

**Indigenous Literature and the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation  
Commission**

by

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## Abstract

In this dissertation, I demonstrate that the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) history of residential schooling is fundamentally incomplete for a variety of reasons, many out of the TRC's control. This incompleteness necessitates further investigation into the history and legacy of residential schooling. I also query the TRC's approach to reconciliation, which I suggest – along the same lines as David Garneau and others – fundamentally asks Indigenous peoples to reconcile themselves to the power of the state within the current settler colonial structure. However, this theory of reconciliation is not the only one that has been proposed or is possible in Canada, which provides grounds for an extended critique of the TRC. I undertake further investigation into the legacy of residential schooling and critique the TRC's approach to reconciliation through analyzing several literary texts about residential schooling and settler colonialism in general, primarily through close reading.

In Chapter One, I identify three ways in which the TRC's approach to the history of residential schools in the Final Report suggests its own incompleteness: repetition of testimonies, arguments made about the TRC as genocide, and inattention to the issues with the Common Experience Payments and Independent Assessment Process. I then contextualize the TRC's approach to reconciliation as they express it theoretically, through a broad definition of reconciliation, and practically, through the Calls to Action. I argue that the theoretical definition of reconciliation and the Calls implicitly exclude political self-determination for Indigenous peoples and thereby fundamentally re-inscribe colonial state power.

In Chapter Two, I analyze Robert Arthur Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls*, arguing that Alexie's novel sets up a theory of reconciliation centered around Indigenous self-

determination. I conclude that this text suggests that any version of reconciliation will only be possible once Indigenous peoples can exercise autonomous decision-making in spiritual and political matters. In Chapter Three, I present a close reading of Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, focusing on the ways in which it follows and departs from an Aristotelian tragic structure. I first establish that the text calls for this reading through its paratext. I then argue that the novel constitutes a tragicomedy in the sense that the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Settlers is narrated as a tragedy throughout, but the relationship between Indigenous peoples within the text begins as a tragedy, but ends as a comedy. These differing narratives require different types of reconciliation, as Hayden White argues in *Metahistory*. Highway's novel therefore suggests that reconciliation between Indigenous peoples is possible and must be prioritized, but reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and Settlers is not possible within the current social and power structures in Canada. In Chapter Four, I first read Drew Hayden Taylor's "Education is Our Right" and James Bartleman's *As Long as the Rivers Flow* as demonstrating the impossibility of dialogue-based reconciliation in the wake of residential schooling. I then pivot to three other texts – Bartleman's *The Redemption of Oscar Wolf*, Elle-Maija Tailfeathers' *A Red Girl's Reasoning*, and Jeff Barnaby's *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* – that depict violent retribution for settler colonial harm. I conclude that, taken together, these texts suggest that more radical responses to settler colonialism than the TRC could posit must be considered if reconciliation is ever to take place in Canada.

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## Introduction

### *A Brief History of Canadian Residential Schools and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*

Canada's Indian<sup>1</sup> residential school system began its genesis in 1830, when the British government shifted from acting based on the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which aimed at maintaining First Nations as British allies, to instituting a set of new assimilatory policies aimed at integrating First Nations into the new Canadian economy (Milloy 11-12). At that time, the Crown assumed that adults *and* children could be assimilated, but the Department of Indian Affairs<sup>2</sup> decided relatively quickly that adults were non-assimilable. By the 1840s, the Department was focusing exclusively on assimilating children through "education," mostly in day schools, which sent students home at the end of each day (17). These day schools did not achieve their assimilatory goals, as children who maintained consistent ties to their Indigenous communities re-integrated into them without much issue and remained uninterested in assimilating into non-Indigenous society in the aggregate (17-18).

Based on this experience and the theories of Indigenous education articulated in the 1844 *Bagot Report*, the 1847 *Ryerson Report*, and the 1879 *Davin Report*, the government inaugurated what is now commonly understood to be the residential school system in the 1880s (Milloy 8).<sup>3</sup> These schools were inspected and funded by the federal government, but run in their day-to-day operations by various Churches and Church organizations (xiii). While policy with respect to the

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term "Indian" here only because it is the term generally applied to this system. Otherwise, I favour "Indigenous" to refer generally to the pre-colonial inhabitants of the land now referred to as Canada and nation-specific words when possible and necessary. For the purposes of this dissertation, "Indigenous" includes Métis Peoples.

<sup>2</sup> Because this department's name has changed often, most recently in 2017, I refer to it by whatever name it was under at the historical moment under consideration in this dissertation.

<sup>3</sup> Milloy also points out that there were already four residential schools in Ontario before the 1880s, but these were not part of an identifiable system (8).

schools changed often until the last school closed in 1997, their general goals remained constant: assimilating Indigenous children by instilling Euro-Western and Christian values, teaching them the languages of the nation-state and suppressing Indigenous languages, keeping them away from their parents, producing Indigenous labourers for the new liberal capitalist economy, and preventing organized rebellion by rejecting any healthy sense of Indigenous identity (24-31). The system's premise was that once the students had been effectively disciplined through violent educational methods,<sup>4</sup> they would not question the state's authority. Given these coercive and violent aims, it is not surprising that the schools tended to be poor environments, with undernourished and poorly-clothed children, haphazard education, and rampant abuse (107).

Partially as a result of the legacy of residential schools, and certainly as a result of ongoing colonialism, the Oka Crisis and the failure of the Meech Lake Accord led to a precipitous rise in Indigenous activism in the 1990s (Coulthard *Red Skin* 116-7). In response to this activism, the government undertook the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), releasing its report in 1996. One chapter of this report detailed a series of recommendations for addressing the legacy of residential schools. To follow up on the RCAP, the Government of Canada released its *Gathering Strength Report* in 1998, which contained the first government apology for the residential school system. Soon after this acknowledgment, representatives of residential school survivors sued the Government of Canada and the churches in a class action lawsuit. This suit resulted in the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA), announced in 2006.

After extensive negotiations, the IRSSA was implemented in 2007. In the words of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, this agreement contained:

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<sup>4</sup> By the term "violent educational methods," I mean the enactment of physical, emotional, and spiritual abuse in an attempt to reach the schools' educational goals.



five different elements to address the legacy of Indian Residential Schools:

- A Common Experience Payment (CEP) for all eligible former students of Indian Residential Schools
- An Independent Assessment Process (IAP) for claims of sexual or serious physical abuse
- Measures to support healing such as the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program and an endowment to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation
- Commemorative activities and,
- The establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). (“Indian Residential Schools”)

This dissertation primarily focuses on the last of these elements, the TRC, with commentary on the other aspects insofar as they intersect with the TRC’s work.

The TRC, whose Mandate concluded in Summer 2015, was intended to “contribute to truth, healing and reconciliation” (“Our Mandate”). It did so with the help of three Commissioners, Murray Sinclair, Wilton Littlechild, and Marie Wilson,<sup>5</sup> who oversaw all of the TRC’s activities. The TRC was required to compile “as complete a historical record as possible” (“Our Mandate”) of residential school experience by analyzing relevant documents provided to them by the Churches and the Government of Canada and inviting all those impacted by residential schools to testify to their experiences. The TRC argues that this information provides

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<sup>5</sup> The original commissioners, Harry LaForme, Claudette Dumont-Smith and Jane Brewin Morley, resigned shortly after being appointed due to political interference and internal conflict (TRC *Interim Report 2*). Curiously, the reasons for their resignations appear in the Interim, but not Final, Report.

the basis upon which Reconciliation<sup>6</sup> can take place. The nature of this Truth, what it leaves out, and the impact it has on Reconciliation are the primary concerns of this dissertation.

The TRC carried out its statement-taking responsibilities at “National Events, Community Events, and [through] Individual Statement-Taking/Truth Sharing” (“Our Mandate”). The Community Events were “designed by communities to respond to the needs of the former students,” and Individual Statements took whatever form the witness preferred (“Our Mandate”).<sup>7</sup> The seven National Events, the last of which took place in Edmonton in March 2014, garnered the most attention from settler Canadian society. These events were intended “to engage the Canadian public and provide education about the [Indian residential school] system, the experience of former students and their families, and the ongoing legacies of the institutions” (“Our Mandate”). At these events, anybody impacted by the residential school system could testify in any of three forms: sharing circles, which were held in small rooms with small audiences; sharing panels, held in halls with larger audiences; and private statements, given one-on-one. The events were open to the public and, when feasible, streamed online. All public statements have been recorded and are now available through the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, both online and in the archive housed at the University of Manitoba. Additionally, transcripts of private statements for which the witness gave consent for distribution are available to read in the same places.

The National Events essentially accomplished three things: they gathered information, disseminated it, and engaged in dialogue. To this last end, honorary witnesses from a wide range

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<sup>6</sup> Throughout the dissertation, I use the capital-R “Reconciliation” to refer to the TRC’s approach, and the lower-case-r “reconciliation” for all other purposes.

<sup>7</sup> This includes literary and artistic responses. While this dissertation does not undertake the archival research necessary to analyze these testimonies, such work would be a valuable next step in understanding the artistic legacy of residential schooling.

of backgrounds, including a Holocaust Survivor (Robert Waisman), a Rwandan genocide survivor (Éloge Butera), a former professional hockey player (Joé Juneau), many Indigenous leaders (such as Grand Chief Ed John, Phil Fontaine, and Alanis Obomsawin), former Governor General Michaëlle Jean and former Prime Ministers Paul Martin and Joe Clark (“Reconciliation...towards a new relationship”), were tasked with listening to testimonies and reflecting on what they heard in speeches at the conclusion of each day. Also to this latter end, the Events had moderated town-hall-style dialogues in which attendees could debate the TRC’s merits and methods, as well as any other related topics. There were also panels on historical relations between Indigenous Peoples and the Canadian Government, and panels on specific acts of genocide like the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide.<sup>8</sup>

While the dialogue that took place at these Events was ostensibly an end in itself, the Events were also designed to support the TRC’s documentary responsibilities. To satisfy these responsibilities, the TRC has published documents in three stages. First, they published their *Interim Report* and a historical report entitled *They Came for the Children* in 2012. They then published four preliminary final report documents, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada; The Survivors Speak; What We Have Learned; and Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Calls to Action* in early 2015. Finally, the six-volume Final Report was published later in 2015. The Final Report contains a two-part first volume chronicling the history of residential schools, a second volume on Inuit and Northern experience, a third on Métis experience, a fourth on missing children and unmarked burials, a fifth on the “Legacy” of residential schools, and a final volume theorizing and proposing concrete steps toward Reconciliation. All of these reports

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<sup>8</sup> This list of the components of TRC National Events and Honorary Witnesses are intended to be representative, not exhaustive.

represent the culmination of the TRC's Truth goal and its approach to Reconciliation, and therefore form the basis of this dissertation's non-literary archive.

### *Research Questions and Hypotheses*

As noted above, one of the TRC's primary objectives was to "[c]reate as complete a historical record as possible of the [Indian residential school] system and legacy" ("Our Mandate"), which represents the "Truth" piece of the TRC equation. Coming out of this objective, this dissertation's first research question was "how complete a record of residential school history is possible, given the TRC's testimonial methods?" Once all of the TRC documents were published, my research led me away from thinking about the TRC in terms of testimony and toward thinking of it as a historiographical body. As I explain in Chapter One, I hypothesized that limitations in evidence-gathering and practical matters resulting from the relationship between the TRC and the government would mean that the record as explained by the TRC would remain incomplete. Given this incompleteness, I asked a further question about the TRC's Truth-articulating responsibility, which was "what impact do the gaps and silences in the TRC's historical record have on the overall understanding of residential school history possible from a strict reading of the TRC reports?" To answer this question, I used a combination of close and distant reading, ultimately concluding that the Truth as the TRC has articulated it obfuscates the ongoing impacts of settler colonialism.

When the preliminary four Final Report documents were published, the TRC defined its approach to Reconciliation for the first time. Given that I began research for this dissertation before all of the documents were available, a further research question was "What is the nature of reconciliation for the TRC?" To answer this question, I closely read all of the TRC's comments on Reconciliation, including the definition, the 94 Calls to Action, and all other

suggestions made by the TRC to this end. I hypothesized that, for the TRC, Reconciliation would fundamentally try to improve Indigenous peoples lives within the settler state, but at no point meaningfully challenge said state's power.

Given my initial suspicion that the TRC would not be able to articulate a vision of Reconciliation that would satisfy all Indigenous peoples,<sup>9</sup> this dissertation also asks questions about literary texts that depict residential school experience, or in which characters are impacted by said experience. In reading these texts, I first asked if there was a distinct impact that literature could have in fostering understanding of residential school experience. After it became apparent that the literary texts contained a kind of emotional resonance and literary truth not obtainable strictly through reading the TRC's Reports, I moved on to thinking about the versions of reconciliation, or absence thereof, that these texts depict. Thus, my subsequent multi-part research question was "what kinds of reconciliation does the literary archive depict? How are they similar to and different from those prioritized by the TRC? What do these similarities and differences indicate about the nature of reconciliation called for by Indigenous peoples outside the confines of the TRC?" Certainly, the answer to these questions cannot be all-encompassing, just as the TRC's approach had limitations. However, I hypothesized that literary texts about residential schools would tend to suggest methods of reconciliation that focussed on making Indigenous communities whole again rather than repairing the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Settler state. I posited that thinking through such versions of reconciliation would lead us to a more holistic understanding of residential school harm and the nature of the

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<sup>9</sup> To say nothing of Settler Canadians. One of this dissertation's key premises, as explained by the theoretical analysis done in its body, is that reconciliation from residential schooling and settler colonialism must focus on giving Indigenous peoples what they need and deserve. As a result, I do not concern myself with whether Settler Canadians would be happy with any individual reconciliatory act, except on the rare occasions that I must pivot to considering practical political matters.

conflict in need of resolution in Canada. In chapters two through four, I test these hypotheses primarily through analyzing literary texts about residential schools primarily through close reading.

### *Selection of Literary Texts*

This dissertation has as its broad archive all fictional texts written by Indigenous peoples in Canada that depict residential school experience and/or the legacy and aftermath of said experience. Such an archive is relatively large, as one could make the case that virtually all published fiction by Indigenous people since the beginning of the residential school era bears at least some marker of residential school legacy, what Sam McKegney has called residential schooling's "shadow presence" (*Magic Weapons* 11). However, not all such fiction represents residential schooling directly. Nor is every text that depicts residential schooling a work of fiction. Indeed, many former residential school students have chosen to write memoirs about their experiences, thus implicitly claiming that their representations accurately depict exactly what happened in the schools. Such memoirs have been extremely valuable for understanding residential school history insofar as they usually tell readers what happened in the schools without any ambiguity.

However, I chose only to examine texts that are explicitly fictional in this dissertation's literary sections. I do so primarily because of my major critical inspiration, which is Sam McKegney's *Magic Weapons*. While McKegney's book is primarily about testimony, his framing of the value of literary work about residential schooling applies at least as accurately to fictional work:

Unlike strictly historical discussions, Indigenous residential school survival narratives cannot be so readily confined to the past. Although they depict historical disparities in

power and often traumatic personal events, they render these imaginatively, affording the Indigenous author interpretive autonomy and discursive agency while transcending the structural imperatives of proof and evidence embedded in historical paradigms. They invoke residential school history as a creative element in provocative visions of growth, healing, and change. (7)

That is, literary work about residential schooling is valuable as a contrast to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission because such works have greater autonomy in how they depict the experience of residential schooling. This autonomy theoretically allows for a different and richer understanding of the truth about what happened in residential schools. As Annette Wieviorka argues, while “[i]t is often supposed that history is better transmitted by nonfiction,” (22), literature contains “a literary ‘truth’ of another sort” (41).

This dissertation is primarily concerned with the fictional texts’ representations of reconciliation and healing in the aftermath of residential schooling. Just as literature need not be concerned with objective proof in the way that historiography is, it does not have to imagine solutions that are pragmatic or that are likely to receive the consent of the state. On the other hand, the TRC’s Final Report lays out a reconciliatory program that requires the consent and participation of the state, and therefore its continued authority, as I argue in Chapter One. Thus, they differ from the literary texts insofar as the latter are free to define precisely and in whatever way they see fit the terms of reconciliation: what the core issues are, what caused them, and what must be done to remedy them. I explain the use of fiction in more detail when I describe my approach to these texts below.

The literary texts largely agree with the TRC as to what the intended and practical effects of residential schooling are: language loss; individual, collective, and inter-generational trauma;

and loss of traditional cultural values. However, the literary texts understand the causes of these harms differently than the TRC Reports do, situating settler colonialism in general, not residential schooling in particular, as causing these harms.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the literary texts depict actions that either undermine settler colonial state authority or are undertaken without considering this authority in order to remedy residential school harms. In reading the literary archive, then, we can come to some conclusions about what the TRC's Final Report does not consider when laying out its paradigm for Reconciliation.

When reading the available literary archive about residential schooling, I noticed a pervasive pattern in the structure of these texts. Namely, the texts tend to start with a description of the community before children were taken to residential school, followed by a description of conditions within the school, and followed by an extensive representation of the aftermath of residential schooling. This structure provides a model for reconciliation, first, insofar as it depicts the community prior to colonial harm, which I refer to as the community's "conciliatory" state. The novels then show the implied reader how this conciliation is broken by residential school and other colonial harms and what the impact of this broken conciliation is. As the characters move toward healing, their communities often gesture toward returning to their conciliatory states, which would constitute reconciliation in its most basic sense. Thus, texts that follow this structure provide a useful framework for understanding reconciliation in particular contexts and as a general theoretical problem.

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<sup>10</sup> This is not to say that the TRC Reports always de-contextualize residential schooling. Indeed, they situate residential schooling within a narrative of colonial relations when explaining how residential school policy was developed (TRC *Honouring the Truth* 191-201). However, the Calls to Action and, by extension, the Reconciliatory program laid out by the TRC, *explicitly* seeks to "redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation" (TRC *Calls to Action* 1). It is therefore reasonable to suggest, based on the words of the TRC Reports themselves, that the TRC's Reconciliatory program is fundamentally about healing residential school-based harms.



I therefore selected the texts for this dissertation by generally choosing those that fit this pattern. The pattern requires the space to depict all of these elements, and I chose to focus on fiction for the reasons enumerated above. Most of the texts that I analyze in this dissertation are novels, not because I am specifically interested in novels, but because they are most useful for answering the questions I outlined at the outset of this research due to their extended depictions of residential school harm, legacy, and reconciliation that does not require factual accuracy or considerations of pragmatic political realities. The novels I analyze in chapters two and three – Robert Arthur Alexie’s *Porcupines and China Dolls* and Tomson Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen* – each follow this structure, so they are useful case studies. As I will demonstrate, they also offer distinctive versions of reconciliation, so my readings and conclusions do not overlap significantly. I considered other texts that follow this pattern, but ultimately excluded them not because they are not valuable in the context of this project, but because the amount of space afforded by this dissertation only allows for close engagement with a limited number of texts. Thus, I chose the two novels that I could make the strongest, non-repetitive arguments about in answering my research questions. Further work should be done to consider other literary texts within the context of residential schooling and the TRC. This work is ongoing, with McKegney’s *Magic Weapons*, the collections *Reconciling Canada* and *Arts of Engagement*, and numerous articles on individual texts, many of which I cite in the dissertation’s body, having already been published.

Particularly in Chapter Four, I consider some literary texts that do not fit neatly into the pattern I identify. After establishing that Highway and Alexie’s novels suggest that residential schooling is a symptom of settler colonialism, which is at the core of the issues faced by Indigenous communities, in this last chapter I argue that novels that do not necessarily centralize

residential schooling still suggest important lessons about reconciliation. More specifically, these texts all suggest that simply engaging in a dialogue with the settler state will not lead to meaningful change, so Indigenous Peoples must consider more revolutionary solutions. Thus, while all of the texts under consideration in that chapter are impacted by residential schooling to varying degrees, they do not necessarily follow the larger pattern articulated above. Instead, they are selected because of how they depict interactions between Indigenous peoples and Settlers, and the power relations inherent in those interactions that make dialogue-based negotiation of reconciliation impossible.

### *Methodologies and Chapter Descriptions*

The general method of reading in this dissertation is close reading in its most basic sense: “the detailed analysis of the complex interrelationships and ambiguities (multiple meanings) of the verbal and figurative components within a work” (Abrams and Harpham 217; emphasis removed).<sup>11</sup> I choose to emphasize close reading in this dissertation because it centralizes the work of the Indigenous author above all else without presuming to be able to understand the author’s intention in creating the fiction. As I.A. Richards articulated in *Practical Criticism*, one of the risks of literary analysis is that “*general critical preconceptions* (prior demands made on poetry as a result of theories – conscious or unconscious – about its nature and value), intervene endlessly, as the history of criticism shows only too well, between the reader and the poem” (15; emphasis original). Rather than coming at each novel with a particular theoretical framework in mind, I use close reading to try to learn and then articulate particular lessons about residential schooling, settler colonialism, and reconciliation suggested by each text. In doing so, I attempt to model an ethical engagement with the literary text in which I approach the text on its own terms.

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<sup>11</sup> The emphases in this text highlight that a concept is explained elsewhere in the text, so I removed them as they have no bearing on the meaning of the quotation in isolation.

That is, by using close reading, I seek to enact David Garneau's articulation of ethical engagement with Indigenous art by non-Indigenous critics. Garneau argues that, to ethically criticize Indigenous art, Settler critics must "enter the Aboriginal sovereign display territory as guests" (37). Garneau refers to "art galleries and other display spaces" (37), which I take to include novels and other literary representations. I therefore use close reading as a primary method in order to satisfy Garneau's call for an ethical model of critical engagement that centralizes the text itself, on its own terms, rather than coming to the texts with particular theoretical models. I expand on this reading method in the body of the dissertation as needed. Further, I do use theoretical and critical work to help this close reading, but only insofar as the texts suggest particular issues that require this context to analyze.

While I centralize close reading throughout, each chapter uses different methods to supplement my close readings. While extending close reading might seem like a departure from its theoretical underpinnings, more recent theory suggests that close reading has always had implicit theoretical underpinnings. As Fredric Jameson points out, "even so apparently ahistorical a 'method' as the older New Criticism presupposes a specific 'vision' or 'theory' of history" (58-9). To use close reading within readings that fundamentally historicize the texts under consideration is still to remain committed to close reading as a method.

In Chapter One, I primarily mobilize a close reading of the documents produced by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in order to determine what kind of Truth they articulate; what their method of Reconciliation is; and what this Truth and Reconciliation might obfuscate or not consider and why. In doing so, I set up the three literary chapters, which attempt to illuminate some of this obfuscation and challenge the TRC's conclusions. However, close reading is not sufficient for my purposes here, because I simply do not have the space to present

a close reading of all of the documents produced by the TRC, which total more than 2,000 pages. Thus, I use a small-scale version of distant reading inspired by Franco Moretti's work to choose elements of the text before interpreting them through close reading. I do not use the precise methods of distant reading as articulated by Moretti – using software and aggregating data in order to come to conclusions about large archives of texts – but rather think of distant reading as a model for identifying patterns and selecting the most important elements of the TRC Reports in the context of this dissertation. I explain this method further in Chapter One.

In Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation I analyze the structures of the novels in question to supplement my close readings. In Chapter Two, I argue that Robert Arthur Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls* sets up reconciliation after residential schooling as primarily a matter of reclaiming Indigenous rights to self-determination. My argument here contrasts the TRC insofar as the TRC only calls for spiritual self-determination without considering the related political possibilities. In making this argument, I consider the peculiar structure of the novel, which is mostly linear but also ends almost precisely at the chronological moment it starts. To help my analysis of this structure, I make brief gestures to the fundamentals of narratology.

In Chapter Three, I argue that Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* suggests a method of reconciliation based primarily on the re-formation of communities broken by residential school policy and ideology. To make this argument, I extend my close reading method in two ways. First, I present a close reading of the novel's preface, in which Highway suggests several intertexts for the novel, although close reading does not generally consider a novel's paratext to be a valid analytical unit. Second, I use one of the suggested intertexts – Aristotle's *Poetics* – to read the novel as a tragicomedy. I still centralize close reading as a way of interpreting individual moments in the text, but I also mobilize structural analysis to frame

these readings. This chapter contrasts the TRC's method for reconciliation insofar as Highway's novel focuses on conciliatory relations within Indigenous communities having been breached by colonization, whereas the TRC focuses on relations between Indigenous peoples and Settlers.

In Chapter Four I provide a broad overview of a motif I identify in contemporary Canadian Indigenous literatures. Namely, these texts suggest that dialogical approaches to solving conflicts between Indigenous peoples and Settlers are destined to fail because of the power relations involved therein. The texts suggest that Indigenous peoples must try more radical solutions, with violent revolution as a key metaphor. Here, because I am suggesting a pattern in the literature, I focus more on identifying and explicating the relevant examples, but use close reading to provide deeper understanding of the texts as necessary. My conclusions here contrast with the TRC because they imagine Canada as a place in which an ongoing conflict is taking place, whereas the TRC suggests that the conflict is over.

A potential objection to this course of research is that fiction does not claim to contain a truth in an objective sense, nor does it make arguments itself about any theoretical concepts, including reconciliation. There is, however, a rich theoretical tradition that justifies my use of fiction to help answer the questions I have about reconciliation in the settler colonial state. The foundational model comes from Aristotle's *Poetics*, which I cite extensively in Chapter Three. In that text, Aristotle articulates the place of the poet in opposition to the historian:

It is also obvious from what we have said that it is the function of a poet to relate not things that have happened, but things that may happen, i.e. that are possible in accordance with probability or necessity. For the historian and the poet do not differ according to whether they write in verse or without verse. [. . .] But the difference is that the former relates things that have happened, the latter things that may happen. For this reason

poetry is a more philosophical and more serious thing than history; poetry tends to speak to universals, history to particulars. A universal is the sort of thing that a certain kind of person may well say or do in accordance with probability or necessity [. . .]. (12)

Indeed, I turn to literature not to explain what has happened. The TRC Report and other historiographical discourse, as well as testimony by survivors, performs this function. Instead, literature is important for this project because it helps to imagine what might happen in the wake of residential schooling. In imagining post-residential school relationships, both between Indigenous peoples and between Indigenous peoples and Settlers, the novels, films, and plays in question imagine how various actors might come to terms with residential school abuse and work against its effects.

Theoretically, then, the literature helps one to critique the TRC not because it is offering something completely divergent, but because it offers depictions of the same events with differing content, not so that we might learn exactly what happened, but that we might learn something generalizable about residential schooling not based on factual accuracy. One of the TRC's goals was to "guide and inspire Aboriginal peoples and Canadians in a process of reconciliation" ("FAQs"). Because there is no singular definition of "reconciliation," as I will illustrate in Chapter One, part of the work of "guiding" Reconciliation was necessarily imagining what Reconciliation might look like in Canada. At its core, imagining Reconciliation is a project of imagining what might happen in order in the future to deal with harms perpetrated in the past and present. Similarly, the literature that I read here has a historical component – it depicts residential school harm in a way that produces a kind of literary truth in Wieviorka's formulation – and creatively imagines solutions to the harms created by this history using literary modes. In reading these texts, then, I do not propose that the texts offer a clear, objective social vision.

Rather, I propose that, by mobilizing close reading, the literary critic might uncover versions of reconciliation that could not otherwise be imagined or proposed through historiographical methods.

Aristotle's model of what the poet does leads me to Northrop Frye's conception of literature. In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye argues that "[t]he poet, like the pure mathematician, depends, not on descriptive truth, but on conformity to his hypothetical postulates" (76).<sup>12</sup> That is, like Aristotle, Frye argues that the absence of objective truth in literature is a feature that still produces meaning. Frye also argues, though, that "the standards of outward meaning are secondary, for literary works do not pretend to describe or assert" (74) and that "the events of a literary fiction are not real but hypothetical events" (84). This model presents an apparent problem for this dissertation. If literature's meaning is necessarily inward-facing, and is not directed at an outward reality, then why read literature as a way of understanding political problems? My reading method here does begin by looking at inward meaning, as a way of approaching the text on its own terms. The texts I have chosen set up hypothetical postulates (if residential school has this set of impacts) and then propose solutions to them (then the community or individual would reconcile in these ways). In reading the texts both structurally and in terms of their language, I can identify these hypothetical postulates and solutions. Doing so extends Frye's method in one of the ways that Jameson identifies is possible. Jameson argues that Frye almost, but not quite, argues that "all literature must be read as a symbolic meditation on the destiny of community" (70). In the three literary chapters, I argue that the texts under consideration all suggest ways of thinking about how communities might behave in the wake of residential schooling. Doing so is directly related to evaluating and critiquing the work of the

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<sup>12</sup> Frye here uses the term "poem" as a synecdoche for literary writing in general (71), so his use of "poet" stands as a synecdoche for all literary authors.

TRC because the postulates contained in the texts about what impacts residential schooling has directly mirror the TRC's conclusions about the same. Thus, in starting from the same postulates and coming to different solutions, the texts provide a useful contrast to the TRC even if one continues to read the texts as literature, which is to say as fictional closed systems of signs.

In doing so, I endeavour to produce “good” criticism in Frye’s sense: “Good commentary naturally does not read ideas into the poem; it reads and translates what is there, and the evidence that it is there is offered by the study of the structure of imagery with which it begins” (86). Frye’s conception of the good literary commentator parallels Garneau’s conception of how Settler art critics might approach Indigenous art. Thus, by reading the literary texts on their own terms as presenting hypothetical postulates for reconciliation, I aim at being a “good” critic in Frye’s sense and a conciliatory guest in Garneau’s.

Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* also provides a model for engaging with novels in discussing cultural and political issues. As Said says in that text, “The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future – these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative” (xiii). Given that the TRC published its Final Report in 2015, I cannot argue that issues related to reconciliation have been *decided* in the literature. This dissertation engages with reconciliation in Canada as an idea while it is ostensibly in process, not after the process is over. However, issues related to reconciliation, decolonization, and settler colonialism in general are reflected in the literature, as I demonstrate through my readings. Engaging with the literature therefore offers an entry point to discussing these issues in the wake of the TRC.



In reading literary work against the TRC Reports, I set up a cultural battleground in Said's sense: "Far from being a placid realm of Apollonian gentility, culture can even be a battleground on which causes expose themselves to the light of day and contend with one another" (xiii). However, my readings do not begin with the assumption that the texts themselves offer a transparent view of social realities. Instead, I borrow from Said's method in starting from specifically literary concerns, but reading in light of the history and power dynamics under consideration in the texts (xxii). The texts do not have a strict deterministic relationship with the histories of their authors and settings, but I do assume, along with Said, that "authors are [. . .] very much in the history of their societies, shaping and being shaped by that history and their social experiences in different measure. Culture and the aesthetic forms it contains derive from historical experience" (xxii). I therefore remain committed to approaching the texts on their own terms, but these terms include historical and political context, which the TRC and other histories of residential schooling offer.

These theoretical models bring me to more recent critical work on residential school literature that seeks to mobilize these texts in understanding the history and legacy of residential schooling. As noted above, Sam McKegney proposes that residential school literature "invoke[s] residential school history as a creative element in provocative visions of growth, healing, and change" (*Magic Weapons* 7). Introducing her reading of *Porcupines and China Dolls*, Emily Hazlett argues that "fiction writing can expand on limited conceptions of colonialism by exploring its intended intergenerational effects" (50). None of these texts is divorced from the objective history of residential schooling, nor do they represent it "accurately" or "realistically" in all moments. However, what we might call inaccuracy is not a limitation, but rather can be an advantage of a literary text. Because it is fundamentally imaginative, it can re-imagine the social

and political order, as Reconciliation does, in any way the author sees fit. The reconciliation depicted in each text does not have to aim at a pragmatic solution with all of the attendant political considerations. Thus, in reading these texts, I treat them as thought experiments in reconciliation, thereby using close reading to explicate what might be necessary to achieve reconciliation, not what we might reasonably accomplish in talking about reconciliation in the public sphere.

Finally, I am inspired by and mobilize Indigenous theorists who analyze the power of the state and its impact on Indigenous peoples. Through this mobilization, I start by asking whether and to what extent we might achieve reconciliation, not from the premise that we must achieve reconciliation. While all four chapters provide numerous instances of this kind of theorization, two representative examples are worth mentioning at the outset. First, Glen Coulthard argues that settler colonial rule “rests on the ability to entice Indigenous peoples to *identify* [. . .] with the profoundly *asymmetrical* and *non-reciprocal* forms of recognition either imposed on or granted to them by the settler state and society” (“Subjects of Empire” 25; emphasis original).

Coulthard’s formulation aids my analysis throughout this dissertation because, as I will argue in Chapter One, the TRC’s events and Calls to Action implicitly call Indigenous peoples to identify with the state, and for the state to recognize Indigenous claims without seriously questioning its own power.

The absence of resistance to state power in the TRC leads me to my second theoretical inspiration. Jodi Byrd argues that “inclusion into the multicultural cosmopole, built on top of indigenous lands, does not solve colonialism: that inclusion is the very site of [...] colonization” (10).<sup>13</sup> That is, I remain skeptical throughout my analysis of any moves toward inclusion of

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<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson argues that “these gifts of reconciliation [. . .] are an integral part of a much larger cycle of settler colonial violence even though they are positioned by the state as a break in the cycle”

Indigenous peoples, politics, and philosophies into dominant socio-political arrangements. Methodologically, then, Byrd and Coulthard's work contributes to a general ethic of skepticism of state-based models of reconciliation, recognition, and incorporation in this dissertation. Rather than assuming that reconciliation is necessarily a moral good, or that it benefits Indigenous peoples, I rigorously examine conciliatory moves in terms of their impacts on power relations between Indigenous peoples and Settlers.

### *Self-Situating*

Before beginning my analysis of the TRC, I believe it is important to make some comments about my position in relation to it. The TRC involves a complex series of relationships: between individuals; between Indigenous peoples and Settlers; between citizens and the state; between people and the natural environment; and many others. To write about the TRC, and about residential schooling and settler colonialism in general, is to intervene in this set of relations. While the legacy of residential schooling impacts everybody, not everybody was impacted equally, and as a Settler I have benefitted in countless ways from this legacy. I would suggest, then, that to situate oneself critically is a bare minimum requirement for intervening ethically on this matter.

I am a Settler in the land now referred to as Canada. I grew up in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, which is traditionally Ojibway territory, in a comfortable working-class family. While growing up, I played a considerable amount of golf very close to what was the site of Shingwauk and Wawanosh Indian Residential Schools, and is now the site of Algoma University. I was not

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("Restoring Nationhood: Leanne Betasamosake Simpson"). That is, Simpson argues that all gestures toward reconciliation initiated by the Canadian government are inherently gestures toward incorporating Indigenous peoples into the colonial state and dispossessing Indigenous peoples from their lands. I do not assume that this is true for the purpose of my analysis, but I do take seriously this possibility. As will become apparent in the rest of this dissertation, Simpson's general conclusion about reconciliation is borne out in the case of the TRC.

aware of this historical context at the time. After graduating from a high school that used a caricatured “Brave” as its mascot, I moved to Waterloo and London, Ontario, for six years to complete my BA and MA degrees at the Universities of Waterloo and Western Ontario, respectively. The research for this dissertation has been taken up primarily in Edmonton, Alberta, at the University of Alberta. During this time, my office and home have been situated in Treaty Six Territory, and more specifically on the land of the Papaschase Cree.

While researching and writing this dissertation, the research I have undertaken has taught me a great deal about my positionality. For example, in reading Jane Willis’ *Geniesh*, a memoir of her time at the Shingwauk Indian Residential School, I was struck by how little I heard about the history of my hometown while I was growing up. Attending two TRC National Events in Montreal and Edmonton placed me in direct relationship to the TRC and its attendant histories as a witness to dozens of Survivor testimonies. When the TRC’s Final Report came out, I read every word, and struggled to figure out with what to do with the knowledge I gained from reading and listening. While I have always tried to be a respectful witness, and to do what I can to mobilize the lessons I have learned in ways that benefit Indigenous peoples, I have also always tried to remain aware of my comfortable position and the ways that I have personally benefitted from settler colonialism in general and the TRC in particular. When I was affected emotionally by these lessons, as I often have been, I was allowed and able to disconnect and take care of myself, a luxury not afforded those with a more direct stake in the legacy of residential schooling. I have also been supported directly, via a SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship, and indirectly, through public funding of the University of Alberta, by the very Settler state I critique.

None of the statements in this final section of my Introduction lead me to a stable conclusion about how to move forward in this work. Nor are they intended to establish my

authority or conversely to serve as a kind of apology for any limitations in what follows. My analysis in this dissertation is mine, and I take responsibility for it. My understanding of my position with respect to the history and literature that this dissertation takes as its central subject is ever-evolving. My hope is that what follows reflects my efforts to be in ethical relation to this history and literature. And finally, I hope that the space that this dissertation takes up in conversations about reconciliation, residential schooling, and settler colonialism provides some benefit to the Survivors and inter-generational Survivors of residential schools.

## Chapter One: Issues with the TRC's Truth Claims and Approach to Reconciliation

### *1.1: Introduction*

I begin the body of my dissertation by using a combination of close and distant reading to analyze selections from the TRC's Final Report. I contextualize these readings within discourses of reconciliation, including theoretical treatises, analyses of reconciliation in Canada and other states, lessons learned from other Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, legislative and court documents, and theoretical work on the production of historical writing. Thus, in this chapter, I identify the TRC's process of articulating the Truth and suggesting a method of Reconciliation: collecting as much available evidence as possible, selecting evidence to produce a coherent (not *the only*) Truth, and using that Truth to suggest Reconciliatory actions. I make two arguments, one each about Truth and Reconciliation.

First, I argue that we must understand the Truth claims made in the TRC's Reports as provisional. Forming those claims involved analyzing a narrow subset of a very large body of evidence within a strict Mandate, so to read this Truth as final or complete would be to disregard portions of the history. While the TRC appears to provide a straightforward chronicle of residential school history, they omit some evidence from the Reports in favour of other evidence. An analysis of the TRC's approach to all kinds of evidence is not possible in the context of this dissertation, but this chapter considers the repetition of testimony, how a Truth claim that the residential school system constitutes cultural genocide – but not genocide in particular – keeps with their<sup>14</sup> non-legal Mandate, and moments in which the Reports clearly omit evidence, or

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<sup>14</sup> Throughout, I favour the pronoun “they” (rather than “it”) to replace “the TRC” as a way of centralizing human agency within the Commission. To use “it,” would erase, in some small way, this agency in favour of referring to the TRC as a structure. In particular, when I refer to the Reports, “the TRC” or “they” refers to everybody involved in the complex institutional process that led to the Reports, which contain the TRC's final arguments. It would not be reasonable to assume that everybody involved agrees with all of these conclusions. Thus, any use of “they” in this dissertation should not be understood as a critique of individual actors, but rather the

make vague statements. Such an analysis forms the foundation of this dissertation's later chapters, insofar as it shows that the TRC's Truth is provisional, and sets up subsequent chapters that ask what lessons one learns by reading fictional texts that testify to residential school experience that the TRC did not consider.

Because the TRC claims that the Truth that they articulate is foundational to processes of Reconciliation, I also identify and analyze the kind of Reconciliation that the TRC concludes is needed in Canada. I contend that the TRC's approach to Reconciliation fundamentally asks Indigenous peoples to reconcile themselves to the reality and power of the State, whose sovereignty and legitimacy go unquestioned. Such a strategy helps the nation-state to heal, but is potentially dangerous for Indigenous peoples because, as Glen Coulthard argues, the reproduction of colonial rule in modern settler states "rests on the ability to entice Indigenous peoples to *identify* [. . .] with the profoundly *asymmetrical* and *non-reciprocal* forms of recognition either imposed on or granted to them by the settler state and society" ("Subjects of Empire" 25; emphasis original).

It is also worth noting at the outset that this chapter does not attempt to prove that the TRC did a poor job of fulfilling their goals, or that they deliberately obfuscated information in some sinister way. Their version of the Truth could not possibly include extensive analyses of every piece of available historical evidence and testimony. This work would require a large number of people, substantial time, and significant financial resources that were not available to them. Instead of simply criticizing the incompleteness of the work, this chapter participates in an ongoing process of finding and understanding the historical truth about residential schools by demonstrating the value of more extensive close readings of some of the available evidence that

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consensuses that these actors came to within the constraints of their Mandate and the potential impacts of these consensuses.

will ideally inspire further reading and consideration of the historical and literary archive.

Furthering our understanding of the history and legacy of residential schooling is only possible if we understand and critique what has already been done.

That is, in this chapter I mobilize my skills as a researcher, as a reader, and as a literary scholar; resources as a person who is financially supported by the university and the government; and energy as a person who cares deeply about this work in what I hope will be a continuing process of reflection on residential school history and settler colonialism in Canada. In effect, I attempt to enact TRC Commissioner Marie Wilson's vision of the academy's place in Reconciliation. She articulated the following call during a keynote address at the University of Alberta, so the general "You" in this case refers broadly to members of the academy:

You are in the thought, analysis, and reflection business. That's your core purpose. You have time to read stuff that other people don't have time to read and to reflect on it and to chew the fat on it and to have coffee over it and to really think it through. And I think you need to use every opportunity you can to provide well-informed opinion in the public sphere so that you can help guide the rest of us. ("Keynote Address")

Indeed, as a graduate student, I have privilege in the form of the time and relative financial stability to read and think about "stuff" like the TRC Reports, which are long and difficult reading. The analysis of the Truth that I undertake in this chapter establishes the need for ongoing study by affirming that the TRC's work is necessarily incomplete and begins to probe the nature of and reasons for this incompleteness.

Similarly, this chapter does not claim that the TRC is wrong to focus primarily on reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and Settlers within the confines of the nation-state rather than intra-community and intra-family reconciliation. Given the tenuous relationship



between the government and the TRC, it would be unreasonable to expect that the TRC would call for the dissolution of state sovereignty or any violent revolution or retribution – to give two examples suggested by the literary archive – without repercussions that would have jeopardized the work that was possible. And indeed, as a secure modern democracy, it is wildly unlikely that Canada’s sovereignty will break down based on claims from any internal minority group, regardless of any arguments about its legitimacy. However, I argue that meaningful reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and Settlers is not possible within the confines of the nation-state, and therefore any method of reconciliation that supports the continued existence of the nation-state is not reconciliation at all. As a result, I try to identify alternative types of reconciliation that the TRC does not consider.

## *1.2: The Truth About Truth*

### *1.2.1: Documents Under Consideration*

One can divide the archive of TRC-produced documents into four categories. The first is the TRC’s foundational documents, including the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement that lays out the TRC’s Mandate, and the “About Us” and “FAQs” sections of the TRC’s website.<sup>15</sup> These documents articulate what the TRC was, what it was intended to do, and the ongoing responsibilities of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR). The second category includes what might be termed the “midway” TRC reports, both released in 2012: the *Interim Report* and *They Came for the Children*. These two documents provide a snapshot of the first three years of the TRC’s work. They are available on the TRC’s archived website, but *not* on the NCTR’s “Report” page. The third category are what we might call the “early” Final Report documents, released in June 2015. This category consists of three

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<sup>15</sup> This website is archived at <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=3> (last confirmed as of February 15, 2018).

documents. The first, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future* is positioned as a “summary” of the Final Report. The second, *What We Have Learned*, lays out the “Principles of Truth and Reconciliation” (1). The third, *The Survivors Speak*, is primarily a compilation of testimonies from Survivors given to the TRC.

The first three categories lead to the fourth, which are the six volumes of the Final Report, released in December 2015. Volume One, divided into two parts by chronology, details the history of residential schools. Volumes Two and Three recount “The Inuit and Northern Experience” and “The Métis Experience,” respectively, suggesting that these experiences differed in significant ways from those of First Nations students. Volume 4 discusses the issue of missing children and unmarked burials. Volume 5 articulates the legacy of residential schooling. Volume 6 discusses Reconciliation and publishes the Commission’s 94 Calls to Action. Because all four categories of documents are aimed at the same goals – articulating the Truth and calling for particular kinds of Reconciliation – I read all of them as parts of a whole in what follows. Except for brief prefaces in some of the documents, all of the Reports are presented as having been written collectively by Marie Wilson, Wilton Littlechild, and Murray Sinclair, the TRC’s Commissioners.

### *1.2.2: Chronicle or Narrative?*

Early in *The Survivors Speak*, the TRC articulates its limitations: “Since statement gathering has been an ongoing process throughout the Commission’s mandate, it has not been possible to undertake a complete assessment and analysis of all the statements. This volume is based on a survey of the statements gathered from all parts of the country between 2009 and 2014” (1). Despite this limitation, this document is ostensibly as close to a straightforward reproduction of testimony as possible, and the TRC states at the outset that “[c]ommentary and

interpretation have been kept to a minimum to allow the students to speak for themselves” (1). While arguing about the semantics of whether the “minimum” amount of commentary and interpretation has been done seems fruitless, as there is no way to meaningfully define what the least amount of commentary needed to contextualize the testimonies would be, the TRC necessarily did significant interpretive work. Selecting and arranging the quotations creates a narrative insofar as certain testimonies are included, in a certain order, while others are left out. This work is not obvious to the report’s readers because it is never explained on the page. The TRC thereby obfuscates its work as a historiographical body, instead implying that they are simply a conduit for the Truth. By reading the reports closely, we see that *the* Truth that paves the way to Reconciliation is actually a single *carefully mediated and selected* Truth that paves the way to a particular kind of Reconciliation.

Practically, a fully “complete” chronicle of residential school history is impossible. Not all Survivors were willing or able to give their testimony to the Commission; not all former students are Survivors; few teachers and administrators were available and willing to testify; and the TRC was not able to compel testimony, given that they were not a juridical body. There was no way for the TRC to collect and analyze all possible evidence, and even analyzing all available evidence is an ongoing task that they acknowledge (TRC *They Came for the Children* iii).

From a theoretical standpoint, it is relatively uncontroversial now to assert that the discipline of writing about history is not objective. Michel de Certeau, for example, argues that “ALL historiographical research is articulated over a socioeconomic, political, and cultural place of production” (57; emphasis original) and therefore “depends on a system of reference” (58). Testimonies therefore constitute evidence, but historiographical research and writing depends on analysis of evidence. In Paul Ricoeur’s words, testimony is not history, but rather “the

fundamental transitional structure between memory and history” (21). It becomes part of the historical record when somebody listens to and accredits it as history. In this case, then, the TRC is not *only* a body that listens, but a body that mediates, accredits, and arranges. This accreditation and arrangement is a form of what Hayden White calls “emplotment,” which is “the way by which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind” (*Metahistory* 7). Clarifying this process further, White identifies “chronicle” and “story” as “‘primitive elements’ in the *historical account*” (5; emphasis original), distinct from the “*unprocessed historical record*” (5; emphasis original), which consists simply of all of the evidence available to the historian. This evidence tells us what happened, but does not explain what happened. It is not comprehensible for a reader. The historian therefore arranges the evidence in some way in order to explain it to their readership, such that one will not only know what happened, but understand how and why it happened.

The chronicle is simply a serial list of everything significant that happened in a particular historical context. Such chronicles do exist – the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is perhaps the most familiar example in English literary circles – but White argues that the task of the contemporary historian is to convert the chronicle into a story. This task is neither simple nor objective:

It is sometimes said that the aim of the historian is to explain the past by “finding,” “identifying,” or “uncovering” the “stories” that lie buried in chronicles [. . .]. This conception of the historian’s task, however, obscures the extent to which “invention” also plays a part in the historian’s operations. The same event can serve as a different kind of many different historical stories, depending on the role it is assigned in a specific motific characterization of the set to which it belongs. [. . .] In the chronicle, [an] event is simply “there” as an element of a series; it does not function as a story element. The historian

arranges the events in the chronicle into a hierarchy of significance by assigning events different functions as story elements in such a way as to disclose the formal coherence of a whole set of events considered as a comprehensible process with a discernible beginning, middle, and end. (*Metahistory* 6-7)

This is not to say that historians deliberately obfuscate historical events in order to create a narrative that might as well be fiction. However, writing historiography is a matter of making decisions to clarify events such that they represent what the historian deems to be the correct narrative.

Suggesting that the TRC Reports are historiographical documents does not call into question the veracity of the testimonies, nor does it devalue using testimonies as primary evidence for crafting historical narrative. However, it does suggest that the TRC could not possibly have created a complete, objective history of residential schooling. As a body, their task was to interpret available evidence and come to the best possible conclusions. White notes, invoking Claude Lévi-Strauss, that these gaps are inevitable in historical writing that looks for coherence:

For it is in this brutal capacity to exclude certain facts in the interest of constituting others as components of comprehensible stories that the historian displays his tact as well as his understanding. The “overall coherence” of any given “series” of historical facts is the coherence of story, but this coherence is achieved only by a tailoring of the “facts” to the requirements of the story form. (“The Historical Text as Literary Artifact” 90-1)

Had they been able to collect *more* evidence, or more fully interpret the evidence that they collected, their narrative might have been different in that it might have been more complete. Alternatively, the same set of evidence might have been interpreted differently. Thus, I intervene

here to continue the work that the TRC did, thereby participating in the ongoing project of understanding residential school history rather than foreclosing it because now we “know” what happened due to the TRC’s work.<sup>16</sup>

On the surface, it might seem that demonstrating the necessary incompleteness of the TRC’s history is redundant given the theoretical orthodoxy cited above. For the most part, people agree that we cannot know everything about past events, and therefore cannot reproduce in full. Indeed, even the TRC has acknowledged the necessity of making provisional rather than authoritative claims, most cogently in *Canada, Aboriginal Peoples, and Residential Schools: They Came for the Children*, published in 2012, which the Commissioners start with a statement of limitations: “However, [this report] has had to have been written without a review of government and church documents. In addition, the gathering of statements from survivors and those otherwise involved in the schools is ongoing” (iii). The TRC is limited not only temporally, but also due to their strained relationship with the government<sup>17</sup> and churches. These limitations do not mean that *nothing* can be written, as *They Came for the Children* was written “as part of its mandate to educate the Canadian public about residential schools and their place in Canadian history” (vii), but they do mean that what is written has structural limitations.

However, the TRC Commissioners also assert that they will be objective chroniclers of a complete truth. In the *Interim Report*, the TRC published Mission and Vision Statements.<sup>18</sup> Their

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<sup>16</sup> We also might “know” what happened because of other historical work like JR Miller’s *Shingwauk’s Vision*, John Sheridan Milloy’s *A National Crime*, The Assembly of First Nations’ *Breaking the Silence*, and the work of individual survivors and inter-generational survivors too numerous to name here.

<sup>17</sup> Indeed, this relationship was fraught from the beginning, with the TRC coming as a result of a class action lawsuit, and the original three commissioners, Justice Harry LaForme, Claudette Dumont-Smith, and Jane Brewin Morley, resigning because of interpersonal conflict and the view that “the Commission’s independence had been compromised by political interference” (*Interim Report 2*) in the case of Justice LaForme. LaForme resigned in October 2008, and his fellow commissioners followed in January 2009. This information appears in the TRC’s *Interim Report*, but nowhere in the *Final Report*.

Mission Statement declares that “The Truth and Reconciliation Commission will reveal the *complete story* of Canada’s residential school system, and lead the way to respect through reconciliation” (2; emphasis added). Their limitations notwithstanding, the Commissioners speak confidently about finding a complete truth that would de-necessitate further fact-finding about what happened in the residential schools. Their Vision Statement reiterates this conception of their capabilities: “We will reveal *the truth* about residential schools, and establish a renewed sense of Canada that is inclusive and respectful, and that enables reconciliation” (2; emphasis added).<sup>19</sup> Again, the TRC refers to *the truth*, a singular notion of what happened, rather than a narrative based on available evidence, part of an ongoing understanding. Given that these are mission and vision statements, one might reasonably read them as aspirational or idealized conceptions of what the TRC might accomplish, and not binding statements of intent. However, since the TRC does not otherwise articulate what would constitute success in their endeavour, we are left with no other standard against which to evaluate their work.

In what follows, I articulate more ways in which the TRC’s apparent “Truth” is limited. That is, I am interested in what evidence from the available archive has been included, and what has not, and the ways in which the TRC analyzes this evidence. To fully analyze the TRC’s reports via close reading would take up more space and scope than this dissertation can reasonably take up, with the reports totalling roughly 2,000 pages in their online (PDF) form. Instead, I began with a modified version of distant reading – in which I read, but do not immediately interpret, the documents in order to select smaller units to analyze – in an attempt to

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<sup>18</sup> It seems unusual that they laid out these statements, which define what they are going to do, halfway through their mandate rather than before.

<sup>19</sup> It is also unsettling that the Vision Statement pre-emptively lays out a peaceful vision of Canada, despite the fact that the Commission’s work is to investigate the country’s violent past and, it turns out, its violent and unequal present.

identify several things: who is being cited repeatedly, what common characteristics tie these citations together, what the documents leave out, and where the TRC comes to conclusions that are, in whole or in part, matters of choosing one interpretation over another.

This chapter restricts its discussion to the Final Report documents, both the “early” ones and the six Final Volumes, thereby leaving out the Interim Report and *They Came for the Children*. It does so not to erase these reports, but because the Final Report incorporates these other two volumes fairly comprehensively, so to discuss them extensively here would be redundant. My initial hypothesis about the TRC’s use of quotations is that they repeat those testimonies that present “the right kind” of traumatized subject – one that is sad or depressed, but not angry – while obfuscating anger or the possibility of violence. The TRC’s use of repetition is most striking in *The Survivors Speak*, as it is the document in which first-hand evidence is most clearly foregrounded, so the forthcoming analysis centralizes that volume.

I am inspired to undertake this work by a personal experience I had at the Quebec National Event. On April 27, 2013, I attended an “It Matters to Me” session, which the program describes as “A Town Hall on Reconciliation” taking the form of an “Open mic session for the public” (TRC “Quebec National Event Program” 9). At the event, people were invited to share their perspectives on what is needed to achieve Reconciliation in Canada. The event included vigorous commentary and debate, particularly from folks who made the trip to Montreal from Kahnawake. These speakers were interrupted by the moderator more than once, usually for taking more than the allotted time. More striking, though, was when an older gentleman, visibly angry, began to advocate for violent rebellion in response to colonialism. When his ire turned to



then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper, he was cut off relatively quickly by the moderator, who argued that it was inappropriate to make such a call in this forum.<sup>20</sup>

I do not wish to criticize the moderator too harshly here, as he was in a difficult position. I assume that he did not want the session to turn violent in that moment, and he certainly did not have time to prepare a longer or more cogent response. And one could certainly make the case that calling for violence against the government does not constitute protected free speech, given that advocating violence is a commonly-accepted restriction on free speech in Western liberal democracies. Personally, I was shaken by this event, and did not quite know where to come down on the appropriate response to the man's anger, or indeed if it was an "acceptable" expression of anger.

While I remain unsure, upon reflection, whether this expression of anger with an underlying threat of violence was appropriate in the context of the town hall, I am compelled to ask some questions about the shutting down of this speech. If the TRC does not create a space where Indigenous peoples can express their anger, then what does this tell us about its set-up? What kinds of expressions are acceptable and unacceptable here? And if the TRC cannot make space for this kind of anger, then does such a space exist in Canada? If not, can such a space exist? And if not, then is Reconciliation even possible? Does Reconciliation not have to include expressions that would otherwise be deemed unacceptable? When was it decided that we are in a post-conflict space, not one of ongoing conflict, and that only peaceful responses can be considered? All of these questions lead to one of the central questions of this chapter, and indeed this dissertation: why is so much information repeated across the TRC Reports while particular kinds of expressions disappear from the archive and therefore collective memory?

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<sup>20</sup> I would like to cite video evidence of this incident, but it does not appear to have made it into the archive of the NCTR, for reasons unknown to me.

Coulthard provides a useful model for answering these questions about the expression of anger in the context of a project of reconciliation. He argues that, ideally, truth and reconciliation commissions “help evade the cycles of violence that can occur when [. . .] so-called ‘negative’ emotions such as anger and resentment are left to fester within and between disparate social groups” (*Red Skin* 106). However, Coulthard also argues that the settler state’s insistence on making Indigenous peoples claim to nationhood compatible with state sovereignty “undermin[es] the realization of” (107) the goal of evading violence. In these spaces, anger “can indicate a break-down of colonial subjection and thus open up the possibility of developing alternative subjectivities and anticolonial practices” (115). It follows that such anger cannot be given expression if the state is to maintain its sovereignty over the land by quashing potential dissent.

Another way to think through this incident is through Gerald Vizenor’s notion of “manifest manners.” While Vizenor does not give a simple definition of this concept, “manifest manners” refers, first, to settlers’ outward respect for what they perceive to be Indigenous peoples’ traditions, although these perceptions are merely understandings of what Vizenor terms simulations of authentic Indigenous cultures, crafted by stories about Indigenous people (15). “Manifest manners” also refers to Indigenous peoples tacitly agreeing to reflect these simulations, which are characteristically peaceful rather than confrontational (18-9). The settler state cannot abide violations of manifest manners, whether they be in the form of activism (19), or of this angry man ostensibly disrupting a town hall that was supposed to affect peaceful Reconciliation.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Acknowledgment is due here to Andy Verboom and Emily Kring, with whom I attended the Quebec National Event and with whom I discussed this moment extensively later that day. This acknowledgment is not intended to imply that we were or are in agreement, but that they helped me to think through this issue. My conclusions are my own.

This anecdote partially explains the reasons for my discomfort with the TRC's claim that they are articulating "the Truth," or a complete Truth, because it demonstrates the TRC's power to exclude testimony. If the TRC's Truth is complete, if it is unimpeachable, then there is no sense talking about it. But if the TRC obfuscates pieces of the Truth about residential schools and their aftermath – pieces of the Truth that might lead to a different kind of historiography – then it is imperative that we continue the ongoing work of understanding the Truth, and thereby continue a discussion about what Reconciliation might mean.

This remainder of the "Truth" part of this Chapter is broken into three parts. The first part analyzes several instances of repetition of testimonies in the TRC Reports. The second part discusses the TRC's approach to the issue of genocide. This is a Truth issue because determining whether residential schooling constituted genocide is a matter of taking available facts and interpreting them within the contexts of domestic and international law. The third part considers a notable silence on the TRC's part: they do not discuss the issues with the Common Experience Payment process, which was interpreted by government lawyers in a way that allowed the government to avoid paying compensation to certain kinds of victims.

### *1.2.3: Repetition*

In this section, I combine distant and close reading methods. Generally, I begin by using a distant reading method to break the TRC Reports into smaller units, then analyze these sections through close reading. By "close reading," I mean the general method of carefully considering and interpreting the texts, with particular emphasis on language and argumentative structure, that I articulate in the Introduction. Franco Moretti positions distant reading as an *alternative* to close reading, a method that accomplishes goals that close reading cannot:

The trouble with close reading (in all of its incarnations, from the new criticism to deconstruction) is that it necessarily depends on an extremely small canon. [. . .] And if you want to look beyond the canon [. . .], close reading will not do it. It's not designed to do it, it's designed to do the opposite. At bottom, it's a theological exercise – very solemn treatment of very few texts taken very seriously – whereas what we really need is a little pact with the devil: we know how to read texts, now let's learn how *not* to read them.

Distant reading: where distance, let me repeat it, *is a condition of knowledge*: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes – or genres and systems. (48-9)

Moretti's approach makes sense in the context of world literature, as it would be impossible to do close readings of all available world literature, so using a distant reading method frees us from the tyranny of the canon.

I do not have the same issue in this dissertation. My archive – TRC Reports and literary texts about residential schools and reconciliation – is manageable, and I have read all of the TRC Reports in their entirety. Further, close reading is absolutely necessary to my overall aspiration to listen attentively to the voices of Indigenous writers, so the bulk of my dissertation will take up close readings of literary and TRC texts. However, in trying to get a handle on the TRC's approach to Truth, I find a distant reading method to be helpful insofar as it allows me to, in Moretti's words, "focus on units that are much smaller [. . .] than the text" (48-9). I cannot perform close readings of the more than 2000 pages that the TRC produced, but I can deploy a distant reading method to identify and select some of the most important tropes, then analyze sections that are characteristic of these tropes. For both parts of my reading method, explained

below, I used a series of simple keyword searches to parse the PDF versions of the TRC documents.

My first strategy here is to identify repetition in the texts in question. I chose this method for two reasons. First, I am indebted to the work of Pauline Wakeham and Naomi Angel, who identify the repetition of photographs in the set of Report documents released in June 2014 (ahead of the Final Report's release in December 2015), and analyze that repetition as follows:

[. . .] across these three volumes, many of the same images are reprinted more than once. For instance, all thirty-five of the photographs published in *What We Have Learned* are repeated in *Honouring the Truth*. Such repetition produces a visual effect that artificially limits the geographical and historical diversity of the schools. The ubiquitous circulation of such older archival photographs in media and TRC publications thus generates a semiotics of pastness – a set of visual codes that cue the spectator to associate the [Indian Residential School] with a more distant temporal realm, thereby implicitly framing the work of witnessing as an act of retrospection, a looking and feeling backwards into history that risks shifting perspective away from the present state of settler-colonial relations. (97-8)

My method thus attempts to extend Wakeham and Angel's criticism here. If the repetition of photographs "generates a semiotics of pastness," then what might the repetition of pieces of verbal evidence – truth claims and discourses – generate?

The second reason that I undertake this method of identifying and analyzing repetition is that, in my initial reading of all of the TRC Reports, I was struck by the Reports' repetition of several quotations across volumes. The TRC has taken more than 6,200 statements ("Share Your Truth"), a small percentage of which are cited in the Reports. Some of these are not cited

because of privacy requirements – statements are kept private if witnesses request that they not be shared with the general public (“Schedule N” 1), and some statements presumably contain legal accusations that are technically not permitted by the TRC Mandate and the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (“Schedule N” 3) – but I cannot help but wonder why, given the TRC’s stated desire to paint a complete picture, they would choose to repeat quotations rather than represent as much testimony as possible. I will not be able to discuss every repetition in detail, but instead will discuss some representative examples.

The second part of my reading method was to identify moments in which speakers explicitly express emotion. All of the testimonies are emotional in some sense, but many explicitly describe particular emotions. Doing so accomplishes two goals. First, it narrows the potential archive for analysis. Like the TRC, I am working with a limited time frame and the requirements of my institutional affiliation, so I have to make some decisions about what is interpretable within the scope of this dissertation. Second, this method tests the hypothesis that the TRC selects quotations that paint a picture of a particular kind of traumatized subject: one who is sad, but not one who is angry.<sup>22</sup> And if they are angry, they are not threatening to mobilize this anger. That is, I suspect that the TRC Reports silences emotions that might pose a threat to the state. If this is true, it sets up a contrast with the texts I read in Chapter Four of this dissertation, which depict anger that results in violence in the wake of injustice.

As is the case with several Survivors, Arthur Ron Mackay’s testimony appears more than once across the TRC’s Final Report, in two different volumes. Both quotations allude to the same story, but with different editorial choices made depending on the context. In *What We Have*

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<sup>22</sup> The TRC even pre-emptively suggests their conclusions about emotion in the preface to *The Survivors Speak*, in which they explicitly delineate the emotions contained in the document: “In this volume, Survivors speak of their pain, loneliness, and suffering, and of their accomplishments. While this is a difficult story, it is also a story of courage and endurance” (xiii).

*Learned*, Mackay is only quoted as saying that ““They [the nuns] told me not to speak my language and everything, so I always pretended to be asleep at my desk so they wouldn’t ask me anything”” (53). In *The Survivors Speak*, however, the quotation goes on: ““The nun, first time she was nice but later on as she began to know me when I done that to lay my head on the desk pretending that I was sleeping not to be asked anything. She come and grab my hair, my ears and told me to listen and sit up straight”” (47). While the former quotation suggests that the learning environment was poor and supports what we know about one of the schools’ goals (eliminating Indigenous languages), the latter connects the poor learning environment with abusive discipline.

The evidence in these two instances is not merely compiled and allowed to speak for itself, but rather is mobilized through the Commissioners’ editorial decisions with specific effects. The interpretation happening at the readerly level is carefully curated by the text’s authors. This is a clear instance of what White identifies as the work of emplotting historical evidence into a story. White notes that all pieces of evidence “‘function’ as a story element” in historiography in order to “disclose the formal coherence of a whole set of events” (*Metahistory* 7). Mackay’s testimony, depending on which piece we use, and where we place it in relation to other testimonies, can function as an element of two different stories. One tells us that the schools failed at educating students, while the other tells us that they were places where the line between abuse and discipline was, at best, unclear. Again, this choice does not represent an obfuscation per se, but it does demonstrate that the Commissioners made editorial choices to highlight coherent points about aspects of the history in question.

In White’s formulation, the two versions of Mackay’s story represent two different modes of emplotment. White argues that all historical work fits into one of four archetypes: comedy, tragedy, romance, or satire (*Metahistory* x). The shorter version of Mackay’s testimony

fits into the mode of tragedy, one in which “[t]he reconciliations that occur at the end [. . .] are more in the nature of resignations of men to the conditions under which they must labor in the world” (9). That is, Mackay is positioned as a passive victim. In putting his head down, he avoids further punishment, but is essentially resigned to his place in the school, which, without further explanation, appears to be “inalterable and eternal” (9). When the extra detail is given, the testimony transforms into a satire. In White’s formulation, satire is “a drama dominated by the apprehension that man is ultimately a captive of the world rather than its master” (9).

Whereas Mackay initially seems to be able to control his fate by passive resignation, the abuse he suffers once the nun becomes familiar with him betrays the fact that he has no control over his world. While both stories are “bad,” the tragic one suggests that passive resignation might achieve a kind of reconciliation, whereas the satiric one suggests that no reconciliation is possible.

As noted above, I began this work on repetition by focussing on *The Survivors Speak*, as it is the most extensive collection of Survivor testimony available in published form, and positions itself as little more than such a chronicle. However, it does in fact include considerable non-testimonial material, as I partially enumerate above. In addition, the text has a nine page preface, a nine page introduction, and editorial commentary throughout (although it is minimal), and the testimonies are clearly edited: full multi-page testimonies are *not* included. This text simultaneously obfuscates its narrative function and clarifies how much editorial work must be done even for a minimally-edited historiographical document. This document is the clearest example of what this dissertation tries to work against: the tendency to see a necessarily incomplete and subjective work as complete and objective. By showing how the same



testimonies can be used for this “chronicle” function and other functions, I provide evidence of the constructedness of the TRC’s overall exercise.

The TRC Reports repeat themselves *very* frequently, and often evidence is repeated across different reports. Below, I give three further examples of such repetition, and elucidate the different editorial decisions made in each case to create different effects. As I noted earlier, my initial hypothesis was that certain emotions (like sadness) were being over-represented while others were being excluded in order to produce “the right kind” of traumatized Indigenous subject. By “the right kind,” I mean the Indigenous subject who displays manifest manners in Vizenor’s figuration, as cited above. Such a subject does not rebel against the governing structure, instead passively accepting state violence while simulating the Indigeneity found in stories about Indigenous peoples. I have not found sufficient evidence to prove this claim.

However, the repetition of testimony across reports is still worth discussing. In addition to Mackay’s testimony, I have identified three representative instances to discuss here. In each case, some common piece of a Survivor’s testimony appears in *The Survivors Speak*, *What We Have Learned*, and *Honouring the Truth*. The first such instance is Walter Jones’ comments on the ceiling put on his education: “‘The supervisor said, “You don’t need to go that far,” he says. He says, “Your people are never going to get education to be a professional worker, and it doesn’t matter what lawyer, or doctor, or electrician, or anything, that a person has to go to school for”’” (*Survivors Speak* 123; *Honouring the Truth* 78; *What We Have Learned* 46). The second is Isabelle Whitford’s comment on corporal punishment: “‘All my dad have to do was raise his voice, and we knew what he meant. So, when I first got hit by the nuns, it was really devastating ‘cause how can they hit me when my parents didn’t, you know?’” (*Survivors Speak* 139; *Honouring the Truth* 105; *What We Have Learned* 73). The third is Paul Andrew’s

testimony about athletics: “‘There were times when I felt dumb and stupid. But put me in a gym, there was not too many people better than I am’” (*Survivors Speak* 189; *Honouring the Truth* 112; *What We Have Learned* 80).

In each case, the version of the testimony cited in *The Survivors Speak* is longer than in the other two documents, with further information given. Walter Jones goes on to quote the supervisor’s view that Indigenous people would only get jobs that non-Indigenous people did not want, then enumerates the jobs he had as a logger and a fisherman, concluding that residential schools succeeded insofar as the supervisor was “right” about his job prospects (123). Isabelle Whitford repeats her statement about her parents not using corporal punishment, but with slightly different phrasing: “Never did I ever get a licking from my parents. It was just ... my dad raising his voice. And, and, we knew what he meant. We had our chores to do; we would do them” (139). Paul Andrew talks more about his academic struggles, and gives examples of what sports he excelled in, concluding that “‘they made me feel good. But the education it wasn’t quite the same’” (*Survivors Speak* 189-90). In each case, the quotations that appear in *Honouring the Truth* and *What We Have Learned* contain just enough information to convey the facts about what happened in the schools. In Jones’ case, his commentary about the *effects* of the school – his inability to obtain a “professional” job – is omitted. In Whitford’s case, the repetition with altered phrasing is left out, as the two versions of her story contain the same information. Similarly, Andrew’s explanation essentially repeats his testimony that sports were his only refuge.

These editing choices indicate that the goals of each Report are different. Whereas all of the reports present factual statements, *The Survivors Speak* is unique in that it does not require the information to be conveyed efficiently. The editors therefore leave in information that does

not further *factual* understanding of what happened in the schools, but honours the precise ways in which the Survivors express themselves. That the Reports are edited differently based on different goals does not necessarily diminish their value. However, it indicates that the Reports were compiled, written, and edited with various goals in mind that are not limited by presenting an objective chronicle of residential school history. For example, the core goal of *What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation* is not to narrativize the history of the residential school system *per se*, but rather to elucidate the TRC's principles of truth and reconciliation, as indicated by the title. Thus, the Commissioners mobilize whatever testimony is needed to support these principles as they have defined them in this Report. *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, published prior to the release of the full Final Report, aims at summarizing the TRC's findings. As a result of this goal, the Report must be more efficient than the others, only citing enough testimony to convey this summary, rather than attempting to depict the supposedly complete picture contained in the full Final Report.

It is also worth pausing over the simple fact of repetition. With limited time, it certainly makes sense that the Commissioners would want to make their point as efficiently as they could, which would mean re-using quotations that present evidence supporting multiple Truth claims. However, this repetition also serves to omit testimonies, because fewer voices are represented overall than could have been in the space that was ultimately used. The Reports therefore imply that one of the overall premises of this dissertation is important: the Reports cannot give all of the available information, so reading more widely is absolutely necessary to get the fullest possible version of residential school history. Such reading can be accomplished in various ways: through reading the TRC's archive of testimonies more closely, through reading memoirs, through talking to Survivors who did not testify at the TRC, or through paying closer attention to

artistic responses to the TRC. Each method furthers understanding in different ways, and I focus on this last one in the other chapters of this dissertation.

However, it is not my end goal to simply argue that the TRC Commissioners made editorial choices in selecting and arranging evidence, although it is important to establish prior to discussing some of the specific limitations of the Reports. As White argues, writing history consists of defining which evidence constitutes a beginning, middle, and end of the historical event in question. That is, it is a matter of choosing what constitutes “the past” and what constitutes “the present” (*Metahistory* 21). Moreover, deciding what constitutes past and present is not ideologically neutral:

To put it another way, the very claim to have distinguished a past from a present world of social thought and praxis, and to have determined the formal coherence of that past world, *implies* a conception of the form that knowledge of the present world also must take, insofar as it is *continuous* with that past world. Commitment to a particular *form* of knowledge predetermines the *kinds* of generalizations one can make about the present world, the kinds of knowledge one can have of it, and hence the kinds of projects one can legitimately conceive of for changing that present or for maintaining it in its present form indefinitely. (*Metahistory* 21; emphasis original)

Indeed, this forming of generalizations about past and present worlds is the “Truth” project of the TRC, with this Truth informing the Reconciliation that can take place. They articulate “what happened” back then in order to determine “what should happen” now. At its core, the Calls to Action, the TRC’s proposed method of Reconciliation, is a project of changing the present and future.

Deciding on a method of Reconciliation is a matter of determining “the kinds of projects one can legitimately conceive of for changing that present” (21) in order to encourage a reconciled future. As a result, the kinds of narratives that the TRC presents in their reports matter a great deal. If the story of residential school policy is a story of good relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples gone bad, then the task of reconciliation is the task of putting these relations right. If, instead, residential school policy is an element of the story of historic and ongoing colonial conflict, then Reconciliation is a matter of fixing the underlying colonial structure of the state. The TRC’s definition of Reconciliation, “establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country” (*Canada’s Residential Schools: Reconciliation* 3), does not quite tell us which of these two possibilities they have set as their goal. One could reasonably read “establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship” (3) as the process of identifying and restoring prior good relations, but one could also reasonably read this statement as requiring the repair of the very foundations of the current colonial relationship.

This matter of continuing struggle or post-conflict care, at its core, brings us back to the idea of time. How one narrativizes colonial and residential school history is impacted significantly by whether one thinks of colonialism as a moment in the past or an ongoing struggle. Indeed, a core question of reconciliation is whether the state in question is essentially colonial or post-colonial. Patrick Wolfe’s formulation of settler colonialism is useful here: “Settler colonies were (are) premised on the elimination of native societies. The split tensing reflects a determinate feature of settler colonization. The colonizers came to stay – invasion is a structure not an event” (*Settler Colonialism* 2). That is, if colonialism strictly happened some time in the past, then reconciliation is, at its core, a matter of making reparations now, of healing

the pain that resulted from it. On the other hand, if we take Wolfe's depiction of settler colonialism as a structure seriously, then reconciliation is a matter of radical restructuring such that institutions of the state *no longer serve to colonize* indigenous peoples.

Moreover, Coulthard argues that state-based reconciliation programs in settler colonial states necessitate a particular conception of time: "reconciliation takes on a temporal character as the individual and collective overcoming of the subsequent *legacy* of past abuse, not the abusive colonial structure itself" (*Red Skin* 108-9). Putting a finer point on this argument, Coulthard goes on to contend that "the TRC temporally situates the harms of settler-colonialism in the past and focuses the bulk of its reconciliatory efforts on repairing the injurious legacy left in the wake of this history. Indigenous subjects are the primary object of repair, not the colonial relationship" (127). Coulthard's book came out before the TRC Final Reports, so he anticipates this temporality based on the TRC's Mandate and structure. My reading of the temporality of the Reports therefore extends Coulthard's argument.

For the remainder of this chapter, I focus on the TRC's insistence on a narrative of colonialism that suggests that we can reconcile primarily via healing and reform under this state structure rather than radically re-examining such structures so that Indigenous peoples can stop being subject to colonial state power. This examination of the Truth narrative and the method of reconciliation sets up my readings in subsequent chapters of literary texts, which I argue write back against the TRC's relatively moderate approaches.

#### *1.2.4: The Question of Genocide*

In the introduction to "The Survivors Speak," the TRC meditates briefly on their use of the term "Survivor" to refer to people who attended residential school: "A Survivor is not just someone who 'made it through' the schools, or 'got by' or was 'making do.' A survivor is a

person who persevered against and overcame adversity. The word came to mean someone who emerged victorious, though not unscathed, whose head was ‘bloody but unbowed’” (xiii). This explanation is optimistic, but its implications are somewhat unclear. At TRC events, all people who attended the schools were referred to as “Survivors,” and those who testified because their ancestors attended the schools referred to as “inter-generational Survivors.” That is, while the TRC reads these people as victorious, anybody alive who attended the schools is, by common usage, a “Survivor.” By extension, this means that the only residential school students who would not be allowed this moniker would be those who died in the schools.

However, if the ability to testify to one’s experience because one emerged from the schools constitutes “emerging victorious,” then what is this a victory *against*? Discussing being able to leave the schools as a victory implies that the Survivors have triumphed over death. If this is true, then the opposite of victory – dying in the schools – would indicate that the schools won. As a result, it takes very little interpretive work to conclude that the TRC implies that one of the schools’ goals was to kill students. The question of whether residential schooling constituted genocide is therefore an important one, and the TRC takes up this question frequently throughout their writings.

However, the TRC is a non-judicial body, which means, according to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement agreement, that it “shall not hold formal hearings, nor act as a public inquiry, nor conduct a formal legal process,” and “shall not possess subpoena powers, and [does] not have powers to compel attendance or participation in any of its activities or events” (“Schedule N” 3).<sup>23</sup> Probably because of these restrictions, the TRC seems to have been *very*

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<sup>23</sup> Because this dissertation is primarily concerned with the *impact* of the TRC, I have omitted an extended description of the reasoning for the TRC’s non-judicial status. What follows should therefore not be interpreted as a critique of this status – I do not have the legal training necessary to make such a critique – but an interpretation of the *impact* of the TRC’s non-judicial status.

careful about what it says in the Reports, avoiding any possibility that they be read as determinations of guilt. Given that the TRC Reports detail extreme violence, though, a very tricky balance must be struck, particularly when detailing actions that might constitute abuse, murder, manslaughter, or even genocide. Wakeham and Angel conclude, borrowing from Roland Chrisjohn and Tanya Wasacase, that “The commission was therefore structurally constituted such that the investigation and exposure of criminal acts might fade from view while a therapeutic emphasis on healing social divides was spotlighted” (111). While it is true that the TRC prioritizes therapeutic rather than criminal discourses, it *does* in several cases hint that further investigation into the criminality of the schools might be worthwhile.

For example, early in Part 1 of Volume 1 of the Final Report, the TRC outlines in brief what harm the residential schools did:

Throughout its long history, the residential school system constituted an attack on the identity and vitality of Aboriginal children, Aboriginal families, Aboriginal languages, culture, and spirituality, and Aboriginal nations. As official records show, these impacts were not unfortunate by-products of a well-intentioned system. On the contrary, they were the predetermined and desired outcomes built right into the system from the outset. (162)

This is a strong assertion: the schools are absolutely responsible for these things, and, as the Report goes on to say, “they were the result of government decisions” (162).

Similar to this statement is one that comes twenty-two pages before it, this time talking about the American boarding school system:

One inspector, William J. McConnell, noted that of the seventy-three students sent to boarding schools from the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming between 1881 and 1894,



only twenty-six were still alive in 1899. The rest, almost two-thirds, had died in school or shortly after being discharged. In a letter to the secretary of the Department of the Interior, he wrote, “The word ‘murder’ is a terrible word, but we are little less than murderers if we follow the course we are now following after the attention of those in charge has been called to its fatal results.” (140)

This section appears to have been meant to contextualize the early stages of the Canadian residential school system, given that “the people who planned Canada’s residential school model would [ . . . ] have known of approaches being taken in many other parts of the world” (141). While both statements that I have quoted at length here imply guilt, a close reading reveals three key differences.

First, the latter statement refers to the American system. Because it is not part of the TRC’s Mandate and is instead only being mentioned for historical context, the TRC does not have to be *quite* as careful about discussing it. Second, while both statements are about culpability, the former phrases what the Canadian government is culpable for in a way that is not unambiguously criminal. That is, the TRC can make these statements because they are not statements of criminal guilt. The second quotation, however, implies that those running boarding schools in the United States may well be directly responsible for deaths. The TRC Report can include the latter statement because of the third difference: in this case, the TRC is not making a determination of guilt, but instead quoting somebody else who is making such a claim. This, it would seem, is the presentation of evidence rather than an accusation coming from the Commission.

The TRC does something very similar later in the Report, this time with reference to the astronomical tuberculosis rates in Canadian residential schools. While the TRC is careful not to

argue explicitly that the schools were responsible for the spread of tuberculosis and therefore the deaths of countless children in Chapter 16, “The deadly toll of infectious diseases: 1867-1939,” the epigraph comes very close to doing so. This epigraph is a 1914 quotation from Duncan Campbell Scott:

It cannot be gainsaid that in the early days of school administration in the territories, while the [tuberculosis] problem was still a new one, the system was open to criticism. The well-known predisposition of Indians to tuberculosis resulted in a very large percentage of deaths among the pupils. They were housed in buildings not carefully designed for school purposes, and these buildings became infected and dangerous to the inmates. It is quite within the mark to say that fifty per cent of the children who passed through these schools did not live to benefit from the education which they had received therein. (375)

Scott’s second sentence reproduces the “scientific” racism that was so popular in the early Twentieth Century and the surrounding two sentences provide a clear path to determining the schools’ guilt: they took in children who were already infected with TB, placed them in buildings that ensured the spread of disease, and then half of them died.

Lest I be accused of judging Scott on what we know now, or even what he knew after he made the decisions that led to student deaths, we know that he had plenty of evidence at his disposal when he made such decisions. During his time working for the Department of Indian Affairs, Peter Bryce was tasked with submitting annual reports on the health of residential school students. Bryce’s 1907 “Report on the Indian Schools of Manitoba and the Northwest Territories” revealed that “it appears that of 1,537 pupils returned from 15 schools which have been in operation on an average of fourteen years, 7 per cent are sick or in poor health and 24 per

cent are reported dead” (18). Bryce’s 1909 report gave specific recommendations for converting the schools into sanatoria in order to save student lives (TRC *Canada’s Residential Schools: The History, Part 1* 409).<sup>24</sup> He was subsequently asked to stop producing the reports (Bryce *The Story of a National Crime* 7), and Scott rejected his proposals on two grounds. First, they would not convert the schools into sanatoria because they were to be ““educational institutions and not hospitals”” (Scott qtd. in TRC *Canada’s Residential Schools: The History, Part 1* 411), although his reference to the students as “inmates” in the longer quotation above undermines this claim. And second, even if the government wanted to take Bryce’s recommendations, which they did not, the Churches would never allow it (410).

There is certainly blame to be assigned to the Churches. For example, one school that Scott recommended be closed based on medical reports was kept open for three years because of the Church’s argument that the people running the school should not be “punished” for doctors’ mistakes (408), evidently regardless of the impact to the students that the schools were ostensibly set up to benefit. More importantly, though, the arguments made by Scott as a representative of the government are striking. Children will die in schools that we know are killing them because the government, with all of its claims to sovereignty over the land we now call Canada, cannot convince or coerce the Churches into not performing what they see as their religious duty in “civilizing” the children. Scott admitted to negligence leading to massive death rates *while he was deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs*.

The TRC never quite refers to the residential school system as genocide, almost always employing the qualifier that it is *cultural* genocide. However, while they cannot “make a

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<sup>24</sup> Bryce also notes that spending on tuberculosis care in the city of Ottawa, by way of example, roughly tripled spending in Indigenous communities (“Report on the Indian Schools” 13).

definitive finding on this point” (TRC *Canada’s Residential Schools: The Legacy* 126), they do suggest that certain parts of the residential school system *might* constitute genocide:

It seems logical to conclude that Canada’s actions in forcibly transferring Aboriginal children from their racial group to another in order to eliminate or destroy their cultures and languages – and therefore their racial group – could at least amount to a legal wrong cognizable in Canadian law because of Canada’s acceptance of it as a legal wrong in international law. (126)

Due to my limited expertise in legal matters, I also cannot make a definitive finding as to whether residential schooling might constitute genocide in a legal sense. However, given the TRC’s acknowledgment of the physical harm that residential schools caused, it is worth pausing on the Reports’ seemingly incongruous insistence on the term “cultural genocide” when referring to the overall impact of the schools.

Whether we focus on cultural genocide, physical genocide, or genocide in general makes some difference in terms of how we talk about residential school history in public discourse. Wolfe cautions against using the term cultural genocide when referring to settler colonial logics of elimination: “the practical hazards that can ensue once an abstract concept like ‘cultural genocide’ falls into the wrong hands are legion. In particular, in an elementary category error, ‘either/or’ can be substituted for ‘both/and,’ from which genocide emerges as either biological (read ‘the real thing’) or culture – and thus, it follows, not real” (“Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native” 398). That is, while referring to residential school policy as an act of cultural genocide represents a movement toward a more accurate public understanding of Canadian colonial history as a history of attempts to exterminate Indigenous culture, this trend might be stunted by the “cultural” qualifier.

The TRC's strategy with respect to genocide is an unfinished version of what Hayden White calls "explanation by formal [. . .] argument" (*Metahistory* 11). White is worth quoting at length again here, as he explains the method and implications of such an argument:

In addition to the level of conceptualization on which the historian emplots his narrative account of "what happened," there is another level on which he may seek to explicate "the point of it all" or "what it all adds up to" in the end. On this level I can discern an operation which I call explanation by formal, explicit, or discursive argument. Such an argument provides an explanation of what happens in the story by invoking principles of combination which serve as putative laws of historical explanation. On this level of conceptualization, the historian explains the events in the story [. . .] by construction of a nomological-deductive argument. This argument can be analyzed into a syllogism [. . .].

(11)

This distinction is important. Simply telling us that the government did a list of things to destroy Indigenous cultures in residential schools matters and has an effect, but only strictly requires outlining "what happened" rather than evaluating the impact of what happened. Discussing it in terms of genocide, on the other hand, imbues these events with implicative meaning: in public discourse, people know what genocide is, and how "bad" it is, but generally associate it with things that happen in "other" times and places like 1990s Rwanda and mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Germany. As a result, suggesting that residential schools amounted to genocide creates resonance that simple statements of the schools' effects might not otherwise have.

There is, however, a difference between acknowledging this history of *cultural* violence and therefore *cultural* genocide and acknowledging a history of actual attempts by government officials to *physically* exterminate the Indigenous population. In Canada, we are perfectly

capable of talking about violence in public discourse and educational institutions – the basic facts about genocides in Germany and Rwanda, for example, are common knowledge – so we could theoretically understand *this* history of genocide if resource extraction and the nation-state in general did not depend on forgetting it.<sup>26</sup> The TRC even implicitly makes the case for this kind of historical similarity, both through the quotations from government officials I outline above and through panels at TRC events about the Rwandan genocide (“Quebec National Event Program” 10) and the Holocaust (“Alberta National Event” 32). However, since the TRC is explicit about cultural genocide and, at best, implicit about physical genocide, discussing the physical impact of residential schooling requires close, attentive reading of the available evidence, which the TRC either did not have time or desire to undertake. This is a perfect example of Marie Wilson’s call for academics to do the kind of reading and thinking that most people do not have the luxury of doing, and bringing this thinking to the public.

Even if it is not possible in this dissertation to make a definitive conclusion about the legal status of residential schools with respect to genocide, it is worth returning to the practical implications of using the term “cultural genocide.” More precisely, I return to Patrick Wolfe to articulate the implications of using an alternative term that does not potentially obfuscate the degree of harm involved like “cultural genocide” might, does not have the specific legal resonances that “genocide” does, and does not confine us to talking about a specific time period, an event in the past. Given that settler colonialism is, in his formulation, a structure rather than an event, Wolfe explains his preference for the term “structural genocide”:

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<sup>26</sup> I am here referring to Ernest Renan’s theory of nation-formation: “Forgetting, I would even say historical error, is essential to the creation of a nation, which is why the advance of historical study often poses a threat to nationality. Historical inquiry, in effect, brings to light the violent events that are at the source of all political formations” (19). Canadian history exemplifies Renan’s theory insofar as Canada has settler colonialism and genocide as core elements in its history of development, but these historical and continuing violent acts are generally ignored in public discourse, and the state persists.

I suggest that the term “structural genocide” avoids the questions of degree – and, therefore, of hierarchy among victims – that are entailed in qualified genocides, while retaining settler colonialism’s structural induration [. . .]. Given a historical perspective on structural genocide, we can recognize its being in abeyance (as, mercifully, it seems to be in contemporary Australia) rather than being a thing of the past – which is to say, we should guard against the recurrence of what Dick Moses terms “genocidal moments” [. . .]. Focusing on structural genocide also enables us to appreciate some of the concrete empirical relationships between spatial removal, mass killings and biocultural assimilation. (“Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native” 401-2)

It is therefore worth adding the additional term “structural genocide” to the discussion. As alluded to above, a primary issue at stake in the TRC’s formulation of the Truth is the problematic of time: is the issue from which we must reconcile an event (residential schooling, which enacted genocide in the past) or is the issue an underlying structure (settler colonialism, which enacts genocide continually)? If it is the former, then reconciliation is a matter of reparation, because the event is over. If it is the latter, as I argue throughout this dissertation, then reconciliation is a matter of structural overhaul. Thus, using the term structural genocide allows us to view residential schooling as a symptom of an ongoing issue, which means that, even if the government is not intentionally killing Indigenous peoples *right now*, we must deal with it on an ongoing basis.

#### *1.2.5: The Failure of the Common Experience Payment*

The closest the TRC comes to making a direct judgment about a legal matter other than genocide is in Part 2 of Volume 1 of the Final Report. The government refused to provide documentation on all criminal convictions related to residential schools on the basis that they do

not keep such a list. However, the TRC notes that “[i]n the 2013 court proceedings that considered claims in relation to the St. Anne’s residential school in Fort Albany, Ontario, it became apparent that Canada does, in fact, maintain records relating to residential school convictions” (TRC *Canada’s Residential Schools: The History, Part 2* 412). Because they could not access these records, though, the TRC compiled their own list, and presented their findings in this Final Report. Because they were not able to make determinations of criminal guilt, the Commission only provided detail about persons already convicted of crimes. However, they do note before beginning their accounts of the convictions that, while they have “not been able to identify any convictions in either Nova Scotia or Québec” (417), they are “convinced by the statements [they] received, and by the evidence provided through the IAP process, that students were also abused at schools in both those jurisdictions” (417). While this is phrased as an opinion rather than a definitive finding, it does make clear that the TRC’s position is that there *is* more to be done in criminal courts to address residential school harms.

Again, the TRC’s non-judicial position requires them to be absolutely clear about their position with respect to criminality. In the chapter in which the documentary records of convictions appear, titled “Abuse: 1940-2000” (400), they note that they have three kinds of available evidence with respect to abuse: “statistics generated by the Independent Assessment Process (IAP) and the Common Experience Payment (CEP)” (399), “[t]he documentary record, particularly as it relates to prosecutions for abuse in the schools” (399), and “[t]he statements of the former students, whether made to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada or in other forums” (399). However, this chapter only contains “information based on the first two sources of data” (399), whereas “[s]tudent statements related to abuse are included in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s publication entitled *The Survivors Speak*” (400).



That is, only claims that have *already been adjudicated* by a third-party, and are therefore verified, are presented as “Abuse.” Those statements made without adjudication are authorized by the Commission as evidence of the overall residential school experience, but *not* evidence of a crime.

The IAP and CEP processes have concluded. It is worth pausing for a moment on these processes, as they are the only avenues of redress available for Survivors whose abusers have died. On the surface, these processes have produced good results if we assume that monetary compensation is an appropriate response to residential schooling.<sup>27</sup> The CEP awards compensation for those that attended approved residential schools, with the dollar amounts increasing for every year the student attended. According to Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (as the department was called at the time, before its 2017 division into two departments), projections were made<sup>28</sup> at the start of the process that there would be 110,000 total CEP applications, with 80,000 being eligible, and \$1,900,000,000 in the Trust Fund to award compensation. Their projections were very close to the final results: they received 105,530 applications, with 79,309 being eligible, and \$1,622,422,106 in compensation paid out.<sup>29</sup> On average, being in residential school, outside of specific abuse covered under the IAP, constituted \$20,456.97 worth of compensable harm.

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<sup>27</sup> Indeed, while conversations about healing as reconciliation have somewhat dominated discussion, there is some precedent for thinking of monetary compensation as absolutely necessary, or as a precondition to, any process of reconciliation. Taiaiake Alfred, for example, argues that “[w]ithout massive restitution made to Indigenous peoples, collectively and as individuals, including land, transfers of federal and provincial funds, and other forms of compensation for past harms and continuing injustices committed against the land and Indigenous peoples, reconciliation will permanently absolve colonial injustices and is itself a further injustice” (“Restitution” 181). Compensation for residential schooling would, in frameworks like this one, be a step toward reconciliation and an appropriate response to this abuse.

<sup>28</sup> I use the passive voice here because it remains unclear who made these projections.

<sup>29</sup> All data accurate as of July 14, 2017. 23 applications are still in process, either at the initial assessment or appeals level.

The IAP, on the other hand, awarded compensation to students who were *abused* while attending approved residential schools. For that process, 38,096 applications have been received, with 36,717 having been resolved thus far, for a total of \$3,117,000,000 in compensation (“Statistics on the Implementation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement”), an average of \$111,737 per claim (including legal costs). Since the two processes run separately, this means that, on average, the Indian Residential Schools Adjudication Secretariat determined that being abused in residential schools constituted \$111,737 in compensable harm. While there is no way to determine whether either the CEP or the IAP determined the compensation amounts appropriately in the context of this dissertation, the data is worth presenting because it is a significant part of the government’s coerced response to residential schooling. Given that some Truth that has been found through these processes, and that this constitutes a kind of justice based on reparations, we might view the payments as part of the process of Reconciliation.

However, it is also worth examining these processes more closely because, while they are “finished,” they are not “complete” in any reasonable sense of the word. In the prior two paragraphs, I used the term “approved” residential schools for a reason. The original Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement identified 130 residential schools across Canada. Students who attended any of those schools would be eligible for compensation. In addition, Article 12 of the Agreement allows for individual students of schools not on the original list to apply to have the schools they attended added to the list and thus be eligible for compensation. Schools would be approved based on two conditions: “a) The child was placed in a residence away from the family home by or under the authority of Canada for the purposes of education; and b) Canada was jointly or solely responsible for the operation of the residence and care of the children resident there” (63).

However, these criteria have apparently left out a significant number of schools. While almost 80,000 students applied for the CEP due to their experiences in eligible schools, a further 9,471 have applied to have their schools added to the list, a total of 1,531 distinct institutions (“Statistics”). However, only *seven* schools have been approved by INAC, with the courts adding *two* more. Neither the IRSSA Website nor the Government of Canada clearly states whether all applications have been considered. However, the IRSSA website’s updates section announced all of the new schools being added, with the last set, the Misstassini Hostels, added to the Agreement as of April 11, 2013, and all were added between December 2010 and April 2013.

While the information about the applications for schools to be added is not available, Murray Sinclair, the now-Senator who was the TRC Chair until its Mandate concluded, has criticized government lawyers for how they have handled this process. He argues that the government’s tactic of splitting hairs over what constitutes a residential school amounts to ““a breach of the settlement agreement”” (qtd. in Barrera n. pag). In order to exclude schools, the government used a variety of tactics. One such tactic included “the so-called administrative split, a tactic used by federal lawyers to defeat claims by arguing Ottawa’s responsibility for incidents did not extend to areas of residential school compounds after they were transferred administratively to other agencies” (Barrera n. pag). Another involved defeating “claims of survivors because they occurred outside school property or on school buses. In addition, evidence has surfaced proving Ottawa’s lawyers sat on documents that would have supported claims that were defeated before the IAP” (Barrera n. pag).

This information may or may not ever be public. The IAP Secretariat, which was in charge of processes related to the IAP, has argued for destroying all documents related to this process for confidentiality reasons. The TRC, led by Sinclair, have argued that all documents

should be preserved because they “are absolutely crucial to the establishment of a national memory around residential schools” (Sinclair qtd. in Barrera n. pag). According to Sinclair, this position of secrecy is consistent with the IAP’s practices up to this point, given that he has heard numerous stories of mistreatment of witnesses and survivors, with no official record for the public to review (Barrera n. pag). However, in *Canada (Attorney General) v Fontaine* the Supreme Court upheld the civil court finding that “the IAP records must be destroyed following a 15-year retention period during which individual IAP claimants could elect to have the records in their own file preserved” (7). The IAP is part of the legacy of residential schooling, so the destruction of these documents means that some of this legacy will be unavailable before too long. As with other legal matters, I cannot determine whether this decision was appropriate, and indeed, I am sensitive to the idea that they had to balance Survivors’ legitimate privacy concerns against the value of keeping this part of the historical record public. However, regardless of whether this decision was appropriate or not, the destruction of the records absolutely has the impact of destroying a part of the historical record.

Further, Sinclair’s comments about the administrative split perfectly illustrate both the incompleteness of the TRC’s work and the value in seeing the articulation of residential school history as an ongoing process. It is outside the scope of this dissertation to determine what Sinclair knew and when, but we know that he is saying things in his capacity as a Canadian Senator that he did not say as Commission Chair. Whether this is an issue of having more information now, a strategic choice to keep the focus away from government bureaucracy in the reports, a reluctance to criticize the government too harshly, given their tenuous relationship, or any other motivation, not everything that need be said about residential schooling is in the Reports.

Sinclair here also models the kind of ongoing engagement that I call for and try to enact in this dissertation. He is using his position as a Senator and therefore a person with some influence and public profile to keep pressure on the Government to acknowledge and respond to historic and ongoing harms perpetrated against Indigenous peoples by the state. During and shortly after the 2015 federal election, Justin Trudeau’s Liberal party made significant commitments in this regard, including “enact[ing] the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission” (“Truth and Reconciliation”), “implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” (“Truth and Reconciliation”), and establishing “a renewed, nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous peoples, based on recognition, rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership” (“A New Nation-to-Nation Process”). Sinclair’s appointment to the Senate might be read as a step toward this last goal, and his advocacy puts pressure on the Government to continue this commitment.

Since the information is not public, we may never know for sure why so many applications were denied. I see no way to read this as anything other than a gap in our supposedly complete understanding of residential schools, which brings me back to the central thesis of this section of the dissertation: we cannot read the TRC reports as a complete and objective Truth about residential schooling. If our goal is to understand residential school history to the greatest possible extent, then we *must* keep reading, we *must* evaluate the TRC’s sources when possible, and we *must* read further accounts that they did not consider, or that do not show up in the Final Report. And we *must* continue to tell our stories about our interactions with the TRC that do not show up in the Report, as I do earlier in this chapter.

Finally, given the evidence we have from Sinclair that the government has been knowingly deceitful in dealing with Indigenous peoples in the wake of the TRC, we must

seriously question the possibilities for Reconciliation in Canada. Especially since the TRC and the current Liberal government have consistently defined Reconciliation in terms of mutual respect, we cannot assume that Reconciliation has happened or that we are on a good path toward Reconciliation if the government continues to refuse to be honest in their dealings.

### *1.3: Reconciliation at the TRC*

Given this analysis of the TRC's approach to Truth, the next task is to analyze their approach to Reconciliation, the other major term around which the TRC revolves. This reading is encouraged by the TRC, which asserts that Truth comes before Reconciliation logically, that it "pave[s] the way to reconciliation" ("Our Mandate"). This section proceeds in three parts: first I take a theoretical approach to the idea of reconciliation to establish what reconciliation means broadly, and how it *might* be approached. This leads to the second part of my analysis, which is an interpretation of how the TRC theorizes Reconciliation. That is, the TRC makes several statements about what Reconciliation is in this context, which can be critiqued on the basis of the theoretical understanding I lay out first. Third, I analyze the TRC's practical approach to Reconciliation by discussing the 94 Calls to Action. Based on this work, I conclude that, by focusing on relations between Indigenous peoples and governments, the TRC accepts the primacy and legitimacy of the settler colonial state. Thus, while the TRC's approach might heal the wounds that residential school policy inflicted, it does nothing to undermine the settler colonial state structure, therefore keeping structural genocide alive, even if it remains in abeyance.

#### *1.3.1: What is Reconciliation?*

In order to discuss the TRC's approach to reconciliation, we must first understand what the term "reconciliation" means. The OED is useful as a starting point, and it defines

reconciliation most generally as “The action of restoring estranged peoples or parties to friendship” (“reconciliation, n.” def. 1b). The word’s structure implies that this restoration is to a state of conciliation, a “peaceable or friendly union” (“conciliation, n.” def. 3). That is, the word “reconciliation” implies a restoration to a previous conciliatory relationship.

Many people who theorize reconciliation start with this linguistic analysis. For example, Patrick Belanger argues that conciliation is a precondition of reconciliation (24); Steven Sampson points out that “reconciliation postulates a situation prior to conflict that is marked by peace, friendship, and understanding” (181); James Henderson asserts that “[t]he process of constitutional reconciliation requires a prime conciliation” (115); and Trudy Govier notes that “The prefix suggests coming together again after a break in a relationship – as does the ‘re’ in words like *repair* and *restoration*” (11; emphasis original). We therefore might say, if we start from language, that reconciliation has two pre-conditions: an identifiable conciliation, and an identifiable crisis that breaks this conciliation.

Despite this linguistically intuitive understanding of reconciliation, plenty of scholars sidestep the need for a prime conciliation. For example, Trudy Govier argues that “If one wanted to speak of ‘restoring’ such a relationship [of harmony in settler societies], one would have to first think of it as an idealization, a fiction based on a notion of what could have been under better circumstances” (11-12). As a result, Govier contends that “[t]o reconcile in such contexts has to mean *building* relationships based on norms of equality and respect; it cannot always mean *rebuilding* them” (12; emphasis original). John Borneman similarly evades the need for prior conciliation when he argues that “reconciliation is an agreement among antagonistic subjects to depart from violence in a shared present” (300). That is, for Borneman and Govier,

when people have *never* had a conciliatory relationship, to speak of reconciliation is *inherently* to speak of conciliation.

Such claims, while perhaps pragmatically justifiable (the state exists, and will probably continue to exist) are not innocuous. Upon laying out the history and usage of the term “reconciliation,” David Garneau argues that, because reconciliation implies a prior conciliatory relationship, and because such a relationship never existed between Indigenous peoples and the state in North America (according to Garneau), we should discuss the possibility of conciliation rather than reconciliation (35). While Garneau’s focus on conciliation might seem equivalent to the way that Borneman and Govier conflate conciliation and reconciliation, the linguistic difference matters. As Garneau explains:

Conciliation is “the action of bringing into harmony.” It is an extrajudicial process that is a “conversion of a state of hostility or distrust”; “the promotion of good will by kind and considerate measures”; and “peaceable or friendly union.” The word calls to mind the meeting of two previously separate parties. Applied to the Canadian situation, it allows the picturing of First Nations and Inuit People having an independent existence prior to contact. (35)

That is, conciliation is exactly what I laid out above: the creation of a good relationship, regardless of history. Reconciliation is not equivalent, though, as Garneau explains:

“Reconciliation” is a synonym with a difference. *Re*-conciliation refers to the repair of a previously existing harmonious relationship. This word choice imposes the fiction that equanimity is the status quo between Aboriginal people and Canada. Initial conciliation was tragically disrupted and will be painfully restored through the current process. In this context, the imaginary the word describes is limited to post-contact



narratives. This construction anaesthetizes knowledge of the existence of pre-contact Aboriginal sovereignty. It narrates halcyon moments of co-operation before things went wrong as the seamless source of harmonious origin. And it sees the residential school era, for example, as an unfortunate deviation rather than just one aspect of the perpetual colonial struggle to contain and control Aboriginal people, territories, and resources. (35; emphasis original)

For Garneau, this theoretical and linguistic shift toward treating reconciliation simply as conciliation and ignoring history makes a significant difference to any process of relationship-building. If the new relationship is not based on a shared understanding of what the problem with the past relationship was (in the Canadian case, settler colonial rule), then how could the new relationship be a meaningful improvement?

### *1.3.2: The TRC's Theoretical Approach to Reconciliation*

This problem of a shared understanding of the past mirrors the primary issue with what the TRC views as Reconciliation. The TRC, evident from its name, has two broad goals: Truth (that is, documenting the history of residential schooling) and Reconciliation. On the surface, it seems as though the TRC must have a historically-based understanding of Reconciliation, of trying to understand the past such that a prior conciliatory relationship can be found and future efforts can be aimed at re-instating this agreement. For its part, the TRC has said that the truth will “pave the way to reconciliation” (“Our Mandate”). That is, we must understand the past in order to construct a better future.

However, the TRC's version of Reconciliation curiously conflates conciliation and Reconciliation, as Govier and Sampson do. When the TRC was formed, it made little attempt to define Reconciliation in its Mandate or on its website, outside of relatively vague statements like

the Mandate's goal of "establishing new relationships embedded in mutual recognition and respect that will forge a better future" ("Our Mandate"). Until the Final Report came out, there was no clear published definition of what "Reconciliation" means in the context of the TRC. Since this is a negative statement, I cannot provide clear evidence for it. However, none of the TRC Reports prior to the Final Report, nor the TRC's website (at various times while it was active), nor the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement articulate a specific definition of Reconciliation. However, the Final Report states that Reconciliation is "about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country" (*Canada's Residential Schools: Reconciliation* 3). This statement sets up two important distinctions relevant to our understanding of Reconciliation. First, Reconciliation at the TRC is an inter-ethnic issue. The relationship up for repair is that between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, *not* between Indigenous peoples within communities. This distinction will be important for my analysis of the literary texts that I analyze in later chapters.

Before moving on to the second distinction, there is something of a paradox worth mentioning with respect to the TRC's definition of Reconciliation. In comments outside the confines of the TRC, Murray Sinclair has defined Reconciliation differently. For example, in an opinion piece that appeared in the *Toronto Star* in April 2014, Sinclair asserts that "in addition to the grand dialogue about reconciliation [. . .], we also have to talk about reconciliation at the personal, and family and community level. This is where true change will occur" (n. pag). However, I do not discuss this definition in any detail for two reasons. First, Sinclair's comments appear to add to the TRC's definition of Reconciliation, not replace it. Second, since this dissertation is concerned with the TRC as an overall body, I defer to the Final Reports as containing all of the TRC's "official" definitions, views, and narratives.

The second distinction requires some further exploration of the available documents. The TRC's definition does not in itself make any claims about conciliation or historical consciousness. However, the TRC, despite being aware of the linguistic issues I discuss above, sidesteps the need to define a prime conciliation: "To some people, 'reconciliation' is the re-establishment of a conciliatory state. However, this is a state that many Aboriginal people assert has never existed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people" (*Canada's Residential Schools: Reconciliation* 3). The first issue here is the speciousness of the claim. While it is true that some Indigenous peoples assert that this relationship has never existed,<sup>32</sup> other commentators, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, point to different historically conciliatory relations. John Milloy (11-12) and John Borrows both identify the Royal Proclamation of 1763 as conciliation, with Borrows arguing further that the 1764 Treaty of Niagara further entrenches this conciliatory relationship (155); Patrick Belanger (24) and (paradoxically) David Garneau (34) point to conciliatory pre-confederation trade relations; and Mark D. Walters argues that the Haudenosaunee and the Crown had conciliatory relations in the eighteenth century (172). The TRC never articulates a position on whether these arrangements constitute conciliation, suggesting that, for them, it is irrelevant. Prior conciliation is not a consideration because they are simply trying to move forward with a new relationship that does not have to resemble a prior one: "[Reconciliation] is about coming to terms with the events of the past in a manner that overcomes conflict and establishes a respectful and healthy relationship among people, going forward" (*Canada's Residential Schools: Reconciliation* 3). We have to understand the past, but the TRC is forward-looking at its core. This is why, as cited above, Reconciliation is the *establishment* of a new relationship, not the *re-establishment* of a prime conciliation. As above,

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<sup>32</sup> See, for example, my discussion of Garneau above.

this distinction goes to the issue of time: rather than discussing the present as a continuation of settler colonial policy, the TRC chooses to section off this relationship in “the past” in order to move forward.

As we see from Garneau’s discussion, though, while the TRC must look forward, we cannot simply ignore its conflation of the terms conciliation and Reconciliation. Even as they lay out a clearly non-conciliatory history of relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada, the TRC’s use of the term Reconciliation suggests an underlying assumption of a prior equanimity. This choice essentially escapes history. For the TRC, we must be aware of how we got to this broken relationship, but this history does not necessarily tell us what conciliation or Reconciliation look like.

In this light, the reasons for the limitations of the TRC’s approach to Truth that I laid out above become even clearer. Considering residential school policy as genocide would mean the continuation of a legal struggle between Indigenous peoples and the state, with the further complication that such a legal process might have to involve international legal institutions. Similarly, even given Commissioner Sinclair’s more recent comments about the CEP and IAP, laying out these problems in the TRC Report would mean keeping open the possibility that not all people who were harmed have been made whole, assuming that financial compensation is an appropriate response. Publishing a wider range of survivor testimonies could do the same insofar as the Reports could take on a much more combative tone, one that would suggest an ongoing struggle. However, the Truth about relations between Indigenous peoples and the state, according to the TRC, is in the past rather than ongoing, which means we can move forward with a new relationship, a new conciliation, instead of having to continue to struggle for compensation for this past harm.

### 1.3.3: *The TRC's Practical Approach to Reconciliation*

The other piece of the TRC's reconciliatory framework relevant here is the general method by which they propose to achieve Reconciliation. This method is articulated in the TRC's *Calls to Action*. I start by considering all 94 Calls to Action, but focus my attention primarily on Calls 43-94, which are contained under the heading of "Reconciliation" as opposed to 1-42, which are under the heading of "Legacy." However, given that part of figuring out how to Reconcile is figuring out how to deal with the Legacy of harm, as affirmed by the TRC's approach of "Truth paving the way to Reconciliation," it is not appropriate to ignore the first 42 Calls in analyzing the TRC's approach to Reconciliation. Of these 94 Calls, 73 make specific reference to government action. Another one (number 46) refers to "the parties to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement" (5), one of which is the federal government. A further four (numbers 16, 24, 28, and 86) refer to post-secondary institutions, which have strong relationships to government. Four more (numbers 63, 69, 71, and 83) refer to specific government organizations. So in total, 82 of 94 Calls to Action have at least a loose relationship to government action.

From these Calls, we can identify the general nature of the TRC's approach to reconciliation: it is a state-based program that requires continuing state consent.<sup>33</sup> Because it is a state-based program, it will not threaten the legitimacy of the state, thus reinforcing authority over Indigenous peoples. In doing so, the TRC reproduces what Dale Turner identifies as one of the central problems of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP): "The

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<sup>33</sup> The TRC occasionally acknowledges the shortcomings of this approach. For example, they argue "that federal legislation is necessary for the government to recognize its constitutional obligations with respect to Aboriginal languages. The Commission is well aware that such legislation in itself will not be sufficient to revitalize Aboriginal languages, yet there is a danger that such legislation may be presented or viewed as sufficient" (*Canada's Residential Schools: The Legacy* 118).

commission's final report criticized Canadian legal and political institutions but its primary function was to suggest new possibilities for governing Canada *as a nation-state*" (80; emphasis original) and, while the RCAP demanded the right to indigenous self-determination, "the right to secede was never considered" (*This Is Not a Peace Pipe* 78-9), leaving Crown sovereignty unquestioned. As Jodi Byrd argues with reference to the United States, "inclusion into the multicultural cosmopole, built on top of indigenous lands, does not solve colonialism: that inclusion is the very site of [...] colonization" (10).<sup>34</sup> That is, placing Indigenous rights into the context of political rights in the nation-state cannot possibly lead to decolonization because the structure of the multicultural state is *inherently* colonial insofar as its authority is based on occupation of lands that it gained illegitimately. So even if the TRC's Calls improve conditions of Indigenous peoples within the Canadian state, they fundamentally re-inscribe the structure of colonization by leaving power imbalances and illegitimate occupation of land unchecked.

Simply noting that the Calls refer to government power does not, however, prove that their program would leave state power in place, but a closer reading of the Calls does. The word "sovereignty" appears just four times, all in Calls 46 through 49, and always advocating for the "Repudiation of concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples such as the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius*" (5; emphasis original). While such advocacy seems like a step toward calling for Indigenous sovereignty, the TRC never actually does so. They ask governments and churches to repudiate the *justification* for sovereignty over Indigenous peoples, but never the *exercise* of this sovereignty. Leaving the government's ability to exercise sovereignty over the land we now call Canada leaves in place the structures of settler

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<sup>34</sup> Byrd here is summarizing and approving of arguments made by other Indigenous theorists, although she does not immediately cite them, instead simply asserting that "Indigenous scholars have argued" (10) the above.

colonialism, which are eliminatory, not reconciliatory, at their core. This reading is complicated, however, by the TRC's explanation of their intent:

It would not be enough to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery, for example, while still maintaining the requirement for Aboriginal people to prove the validity of their existence and territoriality. We are not suggesting that the repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery necessarily gives rise to the invalidation of Crown sovereignty without undermining the important principle established in the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which is that the sovereignty of the Crown requires that it recognize and deal with Aboriginal title in order to become perfected. It must not be forgotten that the terms of the Royal Proclamation were explained to, and accepted by, Indigenous leaders during the negotiation of the Treaty of Niagara of 1764. (TRC *Canada's Residential Schools: Reconciliation* 33)

This bit of explanation is key: the TRC is fine with the theoretical sovereignty of the Canadian state, but if and only if it follows the provisions of the Royal Proclamation of 1763. This leads us into tricky theoretical waters, because it means that settlerhood in general would remain intact, and settler power over particular parts of Canada would remain intact, but the *colonial* structure of that power would not. That is, in “dealing” with Aboriginal title, state sovereignty over Indigenous land would be dismantled, leaving open a possibly conciliatory relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state.

While this model of reconciliation seems to work theoretically, historical precedent complicates matters. The Royal Proclamation is ambiguous about the relative political power of the British government and Indigenous groups. As Borrows explains:

The Proclamation attempted to convince First Nations that the British would respect existing political and territorial jurisdiction by incorporating First Nations understandings

of this relationship in the document. The Proclamation does this by implying that no lands would be taken from First Nation peoples without their consent. However, in order to consolidate the Crown's position in North America, words were also placed in the Proclamation which did not accord with First Nations viewpoints of the parties' relationship to one another and to the land. For example, the British inserted statements in the Proclamation that claimed 'dominion' and 'sovereignty' over the territories that First Nations occupied. In placing these divergent notions within the Proclamation, the British were trying to convince Native people that there was nothing to fear from the colonists, while at the same time trying to increase political and economic power relative to First Nations and other European powers. (160-1)

The TRC also cites a different section of Borrows' essay in which he reaffirms the ambiguity of the Proclamation in the *Reconciliation* volume (35), but they curiously pivot away from discussing this ambiguity.<sup>35</sup> They do discuss Indigenous understandings of this document and Treaty-making processes in general, but not the conflict between these understandings and those of the Crown and the Canadian government. Since the TRC does not deal with the ambiguity of the Proclamation in their Report, they leave open the possibility that the government could carry on reading it as extinguishing Indigenous sovereignty. This would satisfy the TRC's requirement, but do nothing to deal with the structure of settler colonialism.

Another way to look at this issue is through the way that the TRC narrativizes the history of relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. That is, the TRC is here,

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<sup>35</sup> Borrows goes on to argue that, based on subsequent conduct by the Crown and Indigenous peoples, the Royal Proclamation can *only* be understood as guaranteeing Indigenous rights (171-2). This argument would seem to support the TRC's claim that the Proclamation and the Treaty of Niagara represent a viable model of Reconciliation, but their failure to make this case leaves open the question of how they understand sovereignty to be operating in these documents.



for the first time and only implicitly, identifying a conciliatory moment: the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and ratification of the Proclamation by the 1764 Treaty of Niagara. If this is the model of relations that the TRC wants to use for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, then this is a reconciliation, a return to a previously-defined relationship. This implicit identification of a conciliation implies a new narrative of historical progression. Roughly, the TRC identifies 1763-4 as a conciliatory moment, which is broken by the use of the doctrine of discovery to justify incursions into Indigenous land and ignoring Aboriginal title.

This model, if implemented optimally, looks something like a model of multiple sovereignties enacted by Indigenous peoples and Settlers. That is, Indigenous communities and Settlers share the land (this sharing agreement being fully defined after Aboriginal title is fully dealt with in the Courts), but govern themselves separately with a principle of non-interference. The state structure remains intact, one assumes, but the *occupation* of Indigenous lands by Settlers is discontinued. That is, this model of reconciliation rids Canada of *settler colonialism*, but not the government or state itself. This model of reconciliation deals with the TRC's inability to undermine state sovereignty while, at least ideally, devolving sovereignty to Indigenous peoples.

Such a model would require Indigenous peoples to govern themselves without interference from the state. Indigenous nations would have to become fully self-governing, because if Indigenous people "own" the land and can therefore prevent settlement, but do not govern themselves on the land, then this model is just a kinder version of settler colonialism insofar as land is transferred, but power remains in the hands of the colonial state. Without the right to full self-government, Canada remains subject to the consultation aboriginal title model

laid out in *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*. The *Delgamuukw* decision has the following to say about the issue of infringing on aboriginal title:

In the wake of *Gladstone*, the range of legislative objectives that can justify the infringement of aboriginal title is fairly broad. [. . .] In my opinion, the development of agriculture, forestry, mining, and hydroelectric power, the general economic development of the interior of British Columbia, protection of the environment or endangered species, the building of infrastructure and the settlement of foreign populations to support those aims, are the kinds of objectives that are consistent with this purpose and, in principle, can justify the infringement of aboriginal title. (1111)

If any substantial public interest justifies infringing aboriginal title,<sup>36</sup> then Indigenous groups are not treated as autonomous or sovereign nations. Thus, to justify this Call to Action as actually dealing with settler colonial law, the TRC would either have to take a position on the ambiguities of the Royal Proclamation, which they do not do, or lay out a specific call for self-government.

The TRC does not call for self-government, though. The 94 calls *never* mention self-government. However, Calls 48 and 61 mention “self-determination” (5, 7). While the TRC does not define that word here, Call 48 makes specific reference to the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (hereafter “*UNDRIP*”),<sup>37</sup> so it is reasonable to assume that the TRC means

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<sup>36</sup> Much more could be said about aboriginal title in Canadian law, the way the TRC approaches it, and this approach’s legal implications. Given that the TRC is a non-judicial body, though, and my expertise is not in legal argumentation, this chapter focuses primarily on critiquing the TRC’s historiographical function and the ways in which its approach to Reconciliation is laid out and phrased. However, much more work should be done in considering the legal implications of the TRC’s Calls to Action.

<sup>37</sup> I cannot effectively address the legal implications of the TRC’s assertion that “the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is the appropriate framework for reconciliation in twenty-first-century Canada” (TRC *Honouring the Truth* 190). The argument that follows is only intended as a representative example of the difficulty of implementing this framework for reconciliation within the context of the TRC, which has no legal standing to compel changes to Canadian law. That is, while *UNDRIP* is clear on most issues, including self-determination, the precise extent to which the TRC can copy this framework in making recommendations is unclear, at least to a reader of the TRC Reports without extensive legal training.

self-determination in the sense laid out by that document. *UNDRIP* affirms “the fundamental importance of the right to self-determination of all peoples, by virtue of which they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development” (3).

However, when the TRC uses the term “self-determination,” they limit its definition to “self-determination in spiritual matters” (5 – Call 48, subsection ii) and then call for “[r]egional dialogues for Indigenous spiritual elders and youth to discuss Indigenous spirituality, self-determination, and reconciliation” (7). These are not explicit calls for political self-determination. The TRC does call for “the church parties to the Settlement Agreement, and all other faith groups and interfaith social justice groups in Canada who have not already done so, to formally adopt and comply with the principles, norms, and standards of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as a framework for reconciliation” (5). They then enumerate four commitments, including the one quoted above about spiritual self-determination and “Ensuring that their institutions, policies, programs, and practices comply with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*” (5). Such a call implies that the right for Indigenous peoples to determine their political status and therefore self-govern should be affirmed.

The rhetoric of this call is worth considering, though. The TRC chooses to make explicit the right to spiritual self-determination, but *not* the right to political self-determination. One reading of this choice is that the former is more important than the latter. In the context of residential schools, there is some sense in this choice: a primary goal of the schools was to remove the possibility that Indigenous peoples would choose spiritual beliefs other than, or in conflict with, Christianity. The right to spiritual self-determination is therefore vital to healing

from the legacy of residential schools. Further, since politics and theology are interrelated rather than separate, spiritual self-determination may indeed lead to greater political self-determination.

But if one starts from the premise that the Royal Proclamation laid out the proper governing relationship between Indigenous peoples and Settlers, then it follows that one has to deal with political self-determination. The Royal Proclamation and *UNDRIP* both explicitly affirm Indigenous rights to political self-determination, but the TRC Calls to Action do not. As a result, we are left in something of a bind. If to Reconcile means “to formally adopt and comply with the principles, norms, and standards of [*UNDRIP*]” (5), can this be accomplished *without* full self-government for Indigenous peoples? Put another way, can one fully implement *UNDRIP* without including full sovereignty in the list of possibilities for Indigenous peoples to “freely determine their political status” (United Nations “Declaration” 13)? To answer this question from the TRC’s perspective, we need to continue to dig into what they say about Indigenous peoples and the Canadian Government.

The remainder of the Calls to Action relating to Reconciliation all aim at integration of indigenous peoples into the governing structure rather than devolving power. For example, Call 45 seeks to “[r]econcile Aboriginal and Crown constitutional and legal orders to ensure that Aboriginal peoples are full partners in Confederation, including the recognition and integration of Indigenous laws and legal traditions in negotiation and implementation processes” (5). While arguing that the TRC Reports do not call for political self-determination for Indigenous peoples, it is worth considering the fact that the TRC only calls for self-determination *within* the context of the Canadian state, not outside of it. Similar to Call 45, the Final Report’s *Executive Summary* has the following to say about what self-determination would look like in a reconciled Canada:

The destructive impacts of residential schools, the Indian Act, and the Crown's failure to keep its Treaty promises have damaged the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. The most significant damage is to the trust that has been broken between the Crown and Aboriginal peoples. That broken trust must be repaired. The vision that led to that breach in trust must be replaced with a new vision for Canada; one that fully embraces Aboriginal peoples' right to self-determination within, and in partnership with, a viable Canadian sovereignty. (TRC *Honouring the Truth* 184)<sup>38</sup>

That is, Indigenous self-determination would seem to be a priority for the TRC, but that self-determination can only take place within a sovereign Canadian state, not outside of it, within sovereign Indigenous territories. While the extent to which such self-determination is integrative is debatable, given that we currently do not have a full picture of how this process would look, it is clear from a basic reading of what the TRC Reports say that the right for Indigenous peoples to secede and self-determine within sovereign units is not on the table in the TRC's vision for Reconciliation.

At this point, rather than tediously going through every call that touches on self-determination or Indigenous sovereignty, it is worth nuancing our understanding of the Reconciliatory process by making a concession: despite their inability to deal with the fundamental power imbalance contained in the settler state, the Calls to Action do appear to aim at improving Indigenous people's lives and making reparations for residential schooling. One way to demonstrate this point is through a reading of Calls 58 through 61, under the heading "Church Apologies and Reconciliation" (7). Call 58 requires Church leaders to apologize for

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<sup>38</sup> Similarly, the TRC asserts that "Aboriginal peoples' right to self-determination must be integrated into Canada's constitution and legal framework and civic institutions" (TRC *Honouring the Truth* 190), again suggesting that such self-determination cannot take place outside the power of the state under the TRC's Reconciliatory program.

their roles in the schools. Calls 59 and 60 ask Church leaders to educate themselves, their congregations, and budding Church leaders, about Indigenous peoples, religious conflict, residential schools, and related topics. Call 61 asks for a financial commitment from the Churches to be used for healing, reconciliation, “culture- and language-revitalization projects,” “relationship-building projects,” and “regional dialogues for Indigenous spiritual leaders and youth to discuss Indigenous spirituality, self-determination and reconciliation” (7). These calls, if enacted, might well improve relations between Indigenous peoples (insofar as they would increase intercultural understanding) and Churches and they would make reparations (in the form of funding and apology). If the goal of the Commission is to improve conditions under settler colonialism, then, these calls appear to accomplish this goal.

Given that the Calls consistently and *exclusively* call for the integration of Indigenous thought into existing systems, we must conclude that political self-determination as defined by *UNDRIP* – including the right to freely determine political status – is in fact *not* on the table in this process of Reconciliation. While the TRC implies that Settler colonialism must be dismantled in order for Reconciliation to be enacted, their actual *process* of Reconciliation does nothing to dismantle this system, instead aiming at a better, but still fundamentally colonial, state structure. The priority is clear: Indigenous systems will be integrated into Canadian ones, not the other way around. The Canadian system will change to accommodate Indigenous peoples, but Indigenous systems will not be allowed any meaningful political power, remaining subservient to existing settler colonial structures. In this way, the TRC reproduces what James Tully identifies as a key issue of modern constitutionalism:

The members of minority cultures must seek recognition and accommodation within the institutions they share with members of the majority cultures of contemporary societies.

They ask to use their languages in the public sphere, to have appropriate schools and access to the media, to be acknowledged and affirmed in the curricula and narratives of the societies they have helped to build, and to be able to live in accord with their cultural ways without discrimination, so they too can participate in the governance of the constitutional association without oppression. (165)

Governing institutions in modern democracies are set up such that they only accommodate diverse interests if and when dominant parties choose to do so. And as Tully goes on to point out, “the constitutions, institutions and traditions of interpretation in contemporary societies have not been, to say the least, established to recognise and accommodate, let alone affirm, the cultural differences of [minority] members” (165-66). To call for the integration of indigenous thought into dominant systems, then, is to keep the fundamental structure of domination in the settler state intact.

Because the TRC insists on moving forward with good inter-ethnic relations within the context of the nation-state, then, we start to see its Reconciliation goal more clearly. The TRC seems to align itself with the subset of reconciliation theorists, perhaps best represented by Bashir Bashir and Will Kymlicka, who see all political reconciliation as fundamentally concerned with nation-building (12). Similarly, Govier’s book on reconciliation begins with the assertion that “people living in the same society need to cooperate” (7), the word “society” here implying “nation-state” in Govier’s figuration. Like the TRC, Govier and Bashir and Kymlicka take the nation-state as a given, something we need to improve rather than fundamentally query.

While Govier, Bashir, and Kymlicka see nation-building as a positive goal, other theorists identify the issues with it, especially in settler societies. Damien Short argues that Truth Commissions’ “primary concern has been to develop mechanisms that foster state legitimacy,

forgiveness, and social stability” (268), particularly in Australia, where “A pervasive nation building schema was in evidence in many [Australian TRC] documents” (274). However, Short argues that this approach is insufficient for addressing contemporary problems because “citizenship rights fail to do justice to the unique indigenous status, as, in the eyes of many indigenous peoples, such rights emanate from an illegitimate settler state” (273). Pauline Wakeham identifies dominant conceptions of Reconciliation in Canada as “undermin[ing] self-determination by entrenching normative conceptualizations of good citizenship to which Aboriginal peoples are expected to conform, thereby encoding a logic of social incorporation within a supposed framework of social repair” (5). And Coulthard argues that “[w]ithout conflict and struggle the terms of recognition tend to remain in the possession of those in power to bestow on their inferiors in ways that they deem appropriate” (*Red Skin* 39). That is, for Coulthard, peaceful negotiation cannot meaningfully alter power imbalances.

The desire to rebuild that pervades the TRC and some reconciliation theory makes pragmatic sense: the state exists and probably will continue to exist, so we might as well try to make the best of it. But taking for granted the state’s continued existence, if not also its legitimacy, instead of considering the possibility of undermining it or proposing alternative relationships that could better facilitate Indigenous sovereignty, keeps Indigenous peoples subject to a colonial state framework that has historically cared little about Indigenous lives.

Returning to Damien Short, we see a practical contemporary example of how this focus on the nation-state’s stability plays out in a settler society: “Tying justice for indigenous peoples to a national building framework effectively places a (colonial) ceiling on indigenous aspirations and incorporating Aboriginality into the cultural fabric of a settler nation inherently weakens indigenous claims based on their traditional ‘*separateness*’ from settler culture” (274; emphasis



original). Speaking globally, Stanley Cohen argues that “This voice [of reconciliation], however – especially under the slogan of ‘national reconciliation’ – may be bogus and self-serving, a strategy to evade accountability and perpetuate historical denial” (238). Steven Sampson similarly argues that “If the goal of truth-telling is to get society moving again, to start over, it is only to give new vitality to certain social lies, including the lie of ‘starting over’” (184). Speaking specifically about Canada, Turner contends that “Aboriginal peoples’ inherent right of self-government is up for rigorous interpretation, while Canadian sovereignty remains unquestioned and in no need of justification” (“On the Idea of Reconciliation” 111), which means that, in any “national” reconciliation process, state interests subsume Indigenous ones. Indeed, the TRC’s focus on a state-wide reconciliation process necessarily means that Indigenous interests can only be couched in terms of their benefit to the state, rather than having inherent value. As the theoretical and literary archives show us, though, this view of reconciliation is not the only one possible.

#### *1.4: Conclusion*

This chapter has made two broad claims. It began by arguing that “the” Truth contained in the TRC reports is necessarily provisional. It is provisional, first, due to structural limitations, like the restriction on making statements about criminal guilt. Second, it is provisional because of strategies, like the repetition and differential editing of statements, that limit the scope of what can be said about the history and legacy of residential schooling. Third, because the TRC failed to address the problems with the IAP and CEP processes in their reports, these reports omit a key piece of the legacy of residential school policy in Canada. Finally, the TRC’s Truth claims are limited by their inability to consider all available evidence in the time allotted to the process. Taken together, these limitations in the Reports, along with others that I did not address here,

suggest that the process of understanding the Truth about Residential Schooling *must* continue, and must consider the kinds of evidence that the TRC did not, work that I begin in the next three chapters by analyzing literary texts.

My second claim was that the version of Reconciliation contained in the TRC reports does little to undermine the fundamental problem with relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada: settler colonialism. Either because the TRC commissioners fundamentally believed in the ability to reconcile *within* the confines of the settler state, or because they were unable to question the legitimacy of the state within their structure, this decision places a colonial cap on Reconciliation. That is, if the TRC does not consider the possibility that state sovereignty over Indigenous peoples means that they remain subject to the unequal power and violence of which residential schooling was a symptom, then Reconciliation may not remedy colonial harms at all. Instead, it might be that Reconciliation asks Indigenous people to reconcile themselves to the power of the state and their unequal position within it, rather than opening up the possibility of a more radical solution that allows for forms of Indigenous sovereignty not subject to state consent. In Coulthard's terms, this inattention to power relations is characteristic of colonial nation-building projects, which "entire Indigenous peoples to come to *identify*, either implicitly or explicitly, with the profoundly *asymmetrical* and *non-reciprocal* forms of recognition either imposed on or granted to them by the colonial-state and society" ("Subjects of Empire" 439; emphasis original). I address this issue in the next three chapters as well, as I read the literary responses to residential schooling as positing alternative forms of reconciliation that question or do not rely on state sovereignty for enactment.

## Chapter Two: Self-Determination and Cultural Practice in *Porcupines and China Dolls*

### 2.1: Introduction

This chapter transitions from the first by beginning to demonstrate the value of reading literature in the context of analyzing the TRC. I do so by turning to Robert Arthur Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls*. Through reading this novel, I take up one of the central issues that I identify with the TRC in the first chapter: its approach to Reconciliation prioritizes improved relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples within the context of the settler state, never questioning that state's legitimacy. In contrast, *Porcupines and China Dolls* questions the theoretical underpinnings of Canadian state sovereignty by suggesting methods of reconciliation that implicitly de-prioritize waiting for settler governance structures to give their consent. In doing so, the novel centralizes Indigenous self-determination as a remedy for the effects of residential schooling and colonialism.

The novel can accomplish this task more effectively than the TRC because of one of the fundamental characteristics of fiction: it is not required to fit within externally-defined structures. Whereas the TRC had specific tasks it had to accomplish, *Porcupines and China Dolls* and the other fictional texts I consider in this dissertation can creatively imagine the world in any way their authors choose. My reading of these novels is particularly influenced by Emily Hazlett's understanding of residential school fiction as an effective contrast to the TRC. Hazlett argues that "redress discourse has been criticized for forcing claimants to articulate their victimization through Western conceptions of healing, trauma, and imprisonment. While these redress tropes are limited in how they can communicate historical wrongs, fiction writing can expand on limited conceptions of colonialism by exploring its intended intergenerational effects" (50). While the novel depicts some real historical events – residential schooling, the fur trade, and missionary

activity chief among them – it can do so without any requirement to “accurately” depict these events in the sense required by historical discourse. The novel also does not need to suggest pragmatic solutions that might be viable in the real world. Instead, Alexie’s novel defines reconciliation on its own terms, allowing the implied reader to examine reconciliatory actions that would not necessarily be proposed in the context of the actual settler state. It therefore provides a useful contrast to the TRC insofar as it can prioritize intra-community reconciliation through self-determination and reject state-based schemes.

My guiding questions for this chapter, then, are these: what method(s) of reconciliation does *Porcupines and China Dolls* suggest are necessary in the wake of residential schooling? To what extent is the settler state involved in these reconciliatory actions? What limitations might non-state reconciliatory actions have? I answer these questions primarily via close reading, as I define it in this dissertation’s introduction. However, as I do in each chapter, I extend this close reading method. Here, I also consider the novel’s overall narrative structure, gesturing toward a more structural reading. Such considerations allow me to identify how the text defines the reconciliatory project as a project with an identifiable set of conditions for conciliation and therefore a specific set of conditions for reconciliation.

The major theoretical model that guides the close reading in this chapter is David Garneau’s conception of the difference between conciliation and reconciliation, which I cite in the previous chapter. I am here primarily concerned with Garneau’s argument that reconciliation implies a return to some previous conciliatory state (35). Garneau further argues that reconciliation is not possible in Canada because there exists no such state of conciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canadian history (35). The TRC does not explicitly argue that there has or has not been a previous conciliatory moment, but instead sidesteps the

question, as I demonstrated in Chapter One. However, the first chapter of *Porcupines and China Dolls* narrates potential moments of conciliation, both within the Indigenous community it depicts and between Indigenous peoples and settlers. Thus, Garneau's model of reconciliation aids in my structural reading of the novel: if there is a set of conciliatory conditions that the novel suggests existed in the community but were broken by the crisis of settler colonialism, then we can evaluate movements toward restoring these conditions as a kind of reconciliation with a basis in prior conciliation.

Garneau's article also provides a model for settling theoretical paradoxes in this chapter. Garneau theorizes the place of the settler critic in understanding and interpreting Indigenous art:

Exhibitions of Aboriginal art shown within a dominant culture space are always informed by the world-views of those who manage the resources and the site/sights.

Reconciliation exhibitions, if they are held within these institutions, are also likely to be designed within the colonial narrative: reconciliation rather than conciliation; the theory that public display of private (Native) pain leads to individual and national healing; text over speech; etc. If art galleries and other display spaces are to be potential sites of conciliation, they should not meet the dominant culture viewer halfway in their space in their way; the non-Aboriginal viewer who seeks conciliation ought to enter Aboriginal sovereign display territories as guests. (37)

Although Garneau is specifically discussing visual art, his commentary on the place of the Settler critic serves as a useful reminder and a model for interpretation that is applicable across forms. In an attempt to enter into conversation with the novel on its own terms, then, I prioritize close reading – paying very close attention to the specific language of the novel – and structural critique over attempting to fit my interpretation into my pre-conceived theoretical predilections.

When I do turn to theory to help interpret the text, I justify this turn through my close reading, prioritize Indigenous theorists when possible, and find my way through one key theoretical debate about colonial language theory by asking what the text's internal position with respect to language revival is. In doing so, I attempt to fulfill Garneau's call for non-Indigenous critics to respect the sovereignty of Indigenous artistic forms.

This chapter focuses on the way that *Porcupines and China Dolls* depicts the revival of four key elements of the Indigenous community's culture: drumming, traditional songs, funeral practices, and language. These are the four elements that the novel suggests were taken away by settler colonial incursions into the community, so they are the four elements that indicate intra-community reconciliation in the novel. Through the reading method articulated here, I argue that *Porcupines and China Dolls* prioritizes cultural revival as intra-community reconciliation in the wake of residential schooling, and suggests that this cultural revival must be performed outside of the authoritative gaze of the settler state, leaving Indigenous peoples able to enact full self-determination through autonomous decision-making.

## 2.2: *Porcupines and China Dolls* Plot Summary

Robert Arthur Alexie, who died by suicide in 2014, was a Gwich'in author, one-time chief of the Tetlit Gwich'in Band, and was vital to negotiating that Band's 1992 land claim ("Robert Alexie Jr. found dead"). Alexie's 2002 debut novel<sup>39</sup> *Porcupines and China Dolls* is set in the fictional community of Aberdeen, Northwest Territories, a community primarily composed of the fictional Blue People. While the narrator does not give a precise location for the community, he tells us that the Blue People "got their name from the fact that they lived in the

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<sup>39</sup> Alexie published a second novel, *The Pale Indian*, in 2005. This novel is also set in the territory of the Blue People.

Blue Mountains to the west of the Mackenzie River” (4). Further, we are told that the most important non-Indigenous explorer in the area’s history was Alexander Mackenzie (5), suggesting that the Blue Mountains are likely a fictionalized version of the Mackenzie mountain range. Combined with Alexie’s background, this geographic situation leads Sam McKegney (*Magic Weapons* 12) and Helen Hoy (95) to assert that the community depicted within is Teetl’it Gwich’in or at least based on the Teetl’it Gwich’in.

Part One of the novel, its first four chapters, is titled “The Dream World.” In it, the narrator gives a brief history of the Blue People, their early interactions with settlers, and several vignettes of their residential school experiences. In Part Two, “The Awakening,” the implied reader is introduced to James Nathan, through whom the novel is primarily focalized. James is a residential school survivor, and the remainder of the text primarily follows him as he comes to terms with the abuse he suffered as a residential school inmate.<sup>40</sup> Most of “The Awakening” builds up to Chapter 17, in which James, his best friend Jake Noland, and Chief David disclose that they were abused in residential school at an event that strongly resembles a TRC event. The remainder of Part Two and Part Three, “The Real World,” depict the aftermath of this event, as James, Jake, Chief David, and the rest of the community come to terms with the abuse they suffered in residential school and make strides toward healing from this abuse. My focus in this chapter is on how the community as a whole makes strides toward reconciliation, but I also analyze James’ journey toward healing insofar as his journey interacts with community-wide reconciliation.

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<sup>40</sup> Alexie’s novel primarily uses this term rather than “student” to refer to children attending residential school.

### 2.3: *How do We Understand Reconciliation in this Novel?*

Robert Arthur Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls* depicts a community in crisis. After multiple generations of community members attend residential schools, the community's language has fallen largely into disuse; the community does not perform cultural protocols and ceremonies; kinship ties are weak; and there are serious signs of individual trauma in the form of alcoholism, suicidal tendencies, and recurring nightmares. However, throughout the course of the novel, the community makes strides toward rebuilding through self-determination and cultural revival, which constitutes the kind of intra-community reconciliation with which this chapter concerns itself. The novel prioritizes reviving Indigenous knowledges, and while there are some signs of reconciliation between Indigenous and Western knowledges, this reconciliation is coincidental to Indigenous knowledge revival. In turn, such revival creates the conditions whereby individuals can heal and the intracommunity reconciliation required in the wake of missionary activity and residential schools can take place.

Just as the TRC Report's first volume is a history of residential schooling that begins well before the first residential school opens, the novel begins with a brief overview of colonial relations, touching on first Contact with Alexander Mackenzie (5); the Fur Trade (5); missionaries and conversion (6); spread of foreign disease (6); RCMP enforcement of "the white man's laws" (6); and Treaty-making (6-7).<sup>41</sup> The novel makes clear from the beginning that these colonial relations were not welcome, saying that "The future came in the form of intruders" (5).

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas King argues that this historical overview is "too little to do much good" (116) to people unfamiliar with residential school history. Renate Eigenbrod agrees (292-3), citing the fact that the novel coming out in 2002 meant that Alexie could not assume that non-Indigenous audiences would be familiar with this history. While King and Eigenbrod are likely correct, this chapter is not concerned with the novel's historical truth or educative value, rather focusing on the novel's symbolic representation of reconciliation. That is, if we read the novel as fiction, we see that the overview given is enough to set up the "problem" in the text, so that we can evaluate the solutions presented in its latter part.



*Porcupines and China Dolls* does not allow for an uncomplicated version of history, either with respect to pre-Contact or colonial history. For example, the narrator points to positive innovations brought by the fur trade: “The fur traders brought many things to the people that made their lives easier. They also brought other things that made their lives more fun, like the fiddle and new dances called jigs, square dances and waltzes” (5). However, this positive version of fur trade history is complicated by the novel’s description of missionary efforts: “The missionaries, called Anglicans, baptized the Blue People, took away their drums, songs and funeral practices” (6). Since the novel lists drums, songs, and funeral practices as the specific negative impacts of missionary work, it is the return of these cultural activities that would signal reconciliation in its most basic sense, as the return of a prior conciliatory state. My reading of the novel here follows Gerald McKinley, who reads *Porcupines and China Dolls* as a social drama in Victor Turner’s sense, requiring “breach, crisis, redressive action and reintegration” (McKinley 93). I read this text as a reconciliation novel, which requires a conciliation stage prior to the “breach” in Turner’s figuration. The conciliation here, coming pre-Contact and in certain post-Contact relations, is not utopic, but defined essentially by the Blue People’s self-determination.

This self-determination is apparent from the key difference between the novel’s descriptions of fur trading and missionary activity. When describing the fur trade post, the narrator mentions that the post was set up only “with the approval of Chief Red Jacket” (5). Such a phrase does not appear in the description of the missionaries. Instead, the missionaries just “arrived” and “baptized the Blue People” (6). The sentences used to describe missionary activity are all written in the active voice, with the missionaries as subjects and the Blue People as objects. Whereas the fur traders become part of the community with their consent, the

missionaries do their work without regard for the Chief's political authority or the authority of the community's pre-existing religious belief. The Blue People did not choose to be baptized; they simply were. The Blue People do not choose to ignore their drums, songs, and funeral practices; the missionaries force them to do so.

After the missionaries come the Northwest Mounted Police. The description of their activity mirrors the descriptions of the missionaries: "They established a post in Aberdeen, enforced the white man's laws and never left" (6). Again, the police undertake all of these efforts evidently without the consent of the community. After the police comes the Treaty Party. The narrator describes the Treaty, at least with respect to its education clause, as a matter of negotiation and agreement, as "the government and the People agreed that the Treaty contained a clause that states: 'His Majesty will pay the salaries of teachers to instruct the children of the "said Indians" in a manner deemed advisable by His Majesty's government'" (6-7). The novel does not describe this clause as an imposition, but rather as something that the Blue People agree to in good faith: "the People realized the value of the white man's education and didn't make a big fuss about it" (7). Indigenous participation in Western education is therefore not the issue at hand in a broad sense.

However, there is a difference between the agreement about education and the implementation of that education. The narrator tells us that, in signing the Treaty, the Blue People did not know that "the church would be given the responsibility to educate their 'said children'" (7). As with missionary and law-enforcement responsibility, the Blue People's authority is ignored here. When the first group of children go to residential school, the People are again placed as the implicit objects of the sentence, with no agency: "Soon after, the first mission boat arrived in Aberdeen, and thirty-five children were herded out of the Blue Mountains and

dragged off to mission school” (7). This opening chapter, then, subtly describes the core issues that came with Contact in the community. Interactions between the Blue People and non-Indigenous peoples are not *inherently* violent, but become violent when the Blue People are stripped of any decision-making authority. When this decision-making authority is taken away, the effects include the loss of drums, songs, and funeral practices.

This introduction to the novel’s problems does not set up pre-Contact life as a sort of halcyon moment where Indigenous peoples live in a utopia. The novel heads off this romantic tendency almost right away, noting that “The Blue People did not have any easy life. Theirs was a daily struggle for survival, and starvation was always the enemy” (5). However, while the Blue People’s lives were hard before Contact, they had the ability to alleviate their problems how and where they saw fit, moving between spaces to find food and ward off starvation (5). The issue of unfamiliar disease brought on by Contact provides a useful contrast to the issue of starvation: “In January of 1877, Chief Red Jacket realized too late that the newcomers had brought something else: diseases that were new to the People and for which they had no defence. He sent more than twenty of his People home to the Old People” (6). While starvation is no longer a threat, now they risk death from something they cannot alleviate. Similarly, when the first group of students goes to residential school, only “twenty-four of the thirty-five would return” (7), with the rest dying. Here, they are threatened with death in the school, a threat against which they cannot defend. By reading this opening chapter closely, then, we can define the precise issues that the text introduces and define what reconciliation might look like. Reconciliation will not be achieved by realizing some idealized pre-Contact utopia. It will be realized when the People can exercise their decision-making power to re-establish the customs that were taken away by the missionaries, the police, and the Treaty party.

#### *2.4: Breakdown and Reconciliation: Drums, Songs, and Funeral Practices*

In the remainder of the novel's opening part, the implied reader sees the erosion of decision-making capacity in the community as the residential school era begins. Chapter Two describes the unbreakable and unquestionable daily routine of residential schooling, where the children are stripped of their agency (8-13). Chapter Three begins by describing why the community did not resist the imposition of residential schooling, as it calls back to the authority structures that the first chapter set up: "First, it was government legislation and therefore against [Settler] law to keep their children from being sent to mission school. [ . . . ] Secondly, the church operated the mission schools. And at the time, the church had a firm hold on the People and their beliefs" (17). The People do not resist because the authority of the government and the church supersedes theirs and strips them of decision-making power.

Shortly after this description of the mission school, it appears as though the government recognizes the Chief's authority, but it quickly becomes clear that this is not the case:

In 1956, Chief Francis asked the government to build a school in Aberdeen since they had one hundred 'said children' attending mission schools in other communities. In July, the government informed him that they would be building a school that would go up to grade eight and a one-hundred-bed hostel in Aberdeen. The Chief wondered why they were building a hostel, he hadn't asked for one. (19)

The building of the hostel mirrors the breakdown of the Treaty negotiation. The Chief asks only for day schooling, but the government sees fit to build a hostel, which is "similar to the mission schools and residential schools" (19) insofar as it is publicly funded but run by the church. The community still wants education, but they have no power to determine how this education is carried out. The effect of this educational structure is stated outright on the last page of Part One:

“Something is happening to them [the children in the hostel], but they don’t know it. They are developing a routine and someone else is making decisions for them. Somewhere in the far distant future, they will be unable to make decisions for themselves and will rely on others to do it for them” (30). Part One therefore completes the promise laid out in its first chapter, demonstrating that the issue at hand is the devolution of Indigenous peoples’ decision-making capacity. If the community can regain its decision-making capacity, it will be on its way to reconciliation.

The dearth of decision-making capacity in the community reflects one of the issues I identify in Chapter One of this dissertation. Namely, while the TRC calls for some form of self-determination, it never defines self-determination politically, only making clear reference to spiritual self-determination. While the community in *Porcupines and China Dolls* goes on to assert this kind of spiritual self-determination, the novel also makes clear that such self-determination has political consequences insofar as it re-forms structures of authority in the community.

As I noted in the plot summary above, Part Two of the novel primarily follows James as the narrator gives us a picture of his life and his response to residential school abuse. This portrait leads up to Chapter 17, in which James, Jake, and Chief David disclose that they were abused in schools at a community ceremony that is not dissimilar from a TRC National Event. The disclosure ceremony in *Porcupines and China Dolls* draws from outside the community, as “Half of those in attendance were from out of town” (193), just as the TRC National Events did. The government has some presence here, as a few government bureaucrats are in attendance (193), just as some government officials appeared at the TRC, sometimes as Honorary Witnesses. The media contingent (194), finally, marks it as a public space rather than one strictly

for the community, even though those from outside appear to have “no genuine interest in the healing process” (193).

Also like the TRC, what kind of a healing process is to result from the ceremony is not clear. Two of the community’s Elders talk about healing in conflicting ways, one encouraging the community to revive their traditional ways, another arguing for the going “back to the church and its teachings” as a way of healing (194). A key difference between this ceremony and the TRC, though, is that the government does not retain its interest in what comes after in the novel. While reconciliation is a frequent part of political discourse in recent years in Canada (to say nothing of political inaction), the government officials who attend the ceremony in *Porcupines and China Dolls* disappear afterward, never to be seen again in the novel. Their disappearance means that the community at least might retain autonomy over what reconciliation will mean in their community, and what healing strategies they might use. This reconciliation does not therefore have to involve solutions that are acceptable to the government.

It is the second Elder’s suggestion, of going back to traditional ceremonies and knowledges, that the second half of the novel primarily depicts. Indeed, the conclusion of the disclosure ceremony chapter seems to be that reviving traditions will be a way forward. The chapter ends with Bertha and Isaac, two community members, standing over the Christian grave of Michael Lazarus, their son who committed suicide after being abused in residential schools. Here Isaac states in the Indigenous language that “‘It’s time to send him home’” (209). Bertha knows that this means a return to “*The Old People. The Old Ways*” (209; emphasis in original). So too does the implied reader, because of the context for the burial ceremony given in the first chapter, the narrator mentioning that the Blue Peoples’ burial ceremony is believed to return the dead “to the land and their souls would continue on to the Old People who still lived in the

mountains” (4). That they make this decision to perform their traditional burial ritual in the wake of the disclosures suggests a move toward reconciliation, a return to what they did before the missionaries arrived. Further, Bertha and Isaac decide to perform this ritual without deferring to anybody. Instead, they exercise autonomous decision-making authority, something that the residential school and other colonial incursions tried to remove.

To understand the use of the burial ritual as a kind of reconciliation, it is worth carefully considering the novel’s depiction of the ceremony itself. Part of the ritual involves drumming and singing: “As the fire burned, Old Pierre and the Elders started drumming softly. Soon after, they started singing an Old Prayer Song. It rose from the crowd and drifted over the land” (237). The ritual is not an isolated event, but rather part of the context that the opening chapter gave. In reviving the burial ritual, the community inherently also revives their traditional drumming and singing. However, the novel provides space for reading the ceremony as reconciliation on another register. It is reconciliation because it was taken away by missionary Contact, to be sure, but it also has pre-Contact value as a traditional version of reconciliation. The novel’s opening chapter explains the origin and significance of the burial ritual:

One of [the Blue People’s] legends tells of their creation. It says that the Creator took some red soil from one of the valleys in the Blue Mountains and created the Old People from whom all Blue People have descended. It was because of this that the people brought their dead to the mountains to be burned, believing that their bodies would return to the land and their souls would continue on to the Old People who still lived in the mountains. (4)<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Martin, a respected Elder in the community (92), also explains the burial ritual to other community members shortly before his death in the course of explaining how he wants his burial handled and why (173).

The burial ritual is inherently an act of reconciliation that exists outside the logic of the state. The ritual returns the dead to their previous conciliatory state in relation to both the land and the Old People. By performing this burial ritual, the community performs a traditional version of reconciliation.

The ritual also constitutes reconciliation on another register. Earlier in the novel, during a chapter that depicts the experience of the first generation of residential school students, we find out that, when children died in the residential school, as so many did, they were buried “in the cold, dark ground” (12) rather than being reconciled with the land and with the Old People. This burial stands in stark contrast to the community’s traditional burial practice, which Anglican missionaries argue was barbaric and uncivilized (6). The burial practice is both inherently a form of cultural reconciliation and an act of intra-community reconciliation necessitated by Christian missionary activity in general and settler colonialism and residential schooling in particular. By refusing this legacy of residential schooling, the community asserts their sovereign decision-making authority. The community acknowledges that this decision is not approved by either the church or the state, as they say that “[i]t was as if they were going to be doing something sacrilegious. Something illegal” (233). Instead of deferring to church or state authority here, though, they carry out the independent decision that they have made.

The burial ritual may also suggest a framework for inter-ethnic reconciliation, but with a primary focus on the Blue People’s autonomy. The local Anglican Reverend, Andy, attends the ceremony and while Chief James speaks, he looks at Andy and “remember[s] how the minister of the day had tried to stop them [...]. *This one is different. This one understands*” (237; emphasis in original). While the novel never mentions whether Reverend Andy is Indigenous, his job as a reverend positions him as a marker of the missionary activity that first shifted the



community away from exercising self-determination on political and spiritual matters. While he is present at the ceremony, though, he does not try to stop it from happening. That he represents Western forms of thought does not mean that he cannot be part of the community, but the community's autonomous decision to mobilize traditional Indigenous knowledges takes precedence over the church's authority. If Reverend Andy's place in the community represents a movement toward reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, then, it is only through the creation of a respectful, mutually autonomous relationship. Reverend Andy here models the kind of settler engagement in irreconcilable spaces that Garneau calls for, as he participates in the ceremony only as a guest.

As mentioned above, reconciliation in this novel does not mean the precise re-creation of some utopic pre-Contact space. As a result, the ceremony need not look precisely like it would have before Contact to affect reconciliation. This enactment of the burial ceremony involves a Christian prayer from Reverend Andy, which it obviously would not have had before the Blue People had their first exposure to Christianity. However, as Taiaiake Alfred points out, Indigenous peoples "are not the same as they were a hundred or two hundred years ago" ("Pathways" n. pag). To require ceremonies to look the same as they did before they were taken away would be to require that Indigenous knowledges be locked in the past rather than exist as living traditions. Reverend Andy's participation does not negate the ceremony as an act of reconciliation if the community decides on their own to allow him in and to give the Christian prayer some space.

Reverend Andy's inclusion also represents the very real issue of reviving ceremony in diverse Indigenous communities that have been impacted by colonialism. Robert Warrior explains this issue in critiquing Alfred's *Peace, Power, Righteousness*:

That is, it seems to me that such a clarion call to restore indigenous systems of governance would simultaneously prompt a need for a critical framework for working through crucial, contentious issues of difference, including differences between and among various indigenous traditions. [. . .] Yet, a larger problem is that Alfred's proposals fail to address more important contingencies. For instance, how can someone whose upbringing and experiences have led them to other belief systems participate in the governance of their own indigenous communities? (209-10)

Indeed, Indigenous communities, including the fictional one that the Blue People comprise, are not homogeneous. However, the novel's depiction of this difference represents a way through it as it exists on spiritual matters. When Chief David's parents die not long after the traditional burial ritual, there is potential for a religious conflict. Such a conflict does not occur, though: "Later that month, Edward and Rachel William passed away within three days of each other and were buried in the cemetery as they had requested" (258). At this point in the novel, the community is empowered to mobilize their traditional knowledge and perform their burial ritual, but they do not insist on doing so in all cases. Instead, Edward and Rachel are afforded the burial that they request, thereby exercising their own decision-making authority. Like in the novel's opening chapter, the structure of the sentence is important. It is in the active voice, with Edward and Rachel as the subjects. They request the non-Indigenous burial rather simply being given it without any possibility of another choice. The community here handles spiritual diversity by empowering its members to make autonomous decisions. The community has a collective right to reinvigorate its culture, but individuals retain rights to make their own religious decisions.

The moment in which Reverend Andy understands and respects the Indigenous community (and vice versa) also serves as a model for macro-political change in the TRC's

sense, but affords a symbolic resonance that extends beyond the TRC method. The community is afforded spiritual self-determination when they revive their burial rituals despite the presence of the Anglican Minister. Spiritual self-determination, aided by the Churches and the government, is one of the TRC's Calls to Action. However, whereas the TRC's Call to Action on this topic only specifically mentions spiritual self-determination (TRC *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* 5), the novel's structure suggests that this spiritual self-determination has a larger symbolic resonance. The novel's first Part tells us the *content* of what was taken away by missionary and government incursions and the residential school system: drums, songs, and funeral practices. However, it also suggests that these things did not merely disappear because the Church influenced the people and convinced them to behave differently, but because the Church and the government took away the People's decision-making capacity. When the People enact their decision-making capacity in spiritual matters, they begin to break away from government and Church power in favour of self-determination.

One might at this point object to this line of argumentation as simply fitting into the general method of this dissertation – viewing literature as filling in gaps or extending TRC arguments – rather than reading the available evidence in *Porcupines and China Dolls* and coming to logically sound conclusions. Indeed, the ceremony itself does not obviously suggest political self-determination is on the table for the community. Thus, one might reasonably conclude that Alexie's novel reproduces the TRC's shortcoming in “stopping” at spiritual self-determination. However, while the novel is subtle on this point, there is evidence that the community is moving toward overhauling their political decision-making structure in parallel with their spiritual decision-making. To see this overhaul, we need to look at *how* the community makes the decision to perform this ritual. As noted above, Bertha and Isaac begin the process

after the disclosure ceremony, when they agree that it is time to exhume their son's body and perform the ritual (209). However, before they do so, they consult people with authority in the community. Rather than first discussing it with Chief David, who is Chief of the Band Council,<sup>43</sup> they consult with Chief James. The passage in which this process is narrated explains why they went to Chief James instead:

Bertha, Isaac, Margaret, Ernest, Martin and Jane went to see Chief James. He and his wife, Lucy, were both in their seventies. Over the last two decades the People had all but forgotten that he was the last of the Old Chiefs, and only the Elders paid him the respect he deserved. [. . .] They talked to him about their wishes, and the Old Chief shed a tear for the good old days and agreed it was the way it should be.

Later, they went to Chief David and told him what was going to happen and he agreed. (213)

While Chief David is still respected in this moment, he and the other relevant parties defer to Chief James, despite his authority not being “officially” recognized by the Band Council structure. In consultation with Chief James, Bertha and Isaac decide what to do, then tell Chief David rather than asking him. Thus, in deciding to perform the burial ritual, Bertha and Isaac do not only enact spiritual self-determination, but also revive a traditional structure of political decision-making.

At the ceremony itself, Chief David and Reverend Andy do retain a place of privilege. Chief David speaks first (236), and Reverend Andy conducts a prayer (237). But Chief James and Martin also speak (237), Martin helps conduct the ceremony itself by lighting the fire (237),

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<sup>43</sup> While the novel does not use the term Band Council, that Chief David is Chief of the Band Council is implied when the narrator describes Martin as “an Elder in the true sense of the word, a respected leader even though he’d never been a Chief or a councillor” (92), and in the comments the novel makes about the traditional method of Chiefdom passed down through hereditary means (6). David is not mentioned in this lineage.

and “Old Pierre and the Elders” (237) begin the drumming and singing. The community does not completely reject those who represent non-traditional decision-making, instead incorporating them into the ceremony. While this might look similar to the TRC’s general call for reconciling Indigenous thought into existing structures, traditional decision-making structures are not merely reconciled to the colonial power structure in the novel, but instead take over for those political structures that restrict Indigenous self-determination. This prioritization of traditional Indigenous decision-making structures therefore represents a departure from the TRC, which fundamentally calls for integrating Indigenous knowledges into settler colonial power structures.

### *2.5: Breakdown and Reconciliation: Linguistic Revival*

Most of the novel’s opening part suggests that the loss of drums, songs, and funeral practices is the primary harm that the community suffers from Contact. However, Part One also points to language loss as a specific, intended result of residential school harm. Early on, the narrator suggests that residential schooling has led to significant language loss in two ways. First, students who knew their Native language had difficulty speaking it after they left the school: “It slowly dawns on him: he’s forgotten the language. Or has he? The language is still there, but now he’s thinking in English and has to translate it. It’s a long and difficult process” (14).<sup>44</sup> English essentially *becomes* this unnamed character’s mother tongue, with his native language relegated to second-language status. Further, inter-generational native language transmission is compromised by residential schools, as after two generations of children attended residential schools, “most of the children spoke only one language: English. Their parents had done this to ensure they would never be hit, slapped, strapped, or tweaked in any mission school” (19). While

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<sup>44</sup> The novel only ever refers to the Blue People’s language as “the language.”

the language is not entirely lost in the community, residential school experience significantly weakens Indigenous language knowledge.

Because the language is taken away by residential school experience, when it begins to return in the second half of the novel, we can read it as a version of intracommunity reconciliation. That *Porcupines and China Dolls* approaches the issue of language loss is important in the context of this dissertation because the TRC makes a clear assertion that this language loss was a primary goal of residential schooling:

Throughout its long history, the residential school system constituted an attack on the identity and vitality of Aboriginal children, Aboriginal families, Aboriginal languages, culture and spirituality, and Aboriginal nations. As official records, these impacts were not unfortunate by-products of a well-intentioned system. On the contrary, they were the predetermined and desired outcomes built right into the system from the outset. (TRC *Canada's Residential Schools: The History Part 1* 162)

*Porcupines and China Dolls*' depiction of a community in which the language has fallen into disuse as a result of residential school abuse therefore parallels the TRC's historical findings as part of their Truth Mandate. Seven of the TRC's Calls to Action – Calls 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 61, and 84 – explicitly focus on language revitalization (TRC *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* 2-10). Each of these Calls requires action on the part of somebody other than Indigenous communities themselves, in turns the government, the churches, and post-secondary institutions. Asking these actors to take action on language revival makes some degree of sense. The government and the churches are responsible for the languages being exterminated through their enactment of residential school and other colonial policy, and post-secondary institutions generally have the resources to study and teach Indigenous languages.

However, in Alexie's novel, government officials make only a brief appearance before exiting the community (208). The Church remains present in the form of Reverend Andy, but he has no active role in language revitalization. And while some people in the novel have backgrounds with post-secondary education, nobody suggests that anybody take this route to re-learn their Indigenous language, and nobody mentions that such institutions might be capable of helping. Instead, moments of language revitalization in the novel are wrapped up in self-determination struggles and moments of personal healing. Through these moments, the novel suggests that language revival is vital to any project of reconciliation insofar as it is part of a process of self-determination, but the community does not have to wait for action on anybody else's part.

The community is acutely aware of the potential impact that losing their language might have. Martin notes that "'Our language will be gone in 'nother generation. Once 'at goes we'll have nothin'" (174; emphasis in original). Reading the novel critically, Hazlett asserts that "In the latter part of the novel, 'the language' is hardly present; only the elders occasionally speak 'the language'" (61). While it is true that the community's language is *rarely* spoken by non-Elders in the second half of the novel, there are several key moments in which the language is spoken, and these moments are immensely important in terms of thinking about the connection between language, self-determination, and cultural autonomy. Going back to the revival of funeral practices, a key moment in deciding to perform the ritual involves using the Indigenous language. When Bertha and Isaac initially decide that their son should be buried in the traditional way, Bertha expresses herself in the language: "Bertha said a prayer, then cried for his lost soul. After a minute, she said in the language, 'It's time to send him home'" (209). While Bertha and Isaac are older than the novel's main characters, Jake and James, they are not Elders. When

Bertha speaks the language and Isaac understands her (209), it suggests that the language is not completely gone. And that they use it in this context, in making the first clear reference to the burial ritual, implicitly ties together language and cultural practice.

Between Bertha and Isaac's decision and the burial practice itself, there is another moment in which the songs and drums make their first appearance. This moment also involves speaking the language. Two of the community's Elders have kept a fire burning outside their home for several days (214). While sitting around this fire, one of the songs makes a return, seemingly absent anybody's specific intention to bring it back:

Old Pierre was humming an old chant that told of Warriors returning from battle in the days long since gone. He couldn't remember when the last great battle was fought. It was years ago and miles away. He hummed and the others joined in, and soon the chant became a song. They'd heard the song in another time and another place. They now heard it in their dreams. They started moving their feet like they were young and they sang it loud and clear. (214)

While the narrator does not tell us that they are using the Indigenous language here, that the song is from long ago, and is about something that happened before anybody can remember suggests that it is likely in the language. Not everybody in this scene is an Elder, but everybody joins in the Elder's singing. This moment would therefore seem to be one in which the language makes a return.

As the scene progresses, more people hear the song and join in, either singing or dancing. The group includes people of the generation whose parents avoided teaching them the language, James, Jake, and Chief David included (215). Eventually, "over a hundred people" (215) are part of the dance, even though some only know the dance because it is "genetic" (215) in Chief



David's case or "by osmosis" (215) in Reverend Andy's. Not everybody takes the opportunity to join in, with the bingo players apparently having "more important things on their mind" (215), but many of the community members, of different generations, coming together to participate in singing and dancing that had been banned suggests a movement toward cultural revival and self-determination. Nobody tells them to sing and dance. Nobody tells them that they cannot. They each individually choose whether to participate, but participating in this kind of activity was not even an option for them until this moment.

The singing and dancing leads also to the revival of drumming (216). Again, the decision to drum is tied up in using the language and deferring to traditional governance structure: "Chief James looked at Old Pierre and nodded. 'It's time,' he said in the language" (216). Not only is the decision expressed in the language, it is made by the last of the Old Chiefs. Chief James' authority is again recognized, with nobody deferring to Chief David, the Church, or any other government or authority structure.

In addition to self-determination, the language is also associated with individual healing. James speaks his Indigenous language for the first time in the second half of the novel. The context in which he does so implies that speaking the language is tied to community rebuilding. Such rebuilding would constitute intra-community reconciliation in the most basic definition of that term, returning to a community structure that existed before settler colonialism broke it. Speaking the language for the first time in his life, James tells Jake that "I'll always be here for you" (242), which implies the re-creation of a community in which people support one another. After Jake tells James the same thing, we get a moment of emotional catharsis, rare in this novel: "They then did something they'd never done in their lives. They hugged each other like brothers

and held nothing back” (243). By situating a moment of language revival in the context of a moment of community rebuilding, the novel suggests that these two concepts are tied together.

Beyond community rebuilding, practical research on language knowledge in Indigenous communities shows that Indigenous language use directly correlates with better individual mental health outcomes:

Results indicate that those bands with higher levels of language knowledge (i.e., more than 50%) had fewer suicides than those bands with lower levels. More specifically, high language knowledge bands averaged 13.00 suicides per 100,000 (well below the provincial averages for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth), while those with lower language knowledge had more than six times the number of suicides (96.59 per 100,000). (Hallett, Chandler and Lalonde 396)

This study is not perfect, with sample size a primary reason for skepticism. Only 16 of the 152 bands in the study had a knowledge rate of more than 50% (396). However, these statistics provide a preliminary foundation for linking language knowledge to community well-being.

Given the frequency with which the text’s main characters discuss suicide in the text, and Chief David’s assertion that the suicide epidemic “‘is not over, at least not for some of us ‘n it might never be for others’” (236), that language use might reduce suicide rates provides hope in a novel nearly bereft of it. The language is not yet extinct in the community, and people who have never used it before begin to use it in the second half of the novel. If this trend continues, it could aid in individual healing. This individual healing is not divorced from community rebuilding, as keeping community members alive would seem to be a basic prerequisite for keeping the community at large alive and on a path toward reconciliation.

The TRC agrees that language revitalization and preservation are key in the wake of residential schools, arguing in its Final Report that “If the preservation of Aboriginal languages does not become a priority both for governments and for Aboriginal communities, then what the residential schools failed to accomplish will come about through a process of systematic neglect” (*Canada’s Residential Schools: The Legacy* 6). That is, if Indigenous communities cannot speak their languages, then the legacy of residential schools becomes increasingly one of successful assimilation, rather than a failed assimilatory policy, as the TRC argues is currently the case (*Canada’s Residential Schools: The History Part I* 5). In what follows I generally avoid discussing language revitalization and public policy as having only “success” or “failure” outcomes, given that such a rubric disallows the possibility that policies and communities might fail in some ways but succeed in others. However, the TRC’s general point still stands: as languages die out, residential school policy moves toward the “success” part of a success-failure continuum.

However, to simply point to language revival (or death) as an outcome says nothing of its value. One might argue, perhaps, that languages have no inherent value, that they are only tools of communication. Or somewhat less didactically, one might argue alongside Chinua Achebe that, while languages have value, culture and experience can be communicated and preserved in any language: “I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home, but altered to suit its new African surroundings” (349). Simon J. Ortiz makes nearly this precise argument based on empirical work with Indigenous peoples in the United States:

Indian women and men have carried on their lives and their expression through the use of the newer languages, particularly Spanish, French, and English, and they have used these

languages on their own terms. This is the crucial item to be understood, that it is entirely possible for a people to retain and maintain their lives through the use of any language.

There is not a question of authenticity here; rather it is the way that Indian people have creatively responded to forced colonization. And this response has been one of resistance; there is no clearer word for it than resistance. (10)

This moment of language revitalization in *Porcupines and China Dolls* might therefore signify little. It may be the case that Indigenous peoples can resist settler colonialism regardless of whether they speak their ancestral languages. Indeed, given the difficulties that some Indigenous communities face with obtaining resources for linguistic preservation, perhaps some Indigenous peoples *must* resist settler colonialism using European languages.

However, even Achebe at least hopes for the preservation of African languages while arguing for the value of English as an African national language: “I have been given [English] and I intend to use it. I hope, though, that there will always be men, like the late Chief Fagunwa, who will choose to write in their native tongue and ensure that our ethnic literatures will flourish side by side with the national ones” (348). Achebe here implicitly affirms the value of Indigenous language preservation, even if he thinks that such languages can and should co-exist with the languages of the colonizer. Not everybody is as optimistic as Achebe on linguistic co-existence, though. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o argues that choosing a language is more than simply a matter of choosing a means of communication, and therefore prioritizes Indigenous language use: “The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people’s definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe” (4). And because language “is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture” (13), “a specific culture is not transmitted through language in its universality but in

its particularity as the language of a specific community with a specific history” (15). Extending Thiong’o’s argument, language preservation and cultural preservation are intimately tied together. One cannot do the latter without the former. By extension, a community looking to revive cultural practices must revive their languages if they are compromised. Conversely, if a community’s language is exterminated, so too is its culture.

On first glance, the theoretical work seems to present a conundrum in terms of reading the novel’s language politics. To read *this* novel’s politics, then, I turn toward theories of language more closely associated with its context than those articulated by Achebe and Thiong’o. Namely, I prioritize the work of Indigenous theorists who write specifically on the North American settler colonial context, then turn back to the novel itself to come to an understanding of this issue. Taiaiake Alfred, for example, argues that “Native languages embody indigenous peoples’ identity and are the most important element in their culture” (*Peace, Power, Righteousness* 172) and similarly, in an article co-written with Jeff Corntassel, that “*Language is Power*” (“Being Indigenous” 613; emphasis original) when it comes to defeating colonialism. Angela Waziyatawin Wilson agrees, arguing that “Nothing reflects Indigenous worldviews and ways of being more than Indigenous languages. Precisely because language reflects the essence of Indigenous identity, it was beaten out of generations of children in boarding, residential, and day schools” (369).

Further, Dale Turner argues that “language does more than secure a sense of belonging; it also provides the philosophical framework for indigenous ways of knowing the world” (*This is Not a Peace Pipe* 46). In his history of residential schools, John Sheridan Milloy points out that the government saw language and culture as inextricable, that “[i]t was through language that the child gained its ontological inheritance from its parents and community. The word bore the

burden of the culture from one generation to the next. It was the vital connection. The civilizers knew it must be cut if any progress were to be made” (38).<sup>45</sup> Fred Kelly similarly argues that “*Language* is the principal means by which culture is transmitted from one generation to the next” (36; emphasis in original). Renee Linklater argues that “Use of European languages tends not to be able to capture Indigenous knowledges” (30).

Linklater’s comments on Indigenous languages are particularly relevant here because she is speaking not only about Indigenous cultural revival in general, but in the context of healing from trauma. She argues for an Indigenous-philosophy-based wellness approach to trauma that focuses not just on a person’s mental health, but rather their whole person (physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental) instead of a Western-based mental illness model (21-2). As a part of this process, she calls for what she terms a decolonization of language, as Western languages have changed the ways that Indigenous peoples relate to one another (31) such that reconciliation is impossible outside of linguistic revival.

However, some theorists agree with Ortiz. Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack and Robert Warrior, discussing Ortiz’s work, argue in the Preface to *American Indian Literary Nationalism* that:

Claiming English as an Indian language is one of the most important, if not *the* most important step toward ensuring Indian survival for future generations. This does not mean that other Indian languages should be forgotten; it means *more* should be included, learned, mastered. [...] Remembering the older languages becomes no less important in

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<sup>45</sup> Jo-Ann Episkenew similarly argues that, early in the residential school era, “Understanding that language is a critical vehicle of cultural transmission, colonial officials identified eradication of the students’ Native languages, followed by their acquisition of English, as paramount to their resocialization efforts” (47).

Ortiz's schema; at the same time the profound Indianness of English is celebrated. (xvii; emphasis in original)

Womack argues later in that volume that "English is an Indian language. I know a lot of Indians – been around them all my life – and every one of them speaks English" (120).

Of course, the "Indians" that Womack is talking about all speak English at least in part because of settler colonial incursions. The quotation from the volume's introduction, however, suggests a way through this problem. English is the language of the novel, and it is the primary language of the community depicted within. But English does not have to be the only language of the community. Indeed, the community can use their Indigenous language, even prioritize it, without having to completely rid themselves of English. As with reviving traditional practices, it is not necessary for the community to completely reject settler influence, but to be able to determine for themselves what traditional practices to revive and when they should do so.

A way to get through the theoretical disagreement about language, then, is to look back to Garneau and the general method of reading that this chapter uses. We should approach art, in this case the novel, on its own terms and thereby listen to the artist rather than judging it on our terms (37). That is, we must avoid being prescriptive with our reading of the novel, choosing a theoretical approach to language and then evaluating the novel's approach against that theory.

With that method in mind, we can go back to *Porcupines and China Dolls*. If we look back to the scene in which James speaks the language for the first time, one notices something striking about the structure of the text. Just before this moment, James attempts to commit suicide.

Unfortunately, we cannot read this moment of language revival as entirely "solving" the problem of suicide in the text – this is *not* the last time that James will attempt suicide. Instead, it foreshadows a later suicide attempt that parallels this one and mirrors an earlier moment in the

text. Just as the novel does not give consolation by ending after the disclosure ceremony, it does not give closure in this moment.

In the novel's last chapter, after Jake has gone missing (and is presumably dead, although the novel never confirms this fact), James attempts suicide again (304). On closer inspection, the description of this attempt is a verbatim replication of the novel's prologue – the prologue was actually (almost) the end of the novel in terms of its temporal progression. On first glance, this structural choice might lead to some pessimism, as the novel begins and ends with attempted suicide. There is, one might then argue, no progress in the community. However, this scene toward the end of the novel gives additional context. While the prologue simply ends with James “wait[ing] for his ultimate journey to hell” (2), this scene continues and makes clear that his suicide attempt is unsuccessful (304). While his mere survival may not be reason for optimism, in the wake of this attempt, Louise tells him that she loves him (305), and “James pick[s] up the gun and [throws] it into the heavens where it disappear[s] forever” (306). James' suicide attempt is not just unsuccessful, but he here consciously eschews future suicide attempts by ridding himself of the gun. While James talks about suicide frequently throughout the novel, this is the first instance in which he consciously refuses suicide.

Further, after this suicide attempt, James tells Louise that he loves her (304), which is striking given that, throughout the novel, he has *always* failed or refused to say these words. We therefore have a clear structural parallel with the earlier moment of language revival in which James uses the language to tell Jake how he feels for the first time – suicide attempt, failure, emotional revelation. As such, *Porcupines and China Dolls* implies something of a progression, even if it does not suggest that the community's problems have been solved. James' use of the language to tell Jake how he feels opens up the possibility of future declarations of care. James



survives, and so too does his connection to his community. The latter is strengthened by his disclosure and his subsequent use of his language. Telling Jake that he cares for him when he first uses his language portends the clear declaration of romantic love in this scene. If we read these two moments together as parts of James' progression, then these scenes imply that the moment of language revival is also a moment of suicide prevention. Use of the Indigenous language, as Hallett, Chandler, and Lalonde's research suggests, is intimately tied to individual and community survival. In this way, *Porcupines and China Dolls* suggests that Indigenous language revival has an inherent value in keeping the community alive in addition to its value in bringing about other forms of cultural revival.

Structurally, that the novel *does not* end where it begins suggests that the language revival might allow the community to break out of a cycle of trauma. The novel begins with a suicide attempt, but does not *end* here. Instead, the novel ends with the declaration of love and the refusal of suicide. That is, whereas the prologue leaves the attempted suicide as its conclusion, the novel makes refusing suicide its conclusion. In this way, it suggests a progression from the beginning of story-time to the end of story-time, even if only a few minutes of discourse-time actually pass.<sup>46</sup>

That James does not kill himself in this moment does not mean that he is completely healed from his trauma. It does not even mean that he will continue to eschew suicide. As Keavy Martin argues, "Through this eschewing of endings, of resolution, and of conclusion, [. . .] *Porcupines and China Dolls* adds an invaluable contribution – or complication – to current

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<sup>46</sup> I am here referring to narrative theory as outlined in Seymour Chatman's *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (1978), wherein he makes the distinction between story-time (the temporal progression of events in order of what happened), and discourse-time (how the story is told in the text, as it appears on the page). In this novel, story-time ends with the events described in the prologue and the final chapter, but in discourse time, the prologue is the beginning, and the final chapter is the end, regardless of how these events are related in story-time. What happens in between is the middle of discourse-time, but the lead-up to the end of story-time.

discussions of reconciliation. The end points of healing, or of closure, here remain continually beyond the grasp of readers and characters alike” (61). One should certainly not read James’ choice to continue living as leaving the novel with an unambiguously hopeful ending. He and other community members continue to struggle all the way to the end of the novel. However, that he consciously and actively chooses to live in this moment, whereas he attempts suicide frequently throughout the novel or simply passively lives, suggests a movement toward a more stable healing path.

## 2.6: Conclusion

Shauna Van Praagh argues that *Porcupines and China Dolls* “captures the challenge” (26) of finding effective resolutions to the impact of residential schooling. Van Praagh’s phrasing is apt – the novel does not present practical, process-based resolutions, but rather depicts the value and necessity of achieving self-determination in political, cultural, and linguistic matters without assuming that any one solution can solve all of the community’s problems. This tendency toward ideas rather than implementable solutions provides an effective contrast to the TRC, which aims at practical actions that are primarily state-based. But as Alexie’s novel shows, and Van Praagh points out, while the state cannot disappear in the wake of residential schooling, communities can make strides toward reconciliation without deferring to government authority, as “neither learning nor practice is constrained by the state” (Van Praagh 26). One might object here that Van Praagh ignores the history of the Canadian state restricting learning through residential schooling and bans on cultural practice, as Alexie’s novel acknowledges. She also fails to acknowledge the material resources that learning can require. I have not argued here, however, that Alexie’s novel should be held up as a transparent manual for achieving reconciliation. Instead, I argue alongside McKegney that the novel’s status as fiction leads it to

“[strain] against the limitations of historical representational validity implied by autobiography” (*Magic Weapons* 16). Just as the novel does not have to prove its truth, it need not be constrained by the practicalities of achieving political reconciliation. I therefore read the novel as representing the value of achieving self-determination, however that might come about. While the state or international governmental organizations might have to be involved for this self-determination to become official in a legal sense, the actions taken by the community in the novel indicate that Indigenous communities must make strides toward self-determination without waiting for the consent of the state, which may or may not ever come.

My reading here does not suggest that the text depicts a community that *achieves* reconciliation. Indeed, as McKinley argues, the redressive actions in the novel “only [move] some of the people because the multiple histories require multiple redressive actions. Alexie’s work also speaks to the complexity of the social problems that are ongoing within Indigenous communities where violence, bootlegging, drug abuse and neglect continue alongside healing projects” (108). More specifically, and more forcefully, Hazlett points out that “[t]he men are offered pathways to healing that include charging their aggressor publically, reconstituting familial bonds, and relearning the Blue People’s traditions. None of these avenues seem to be available to the raped women, despite the fact that they continue to live in the same small community as their rapists” (66). The community certainly remains a problematic space, especially as it relates to gendered violence. Self-determination and cultural revival are not a panacea for the community. However, as I have shown, encouraged by cultural revival that was decided upon without the consent of the colonial governing structure, some parts of the community do make moves toward reconciliation. As Michelle Coupal argues, that the novel does not allow for the closure of a full intra-community reconciliation does not mean that it ends

without hope: “rather, it seems to capture the complexities of the healing process precisely as a *process*, not an end in itself” (222; emphasis original).

This chapter therefore contributes to discussions about reconciliation insofar as my reading of *Porcupines and China Dolls* contrasts the TRC’s approach to Reconciliation on the topic of self-determination. While the TRC calls for limited forms of self-determination as a small part of a larger reconciliatory paradigm, Alexie’s novel centralizes self-determination as the key marker of reconciliation. As Helen Hoy points out in talking about increased language use in the second half of the novel, Alexie’s narrow focus does not preclude other necessary steps toward healing and reconciliation in Indigenous communities: “Larger changes also important for health and positive outcomes – reclamation of stolen land and an end to colonial interference [. . .], movement toward self-government [. . .], local employment and economic stability [. . .] – lie beyond the scope of the novel, although the latter are gestured toward through their absence” (108). Self-determination will not immediately solve all of the community’s problems. But self-determination absolutely must be achieved and prioritized if any reconciliation is to take place, because colonial incursions fundamentally undermine Indigenous peoples’ ability to make their own spiritual and political decisions. Thus, to achieve reconciliation, the fundamental power structures of settler colonialism, which take away Indigenous decision-making structures, must be overhauled.

### Chapter Three: Tragedy, Tragicomedy, and Reconciliation in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*

#### 3.1: Introduction and Reading Method

Since its publication in 1998, Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (hereafter *Kiss*) has inspired significant critical conversation. This conversation mostly revolves around a few key themes: the novel as a form of life writing; queerness and the intersections of queerness with indigeneity; and inter-ethnic reconciliation after colonization and residential schooling. While all of these critical threads produce compelling scholarship, I focus on the last one in this chapter, only including comments about queerness and life writing insofar as they intersect with questions about reconciliation in the novel. Further, I extend the extant conversation about reconciliation to include individual and intra-community reconciliation.

While *Kiss* is autobiographical to a large degree, depicting elements of the experiences of Highway and his late brother, René, in residential school and as young artists, this chapter analyzes the novel's *fictionalization* of these events, rather than its relationship to the author's biography. While the novel offers an important testimony to residential school experience, and as a result has been studied extensively in works about residential school testimony, including Sam McKegney's *Magic Weapons* (137-74), I prioritize reading the novel as fiction because of David Garneau's call for Settler critics to approach Indigenous art by "enter[ing] the Aboriginal sovereign display territories as guests" (37). That is, I read the novel as fiction because Highway tells us to do so in his Acknowledgements:

This book, of course, is a novel – all the characters and what happens to them are fictitious. Moreover, some liberty has been taken with the chronology of certain historical events – the Fur Queen beauty pageant, for instance. As a certain philosopher of ancient Greece once put it, the difference between the historian and the poet/storyteller is that

where the historian relates what happened, the storyteller tells us how it might have come about. (vi)

In the preceding quotation, Highway summarizes an important point from Aristotle's *Poetics*. There, Aristotle sets up his theory of tragedy by laying out what the goal of a poet is, and how the poet differs from the historian. Stemming from Garneau's call and Highway's reference to *Poetics*, this chapter's method of structural analysis borrows extensively from Aristotle's definition of tragedy. Aristotle explains:

It is also obvious from what we have said that it is the function of a poet to relate not things that have happened, but things that may happen, i.e. that are possible in accordance with probability or necessity. For the historian and the poet do not differ according to whether they write in verse or without verse [. . .]. But the difference is that the former relates things that have happened, the latter things that may happen. For this reason poetry is a more philosophical and more serious thing than history; poetry tends to speak of universals, history of particulars. (12)

As such, the value of reading the novel strictly as fiction rather than as partial memoir is immediately apparent: we can read Highway's work as providing a version of a *general* experience rather than his *particular* experience. While this approach should not be uncritically universalized to all Indigenous or Cree literature, starting from an Aristotelian understanding of literature is useful in this case because Highway subtly tells us in the prologue that Aristotle forms at least part of his understanding of literature. Thinking of the novel this way suggests that *Kiss* provides a model of residential and post-residential school experience.<sup>47</sup> Following

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<sup>47</sup> Aristotle accounted for poetic work that was historical in nature: "even if it turns out that he is representing things that happened, he is no less a poet; for there is nothing to prevent some of the things that have happened from being the sort of things that may happen" (13). That Highway takes his own biography as part of his subject in this novel therefore does not problematize reading the text as a tragedy.

Aristotle's formulation, then, we can read *Kiss* as relating what *might* happen in the aftermath of residential schooling and colonization. This reading does not assume that *Kiss* provides a singular, universal model for post-residential school legacy and reconciliation. In contrast to the TRC's approach of finding the Truth, which paves the way to a specific kind of Reconciliation, I argue that *Kiss*, like the other texts I consider, provides a model worth considering in the context of finding a multitude of approaches to reconciliation, actionable in different circumstances. In Highway's fiction, there is potential for nuancing our broad understanding of reconciliation if we read literature as containing potentialities or hypotheses,<sup>48</sup> as I outline in this dissertation's Introduction. The novel therefore parallels the "reconciliation" part of the TRC's Mandate: given the Truth about what has happened, what might we do in the present and future to deal with it?

A close reading of the novel's paratext therefore suggests that such a reading follows the kind of method used elsewhere in this dissertation, in which my approach depends on beginning from what the text suggests internally – in this case the terms laid out by Highway in the preface – rather than from external theoretical frameworks. This is not to say that one should take Highway as some sort of individual or isolated authority on residential school experience,<sup>49</sup> or even his own text. Indeed, there is plenty of information in the literary and testimonial archives to complicate Highway's account, much of which I consider elsewhere in this dissertation. However, the paratext provides a starting point for thinking about the novel as providing a kind of situated truth, as opposed to a TRC-style singular Truth, about residential school experience and a version of what reconciliation, but *not* the authoritative Reconciliation from the TRC,

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<sup>48</sup> That is, in Frye's terms, that "[t]he poet, like the pure mathematician, depends, not on descriptive truth, but on conformity to his hypothetical postulates" (76).

<sup>49</sup> It is worth acknowledging the practical risk that taking Highway as an isolated authority poses. For example, a group linked to "anti-semitic [sic] and discriminatory language" at the University of New Brunswick recently used Highway's reference to his "positive" experience in residential school in a poster claiming that "Overwhelmingly, Native Americans are **beneficiaries**, and not victims, of the society built by Europeans" (Meloney n. pag.).

might look like. We can then contextualize these versions of truth and reconciliation and critique them via comparisons with the TRC's Final Report and reconciliation theory. Again, this is not to say that Highway's theory of reconciliation should be applied universally. Rather, it is simply to argue that Highway has something useful to say about residential school history and reconciliation, and it is worth considering it if we are to arrive at an approach to reconciliation that includes, but does not defer to, the TRC.

Extending my method of listening via close reading reveals that the novel suggests several intertexts that are worth considering, some for formal reasons, and others for the sake of better understanding the content of the novel. As already noted, Highway's citation of Aristotle's *Poetics* suggests that mobilizing this text as a theoretical model for reading the novel might bear fruit. Particularly, in this chapter, I read *Kiss* as a contemporary Indigenous tragedy, informed but not completely determined by Aristotle's formulation of classical tragedy. Highway's reference to Aristotle does not itself imply that the novel is a tragedy, but it does provide the impetus for thinking of the novel via Aristotelian literary theory, and the novel's content partially constitutes a tragedy, as I will show. Such a reading leads me to identify several tragic falls initiated by the protagonists' residential school experience, with a key difference. Classical tragedy primarily deals with the character of a single man of good reputation, what we might think of as individual tragedy. The tragic falls in this novel, however, are all essentially relational: the fall of Champion-Jeremiah's relationship to himself,<sup>50</sup> the fall of Champion-Jeremiah's relationship to his culture and community, and the fall of the Indigenous community's relationship with non-Indigenous communities. All of these falls set up possible reconciliations, because all follow the basic structure I identify elsewhere in this dissertation:

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<sup>50</sup> Or, using a parlance common in trauma theory, the psychological split caused by the trauma Champion-Jeremiah experiences in residential school.



conciliatory relationships (Champion-Jeremiah's with himself and his community and, less obviously, the Indigenous community's relationship with the colonizer) are broken by the crisis of colonialism and residential schooling, and are therefore in need of repair.

While Aristotle's notion of tragedy omits a resolution to the tragic fall, Highway's novel suggests several resolutions, which I argue suggest general methods of reconciliation. In the second half of the chapter, I argue that these resolutions are comic reconciliations in the sense enumerated by Hayden White. I am not therefore arguing that *Kiss* follows Aristotle's articulation of tragic structure in a straightforward way. Rather, I argue that the novel's depiction of relations between Indigenous peoples and their cultures constitutes a tragicomedy, whereas the novel's depiction of relations between Indigenous peoples and Settlers is always tragic. In this way, I use Aristotle's *Poetics* as a starting point, noting where *Kiss* follows the model of tragedy therein and where the novel breaks off from it, thereby analyzing the implications of the novel's structure. Because I argue that Highway's novel implicitly encourages a reading of it as tragedy – insofar as its plot follows the structure of classical tragedy, as I show throughout the rest of this chapter – this reading still fits with the general method of this dissertation to approach texts on their own terms. In order to ensure that I continue to do this throughout, I frequently explain how the novel fits into Aristotelian tragedy before interpreting the significance of the events that make up this structure.

It is worth acknowledging here that approaching the novel through this Aristotelian structural analysis will invite criticism that I am reproducing the Western colonial gaze that has plagued non-Indigenous criticism of Indigenous literatures. Particularly, critics coming out of the tradition of Indigenous literary nationalism might object that I am not “privileg[ing] internal cultural readings” (10) as Jace Weaver – invoking Craig Womack – suggests Settler critics

should approach Indigenous literatures. They might further suggest that when I centralize Aristotle, I risk reading Highway without “respect and a sense of responsibility to Native community” (Weaver 11). Indeed, these criticisms may be valid. I could have analyzed the novel primarily through its use of the Cree language, which I do at times, or through Cree understandings of storytelling, which I have not done. Such a reading would more obviously centralize Highway’s and *Kiss*’s Creeness as essential factors. However, I believe that I have respected Highway’s agency here rather than simply relying on an *a priori* assumption that Aristotelian criticism is relevant to *Kiss*. I have done so by showing how the novel itself suggests the formal reading I offer, by starting from what Highway says in establishing the premise that Highway’s understanding of fiction is at least somewhat influenced by Aristotle, and by mobilizing Cree linguistic analysis and the political histories relevant to the novel in making my argument.

The novel also suggests how we might read it via its two epigraphs. The first, “*Use your utmost endeavours to dissuade the Indians from excessive indulgence in the practice of dancing*” (ix; emphasis original) is from a circular distributed by Duncan Campbell Scott, then “Deputy Superintendent General of the Department of Indian Affairs” (ix), in 1921. This epigraph helps us to situate the *cause* of some parts of Champion-Jeremiah’s tragic falls, broadly the restrictions placed on Indigenous communities by colonization and residential school policy. In light of this epigraph, this chapter focuses on changes in artistic expression motivated by residential schooling and settler colonialism.

The second epigraph is from Dr. Henry Smith’s translation of a speech given by “Chief Seattle of the Squamish” (ix) in 1853: “*At night, when the streets of your cities and villages are silent, they will throng with the returning hosts that once filled them, and still love this beautiful*

*land. The whiteman will never be alone. Let him be just and deal kindly with my people. For the dead are not powerless*” (ix; emphasis original). There has been some critical attention to this quotation as suggesting a way to read the content of the novel, particularly as it pertains to Dancer-Gabriel’s death. This chapter pivots to considering Chief Seattle’s quotation in relation to the murdered Indigenous women who haunt the novel.

A brief introduction to this criticism helps to situate this chapter’s reading. For example, Rachid Belghiti argues, conflating the real René Highway and his fictional parallel Dancer-Gabriel,<sup>51</sup> that “René’s [ghost] [. . .] returns to claim that ‘the [Indigenous] dead are not powerless’ as the Chief Seattle of the Squamish says in the second epigraph of the novel” (“Choreography, Sexuality, and the Indigenous Body” 7). Rubelise Cunha argues that “The epigraph by Chief Seattle of the Squamish stresses that Indigenous people will never leave their land, Mother Earth, even when dead. [. . .] Gabriel is not powerless after his death, since the Fur Queen takes him to the spiritual realm” (114-5). Diana Brydon asserts that the novel “proves the truth of [Chief Seattle’s] statement through moments that erupt through the narrative that follows” (“Experimental Writing” 47). Caitlin Iles posits that “It is through Gabriel’s death that Highway’s epigraphical quotation by Chief Seattle of the Squamish [. . .] is realized, for Gabriel’s death will have a ripple of positive effects on the Aboriginal community as a whole” (73).

All of this criticism is useful for understanding Dancer-Gabriel’s death as a marker of reconciliation in the sense that this death potentially leads other characters toward new forms of conciliatory relations within and between Indigenous communities. It is striking, however, that

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<sup>51</sup> The characters are referred to variously by English translations of their Cree names (Dancer and Champion), by their Christian names (Gabriel and Jeremiah) and by hyphenated versions of the two. I have chosen to use the hyphenated versions throughout, as they acknowledge all parts of their experience and are unlikely to cause confusion.

so much of this criticism focuses on Dancer-Gabriel, but not on the other deaths and ghosts in the novel. Death is omnipresent in the novel, and the fact that those that have died remain a presence in the novel is signalled early, when the narrator explains that “Champion would have had ten older siblings but for TB, pneumonia, and childhood ailments, Mariesis explained to an uncomprehending Champion” (24). These dead children never appear as characters, but this seemingly throwaway line establishes their presence in the novel. Further, *Kiss* is populated with ghosts, most frequently those of murdered Indigenous women and girls, and these ghosts have major impacts on the novel that cannot be ignored. Thus, this chapter extends the conversation around Chief Seattle’s epigraph by briefly analyzing the impact of the novel’s other ghosts. Such a reading approaches death in the novel at a structural, rather than individual, level, which helps to clarify a generalizable method of reconciliation. That is, Chief Seattle’s epigraph helps us to understand how the tragic falls might be remedied in their aftermath.

This novel suggests several more intertexts: Champion-Jeremiah’s play *Ulysses Thunderchild* references *Ulysses* by James Joyce; Homer’s *Odyssey*; and the Cree story of the Son of Ayash (Highway *Kiss* 277). Further, the novel’s protagonists attend the “Wasaychigan Hill Pow Wow” (241), which takes place on the fictional reserve on which three of Highway’s plays (*Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, *Rose*, and *The Rez Sisters*) are set. In addition, both “Jeremiah” and “Gabriel” as names have Biblical resonances. While understanding these texts certainly helps us to understand the novel, this chapter will primarily focus on Aristotle and secondarily on the two epigraphs as theoretical models for reading the text because they are most specifically relevant to this dissertation’s task. More work can and should be done, however, in understanding the novel in terms of its broader intertextuality.

This chapter is divided into seven parts. This introduction is Part One. I explain Champion-Jeremiah's falls with respect to himself and his community in Parts Two and Three, respectively. Such explanations indicate how harm has been done to Champion-Jeremiah, which impacts how he must reconcile with himself and his community, a process that Part Four analyzes. Parts Five and Six analyze the fall of the relationship between the Cree and Settler communities, then evaluate their potential for reconciliation. I then conclude in part Seven by combining the lessons of the first six parts of the chapter into a general method of Reconciliation and identifying where this method breaks off from that articulated by the TRC. In Highway's novel, ostensibly peaceful relations between Indigenous peoples and Settlers always re-inscribe colonial power relations and therefore do not constitute reconciliation. The novel instead suggests that, if any reconciliation is possible in the Settler state, it is within and between Indigenous communities, divorced from any colonial gaze.

### *3.2: Champion-Jeremiah's Individual Tragic Fall*

Before analyzing each of the tragic falls that I take up in this chapter, it is useful to define briefly what a tragic fall is and who is subject to such falls. Aristotle argues that the subject of the tragedy "is one of those people with a great reputation and good fortune" (16). The novel's opening points to Champion-Jeremiah and Dancer-Gabriel's family as one of "good reputation." The boys' father, Abraham Okimasis, is the "winner of the 1951 Millington Cup World Championship Dog Derby [. . .], the first Indian to win this gruelling race in its twenty-eight-year history'" (6). While this fact on its own may not qualify the family as worthy of renown, the novel's narration subsequently and subtly makes this case, referring to Abraham as a "Cree *gentleman* from Eemanapiteepitat, Manitoba, caribou hunter *without equal*, *grand champion of the world*" (9; emphasis added) and "the *king* of all the legions of dog-mushers" (11; emphasis

added). The narrator also references an anthropologist's evaluation that their mother, Mariesis, had "cheekbones" the like of which he had "never in all his travels [. . .] seen" (17), and Abraham's assertion that she was the most beautiful woman in the world (18). In the context of this text, this is no ordinary family.

Even beyond the accomplishments of the elder Okimasises,<sup>52</sup> the family name itself implies a high position. According to Arok Wolvengrey's dictionary, "*okimāw*"<sup>53</sup> means "chief, leader, head person, man of high position; king; boss; one's superior" (151). "*Okimasis*" would be the diminutive form of this noun.<sup>54</sup> Wolvengrey's dictionary defines "*okimāsis*" as "little chief, boss" (151) and several other synonyms. This surname fits the family perfectly into Aristotle's definition of the subject of tragedy as a man between two extremes, neither strictly "decent" nor "wicked," (16) but rather, as above, a good but imperfect man brought down by some internal or external problem. The family is not one from the highest possible position, but is a respectable one of some renown.

Further, Champion-Jeremiah establishes himself as a man of good repute independently of his familial ties, both in the city and on the Reserve. At home, he is seen by both the local Priest and his parents as a candidate for the Priesthood (190). While the idea of this job as one of "good repute" is complicated given the text's depiction of sexual assault by Priests and the

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<sup>52</sup> I have chosen here to use the English method of pluralization (addition of "es"), rather than the Cree method of pluralizing animate nouns (addition of "ak" or "uk" depending on dialect and method of converting Cree words into Roman Orthography). I have done so because the novel italicizes Cree words, but it does not italicize Cree names. I therefore treat the word as an English one with Cree etymology, and use the rules of English syntax, while using my knowledge of the Cree language to analyze it.

<sup>53</sup> The long ā in Wolvengrey as opposed to the short a in Highway's novel is likely to just be a variant spelling based on dialect. Wolvengrey's dictionary does not have an entry for "*okimaw*" or "*okimasis*" with the short a, but the Online Cree Dictionary lists the former as a dialectical equivalent of "*okimāw*" ("Online Cree Dictionary").

<sup>54</sup> In addition to Wolvengrey's dictionary and the Online Cree Dictionary, I would also like to acknowledge Dorothy Thunder, who has been my Cree teacher in Cree language courses through the Faculty of Native Studies at the University of Alberta, as well as my classmates in these courses. Any errors are my own.

general impact of Catholicism on Indigenous peoples, *it is* considered a good role by the Priest, for obvious reasons, and by his parents, who remain dedicated to their Catholicism (190). In the city, his piano teacher predicts that he will win the prestigious Crookshank Memorial Trophy (101) for his piano-playing, which he later does (214). Not only is this victory a sign of significant artistic success within Settler society, but it places him in an elevated position as a member of the urban Indigenous community, with the Fur Queen (in one of the various forms she takes during the course of the novel) telling him that he “‘make[s] [her] so proud to be a fuckin’ Indian’” (216). Thus, we can infer based on his family history and his own accomplishments that Champion-Jeremiah is the kind of character that might be the subject of a tragedy, being a man of good, but not necessarily perfect, repute. After his tragic fall, these are the terms on which we will be able to see how he is hurt and, subsequently, how he might heal.

We must next establish how his tragic fall happens. Aristotle lays out three parts of a tragedy that relate directly to the tragic subject.<sup>55</sup> The first is the “reversal” which “is a change of the actions to their opposite, as we said, and that, as we are arguing, in accordance with probability or necessity” (14). A classical example of the reversal is in the Oedipus story, in which “the man who comes to bring delight to Oedipus, and to rid him of his terror about his mother, does the opposite by revealing who Oedipus is” (Aristotle 14). The second part is recognition, which “is a change from ignorance to knowledge, and so to either friendship or enmity ” (14). The preceding example of reversal from the Oedipus story is also a moment of recognition. Aristotle asserts that a third part is suffering, which is “a destructive or painful action, e.g. deaths in full view, agonies, woundings, etc.” (15). Each of these three parts of the

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<sup>55</sup> Aristotle also lays out the structural elements of tragedy, which this chapter leaves aside. This decision is made partially in favour of a closer content-based reading, resulting in a deeper, but narrower analysis. Further work on the structural elements of tragedy in this novel would, however, be fruitful.

classical tragedy can be accounted for with respect to each of *Kiss of the Fur Queen*'s tragic falls.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Champion-Jeremiah's tragic fall in his relationship to himself – that is, the events that cause him to fall into despair and individual trauma – begins in residential school, and has to do with his musical education. Before discussing the recognition, reversal, and suffering resulting from residential schooling and Western musical education, it is worth considering what happens to Champion-Jeremiah that sets up the novel's tragedy. Prior to Champion-Jeremiah's enrolment in residential school (51), the implied reader learns that the Okimasis family has a long tradition of musical performance, and Champion-Jeremiah is in a position to take up that legacy: "Abraham knew that his son was singing for him. For wasn't it his greatest pride to have finally sired a child with a gift for the making of music, one to whom he could pass on his father's, his grandfather's, and his great-grandfather's legacy?" (27).

When Champion-Jeremiah first arrives at residential school, it is music that makes him comfortable in the institution, and the school nurtures his musical gift, extending the family legacy and evidently impacting his later artistic success. This apparent goodness is one of the factors that makes *Kiss* so difficult to analyze. It does not allow for an uncomplicated version of good or bad relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in any moment. Indeed, as Mark Shackleton notes, "the novel is also generous in acknowledging that a white education can open doors that might otherwise be closed – in Highway's case the gift of classical music" ("Native North American Writing" 73). Shackleton here alludes to Highway's assertion about his childhood experience, which serves as a clear parallel between his life and Champion-Jeremiah's: "At age seven I left the paradise that is northern Manitoba to go to boarding school. That's what I call it because, for me, it was a positive experience. Because of the practically



Jesuit-style regimented education that I got at that school, for one thing, I enjoy a thriving international career” (Highway *A Tale of Monstrous Extravagance* 19).<sup>56</sup>

However, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, one does not need to uncritically read this text through Highway’s biography or through his own comments. That is, in the *fictionalization* of these events, the novel shows us the harmful impact of residential school. This is not to say that the school has no beneficial impact, but it is to say that we have to evaluate the causal structure of the text as it stands. As Sophie McCall argues, Highway’s novel “suggest[s] the necessity and value of mobilizing a range of approaches in order to address the multiple, contradictory, and ongoing effects of colonialism” (64). Furthermore, we can account for the Highway’s positive description of his particular experience and also the harmful aspects of his characters’ experience through considering Aristotle’s definition of the poet cited above. That is, if the poet differs from the historian in relating what might have happened based on laws of probability, then our understanding of the harmful impact of residential schooling in *Kiss* is actually strengthened. Parts of Highway’s specific experience were positive, in his parlance cited above, but that experience was not generalizable.<sup>57</sup> It was not, to put it differently, the most *likely* outcome. The most likely outcome is, instead, what we see in Highway’s fiction: an experience that had positive *aspects*, but created long-term harmful impacts both in terms of individual trauma and in terms of generally strengthening the effects of settler colonialism. And that the

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<sup>56</sup> I attended the Kreisel Lecture in which Highway made this claim and, to my ear, he seemed absolutely sincere. The seeming matter-of-factness of the statement is not, therefore, strictly a result of its rendering into text.

<sup>57</sup> I use the term “positive” here only to mirror Highway’s use of that term in his Kreisel lecture. I am discomforted by the way that testimonies to positivity have been misused to assert that residential school policy was generally good, like Senator Lynn Beyak’s recent assertions that the schools were well-intentioned, and that positive experiences greatly outweighed abuses (Tasker n. pag). However, as Highway’s novel (as well as many others, and other artistic responses, and other histories of the schools) shows, that some students experienced some benefit from their experience in the schools does not imply that the schools had an overall positive impact.

experience initially seems positive deepens Champion-Jeremiah's sense of betrayal when things start to go wrong at the school.

Before moving on with this analysis of Champion-Jeremiah in particular, it is worth noting that this reading follows the TRC's narrativization of residential schooling fairly closely. That is, the TRC does not uncritically present strictly harmful or beneficial impacts of residential schooling, but instead gives some space for both. While, as I argue in this dissertation's first chapter, the TRC presents a strong case that residential schooling was genocidal, they also do acknowledge beneficial aspects and experiences. For example, they discuss success in sport (TRC *Canada's Residential Schools: The History, Part 1* 360-6; *Part 2* 463-77; *The Survivors Speak* 189-96) and art (TRC *Canada's Residential Schools: The History, Part 2* 478-84), and relationships between students and individual student successes that came at least partially as a result of what success the schools had in actual education (TRC *The Survivors Speak* 185-8). These successes are not presented as being generalizable, but keep the TRC's historiography intellectually honest – Survivors testified to these impacts, so it would be dishonest to exclude them from the record. Beneficial things happened in the schools, but they were structurally genocidal and overall not designed to create good outcomes. Like in Highway's novel, residential schools produced some mixed outcomes with an overall negative impact on Indigenous peoples. Highway and the TRC both point to the notion of ambivalence here. As Homi Bhabha argues, the colonial project produces ambivalence via the production of cultural hybridity (154). That is, colonial projects like residential schooling, which produce Indigenous colonial subjects with at least some Western values, produce simultaneous love and hate in their subjects. Highway points to the positive impact of residential schooling in his lectures, but also

writes texts that explicitly suggest that residential schooling was a site of trauma. The TRC does the same in acknowledging both harm and benefit in their Final Report.

Returning the novel, Champion-Jeremiah's reversal happens in two parts. The first part of this reversal happens when he starts to learn to play the piano. We would expect, based on the above evidence, that this would be a sign of a beneficial development: his family has a musical legacy that he is expected to uphold, and the residential school is not just going to allow this to happen, but encourage it. As is often the case in this novel, though, reality is not as simple as expectation. As Sarah Wylie Krotz argues:

Jeremiah's shifting relationship to classical piano provides an index of the challenges of transculturation. His rejection and ultimate reconfiguration of the art form emphasize the ways in which music is embedded in the oppressive framework of empire and its divisive hierarchies. However, music manifests a plurality of meanings in the novel, the interplay of which captures the tensions of Jeremiah's (and arguably also Highway's) postcolonial existence. (183)

That is, for our purposes, while Champion-Jeremiah's experience in residential school is improved by his playing the piano, it also leads directly to at least one scene of suffering. Here again is the notion of colonial ambivalence cited above.

The scene itself happens due to Champion-Jeremiah's desire to continue this legacy. During his first year at Birch Lake residential school, Champion-Jeremiah declares to Father Lafleur that he wants to learn to play the piano after hearing the church organ (64-5). He does so because, as Krotz points out, "[a]lthough its rhythms and textures may be unfamiliar, the music immediately makes sense to him and brings him pleasure" (187). He convinces the priest that he

has some musical talent by singing a song he composed back on the Reserve (66), and this starts his Western musical education.

It is this musical education that initiates the reversal that precipitates Champion-Jeremiah's tragic fall. What happens in residential school does not independently explain this fall, though. Indeed, while he is in school, he works with the other students in artistic productions (76-7) that are perhaps sad, and perhaps part of their religious education, but do not on their own seem to produce any harmful individual effect.<sup>58</sup> Instead, the shift (reversal) that is a direct result of his learning the piano comes to fruition when he moves to Winnipeg after finishing his tenure in residential school. Here, Lola van Beethoven teaches him, and she dictates his practice regimen for him: "Five hours a day, six days a week, Jeremiah. Practice, practice, practise" (101). While it is tempting to read his musical education as simply autobiographical, a representation of what Highway likely had to do to become as good a pianist as he is now, it is the *intention* of the practice that matters here.

That is, while his musical education in residential school was apparently fulfilling, and allowed him the space to creatively articulate himself in conjunction with other students, his practice in the city is essentially solitary and intended for further solitude. Here, he is aiming at the recital that we see later in the text, a competitive rather than collaborative space in which he stands alone, the individual artistic genius. His practice regimen expressly disallows the kind of interaction to which his prior practice led:

Sitting bolt upright, staring straight ahead, Jeremiah tried to appear as though he was on his way somewhere – dinner *with* rock-musician friends, a movie *with* a busty blonde, for

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<sup>58</sup> Although we do see a shift from the Cree culturally-relevant music he played before residential school to Western and Christian music here, and punishment for cultural expression (84-5). I will discuss this issue in the following section on Champion-Jeremiah's tragic separation from his culture.

God's sake, even bingo *with* his mother would do! – when in fact he had absolutely nowhere to go. All that awaited him was a basement room on the north side of the city, with a bed, a dresser, and a moth-eaten old piano. (102-3; emphasis added).

Instead of relationships with others, Champion-Jeremiah has his solitary practice. This is a clear reversal of the set-up to his musical education, in which he is expected carry on the legacy of his family's musical tradition (27). In his home, the music is always played with other members of his family (42-4), never alone. This is a version of how Aristotle understands reversal, as “a change of the actions to their opposite” (14). Richard Janko further explains that the reversal results in “the reverse of what the characters (and often the audience) expect” (Aristotle 220). That is, as already noted, the novel sets up Champion-Jeremiah as a carrier of his family's musical legacy. Thus, for him to learn the piano in residential school would initially seem to lead him toward this legacy. Champion-Jeremiah himself creates this expectation when he understands the piano as like “The organ” (65) in his home community. An implied reader who is not familiar with the legacy of residential schooling would also have no reason to expect the music lessons to lead to trauma and isolation. However, the lessons lead him away from his family, practicing in isolation in the city rather than on the land, in harmony with his brother and the natural world, as he does before residential school (42-4).

Social isolation is perhaps not itself a tragedy, although it does produce some degree of suffering. McKegney notes, reading residential school history and memoirs together, that this isolation is a direct and intended consequence of residential school policy: “the institutional will was clearly to use such technologies to alienate the individual as completely as possible from social and familial ties and recreate him or her as a discrete, autonomous (albeit racially inferior

and undereducated) individual within the Canadian settler state” (““pain, pleasure, shame. Shame” n. pag).

The other two parts of the tragic fall are also present here. The recognition happens at the same time as the reversal: he recognizes the organ at the school as something that can help bring him from ignorance to knowledge, as he asks the Priest to teach him to play the piano (65). This is recognition in Aristotle’s sense: “A recognition, as the word implies, is a change from ignorance to knowledge” (14). Additionally, it follows one of the types of recognition that Aristotle discusses in *Poetics*: “The third [kind of recognition] is by means of a memory, when someone reacts to something he sees” (21). When Champion-Jeremiah sees the organ, it reminds him of the organ in his community (Highway 65) and when he hears the piano it brings to mind his first instrument: “He missed his accordion dearly” (64). Through this recognition, he realizes that continuing his musical education in the school is possible, even though it would not be in the same form as before, with the accordion. Additionally, the description of his practice is filled with expressions of new knowledge, like this sentence in which the primary denotative purpose seems to be information conveyance: “*Toccata*: the word is Italian for *touch*, the widow van Beethoven had embedded in her newest pupil’s memory that day” (100; emphasis original). Aristotle asserts that reversal and recognition should ideally be coincident with one another (14), so this parallelism fits with the general definition laid out in *Poetics*. The novel depicts Champion-Jeremiah undergoing a tragic fall as a result of residential school policy, resulting in his social isolation.

While there are many scenes of suffering in the novel, one such scene most clearly comes from the recognition and reversal laid out above. It is also the subtlest, and the one that has attracted the least critical attention. It is, however, a direct result of his urban musical education

and practice: “In Mrs. Slotkin’s basement, all that year, Jeremiah Okimasis practised the piano until his fingers bled” (107). While it is uncontroversial to assert that the development of musical prowess generally requires intense practice, this narration clearly indicates suffering in its description of the physical impact of the practice. We therefore have all of the necessary parts of Champion-Jeremiah’s tragic fall: he learns the piano (which is both reversal and recognition), which leads to his individual suffering at his own hands. The scene of reversal and recognition when he sees the piano leads him directly to this solitary work, which causes individual suffering. Without that recognition, he could not have become a piano player, and he therefore could not have ended up practicing himself to injury in Mrs. Slotkin’s basement. As indicated earlier, though, that this is tragic is predicated on his move from relational musical practice to individuality and isolation. This is not precisely how Aristotle lays out tragedy as a genre, so Highway’s novel here departs from *Poetics* somewhat. In what follows, then, I continue to use *Poetics* as a structural guide, but seek to understand the novel’s departures from strict Aristotelian tragedy as a way of strengthening our understanding of the effects of residential school and its possible remedies. Before discussing the Reconciliation that this tragedy requires, we must understand his tragic fall with respect to his relationship with his community and culture.

### *3.3: Fall of Champion-Jeremiah’s Relationship with his Community and Culture*

The individual scene of suffering cited in the prior paragraph comes *directly* after another scene of suffering that does not directly involve Champion-Jeremiah, but that he witnesses. From this scene we can infer that, while Champion-Jeremiah’s practice sessions indicate suffering at an individual level, the novel further contextualizes him within a broader context of settler colonial relations. On the preceding page, there is a description of an interaction that Champion-

Jeremiah saw a week before, in which four men ask a seemingly random woman if she “[wants] to go for a nice long ride” (106), followed by “brief verbal sparring” (106) and her “stepp[ing] into the roofless car” (106).

Champion-Jeremiah is uneasy with what he has witnessed. It turns out, his uneasiness was justifiable:

Gallantly, though not easily, Jeremiah left the episode behind him. Until, one week later, he thought he saw the woman’s picture on a back page of the *Winnipeg Tribune*: the naked body of Evelyn Rose McCrae – long-lost daughter of Mistik Lake – had been found in a ditch on the city’s outskirts, a shattered beer bottle lying gently, like a rose, deep inside her crimson-soaked sex. Jeremiah would report the image he had seen splashed across Mr. Ashkenazy’s grand piano. But the Winnipeg police paid little heed to the observations of fifteen-year-old Indian boys. (106-7)

This passage has both structural and content-based implications for a matrix of harm that includes Champion-Jeremiah and Evelyn Rose McCrae. Structurally, that the two scenes of suffering are narrated so close together suggests a narratological association, although not necessarily a causal relation. That is, we understand these two scenes as having some relation because we read about them together, but we cannot prove a causal relationship – Champion-Jeremiah’s piano practice does not *cause* Evelyn Rose McCrae’s death. That the image is “splashed cross Mr. Ashkenazy’s grand piano” (107), though, suggests that relationship between the two is undeniable. As Krotz points out: “This association [between music and sexualized colonial power relations] intensifies in Winnipeg, where it becomes impossible to separate classical music from some of the most destructive elements of Canada’s colonial culture” (190).



Simply reading the content of these scenes rather than their structure, however, helps strengthen our understanding of this association. Champion-Jeremiah sees the lead-up to McCrae's death. He feels uneasy, but he cannot stop it from happening, nor can he help enact justice in the aftermath. He cannot do so, at least in part, because of the colonial relationship between policing and Indigenous peoples: he reports what he sees and is ignored, not because his observations are invalid in any meaningful sense, but because the police are not inclined to believe him due to the intersection of his young age and his racialized position. He is just one of many "fifteen-year-old Indian boys" (107). He is caught up in a colonial relationship that does not directly enact this specific bodily violence, but allows for the conditions under which it happens, and cannot enact justice. The police believing him would not have stopped this individual violence from happening, but the fact that they do not hinders justice in the aftermath.

As Jennifer Henderson points out, this rape and others in the text are "references to a documented history of racist sexual violence. Rape, in this case, is not a figure for colonialism but one specific form that its violence takes" ("Something not unlike enjoyment" 196-7).<sup>59</sup> Mark Shackleton similarly argues that "[r]ape is associated both with terrible trauma on the individual level, and with linguistic and cultural destruction, a ruthless genocide, on the suprapersonal level" ("Language and Resistance" 215).

Understanding Champion-Jeremiah's position in a matrix of harm as a relational tragic fall is somewhat intuitive on a surface level, although it departs from Aristotelian tragedy. Aristotle lays out tragedy in terms of the individual harm of a good, but flawed, tragic subject. Champion-Jeremiah *is* individually harmed, as I laid out in the previous section, but his

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<sup>59</sup> The description of McCrae's death also not-so-subtly alludes to Helen Betty Osborne's real-life murder. Highway describes the case in his Kreisel Lecture, noting that she "was murdered by being stabbed in the vagina fifty-six times with a screwdriver" (Highway *A Tale of Monstrous Extravagance* 7).

individual harm is inextricable from his separation from his community. In this way, Highway's novel extends Aristotelian tragedy and reconfigures a notion of harm in the wake of residential schooling. Champion-Jeremiah and McCrae are part of a broader urban Indigenous community, so the fact that their community cannot protect them certainly suggests that something is amiss. Understanding it as a fall, however, requires us to move back in the text chronologically, understanding the relationship Champion-Jeremiah has to his community initially, then identifying what creates the break in relations – the reversal. We therefore must go back to our structural work, understanding the way the text works as tragedy. As we do so, it will become apparent that McCrae's suffering is only one of many that we have to understand in order to conceptualize this part of the tragedy.

If we are to understand a rupture in Indigenous community relations as a tragic fall, we must take earlier intra-community relations as a starting point. The novel's second and third chapters give a harmonious, if not necessarily idyllic, depiction of Champion-Jeremiah's birth and early interactions with his community. He comes from a stable, loving Cree family of some renown (as discussed above). This is a postcontact space, so we do get some hints about community fractures caused by colonialism, especially those caused by missionary activity.<sup>60</sup> For example, during Dancer-Gabriel's baptism, his godmother (Annie) objects to his being given a Christian name, to which the Priest replies that ““women are not to speak their minds inside the church”” (37). This most obviously points to Catholic restrictions on placing women in authoritative roles, but also suggests an early fracture in the community: Annie's objection to Christianity taking precedence over Indigenous practices is silenced, and nobody defends her

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<sup>60</sup> This is not intended to set up a dichotomy between a fictional idealized pre-contact space in which Indigenous peoples had no problems, but simply to note that this a space touched with the effects of colonialism, which come with particular kinds of community fractures.

position. This community is therefore not without its fractures already, with these fractures caused at least partially by colonial and missionary activity. However, Annie's speaking up does imply that the community's practices can remain intact and be defended in this space. And that she switches to speaking Cree right after to continue her complaint, and is not silenced,<sup>61</sup> further suggests this persistence of Cree culture, belief, and community.

We know also that Champion-Jeremiah's family is loving and protective, despite having limited power. When they send him to residential school despite Mariesis' objections, Abraham says: "“What Father Bouchard wants, I guess,” he finally admitted, wishing dearly that he had some say in the matter” (40). Their single comfort is that, even away from the community, Champion-Jeremiah will have family around (47). To summarize, then, this community is one in which kinship ties remain strong, culture is defended, but the effects of settler colonialism are clear. We can think of it, then, as a communal version of Aristotle's subject of tragedy: it is strong, but imperfect. This imperfection is at least in part a result of settler colonialism, as is clear from the novel's discussions of the impact of Christianity. This essential goodness, but imperfection, makes it an unconventional, but still possible, tragic subject.

We can read the act of sending Champion-Jeremiah to residential school and his experience in the residential school itself as a reversal. First, when it comes time to send the boy to school, at seven years old, Abraham explains the requirement in terms of legality: ““*Soonie-gimow*'s [the Indian Agent's] orders, Father Bouchard says. It is the law”” (40). Sending him to the school, then, is conceived in part as an act of protection: if the family does not send him, it will become threatened by settler colonial law. To send him to the school is to place him in a

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<sup>61</sup> She says ““*Nee, tapwee sa awa aymeegimow,*”” (37), which Highway translates as “sheesh, the nerve of this priest” (309). Father Bouchard, the Priest, lets this go, despite the fact that he does speak Cree, though admittedly “a Cree so mangled it might have been German, Chinese, and Swahili” (190).

space that should theoretically protect him from state violence. It is a transfer from the protection of the community to the protection of the State.

We know from reading the TRC report and other texts about residential schools, though, that the schools were *not* adequate at protecting their charges from violence. And indeed, the school in *Kiss* does not protect Champion-Jeremiah or anybody else. In this sense, it is a tragic reversal: Champion-Jeremiah goes to residential school in part to protect him from state violence, but it is there that he first becomes subject to this violence. The trauma that results at individual and collective levels therefore constitutes a kind of “betrayal trauma.” As Jennifer J. Freyd explains: “Betrayal is the violation of implicit or explicit trust. The closer and more necessary the relationship, the greater the degree of betrayal. Extensive betrayal is traumatic” (9). The Okimasises send their children to residential school partially because they have to, and partially because they implicitly trust the Church (40). When Dancer-Gabriel is abused (78-9) and the school fails in its duties of care and education, then, the injury is one of betrayal trauma.

A counter-argument to this claim is that this experience is not necessarily generalizable. We cannot blame the State itself for the actions of a sexual predator. This counter-argument fails for two reasons. First, as alluded to earlier, the text’s status as fiction means that we have to read it as presenting a generalizable, rather than specific, experience. If I am to take seriously my responsibility to listen to Indigenous peoples that I lay out elsewhere, I must start from the premise that Highway, as a Survivor, is trustworthy in his judgment about residential schools as presented in this text.

If the theoretical argument is unsatisfying, though, the TRC gives us historical context. We know, as I noted in the first chapter, that school administrators ignored the fact that the schools were breeding grounds for disease and were literally creating the conditions by which

Indigenous children's death rates skyrocketed. Moreover, we know that school administration tacitly accepted sexual assault in the schools, and indeed were structured such that this result was inevitable. For example, the TRC argues, in a moment of historiography rather than simple chronicle, that "The federal government's determination to have as cheap an Indian policy as possible, coupled with the church's drive to enrol and convert as many children as possible, meant that the schools were sites of hunger, overwork, danger and disease, limited education, and in tens of thousands of cases, physical, sexual, and psychological abuse and neglect" (TRC *Canada's Residential Schools: The History, Part 1* 131). They argue additionally that:

The fact that there were few police investigations into these abuses, or criminal prosecutions of perpetrators, during the period of time that the schools were in operation is yet one more sign of the failure of the federal government to take its responsibility towards Aboriginal children seriously. For the churches or the government to say that they did not know about the extent of abuse amounts to an admission of a failure to properly manage the institutions under their control. Those who were aware of the abuse and failed to intervene appropriately were complicit in the abuse. (TRC *Canada's Residential Schools: The History, Part 2* 400)

Thus, if we take seriously the TRC's conclusions about sexual abuse, we must read sending a child to the Schools to protect them from State violence as a tragic reversal. As Highway's novel suggests, the act of sending children to residential schools should have protected the community from violence insofar as the law demanded it under threat of penalty. Because it is not clear that the Okimasises knew that the schools would be abusive, they had a reasonable expectation that their children would be protected. While the parents are indeed protected from legal ramifications, the schools directly harmed the children.

However, since part of this dissertation's method is to listen to, but also evaluate the TRC's claims rigorously, it is worth noting the specific evidence that validates these claims. As a summary of evidence, the TRC notes that abusers were frequently fired instead of being prosecuted, officials did not always report abuse that they observed, and when abuse was reported it was "often not fully or properly investigated" (TRC *Canada's Residential Schools: The History, Part 2* 412). Given that abuse was not taken seriously in the schools in general, then, we must read abuse in the schools as the state's responsibility. Not only are these claims about the residential school system's approach to sexual abuse valid, but the government approach of concealment continues into the present day. When the TRC requested documentation relating to all residential school abuse convictions, they were rebuffed, and told that the Government does not maintain a list of convictions, despite the fact that "In the 2013 court proceedings that considered claims in relation to the St. Anne's residential school in Fort Albany, Ontario, it became apparent that Canada does, in fact maintain records relating to residential school convictions" (TRC *Canada's Residential Schools: The History, Part 2* 412). That the government still conceals these records lends legitimacy to one of this dissertation's main premises: we cannot consider reconciliation as just a matter of redress after residential schools, because the schools were a symptom of ongoing structural genocide, not an unfortunate departure from an otherwise peaceful history. Thus, we must read Champion-Jeremiah's experience as generalizable, not just for residential school experience, but also for the experience of Indigenous peoples under settler colonialism. State violence is the most likely outcome of relations between Indigenous peoples and the Government in Canada. *Kiss* and the TRC start from similar historical premises, but arrive at different conclusions about reconciliation, which I lay out in the latter part of this chapter.

Not only is sending Champion-Jeremiah to residential school a tragic reversal in terms of his relationship to community, but so too is his actual experience in the school. To think about this issue, we must return to his musical education. As discussed above, Champion-Jeremiah learning to play piano in the school makes him comfortable, but it does not protect him. We might expect his music to protect him in two ways, for a variety of reasons. First, as discussed above, his family already has a musical legacy, which learning the piano would ostensibly allow him to continue. In theory, this should bring him closer to his family. Second, learning classical piano, as he does in the school, might afford him a degree of protection in colonial Canada at large, insofar as it gives him a viable skill that leads to some success. This success is assimilatory, but “successful” assimilation might at least protect him from certain discourses of savagery or Indigenous inferiority. Thus, while it might bring him away from his family, depending on his later actions, it might also give him a new “community” in settler colonial society. This expectation is reasonable in part because of what Highway himself says about residential schools, cited above.

However, given what happens away from the school, Champion-Jeremiah’s experience clearly constitutes a tragic reversal in the sense that it tears him away from any possible community ties. We can see this through a close reading of four scenes as scenes of recognition. The first is one already mentioned in passing in this chapter. During a break from the School, Dancer-Gabriel starts to testify to his parents about the sexual abuse that occurs in the school, although he does not consciously understand what he is doing: “‘Do “*machipowamoowin*”<sup>62</sup> mean what Father Lafleur do to the boys at school?’ Although he wanted to tickle his brother with this light-hearted joke [ . . . ]” (91). Instead of taking this as an opportunity to invoke the

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<sup>62</sup> Highway’s glossary in the back of *Kiss* translates this term as “bad dream power (a very powerful term)” (308). The grammatical error in the quotation (“do” instead of “does”) is in the original.

community protection that we know is available based on earlier sections of the novel, Champion-Jeremiah refuses to explain the comment to his parents, claiming that “‘Even if we told them, they would side with Father Lafleur’ (91) and, when pressed by his mother, simply saying “‘*Maw keegway.*’ Nothing” (91). Based on his experience up to this point, Champion-Jeremiah assumes that his community is unwilling or incapable of protecting him due to an assumption that the Priests are necessarily correct or morally superior. This is a scene of recognition in that Champion-Jeremiah now can see the new social relations created by the reversal in the school. The school has not protected him, but rendered him entirely without protection.

Whether Champion-Jeremiah is correct in his assessment of the situation is both unknowable and irrelevant, because his believing it causes the separation I argue for here. But it is perhaps worth noting that, even if his parents did believe him, they likely would have been powerless to protect him from a legal standpoint for two reasons. First, had they not returned him to the school, they would have been legally in the wrong because “The 1894 *Indian Act* amendments made parents who did not return truants to school subject to prosecution” (TRC *Canada’s Residential Schools: The History, Part I* 583). And second, had they filed a complaint, it likely would not have helped because, as Champion-Jeremiah anticipated, there was a tendency for the government to believe principals above all else, including students, parents, inspectors and Indian Agents (TRC *Canada’s Residential Schools: The History, Part I* 545-6).

When he gets to Winnipeg, Champion-Jeremiah has two related scenes of recognition involving Amanda Clear Sky that suggest that his education has also left him without protection in his new urban community. The first is during and after a presentation in his high school history class. After making the claim that the French Revolution was “‘the most violent and



bloody [. . .] period in the his . . . tory. Of the world” (148), Amanda Clear Sky, an Ojibway student, disagrees and reminds him of the violent colonization of North America (148). The classroom space is contentious and racist, with one student referring to blood that spattered on Champion-Jeremiah as “warpaint” (147), and Amanda as “The Princess Pocahontas” (148). Champion-Jeremiah is only angry at Amanda in this moment, though, confronting her after class (149), which leads to her arguing that the other students were trying to make a fool of him, whereas she was trying to help (149-50). Like in his home community, Champion-Jeremiah has help available to him here, this time from an Indigenous student from a different nation, but he rejects this help because now his priority is not being embarrassed academically. He does recognize that he needs some help, and tries to talk to Dancer-Gabriel, but ultimately finds himself alone (150).

Shortly thereafter, Champion-Jeremiah has a more obvious scene of recognition, this time seemingly by accident. He stumbles on a pow wow, and his reaction summarizes his feelings about Indigeneity at this point in the novel: “What he saw took him by surprise. For where pews should have been – with mutts in choirboy regalia singing praise to the good God on high – bobbed a church of feather-tufted dancers, while watching from the sides stood Indians civilized enough for jeans and other human dress such as T-shirts” (171). The rest of this scene, focalized through Champion-Jeremiah but narrated in the third person, further indicates that he sees Indigeneity as dead, past, savage. He calls what he sees “perverse” (172), refers to the pow wow as one of several “dead customs” (172), refers to those who dress in pow wow regalia as “Disney Indians” (173),<sup>63</sup> indicates that he does not “even know if [he] enjoy[s] being Cree” (174), calls the rest of the Indigenous people around him a “conquered race of people” (174),

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<sup>63</sup> This quotation is direct discourse from Jeremiah, not narration.

refers to himself as a “Cree captive” (175), and suggests he does not know what songs and dances have been lost to colonialism (175). In the space of the pow wow, everything he has been told about Indigeneity by colonial authorities is, in his estimation, proved correct.

When he leaves the pow wow, he makes clear what it is he recognizes in this space, which we might read as a scene of misrecognition. When Amanda Clear Sky’s grandmother makes reference to colonial evaluation that Indigenous dance practices were ““Devil worship,”” (176), Champion-Jeremiah responds to himself thusly: “Yes, Jeremiah thought, the nerve [of the grandmother]. And right on the money” (176). His moment of recognition is filtered through his colonial education. This is therefore both recognition and misrecognition: he incorrectly identifies as a non-member of this group, but he correctly recognizes himself as separated from this potential community. What he does not acknowledge is that he owes this separation to residential schooling’s success in convincing him of its inferiority. Because he believes in this inferiority, he cannot create a new community for himself as a member of an urban, multi-national Indigenous community.

However, he also cannot be a member of the Settler community. This community sees him as Indigenous, regardless of the internalized racism he learned at residential school. His musical prowess does not protect him from this separation, as we see at his recital. An extended quotation is necessary here to capture the depth of prejudice and racism to which he is subjected:

Pale white faces hovered, staring, probing, judging him. Just who the hell did this cheeky brown man imagine himself to be, walking to the spotlight with such a graceless gait, such an unmusicianly trundle? For since his fluke acceptance into the final round one week earlier, controversy had raged.

It was said, among the judges – being from England, they had to be excused their ignorance of facts aboriginal – that he was a Commanche Indian whose forebears had performed the chase scenes in the movie *Stagecoach*. Others claimed he was Apache and therefore a cousin to that drunken lout Geronimo. Still others claimed he came from the country's most remote and primitive hinterlands, where his father slaughtered wild animals and drank their blood in appeasement of some ill-tempered pagan deity. (211-12)

Here, despite his musical prowess, he remains an outsider. As Krotz argues, Champion-Jeremiah's public performance "becomes a spectacle onto which his white audience project their exotic fantasies about his Aboriginal heritage" (194). The members of the theoretical community set up by his musical education in residential school – Settler musicians – recognize him as an outsider, and misrecognize him in his particularity, so he cannot be part of this community either. Residential schooling, and settler colonial modes of thought in general, cause him to reject protection from an Indigenous community, and Settler communities to reject him. The limited beneficial possibilities of residential schools, which were afforded Highway, are not afforded Champion-Jeremiah.

Music gives Champion-Jeremiah a community in the residential school, however fraught that might be. It is also part of his community before he goes to the school. But here, rather than being part of a musical community, he is isolated. The difference is in the practice of music in the different spaces: at home, he performs music with his family, and in relation to the land. He plays music while Dancer-Gabriel dances, and the song apparently causes caribou to come to him (42-4). At the school, he performs music as part of plays (81-2). Here, though, he is part of a recital culture: he plays by himself, with no interaction with any living people except insofar as

they listen, but do not interact. The musical practice itself is non-community-based, and therefore parallels his isolation in the city at large.

Even before he wins the competition, though, we see Champion-Jeremiah's relationship to his community start to move toward a suffering stage. Just before the competition, Champion-Jeremiah fights with Dancer-Gabriel over the latter's homosexuality. Champion-Jeremiah's response to his brother spending a night with an older man, Greg, reveals another piece of the impact that residential school has had on him: "How can you let someone do what that disgusting old priest did to you? How can you seek out . . . people like that?" (207).<sup>64</sup> Champion-Jeremiah here conflates homosexuality and paedophilia in drawing a direct comparison between his brother's consensual relationship with Greg and the sexual abuse he suffered at the hands of the residential school Priest.

The description of the fight that ensues because of this conflict is extremely violent: "Jeremiah's hand hit Gabriel so hard his cheek, for a moment, turned pale" (207); "Jeremiah slammed Gabriel against the wall" (207); "Gabriel grabbed the wrist and flung it to the side with such force that Jeremiah reeled" (207). The fight produces a clear scene of suffering: "When the roaring in his ears subsided, Jeremiah was lying on the floor, Gabriel standing over him, his face smeared bloody" (207). We here see the success of the residential school project in creating a Christian subject. Because of the abuse they suffered in residential school, he cannot see Dancer-

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<sup>64</sup> There is an apparent irony here, in that Champion-Jeremiah retains his faith and trust in Christianity (183-5), despite tacitly acknowledging his brother's abuse at the hands of the Priest in the school. This apparent irony is comprehensible via the theory of betrayal trauma. As Freyd explains, when trauma occurs at the hands of somebody the victim *has* to trust, they tend not to lose their trust as a result of the trauma (11). That is, if it is too dangerous *not* to trust the victimizer, the survival response is to separate the abuse from this trust. Since the abuse happened when the boys were children in a place they could not have survived on their own, it is logical according to the theory of betrayal trauma that Champion-Jeremiah might retain his trust in Christian authority. Instead of associating the Church with pedophilia, he makes a connection between pedophilia and homosexuality.

Gabriel's sexual activity as anything but a continuation of that abuse. This both signals his belief in Catholicism, with its rejection of homosexuality,<sup>65</sup> and separates him from Dancer-Gabriel.

This scene also draws attention to music's place in this matrix of harm and separation. Toward the end of the fight scene, Dancer-Gabriel decides on what his ultimate goal will be in harming his brother: "I. Am gonna break your arm. You will never, ever play another note on that fucking piano" (208). At the end of a fight scene in which his brother has called him "sick" (208) and essentially implied that his lover is a paedophile, the most extreme harm Dancer-Gabriel can think to do is to make sure that Champion-Jeremiah's musical talent will be unusable. It is not familial separation, nor any other physical pain, but the pain of not being able to play the piano that will impact Champion-Jeremiah most profoundly, in his brother's estimation. His primary relationship is no longer the one he has with his family, but the one he has with his music. And because his practice is essentially isolating, we see that his tragic fall has rendered him an autonomous subject rather than a part of a community.

What Dancer-Gabriel says on the prior page reveals a larger implication of the harm that he is trying to enact: "You try too hard. At everything. You and those lily-white fingers. That's what you want, isn't it? To become a whiteman" (207). The specific reference to his fingers, combined with the context we already have (Champion-Jeremiah's obsessive practice routine) and what comes after (Dancer-Gabriel trying to make sure he cannot play the piano anymore) brings out a connection between whiteness and music. In Dancer-Gabriel's estimation, playing the piano is a "white" activity, one that places his brother in close relationship with the Settler community and consequently takes him away from Indigenous communities. To break his arm

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<sup>65</sup> I recognize that the current Pope has tried to temper the Church's stance on homosexuality ("The Pope Francis Statement That Changed the Church on LGBT Issues"). However, in discussing a novel published in 1998 and taking place in the 1980's, one cannot section off discourses of Catholicism and homophobia.

and stop his piano-playing, then, is to sever *that* connection. It may be the case that Champion-Jeremiah cannot be a member of his Indigenous community anymore, but he certainly cannot be a member of a Settler community if his piano-playing is taken away. Champion-Jeremiah starts this scene of suffering, but the suffering is multiplied because of the severed connection between the two brothers, resulting in Dancer-Gabriel's participation in creating further suffering.

We find out in the next chapter, after a time break of three months (209), that Dancer-Gabriel has been unsuccessful in killing his brother's musical potential.<sup>66</sup> However, the non-physical suffering continues. Champion-Jeremiah calls his brother to check if he would be attending the musical competition: "'So,' Jeremiah's voice was still scarred by grievous injury, 'you coming?'" (209). While the younger brother *was* planning on going, despite their conflict, he got the time wrong and had booked a concurrent plane ticket to move to Toronto with Greg. When this is revealed, Champion-Jeremiah makes a plea that reveals the extent of his familial and cultural separation: "'Gabriel,' pleaded Jeremiah, 'I've been working towards this for fifteen years. Mom and Dad and the rest of them, they're a thousand miles away. You're the only family I'm gonna have . . .'" (210). Dancer-Gabriel ultimately does not attend the recital because Greg refuses to change his plane ticket (210), then moves to Toronto, furthering the suffering that is familial separation.

After Dancer-Gabriel leaves, Champion-Jeremiah does seek new community. However, his options are somewhat limited. As I demonstrated above, participating in the multi-national urban Indigenous community is not an option due to his internalized racism and outright rejection of their practices. The Settler community is not an option due to that community's

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<sup>66</sup> Although he does have some effect, as we see at the beginning of Champion-Jeremiah's recital: "At first, the process was laborious. His left wrist still ached, though Gabriel, thank the living lord Jesus, had only sprained it. His constitution, moreover – of an athlete, a fisherman, the doctor had squeaked – had ensured that it sprang back to normal in no time flat" (212).

clear prejudices against him. Because his brother is not there to celebrate, he celebrates his victory in the bar where Dancer-Gabriel might have been had he not moved (215). Here, he experiences another self-recognition: “He had tried. Tried to change the meaning of his past, the roots of his hair, the colour of his skin, but he was one of them. What was he to do with Chopin? Open a conservatory on Eemanapiteepitat hill? Whip its residents into the Cree Philharmonic Orchestra?” (215). Unlike at the pow wow, he here recognizes himself as Indigenous, but he still does not validate his place in a community of Indigenous peoples. He is born into this community, but his education (in his estimation) means that he cannot participate in it. As I mention elsewhere in this chapter, Bhabha argues that the colonial project fundamentally produces hybrid subjects. Champion-Jeremiah is an example of this production of hybridity – he is not completely a part of either community. The residential school does not only produce ambivalence about the settler colonial state, it also creates ambivalence about Indigeneity. Champion-Jeremiah has some affection for this community, but has also expressed hatred for it in its cultural particularity, particularly in the pow wow scene cited above.

Insofar as he can be part of this community, though, it is necessarily a community of traumatized subjects. The first interaction he has in the bar is with Evelyn Rose McCrae, the dead woman he saw earlier in the novel just before her death (215). The second is with “Madeline Jeanette Lavoix, erstwhile daughter of Mistik Lake, skewered in the sex by fifty-six thrusts of a red-handled Phillips screwdriver, a rose of legend” (216). These women are, of course, both dead, having been killed by colonial violence that will, according to historical precedent, be unpunished.<sup>67</sup> If this is Champion-Jeremiah’s new urban community, it is a community of suffering.

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<sup>67</sup> This chapter, and this dissertation in general, does not have time to get into the now-ongoing inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). However, based on what we know about similar

As the next part of the novel begins, it briefly appears that Champion-Jeremiah's lot has improved since leaving music behind. He is now a social worker (222) working for the Indian Friendship Centre (221). While his work is depressing – apparently consisting mostly of “scraping” passed-out Indigenous people off the streets (221) – he is at least ostensibly a member of an urban Indigenous community. However, he is certainly not pleased with his life: “How much longer could he endure this . . . purgatory?” (221). Additionally, there are clear signs that addiction has tainted his life: “The van kicked to life, taking client 2,647 off into the dark February morning. His fingers stiffened to claws, gnarled from the cold, the twenty-six-year-old Cree social worker gulped from a flask” (222).

After a 16-page interlude in which the boys return to their Indigenous community for their father's death, Champion-Jeremiah's extended scene of suffering in which he is separated from a community comes to a head. He appears to his brother as a “ghost” (238), although he is not literally dead, begging for help. His ghostliness alludes back to the Chief Seattle epigraph: although he is not physically present, his existence impacts how his brother acts. Dancer-Gabriel decides to help him by taking him out of the city, but not before we get a brief, but evocative description of the state of Champion-Jeremiah's life: “He drank too much, ate and smoked too much, never twitched a muscle; in fact, he looked not unlike a sewer rat” (239). Dancer-Gabriel decides to bring him to a pow wow, which signals the transition from suffering to reconciliation in this altered structure of tragedy that I discuss further in the next section.

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inquiries (the TRC and RCAP most prominently), it seems unlikely that this inquiry will result in meaningful punishment. Notably, the MMIWG inquiry reproduces several limitations of the TRC, including its lack of legal power, and its mandate explicitly disallowing meaningful challenges to state power, instead aiming to improve conditions within the state structure, inasmuch as this is possible: “It has the mandate to educate the public, to facilitate healing of traumatized communities, *to restore public confidence in institutions that have been seriously damaged in the eyes of Canadians, and to make recommendations for actions and policy reform* [. . .]” (“Frequently Asked Questions”; emphasis added).



### 3.4: *Champion-Jeremiah's Reconciliations*

In this section I will consider Champion-Jeremiah's movement toward better individual health and community relations as a series of reconciliatory movements. I will discuss his personal and communal reconciliations together because, as will become apparent, the two are inextricable. This section sets up the conclusion of this chapter, in which I compare this series of reconciliatory actions to the way the TRC conceptualizes Reconciliation in its theorization (in the body of the Final Report) and in practice (in the Calls to Action).

When Champion-Jeremiah goes to his second pow wow, one might expect that he will reject what he sees there, based on his prior experience at the urban pow wow. However, Dancer-Gabriel's goal in bringing him there, "to thaw their cold war of thirteen years" (239), is brought to fruition, as I will elaborate below. Given this shift in the novel – from Champion-Jeremiah's slow descent into personal and communal tragedy to a rekindling of relationships and self-worth – we can read this scene as a secondary reversal. The initial reversal represented a shift from good to bad relations, which I have read as a tragic fall. This reversal mirrors part of the impact of residential school policy, as I cite McKegney asserting above. The TRC agrees, arguing:

Throughout its long history, the residential school system constituted an attack on the identity and vitality of Aboriginal children, Aboriginal families, Aboriginal languages, culture, and spirituality, and Aboriginal nations. As official records show, these impacts were not unfortunate by-products of a well-intentioned system. On the contrary, they were the predetermined and desired outcomes built right into the system from the outset. (TRC *Canada's Residential Schools: The History, Part 1* 162)

*Kiss* and the TRC are therefore largely in agreement about the impact of residential schooling as it pertains to indigenous community relations. The novel sets up its depiction of this impact through its tragic structure, which shows the way that residential schools are a reversal of what the community might have expected from residential schools, ultimately leading to Champion-Jeremiah's individual trauma and his separation from his community and culture.

This secondary reversal signals a shift from bad to better relations. The novel therefore follows the basic structure of reconciliation identified elsewhere in this dissertation – there is initial conciliation, followed by a break in conciliation (the first reversal), and something happens to return the involved parties to conciliatory relations (the second reversal). In this section, I identify this shift toward conciliatory relations as a break from Aristotelian tragedy toward what Hayden White terms comic reconciliation. In the chapter's last two sections, I compare the genre shift with respect to community relations to the absence of genre shift in the novel's depiction of relations between Indigenous peoples and Settlers.

That is, when Champion-Jeremiah begins to move toward new conciliatory relations, the novel shifts from an Aristotelian tragedy to a comedy. In *Metahistory*, White argues that contemporary historiography all fits into four archetypes, all of which are fundamentally literary forms: comedy, tragedy, romance, or satire (x). White explains that comedy and tragedy both “suggest the possibility of at least partial liberation from the condition of the Fall and provisional release from the divided state in which men find themselves in this world” (9). However, where the two forms differ is in the reconciliation that their conclusions offer. White asserts that “[i]n Tragedy, there are no festive occasions, except false or illusory ones; rather, there are intimations of states of division among men more terrible than that which incited the tragic agon at the beginning of the drama” (9). Further, “[t]he Reconciliations that occur at the end of Tragedy are

much more somber; they are more in the nature of resignations of men to the conditions under which they must labor in the world” (9). If the novel had ended with Champion-Jeremiah’s fight with Dancer-Gabriel (207) or his rejection of the idea that he might return to his community (189-91), we would be able to read the novel as an uncomplicated Tragedy. In those cases, Champion-Jeremiah would be resigned to his position as an isolated individual, unable to be part of either an Indigenous or Settler community.

However, the novel does not end with this separation. Instead, it continues, moving Champion-Jeremiah toward good relations with his family and community. In White’s analysis, this change would constitute a shift toward comedy:

In Comedy, hope is held out for the temporary triumph of a man over his world by the prospect of occasional *reconciliations* of the forces at play in the social and natural worlds. Such reconciliations are symbolized in the festive occasions which the Comic writer traditionally uses to terminate his dramatic accounts of change and transformation. [ . . . ] The reconciliations which occur at the end of Comedy are reconciliations of men with men, of men with their world and their society; the condition of society is represented as being purer, saner, and healthier as a result of the conflict among seemingly inalterably opposed elements in the world; these elements are revealed to be, in the long run, harmonizable with one another, unified, at one with themselves and the others. (9)

This shift therefore complicates my reading of the novel as an Aristotelian tragedy. Highway’s novel begins by following the tragic form, but pivots toward comedy in its final third as Champion-Jeremiah returns to a conciliatory relationship with his community and himself. In terms of its depiction of Champion-Jeremiah, the Cree community, the urban Indigenous

community, and their interrelations, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* is a tragi-comedy, a variation on both the tragic and comic forms.

In Dancer-Gabriel's original plan, the pow wow does not figure. He instead conceives of helping his brother as a project of bringing him away from the city and back to the land (239-40). It is immediately clear that this choice is a good one when they are on the ferry to Manitoulin Island: "Thrilled to be on water after so many years, the brothers Okimasis leaned on the railing" (240). When they arrive on the island, they stumble upon the Wasaychigan Hill Pow Wow.<sup>68</sup> The pow wow signals the narrative movement toward comedy, as it could constitute the kind of festive occasion that White identifies as characteristic of comedy. Dancer-Gabriel is excited by the prospect of attending the pow wow, but Champion-Jeremiah is decidedly unenthused: "Jeremiah merely scratched his balls, for, after ten years of southern Manitoba pow wows – scraping drunks off the street and taking them there by the van load – they still made him feel like a German tourist" (242). While there, they run into Amanda Clear Sky (253), who tried unsuccessfully to integrate Champion-Jeremiah into the urban Indigenous community at the first pow wow.

It is not at all clear, early in this scene, that Champion-Jeremiah is on a trajectory toward individual healing and renewed relations with his community. When he sees *migisoo* (an eagle), summoned by one of the pow wow songs, he immediately thinks of drinking (244). When Ann-Adele tells the story of Chachagathoo, the last woman shaman, Champion-Jeremiah first cannot understand the story, wondering "what in the name of Jesus was a shaman?" (245), and then argues (with his brother's backing) for the colonial interpretation of the shaman as a witch (246)

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<sup>68</sup> As noted above, this is the fictional reserve on which three of Highway's published plays take place. Further analysis can and should be done on the implications of this intertextuality, but to do so here would distract from this chapter's argument.

because that is what his parents believed (247). It is at this point that a path toward reconciliation becomes clear to Dancer-Gabriel.

The narration, turning to Dancer-Gabriel's thoughts, articulates it as such: "Then it struck him: if *machipoowamoowin*, bad dream power, was obviously powerful enough to snuff out a human life, then would not *mithoopoowamoowin*, good dream power, be as strong?" (247). Dancer-Gabriel's previous reference to bad dream power was when he was trying to testify to his abuse in residential school (91). This reference therefore implicitly points to a reversal from the bad impact of residential school to a trajectory that will affect reconciliation. In this sense, it is also a recognition: Dancer-Gabriel moves from ignorance as to how to help his brother and, by extension, his community to knowledge. However, this reversal and recognition does not portend a tragic fall, but rather a shift toward a comic reconciliation.

The impact is not immediate, though, and Dancer-Gabriel does not affect reconciliation on his own. Their separation from cultural knowledge is clear the first night, when they "almost destroyed the tent trying to erect it" (248) and did not bring enough food to survive, nor a plan to obtain food (248). When Champion-Jeremiah disappears, his brother finds him at the party, "sucking back a beer" (250), signalling his alcoholism's persistence. And when the other people at the party demonize Dancer-Gabriel for his sexuality, Champion-Jeremiah does not defend him, and articulates why in his thoughts: "For how else would he face the truth: that he was embarrassed to be caught in cahoots with a pervert, a man who fucked other men? On an Indian reserve, a Catholic reserve?" (250). To affect reconciliation, the boys must deal with all of the impact of residential school, including cultural loss, mental health impacts like alcoholism, internalized racism, and Catholic belief structures that are incompatible with Indigenous community-making.

However, the pow wow gives Champion-Jeremiah a second chance at making a new urban Indigenous community when he sees Amanda Clear Sky again (253). Whereas Champion-Jeremiah refuses to employ his musical talents at the first pow wow, here he is forced to do so by Amanda's father (255), although the result is an apparently very bad version of Chopin, quickly rejected as "whiteman music" (256). While what follows demonstrates the persistence of Champion-Jeremiah's trauma, with the reminders of his sexual abuse (259), Amanda begins to convince him that his artistic talent constitutes a kind of duty (259), while they have sex and watch Amanda act in an Indigenous soap opera (260).

Later, Dancer-Gabriel also forces Champion-Jeremiah to play the piano again. This time, there is a shift – instead of trying unsuccessfully to play Chopin, he seems to improvise, and the result is something with which his brother can interact:

First came his left hand, pounding on its own a steel-hard, unforgiving four-four time, each beat seamlessly connected by triplet sixteenth notes, an accidental toccata.

From where? 'Ha!' Before he knew it, his other hand had joined, its discords like random gunshots: *bang, bang!*

No less surprised, and tickled bubblegum pink, Gabriel leapt to his feet and started rocking to the pulse – *peeyuk, neeso, peeyuk* [. . .]. (265)<sup>69</sup>

That is, Champion-Jeremiah here begins to shift away from a stringent, classical, recital-based musical practice into something freer, something that requires a response other than just listening. This shift begins to signal a reconciliation between the two boys, a comic reconciliation in White's sense.

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<sup>69</sup> Highway's glossary translates "*Peeyuk, neeso*" as "one, two" (309).

At the pow wow and in its aftermath, then, the text depicts several things that it has depicted before: Champion-Jeremiah reacting negatively to pow wow practices, his homophobia, the Clear Sky family trying unsuccessfully to welcome him into a community, traumatic memory, and him playing classical music on the piano. We would expect, based on the previously-tragic structure of the novel and everything that has come before, that these events will lead to Champion-Jeremiah's further downfall. However, he immediately shifts to a more communally-based musical practice. This is another of the novel's secondary reversals, this time a kind of meta-reversal: we expect further tragic fall, but we get the beginnings of a movement away from trauma and toward comic reconciliation. It is the event that creates the impetus for the reversal of the tragedy, what we might tentatively call his individual and intra-community reconciliation. This is not to say that everything will be easy for the rest of the novel, but it is to say that it begins a generally reconciliatory trajectory in the text.

The most obvious way in which this trajectory manifests is through the music itself. Ten months after Dancer-Gabriel forces him to play the piano, the novel returns to Champion-Jeremiah on stage with five dancers. The music he plays now has grown directly from that experience at the pow wow: "As seamless as thread, his triplet sixteenth notes connected the four-four time of an unrelenting, drum-like bass. How had a casual improvisation grown, in ten months, into a showpiece stomped to by professional dancers, a sonata in four contrasting movements scored, phrased, liberally fermataed?" (267). It is worth stepping back here to theorize dance as a relational practice, as it would be relatively easy to see dance, like piano recital, as performative but not necessarily relational. However, Floyd Favel Starr, an Indigenous dance expert, explains the mechanics of dance as inherently relational: "the position of the body on the earth, the relationship of the feet to the ground, the head to the sky, the different

oppositions in the body, balance. It is the enigmatic relationship between these technical principles that creates the dance” (114). That is, dance is constituted by relationships, here conceptualized as human/non-human relationships. Adding the piano composition and having five dancers on stage adds human/human relations to this matrix, creating a kind of conciliatory relationship between individual artists and between artists and their surrounding environment.

This shift is not merely a shift from classical piano to classical dance. Instead, this piece that Champion-Jeremiah has composed brings his conciliatory pre-residential school experience into this urban space: “The quintet of circling dancers launched into a pentatonic chant, ‘*Ateek, ateen, astum, astum, yoa, ho-ho!*’<sup>70</sup> And suddenly, the piano was a pow wow drum propelling a Cree Round Dance with the clangour and dissonance of the twentieth century” (267; emphasis original). The chant here echoes Champion-Jeremiah’s musical practice before he attended residential school. Before leaving for the school, Champion-Jeremiah played his first composition, with Dancer-Gabriel dancing near him, imitating a caribou: “‘*Ateek, ateen! Astum, astum!*’ went Champion’s song in its simple circle of three chords, limpid with honey-coloured sound. ‘*Yoa, ho-ho!*’” (42; emphasis original). The new musical piece therefore represents reconciliation in its most basic sense: a return to a conciliatory condition that existed before it was broken by some harm. In the structure of this novel, it is a movement toward remedying the tragic fall caused by residential schooling through a comic reconciliation.

This performance contains not just present human/human and human/non-human relations, but also relations between Champion-Jeremiah’s present and past selves. It is not a simple return to a pre-residential school condition, as a strict reading of reconciliation as a concept would require, but the re-deployment of ostensibly beneficial aspects of residential

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<sup>70</sup> Highway’s glossary translates this term as “caribou, caribou, come to me, come to me” (307).



schooling to include Indigenous cultural practice into a musical practice that had been strictly European for most of Champion-Jeremiah's life. While this is not a *political* reconciliation, it is what we might term an aesthetic reconciliation between Indigenous and European forms.

This new way of interacting with the city extends beyond the recital hall. He begins working at the “Muskoosis<sup>71</sup> Club of Ontario” (269), “providing urban Indian children, most from broken homes, with REC: recreation, education, culture” (269). Like in Winnipeg, Champion-Jeremiah has a relationship with the urban Indigenous community. Unlike before the pow wow, though, this relationship goes beyond “scraping” drunks off the street while maintaining his alcoholism. Here, he tries to make a positive difference for children. He does not only give his time to these children, but also uses the club to workshop a new performance piece (271).

This performance piece extends the relationality that I explicate above to include a radical kind of intertextuality. This new play includes Cree cultural knowledge, which he is trying to pass on to his students (278), as well as more Western forms of expression. It is a re-writing of the Son of Ayash story from Cree mythology, but in something of a Western form, taking the name “Ulysses Thunderchild” (277). Champion-Jeremiah explains it with reference to James Joyce's *Ulysses*: “Well, [ . . . ] if James Joyce can do “one day in the life of an Irishman in Dublin, 1903,” why can't I do “one day in the life of a Cree man in Toronto, 1984”?” (277). On first inspection, this artistic intervention seems positive as a kind of pragmatic multicultural hybrid piece. Sam McKegney's reading points to this optimistic possibility:

He entwines both his distant past and the recent trauma in a mythic discourse he can ultimately control as a writer. Thus, he actively prevents himself from feasting on others

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<sup>71</sup> Which means “little bear” (*Highway Kiss* 309).

like the Weetigo, seeking instead emotional, spiritual, and psychological nourishment in the creative process. Rather than being consumed by past trauma and passing it to others, Jeremiah channels his anguish into creative work that will not only aid his personal healing but will provide the cultural materials for a broader Indigenous empowerment.

(“From Trickster Poetics” 101)

Such an inspection respects the rights of individuals to maintain their cultures and benefit from others as they see fit, creating new things out of this contact. It is also, optimistically, a reversal that leads to comic reconciliation: rather than the piano causing further trauma, it alleviates trauma and creates new community.

This optimism is quickly complicated as Champion-Jeremiah tries to sell the play to Toronto theatres. Amanda Clear Sky explains: ““No theatre in town would touch it. [. . .] “Your script?” this one guy said. “No conflict. It’s not a play.”” Still, [Champion-Jeremiah] suspected that his liberal sprinklings of Cree might have thrown off readers” (278). While the play takes a European influence, its essential Creeness makes it unsellable, perhaps unintelligible, in Canada. This moment serves as a reminder to Settler critics of Indigenous literatures to approach artistic productions on their own terms.

The criticism of the play as having “no conflict” is nonsensical if one understands the play at all, approaching it on its own terms. “Ulysses Thunderchild” is not depicted in *Kiss*, outside of a few isolated lines. But it is clear from the reactions to it that the play does contain a conflict. This conflict is not contained in the plot necessarily, but rather at the structural level. The play’s “liberal sprinklings of Cree” create a linguistic conflict within the script. The novel to this point very clearly articulates the relationship between Cree and English, at least under settler colonialism, as antagonistic. To recall just a few examples, Cree is outright banned at the

residential school in favour of English (70), the boys believe that they cannot express their new ideas about Western success in Cree (189-91), and the narrator asserts that “Wars start when two parties haven’t taken the time to learn each other’s tongues” (95), which almost no Settlers in the text have done. The play’s bilingualism, which results in its rejection by theatre companies, therefore itself constitutes a conflict insofar as it reflects a tension in the settler colonial relationship. It is also a sign of the ambivalence created by the residential school: Champion-Jeremiah mobilizes the knowledge he gained in the school, which allows him some degree of artistic success, in order to express the trauma and hatred that results from it.

The theatre critics repeat this idea of structural and audience conflict. When the Okimasis brothers manage to produce the play on a small scale, a sample of the critical reaction runs thusly: ““Respected Cree dancer-choreographer Gabriel Okimasis [. . .] is surely the most beautiful man who ever walked the earth [. . .]. But the cannibal spirit shedding his costume at death, revealing a priest’s cassock, confuses the viewer. The image comes from nowhere. And goes nowhere”” (285).<sup>72</sup> This review has several important aspects worth discussing. First, it contains a summary of the conclusion of the play, which suggests a plot-level conflict: the cannibal-as-priest represents a danger to the play’s characters, a threat of violence at more than one level. In other words, the cannibal-as-priest suggests a religious and cultural conflict. If Christianity is here represented as cannibalistic, then this signals a cultural conflict between Christianity and Indigeneity. It seems that, rather than having no conflict, the issue that makes it unintelligible at a plot level is that there is no resolution to the conflict. Indigeneity and Christianity are not reconciled here in the comic sense (with a celebration) or the tragic sense (with one becoming reconciled to the conditions of the other).

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<sup>72</sup> This quotation is Amanda reading the review aloud to Champion-Jeremiah. I have omitted the bits of narration in between parts of Amanda’s statement for the sake of clarity.

That the critics do not pick up on this distinction speaks to the limitations of the play's audience. At the time that the play takes place in the novel, one could not reasonably assume that a primarily Settler audience would know the details of residential school policy.<sup>73</sup> Continuing this close reading of the play's criticism reveals how the critic is both limited and able. Belghiti argues that the play constitutes "a re-conceptualisation of the postmodern theory of elusiveness in dance through indigenous paradigms that remain untranslatable in Western narratives of knowledge" ("Choreography, Sexuality, and the Indigenous Body" 13). The play is not legible for the critics, but they can (and, indeed, must) condemn it. They also actually say nothing of Dancer-Gabriel's ability, carefully avoiding making a positive judgment by instead citing the critical consensus that he is "respected." They do compliment him, but only his physical attractiveness, an accident of genetics and social conventions rather than a skill. The critic in question is not evaluating the play at all, not discussing its merits, but just regurgitating extant notions. He does not understand the play because it does not follow a structure that he can handle, but the consensus is that Dancer-Gabriel is good at his job, although he cannot say for sure. The bodily objectification, the one moment of evaluation, also repeats a scene from residential school, where the staff could not believe that the boys were brothers because Dancer-Gabriel was "'Much too pretty'" (69). Like the critic, the staff see Dancer-Gabriel as an object of adulation. That is, while Champion-Jeremiah is on a path toward reversing his tragic falls and achieving comic reconciliation for himself and his community, any progress he makes still keeps him within the state structure.

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<sup>73</sup> This is not to say that the information was not available, nor is it to excuse the rampant ignorance of residential school conditions. It is simply to observe that, had the critics known more about what took place in residential schools, they might have been able to understand the play's depiction of this history.

Before discussing this progress further in terms of how it interacts with notions of reconciliation, we can press the close reading further by thinking about how the critic uses the word “viewer” in saying that the play’s conclusion “““confuses the viewer””” (285). The critic here repeats, with some difference, Champion-Jeremiah’s anticipation of the play’s problem in using Cree, which might have “thrown off readers” (278). Both men are reacting to the same issue, which is that introducing Cree cultural knowledge and experience is “confusing” for theatre audiences and producers. Both limit the scope of their concerns in the same way: the language is only an issue for audiences who do not already speak Cree. And the cannibal-as-Priest is only confusing for people who do not know what happened in residential schools: for a knowledgeable audience, the symbolism is obvious.

Ignorance, in both cases, is a function of settler colonialism. Fewer people have Indigenous linguistic knowledge than they might otherwise because the British, French, and Canadian governments all made efforts to reduce such knowledge, most notably for our purposes through residential school policy. French and English being official languages, and therefore most important for participating in the liberal capitalist economy, is a direct result of colonial policy in the land we now call Canada. And people do not know about these efforts because such history was not supposed to be mainstream knowledge in Settler society. Such knowledge theoretically disabuses the citizenry of its idea of Canada as a multicultural state in a peaceful, positive sense.

This knowledge is becoming more mainstream now in the wake of the TRC. However, this is not happening because the government is now suddenly dedicated to being more honest about its past and present actions. The TRC has brought information to the forefront, but it only exists because of a massive class action lawsuit that the government lost. Prior efforts, like the

RCAP, were buried by successive governments and ignored. And governments continue to resist the TRC's information-gathering, as I cite in the first chapter of this dissertation, by refusing access to vital archival documents. When knowledge about state violence becomes common, it is not because of the government, but despite its best efforts.

As is frequently the case in *Kiss*, the underlying issue at play in thinking about the play's reception is one of relationality. First, the review references Dancer-Gabriel himself and his key action in the play, shedding the cannibal costume, but only analyzes him *in isolation* and with respect to a Settler audience. This scene is problematic because it is decontextualized by the review, and it is decontextualized because the critic does not have sufficient knowledge, as explained above. As Favel Starr argues, dance is always relational, so the critic's analysis is nonsensical if it does not account for this relationality. The only relationality that the critic allows is that between dancer and audience, and here he seems to take himself as a representative example of this audience. The gains that Champion-Jeremiah makes through writing the play are relational gains, but they are not gains in terms of the relationship between the Indigenous and Settler community. Instead, the critic follows the logic of the colonial gaze in requiring the performance to make itself legible to a general Settler audience.

Champion-Jeremiah's play does not successfully bridge the colonial cultural gap. This does not mean that it fails to achieve a kind of reconciliation, though, if we think about the play's stated goals. When Dancer-Gabriel asks him why he chose to give the Son of Ayash story a modern twist, Champion-Jeremiah explains: "'Because I want my *Muskoosisuk* to get it. Could we relate to Dick and Jane and that damned dog Spot when we were kids?'" (278). Champion-Jeremiah has *already* made concessions in order to make the play understandable. These concessions were not for Settler audiences, though, but rather for relatability in an urban

Indigenous context. By bringing the myth of Ayash into conversation with this new context, he creates the very community in Toronto that he rejected in Winnipeg. As Lindsey Claire Smith argues, “through his artistry, in a cosmopolitan setting, Jeremiah asserts Cree kinship, through family obligation, which though outside the reserve, and indeed outside of Manitoba, leads him to a proper relationship with his community” (159). He is therefore resolving his individual tragic fall by going back to his musical gift but using it in a relational way, which is how it exists prior to residential schooling, and his tragic fall with respect to his community in rekindling his relationship with his brother and creating a community in his new urban space through cultural revival. These reconciliations are comic in White’s sense, meaning that the story of Champion-Jeremiah’s relationship to himself and his community is a tragicomedy insofar as it begins as tragedy but ends as comedy. Through this comic emplotment, the resolution to the conflict between Champion-Jeremiah and his community comes through “the establishment of a genuinely peaceful social order” (*Metahistory* 177) with his renewed community.

### *3.5: Fall of the Relationship Between Cree and Settler Community*

As I have noted frequently throughout this dissertation, the TRC’s theorization of Reconciliation prioritizes inter-ethnic harmony within the confines of the Settler state. As a result, it is worth considering whether *Kiss* depicts the possibility of conciliation and/or reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and Settlers. In this section and the one that follows, I argue that the text indicates that at least a limited form of conciliation is possible, but it is broken by the colonial power of the Settler state (which I read as a kind of reversal precipitating a tragic fall), and this relationship might be reconcilable, but is never reconciled in the text. The story of the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Settlers is therefore *not* a tragicomedy, but

instead merely follows the logic of tragedy. I make this case primarily through reading the linguistic relationship between Cree and Settler communities in the text.

As noted in Part Three, the post-Contact, but pre-residential school space of Eemanapiteepitat, Manitoba is not idyllic or perfect, and there are certainly markers of colonial violence in it. However, most importantly for my purposes here, the linguistic situation in the community is unique in the text. The local Indigenous people still speak Cree and, vitally for the purposes of considering the relationship in this section, so too does the local Priest: “‘Why?’ the priest hobbled on in a Cree so mangled it might have been German, Chinese, and Swahili” (190). His Cree is limited, but he interacts with his flock in the local language, despite the communication not always working for certain purposes: “‘I’ll buy the church a piano, throw your tired old *organ* smack in the lake.’ Their father’s joke plummeted, for on matters sensual, sexual, and therefore fun, a chasm as unbridgeable as hell separates Cree from English, the brothers were sadly learning” (190; emphasis original).

Admittedly, this is a limited form of good relations. The priest’s Cree is poor, and he cannot communicate perfectly with the non-English speaking members of the community. However, we can read this as a limited form of conciliation because it mirrors what the narrator tells us earlier in the text, that “Wars start when two parties haven’t taken the time to learn each other’s tongues” (95). That is, a bilingual space, in which Settlers speak Cree and Cree people speak English would, theoretically, constitute a conciliatory space in the context of this novel. If no linguistic violence is being enacted, then War, in this case the constant War of settler colonialism and structural genocide, is unnecessary. Conciliation, and therefore reconciliation *in theory*, are both possible. Such conciliation is not merely fictional, but also practical if we mobilize reader response criticism, as Angela Van Essen does: “For non-Cree readers, the



untranslated names and missed humour are a reminder to be humble: our linguistic limitations have political consequences. Readers may be encouraged to learn Cree, and all are encouraged to seek to understand each other's perspectives" (n. pag).

It is worth noting before moving on to the fall of this relationship that this is *not* a Cree-only space. It is multilingual, but in a manner that is as limited as the Priest's Cree. For example, Mariesis does not speak English, but she does not reject it either, at one point asking Champion-Jeremiah to use that language: "'Speak English, *nigoosis*,' said Mariesis. 'It takes me back to the first time I heard it, on Father Thibodeau's radio. That old priest had to translate for us, of course, but people across the ocean were killing each other. A story so terrible, but the words sounded like music, I thought at the time'" (195). Mariesis' statement suggests two things that are important for our understanding of this linguistic relationship. First, because she does not have a negative association with English that might have come from more direct exposure to colonial language policy, Mariesis still views the language positively. And secondly, since Father Thibodeau could translate the radio broadcast, we can infer that he is bilingual, and having a bilingual priest is normal, not an aberration, in the community. This standard is maintained in this memory insofar as Father Thibodeau did not see the radio broadcast as an opportunity to teach and impose English on the community, but rather simply translated it so that they would understand.

All of this relative peace and understanding stands in stark contrast to residential school and post-residential school experiences in the text. When Dancer-Gabriel arrives at the school and his brother speaks to him in Cree, there is a succinct statement of the school's linguistic policy: "'Now, Jeremiah. You know you're not to speak Cree once you're off the plane'" (70). This policy is brought to bear shortly later in the text, when Dancer-Gabriel is punished violently

after he is “caught singing ‘*Kimoosom Chimasoo*’” (85). The result of this indiscretion is that he is “lashed and lashed until, by the third blow, [his posterior] had turned as red as cherry Jell-O” (85). This scene indicates that, while Highway might conceive of his residential school experience as positive, the school depicted in this text is typical or, to use a term from earlier in this chapter, generalizable in its violent treatment of children.

This scene, and indeed the residential school experience in general, constitutes a reversal if we continue to follow the logic of tragedy. Theoretically, the boys learning English should help conciliation. The community could then be more fully bilingual, which would ensure peace in the context of how the text approaches language interaction. However, such a bilingualism is actively discouraged here, which means that residential school here produces the fall: conciliation is no longer possible, as a bilingualism that includes European and Indigenous languages is actively repressed by government policy.

This fall comes to fruition in the city. When Dancer-Gabriel arrives in Winnipeg, he starts a conversation in Cree. Champion-Jeremiah, we learn, has “given up his native tongue to the roar of traffic” (113), and Dancer-Gabriel asks, sarcastically but tellingly, if “‘Cree [is] a crime here, too’” (113). The boys still retain their language, but in the urban environment, with a fractured Indigenous community that Champion-Jeremiah rejects, the language is effectively silent. Here, English is *de facto* the only available language for them. With this colonial language imposition comes the impossibility of a conciliatory relationship, which we see in the forms of racism, muted and otherwise, internal and external, that I have already discussed above.

### *3.6: Reconciliation between Cree and Settler Community?*

The next logical step is to ask whether this broken relationship can be reconciled. To do so, it is worth going back to “Ulysses Thunderchild,” which achieves some success after it is

revised. However, this success is *not* a marker of reconciliation, but rather a marker of the continuing power of the settler colonial state.

After “Ulysses Thunderchild” is performed for the first time in front of the critic whose work I analyze above, Champion-Jeremiah is confused by the reaction. Dancer-Gabriel helpfully crystallizes the “problem” with the play: ““You didn’t say it loud enough, Jeremiah”” (285). The play does not meet its non-Indigenous audience, the only audience that matters according to the critic, halfway. Settlers cannot conceptualize what they have seen because the play does not present its action and message in Settler terms. Workshopping the play with Amanda and Dancer-Gabriel, he makes changes to bridge this gap (291) and the play attains some economic success. In doing so, he seems to fix the misunderstanding that results in his initial draft, which his culturally ignorant audience was reticent to accept.

This reaction and workshopping stands in stark contrast to the earlier workshopping Champion-Jeremiah did with the children in his REC program. When one of his students in that program is confused, he *asks* Champion-Jeremiah to clear up his confusion, rather than throwing his hands up and judging based on what knowledge he already has, despite it being uncomfortable for him because he is ““shy”” (271): ““What’s . . . what’s a . . . a Weetigo?”” (271). Unlike the theatre critic, the child tries to understand what he initially does not, rather than assuming what he knows is the only available knowledge. When Champion-Jeremiah tries the play with children, they question, but accept it.

When he workshops the play with adults, though, they acquiesce to what the critic says. The adults who help him – Amanda and Dancer-Gabriel – are Indigenous, and retain some level of cultural and linguistic knowledge. But they are also successful in the Settler state, so they understand what Settler audiences need in order for the piece to be acceptable. Thus, while we do

not know exactly what has gone wrong with the play, or what changes are made, we can infer based on the information we do have that such changes are necessarily those that increase legibility for a critical Settler audience that *will not* try to understand something that requires Indigenous cultural or linguistic knowledge. That it attains success suggests that some form of reconciliation has happened, but it is still worth asking what the nature of this reconciliation is, and to what extent it is satisfying.

### 3.7: *Conclusion*

Based on the reactions to the two versions of “Ulysses Thunderchild,” we can see a basic structure emerging that follows David Garneau’s theorization of conciliatory relations between Indigenous people and Settlers. Garneau calls for “Irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality, [which] are gatherings, ceremony, etc. in which Indigeneity is performed apart from a Settler audience” (33). He calls for such spaces because, he argues, when Indigenous people know they are being observed by a Settler audience, it triggers “a Reserve response; an inhibition or conformation to settler expectations” (33). When Champion-Jeremiah changes the play in order to achieve success with Settler audiences, then, he shifts from what he can do in these irreconcilable spaces in which he writes the play – with the children and with his brother and Amanda – to what he must do in order to conform to Settler expectations. Champion-Jeremiah’s changes therefore might be read as a kind of pragmatic hybridity, but the question of whether this is decolonization, reconciliation, or simply assimilation remains open. Is the result of these changes instead closer to incorporation into the Settler state, which Jodi Byrd argues “does not solve colonialism: that inclusion [into the multicultural cosmopole] is the very site of [. . .] colonization” (10)?

To answer this question, it is worth considering whether any inter-ethnic relations within the state as depicted in the text, other than the artistic success we see, are healthy or mutually beneficial. As I argue above, Champion-Jeremiah's musical practice is violent and isolating. Any relationality we can read in his practice is either based on judgment (by the audience) or with long-dead European composers with whom he has an essentially one-way relationship. I have, to this point, resisted analyzing Dancer-Gabriel's artistic practice in favour of analyzing Champion-Jeremiah, through whom the novel is primarily focalized, and whose character arc most clearly follows a classical tragic structure. However, in this context, it is worth considering the possibility that his dance, with the relationality that it implies in Favel Starr's estimation, might be a model of good relationality within the context of the state.

Dancer-Gabriel's artistic relationality is also imperfect, though. The primary relationship he has is with Greg, his choreographer and then lover. This appears to be a "good" relationship at first. However, it is worth noting that the sexual relationship between them begins while Dancer-Gabriel is still underage (207) and while Greg is in a somewhat powerful position relative to his young lover, so it could certainly be read as exploitative for only those reasons. As Belghiti points out, though, their relationship is also part of a larger context of control over Indigenous peoples' bodies:

I read Gregory's queer sexual relationship with Gabriel in terms of colonial desire because Gregory's above described attempt to regulate Gabriel's sexuality cannot, in my view, be abstracted from the colonial history which legitimizes this regulation and normalizes it. The physical images that Gregory uses to describe Gabriel – "stashed . . . in those secretive corners, . . . eyes [with] dark little clashes" – recall the Eurocentric repertory of mystifying images which exoticise the indigenous subject as the secretive

Other whom the settler expels but still longs to explore sexually and, in the case of Gregory, manage choreographically. (“Dance and the Colonial Body” 157-8; parentheses and ellipses in original)

Even when art creates a relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the text, the relationship is fraught with colonial power relations and violence.

To consider whether any of this relationality constitutes reconciliation, we can return to the Settler response to the play and Garneau’s theorization of relations within artistic spaces. It is reasonable to be frustrated at this point with the possibilities for inter-ethnic reconciliation. If the play can only be successful if it is understood by Settler audiences, and if this understanding can only be achieved if the play is stripped of a measure of its essential Creeness, then it looks as though the novel suggests that Indigenous peoples *cannot* articulate themselves to Settlers and be understood unless they make the only cultural compromise and effort in the exchange. However, Garneau does argue that conciliation is possible within artistic spaces: “If art galleries and other display spaces are to be potential sites of conciliation, they should not meet the dominant culture halfway in their space their way; the non-Aboriginal viewer who seeks conciliation ought to enter the Aboriginal sovereign display territories as guests” (37). Based on what we have already seen from critics and producers, this play does not create a conciliatory space. It is edited so that people with power in the theatre world can read it effectively on *their* terms only.

The fact that this play achieves financial success, and that we have relatively peaceful relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples for the time being means that this artistic practice only meets the absolute minimum standard for inter-ethnic reconciliation. People are living together peacefully, but Indigenous peoples are still caught up in a matrix of harm. This is reconciliation in Trudy Govier’s figuring: “It is exactly because people must live together

and work together that reconciliation matters” (17). But people only “have” to live and work together because of the persistence of the Settler state. As I argue in the first chapter, this assumption of togetherness, of peace mattering above all else, is the precise logic of what Patrick Wolfe calls structural genocide (“Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native” 401) when it is in abeyance. People are not literally killing each other, which means that we have peaceable relations in the strictest sense of the term, but this peace also diverts focus from the less overt forms of violence in the Settler state, like the control of Indigenous peoples’ bodies that Belghiti identifies.

The novel therefore encourages an examination of the limitations of the primary version of Reconciliation asked for by the TRC, that which occurs between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. In one sense, we might achieve this version of Reconciliation, but only if we either make the “standard” for Reconciliation so low as to evaluate the absence of literal murder as peace. In another sense, further Reconciliation might be possible through increased cultural understanding, but unless Settlers seriously re-examine their assumptions about cultural understanding and their lack of effort in that arena, such Reconciliation will require Indigenous peoples, and only Indigenous peoples, to make sacrifices in order to make themselves intelligible to Settlers. This kind of Reconciliation would not be comic, but rather tragic in White’s sense. Indigenous peoples would not be reconciling *with* the Settler state, but rather reconciling themselves *to* the fact that they must adapt in order to be understood or become “successful.”

Lest I be accused of being too pessimistic, of ignoring understanding that Settler characters might have, such an understanding is *never* depicted in the novel, except in extremely limited circumstances. For example, the northern Manitoban priests’ ability to learn Cree may give us some hope for inter-ethnic understanding, as we might read linguistic understanding is a

step toward cultural and political understanding. However, despite their linguistic knowledge, the priests remain harmful figures in the community, with Father Bouchard being primarily responsible for ensuring that the children be sent to residential school (40). In this figuration, linguistic understanding might be thought of as necessary, but not sufficient, for achieving reconciliation.

Recall also that the novel ends by showing clearly that such understanding has not been achieved in the urban space or in the broader political climate. When Dancer-Gabriel dies, the Okimasises and Amanda do manage to perform what seems to be an important cultural ritual in the hospital. Renate Eigenbrod reads this as a “victorious note: the tragedy of the brother’s death is, if not diminished, then balanced by a celebratory performance of Cree spirituality” (290). It is a comic reconciliation in this sense: the celebration of Cree spirituality crystallizes the reconciliation between brothers and between the residential school students and their culture. But this reconciliation only takes place due to their struggle against the imposition of Settler law and culture. In order to keep a nurse out who is trying to get them to stop burning sweetgrass, Champion-Jeremiah “slammed the door” in her face (304); they have to trick Mariesis into leaving the Priest outside the door (305); and Amanda uses her body to block the fire chief from coming in and stopping the ceremony (304). Settler law and culture has been successfully resisted, but it persists, and it does not allow for Indigenous expressions of culture if they run counter to what the Settler state considers appropriate or safe.

However, this does not mean that no reconciliation is achieved. The novel ends with this ceremony, which would not have been possible had Champion-Jeremiah not come back to his community because of the influence of Amanda and Dancer-Gabriel at the second pow wow. The hospital room becomes an irreconcilable space: no Settlers are allowed in, and the narration



does not give the implied reader a complete understanding of what is going on. That is, this celebratory irreconcilable space of Aboriginality, which includes a smiling Fur Queen (306), is created by another celebratory irreconcilable space (the pow wow). Cultural and linguistic knowledge is present here, and a community of Indigenous people comes together. This community was not possible after the tragic fall initiated by residential schooling and settler colonialism in general.

Thus, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* suggests possibilities for reconciliation between indigenous peoples and is an effective contrast to the TRC's attempts to achieve Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples within the state. Inter-ethnic Reconciliation might be possible, but only if Settlers, not Indigenous peoples, meet their counterparts on their terms. This might be impossible within the context of the state, but the relationship between the Priests and Cree people in the community before residential schools does suggest it is possible, if in a limited way. If Reconciliation is achieved without further understanding of Indigenous peoples by Settlers, the story of Reconciliation in Canada will be tragic reconciliation of Indigenous peoples to the power of the state.

Like *Porcupines and China Dolls*, then, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* rejects the primacy of inter-ethnic reconciliation in favour of trying to achieve intra-community reconciliation after residential schooling. As Brydon points out, this reconciliation is not precisely redemption ("Difficult Forms of Knowing" 22), as the text does not suggest an *exact* return to pre-residential school conditions and relations, but rather the forging of new ones in light of colonial harm. The text suggests this form of reconciliation through the extension of classical tragic structure and conventions to create a tragicomedy: we start with peaceful conciliation, something happens to reverse the action of the text and break conciliation, a tragic fall results from the reversal, and a

secondary reversal happens to place the characters on a path toward achieving a sort of comic reconciliation. That this shift toward comedy only happens in the novel's depiction of intra-community relations provides an effective contrast to the TRC. Whereas the TRC focuses on Reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and the state, and suggests that these groups might achieve conciliatory relations in the future, the novel maintains the tragic structure in the narrative of the relationship between these groups. This tragic structure suggests that the only political reconciliation available is that which requires reconciliation *to* the existing paradigm, not reconciliation *between* indigenous peoples and the state.

That the comic reconciliation takes the form of artistic performance suggests the possibility of an aesthetic reconciliation. That is, reconciliation might be possible through artistic production. In Chapter Four, I query this notion and complicate it, most importantly via a reading of Drew Hayden Taylor's *Education is Our Right*.

## Chapter Four: Revenge and Violence in Response to Settler Colonialism

### 4.1: Introduction

The first three chapters of this dissertation have assumed that any violence enacted upon settlers in the literary texts under consideration is aberrational, rather than part of an appropriate response to settler colonialism. That is, the rest of this dissertation has followed the TRC's basic logic: moving forward with reconciliation means finding peaceful solutions based primarily on dialogue between victims and perpetrators of violence or between victims. However, the TRC's approach to peaceful reconciliation, as I will elaborate on below, tends to assume that the conflict from which we must reconcile is over. In this chapter, I try to write against this tendency by considering the possibility that this conflict is ongoing in Canada. If the conflict is ongoing, and the government does not appear to want to devolve sufficient power to depart from this conflict, then it is worth considering what might happen if the Indigenous peoples enact more radical responses and what impact these responses might have. In earlier chapters I have also made partial arguments that the conflict from which we must theoretically reconcile is *not* over, as settler colonialism is alive and well, and structural genocide is ongoing, even if it is in abeyance. In this chapter, I extend this argument by considering literary texts that suggest that peaceful resolutions based on dialogue are not tenable as solutions to ongoing violence in the settler colonial state.

After this brief introduction, this chapter is structured in three broad parts. First, I establish that both the TRC and dominant reconciliation theory require as premises that the conflict is over and that all solutions must be peaceful. Within this first part I also argue that a simple reading of the TRC's approach to Reconciliation reveals that non-adversarial forms of justice are not available to Indigenous peoples, as state-based justice systems are the only

avenues in which perpetrators can be held to account under settler legal systems, and these systems are adversarial to Indigenous peoples at their core.

In the second part, I discuss two texts, Drew Hayden Taylor's play "Education is Our Right" and James Bartleman's novel *As Long as the Rivers Flow*, in which Indigenous peoples attempt to achieve progress toward reconciliation through dialogical engagement with perpetrators. In this section I argue that these texts both suggest that such a dialogical engagement is not sufficient in order to achieve progress toward reconciliation.

In the third part, I discuss three texts in which peaceful solutions fail and violent forms of justice are enacted, although not necessarily in this order: James Bartleman's novel *The Redemption of Oscar Wolf*, Jeff Barnaby's feature-length film *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, and Elle-Maija Tailfeathers' short film *A Red Girl's Reasoning*. I argue here that the different forms of violence in the texts function symbolically to suggest that reconciliation is not an option due to the ongoing violence enacted against Indigenous peoples in the settler colonial state.

#### *4.2: Re-Examining Reconciliation*

As I have done in varying ways throughout this dissertation, I re-consider the terms and means of reconciliation in this section. I first examine the TRC's approach to Reconciliation in the context of questions about justice in the colonial state. Second, I consider the theoretical timeline for reconciliation. That is, I ask under what conditions two parties who have engaged in a conflict might depart from that conflict and work toward reconciliation. This theoretical work sets up my readings of the primary texts, which follow in the two subsequent sections.

##### *4.2.1: TRC, Reconciliation, and Justice*

As I note in the first chapter of this dissertation, the legal process that led to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement was intended to compensate monetarily all direct

victims of residential school policy and abuse. However, the Common Experience Payment and Independent Assessment Processes failed to compensate everybody due to monetary restrictions, legal loopholes exploited by the government, and a general unwillingness on the part of the government to act in good faith as an agent of reconciliation. Further, the government has withheld information relevant to a Truth-gathering process, which is foundational to any process of Reconciliation based on good-faith interactions between Indigenous peoples and the colonial state. These processes suggest that, rather than acting peacefully, the government is still treating Indigenous peoples as adversaries in an ongoing conflict, not partners in a process of reconciliation.

I have also suggested that the TRC's Calls to Action reflect the TRC's structurally limited role. Because the TRC is not a judicial body, and because it could not act adversarially if it had any hope of achieving even limited success, it could not meaningfully challenge state power. The Calls to Action reflect this limitation insofar as they consistently defer to state power, even as the TRC's Final Report elsewhere subtly undermines state legitimacy. The remainder of this sub-section examines the TRC's references to the Canadian justice system and challenges with evidence gathering, carefully analyzing these comments to come to some conclusions about how the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the government is structured now, supposedly at the dawn of the age of Reconciliation.

In Volume Five of its Final Report, the TRC outlines why a Truth Commission and the IAP and CEP processes were necessary through describing the experience of Indigenous peoples in the regular Canadian justice system. They argue that, in civil litigation:

Survivor's [sic] faced challenges and possible re-victimization in order to assert their claims. For example, Survivors sometimes had to endure insensitive questioning or

adversarial cross-examination in pretrial discoveries where judges are not present to prevent the harassment of witnesses. As in the criminal justice system, the Survivors often felt they were put on trial and re-victimized by residential school litigation.

*(Canada's Residential Schools: The Legacy 200)*

This description of the Canadian court system is striking, but not surprising. Canadian courts are, at their core, adversarial. If a person claims to have been harmed, they must prove it, and the person or group who is responsible for the alleged harm necessarily does everything in their power to prevent them from doing so. Attacking and discrediting already-harmed parties is a built-in expectation in the Canadian justice system according to the TRC. This is an issue with presumptions of innocence and guilt. Having been created by a class-action settlement, the TRC is free to assume that residential school Survivors have been harmed, even though they do not have to – indeed, are not allowed to – attribute guilt to anybody. Canadian courts, on the other hand, presume the innocence of the accused parties and are concerned with determining whether one can prove individual harm. This means that harmed parties must first *prove* that they are harmed, and defense attorneys have a vested interest in ensuring that they cannot, creating an adversarial situation. In the case of residential school harms, or indeed any harms inflicted because of settler colonial logics, it is the government and its representatives that act in an adversarial manner with respect to Indigenous peoples.

However, under the current structure of the state, which will not be meaningfully altered under the TRC's paradigm of Reconciliation, Indigenous peoples have little choice but to use the mainstream justice system to assert their claims, a point that the TRC makes in Volume Six of its Final Report. Here, the TRC discusses court-based solutions: "the view of many Aboriginal people is that the utilization of Canada's courts is fraught with danger. Aboriginal leaders and

communities turn to the courts literally because there is no other legal mechanism. When they do, it is with the knowledge that the courts are still reluctant to recognize their own traditional means of dispute resolution and law” (*Canada’s Residential Schools: Reconciliation* 48). While this statement is structured simply as the presentation of evidence – people say this, but we are not at liberty to confirm or deny it – the TRC allows it to stand without refutation, and suggests alternatives to this justice system at other points in the Report.

Specifically, the TRC repeatedly argues for the establishment of new Indigenous-based legal systems and recognition of existing ones. It frames such establishment and recognition as vital to the enactment of justice in the settler state: “Aboriginal communities must also exercise their own inherent powers of self-determination, and consider designing and administering their own justice systems. By using their own traditions, Aboriginal people will be able to take a more holistic approach to offending behaviour and recognize the need to address the underlying causes of the behaviour as well” (*Canada’s Residential Schools: The Legacy* 186). While this statement is mild, the TRC goes on to use much stronger language to make a similar point later in the same Volume: “Given the failure of the Canadian legal system to stop or repair the genocidal injustice of residential schools, it is only reasonable to suggest that Aboriginal people be allowed to develop their own justice systems” (276).

While the TRC cannot make a legal claim about residential schooling as genocide, this statement subtly suggests that state-based justice systems also cannot make this determination. The settler state constitutes a genocidal system as I define and argue in Chapter One with reference to Patrick Wolfe’s concept of structural genocide, so it is logically inconsistent to suggest that the state’s justice systems are equipped to recognize it as such and thereby delegitimize itself. If it is true that the state cannot recognize its own genocidal tendency, then of

course genocidally harmed parties must look elsewhere for recourse. As noted earlier, the TRC begins to suggest one avenue for such recourse by turning to international law on genocide, but here they suggest that another recourse could be domestic. If Indigenous peoples are to heal from Canada's genocidal past and present, they would necessarily have to do so, at least in part, through use of Indigenous-justice based systems.

It is not *only* the operation of the justice system that suggests the adversarial nature of the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian government, though. The TRC also points to the challenges they had with evidence-gathering:

The federal government possessed many of the documents that would establish whether allegations about long ago events were accurate. This is especially true in the Aboriginal context where the Truth and Reconciliation Commission itself has discovered that the federal government has a wealth of documents about residential schools that were not always disclosed to this Commission as fully and promptly as they should have been.

*(Canada's Residential Schools: The Legacy 203)*

If reconciliation is to happen in Canada, it is reasonable to expect that the government will act in good faith. The TRC was set up, in part, in recognition of the fact that state-based courts could not deal with Indigenous claims about residential schooling. It turns out that, while the TRC could make progress on this account, it was not with the help of the government, but rather in spite of the government's efforts to maintain its innocence. Even though the government is compelled by the IRSSA to provide all relevant documents, they have refused to do so, as the above quotation suggests. As a result, it seems clear that the legal relationship between Indigenous peoples and the government of Canada remains adversarial at its core. This adversity would seem to harm any attempt to move toward Reconciliation.



What does this adversity mean for inter-ethnic reconciliation in Canada? The government has made some strides toward this goal, although problematically and minimally as we can see from the above evidence. Indigenous peoples, on the other hand, retain a sort of right of refusal according to the TRC:

Practically speaking, Indigenous peoples will genuinely respond to Canada's offerings of apology or initiate their own overtures only when they are satisfied that Canada has sincerely created conditions that will allow Indigenous law and protocol to be meaningfully received and acted upon. Until this happens, Indigenous peoples will likely not offer Canada the conditions necessary for reconciliation. (*Canada's Residential Schools: Reconciliation* 79)

Despite the 94 Calls to Action that follow these meditations, then, it seems that the project of Reconciliation in Canada is not ready to move forward because the conflict is not over. This is not to say that the Calls to Action *state* that the conflict is over, but it is to say that the Calls to Action suggest a way forward within the confines of the settler state, as I argue in Chapter One. While residential schooling is in the past, the fundamental relationship that created and maintained the system is intact. Before moving on to discussing how this plays itself out in the literary archive, we must first understand what these "conditions necessary for reconciliation" are, so that we can evaluate when they are or are not present in the texts in question. I do so by turning back to theories of reconciliation.

#### *4.2.2: When is Reconciliation Possible?*

The hypothesis for this section is that reconciliation is not possible if parties are still acting in an adversarial rather than conciliatory manner. Reconciliation, at its core, is a departure from adversarial politics, which both the TRC and other theories of reconciliation acknowledge.

As I have cited before, the TRC states that, for its work, “reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. For that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour” (*Canada’s Residential Schools: Reconciliation* 3). These four factors all have a general precondition that both sides must be acting in good faith. While the government has acknowledged the harm caused by residential schooling in the 2006 apology, as well as frequently afterward, it has not acknowledged broader harm. That is, it apologized for a specific enactment of settler colonialism, but not for settler colonialism in general. Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham point out this limitation, noting the irony that, three years after the apology, Prime Minister Stephen Harper asserted that Canada “‘has no history of colonialism’” (1). It follows, then, that the apology acknowledged residential schooling as a set of state policies, but *not* as part of a larger system of colonialism. The TRC has created greater awareness of the past, but has not been able to complete this work due to the government’s obstruction (TRC *Canada’s Residential Schools: The Legacy* 203).<sup>74</sup> There cannot be atonement for the causes in this case, because the cause is the structure of the state in general, for which the state itself cannot atone and maintain its legitimacy. There might be some change in behaviour, but it is currently too soon after the TRC’s Final Report to effectively evaluate the extent to which this is happening.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Leanne Betasamosake Simpson also argues that Canadians as a whole are not sufficiently aware of the ongoing harms of colonial policies (22).

<sup>75</sup> In the interest of tracking this change in behaviour, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation has created an online tool to follow support and actions for each of the 94 Calls to Action. As of September 25, 2017, the NCTR has identified “Support” for 80 of the 94 Calls, but concrete “Action” on only 23. Further, the NCTR has been as generous as possible in identifying actions. For example, with respect to Call 43 on fully implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the NCTR lists a 2016 speech made to the UN in which the Carolyn Bennett, the current Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, expressed Canada’s intention to

The TRC goes on to say that reconciliation “will take sustained political will at all levels of government and concerted material resources” (*Canada’s Residential Schools: Reconciliation* 5). Again, it is too soon to know whether this will happen. However, there were multiple histories and first-hand accounts of residential schooling before the TRC. Government officials have been aware of what happened, and what was happening, in residential schools for the duration of their existence and after the last one closed. Yet the government has not made any sustained effort to achieve reconciliation based on this information. As a result, the balance of probabilities suggests that they will not do so now while they are bound only by moral, not legal, obligation.

Evidently because of the outlaid preconditions and a general knowledge of the history of relations between Indigenous peoples and the state, the TRC is not always optimistic about the possibility of Reconciliation. For example, they argue that “That there were few direct exchanges at TRC events between Survivors and former school staff indicates that for many the time for reconciliation had not yet arrived. Indeed, for some, it may never arrive” (*Canada’s Residential Schools: Reconciliation* 7). This point is one on which it is worth pausing. Most of my analysis here has focused on the government’s actions as those that created residential schools and allowed them to persist, so it follows that reconciliation must take place between Indigenous peoples and the government. But school staff carried out the abuses directly, so any process of reconciliation is also a process by which these staff must be held to account in some way. The school staff were represented both the government and the missionary societies that ran the schools, so that there were few confrontations between Survivors and school staff obfuscates the

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implement the Declaration fully. They also list a failed private member’s bill to this effect (“Monitoring the TRC Calls to Action”), although the bill was defeated prior to the 2015 election, while the Conservative Party of Canada was the governing party, holding a clear majority of seats.

responsibility these societies carry for harm inflicted in the schools. And since the Canadian TRC, unlike others (most prominently in South Africa), did not include confronting direct perpetrators except in rare circumstances, that part of the Reconciliation process is necessarily stunted. Later in this chapter, I analyze a literary example of a confrontation between Survivors and a school staff member (with a higher-up Church official also present), and consider what impact such confrontation might have.

Further, the TRC asserts that Reconciliation cannot just be about atoning for residential school harms. One of their 10 core principles of Reconciliation is that it “requires constructive action on addressing the *ongoing* legacies of colonialism that have had destructive impacts on Aboriginal peoples’ education, cultures and languages, health, child welfare, administration of justice, and economic opportunities and prosperity” (*Canada’s Residential Schools: Reconciliation* 16; emphasis added). While this principle does not explicitly suggest that colonialism itself is ongoing, it does suggest that residential school harms are not the only ones perpetrated within the colonial state. The government has acknowledged residential schooling, but not colonialism in general, which suggests that in the TRC’s framework, the preconditions for Reconciliation are not present.

The available theoretical archive on reconciliation largely agrees with the TRC’s formulation of what conditions must be present for reconciliation to be enacted. John Borneman, for example, begins with a definition of the verb to reconcile as “to render no longer opposed” (281). This definition does not assume that the parties to reconciliation are not opposed when the process begins, so one might assume that there is some hope for reconciliation in a situation like Canada’s. However, Borneman goes on to define reconciliation “not in terms of permanent peace or harmony but as a project of *departure from violence*. To reconcile is an intersubjective

process, an agreement to settle accounts that involves at least two subjects who are related in time” (282; emphasis original). It is not clear that the government has agreed to depart from violence or to settle accounts in a fair way. The government has apologized, and has made some reparations in the form of the IRSSA, but it has not meaningfully changed its behaviour since apologizing. Borneman’s formulation of reconciliation therefore provides part of the impetus for an examination of texts that do not depict departures from violence, but rather centralize violence as part of Canadian intersubjective relations.

Trudy Govier’s formulation of reconciliation does not make direct reference to violence, but does so implicitly by talking about reconciliation as an attempt to maintain peace. Specifically, Govier argues that “In societies divided by a bitter past, former antagonists need to work together to build better legal and social institutions than they had before. If they are unable to do so, the divisions of the past will arise again and again and extend into the future, making the institutions of democracy and peace precarious and unsustainable” (9). Govier is correct that the threat of future violences based on past injustice is a threat to democratic norms. However, liberal democratic norms are not set up to be entirely peaceful. Rather, they are set up to create a monopoly on violence controlled by state institutions. This monopoly on violence is precisely the issue that the TRC identifies with attempting to find justice within the state. The settler state’s court system rules on the legitimate use of force, so any violences enacted as part of the structure of the settler state are unexaminable – there is no recourse above this system to check it, outside of international law.

The TRC does follow Govier’s logic, though, in calling for Indigenous-based justice systems. Such systems might constitute “better legal and social institutions” insofar as they could allow better forms of justice to emerge. However, within the context of a Canadian state that

remains unquestioned, the creation of such institutions would hinge on the state allowing them to be created and continue to exist. As such, the fundamental issue with Canadian court supremacy persists. When I turn to a close reading of *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, I will examine in further depth the promises and difficulties of structures in which Indigenous peoples enact forms of justice within the context of a still-powerful settler state. As Govier argues, “It is exactly because people must live together and work together that reconciliation matters” (17), but such a formulation ignores the possibility that “people” might not *have* to live and work together, that a settler state might have to contend with competing sovereignties within its territorial borders rather than subsume them. As James Tully argues, the possibility of multiple sovereignties within a single territory has generally been thought of as untenable in modern states, as:

one of the major causes of conflicts and civil wars over cultural recognition is the inability of modern constitutionalism to tolerate multinational constitutional associations with a diversity of often overlapping legal and political cultures. The requirements of one sovereign people [. . .], one nation and one uniform order of modern legal and political institutions make the recognition and accommodation of diversity impossible. The only options available within these parameters are either assimilation or secession, neither of which resolves the problem of recognition under conditions of cultural diversity. (140)

Govier and the TRC seem to suggest that there is no way for the state to contend with competing sovereignties, implying that the form of constitutionalism described by Tully necessarily persists. However, Tully argues that a version of “diverse” federalism – based on mutual recognition and respect for sovereignty – is not just possible, but has historical precedents in North America. He points to three prominent examples: the confederation agreement of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Lower Canada, and Upper Canada in 1867 to form Canada (140); the Royal

Proclamation of 1763 (154); and the Québec Act of 1774 (154). In each case, already-existing sovereignties continue to exist when new ones are created and each sovereign association recognizes the other.

As noted early in this chapter, the TRC's theory of reconciliation is primarily based on the idea that dialogue can lead to justice and change, with the possibility of further violence and conflict not discussed. While they do not cite Patrick Belanger, their approach mirrors his, as he argues that:

The aim [of reconciliation] is to achieve a sufficient degree of confidence across lines of difference and historical animosity/injustice to commence the process of deliberation (in the broadest sense of the term) and collective re-imagination of the social order. Yet dialogue itself may foster inchoate trust; the very act of dialogic engagement may constitute demonstrable progress towards the goal of reconciliation. (17)

Belanger's first sentence suggests that reconciliation is a precondition to re-imagining the social order. The TRC seems to imagine this process works in the opposite direction: once trust is achieved, then reconciliation happens *through* re-imagining the social order. In either case, trust and confidence are the key terms, and many Indigenous people in Canada legitimately resent the government rather than expressing trust and confidence in it (Coulthard *Red Skin* 109).

Thus, one has reason to question the optimism implied by Belanger's second sentence. It is certainly possible that dialogue itself may foster trust. But if dialogue is the only possibility on the table within a social order that cannot abide further resistance by harmed parties, what happens when dialogue *does not* foster trust? Put another way, what if dialogue reveals that trust has not been earned by the government, that they are not acting in a trustworthy manner? If this

trust cannot be earned, then the country remains in a state of conflict, as the literary texts under consideration in this chapter suggest.

All of these theories of reconciliation tacitly assume that living in one society is ultimately the goal in Canada. We foster trust so that we can build better institutions that allow people who had previously been in conflict within the society to live peacefully in it. In the Canadian case, and indeed in the case of all settler colonial societies, the requirement to live together is fundamentally part of the conflict in question. And most specifically, residential schooling was set up as a mechanism by which Indigenous people would learn to function in a settler society. As I have cited elsewhere, Jodi Byrd argues therefore that incorporating indigenous rights into the Settler state cannot be considered reconciliation, but rather is continuation of an assimilationist urge (10).

In *A National Crime*, John Sheridan Milloy argues that residential schooling constituted a shift from Royal Proclamation policy, which aimed at maintaining First Nations as allies, to a new assimilatory policy that would produce Indigenous subjects of the new Canadian capitalist economy (11-12). That is, while the idea before 1830 was to essentially leave Indigenous peoples out of the new society but treat them as allied nations, residential schooling aimed at destroying such nationhood in the service of capitalist economics. More recent analyses of residential school policy tend to arrive at the same conclusion. For example, Jennifer Henderson argues against reading residential schooling as aberrational, instead seeing it as a characteristic enactment of liberalism:

Making the residential school signify illiberal constraint, however, requires an elision or diminishment of the productive aspect of the colonial power institutionalized in the school. Compulsory residential schooling was the mechanism through which liberal



individuals were to be made out of Aboriginal people, the mechanism through which, in the words of Duncan Campbell Scott, Aboriginal people could be made “to support themselves, and stand alone.” (“The Camp, the School, and the Child” 66-7)

Leanne Simpson argues that, because residential schooling was part of an underlying structure of colonialism, a reconciliation process that focuses solely on residential school policy risks forming a perception that “post-reconciliation, Indigenous Peoples no longer have a legitimate source of contention” (22), but the underlying legal structures of colonialism remain in place. A version of reconciliation in which Indigenous forms of justice are made to stand within an unbroken Canadian justice system is therefore an extension of colonial policy. It may well be an improvement on the current social order, but it is still fundamentally part of a history of inscribing Indigenous peoples into the state rather than respecting their sovereignty.

Before the TRC completed its work and released its Final Report, Dale Turner aptly argued that “the TRC’s work is, by necessity, a political activity, and therefore it must also consider the problems of interpretation and translatability associated with the competing interpretations of s. 35(1) [of the *Constitution Act, 1982*]” (“On the Idea of Reconciliation” 101) and that “for the TRC to be useful as means of healing the nation-to-nation-relationship, it must also affirm the inherent Aboriginal right of self-government” (101). Section 35(1) affirms existing Aboriginal and Treaty rights (“Part II: Rights of the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada”), but there is some debate, to which Turner alludes (“On the Idea of Reconciliation” 101), over whether it affirms self-government rights. The core of this disagreement is over what Treaty and Aboriginal rights mean. A strict reading of Treaty texts as they are preserved in writing, for example, might suggest that Indigenous nations gave up the possibility of self-government or sovereignty. However, Sharon Venne argues with reference to Treaty 6 that the texts do not

accurately reflect the oral negotiations or Indigenous understandings of the Treaties as part of a sharing agreement between sovereign entities (205-6).

As pointed out in Chapter One, the TRC *does not* explicitly call for the recognition of Indigenous rights to self-government, always stopping somewhat short of doing so. Because of this omission, the competing interpretations of Section 35(1) are not resolved, and the Treaties remain open for disagreement. As I will make clear through my reading of “Education is Our Right,” this means that discourse continues within a structure of power relations that render Indigenous arguments fundamentally impotent in a process of making change. As Turner argues, this power relation remains in place because “the legal and political dimensions” (“On the Idea of Reconciliation” 110) of reconciliation are not taken up by the TRC’s Mandate. By “allowing” Indigenous peoples to tell their story and giving them (some) compensation, the government “wipes the moral slate clean” (110) and, in their eyes “the issue is resolved once and for all” (110), de-necessitating meaningful political change.

Reconciliation that does not include these legal changes has a ceiling not of equality, but of simple “coexistence” which is “a social order that requires no listening” (Sampson 182). Such coexistence creates the kind of reconciliation that Stanley Cohen cautions against: “This voice [of reconciliation], however – especially under the slogan of ‘national reconciliation’ – may be bogus and self-serving, a strategy to evade accountability and perpetuate historical denial” (238). This has been borne out thus far in the Canadian case – we have considerably more information than we did before the TRC, but because some documents remain withheld, we necessarily do not have a full accounting. Because the withholding of documents is not common knowledge, and because the TRC has ostensibly finished telling the story, these gaps in the historical record continue to be deniable by the government.

All of these issues with the TRC conclusions and with discourses of reconciliation lead to the arguments made by several scholars about the ultimate function of Truth Commissions. Damien Short forcefully argues that such commissions' "primary concern has been to develop mechanisms that foster state legitimacy, forgiveness and social stability by attempting to acknowledge and atone for past injustices in novel and context sensitive ways" (268). State legitimacy is the watchword here, not justice. Discussing rights within the state – like equitable funding – but not those that run counter to state legitimacy – like self-government – is insufficient for completing a process of reconciliation because "citizenship rights fail to do justice to unique indigenous status, as, in the eyes of many indigenous peoples, such rights emanate from an illegitimate settler state that has subordinated indigenous laws, autonomy, and forms of government. From an indigenous perspective they are regarded as little more than acts of absorption" (273).

More recently, Pauline Wakeham has cautioned against reading reconciliatory gestures as meaningful responses to Indigenous resistance:

[. . .] settler states' reconciliatory gestures not only impose historical closure upon past wrongs but also *foreclose* upon any need for ongoing anticolonial resistance in the present and future. By inscribing a supposed historical end point for colonial wrongs and their resolution, therefore, dominant formulations of reconciliation have, paradoxically, contributed to the rise of a climate of impatience – which intensifies into intolerance – with regard to continued Indigenous anti-colonial activism. (6)

The Canadian TRC has not said explicitly that colonial harms have stopped. However, they tend to discuss these harms as legacies of residential school policy, rather than unique enactments of

colonialism. If current harms are merely results of past policy, then reparations and healing are the only necessities, not ongoing resistance.

Such an approach to harm is in the best interest of the state, as Kirt H. Wilson argues with reference to the South African TRC. He argues that this TRC “protected white interests by including white voices in the process of transformation and by sustaining white institutions so that restoration would be possible” (372). Settler institutions are in no danger of being torn down under the current approach to Reconciliation. Wilson offers a nuanced reading of the maintenance of pre-TRC institutions in South Africa, noting that it did prevent “a race war” and “reduced the hatred that was boiling over in 1993 and 1994” (373). This is not to say, however, that reconciliation was an unqualified success in South Africa: “As we applaud the good that reconciliation has accomplished, let us also consider that it has not transformed many of the racist systems that maintained the privileges of Afrikaners and whites of British descent” (373).

Wilson’s formulation here suggests that peace and justice are not equivalent. Certainly, Reconciliatory actions taken in the wake of the TRC may do enough to prevent violent conflict. But the prevention of this conflict is, as Wakeham points out, not a result of consistent peace. It is, instead, a result of little *resistance* to colonial violence (6). We may not have a civil war, just as South Africa has avoided one over the past couple of decades, but the maintenance of peace is contingent on Indigenous people accepting their re-inscription into the colonial state, not on any meaningful transfer of power or changes in the colonial system.

#### *4.3: Discursive Failure*

In the following sections, I discuss several literary texts that narrate reconciliatory failure. First, I discuss two literary texts that depict discursive responses to colonial harm and analyze the failure of these responses. That is, in this section I consider what happens when the post-conflict

state is reasonably peaceful, but power relations do not change and meaningful anti-colonial resistance is stunted. These readings extend into literary interpretation Jennifer Henderson's analysis of how discursive exchanges aiming at reconciliation operate: "Like monetary exchanges, discursive exchanges in the field of redress function to standardize – to convert incommensurabilities into a shared form" ("The Camp, the School, and the Child" 65). In both texts, we see incommensurable understandings of residential school impacts, which characters attempt to reconcile via dialogue.

Here, I extend my general close reading method by considering the structures of these texts more closely. I do so because reconciliation, at its core, requires change from a state of enmity to a state of conciliation. Thus, in order to observe a failure to reconcile in the texts, one must consider how contexts and characters change. In discussing *As Long as the Rivers Flow* and "Education is our Right," I track the ways in which the government officials depicted therein move from ignorance to acknowledgment of residential school history, and how and why this acknowledgment fails. I therefore spend more time than usual explaining the structures of these texts in order to demonstrate the ways in which these structures imply reconciliatory failure.

#### 4.3.1: James Bartleman's *As Long as the Rivers Flow: The Limits of "Self Government" and of Confronting Perpetrators Peacefully*

James Bartleman's *As Long as the Rivers Flow* follows a familiar pattern for novels about residential schools.<sup>76</sup> There is a description of the community, "Cat Lake Indian Reserve in Northern Ontario" (1) in 1956, divorced from a description of residential school (1-22), scenes of

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<sup>76</sup> As of this writing, there have been no peer-reviewed articles or theses dealing with *As Long as the Rivers Flow*. It has been reviewed twice, once by Margaret Mackey in *Resource Links*, and once by Karen Charleson in *Canadian Literature*. Neither spends more than three paragraphs on the text. Beyond plot summary, both reviews level mild criticisms of Bartleman's prose (Mackey 61, Charleson 132), and Charleson argues that the novel tries to convey too much information and has an unrealistic ending (131). Because of this unavailability of published analysis, I rely heavily on this dissertation's overarching method of close reading in this section.

suffering and harm in the school (23-58), followed by a section in which the results of these harms are made clear (59-207), and finally an attempt to solve these harms in some way (208-44). The novel is somewhat unique, though, in that it imagines extensive conversations between Church officials with reference to the residential school system (see, for example, 212-5), and depicts an attempt to peacefully confront Church officials and a perpetrator of residential school assault with information about crimes committed within the school in an attempt to heal (220-33).

The section about the residential school lays out that it was a fundamentally and structurally sick place, and that harm occurred not strictly due to racial difference, but rather because the school was designed to inflict harm. That is, staff members abused children not simply because they were Settlers and their charges were Indigenous, but because the school necessitated it. This is clear from the actions of an Indigenous staff member who had previously been a student at the school: “Sister Angelica, who was trying to prove to the other nuns that she was now a fully assimilated and civilized person by beating the children in her care, slapped the little girl” (30). Angelica’s education creates a discourse of civilization that necessitates abusive discipline. Her Indigeneity here is irrelevant because of the “moral” influence of the school. The meaning of “civilization” implicated here includes abuse. In this imagining of the residential school, then, the implied reader is led subtly to the idea that associated abuses are necessarily a structural rather than individual or racial problem.

Abusive discipline is not the only harm enacted in the school, which is consistent with histories of residential schooling as well as other literary texts about it. The school also includes a priest, Father Antoine, who abuses children in his care. Unlike most priests in residential school novels, Father Antoine is afforded something of an origin story by the narration.

Apparently, during his time at seminary prior to being employed at the residential school, “he found he could not stop himself from fantasizing about little girls” (39). Father Antoine tells another priest about his urges, but this other priest merely tells him that he will outgrow his impure thoughts and be liberated from them through prayer (39).

Unsurprisingly, Father Antoine is unable to pray away his urge to molest children: “despite much fervent praying, the seminarian’s obsession became stronger, and incidents occurred, all of which were hushed up” (39). In what appears to be a characteristic example, one of his victims’ parents catches him and goes to the police, who did not want to lay charges on “a future member of the clergy” (39), and then the bishop convinces the parents not to press charges and thereby spare the Church embarrassment (40). This argument succeeds, and “to ensure that he [Father Antoine] would cause no future scandal, [the bishop] sent him to an Indian residential school in northern Ontario, where presumably he could do no harm, to cater to the spiritual and moral needs of the children and teaching staff, all of whom were nuns” (40). Consent to Church authority here creates a non-questioning populace in which victims cannot be protected. Since he sends Father Antoine to the residential school to prevent harm, we see that his understanding of “harm” in these comments is limited to “harm to the Church.” As residential school harms are outside of general public discourse among Settlers, whatever Father Antoine does in the school will be unlikely to harm the Church, which trumps any harm to Indigenous children or staff members.

However, this priority and power to protect the Church is also clearly not *only* the fault of the Church in this text. The police, who theoretically represent a justice system that protects the citizenry from harm, also prioritize protecting the Church. Justice here is set up in a clearly unequal way: given the choice to protect children or the Church, both the state and the Church

choose to ignore the children. There are two points worth making about this unequal protection. First, it is clearly reflected in residential school history. As I noted in the first chapter of this dissertation, government officials deferred to Church officials when presented with evidence that school conditions were killing children through astronomical tuberculosis rates. Both the government and the Churches fail in their duty of care, both historically and in this literary example.

Second, by giving us Father Antoine's origin story, the novel shows the implied reader that the problems associated with residential schools are not restricted to residential schools. This failure to protect children, evidently Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, is not an exception to an otherwise effective justice system in Canada. It is instead characteristic of how the state conducts itself. When students leave the schools or the schools are shut down, it does not protect these children from harm, as this harm is part of the fabric of the settler colonial society. Any form of reconciliation therefore must grapple with radical restructuring of the state and understandings of justice within it.

At least partially because of the way he has been treated so far, Father Antoine develops something of a victim complex, not seeing himself as serving out a light or even just sentence for his crimes. He looks at the children as luckier than him as they cry in their bunks at night:

As he passed the dormitories, he would hear the muffled sobs of some frightened, homesick student and would feel a sense of solidarity mixed with envy. Both of them, student and priest, he could not help thinking, were prisoners in exile from their homes serving out harsh sentences. But the child would be free to return home after ten or twelve years while he was condemned to remain in his prison until he retired. (43)



It apparently does not occur to him that the children are serving a sentence, but have committed no crime other than being born Indigenous in a settler colonial state. Due to what he sees as his unfair punishment, he “grew bitter, and he shut himself up in his bedroom and adjoining office” (43). Certainly, Father Antoine should recognize his fault, but the fact that he does not is also a structural issue. Both the Church and the justice system seem to agree that he has caused no harm worth addressing, so it makes perfect sense for him to see himself as unfairly punished, just as the children are.<sup>77</sup>

It also makes sense that, since the Church and justice system have given him free reign to do anything he wants as long as it does not result in bad publicity, that he will continue to harm children. While he apparently resists his urges for some time, he does not do so forever, and begins harming children again:

The day came, almost inevitably, when he could no longer control himself and he molested a little girl. At first he was afraid because she fled his office in hysterics and told the nuns that he had hurt her. But no one believed her and he realized that he was free to do anything he wanted without fear of sanction. The Indian girls were under his control, and the nuns, even if they were to take the word of a child over his, would never think of calling the police or reporting him to his superiors. He was after all, a priest, and they had been trained to obey priests without question. In any case, [. . .] the worst that would happen [. . .] would be that he would be transferred to another residential school where he could carry on as before. (44)

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<sup>77</sup> Notably, he is still capable of remorse, but seemingly only for religious violations: “When he became fat, he became remorseful, aware that in the eyes of the Church, gluttony was a venial sin only, but still, something to be ashamed of” (44).

There are several striking aspects of this passage. First, the only emotion that Father Antoine feels is fear of punishment, not guilt at his actions, which suggests a fundamental absence of empathy. Second, he is correct about the structure of justice around him: there is virtually no chance he will be punished for what he has done, as evidenced by what we know about how harm was dealt with in residential schools historically and how he has been dealt with in the text up to this point. The school is a symptom of a larger structure of injustice that protects him. Third, it is striking that the narrator suggests that the molestation was “almost inevitable.” Father Antoine’s experiences up to now have made it more likely that he will re-offend, but have not made these re-offences entirely unavoidable. The use of “almost” suggests that Father Antoine could break this cycle, but chooses not to do so. Thinking in terms of the novel’s postulates, this passage suggests that the state creates the conditions under which harm is more likely, but individual actors can still bear responsibility for enacting this harm.

Before moving on to discussing the post-residential school impacts and responses, it is worth mentioning that the incident discussed above is not isolated in the text. Father Antoine goes on to offer ““spiritual guidance”” (45) to hand-picked girls as a cover for molesting them. He does not view this molestation as assault, even though “his little visitors sometimes cried” (45). This series of abuses causes him to “[emerge] from his depression and [begin] to smile again” (45). The harm that he inflicts represents a direct emotional benefit to him. The personal experience of this character mirrors the general residential school experience in history, in which harm to Indigenous peoples is directly linked to state and church benefits insofar as it theoretically produces peaceful Christian subjects who contribute to the economy and obey spiritual authority.

As with other texts that this dissertation takes up, the residential school does not contain all of the harm in this text. After leaving residential school, Martha, the novel's protagonist and one of Father Antoine's victims, has a child named Spider (73) who is taken away from her by the Children's Aid Society (77). Years later, she finds him in Toronto (159), and brings him back north to the Reserve in 2003 (163). On the way back, Martha and Spider attempt to rent two motel rooms. The manager of the motel attempts to reject them first based on the mistaken assumption that they will not have a credit card available, then on the lie that they do not have any vacancies (169). When Martha refuses to accept this rejection, he explains further that his motivations are racially-based: "Look, lady, gimme a break. I got nothing personal against you but I've got a living to make. I never rent rooms to Indians. They're nothing but trouble—drinking and fighting and disturbing the other guests'" (169). Martha, for her part, does not accept this justification either, pointing to her Charter rights against racial discrimination, then threatening to sue (169).

This threat does not bother the hotel manager, though he is bothered by Spider starting to throw things at him (169-70), and his threat to call the police because of that minor assault ends the interaction. Here we see another instance in which the justice system functions unequally. The hotel manager is not afraid of a Charter challenge because *de jure* equality and *de facto* equality are two different things. To sue him would be expensive and time-consuming, and ultimately would be unlikely to have any real impact. But calling the police on Spider for causing a disturbance due to this absence of *de facto* equality would almost certainly have immediate and negative impacts on the young Indigenous man's life. The hotel's business and property here are more effectively protected by the justice system than Indigenous rights to

“equality” within the state. Just as is evidenced by Father Antoine’s abuses, this passage suggests that the justice system is simply not set up to protect Indigenous lives.

The first attempt to “solve” these colonial inequalities in the novel is through self-government. It is immediately clear, though, that self-government does not mean sovereignty, and it also does not mean equal treatment with settler governing institutions. When Martha gets back to her reserve, she finds out from the Chief, Joshua, that the band is now under a self-government agreement: “‘We are now self-governing,’ he said. ‘At least, that’s the theory. Ottawa has given us responsibility to manage more of our own affairs and we do the best we can. But for reasons best known to itself, the government provides less money to us for education and child welfare than it does to white people for similar services in their jurisdictions’” (173).

Joshua’s statement reveals the dual limitation of self-government agreements negotiated by the settler government. The Indigenous nations are not allowed meaningful sovereignty, instead being allowed “‘to manage more of [their] own affairs.’” This leaves them still subject to the same colonial government that has created the problems with which they are trying to deal. And these self-governing arrangements in which Indigenous governments are absorbed into the overarching Canadian governing structure reproduce the same racialized power relations characteristic of other arrangements. Such a power relation keeps the gap between *de jure* and *de facto* equality mentioned above.

To try to overcome this power limitation and heal, the community tries to use discourse to solve some of their problems, starting with the legacy of residential schooling. Raven, Martha’s estranged daughter, cautions that she does not think that this is a good idea, because “‘Just holding another meeting where everyone talks forever and never comes to any conclusions won’t help’” (206). Joshua takes this point seriously, and suggests that they invite Father Antoine

to a healing circle as a way of trying to work through these problems (206-7). In theory, this option improves upon the TRC insofar as it explicitly creates confrontation between victims and perpetrators, which some of the theory cited above suggests is necessary to any process of reconciliation. Indeed, reconciliation is the primary goal of the meeting, as Joshua states in his letter to the archbishop requesting Father Antoine's attendance (209).

The archbishop agrees to send Father Antoine and a bishop to the healing circle. The archbishop's logic is both moral and practical, that "'in being honest with the residential school survivors, we will only strengthen the church'" (214). The bishop he sends, though, does not agree, instead arguing that the greater good will be served by denying the claims of sexual assault, thus keeping more of the Church's money and allowing it to allocate the money to the supposedly more important cause of helping the faithful (214). This moral disagreement creates a problem when the healing circle starts and the bishop arrives at the reserve and begins the healing event with a speech denying responsibility:

"Now before I turn the floor over to Father Antoine, who is the person I am sure you really want to hear from, I just wanted to say that I know many of you attended one of our residential schools that served the children of this area many years ago. Not everyone, I know, was happy there. Times were different and the Church did the best it could in the circumstances. I hope you will remember this if troublemakers from the outside come to you and ask you to join in lawsuits against the Church for the way your children were treated in our schools." (227)

The bishop asserts to himself that he is conveying the official position of the Church (227), even though his superior explicitly disagreed (214), creating an instance of literary irony. Since the

people of the community do not know what the implied reader knows, they must assume that this is in fact the official Church position.

There is potential for an effective form of reconciliation to take place in this space. Leanne Simpson describes a reconciliation process guided by Nishnaabeg legal systems, which would include “government officials, church officials, nuns, priests, and teachers from a particular residential school in a circle with the people that had survived their sexual, physical, emotional and spiritual abuse” (23). Such a process, which resembles the one described in Bartleman’s novel, would fundamentally transform reconciliation into “a process embodied by both the survivor and the perpetrator” (23). This type of process requires perpetrators to take responsibility for their actions. However, Father Antoine makes matters worse by justifying what he has done as not actual abuse. He begins with a monologue about how much good he did in educating the children (227-8). He rejects the “Cries of outrage” (228) that result, asking “How can you say such things?” (228), and pointing to “how gentle [he] was with everyone” (228). It is not that he denies having sexual contact with the children, but rather that he denies that such contact was abusive or wrong in any way because he “gave them [his] love” (228). He closes his defence with a claim to his own Indigeneity: “I love Indians. My own grandmother was a Huron from Wendake near Quebec City, so the blood of an Indian flows in my veins” (229). An attempt at reconciliation, which started from the archbishop’s evidently sincere desire, devolves into historical denial when the perpetrator is involved, but cannot admit guilt.

Father Antoine does eventually come to understand that he has created harm. He hears the stories of Rebecca, Jonathan, and Sara, three thirteen-year-old children who have taken their lives (235). All three children’s mothers were victims of sexual assault in residential school at Father Antoine’s hands (237), and all three subsequently neglected their parenting duties (234).

This leads to a rare moment of self-reflection that begins to give the implied reader some hope for reconciliation: “Now, for the first time, he was ashamed of himself and realized that he had used his faith as a tool, an instrument, a means of rationalizing his unacceptable conduct” (242). However, whatever hope is found in this moment is shattered by Father Antoine’s essential weakness and limitation: “He now had to find a way to make amends to his victims before he died. But in his heart, he knew he had pity enough only for himself” (243). There is a difference between acknowledgment of past injustice and actions that create a more just, reconciled society. This scene suggests that discourse only leads to reconciliation if people can both acknowledge the harm and have the moral courage and actual power to help those who have been harmed.

Father Antoine’s statement reveals a core issue with the structure of the TRC. While Settlers attended TRC events and were, at least anecdotally, impacted by the emotional resonance of the testimonies, this kind of witnessing does not require subsequent action. While it may well be the case that some Settler witnesses followed their experience up by making concrete steps toward reconciliation, because Settlers do not have to live with the adverse impacts of residential schooling and colonization on a daily basis, the “pity” that they may have felt at TRC events does not necessarily have any real-world political impact on the settler state.

The novel does end with some positivity when we return to the bishop, who had previously prioritized protecting the Church above all else. His reflection explicitly suggests a shift in values:

Something had happened that evening, he knew, that would change his life forever. When he heard the stories of the suffering mothers who had lost their children to suicide, he had been overwhelmed by the deepest sorrow and sadness, and a feeling of compassion such

as he had never before experienced. His ambition to rise in the hierarchy of the Church was no longer of any importance. (243-4)

It is tempting to read this as a sort of uncomplicated redemption. The bishop used to care little for the harm that he created, and now he does. However, our hopeful reactions should be tempered for two reasons. First, his reflection does not suggest any further action to help these victims, instead turning inward toward his own ambition. He is coming to greater self-understanding, but his victims' lives do not improve. The perpetrator feels better, but the victim is not helped. Second, as the rest of the novel has suggested, even when people want to do good, or even when progress seems to have been achieved on a small scale, we have to remember that structures of power do not change at the same rate as individual perceptions, and that the sympathy created by residential school testimonies at the TRC does not necessarily lead to action. If reconciliation cannot be achieved by peaceful means, then harmed parties may have to resort to more radical, possibly violent solutions, which I will discuss after I present a reading of Drew Hayden Taylor's "Education is Our Right."

#### *4.3.2: Acknowledgment, but not Action, in Drew Hayden Taylor's "Education is Our Right"*

The differences that become clear in the closing vignettes of *As Long as the Rivers Flow* – between acknowledgment and action; between individual perceptions and structural power; and between interpretations of a harmful event – are mirrored and amplified in Drew Hayden Taylor's 1990 play "Education is Our Right." This play is, in the words of Monique Mojica and Rick Knowles, "a sort of agit-prop *Christmas Carol* about funding Native education" (313). In this play, a fictional Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, Ebenezer Cadieux,<sup>78</sup> travels to Otter Lake, a fictional central Ontario reserve. There, he briefly discusses the Progressive

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<sup>78</sup> The real Minister that the text alludes to was Pierre Cadieux (Taylor 78).



Conservative government's decision, under Brian Mulroney, to impose a Cap on Post-Secondary Education Spending for Native Students (hereafter "Cap"). This legislation was enacted in real life in 1989, and Taylor positions this play as a response to it (Taylor 78). After meeting with the residents of Otter Lake, Cadieux is visited by three spirits, the Ghosts of Education Past, Present, and Future, who try to see the errors in his understanding of Indigenous history and issues. They do so by showing him fictionalized versions of real events. As Taylor explains: "There was a walk to the nation's capital, a hunger strike in Ottawa, residential schools, and Elders who told wonderful and educational stories. There is very little fiction in this drama" (78). I therefore read the play as an allegory of the limitations of a discourse-only approach to making political change. This reading fits with the general reading method of this dissertation, which takes literature about residential school as a discourse in which propositions about what might happen after residential schooling are presented.

Before Cadieux is visited by the ghosts, he tries to defend his government's decision to the people of Otter Lake. He states that the government asked several band governments what they thought of the proposal before announcing it, and their reaction was "less than favorable" (82). Despite this reaction, they went ahead with the legislation because the reactions were not reliable anyway: "We at the department felt that the Native people had a particularly prejudicial point of view, that of maintaining the status quo, rather than seeing the need for change. Therefore, their comments had to be taken with a grain of salt" (82). We see our first hint here as to the limitations of discourse in trying to achieve better political outcomes. Cadieux and the government claim to value discourse, but because the power relations between the federal and band governments are unequal, this discourse has no effect. The inefficacy of this appeal to a

discourse of Aboriginal and Treaty rights represents the first of several failures to enact change in the play.

The government views anybody who stands to benefit or be harmed by legislation as being “prejudiced,” but themselves as objective arbiters of the benefit of policy. Ultimately, the view of the federal government takes precedence, despite the impact of the legislation being concentrated acutely on the bands. This unequal weighing of benefits and harms parallels the government’s duty to consult Indigenous communities when making policy that impacts their territory. As I argued in Chapter One, this duty to consult, even were it enacted in good faith, points to the difficulty with legal reconciliation under the settler state. In the case of this play, the government completes its duty to consult, but is evidently under no obligation to listen. This limited listening is a marker of the legal and political power relations of settler colonialism, as the state prioritizes benefits to the majority of the populace over Indigenous claims to sovereignty.

The residents of Otter Lake are undeterred by the limited influence they seem to have, as they try to make their case through a couple of discursive strategies. First they appeal to their “right to want the status quo maintained” (83), which Cadieux simply asserts they do not have. In contemporary states, rights are defined primarily through government action. Appeals to Indigenous rights, which can be thought of as natural but frequently not officially legislated, are ineffective because the government has no legal obligation to recognize them.<sup>79</sup> Dale Turner takes up this issue of the way in which the government views Indigenous rights within a sovereign state system in analyzing the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples:

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<sup>79</sup> Except potentially through international law, particularly *UNDRIP*, as I have pointed out elsewhere in this dissertation.

The second form of reconciliation focuses on the definition of s. 35(1) of the Canadian Constitution Act, which characterizes Aboriginal rights as the reconciliation of Aboriginal customs and systems of law, which predate the formation of the Canadian state, with the unilateral assertion of Crown sovereignty. Aboriginal peoples inherent right of self-government is up for rigorous interpretation, while Canadian sovereignty remains unquestioned and in no need of justification. [. . .] Aboriginal peoples argue that the source of their rights flows out of their status as nations. (“On the Idea of Reconciliation” 111)

Taylor’s play depicts this precise issue, which Glen Coulthard also articulates: “Like all Aboriginal rights in Canada, then, the right of self-government is not absolute even if such a right is found to be constitutionally protected” (*Red Skin* 124). While the residents of Otter Lake are consulted, their claims must be rigorously evaluated before they are accepted. The residents’ “right to want the status quo maintained” (83) flows from the fact that their community exists prior to the imposition of state sovereignty. Their existence and right to self-determination is a status quo from their perspective. On the other hand, Cadieux’s legitimacy, as a representative of unquestioned Crown sovereignty, is not up for debate.

The same resident attempts to resolve this issue by pointing to one place that such a right could be codified, asking “What about treaty rights?” (83). Despite the fact that she is correct – rights to education are generally codified in treaties between Indigenous peoples and the Crown – Cadieux’s counter-argument is based on the interpretive power that Indigenous communities do not have. He argues that “when these treaties were signed, things were different. Education then meant on-reserve education, not post-secondary” (83). This is not explicitly laid out in the treaties, but, as Cadieux argues, “Times change. So do people. And so do interpretations. The

treaties are open to interpretation” (84). This series of assertions is reasonable, but irrelevant to the argument he is actually having. The Otter Lake resident *is* interpreting the treaties. The only difference is that Cadieux’s interpretation has administrative weight because of his position as a government official.

Cadieux is also not being intellectually honest. Later, when the issue of treaty rights is raised again, he will appeal to a strictly literalist reading of the Treaties, rather than the sort of “living document” approach he uses above. When the ghost of Education Present points out that the financial limitations are caused solely by the priorities of the government, Cadieux tries to counter-argue based on the treaty texts: “The treaties state, and I quote ...” (111). He does not get a chance to finish, but using the precise language of the treaty text is a departure from his prior approach, which “interpreted” the spirit of the agreement. His approach to treaty interpretation is based not on an intellectually consistent position, but on the rhetorical necessities of defending his government’s actions in each individual case.

The fact that he is not intellectually honest does not necessarily mean that his mind cannot be changed, though, which is what the Ghosts try to do. The first vignette he is shown is of a residential school. Here, we see him undergoing an emotional change that could shift his choice of actions. He starts out defensively, arguing that he cannot be held responsible for residential schools because he “wasn’t even born when they started” (97). When the Ghost of Education Past introduces the notion of institutional responsibility, Cadieux is “*silent for a moment*” (97).<sup>80</sup> After he sees a child being punished and having the structure of punishment explained to her, Cadieux is again “*at a loss for words*” (101). Then, when the spirit debates how little has changed since residential schools were common, Cadieux is “*silent for a moment*” (101)

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<sup>80</sup> All italics in reference to this text indicate that the quotation is of a stage direction, mimicking the format of the primary text.

again. These silences represent a shift in approach on Cadieux's part. Prior to this scene, none of the stage directions indicate pauses or silence. Cadieux always has a reply that reflects his party's priorities.

When he asks about what happened to the girl in the vignette, the stage directions suggest an escalation of emotional response. When the spirit is reluctant to answer him, he becomes "*More insistent*" (102). When he is told that she lives on the reserve as an old woman, he "*breathes a sigh of relief. He had expected worse*" (102), suggesting concern. When he finds out that she lost half of her foot to frostbite while trying to run away, he is "*visibly taken aback*" (102). All of these directions indicate concern for the little girl, whereas he had previously been concerned only with finding ways to justify harmful policy.

His reactions here parallel what happens at TRC events. At the National Events, as people testified to horrible atrocities, emotional responses were strong, varied, and present across audiences.<sup>81</sup> This also seems to be consistent with responding to reading TRC Reports, which also produce strong emotional responses in my experience. However, Cadieux's emotional response does not match his subsequent action, which is defiant: "So am I supposed to learn anything from this? Am I supposed to wake up in the morning with a ray of sunshine and see the world in a whole new light? Am I supposed to have a whole change of philosophy, join the NDP or something?" (103). As is often the case, acknowledging injustice and having an emotional response does not necessarily lead to action, which Roger I. Simon worries about: "A public memory of residential schooling that heavily relies on pathos to achieve its effect risks diverting attention away from the nexus of government and institutional policies and practices that enacted and subsequently implemented residential school legislation" (133). This is not to say that

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<sup>81</sup> I am here speaking from experience, based on my reactions and those I observed at events.

sympathy and related emotions do not matter, but it is to say, according to Simon, that people listening to residential school testimonies might sympathize, congratulate themselves for this sympathy, and then absolve themselves of responsibility for future actions (133).

There is a similar event later in the play that mirrors Simon's concern. Cadieux is "*feeling despondent*" (123) after the Spirit of Education Future shows him the potential impact of his decisions. However, this feeling is fleeting, as he immediately shifts to giving a defiant monologue: "Wait a minute, why am I feeling guilty? Am I my Indian's keeper? I refuse to feel guilty over all this. I will not carry the burden of 500,000 Native people on my back. Just because I'm the Minister of Indian Affairs is no reason to blame me for everything that goes wrong" (123). These two vignettes indicate that appeals to emotion, even very effective ones, do not necessarily change how people act, particularly with respect to government legislation. This is not to say that emotional response *never* produces changes in behaviour. It is to say, however, that individual emotional responses are not sufficient to produce large-scale change. Settlers, in particular, can leave the space in which this emotional response is produced, and ignore it because the impacts of residential schools are not intimate and ever-present for them.

The play also seems to offer an explanation as to why some emotional arguments produce change and some do not. When the Ghost of Education Present shows Cadieux a march to Ottawa in protest of the Cap, we get a glimpse of somebody changing based on emotional resonance. A teenage boy's father initially opposes the idea of anybody from his family marching, but then shows up, much to his son's surprise (111). His explanation is telling: "Your little sister will be going to high school in a few years. You started me thinking about her future. I didn't like some of the things that popped into my head. She may not have the chance to do something like this, it might be over and done with. But I want her to know we tried" (113). He

changes his behaviour based on an emotional response to a thought experiment, which is similar to Cadieux being shown the vignettes. His thought experiment accomplishes what Aristotle argues is the goal of tragedy, the production of “pity and terror and the catharsis of such emotions” (7). His catharsis leads to action because the political decisions under consideration have a direct and immediate impact on his family. Conversely, Cadieux will not suffer due to the imposition of the Cap, so while he also finds himself feeling pity, any catharsis he experiences does not lead to action.

Cadieux’s decisions *do* impact him, but inversely to how they would impact Indigenous people. The second half of his monologue after the Spirit of Education Future leaves gives us a glimpse into his motivation, based on the impact on him: “Do you think I like all this? *Almost pathetically*. If it was up to me I’d let everybody in Canada go to school free, really I would. I’m only human, too. I had to do this to keep my job. I never wanted this position anyways” (123). Like *As Long as the Rivers Flow*, then, the play here shows the difference between individual belief and power to change. Like Father Antoine and the sympathetic TRC witness, Cadieux feels pity for the people harmed by residential schools and settler colonial policy, but his emotion does not lead inextricably to action. Cadieux is entirely unconvinced that his actions are morally or intellectually correct, but to change them would not produce large-scale change. Implementing the Cap allows him to keep his job, a direct benefit to him. And even if he were to refuse, the job would simply be filled by somebody else who would carry out Prime Minister Mulroney’s agenda. As Denise Suzanne McConney points out, Cadieux here appeals to a standard Settler defence of contemporary actions, that past and present injustices are not “their fault” at an individual level (208). Cadieux is just following the orders of the Prime Minister. No amount of discourse can produce meaningful change on this front, because the settler state is structurally set

up to silence dissenting views that benefit Indigenous peoples and obfuscate individual responsibility for upholding Indigenous rights. Just as an appeal to Aboriginal and Treaty rights fails to make change in the play, here a second strategy, the appeal to emotion, fails.

That we have a Minister of Indian Affairs in this text who is essentially irrelevant in terms of government policy, means that we have to look somewhat deeper to see how the text understands the underlying motivation for the Cap. The Spirit of Education Present shows Cadieux a hunger strike in protest of the Cap. When Eric, one of the hunger strikers, is asked by a Reporter why he thinks the Cap was put into place, his answer is direct and telling: “Educated Indians cause trouble. We know how to fight your way now. The government wants to stop that, stop the criticizing of its DIA policies and the fight over self-government. It wants to go back to the good old days when we did what we were told” (120). Eric’s argument, to put it succinctly, is that the Cap is a mechanism for pre-emptively defending state legitimacy against attack.

Just because a character says something, of course, does not necessarily mean we should believe them. However, the structure of the play indicates that characters in these vignettes should be believed. The Spirits show Cadieux these vignettes in order that he should learn something. This vignette makes only one argument about the Cap, and it is Eric’s. There is no disagreement to stage from which we can glean a less ambiguous understanding of the legislation. Further, Eric’s argument is logically valid: the dominant settler education system teaches dominant narratives and philosophies. Should Indigenous peoples understand such dominant philosophies *as well as* their own, they are better-equipped to resist settler colonial policy.

This literary argument mirrors Sharon Venne’s practical argument for why Indigenous peoples signed Treaty Six, insisting especially on the education provision: “The Chiefs and



Elders wanted their young people to be able to cope with the newcomers, and believed the most successful way would be for the children to understand their ways” (195). Among many other things, settler colonialism brought a new set of knowledges into Indigenous territory. These knowledges form the basis of the settler state, so to understand them is to be able to choose to interact with the state in the most effective way possible.

We should also take Eric’s argument seriously in discerning the play’s general stance with respect to the Cap because an opposing ideological force echoes his argument later. During Cadieux’s interaction with the Spirit of Education Future, he is shown a university class in which his legacy is being examined. Cadieux demands to teach the class in the vignette, and explains the motivation for the Cap:

Or was it really a political move aimed at restricting the call for Native self-government? Think about it. We know the Native people fought COPSSE tooth and nail. Marches, hunger strikes, plays were written about it. Several years later Cadieux was almost assassinated by Cree terrorists. Lucky for him his policy made it impossible for them to properly put their bomb together. Couldn’t read the instructions. (132)

Cadieux himself plainly states that the Cap was intended to prevent Indigenous resistance, which clearly suggests that this is the text’s position with respect to the Cap itself.

Looking a bit further, Cadieux’s speech also begins to hint at the general conclusion of the play. The Cap passes despite all of the peaceful protests from Indigenous communities. This leads inexorably to an attempt at violent revolt. The monologue therefore serves both as an argument about how things are now and a warning about what could happen in the future. The government is not acting in good faith, not listening when they “consult,” and not doing anything to prevent the tyranny of the majority when it comes to governing Indigenous peoples.

Conciliation through dialogue is not possible because this dialogue involves a power imbalance that the dominant side of the equation is not interested in giving up. It is also a warning: if dialogue fails, colonial conflict persists, and this conflict could escalate to violence. In any case, some form of resistance must be found in order to resist colonialism.

What form this resistance must take is unclear in Taylor's play. What is clear, though, is that the current practice of trying to come to compromise through dialogue is not working. Discourse is the play's third failure, joining the arguments about Aboriginal and Treaty rights and the appeal to emotion. None of the strategies for changing Cadieux's mind is effective and the play closes on a less than optimistic note. Unlike Scrooge, Cadieux's Dickensian counterpart, Cadieux's behaviour is not changed in any meaningful way by his experience with the spirits. In exchange for the knowledge he has been shown, the Spirits ask Cadieux for "A promise. To reexamine COPSSE" (138). He does not grant their request, instead giving a more measured promise to "take it under consideration" (138) even though it is apparently "up to the people of Canada to decide the policy of the country" (138). He ends the play with a strong, clear assertion of his intentions: "When I'm shown the majority of Canadians don't agree with it, then I'll talk. Until then, the show is over" (139).

Despite what he has been shown, Cadieux ends the play by simply re-affirming the structure of the democratic state: minority rights, and Indigenous rights in particular as a category of minority rights, are always subject to popular approval. When they are not popular, they can be taken away with no recourse within the state structure. Put another way, "Cadieux sees himself as responsible, first and foremost, to the federal Cabinet and Canadian taxpayers" (McConney 206) rather than to Indigenous peoples, despite being the Minister of Indian Affairs. Here, the play shows a failure to change policy through the inherent issue with majoritarianism.

Because neither an argument about Aboriginal and Treaty Rights, nor an appeal to emotion, nor dialogue between the government and Indigenous peoples can move public opinion, legislative change remains unlikely.

Cadieux here reproduces what Audra Simpson identifies as a problem with “the literature on nationalism,” which “has difficulty viewing Indigeneity as possibly nationalist, and something able to be theorized. Rather, Indigeneity is imagined as something entrapped within the analytics of ‘minoritization,’ a statistical model for the apprehension of (now) racialized populations ‘within’ nation-states” (17-18; emphasis original). That is, by appealing to democratic norms, Cadieux elides Indigenous claims to nationhood within Canada, instead reverting to Indigenous peoples as a minority who cannot be protected from exploitation by “majority” desires.

That he gets the last word in the play is also significant. A play that is virtually all about Indigenous peoples objecting to government decisions and the governing structure ends with a representative of that structure deciding to silence any further dissent. In Taylor’s play, there is no reconciliation available coming from discourse and peaceful protest, through artistic or any other means. As McConney argues, “The very process of this play devastatingly undercuts the commonplace platitude that simply educating non-First Nations’ people will systematically change conditions for First Nations people” (210-1). Indeed, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, the TRC’s function as a historiographical body is important for the purposes of the public record, and its Calls about education might be morally good, but they do not necessarily lead to meaningful change.

The end of the play stands in contrast to the end of *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, and indeed the play within that novel, although analysis of these two texts result in similar conclusions. As I

argued in Chapter Three, *Kiss* suggests that a form of comic reconciliation through performance is possible, but that this reconciliation can only take place between Indigenous peoples, not Indigenous peoples and the state. The play within *Kiss* suggests the impossibility of reconciliation with the image of the (Settler) priest as cannibal (285) that the play's critics cannot understand. However, *Kiss* ends with the comic reconciliation between Indigenous peoples, even as Dancer-Gabriel dies (306). In contrast, Taylor's play ends by centralizing the government figure. By having Cadieux reject all of the community's attempts to change his mind and end with an appeal to majoritarianism, the status quo of the settler state, Taylor's play refuses a comic reconciliation for this relationship.

Pauline Wakeham's analysis of the colonial state's approach to reconciliation provides a further useful model for thinking about this ending. Wakeham argues that the state requires Indigenous people to "accept the limits of duration established for official reconciliation processes" in order to "demonstrate an appropriately 'forgiving spirit'" (6). Cadieux enacts this theorization insofar as he unilaterally puts an end to debate on the impact of the Cap. This attempt at reconciliation is stunted not by a dearth of Indigenous effort, but an absence of openness on behalf of the government. In doing so, as Wakeham argues about real-life government officials in Canada, he "impose[s] historical closure on past wrongs but also *foreclose[s]* any need for ongoing anticolonial resistance in the present and future" (6). There is no need for further resistance, according to Cadieux's logic, because his government is acting legitimately. Unless the majority of the populace opposes what he is doing, he is free to continue, and Indigenous resistance is meaningless. However, as we will see in remainder of this chapter, this unwillingness to listen to resistant voices can lead to more violent forms of resistance.

#### 4.4: *From Discourse to Violence*

In this section, I analyze three texts that depict violence during and in the aftermath of residential schooling: James Bartleman's *The Redemption of Oscar Wolf*, Elle-Maija Tailfeathers' short film *A Red Girl's Reasoning*, and Jeff Barnaby's feature *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*. As in the prior section, I extend my close reading method to consider the structures of these texts insofar as they indicate a change in attitudes. Rather than focussing on Church and state actors, though, I centralize the way that Indigenous characters move from passively resigning themselves to colonial violence to actively resisting the state.

Before I commence discussing the three main texts depicting violence, it is worth laying out the theoretical precedent for interpreting violent actions with respect to colonialism. The clearest forerunner to my argument here is Frantz Fanon, who argues in *The Wretched of the Earth* that "[n]ational liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, commonwealth: whatever may be the headings or the new formulas introduced, decolonisation is always a violent phenomenon" (29). To this point in this dissertation, I have focussed on showing the ways in which the TRC's approach to reconciliation is fundamentally based on peaceable solutions and critiquing this focus. But we might well include "reconciliation" as one of the "new headings" that Fanon refers to in the above quotation. If reconciliation is a response to colonialism, an attempt to reverse the effects of colonialism, then it is worth thinking about it in the context of theories of decolonization. Fanon goes on to argue that decolonization is "a programme of complete disorder" (29) involving "the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature [. . .] Their first encounter was marked by violence and their existence together – that is to say the exploitation of the native by the settler – was carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and canon" (30). That is, for Fanon, any

attempt to reverse the impact of colonization must necessarily be marked by violence because the relationship between colonizer and colonized is always already violent. Walter Benjamin makes a similar, but more general point in his “Critique of Violence,” arguing that “lawmaking is power making and, to that extent, an immediate manifestation of violence” (295), even when this lawmaking does not aim at complete annihilation, but rather the creation of supposedly “‘equal’ rights” (295).

Coulthard takes up this issue of violent response to colonialism in the “Seeing Red” chapter of *Red Skin, White Masks*. There, Coulthard argues that “those who refuse to forgive and/or reconcile” after apologies for colonial policies “are typically cast as being saddled by the damaging psychological residue of this legacy, of which anger and resentment are frequently highlighted” (109). However, far from arguing that this anger gets in the way of reconciliation, Coulthard argues that anger “is actually an entirely appropriate manifestation of our *resentment*: a politicized expression of Indigenous anger and outrage directed at a structural and symbolic violence that still structures our lives” (109). This legitimate anger can then be mobilized “in generating self-affirmative acts of resistance and Indigenous direct action” (110) and to “play an important role in generating practices of resistance and cultural resurgence, both of which are required to build a more just relationship with non-Indigenous peoples” (120). In what follows, I analyze the way this “legitimate anger” is depicted in the textual archive and analyze this anger’s potentialities in resisting further colonization and rejecting reconciliation.

#### 4.4.1: James Bartleman’s *The Redemption of Oscar Wolf: The Utility and Limits of Revenge*

James Bartleman’s 2013 novel *The Redemption of Oscar Wolf* (hereafter “*Redemption*”)<sup>82</sup> depicts residential school experience and its aftermath. Unlike his earlier novel *As Long as the*

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<sup>82</sup> As with *As Long As the Rivers Flow*, there is no published scholarly work on *The Redemption of Oscar Wolf* as of this writing. Andrea Kempf reviewed the novel for *Library Journal*, but the only moment of literary analysis in

*Rivers Flow*, however, the primary narrative in this one results from revenge taken by one student after he leaves the school. Stella – the eponymous Oscar Wolf’s mother and a residential school survivor – does not commit the text’s main act of revenge, but an early passage affirms anger as a reaction to residential school conditions:

As she grew older, however, and her father still didn’t come for her, her disappointment turned to desperation and then to anger. She blamed her mother for dying and her father for leaving her in the hands of people who beat her for coming late to class, who asked her to their offices to touch her private parts and in return to reveal their private parts to her, who made her work long hours cleaning floors and scrubbing pots and pans, who fed her slop hardly fit for animals to eat, and who allowed the big kids to bully the small ones. (18)

Here, anger is positioned as a legitimate point on a continuum of emotions resulting from residential school conditions. Students in the schools might be, at varying times, disappointed, desperate, angry, or a combination of these emotions.<sup>83</sup> *Redemption* therefore validates anger and depicts violent actions taken as a result of anger and resentment.

Oscar Wolf is an intergenerational residential school Survivor. Stella is his mother, and as she deals with the latent impact of her residential school experience, she passes this impact on to her son. Her stunted parenting skills, an effect often brought up by residential school Survivors (TRC *The Survivors Speak* x and 28; *Canada’s Residential Schools: The Legacy* 4 and 32), are apparent when Oscar wins a prize at school, and her reaction is less than enthusiastic: “his hope that she might say something nice to him, or perhaps look at him with an approving

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her 248-word review is that Oscar is “a reincarnation of the trickster” (78). Because of the dearth of published work on this novel, this section relies heavily on close reading and structural analysis.

<sup>83</sup> This list of emotions is not intended to be exhaustive.

smile, was not to be. Shrugging her shoulders and frowning, she had blown out a mouthful of smoke and resumed her vigil without even glancing at him” (60). As we learn on the next page, this is not merely the result of an individual bad day, but part of a larger pattern of harsh parenting, as “She had been nasty to him for as long as he could remember, even though he always made a big effort to please her” (61).

The text explains Stella’s problematic parenting as being in part a result of residential schooling. We learn that “Stella loved her son in her own way but was unable to express her true feelings to him. And for that, she blamed her father for turning her into a hardened and coarse human being. She had never forgiven him for leaving her in a residential school when she was a child of six” (61). The text goes on to nuance this description with further explanations for her “hardened and coarse” nature, but eventually succinctly states the structure of this toxic relationship: “every time she looked at her baby, she saw herself in her son, and since she deserved to be punished, he deserved to be hurt” (62).

Oscar’s problems do not stem solely from his mother. He is abused and ridiculed at school (56-8), and his grandfather tells him to react by doing nothing and instead trying to “fit in” (58). While Oscar hears this advice, he also hears stories of World War One and of acts of violence committed by Indigenous warriors before Contact (58). Without anybody to mediate these seemingly conflicting philosophies, he chooses a violent path, “vow[ing] to get even, not just with the two white boys and Gloria Sunderland, but with everyone in the village, no matter how long it took” (58). Discourse is not available to Oscar for a variety of reasons: poor education for his mother, poor education for him, and a prevailing philosophy of not arguing with Settler authority figures. However, revenge is available to him, just as it is for the imagined “Cree terrorists” in *Education is Our Right* (132). He fantasizes about being a soldier and killing



Clem, whom he understands is abusing his mother (65). When he is jarred from his fantasy world, his rage against everybody who has wronged him coalesces to violent rage against his mother's abuser, and Oscar sets Clem's boat on fire (66). Afterward, he slips back into his fantasy world (67-70).

The impact of his choice is not a fantasy, and a significant amount of property is destroyed when the fire spreads. Clem's father, James, reflects on the unintended impact of this destruction, centering the community of people who are harmed in his comments: "What would his customers do? What would the tenants of his other buildings along the business section do? Was his insurance enough to cover his losses? Was he now a ruined man?" (75). James and Crum, it is worth noting, are part of an insidious legacy of settler colonialism, as the text explains. James's father settled in the District of Muskoka "in the late 1850s" (75) when "Single men were eligible to receive [free] one-hundred acre allocations and married men two hundred acres" (75) in a project to "replace the Indians who were in the process of disappearing anyway" (76). He settled and built a business empire on land given to him by the government, which they sold out from under the area's Indigenous inhabitants.

The community in this novel has a historical precedent, as Bartleman illuminates in the interview that appears at the end of the novel. It is based on the real village of Obagawanung, the residents of which were displaced by settlers from "the Old Country" (260) in the 1860s. The area's Chief sent a letter to the Governor General to ask him to allow the Indigenous people to stay in the community, but it was rejected, "and the people were forced to abandon their homes to make new lives elsewhere" (260). Oscar's act of revenge is, therefore, not merely an act of individual violence, but symbolic of a revolutionary act. An Indigenous child sets fire to symbols and economic means of the settler colony. In this sense, it is an effective act of rebellion.

However, this property destruction is not the only unintended consequence of Oscar's action. When the fire spreads, many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people come to help. Among them is Oscar's grandfather, Jacob, who tries unsuccessfully to save a university student's life, resulting in the death of both Jacob and the student (77). Oscar's act of violence has very complex results. It is, in one sense, an act of rebellion against settler colonialism, but it also results in lateral violence against his own grandfather. It is also worth noting the irony of what happens here. The actual target of Oscar's revenge is not destroyed, as Clem's boat is saved (79). And James then expresses his condolences and promises to "find some way of paying him back for his loss [of his grandfather]" (79). In sum, this is a violent act of rebellion that has some effect in the text, but this effect is not predictable or uncomplicated. Because of the unintended consequences of his actions, Oscar does not turn into a rebellious figure in the long-term. Instead, he chooses the path laid out by his grandfather as a way of trying to work through his trauma:

While still filled with shame and plagued by flashbacks of the fire, Oscar now devoted himself to fitting in as his grandfather had urged him to do when he was a little boy. In so doing so [sic], he hoped he would be able to make amends with the white people he had wronged and appease the shadow, if such a thing existed, of his grandfather. If the white people wanted him to get an education, he would get an education. If the white people wanted him to become a missionary, he would become a missionary. If the white people wanted him to become a brown-skinned white man, he would become a brown-skinned white man. (116)

While his rebellion was not unjustified in a broad sense, he sees assimilation as penance, or in the parlance of the text, as his only path to redemption. In this way, the rebellion continues the

cyclical violence of residential schooling, in which any resistance creates further violence. While Oscar is not subject to any physical violence in the text, his pivot to assimilation in the wake of his rebellion represents a colonial violence. The settler colony is not meaningfully harmed or reshaped by indigenous violence due to its characteristic capacity to subsume such resistance. As Oscar moves forward, he attains some measure of success in the settler community and is therefore included in it, but as Jodi Byrd argues, such success cannot “solve colonialism; that inclusion is the very site of colonization” (10).

Oscar recognizes that he has wronged the Settler community, but Settlers at no point in this text see any need for reparation to the Indigenous community. As noted, the Settler community in this text stems from a project of the government giving land away that did not legitimately belong to them in an effort to uproot the Indigenous population. While Settlers provide for Oscar in the wake of the tragedy (since the community does not know that he started the fire), the community provides these reparations not because of the violence he suffers at the hands of the Settler state, but rather the violence enacted against it in the form of the arson. Harms to this system require reparation, but harms to Indigenous peoples do not.

This fraught form of reparation parallels the other Bartleman novel under consideration in this chapter. While the bishop in *As Long as the Rivers Flow* has a limited epiphany at the end of that novel, we never see any real movement toward justice between the Church and the Indigenous community. The structure of harm remains in place, and justice is not available for colonial harms like residential schooling. Oscar’s choice to assimilate into Settler society leads to a successful career in the foreign service after serving in the Second World War. In this way, Oscar’s narrative parallels Bartleman’s life, as Bartleman “serve[d] in a dozen overseas postings [in the foreign service] in a career lasting more than thirty-five years” (261). As part of his

career, Oscar has a minor role in negotiating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the United Nations in 1948 (166). Canada's signing of the Declaration leaves him optimistic that there will be progress on Indigenous rights in Canada, as the Declaration guarantees "equal rights and freedoms to all [. . .] citizens, whatever their 'race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status'" (166).

However, as has so often been the case when the Canadian state had the opportunity to deal with Indigenous peoples in good faith, this action is purely symbolic with respect to domestic policy. As Oscar finds out upon returning to Canada in 1952, the settler state is alive and well, with Indian Agents retaining power and the residential school system still in place (167). Oscar also helpfully contextualizes Canada's actions with respect to the world stage, highlighting human rights violations in other settler colonies who signed on to the declaration, like lynchings by the Ku Klux Klan in the United States, land grabs in Latin America, the Stolen Generation in Australia, and apartheid in South Africa (167). The text here offers two reasons that the UN Declaration seemed to have no immediate impact on domestic policy with respect to Indigenous peoples worldwide. First, the Declaration is framed as a victory for *international* rather than *domestic* policy, as a continuation of Allied victory in the Second World War: "victory over the evils of Nazism and Fascism was now being followed by triumph over injustice toward peoples and individuals" (166). However, the Canadian delegation in this text also phrases the UN Declaration as initiating a brave new world of Indigenous self-determination and statehood (166), so a second explanation is necessary.

Oscar asks for such an explanation and gets a response that is also focused on international policy: "Governments around the world, including Canada, are busy fighting the Cold War, and as soon as that's over, they'll get around to living up to their international human

rights obligations. Just be patient’” (167). At this point in the novel, there are two possible readings of this explanation. One is optimistic: if we take for granted that the Cold War represented an existential threat to liberal democracies, then we can see why such a conflict would necessarily supersede domestic concerns. Once that existential threat is extinguished, then governments would have no reason not to turn their attention inward.

The other reading is pessimistic. It might be true that the Cold War represented an existential threat to liberal democracy, but such threats have always existed and, reading from our position in the contemporary moment, we know that there is always a new threat to consider and use as a scapegoat to sidestep fair dealing with Indigenous peoples. The Cold War followed on the heels of fights against Nazism and Fascism, as the text tells us. But it has also been followed by a series of other supposedly existential conflicts almost without pause: the first Gulf War, the contemporary conflicts in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, and the broader Middle East, and ever-present threats of nuclear and environmental annihilation. History tells us that supposed liberal democracies are always under threat, so international conflicts always take precedence over domestic issues, particularly when such issues impact only a minority of citizens, who have consistently been repressed even under optimal conditions.

I use the term “supposed” liberal democracies, because it is also the case that Indigenous rebellion poses a threat to the legitimacy of such governments, or of the perception of them. As Taylor’s play suggests, the state has a vested interest in quashing dissent from Indigenous peoples. More attention paid to human and Indigenous rights violations means that people become more aware of the ways in which imagined liberal democratic values are not being enacted. Taking children away from their communities in order to give them an assimilatory and abusive education is theoretically illiberal and an obvious human rights violation. Leaving Indian

Agents with almost unchecked authority on Reserves is not liberal equality at all, but a race-based authority structure. Canada, observed under this lens, does not live up to the ideals that it tries to defend against other more obviously illiberal, fascistic regimes.

Despite his knowledge of the gap between government rhetoric and action, Oscar remains optimistic. He continues in the foreign service, where he makes a case to do something about human rights violations against Indigenous people in Colombia, citing Canada's signature on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (182-3). He is met with a frank explanation that Canada absolutely will not do anything to intervene, being told by an Ambassador that "We signed those human rights declarations just for show, just to make us feel better for treating your people [. . .] the way we do, just to make us look good internationally" (183) and that "In embassies in these places in the middle of nowhere, we don't care about Indians. What we care about down here is selling asbestos, mining equipment, diesel generators [. . .], anything at all to make a buck and keep Canadians working" (183). Strikingly, the ambassador's explanation parallels what we saw when Oscar took revenge early in the novel. The community's economy is worth protecting, and reparations for what is lost in the fire are necessary, but harms against Indigenous people are ignored. The ambassador clearly lays out Canada's position as one in which declarations about Human Rights are merely window-dressing for the real project of protecting the capitalist economy.

According to Bartleman himself, this ambassador does not represent any particular sentiment he encountered during his time in the foreign service. When asked whether he experienced anti-Native sentiment in his career, he responds unequivocally: "Not at all. Like Oscar, I worked with strong, gifted sometimes idiosyncratic colleagues who would never have thought of discriminating against anyone" (262). The interviewer pushes him, however, and

Oscar does admit that “Canada’s ambassador to South Africa in the late 1950s and early 1960s” was described by his deputy as “someone who ‘was convinced of the need for the blacks to live separately from the whites’” (263). That Bartleman asserts that nobody in the foreign service acted like his fictional ambassador creates something of a complication for our reading of the text. That is, we cannot read the novel as a straightforward pseudo-memoir or a direct reflection of the real world. However, that the foreign service officers in the text, as representatives of the government, so consistently appeal to settler colonial values is enough to validate reading them as symbolic of a general problem.

Thus, I return here to the method employed in Chapter Three for reading Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. Like Highway’s novel, Bartleman’s text parallels, but does not completely reflect, his own experience. One can however read it as a generalizable thought experiment in the same way that I read *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. As we see in *Redemption*, if settler colonial philosophies are allowed to persist without effective resistance, then they necessarily spread both within and outside of Canada. The ambassadors represented here might not represent anybody in particular, but they do represent a general approach to Canadian governance that maintains settler colonial attitudes in the face of Indigenous resistance. Capital and property must be protected, not the territory’s original inhabitants.

Later in the text, Oscar participates directly in the project of spreading the Canadian strategies of settler colonialism when an Australian delegation visits Canada for advice. He is told that, as a representative of the government, he is “‘obligated to defend and promote the interests of Canada and to portray it in the best possible light at all times’” (210). This is a not-so-subtle reminder that Canadian interests are *not* Indigenous interests. When other officials are asked questions, their statements clearly toe this line. When asked whether treaty-making would

be a good idea for Australia, the Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs states that ““We negotiated treaties with tribes across Canada throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and it worked out well for us because the Indians were illiterate and believed anything told to them. And we never had any intention of honouring them anyway. It was just an easy way to take their lands”” (211).

The deputy minister also gives tacit support for provincial programs of sterilizing Indigenous people (212) and the residential school program that, in his view, makes the Indigenous children more “human” (212-3). Most striking, however, is the caution he gives to the Australian government with respect to treaty-making. He says that making treaties is risky essentially because, once the other side understands what is in them, they are likely to force the government to honour them: ““But today, they’re launching lawsuits and we’ll have to give the country back to them if we’re not careful”” (211). As in “Education is Our Right,” a government representative here *admits* that the conflict between Indigenous peoples and the state is not over. It may be in abeyance, as Wolfe argues is the case when structural genocide is ongoing (“Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native” 401), but that is only because Indigenous peoples are not actively resisting, so the government has no incentive to be more aggressive. The government has no intention of acting in good faith, as they never have in their history.

To summarize, then, *The Redemption of Oscar Wolf* acts as a thought experiment about the utility and dangers of violent rebellion and assimilation. Oscar’s rebellion works on multiple registers and cannot be read as an unambiguously positive or negative act. It does have an immediately negative impact on him personally, especially as it leads to the death of his grandfather. His response to it is to assimilate into the society, because he feels he owes reparations to the community that he has harmed. But in paying these reparations, he



theoretically pays back the people who stole his people's land in the first place. And as he goes forward, he comes to understand that his life is not protected by the state if it comes into conflict with property rights. Thus, while we cannot read his individual rebellion as a particularly useful act, it leads him on a path through which one can see the need for further resistance. The resistance must be more effective in overturning structures, though. I therefore turn to three more texts in which resistance functions in order to further nuance this chapter's understanding of collective resistance to state power.

#### 4.4.2: *What If Violence is the Only Option? Retributive Justice in Rhymes for Young Ghouls and A Red Girl's Reasoning*

*The Redemption of Oscar Wolf* leaves us with some uncomfortable questions about the utility of retributive justice. The violent protest that Oscar enacts does little to solve the settler colonial issues in the text. On the other hand, the texts I discussed early in this chapter seem to point to the limits of dialogical methods of making political change in the settler colonial state. The first film under consideration here, Elle-Maija Tailfeathers' short *A Red Girl's Reasoning*,<sup>84</sup> (hereafter "*Reasoning*") leaves us with similarly uncomfortable questions, but is unique in suggesting that violent retribution is the only avenue available for harmed parties. Although *Reasoning* does not depict residential schooling, it deals with structures of colonialism that led to and stem from residential school policy. The second film I will consider, Jeff Barnaby's feature film *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (hereafter "*Rhymes*"), also concludes with violent retribution as a solution, but provides more context as to why such retribution was necessary, and points to at least the nominal possibility that it is effectual in overhauling colonial structures.

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<sup>84</sup> Acknowledgment here is due to Katherine Meloche, my colleague in the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta, whose dissertation chapter-in-progress (at the time of this writing) inspired me to include Tailfeathers' film in my analysis.

*Reasoning* follows Delia, a vigilante who seeks revenge on people who have committed sexual assault with Indigenous women as their victims. The 11-minute film follows her as she enacts her brand of justice on Brian, one such assailant. While there is very little dialogue or explanation of her backstory, one character claims that Delia is a sort of legendary figure, and the bartender working at the bar in which she finds Brian seems to be in on the plot, as she smiles but says nothing when Delia slips drugs into his drink (Tailfeathers). The early part of the film suggests that colonial justice will be the primary issue under consideration. We are told that Canada has set up a burden of proof for sexual assault cases that is so high as to make it extremely difficult to bring assailants to justice (Tailfeathers). Delia therefore provides an alternative to this broken system as she drugs Brian and binds him in a pose reminiscent of Christ on the crucifix (Tailfeathers). She interrogates him briefly, at which point he denies any wrongdoing because of a twisted logic of implied consent – his victim wanted to have sex with him, despite not saying so, and he used drugs to simply “loosen her up” (Tailfeathers). Delia repeats the argument about colonial justice, suggesting that Canada has a “Pathetic excuse for a justice system” (Tailfeathers).

When it becomes clear that Delia intends to kill him, Brian paradoxically apologizes, but also claims that he was not responsible for what he did, for reasons that are clear only to him (Tailfeathers). This kind of apology parallels institutional apologies, which tend to claim sorrow without taking any meaningful responsibility for what happened. To make clear that this apology will not be enough to save him from punishment, Delia douses Brian in gasoline (Tailfeathers). Brian claims that Delia “can’t do this,” apparently appealing to the fact that she has no legal authority, but she simply responds with “Just watch me” in Cree<sup>85</sup> (Tailfeathers).

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<sup>85</sup> I identified the language via my knowledge of Cree. *Cinema Politica* also identifies Cree as one of the film’s languages (“A Red Girl’s Reasoning”).

Those with some knowledge of Canadian history might recognize Delia's response mirroring Pierre Trudeau's comments to a reporter asking how far he would extend the War Measures Act during the FLQ Crisis in 1970. Trudeau's response is worth quoting in full here, as he makes a clear statement about the place of law and order:

Q: I still go back to the choice that you have to make in the kind of society that you live in.

A: Yes, well there are a lot of bleeding hearts around who just don't like to see people with helmets and guns. All I can say is, go on and bleed, but it's more important to keep law and order in the society than to be worried about weak-kneed people who don't like the looks of [unintelligible].

Q: At any cost? At any cost? How far would you go with that? How far would you extend that?

A: Well just watch me. ("Trudeau – just watch me")

Tailfeathers' script cleverly re-appropriates of the logic of the colonial state, using an Indigenous language. When questioned about his authority to enact violence on those who have not been convicted of crimes, Trudeau here acknowledges that normal state power cannot account for all possible violences. Trudeau and Tailfeathers bring to mind the very notion of sovereignty as defined by Carl Schmitt. Schmitt argues in *Political Theology* that the "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception" (5). That is, a government or person can be said to be sovereign when they can legitimately decide under which circumstances the "normal" legal order no longer applies. Schmitt refers to these cases as states of exception (5). In a footnote in his translation of Schmitt, George Schwab usefully summarizes the state of exception: "In the context of Schmitt's work, a state of exception includes any kind of severe economic or political disturbance that

requires the application of extraordinary measures” (5). Defining what constitutes a state of exception in Canada and what might be done in response to the exception is the intention of the War Measures Act. More specifically, the act authorized “arrest, detention, exclusion and deportation,” “appropriation, control, forfeiture and disposition of property and of the use thereof” and other similar actions “as [The Governor in Council] may deem necessary by reason of the existence of real or apprehended war, invasion or insurrection or advisable for the security, defence, peace, order and welfare of Canada” (“An Act to confer certain powers upon the Governor in Council and to amend the Immigration Act”).

Extension of state power under the War Measures Act means greater violence, both symbolic (“people with helmets and guns”) and literal (detention of people without formal legal cause). Delia takes up this logic when the state fails to protect her community insofar as it does not prosecute Brian or the criminals that Brian represents. Such violence is necessary not merely for retribution, but in order to keep the community safe. Delia’s semi-legendary status functions similarly to how the threat of state violence acts in theory, as a preventative measure against people doing wrong. Just as the reporter argues against Trudeau’s authority to invoke the War Measures Act, Brian claims that Delia cannot invoke her own version of the extension of judiciary power.

Brian’s argument about legitimacy does not save his life, though. Although we do not see his death, the film strongly implies that he has been set ablaze. Even if he has not, though, his crucifixion and dousing in gasoline are effectively punishments, and were he spared, he would go forward with an awareness of Delia’s power. But it is worth pausing on the fact that the film does not end with Brian’s death, but rather with a shot of Delia riding away on her motorcycle. Concluding with the spectacle of Brian’s death would centralize *his* experience as a “victim” of

this vigilante system. Instead, we end by centralizing Delia's experience as she rides away on her motorcycle. As Sophie Mayer points out, this film never actually depicts violence, eschewing such spectacle in order to subvert filmic conventions for the "Strong Female Character" (890). We therefore do not see that his individual death and the associated spectacle is important, but rather that Delia's actions matter on a symbolic level.

Delia's actions matter at a symbolic level because of how non-state-sanctioned violence relates to state violence. Benjamin argues that, because the state's creation of "a monopoly on violence vis-à-vis individuals is not explained by the intention of preserving the legal ends but, rather, by that of preserving the law itself; that violence, when not in the hands of the law, threatens it not by the ends that it may pursue but by its mere existence outside the law" (281). Delia's actions do not merely substitute for the failure of the state. In enacting violence that is not sanctioned by the state, she threatens the very foundations of the state by acting outside its monopoly on violence. We therefore must read Delia not as attacking an individual instance of harm, but instead as posing a threat to state sovereignty itself.

What is important is not the literal violence in the film, but rather its overall structure and symbolic resonance. It suggests through its mobilization of violence that the state justice system is flawed insofar as it does not protect Indigenous peoples, which means that Indigenous peoples' resistance to the state, violent or otherwise, is legitimate. Going back to Northrop Frye's theory of literature as containing "hypothetical postulates" (76), we can identify that the flawed nature of the Canadian justice system is the central postulate of *Reasoning*. As is often the case with the texts under discussion here, this postulate largely matches the TRC's understanding of Canadian justice, which I have identified elsewhere. However, whereas the TRC follows this postulate by arguing for an essentially tragic reconciliation between Indigenous and Canadian

justice systems wherein Indigenous forms will be reconciled to the Canadian state, the film rejects reconciliation wholesale. *Reasoning* suggests that, since the justice system is fundamentally flawed, it is necessary for Indigenous peoples to use other forms of autonomous power outside of and not reconciled to state power to enact justice and undermine the legitimacy of the state. This justice does not *have* to be retributive or violent, but it absolutely must centralize Indigenous peoples as autonomous actors in ensuring justice for themselves. The failure of state sovereignty to achieve liberal ideals of equal protection under the law means that other forms of sovereignty must replace or exist within it.

This notion of multiple sovereignties in Canada has at least one contemporary practical example.<sup>86</sup> Audra Simpson argues in *Mohawk Interruptus* that “sovereignty may exist within sovereignty. One does not entirely negate the other, but they necessarily stand in terrific tension and pose serious jurisdictional and normative challenges to each other: Whose citizen are you? What authority do you answer to?” (10). Drawing on Tully’s argument about diverse federalism, which I cite early in this chapter, Simpson shows that such a ““nested sovereignty”” (11) is possible and the issues that this sovereignty entails through the example of the Mohawk nation at Kahnawàke, of which she is a member. In Kahnawàke, the national community exists within Canada’s territorial borders, but consistently asserts its own authority through a refusal to recognize the supremacy of Canadian legal orders. Kahnawàke shows us that “Indigenous sovereignties and Indigenous political orders prevail within and apart from settler governance” (11). Tailfeathers’ film similarly depicts a fictional enactment of a type of nested sovereignty in which parallel justice systems are in tension with one another.

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<sup>86</sup> As well as the historic examples of pre-contact relations, the multiple sovereignties called for by the 1763 Royal Proclamation, and the implicit recognition of Indigenous sovereignty in the process of treaty-making.

Another way to think about the issue of competing or nested sovereignties in *A Red Girl's Reasoning* is by reading it against Pauline Johnson's 1893 story of the same name from her short story collection *The Moccasin Maker*. While that story does not contain a violent ending, it does take up the issue of differing legal orders existing simultaneously. Johnson's story follows Christie, the daughter of a Settler father and an Indigenous mother, who marries Charlie, a Settler (102). Their marriage begins relatively peacefully, but encounters a conflict when Christie reveals that her parents were married in an Indigenous<sup>87</sup> rather than Christian ceremony (110). Charlie is angry because Christie's parents chose not to undergo the Christian ceremony when it was available to them, which suggests to him that they are not married at all (114-5).

That the conflict in this story is one of competing legal and religious orders is apparent from Christie's defense. She first explains that for her parents to be married by the Priest would imply that their Indigenous marriage held no weight (115-6). Her argument here goes to the possibility of a nested sovereignty: both Christian and Indigenous marriages can be valid in the same space, in the same time, as evidenced by the fact that she and Charlie had a Christian marriage. When Charlie rejects this case, Christie takes his argument to its logical conclusion:

"There was no such time as that before our marriage, for we *are not married now*. Stop," she said, outstretching her palms against him as he sprang to his feet, "I tell you we are not married. Why should I recognize the rites of your nation when you do not acknowledge the rites of mine? According to your own words, my parents should have gone through your church ceremony as well as through an Indian contract; according to

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<sup>87</sup> The story does not clarify what nation Christie and her mother belong to, nor where the story takes place, except to say that the Indigenous characters are members of one of the "higher tribes of North America" (103). Tailfeathers' film similarly does not identify itself in terms of culture or geography, although Delia's use of Cree identifies her at the end of the film, and one might be able to identify the city in which the film takes place through its visual markers.

*my words, we should go through an Indian contract as well as through a church marriage.*

If their union is illegal, so is ours.” (117; emphasis original)

That is, if these two legal orders cannot co-exist and be “nested,” then they must necessarily either meld (and both ceremonies would always be necessary) or they must compete for legitimacy. The issue is not that the two legal orders cannot coexist, but rather that the settler legal order is perceived as superseding the Indigenous one in a perfect metaphor for settler colonialism in general.

In response, Christie dissolves their relationship, returning to her community and rejecting Charlie’s subsequent advances (120-5). Rather than insisting on recognition, Christie chooses to reject a Settler order that does not recognize her ancestral one. In this way, Christie enacts one of the key features of Kahnawàke that Simpson identifies:

Second, there is a political alternative to ‘recognition,’ the much sought-after and presumed ‘good’ of multicultural politics. This alternative is ‘refusal,’ and it is exercised by people within this book. They deploy it as a political and ethical stance that stands in stark contrast to the desire to have one’s distinctiveness as a culture, as people, recognized. Refusal comes with the requirement of having one’s *political* sovereignty acknowledged and upheld, and raises the question of legitimacy for those who are usually in the position of recognizing: What is their authority to do so? Where does it come from? Who are they to do so? (11)

Christie’s refusal makes her a perfect forerunner for Delia. While Christie goes back to her community to enact her refusal, Delia’s refusal leads her to create a new community in the contemporary urban space, just as the protagonists of *Kiss of the Fur Queen* do.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Although one could also read Delia as a reincarnation of two of Johnson’s more violent protagonists. In a poem from her 1895 collection *The White Wampum*, the eponymous Ojistoh tricks and kills her potential Huron rapist (46-



Christie's refusal also has a resonance in terms of thinking about a discourse of reconciliation, this time in a legal sense. The legal discourse of reconciliation comes from family law, which defines reconciliation as "[t]he coming together of estranged spouses" (Law and Martin). Not only do Christie and Charlie separate, but Christie literally refuses (legal) reconciliation here. Although her resistance is not violent, Christie fits with Delia and Aila as protagonists who reject the possibility of reconciliation with non-Indigenous peoples.

In Jeff Barnaby's feature film *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, the Mi'kmaq community, led by teenaged Aila, attempts non-violent resistance to residential schooling. That is, they do not simply refuse to recognize Settler authority, but instead attempt to subvert it. Barnaby asserts that Aila should be read as a hero produced by the "violence, drunkenness, sadness and death" ("Prospector Films Presents *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*: Press Kit" 3) entailed in his "honest representation without shame" (4) of contemporary indigenous community life. Following the general method of this dissertation, what follows takes seriously Barnaby's reading of Aila and the depicted community. I therefore proceed from the assumption that Aila must be read as a hero in the sense that her actions aim at making positive change and indicate, in Barnaby's words, "just how strong [Indigenous peoples] are" (3).

Like most texts about residential schools, *Rhymes* makes clear why the community must resist residential schooling. Roughly one-quarter of the way in, the Indian Agent, Popper, explains the sadistic rules of the School, which involve beatings for most offences, and solitary confinement for others (Barnaby). Later, a minor character explains Popper's nightly routine,

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59). And in "As it Was in the Beginning," another story from *The Moccasin Maker*, Esther kills Laurence, who is a Settler and her would-be husband (156), after the principal of her residential school convinces him not to marry her because of a moral opposition to miscegenation and the economic benefit of him marrying somebody else (150-4).

which involves his “nightly grope” (Barnaby) of the students. The School is therefore clearly set up as a violent space, in which physical and sexual abuse rule.

Popper, the film’s clear antagonist, is the community’s Indian Agent. It appears that he is Indigenous – we learn that he was a student at the School when he was a child – but he is white-passing (Barnaby). His origin story helps us to frame him. He was abused by other students during his time at School, and Aila’s father attempts to help him, but only because he has an inherent urge to fight (Barnaby). Afterward, Popper is given the opportunity to turn around and punish his fellow students in acts of lateral violence sanctioned by the school administration, placing him on a path to being the violent authority figure he becomes. As Damien Short argues, it is vital for any process of reconciliation not to focus on how claims are made against the state, “but rather how the colonisers legitimately settle and establish *their* own sovereignty” (277; emphasis original). Popper might be Indigenous, but he receives his power from the state – he is produced as a sovereign subject in the community because he can maintain power through any means necessary. Popper is not necessarily dedicated to upholding settler colonial rule for any philosophical reasons, but he is an effective tyrant who ensures that such rule is upheld so that his power remains. Popper does not even pretend that the school is an educational institution. Aila stays out of school by paying him off, but she is forced into the school upon running afoul of him (Barnaby). He uses the school as a penitentiary for his vigilante justice, not at any point as a place for education.

The film opens with Aila’s mother accidentally killing a child with her car. Aila’s father takes the blame for the child’s death, and he is subsequently imprisoned. Aila’s mother commits suicide in the aftermath of this event. While her father is away in prison, Aila creates a drug trade that keeps the local children away from the School by using the profit to pay a “truancy tax” to

line Popper's pockets. This semi-capitalist, semi-socialist economy is effective in the short-term, but one gets the sense that it is doomed to fail as Aila (as narrator) tells us that "Indians don't get [understand] money" (Barnaby). This peaceful method of resistance *does* work, but only until some money is stolen and Aila runs afoul of Popper, landing her in the School. Paying Popper off does not overturn his power. Rather, it supports his power, as his discretion remains supreme in deciding who goes to the School and who does not. There is a sort of rule in place – you can stay out of School if you have the financial means – but Popper decides when the exceptions to that rule apply, an avenue in which his authority is absolutely sovereign.

Peaceful action through financial means certainly does not meaningfully challenge the authority structure, but it is not the only kind of non-violent resistance that the community tries to enact. When Aila's father, Joseph, returns from prison, he first attempts to stop the drug trade in order to protect Aila. His brother, Burner, convinces him that this is not the way to fix an issue he does not understand: "You can't just go around pulling on threads with your good intentions expecting shit to work itself out" (Barnaby). He is, however, convinced that symbolic action will be helpful. The car with which the child was killed acts as a harsh metaphor. It apparently never stops running during the many years that he is in prison (Barnaby). He sees it as an instrument of destruction, and he sets it on fire (Barnaby), which seems to theoretically stop this cycle of violence. This reaction is ineffective, as Popper's authority remains intact regardless of any symbolic action.

After it becomes clear that the normal channels of resistance are not working, Aila and some other community members hatch a plan to enact revenge on Popper by breaking into the school and robbing him. While they are doing so, Aila and her young accomplices decide to humiliate him by making him shower in the community's feces. While the robbery works, this

only aggravates Popper further, and he finds Aila before she can run away. He pushes her to the ground and begins to disrobe, apparently in order to rape her (Barnaby). Popper's power remains intact despite the robbery, and he intends to enact it violently, as he so often does. The money he collects is a result of, not the source of, his power. Economic punishments do not therefore alter power structures in the film.

But before he can hurt Aila, the smaller boy that she spends most of her time with, Juiij,<sup>89</sup> picks up a rifle and shoots him. Popper, as representative of a sovereign Settler legal order, is eliminated. His death does not necessarily lead to the elimination of this legal order, though, because Popper can be replaced by another Indian Agent, who might enact their authority in any number of ways. However, unlike other texts under consideration in this chapter, we see some aftermath of this action and can therefore evaluate its efficacy on some level. Joseph takes responsibility for the murder, and he goes back to prison. A respected member of the community known only as "The Old Man" takes on some authority in the community, shutting down the drug trade. Discussing the film in terms of its depiction of inter-generational trauma, Kyung-Sook Boo<sup>90</sup> argues that this ending "suggests hope that the soul wound may be stopped from being passed down another generation" (215). The violence is not posited as a solution in and of itself, but Popper's death creates a sort of power vacuum that the Old Man takes up. That we end with this information and not with the establishment of a new Indian Agent suggests that, in the wake of a revolt, power might be re-concentrated in community members who are more likely to act in good faith. The means to achieve sovereignty, autonomy,

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<sup>89</sup> Their exact relationship is unclear – it looks like a sibling relation, but the age difference between the two makes this relationship genetically impossible because of Aila's mother's death and her father's imprisonment. In any case, Aila takes care of Juiij as part of an apparent kinship tie.

<sup>90</sup> As of this writing, Boo's article is the only published peer-reviewed article about *Rhymes*.

or self-government need not necessarily be violent, but these means must upset the power structure rather than leaving it intact if any change is to be enacted.

The film therefore ends by imagining new possibilities in the manner that John Borneman argues is necessary for reconciliation in the wake of ethnic cleansing: “Passing and enforcing judgments is crucial, but it is only the last step in a settling of accounts that itself will remain open to memory work over time. Retributive justice merely creates a sense of ending by stopping the cycle of rebounding violence, thereby inaugurating the possibility of mourning the losses and articulating alternative beginnings” (299-300). Borneman’s argument mirrors Coulthard’s understanding of Indigenous resentment of the colonist in Canada as “an important turning point” (*Red Skin* 114) through which Indigenous peoples might turn to political resistance and away from internalized colonialism and lateral violence. That is, retributive justice is not an end in itself, but might be necessary in order to start a better structure, to create a new kind of conciliation. While Aila does not pass judgment in a juridical sense, Jujiij killing Popper suggests that his violently enacted power can only be stopped through violently retributive means.

#### *4.5: Conclusion*

This chapter has argued that the literary archive of texts about residential schooling suggests that peaceful, dialogue-based resistance to colonial violence is ineffective. It is ineffective because the colonial state continues to enact violence on Indigenous communities and these communities have no domestic legal recourse. I have further argued that, in light of this dialogical failure, Indigenous peoples may legitimately mobilize their anger, reject reconciliation, and resist continued colonization by asserting their sovereign rights.

The consistency with which dialogical solutions *do not* work within the political spaces postulated by the literary texts considered here suggests that there is little hope for reconciliation at the present moment, and that continued direct resistance to the settler state may be necessary. Dialogue is only effective if the side with the balance of power is willing to re-examine this power and how it is exercised, which is not the case in contemporary Canada. That is, if “reconciliation” within the Canadian state continues settler colonialism in perhaps a gentler way, then it may be the case that further resistance to the state must happen prior to any reconciliatory movement. Such work may have to include a return to the direct action-based-political resistance of the 1980s, “a near decade-long escalation of Native frustration with a colonial state” characterized by “a marked rise in First Nations’ militancy and land-based direct action” (Coulthard *Red Skin* 116). As a settler critic, I have endeavoured to follow Coulthard’s suggestion that “we ought to critically affirm rather than denigrate” (128) what we identify as “Indigenous peoples’ anger and resentment” (128) in analyzing literature and practical forms of resistance. It is only upon taking seriously these legitimate emotional responses that Settlers might reasonably hope for reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude this dissertation seems an incongruent exercise. Indeed, one of my underlying premises here has been to remain sceptical of any conclusive statements, especially about reconciliation, and especially those necessitated by institutional restrictions. However, a few final comments about the scope and significance of my arguments here are required by the University of Alberta's thesis guidelines. In the Introduction, I outlined several broad questions, so I here return to them to structure my final comments in an effort to evaluate whether and how I have answered these questions.

My first question was "how complete a record of residential school history is possible, given the TRC's testimonial methods?" Based on my investigation, presented mostly in Chapter One, it seems clear that the most complete record of residential school history to date is still not complete in any reasonable sense of the word. It is incomplete for several reasons having to do with the information contained within the document, the evidence that was not available to them, and the TRC's interpretation of it. The TRC collected a much larger archive of testimony about residential schooling than they could include even in their expansive Final Report. While one could potentially make the case that the testimonies they did include are representative of the full record, a representation of the full record is not the full record itself. One might also argue that the TRC's archive contains all of the testimonies that witnesses allowed to be placed in the public record, so to suggest that the Final Report proves that the TRC's record is incomplete is to shift the goalposts in answering a broad question about the TRC. However, even conceding that a reading of the Final Report is not a full analysis of the TRC, the TRC's archive is still limited by the conflicts they had with the government in releasing historical records. Thus, if we take a "complete history" at its most basic definition, the TRC's record is incomplete due largely to

factors outside its control. This is not to devalue the TRC's work, but to remind all people who seek to understand residential school history not to take the TRC's account as final.

Further, as I argue in Chapters Two through Four, literary and other artistic representations of residential school history should be considered part of a complete history. These texts contain a kind of literary truth, and somebody seeking to understand this history would find significant value in these texts, which the TRC did not consider. Finally, interpretation of the historical record is part of the complete record of residential schooling, as the TRC is a historiographical body, not one that presents a simple chronicle. Thus, the details that the Reports leave out with respect to IAP and CEP compensation represent a gap. So too does the non-legal argument the TRC makes about residential schooling as genocide. Responsible commentators on residential school history, legacy, and representation must consider these interpretive issues to be in progress, not finished, if we are to fully consider residential school policy's impact.

These issues with interpretation also speak to my second question, which was "what impact do the gaps and silences in the TRC's historical record have on the overall understanding of residential school history possible from a strict reading of the TRC reports?" Certainly, one can get a significant overview of residential school history and legacy from the TRC Reports. What they do not – or cannot – contain does not cut off understanding, though. Instead, as I have attempted to show here, a close, responsible, detailed reading of the TRC Reports makes clear its limitations. However, these limitations, alongside the significant successes of the TRC Reports, provide opportunities for further research, discussion, and activism in the wake of the TRC.

The remainder of my questions had less to do with the historical record than the discourse of reconciliation: "What is the nature of reconciliation for the TRC?" Through my readings in



Chapter One especially, it became clear that Reconciliation meant the production of a peaceful relationship between Indigenous peoples and Settlers within the confines of the settler colonial state. It did not mean challenging the underpinnings of settler colonialism, nor did it mean allowing for Indigenous sovereignty within the borders of the state, nor did it mean meaningful political self-determination. For the TRC, Reconciliation primarily meant reconciliation *to* state power (tragic reconciliation), not reconciliation of Indigenous power with state power (comic reconciliation). These distinctions are important because, as became clear in my later chapters, many Indigenous peoples are not interested in reconciling with Settlers within a state that is still fundamentally colonial. In the literary texts – and in a significant subset of Indigenous theory – tragic reconciliations to the state are refused in favour of comic reconciliations within Indigenous communities.

These differences speak to my questions about the literary texts: is there a distinct impact that literature can have in fostering understanding of residential school experience? What kinds of reconciliation does the literary archive depict? How are they similar to and different from those prioritized by the TRC? What do these similarities and differences indicate about the nature of reconciliation called for by Indigenous peoples outside the confines of the TRC? There is very little similarity between the TRC's version of Reconciliation and the versions of reconciliation depicted in the literary texts. Approaching these texts on their own terms reveals that they are either fundamentally unconcerned about reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and Settlers (*Kiss of the Fur Queen*; *Porcupines and China Dolls*; *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*; and *A Red Girl's Reasoning*) or fundamentally pessimistic about the possibilities for this kind of reconciliation (*The Redemption of Oscar Wolf*; *As Long as the Rivers Flow*; and "Education is Our Right"). This does not mean that the literary texts suggest that no reconciliation is possible.

In many ways, these texts are optimistic testimonies to Indigenous peoples' strength. They do suggest that reconciliation between and within Indigenous communities is possible, necessary, and should be the first priority in the wake of the TRC. Since residential schooling sought to break up Indigenous communities and destroy Indigenous cultures, the kinds of resurgence and resistance that we see in the literary texts constitutes reconciliation. The communities had conciliatory relations, which were broken by residential schooling and settler colonialism, and resurgence and resistance can constitute a return to prior conciliatory relations and create new ones.

This is also not to say that there are no similarities between the TRC and the literary texts under discussion here. The literary texts largely agree with the TRC about political and historical matters: residential schooling and the settler state have harmed Indigenous peoples individually and culturally, these harms continue into the present, and communities must find ways to move forward from this harm. These similarities speak to my general reading method for this dissertation, which begins from Northrop Frye's premise that literature contains "hypothetical postulates" (76) that must conform to the text's internal logic (74). That is, the internal logics set up by the TRC and the literary texts are substantially similar because their understanding of the history of residential schooling and settler colonialism are fundamentally similar. Thus, to compare their hypothetical solutions to this violent history – the TRC's Calls to Action and the moves toward healing and resistance to state power made in the literary texts – is to compare sets of future-oriented postulates about reconciliation. These literary texts are fictional, but in understanding them as fiction, and reading them in the knowledge of the TRC and its associated histories, we can develop a greater understanding of what reconciliation might or might not look like in the future.

My hope is that the arguments I have made in this dissertation contribute to the broader discourses on settler colonial and residential school history in Canada, Canadian Indigenous literatures, and the spaces where these discourses intersect. My goal has been to extend critiques of reconciliation in Canada made by David Garneau, Audra Simpson, Leanne Simpson, Kevy Martin, Roger I. Simon, Jennifer Henderson, Pauline Wakeham, Glen Coulthard, Jodi Byrd, and others by theorizing reconciliation in light of the TRC, which has assumed a dominant role in public discourse about reconciliation since the Final Report's release. I have also tried to extend the critical conversations about each of the literary texts. Most of the criticism on these texts was published before the TRC Reports, so by reading them in light of the TRC, this dissertation adds in this new layer of analysis. Finally, there is ongoing discourse about residential school literature, and critics have begun making arguments about these literary texts in the context of the TRC while I have completed this dissertation. As I mention in my Introduction, Sam McKegney's pre-TRC *Magic Weapons* is the clearest model for my work, but I have more recently been immensely inspired by the work done by literary, political, and artistic critics during and in the aftermath of the TRC, particularly the analyses contained in the invaluable collections *Reconciling Canada* and *Arts of Engagement*. Ideally, this dissertation intervenes in these ongoing discussions by offering a sustained engagement with the literary archive in the wake of the TRC, and a careful consideration of the TRC's Final Report. Further work is certainly needed to more precisely conceptualize and enumerate how literary analysis can contribute to discussions about reconciliation, but my work here offers an engagement that makes a strong case for including literary voices – both artistic and critical – in any such future discussions.

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