existence (Wieskamp 73). Continuing in the rhetoric of survivance, Wab's opening up follows the outline of survival put forth by native people over time, one where community is emphasized to combat settler colonial practices. Not only was she raped, but the land that her community inhabits has also been raped of resources. It requires a communal act like storytelling to begin existing in a healing space. This is something seen repeatedly in this novel.

Wab's experience, though extreme in its circumstances, is one that is played out consistently on Native women's bodies. This sobering fact is so prevalent that even in a fictional future, one where all problems could be erased, the problem pervades and creeps into the psyche and physical space of the Native communities Dimaline imagines. Dimaline challenges the stereotype of a raped woman being a devalued woman by making Wab an essential member of her community. Her strength and ferocity make her an asset in the survival of everyone around her. This directly contrasts the idea that "rape is the rupture of a woman's purity" or her "good

and valuable subjecthood" (76). Instead her value has only grown with her, making her invaluable to her community.

Riri, the youngest of the female characters, is part of the little community at the center of the narrative and comes to represent the acronym MMIW, which stands for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. (This is also represented in *FD* with the victims of the drug ring.) When the audience first meets this character, she is the loveable youth that gives the older members of the group a reason to be alert and extra protective. She is kept from "Story" because Miig, the leader of the group, does not want to inundate her with the traumas of her people yet. She is so young that her trauma is less clear, less hard edged. Story is the verbal processing and informing of all the atrocities that have happened. It is also the story of how the Anishinaabe people survived, continue to survive, and how they can survive for many years to come. According to Clarissa Pinkola Estes, a Jungian scholar, "stories are...nourishing; they provide initiatory maps so that. . .work. . .can be completed" (43). Riri is not brought into the fold of this tradition until after she is unintentionally exposed to Wab's coming-to story, the one rife with sexual assault. This experience is so traumatizing that Miig invites her to "hear story" for the first time, acknowledging that it is time for her to begin healing and processing with the rest of them (Dimaline 86). It is time for her to begin her own healing journey.

Where Riri becomes a statistic is when the group encounters the men from Wab's past in the forest. These men bring nothing but trouble with them, and tensions snap and a fight breaks out. Riri is captured and dragged over the edge of a cliff. The loss of her pushes other members in the group to violent actions in retaliation. The loss of her is just another trauma piled on the mountain of others they collectively carry on their shoulders. The loss of her is also where "story" ends for the remainder of the novel, symbolically showing that trauma can break a

person, can break them from their rituals, and it is only with Minerva's later sacrifice that ritual can be restored.

In the dominant Euro-American discourse of trauma, stories or narratives are often deemed simply anecdotal. They do not hold power or weight in the processing of trauma against women. Logic, rationality, and individuality saturate western discourses of therapy, but as can be shown with the community in the book, whole groups experience the rippling effect of trauma. Survivance is portrayed with characters like Wab and Riri, their traumas adding to the collective, and strengthening the collective with their realities, this clarifies what they must fight for and against. The character of Rose illustrates another key component of this Anishinaabe rhetoric for healing, that of the traumatological timeline being both past and present.

Rose comes from a background where she was exposed to more elder members of the Anishinaabe community. These elders protected her from a fate similar to Wab's by isolating her from outsiders. This is the foundation for her strong ethnic identity, one that she fosters throughout the narrative. Especially in Dimaline's dystopian future, this ethnic identity becomes a tether to reality, grounding not just Rose, but all the characters in the purpose of survival. Her spirited nature made her a key community member at the center of the narrative. During Story time with the group, she would be so incensed by the historical loss her people had endured that:

> She became more vocal about it every day. . . .in fact she became part of Story, the dissenting voice to the way things are, the rebel waiting for the fight to be brought. . . having been raised by old people, she spoke like them. It made us feel surrounded on both ends – like we had a future and a past all bundled up. . ." (Dimaline 32)

Rose acknowledges the most vocally how historical loss can "serve as a culturally relevant stressor [one] that is not only distressing, but may detract from one's sense of meaning,

belonging, and purpose which represents dimensions of well-being" (Fetter and Thompson 492). This is why she interacts with Story so strongly, because she sees it as one of the best ways to combat the pressure of that loss. Rose represents the resistance portion of “survivance,” she actively fights throughout the narrative for her people and those in her community. At the end of the novel when Minerva is captured, she is right in the center of the plan to rescue her.

Finally, Minerva in the narrative is a character often at the margins of the text. It is only towards the end that she plays an active role, and it is the most symbolic of the Anishinaabe approach to processing and combatting trauma. Minerva “has language,” meaning she can speak in the Anishinaabe tongue; the other members of the group clamor for every bit she hands out, desperate to know this connection to their core identities as native individuals (Dimaline 38). Throughout the narrative, Dimaline paints Minerva as sage, and passive. Shortly before Wab opens about her troubled past and serving as a potential catalyst for Wab’s coming-to story, Minerva tells the traditional tale of the Rogaru. In this tale the beast is a man turned animal, hungry for young women. The normalization of violence in the tale, and the fact that it is a building block for other stories to come, shows the ever presence of violence, especially in young Native women’s lives. The story also reenforces the cyclical nature of violence in the lives of Native women, it has always existed as far back as they can collectively remember, and it will continue to exist.

Minerva represents an older generation, and she makes decisions that she believes will benefit the next one. She is captured by the Recruiters in the second half of the novel, and she sacrifices herself to keep the community hidden. Her sacrifice shows the necessity for the communal whole to be a priority in the healing process. She knows the survival of most of her people is greater than herself. After she leaves, the group stops hearing Story, illustrating how

the presence of an elder was key to the knowledge being passed on. She is not dead though, and eventually uses the power of Story in her escape. "Hum[ming] an old song to herself" while the Recruiters hook her up to a machine that would drain her imagination, her ability to dream, Minerva represents a new kind of threat to her captors. She has a "blood memory, her teachings, [and] her ancestors" all stored inside of her, waiting to be released (Dimaline 172). All this tradition and knowledge is what lent her the power to sing a song so destructive that "she brought the whole thing down" (172). Here the audience, especially those who are not familiar with Anishinaabe thought and traditions, sees for the first time the true power of them, and why people have fought to preserve them. They not only have to power to heal a community in traumatological processing, but also the power to fight back, to resist the oppressive forces around them. The survival of a whole people depends on their ability to carry on their history, remember their community, and work together for a better future.

Much like in the two short stories at the beginning of this analysis and in *FD*, *Thieves* uses the power of storytelling to connect its Indigenous characters with their ethnic identities. Dimaline, like the other authors, also uses story to validate her characters existence, it shows them the depth and breadth of their history and how that history is still relevant in the present.

Dimaline's novel is a direct contrast to the science fiction produced for decades before the rise in popularity of Native Futurisms. She has produced a narrative centered on ideologies and gender roles so different in their presentation that they challenge previous understandings of the genre. *Star Trek* is an easy comparison since it stems from early in the science fiction tradition, therefore holding many of the original tropes in place. Dimaline takes the positionality of the audience from the majority to a minority group in the narrative and shows how they survive, endure, and resist the traumas they face. She utilizes women as key players in the

healing and fighting journeys of the people central to her narrative, which is another direct contrast to the secondary roles they often play in traditional science fiction. Other indigenous authors such as Rebecca Roanhorse with her novel *Trail of Lightening* and Louise Erdrich with her novel *Future Home of the Living Go*d have walked this path and achieved similar success in portraying these tropes flipped or twisted into the futurisms of their hypothesized timelines. This kind of literature is important in broadening readers' perspectives of what is and is not working in our modern society.

Conclusion

Each of the texts we have explored demonstrates the power of Native women creating narratives that encapsulate their truths and asserts their voices into a position of power. Historically Native communities have not been given the space to speak up and be heard by broader audiences in the United States, these narratives demonstrate the power of survivance as a key tenant in Native literature. After having looked at the way Native women are portrayed in these texts it is clear that Native female authors have criticisms on the way things are currently going for their communities.

In all the stories we see how trauma is an ever-present threat to the health and wellbeing of Native women. One of the ways these authors fight back against this trauma is by manipulating their narratives to provide the female characters with the power to help themselves and their communities. They do this is through trumping linear timelines with their own circular model and allowing the communities to heal in a way that bridges the psychological gap created between Native people and linear time models of healing. We see this in all the texts. This narrative choice is important because it helps to establish Native people as legitimate and valuable in the face of linear histories that only document Western nation states and their progress. These women are resisting erasure by positing female characters who take charge over their healing and the healing of those around them.

The female characters in these stories take up space. They do not back down in the face of the harm coming for them. They all fight for not only the betterment of themselves but also the community around them. In the two short stories we see Native women who are successful in their pursuits of justice and in fact nullify the threatened sexual traumas before they can occur. In *Firekeeper's Daughter,* Daunis is able to bring the truth to light, but because it is a "true crime"

text and not one of speculative fiction Boulley chooses to show outcomes reflective of where things currently stand. This dose of reality helps to contrast how powerful the choices of Zeller and Boudreau are in their short tales. Where this connects to *Marrow Thieves* is how Dimaline chooses to continue the current trauma's facing Native communities into the future and compounds them. However, her dystopia is for everyone, not just the Native characters, illustrating how the current issues facing Native communities will have dire consequences for all involved if change does not occur. By using women to illustrate their social commentary the Native authors are showing outside audiences how women are seen as powerful and equivalent to their male counterparts in Native tradition. Unlike women subjected to oppressive patriarchal systems, these Native women take center stage in seeking justice for themselves and their communities.

Finally, these narratives posit the importance of the character's ethnic identities to their health and wellbeing. All these stories incorporate traditional storytelling as a source of knowledge and strength for the women interacting with it. In the short stories the knowledge of creatures such as the Wehtigo and the Kushtuka assists the female characters in their pursuit of justice. In *Firekeepers Daughter* the traditional stories and practices help Daunis feel grounded and have perspective on the issues she is facing, and in *Marrow Thieves* "Story" is literally the source of the character's power in resistance. It is evident that these four Native women, in writing these narratives, want to show people the pride and power they derive from their heritages. They want to establish them and their people as worthy of note and consideration.

It would be beneficial moving forward to broaden the sample size of this study. While these four texts cover multiple genres, there are multitudes of other texts to consider. An author who was not considered in this paper but would provide more insight into the role Native female

characters play in science fiction is Rebecca Roanhorse (Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo). She has multiple science fiction novels that star a female protagonist. In this paper I focused on texts published after 2010, and with the prolific nature of the Native literary scene right now, I could easily narrow that focus down to texts published after 2020 to examine how ideologies are progressing. Where this paper lacks the most is its lack of firsthand commentary from the authors in question. In the future I would like to reach out to female Native authors and ask them about their expectations and motivations in creating these strong female protagonists. It would be beneficial to align my analysis and commentary with their true intentions.

The four texts that I have examined in the paper all show audiences how rewriting power dynamics, manipulating temporal understandings, and connecting to one's ethnic identity are frequently found in the texts of Native female authors. These commonalities link both the authors and their female characters in protest against a society that has so often pushed them to the margins and tried to erase their identities. These texts are a form of resistance, or better yet a testament to the ongoing survivance of the Native communities in the United States and Canada.

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