

READING PRACTICES FOR INDIGENOUS LITERATURES

READING PRACTICES FOR INDIGENOUS LITERATURES:
EXPLORING IMPOSSIBLE MOMENTS IN WORKS BY RICHARD WAGAMESE
AND LEE MARACLE

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Lay Abstract

This project presents close readings of what are conceptualized as “impossible moments” in four literary works : Richard Wagamese’s (Anishinaabe) books *Keeper ’n Me* (1994) and *For Joshua* (2002), as well as author Lee Maracle’s (Stó:lō) novels *Ravensong* (1994) and its sequel *Celia’s Song* (2014). The term “impossible moments” may be understood as characterizing unsettling reading experiences, particularly those that leave the outside (i.e. non-local and, or non-Indigenous) reader on unfamiliar ground regarding how best to interpret the “impossibilities” that occur within a given narrative. The critical framework in this project demonstrates that “impossibilities” in Wagamese and Maracle’s works are expressions of kinship between all living things (i.e. humans, the land, the animals, and spirits) as well as expressions of spiritual traditions and ceremonies. Indeed, this project demonstrates the need to reassess our reading practices to encompass differentiated ways of knowing.

Abstract

This project arose out of restlessness, on my part, regarding how to read and engage with elements in Indigenous literatures written in Canada, which I could hitherto label as supernatural occurrences. Indeed, my Euro-Western literary education has been unable to provide appropriate tools for profoundly exploring the supernatural occurrences that I was encountering in the literature—a limitation that is made clear by scholars like Vine Deloria Jr. (Sioux), whose work calls for considering origin stories as *literally* possible. Through this thesis, I re-conceptualize these “supernatural” occurrences as “impossible moments”—a term that I use to avoid the connotations of Euro-Western rationalist nomenclature while also remaining aware that I read from an outsider position. My literary archive consists of Richard Wagamese’s (Anishinaabe) novel *Keeper ’n Me* (1994), his autobiographical book *For Joshua* (2002), Lee Maracle’s (Stó:lō) novel *Ravensong* (1993), and its sequel *Celia’s Song* (2014). Through the project, I establish two ethical, self-reflexive reading practices: one considers my active participation as a reader within the narratives and the other attends to my role as a reader in the “real” world. These reading practices are established both within the body of the thesis, as well as in extensive meditations within the footnotes. As an outsider, I employ my reading practices with the intention of bringing awareness to the limitations of Western literary reading practices, while at the same time not assuming an authoritative voice. Particularly important for my explorations of impossible moments is Daniel Heath Justice’s (Cherokee) principles of “kinship,” a term that identifies relational responsibilities between all living things. Utilizing the principles of kinship throughout this project allows me to demonstrate that impossible moments occur

through narrations of the relational engagements that exist between all living things and the characters' spiritual practices.

Acknowledgements

The path to Indigenous knowledge ...
[Is] an intellectual adventure to connect more deeply with Indigenous ecologies
[that leads] into a vast, unforeseen realm of knowing

Marie Battiste and James (Sa'ke'j) Youngblood Henderson

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Declaration of Academic Achievement

All research and analysis in this thesis, except where otherwise cited and acknowledge, is the sole work of Lene Trunjer.

Introduction: Exploring Impossible Moments in Indigenous Literatures

Keeper says when the ancestors in the spirit world smell that smoke [smudge] it makes them happy on accounta they know that someone in this reality's a believer and trying to live in a good way. They remember to watch over us and protect us. And that smoke as it drifts up and up and finally disappears is carrying our prayers into the mystery where the Creator can hear them. (Wagamese, *Keeper 'n Me* 176)

"Death is transformative," Raven said to earth from the depths of the ocean. The sound rolled out, amplifying slowly. Earth heard Raven speak. She paid no attention to the words; she let the compelling power of them play with her sensual self. Her insides turned, a hot burning sensation flitted about the stone of her. Earth turned, folded in on herself, a shock of heat shot through her. It changed her surface, the very atmosphere surrounding her changed. (Maracle, *Ravensong* 85)

These two passages, taken from Richard Wagamese's (Anishinaabe) novel *Keeper 'n Me* as well as Lee Maracle's (Stó:lō) novel *Ravensong* hold such potential for exploring how Indigenous literatures¹ unsettle Western² literary reading practices.

Throughout this project, I describe passages such as these as "impossible moments." The conceptual thinking behind impossible moments emerged out of a restlessness on my part with the limitations of Western epistemologies' and literary theories' ability to make sense of what I could only describe as "impossibilities" in Indigenous literatures. Observing the above passages, both authors employ words (i.e. ancestors, mystery, Creator, as well as transformative, animated Raven, and earth's sensual self) that push the boundaries of how we read. The "impossibility" (on my part) occurs

¹ I employ the term "Indigenous" from Marie Battiste (Mi'kmaq) and James (Sa'ke'j) Youngblood Henderson's (Chickasaw) discussion of a UN definition of 1986, which is a combination of "cultural distinctiveness [that retains elements of] colonialism, discrimination, or marginalization; and [...] the desire of Indigenous peoples to continue their cultural integrity into the future" (63). The term "Indigenous" is used in this paper as a general terminology for different tribal literatures. Where applicable, I will address scholars and their frameworks from a tribal position. Furthermore, I employ the term "literatures" in plural to signal the diversity of tribal literatures behind the term "literature."

² I employ the term "Western" when generally referring to Europe, United States and Canada. Where applicable, I will use the term "Euro-Western" to refer to my own background.

because the authors blur the lines between a realistic setting (framing these passages) and more-than-natural interactions between smoke, prayers and Creator as well as between Raven and the earth. What unsettles my reading practise is that Wagamese's and Maracle's novels engage with layers of traditional stories, with "more-than-human entities" (Abram 8)³, as well as with spiritual practices that ask me, as a reader, to consider Indigenous epistemologies in which these interactions are part of an experienced world.

The reading of these passages is unsettling because they challenge my perception of what constitutes fiction in literary texts, and especially of the ways in which I negotiate a fictional realism in the presence of animated entities. Within a Western frame of theory, encounters with more-than-human entities are often relegated to supernatural genres. My hypothesis is that by employing supernatural literary reading strategies I do a disservice to the Indigenous literatures and to what these texts are attempting to convey. However, from my own Euro-Western, literary perspective, it makes sense to utilize supernatural theory to analyze these passages because, as a Euro-Western reader, I lack tribal, cultural knowledge to profoundly engage with and understand the usage of animated, more-than-human entities, and narrations of spiritual practices.⁴ Thus, these passages unsettle more than my reading

³ Throughout the thesis I employ the term "more-than-human entities" from philosopher David Abram's renowned work *The Spell of the Sensuous*. I use this term to indicate what I mean when I say that an entity is the ecologies around us: "the diverse plants and the myriad animals—birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, insects—that inhabit or migrate through the region [...] the particular winds and weather patterns that inform the local geography, as well as the various landforms—forests, rivers, caves, mountains—that lend their specific character to the surrounding earth" (Abram 6-7). Furthermore, I employ "more than-human entities" to signal that I talk about animated entities with their own form of agency and with which humans can develop meaningful relationships.

⁴ Blair Stonechild (Cree-Saulteaux) refers to a general sense of spirituality as: "a search for meaning, the desire to know the truth about things and oneself" (183). Considering what Stonechild means by "meaning" and "desire," I expand on these terms with Daniel Coleman's definition taken from his extensive meditation on reading practices. Coleman explains his perception of spirituality as "a drive or energy in ourselves that is outward-reaching, that is a kind of longing to be meaningfully connected. I

strategies, or how I negotiate *fictional* realities. The texts push my frame of knowing, and ask of me to consider the possibility that these passages may be taken as literal (or “taken literally”). My exploration of reading these passages as “literal” derives from Vine Deloria Jr. (Sioux) who suggests a form of literalness in his paramount work, *God is Red*, in which he expounds upon the relation between literality and old stories: “I have been gradually led to believe that the old stories must be taken literally if at all possible, that deep secrets and a deeper awareness of the complexity of our universe was experienced by our ancestors and that something of their beliefs and experiences can be ours once again” (xvi). I follow up Deloria’s intriguing statement by quoting Blair Stonechild (Cree-Saulteaux), who elaborates upon the notion of a different epistemological reality, literality, and Deloria’s expression of the “complexity of our universe.” Stonechild builds upon these three concepts by saying, “the spiritual plane is not simply a belief, but is *reality*” (63, emphasis added).⁵ The “impossibility” (although only impossible to the outside reader) in Deloria’s and Stonechild’s expressions of “literally real” stories that refer to a literally real spirit realm shake my well-established worldview and theoretical frame of reference; however, their statements simultaneously allow me to re-consider *how* I read and provide me with the opportunity to venture into different knowings and perceive differentiated realities. As Marie Battiste (Mi’kmaq) and James (Sa’ke’j) Youngblood Henderson (Chickasaw)

mean what finally moves us, what propels our actions and sparks our imaginations. I mean a recognition of ourselves as connected to others, to the surrounding world and—within or beyond the sensory world—to the creator” (9). I employ these two definitions because they describe a spirituality that embraces a personal relationship with what motivates and drives us.

⁵ Battiste and Henderson also talk about the spiritual plain: “the core belief of Indigenous spirituality is that everything is alive, and Indigenous peoples seek spirituality through intimate communion with ecological biodiversity” (100). That “everything” is considered alive echoes Abram’s definition of ecologies (p. 2). By ecology, I refer to Battiste and Henderson’s assertion that “the ecologies in which we live are more to us than setting and place; they are more than homelands or promised homelands. These ecologies do not surround Indigenous peoples; we are an integral part of them and we inherently belong to them” (9).

put it, “Indigenous knowledge needs to be learned and understood and interpreted based on form and manifestation as understood by Indigenous peoples” (134).⁶ My proposed research objective is to show how impossible moments make readers aware of encounters of “something” outside our own frame of reference that asks us to reassess our reading practices. Instead of imposing definite interpretations and definitions, we might entertain the idea that works of Indigenous literatures may be taken literally and have transformational effects that engage the characters as well as the reader. Indeed, I argue that impossible moments reveal Indigenous (tribal) ways of narrating principles of kinship, and through these relationships, and by actively participating with body, mind and spirit, the characters as well as the reader are able to attain intellectual, spiritual, and embodied ways of knowing.⁷

My motive for conducting this project is to engage in conversation across difference between Indigenous and Western knowings, especially that of spiritual relational kinship. Stonechild points to my own concerns that if we do not engage in conversations about spirituality—we will then risk silencing the same spirituality that has been prohibited, controlled and then assimilated. Stonechild makes these important observations: “Is it possible that there can be a renaissance? Can ancient

⁶ I define Indigenous knowledge along lines laid out by Battiste and Henderson who clarify that Indigenous knowledge is built by generations of individuals who are “engaged in a lifelong personal search for ecological understanding” during which they “make observations, compare their experiences with what they have been told by their teachers, conduct experiments to test the reliability of their knowledge, and exchange their findings with others” (45).

⁷ Lene’s voice: The use of pronouns, such as I, we, you, them, or, addressing me and the theorists/authors I employ in the text as settler, White, Western, Indigenous, Anishinaabe, Stó:lō etc. demonstrate that the challenge of writing outside my own subjectivity—or outside a Danish frame of reference—includes the fact that by using pronouns other than “I,” I risk generalizing or excluding experiences as described in my project. However, employing the “I” is not without problems either, because by using “I” it appears as if I am having one-way conversations with myself throughout the paper. If I use “we” am I then referring to the person reading, and what if the reader (self-)identifies as outside my frame of reference? Moreover, Indigenous readers will approach these texts from perspectives that are quite different from my own. Thus, when I employ the “I,” I specifically refer to me, as the reader, and as a researcher who is discussing her reading practices. When I employ “we,” I refer to a general, broad “we” that should not be taken as addressing a specific reader of my project.

meanings of spirituality be rediscovered and be relevant in the modern world? Can the concepts that everything has spirit, is interconnected, and therefore deserves to be respected help restore the environment?” (182). Stonechild raises these crucial questions in the backdrop of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada’s report from 2015 which investigates the “impact of residential schools on over 150,000 First Nations pupils” (182). Stonechild refers to the commission’s findings, in which “the commission found that the schools’ program amounted to ‘cultural genocide’” (182). The result of this politicised, oppressive school system was that “cultural knowledge, including language and spiritual beliefs, was replaced with alien systems” (182). Stonechild aligns the commission’s findings with his own studies in “More Holistic Assessment for Improved Education Outcomes” from 2009 in which he found that there was a “lack of teaching of spirituality in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal classrooms” and that the “teachers and students reported a sense of ‘something lacking’” (182). Stonechild’s discussion of the TRC’s findings as well as his own research demonstrates the necessity of making spirituality relevant again. I will, in this particular instance, argue that this is true for many people, myself included. The “something lacking” does not mean that humankind should assimilate Indigenous spirituality, but that we can at least become aware of the “lack of spirituality” if we are to engage in respectful listening and conversations with Indigenous peoples and Indigenous literatures.

The purpose of this project is thus to theorize reading practices for some select works of Indigenous literatures. These practices are meant to address what I identify as an epistemological and spiritual quandary between Indigenous and Western knowings, which arises when readers encounter impossible moments in Indigenous

literatures. The history of Western institutions taking over Indigenous spiritual traditions raises important questions both about how I should *study* Indigenous knowledge and spirituality, in this case, through recognizing impossible moments, and how to determine the best approach for *writing* about my conclusions, especially as this project emerges from within an academic setting. My study of impossible moments solely derives from personal encounters of “impossibilities” that exist outside my frame of reference. Reading impossible moments requires me to make sense of concepts such as “literality” and “kinship,” and it challenges me to perceive and take seriously the spiritual realm that exists within Indigenous epistemologies, while at the same time not trying to incorporate these concepts into my own Euro-Western knowledge system. I thus position my readings within Indigenous scholars’ theoretical frameworks; and where applicable for my archive, I turn to tribally-specific knowledge. These reading requirements for exploring impossible moments have compelled me to establish two methodological approaches. First, I include self-reflexive footnotes throughout the project, which I refer to as “Lene’s voice;” and second, I position myself as a reader who questions my own reading strategies. I will in the following, expound upon these methodological strategies.

Ethical Research Concerns in my Project

The reassessment of reading practices in the study Indigenous literatures implicates me as a Danish (Euro-Western) educated researcher. Considering my Danish background, I wonder how I conduct research as an outsider with no access to Elders or ceremonies that can guide my exploration of Indigenous knowledge as I proceed with my project. Indigenous literatures invite me to engage with a reading practice that simultaneously insists that I keep a certain epistemological distance. In

other words, the tension between my Danish education and Indigenous epistemologies creates an ethical⁸ distance that I need to negotiate in my readings. I am thus attempting to write my project with the awareness that I can never fully access the knowledge presented in my archive. My own insistence on an ethical distance between Indigenous epistemologies and me arises out of a concern that the research outcome somehow demonstrates that I am assimilating knowledge into my own ways of knowing. This ethical concern of assimilating knowledge arises from my discussion of how we should engage with Indigenous spiritual practices that have been prohibited. Lee Maracle points to these concerns when she stresses the crucial stakes for Indigenous peoples to recover their own body of knowledges. She explains that the Europeans' colonial strategies, by means of "legal, military, and state machinery" (79) dismantled "the process of knowledge transmission among First Nations knowledge keepers and their children through a variety of means" (79). Maracle mentions the potlatch laws⁹ as examples of how generations of Indigenous knowledge were prohibited and then appropriated "to serve the mother country or consigned to museums and archives to which First Nations people had no access until recently" (79). My ethical concern is that if I to any extent assimilate Indigenous knowledge

⁸ Lene's voice: I would like to think through ideas of ethical practice alongside Marlene Brant Castellano (Mohawk), who reminds us that "ethics cannot be limited to devising a set of rules to guide researcher behaviour in a defined task. Ethics, the rules of right behaviour, are intimately related to who you are, the deep values you subscribe to, and your understanding of your place in the spiritual order of reality. The fullest expression of a people's ethics is represented in the lives of the most knowledgeable and honourable members of the community" (103). I turn to Castellano's definition of "ethical" because it embraces what I am attempting to do in this project: understanding my role in reading Indigenous and how I engage with a different knowledge system. I question myself as to what my "deep values" are and if I truly understand my part (if I have one?) in the stakes of suggesting a reassessment of reading practices. I have come to realize during the process of this project that I am not consciously aware of what elements construct my conduct as a reader, writer and researcher. Coming to awareness about these ethical values is something I continuously reflect on through the paper.

⁹ Keith Thor Carlson explains that the potlatch laws were established under the Indian Act in 1885, which made "the potlatch illegal" (*The Power* 201). The law was set in place because potlatch ceremonies obstructed Indigenous peoples from "successfully achieving a state of Western civilization" (201). The potlatch, moreover, was considered "anathema to civilized society." (202).

from undertaking this project, will I then not, in similar ways, emulate the colonial system's ways of overtaking Indigenous knowledge?

These ethical concerns are the reason why I employ Willie Ermine's (Cree) theory of "ethical space."¹⁰ I consider ethical space as a "space" in which I can encounter and respect the position from which Indigenous knowledge systems speak. Ermine's assertion that knowledge arises "from a distinct history, knowledge tradition, philosophy, and social and political reality" (194) rings true for both my own knowings as well as for Indigenous knowings. The way knowledge is produced makes me aware that establishing dialogue within the ethical space requires keen awareness of my own ways of engaging with the world that surrounds me. If I am to establish dialogue, I have to be aware of my own position so I do not unconsciously assimilate Indigenous epistemologies into my Euro-Western knowledge system. Ermine's theory thus creates a platform from which I can employ a self-reflexive method that establishes dialogue with respect to each knowledge system. I will use Ermine's theory both as a self-reflexive method in the "Lene's voice" footnotes as well as in my readings of the chapters. The purpose of my footnotes is to establish a way of thinking through my transformational learning experiences while undertaking this project. The footnotes provide an avenue for me to engage with the Indigenous literatures and epistemologies, as presented by the authors and the scholars throughout

¹⁰ Ermine developed his theory based on the ideas (or philosophies) presented in Roger Poole's book *Towards Deep Subjectivity* (1972). Ermine explains Poole's ethical space as a space established between two men with opposing interests (194). Instead of thinking of the space created between two men, Ermine theorizes the space as in-between two entities, "as a space between the Indigenous and Western thought worlds," and elaborates on his conceptualization of space as one that is "conceptualized by the unwavering constructions of difference and diversity between human communities" (194). The way Ermine frames ethical space reminds me of the necessity for always approaching "unfamiliarities" from this ethical position.

my project, and in relation to my own knowings, life experiences, and experimental learning conducted at Princess Point in Hamilton.

I conduct experimental learning, in part because much Indigenous knowledge is established from generations of people observing and interacting with ecologies. I want to conduct a similar practice in order to pay respect to the teachings from both my archive and my theoretical readings.¹¹ To commit myself to this way of learning, I found inspiration and guidance in Richard Wagamese's novel *Keeper 'n Me*, in which the protagonist Garnet Raven expresses profound ways of feeling the land. I wonder what it means to consciously *feel* the land from the perspective that everything is alive and all living things are my relatives. I write consciously because I, since the age of six, have been horseback riding, and I developed a very deep relationship with both the horses and with the land; yet, I have never thought consciously about *how* and *why* these relationships became so integral to my being. When conducting my experimental learning, I apply an Indigenous theoretical framework (as presented in this project, which includes actively engaging with my body upon the land, listening to birds, engaging with trees through intuitive non-verbal ways of communicating, and reflecting upon these engagements through my writings),¹² which hopefully will give me a conscious method to observe and engage with the ecologies at Princess Point.

¹¹ Lene's voice: My experimental learning is also motivated by Battiste and Henderson's assertion that Indigenous knowledge should be learned and understood from the perspective of that of Indigenous peoples (134) (in this project I write about it on p. 4). They specifically say that "the path to Indigenous knowledge [...] does not start with race or racial knowledge" (39), but rather that "to learn about Indigenous perspectives requires a different method of research" (41) and they further outline that "to sustain Indigenous knowledge, one must be willing to take on responsibility associated with that knowing, especially putting the knowledge into daily practice" (41). From what Battiste and Henderson map out, I have tried to change my way of studying by conducting experimental learning on a regular basis.

¹² Lene's voice: The experimental learning has for me been about staying in the present moment while I am at Princess Point. I am often just standing still or leaning up against a tree, while practicing breathing in harmony with the land around me. Furthermore, I listen and observe what happens around me, and try to distinguish between voices of birds, squirrels, chipmunks and deer.

While I know that relationship, for lack of a better word, flows easily between horses, the land and myself, applying a conscious method to what I already know illustrates the ethical issues of assimilating knowledge. I cannot profoundly and respectfully explore Indigenous epistemologies without committing myself genuinely; yet, by doing so, I obtain a method that adds to my own knowledge and ways of being with the land. The potential problem with using Indigenous knowledge to garner a closer relationship with the land is that by adopting Indigenous knowledge and ways of being in the world seems related to the illusion that anyone can take on Indigeneity, and by extension, naturalize engagement with the land and animals. The concerns I have outlined here demonstrate the importance of conducting my experimental learning in ethical space.

Establishing ethical space and maintaining distance is, however, truly complicated. The balance between knowing my own knowledge system thoroughly and exploring Indigenous epistemologies echoes the ethical concerns of conducting experimental learning. Another example that might help clarify the ethical concerns of this project is found in my initial interest in Indigenous literatures. In 2013, I found myself at McMaster University through an international exchange program. At the beginning of the school year, I participated in MFNSA's¹³ annual powwow. While standing there, I felt the sound of the powwow drum flow through the soil into my body. I had to leave after an hour because the feeling of the drum's rhythmical beat in my bones made me nauseous. The whole night I felt the influence, and the next morning, I woke up with a profound resolution to study Indigenous literatures and make sense of the pervading colonial structures, as well as the knowledge of

¹³ McMaster's First Nations Student Association.

traditional, oral stories and spiritual practices. In my own words, I would say the drum called upon me; however, I am not sure what that specifically implies. My experiences with the drum and my experimental learning at Princess Point demonstrate why ethical encounters are so difficult. I need to know enough of the drum's and the land's significance in Indigenous epistemologies to recognize their value, but if I assimilate their significances into my own knowledge system, I contravene the ethics of respectful distance.

Becoming more aware of how I conduct my research in this project, I turn to Renate Eigenbrod who had a German education, and, like me, came from a European country. Her experiences with conducting research in the Indigenous literary field from an outsider position provide crucial information, especially considering how Eigenbrod challenges the scholarship of White academics in the field of Indigenous literatures. Eigenbrod thoughtfully reflects on her own subjectivity and the "situatedness of [her] knowledge" (xv) from German and Canadian positions, or as Michael Pomedli puts it when he explores Ojibwe knowledge, "how is it possible to enter an Ojibwe world? How can any outsider say anything meaningful and intelligent about that world?" (xiv). Pomedli's agonizing questions echo my concerns of undertaking this project. Similarly, Eigenbrod warns that publication from White scholars "easily [can] become another 'conquest'" (xv). Considering Eigenbrod's warning, how do I then involve myself in this project without turning the knowledge I produce into a conquest of Indigenous epistemologies?

Helen Hoy's *How Should I Read These?* provides me with a frame to become aware of and think through how I involve myself in this project as "a specific cultural outsider" (11). I bring attention to Hoy's extended meditation of reading practices

because Hoy, like myself, is a white woman who questions her engagement with literatures by Indigenous authors. My ethical concerns of assimilating knowledge through the act of being a privileged reader emulate those of Hoy. Hoy makes readers aware of these privileges by stressing the power relations that play out between white researchers who are “privileged by race and class” (7) and “writers and theorists of colour” (7) who are “being perceived primarily, and disproportionately, in terms of their race” (6). Hoy’s awareness of race, colour and class issues seems to collapse the diverse groups of Indigenous peoples and people of colour in opposition to white people. Likewise, Hoy’s focus on these racialized social constructs does not take into account the issues of land rights, or land claims, or how to engage with all living things from an outside, privileged position. The specific focus on that of privilege is, however, productive for two reasons. First, making sense of what it means to be a privileged reader brings emotional discomfort, in part because I come from an economically unprivileged background, and in part because my cultural identity has been shaped by class factors rather than race, as a product of the racially homogenous culture in which I was raised.¹⁴ Secondly, Hoy’s critique of outsiders’ methodological approaches, such as self-reflexivity, which can be a “for[m] of luxury and self-indulgence” (18), made me aware that I risk indulging myself by providing myself with a voice in my footnotes. Thinking through these aspects of privilege reminds me that establishing ethical space is also about identifying the emotional discomfort and

¹⁴ Lene’s voice: the noun “privilege” has been especially difficult to make sense of, and it was not until I came to understand that privilege is not only about money, or always having to work hard for what I have, but also about mobility. Eigenbrod talks about mobility in terms of how “white, middle-class academics [have] freedom to move in any possible way” (xiii), by which I suggest that I have the freedom to move away from Denmark, but also that I have freedom in my choice of studies. I am still trying to grasp the implication of White privilege that is associated with the ability to move between identities at will, such as non-Indigenous peoples’ mobility (moving on the land) and non-Indigenous peoples’ taking on Indigenous identities (which is one of my concerns for undertaking this project, especially because taking on the identities of others have few consequences for me).

types of self-indulgence that hinder my understanding of what I read. Positioning myself in ethical space is thus a radical self-exploration of personal entanglements (e.g. not fully grasping what privilege means in Canada from my Danish perspective) and requires that I accept discomfort as part of my reading practice in this project.

To foresee the ethical issues of being a reader of privilege who discusses my own readings, I draw on theories that attend to the concerns of engaging with Indigenous knowledge. I think through Nicole Latulippe's (Anishinaabe) proposed¹⁵ Indigenous research paradigm because it provides me with a framework that emphasizes concepts such as responsibility and respect. Latulippe maps out the paradigm as one that "centers the relationships and responsibilities researchers carry with respect to Indigenous lands, people, and systems of knowledge and governance" (1). Moreover, Latulippe clarifies that the paradigm may be understood as "a web of connections and relationships" (4). Therefore, researching Indigenous literatures is not just about analyzing a given text, but about respect for relations,¹⁶ from what Latulippe emphasizes, Indigenous research's aim is to "not explain an objectified universe, but to understand one's responsibilities and relationships" (5).¹⁷ I find, that I can build upon Latulippe's paradigm of a "web of connections" with Larissa Lai's

¹⁵ Latulippe's discussion of an Indigenous research paradigm is based on Linda Smith's work *Decolonizing Methodologies*.

¹⁶ I refer to Battiste and Henderson's explanation that relationality may be considered "relationships between the people and the land, and the kinship of the people with the other living creatures that share the land and with the spirit world" (100).

¹⁷ Lene's voice: Perceiving Latulippe's paradigm as "a web of connections and relationships" (4) is actually a theoretical impossible moment. We find a different understanding of networks in the term "intertextuality" by which I mean the fact that literary texts build upon each other. I am aware that intertextuality and "web of relations" are not the same thing, which precisely illustrates the challenge of attempting to unpack what Latulippe specifically means by these webs of connections. How do I read Indigenous literatures through employing her paradigm, when I am not completely sure how this interrelatedness functions between text, author, characters, more-than-human entities, and me? How do I read with this interrelatedness in mind?

concept of an “epistemology of respect” (126).¹⁸ I emphasize Lai’s discussion of an active “acknowledgment of differences” (102) to make myself aware that respect (i.e. Indigenous and Western worldviews) is not necessarily built on “sameness,” but, perhaps, more so, in the recognition of “differences” (102). Lai elaborates that perceived differences are a way of building relations that “arise through difference and disagreement” (102). Lai’s powerful statement demonstrates that despite (or even more so, because of) the difference in worldviews, by recognizing these differences I can position myself in a respectful dialogue.

I hope, by employing these methodological strategies that they may contribute to a better respect for different knowledge systems, but also to recognizing my responsibility as a reader and a researcher. The first part (better respect for different knowledge systems) may be considered basic liberalism (you have your knowledge system, I have mine; I do not need to be responsible to respond to your knowledge system or ways of knowing), whereas the second part demands more from me as a reader (some kind of response-ability) by which I suggest that my exploration of impossible moments asks of me to actively participate¹⁹²⁰ (respond), and thus, my

¹⁸ Lai develops her argument from a position of living in diaspora and recognizing her position in relation to Coast Salish people and their territory which she lives upon (99). Although I cannot claim Lai’s position as living in diaspora, I am highly inspired by her discussion of the epistemologies of respect because it informs my thinking of how to approach my archive and the knowledge systems I encounter from conducting my project.

¹⁹ I have borrowed the concept “active participation” (27) from Gregory Cajete (Tewa). I will expand on this in my discussion of reality on p. 17.

²⁰ Lene’s voice: One approach to actively engaging with Indigenous ways of knowing has been my participation with a research group consisting of community based and university based people at the Deyohah’a:ge: Six Nations Polytechnic Knowledge Centre. Here, we discussed research methods from the perspective of the Two Row Wampum belt. The name, Two Row, derives from the treaty between the Iroquois and Dutch dating back to 1613 (Hill, “Oral” 149). The name Two Row comes from “white Wampum belt [that has] two parallel purple lines symboliz[ing] the terms of the treaty” (149). The Two Row treaty was a symbol of mutual “peace, respect and friendship” (Hill, “Linking” 2009, 19). The purple lines represent the Iroquois canoe and the Dutch ship floating parallel on the River of Life (19). When the treaty was made, it was said that each people should stay in their respective canoe and ship; yet, the structure has now become more fluent, considering the colonial legacy, such as the implementation of residential schools, Indigenous children adopted into non-Indigenous homes, and

participation generates a different kind of responsibility. My active participation recalls Latulippe's paradigm of researchers' responsibilities to and respect for the studies they conduct (1). I am employed in the text as a racial, cultural, and colonial other to witness suffering and struggle, and by doing so, as an honest, true witness, I face the consequences of history. To actively participate and carry my responsibilities as a researcher, I think through Maracle's methodological approach when engaging with "story." Maracle explains the importance of articulating and setting aside "personal agendas" when examining "story" ("Oratory" 57). She proclaims this aspect of engaging with "story" because we have to "face the filters through which our specific cultural and personal origins affect clear and clean vision" (59). The responsibilities I gain from conducting this project reaches outside these pages; reaches outside of the Department of English and Cultural Studies, my education, and finishing my M.A. The responsibility emerges out of my experimental learning with the ecologies at Princess Point and the knowledge I gain that become intimately entwined with my way of conducting this project.²¹ Indeed, my exploration of

settler scholars researching Indigenous epistemologies. The water in-between the purple lines (as I can understand it) expresses the ways of making sense of the negotiable relationship between Indigenous peoples and settlers. These discussions of how to enter into research from different outlooks have shaped how I approach my project, specifically in terms of making sense of the shared space in the River of Life. I have found that my background positioned me on the shore instead of in the water, mostly because I am Danish and I did not know how to jump into the water and navigate the Indigenous/Canadian space with the rest of the group. Instead, I have listened and tried to make sense of what was discussed, and I found that there is nothing easy about either being in the water or on the shoreline.

²¹ Lene's voice: Thinking through responsibility is an equal agonizing and deep love for this project, and what it means to me to be able to write it, even though I have come to realize that by doing so, I am looking deep within Indigenous thought processes and returning to the surface as a transformed person. I relate these thoughts of agony and love to Georges Poulet's discussion of reading practices in which he questions the relationship between the book and the reader. He specifically discusses how the physical barriers of the book and of the body disappear when reading: "you're inside it; it is inside you; there is no longer either outside or inside" (42). In Poulet's words he seems to exist in "the consciousness of another"; book lends itself to him (42). When Poulet emerges from this shared consciousness, he has absorbed "words ... images ... ideas" (42) and from that arises a new existence he ascribes to existing in "[his] innermost self" (42). Poulet perfectly sums up my feelings of undertaken this project, and the depths of co-existing in different consciousness' of my readings. The

impossible moments, as well as my proposal for reassessing reading strategies is (part of) a practise of balancing spiritually and academically differentiated knowings in ethical space.

Theoretical Framework:

The Disguises of Fiction: Creating Believability or Literality in Fictional Universes

Reading fiction requires an assent to believable fictional universes. In Catherine Gallagher's "The Rise of Fictionality," she demonstrates that fiction refers to itself as establishing believability within the text while simultaneously making readers aware of its "deception" (338) (i.e. fiction constructs worlds that I can believe in, although I know they are deceptions). When considering what we encounter in impossible moments, we find that what unsettles our reading is a question of interpretation: Do we believe while simultaneously knowing the fictional world is a deception, or do we read with an awareness of a literal "real" fictional world? As Deloria puts it: "the old stories must be taken literally" (xvi). Believing in the novel's fictional universe, according to Gallagher, has to do with a "*willing* suspension of disbelief" (347, emphasis in original) – "disbelief" being "the condition of fictionality [...] not about the story's reality, but about its *believability*, its plausibility" (346, emphasis in original). What we learn from Gallagher is that when reading fiction, we are aware of fiction's potential for both being "real" inside the fictional universe as well as being a fictional text. We suspend our disbelief if the fictional universe presents us with verisimilitude, by which I suggest that we, in the reading, are presented with details that come across as true or real. For example, the passage with

love arises from knowing that my spiritual path (i.e. of meaning, desire and connection) is through studying words, images, and ideas. The agony arises from absorbing these words, images, and ideas, and worrying that I simultaneously assimilate them.

Raven and earth I outlined at the beginning of this chapter, establishes verisimilitude through Raven's and earth's way of communicating and moving. We know birds have voices and can communicate. Likewise, the movements of the earth, described as a "hot burning sensation" and a "shock of heat shot through" (Maracle, *Ravensong* 85) seem plausible ways of describing the internal layers of the earth (e.g. earthquakes or volcanic eruptions). These verisimilitudes make us accept the fictional world. When we then encounter the active engagement between Raven and the earth, by which we learn that "Earth *heard* Raven speak" (85, emphasis added) we suspend our disbelief and believe that the earth and Raven have human-like qualities that enable them to communicate. Similarly, we suspend our disbelief when reading about the earth's human-like qualities that are established through pronoun use, such as "she" and "her" (85).

When considering the construction of fictional worlds, I find that the key phrase is "believable narrative." Gallagher expounds upon believability when she explains that "the novel has also been widely regarded as a form that tried, for at least two centuries, to hide its fictionality behind verisimilitude or realism, insisting on certain kinds of referentiality and even making extensive truth claims" (337). Essentially, Gallagher writes that fiction hides behind the appearance of realism (i.e. Raven's voice and the earth's movements). When discussing fictionality according to Gallagher, we might take into consideration that she theorizes the novel's fictionality from an Anglo-American perspective by specifically examining "evidence ... [from] the mid-eighteenth-century novel in English" (336). Gallagher explores how the British novel's development of new fictional narratives "became the norm throughout Europe and America in the nineteenth century, and we still anticipate encountering it

when we pick up a novel today” (336-337). I have encountered Gallagher’s assertion of fictionality more than once throughout my education, which to me suggests that I (in general) am influenced by theories of fictionality developed in mid-eighteenth-century British novels. I am thus in this project discussing fictionality as presented from an Anglo-American perspective. The issue with Gallagher’s assertion of fictionality and the “suspension of disbelief” is that it has become almost a mechanical reading practice when I encounter “impossibilities” outside my frame of reference that I—from my limited perspective—think could never happen. Thus, by only suspending my disbelief in my readings of works of Indigenous literatures, I cannot read or perceive impossible moments as literal real encounters.

The literal real encounters ask of us to re-consider our reading approach and that we might entertain the idea that the literatures does or is intended for something different. Maracle explains that in Stó:lō knowledge, we study story “to examine the *context* in which it is told, [and] to understand the *obstacles* to being that it presents, and then to see ourselves through the story, that is, transform ourselves in accordance with our agreement with and understanding of the story” [emphasis added] (55). Maracle further explains that the function of story is to “look for the obstacles to growth and transformation, both in the external and the internal worlds. Once an understanding is achieved, the mythmakers story it up in a way that they hope leads humans toward social maturity and growth” (“Oratory” 57).²² Maracle reflects on

²² In Stó:lō storytelling there are two categories of story. Carlson defines those as “two categories of oral narratives: 1) *sxwōxwiyám*- myth-like stories” of the “Transformers (*Xexá:ls*)” and “2) *sqwélqel*- ‘true stories or news,’ which typically describe experiences in people’s lives” (*You Are* 182). These two kind of stories “are considered true and *real*” (“Orality” 56 emphasis added). Of the former, Carlson writes about the transformational stories that they may be considered as a form of active participation, “the Transformers leave their mark on the world through transformations that in turn are understood and known through the stories describing that act” (61).

what story can do, both as “transformation” and “growth,” and we are invited into the story, to learn, to grow, and to transform, and as Maracle puts it, to study story in a way that leads “to discovery, new directions, and, of course, new story because we build on what we have not heard and said before” (58). This way of engaging with stories rings true for how I am employed as an active participant in this project. Story thus functions as “transformation” and “growth” for the fictional characters as well as for the reader. In my second chapter which is on Maracle, I will explore story as it present itself through context, obstacles as well as possibilities for growth and transformation.

Elaborating on transformational stories, Battiste and Henderson consider what may be understood as a transformational flux. I highlight the notion behind transformational flux because it provides us with a different frame to think though what constitutes reality both in Wagamese’s and Maracle’s passages as well as outside their fictional worlds. Battiste and Henderson define transformational flux from a Mi’kmaq perspective, yet similarities can be drawn to the novels in my archive that are about transforming (and change) from a Canadian-Western worldview to Anishinaabe and Stó:lō worldviews. Battiste and Henderson put emphasis on transformation when they define transformational flux as “forces [that] give rise to the perceived world; they transcend it, they energize it, and they transform it” (76) and they define “forces” as when “all matter can be seen as energy, shaping itself into particular patterns” (76). These forces or energy are described in English as “nature” yet in Mi’kmaq they “can best be expressed as *kisu’lk mlkikno ’tim* (creation place)” (77). Additionally, they explain that “[Mi’kmaq] knowledge does not describe reality; it describes ever-changing insights about patterns or styles of the flux” (77). The way

we engage in transformational flux, seems to be, according to Gregory Cajete (Tewa), about active participation, “continual orientation of Native thought and perception toward active participation, active imagination, and active engagement with all that makes up natural reality” (27). Battiste, Henderson, and Cajete provide us with a way of rethinking the reality we subscribe to, and how this reality eventually shapes how we read literature. Considering different constructs of reality is paramount in my chapters’ exploration of magic, stories’ transformative power, and the characters’ spiritual motivation and desire to develop deep relations with more-than-human entities. Likewise, for us to reassess how we perceive our reality, we need, in Cajete’s words, to actively participate also when it comes to re-consider our reading strategies.

We may be able to expound on literature as generating transformation and growth by considering principles of kinship. Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) stresses that decolonial narrative in Indigenous literatures “reflects indigenous continuity of the past and present and projects that continuity into the future. Stories—like kinship [...] are what we do, what we create, as much as what we are” (150). Justice defines kinship as “a tribal web of kinship rights and responsibilities that link the People, the land, and the cosmos together in an ongoing and dynamic system of mutually affecting relationships” (151). Justice’s outline of principles of kinship seems to support my project’s research paradigm, which takes into consideration the relation between the texts, my readings, and me, as well as the responsibilities I carry. Likewise, the principles of kinship unpack the relational encounters generated within impossible moments. In fact, Justice considers kinship as active engagement, more like “a verb rather than a noun, because kinship, in most indigenous contexts, is something that’s *done* more than something that simply *is*” (159, emphasis in

original). Throughout this project, I consider kinship as a framework for thinking through an active participation between all living things.

Theoretical and Theological Aspects: A Matter of Reality

Battiste and Henderson elaborate on how to recognize different realities by highlighting the concept of “intelligible essences.” “Intelligible essences”²³ is probably *the* concept that has changed how I look upon my world, and by extension, has caused me to re-consider my reading practices the most. Battiste and Henderson outline that the concept of intelligible essences has to do with how we perceive our reality, and they clarify that intelligible essences highlights “the idea that there is a realm of things in nature, independent of the mind, and capable at some point of being perceived as it truly is” (122). Opposite to intelligible essences is, according to Battiste and Henderson, Western Science and philosophical theories that have created artificial realities, which means that people “are subject to arbitrary desires and accept certain assumptions about the natural world” (28). Embedded within these sets of assumptions are social constructs that constitute how we look upon the world. Although these assumptions may be common knowledge, what Battiste and Henderson add to this perception of worldviews is the insight that “the natural world exists independently regardless of any belief about it” (29). Their way of conceptualizing a reality (i.e. the Flux) in which we perceive ecologies as intelligible essences is essential in the discussion of impossible moments, because it encapsulates why the occurrences of these “impossibilities” are impossible for me, as a Euro-Western reader. I perceive realities through artificial Euro-Western scientific

²³ Intelligible essence is borrowed from Greek philosophy, and Battiste and Henderson explain that intelligible essence may be perceived as “the form in matter that lends each being its distinctive identity” (121).

paradigms and by extension I am precluded from reading the more-than-human entities (i.e. ecologies) as presented in Indigenous literatures as entities that exist in their own sensorial way regardless of how I look upon them.²⁴ If the ways we construct reality are somewhat invisible to us, it problematizes how to read with “clear and clean vision”—as Maracle says (“Oratory” 59)—and thus prevents me from establishing dialogue within ethical space.

The ways in which we perceive different realities then also include how we perceive ecologies. When we unpack impossible moments, we have already found that “something happens” between characters, a sensuous land, and more-than-human entities, as well as narrations of spiritual practices. Battiste and Henderson’s introduction of intelligible essences helps us consider a reality with ecologies that exist regardless of which theoretical or personal assumptions we project upon them—the ecologies (i.e. the land, animals, winds, stones) “just” are. Perhaps Abram can expand on how we perceive ecologies when he says that Indigenous cultures engage with the *same nature* as Europeans, but that nature is engaged with *differently*: “[it is] the same plants, animals, forests, and winds—that to literate, ‘civilized’ Europeans are just so much scenery” (9), and thus the word “supernatural” becomes a label for unexplained phenomenon. What Abram clarifies is that how we think, make assumptions about, perceive, and observe ecologies is a matter of the reality we

²⁴ Lene’s voice: The discussion of reality reminds me of how established realities construct societies, values, rules of engagement and so on. What I came to realize in my first year as an undergrad—and from studying Danish literature—is that literature (perhaps more than history itself) shapes certain kinds of thinking within a society. In Denmark, much of the nineteenth-century literature narrates Denmark as small, filled with beech trees and cozy beach areas (which is true, though). It was not until I studied these texts that I became aware of how dominantly my thoughts had been influenced by the thoughts presented in this particular literature. What scared me was not that our thoughts and engagements are shaped through literature (and to some extent are invisible, which makes it difficult to establish ethical space), but that if we are unaware of this influential process, we are also unable to question and push boundaries to make changes. Undertaking this project demonstrates that “reality” depends on these social constructs and that we can change how we perceive the world if we become aware of how reality is constructed.

inhabit and what worldviews we have constructed to fit that reality.²⁵ When we read Indigenous literatures we are confronted with ecologies as animated (i.e. the more-than-human entities), as an expression of the principles of kinship. Battiste and Henderson explain such knowledge systems as “the vibrant relationships between the people, their ecosystems, and the other living beings and spirits that share their land” (42). The principle of kinship between humans and ecologies is a social structure that Battiste and Henderson clarify may be understood as a result of lifelong observations and engagements with all living things, which Battiste and Henderson characterize as “historical marriages or alliances between humans and non-humans, and among different non-human species” (45). How we perceive kinship also provides us with tools to interpret impossible moments, but if we are not in possession of these tools, impossible moments appear to turn supernatural, because that is often the Euro-Western nomenclature that is employed to interpret such “impossible” (supernatural) texts.

Humans are not separate from the natural world, but often the latter is labeled as supernatural when we cannot explain a phenomenon—as, for example, kinship in Indigenous knowledge systems. What we may take into consideration is that the perception of “supernatural” builds on misconceptions from what Abram characterizes as a rational worldview that insists, “that the natural world is largely determinate and mechanical, and that that which is regarded as mysterious, powerful, and beyond human ken must therefore be of some other, nonphysical realm *above* nature,

²⁵ Cajete explains that we construct worldviews from “a set of assumptions and beliefs that form the basis of a people’s comprehension of the world. The stories, symbols, analogies, and metaphors that express a worldview are called mythologies. Worldviews are conveyed via mythologies in informal, formal, unconscious, and conscious ways through family, community, art, media, economic, spiritual, governmental, and educational institutions” (62). As Cajete explains here, many elements compose our worldview, and becoming consciously aware of all of them is arguably the process of having a clear and clean approach to reading—to borrow Maracle’s framing.

‘supernatural’” (8, emphasis in original). Specifically in the first chapter, I discuss the construction of and difference between understanding the physical’s world interactions as supernatural and understanding them through the concept of kinship. Battiste, Henderson, and Abram all theorize that the difference between supernatural and kinship relates to Christian and Indigenous worldviews. Battiste and Henderson theorize about Adam and Eve’s exclusion from the Garden of Eden, and argue that the religious creation story has divorced Christians from being one with the natural world (24). Abram expounds upon this theory of separation from ecologies (i.e. Eden), and relates it to a (rational) separation of our body and soul:

According to the central current of the Western philosophy tradition, from its source in ancient Athens up until the present moment, human beings alone are possessed of an incorporeal intellect, a ‘rational soul’ or mind which, by virtue of its affinity with an eternal or divine dimension outside the bodily world sets us radically apart from, or above, all other forms of life (47).

We find in Abram’s theory that the rational soul is what separates humankind from “other forms of life” (47) (e.g. ecologies). Thus, humans are not just separated in body and soul, but also separated from all other life forms (because of the exclusion from Eden). The theological hierarchical thinking of body, mind, soul and ecologies draws attention to the issue of ethical space and the importance of knowing your own knowledge system thoroughly. Knowing that my Euro-Western, Christian upbringing in some ways has taught me to inhabit a worldview where I am above all living things can help me to push the boundaries of my thinking when encountering impossible moments in my readings. When we turn to the readings of my archive we will find that the characters inhabiting the fictional worlds demonstrate the struggle between the Christian-theological “barrier” to recovering and restoring kinship. In fact, we find

that the separateness between the characters and the more-than-human entities creates desolate feelings whereas restoring the bond creates feelings of belonging.

The supernatural approach is relevant because—as demonstrated in the opening passages—both Wagamese and Maracle narrate what appear as supernatural occurrences. A discussion of the supernatural assumption is particularly important in my first chapter (the Wagamese chapter). Similarly, in this chapter, the concept of magic is discussed in correlation with the protagonist Garnet’s experiences on the land. Considering how to interpret what appears as magical, I will attempt to define and discuss “magic” as both mysterious as well as an interrelational bond. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines magic as “the power of apparently influencing events by using mysterious or supernatural forces” or “as having or apparently having supernatural powers.” The OED’s definition of magic suggests that “something” intangible has “powers” that cannot readily be explained, which recalls similarities to the hierarchical theological worldview, whereby magic, as the supernatural, exists outside or above an experienced world. Abram considers magic from an Anglo-American perspective, by saying: “the most sophisticated definition of magic that now circulates through the American counterculture is the ability or power to alter one’s consciousness at will” (9) yet “no mention is made of any reason for altering one’s consciousness” (9). Instead Abram observes that magic “in tribal cultures [...] takes its meaning from the fact that humans, in an indigenous and oral context, experience their *own consciousness as simply one form of awareness among many others*” (9, emphasis added), by which Abram stresses that “magic, then, in its perhaps most primordial sense, is the experience of existing in a world made up of multiple intelligences” (9). Abrams’ second definition of magic echoes the principles of

kinship (e.g. being one consciousness among other people and ecologies). With Abram's definition we find two different cultural outlooks on magic. The one states magic is related to one person and that person's ability to create magic, without any relation to his or her surrounding world, and the second, that magic is a primordial sense that can be established between different kinds of consciousness.

The very nature of impossible moments suggests a tension between what is real and what is magical. Therefore readings in magical realism might be an access point for making sense of "impossibilities" that we encounter in certain Indigenous texts. Indeed, Agnieszka Rzepa says that "magic realism is often treated as a genre particularly well suited to the expression of minority group concerns, and praised for its decolonizing capacity : issues of primary concern for many Canadian critics" (8). Likewise, Michèle Lacombe broadens the definition of magical realism by asserting that the genre "has also been applied to writing that explores a particular quality of light in the individual's perception of the world, including a sense of miraculous events that defy logic" (269). In the second chapter, I discuss magical realism from the perspective of Rzepa's "focus on different facets of memory," which are "the key issue of magic realism" (9). Although I conduct readings through the lens of magical realism, Lacombe reminds me that paying attention to magical realism (among others) gives a "sense of the limits of those frameworks" (267). Instead of reading occurrences of magical realism in a (post)-colonial context, Lacombe highlights that "paying attention to Indigenous literary theory and the relevance of Nation-specific creation stories, is one way of addressing conflict and loss but also resistance and resurgence in contemporary Native writing" (267). She argues that for Indigenous authors there is not the "same need to reconcile "magic" with "realism" (269), by

which she explains that “the term ceases to be oxymoronic, and perhaps for this reason it is not much used by Native critics” (269). It would seem that neither supernatural, post-colonial, nor magical realism provide us with a framework deep enough to discuss impossible moments.

Differentiated Ways of Perceiving the World that Surrounds Us

Mythic realism may be an alternative to magical realism. Jeanne Delbaere-Garant borrows the term “mythic realism” from author Michael Ondaatje to describe literature that concerns itself with “‘magic’ images as borrowed from the physical environment itself, instead of being projected from the characters’ psyches” (253). Garant’s conception of mythic realism positions the natural environment as an active agent. Garant’s claim of “some kind” of aliveness of the land is established from her reading of Ondaatje’s text *Running in the Family* (1982). While exploring Ondaatje’s text, Garant asserts that within the narrative “magic and the real is no longer metaphorical but literal; the landscape is no longer passive but active” (252). When unpacking mythical realism, we discover the noun “myth,” which is defined as “always [being] concerned with creation concepts” (*Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms* 453). The term has a long, complex history, and is, at least in most Western literary traditions, now considered “a story which is not ‘true’ and which involves (as a rule) supernatural beings” (453). Obviously, that is a very dogmatic, Western definition, and does not encapsulate the traits of mythic realism as discussed by Garant. The definition of mythic realism is also divided between two cultural outlooks; Garant claims that mythic realism gives agency to (at least) the landscape, and the idea given in *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms* claims that myth is “not true.” To complicate the question of “real,” Bo Schöler points out that most

Indigenous authors “treat so-called mythic occurrences as if they really happened or happen” (65), and he states that “what [Indigenous authors] write is a reflection of reality and [...] of the truth as they see it” (65). Although Ondaatje is not an Indigenous author, I find Garant’s assertion about mythical realism giving agency to animated entities accords well with Deloria’s statement regarding the literality of old stories. Mythic realism seems to encompass notions of literality and agency from a non-Western perspective, and thus offers a framework for me to explore impossible moments through concepts of agency and literality.

When considering literality in this line of thinking we find a strong connection to the land. Deloria outlines similarities between the intersection between literal and the land as to how death is conceptualized in Indigenous tribal knowledge systems. Death is, according to Deloria, when the body is given back to the land: “human beings [are] an integral part of the natural world and in death they contribute their bodies to become the dust that nourishes the plants and animals that had fed people during their lifetime” (171). What Deloria outlines accords well with the principles of kinship, which thus demonstrates that the relational bond exceeds death; indeed, as Deloria puts it, the ancestors are therefore considered to be “spiritually and emotionally present” (172). Deloria demonstrates the relation between the dead body, the spirit ancestor, and how the land becomes sacred by quoting Potawatomi chief, Metea. Before his passing, he said to his son: “this country holds your father’s body. Never sell the bones of your father and mother” (173). Deloria explains that Metea’s assertion of this interrelated bond should not be read symbolically, but should be considered an expression of literality: “Thousands of years of occupancy on their lands taught tribal peoples the sacred landscapes for which they were responsible and

gradually the structure of ceremonial reality became clear. It was not what people *believed to be true* that was important but what *they experienced as true*" (67, emphasis added). Deloria's statement here is remarkable! Especially in the midst of my study of literality as exceeding my reading practice. Looking at Gallagher's phrase, "Believed to be true" (67) in her discussion of fiction's "suspending disbelief," contrasts with Deloria's phrase "experienced as true," which also echoes Deloria's statement of understanding the old stories as literal, something he states in order to reclaim and to recover what he describes as "deeper awareness" of the "complexity of our universe" as "experienced by our ancestors" (xvi). The land becomes sacred because of the deep entwined bond between ancestors (and the bodies they give back to the land) and the people living upon the land.

The entwined correlation between the land, ancestors, and the people might explain the kinship to all living things. I turn to Vanessa Watts (Mohawk-Anishinaabe) to identify this relational bond's relation to understanding agency. Vanessa Watts outlines the concept of "Place-Thought,"²⁶ which she says consists of a literal relation between the body, thought, and the land "based upon the premise that the land is alive" (21). "Spirit exists in all things" (30), Watts explains as she expounds that spirit should be understood as part of the land's aliveness. As Watts puts it, "if we think of agency as being tied to spirit, and spirit exists in all things, then all things possess agency" (30). Following Watts's argument, I position my discussion of agency as all living things have spirit. Watts adds that not only do more-than-

²⁶ Watts develops her concept "Place-Thought" from examining the Haudenosaunee creation story, by which, the characters Sky Woman and Turtle formed land by extension of their bodies (21). Further, Watts stresses that the creation story is not merely mythical, but a historical, literal event (21). The Haudenosaunee creation story establishes a relational bond between Sky Woman and Turtle—and between Sky Woman, Turtle and a certain place.

human entities have the ability to communicate with us, what is important to consider is “their *willingness* to communicate with us” (30, emphasis in original). By emphasizing “willingness,” Watts insists that the more-than-human entities have agency by having the choice to communicate with humans.

The sensorial connection between literalness, consciousness, magic, and kinship may be considered as embodied experience. As a first attempt of defining “embodied,” I turn to Cajete who identifies a connection between body and knowledge: “the body, as the source of thinking, sensing, acting, and being, and as the basic of relationship, is a central consideration in Native science” (25). Cajete’s discussion makes tangible the web of relational, active kinship in alliance to all living things (i.e. we engage with ecologies through our bodies). Moreover, by considering Judith Davidson’s assertion (as borrowed from philosopher John Dewey’s early work on “Body-Mind” connections) we find that “Body-Mind” (198) is “a means of identifying the deeply connected paths of knowing, where body and mind intersect and become entangled” (198). I highlight Davidson’s assertion here because it exemplifies the connection of body-mind as opposed to the rational body-mind and soul separation. Although Davidson discusses studies in “music, visual arts and dance/drama” (202) in correlation to “different ways [...] knowledge is embodied through experiences of the art form” (202), her studies suggest to me that there are similarities between dancing and active movements upon the land. By moving upon the land, our bodies connect with the land as embodied experiences (i.e. we need to participate with our bodies to achieve embodiment). Davidson concludes in her study, “art in school is highly restraining of the body and avoids delving into the reservoirs of body-mind experience and knowledge” (209), which accords well with Cajete’s

statement that the difference between Native Science' and Western Science is that "modern thinkers abstract the mind from the human body and the body of the world" (26). Davidson's and Cajete's statements here demonstrate that there is a difference between how we perceive our bodies from within Western and Indigenous ways of thinking that shares similarities with what Battiste, Henderson and Abram outlined. The separateness from our bodies is a paramount theme throughout this project.

Overview of Chapters

I have selected the above-mentioned novels, *Keeper 'n Me* and *Ravensong* (from which I have quoted the passages) in addition to Wagamese's autobiographical text *For Joshua* and Maracle's novel *Celia's Song* as my archive. I have chosen these four works based on the way they engage with traditional (Anishinaabe and Stó:lō) knowledge, by which I mean that they are instructive examples of narrating the tension between human characters' encounters and interactions with more-than-human entities, and, or the animated land. Whereas Wagamese's books narrate a sensitive individualized way of recovering a sense of belonging through reclaiming Anishinaabe knowledge and spiritual traditions, Maracle's novels are a communal narration of a family's struggle to restore Stó:lō longhouse (i.e. potlatch) ceremonies within a new colonial world order.

In the first chapter, in which Wagamese's texts are explored, I am guided by *Keeper 'n Me*'s protagonist Garnet's repeated assertion that *the land is a feeling*. I explore "feeling" and "magic" as teaching Garnet through sensory and intuitive alertness that "pulls out" meaningfulness that pulses in the land. I discuss Garnet's transition from emulating Western assumptions and worldviews that interpret magic as pagan or supernatural to developing the slow, non-methodological Ojibway

Method, in which he embraces a spiritual practice of living in balance. The journey Garnet undertakes is narrated in a way that allows for me to consider both Western and Anishinaabe frames of thinking. Garnet's transition between worldviews is invaluable for me as a reader to organize my thinking around impossible moments. Eventually, Garnet's engagements with "magic" and "pulling learning" become a spiritual journey known as the "red road." Similarly, Wagamese narrates his own transformational, spiritual journey in his memoir, *For Joshua*. This book offers itself to the reader through a different framework than fiction. I have chosen this text because of Wagamese's narration of four oral stories (e.g. the story of the Animal People and the drum), which are essential for me to develop insight when reading impossible moments. Wagamese's stories and accounts of his experiences—such as those in which he undertakes a vision quest—provide guidance on how to engage with the content of impossible moments. The impossible moments in these two books demonstrate that what construct our reality (or worldview) in many ways guide how we read and interpret texts.

In the second chapter, in which I explore Maracle's novel *Ravensong* and its sequel *Celia's Song*, I am guided by Maracle's view of *stories as transformational*. In the chapter, I explore the protagonist, Celia's visionary gift not as what others in the novel refer to as delusions, but as a seer ability that allows her to look beyond physical boundaries. I explore her gift through the various lenses of magical realism, embodiment, mythic realism, agency, and principles of relational kinship. I also explore Raven's mean plan to restore balance specifically with a focus on the principles of storytelling as transformational. Lastly, I examine the ways in which the characters restore their longhouse ceremony. Throughout the chapter, we find that

transformation is not merely about Western labels of positive or negative growth, but about maintaining balance through ceremonies (i.e. songs). These risks of transformation are exemplified through the more-than-human entities, spider and the serpent. The impossible moments in these novels are about suspending our disbelief towards the active entities, such as the bones, Raven, cedar, spider, the serpent, and the spirit of grandmother Alice. Indeed, the impossible moments bring to the forefront the intersection between literality and believability.

The Land is a Feeling in Richard Wagamese's *Keeper 'n Me* and *For Joshua*

And as those tears swept my face I offered a pinch of tobacco to the skeleton of the cabin that had become the bones of my life, to the power of the land for keeping it here, to the Creator of all things for his plan and I knew that there would be no need to search for that special place to offer my circle of prayers. And I knew that when it was time to leave this place, it would be sacred land. Sacred land. To carry it in my heart forever was my responsibility, my destiny and my dream. The land, you see, is a feeling. (Wagamese, *Keeper 'n Me* 170)

I have chosen this particular passage in *Keeper 'n Me* in which Garnet for the first time encounters his grandfather's old cabin on what once was his family's traditional land²⁷ (*Keeper 'n Me* 9). On the surface, the passage seemingly offers the reader insight into how Garnet's "sense of being" at the cabin profoundly settles into his bones and heart. As a reader, I can empathize with Garnet's feelings because I, myself, am attached to particular places. My grandparents' house holds treasured memories to me; it was my second home. Although I, on an emotional level, identify with Garnet's experience of finding roots, Garnet's references to "offering [...] tobacco," "the bones of my life," "power of the land," "Creator," "prayers," and the "feeling of the land" (170) unsettle my way of reading, because I cannot readily make sense of these references and actions.

Reading the occurrences of what I characterize as impossible moments in Wagamese's text challenges me, as a reader and as a researcher, to make sense of what Wagamese is attempting to convey through Garnet. I can, in my reading practice observe that I have a gap in cultural, spiritual knowledge that unsettles the ways I write and make sense of the Anishinaabe knowledge and spiritual practices Wagamese

²⁷ Garnet explains that he was born on that particular land. Before he was three, Ontario Hydro relocated the Raven family because they were building a dam and therefore flooded over some of the trapline. The Hydro company was able to do so because the land was outside the White Dog reserve (*Keeper 'n Me* 9).

presents. The purpose of this chapter is to unpack the Anishinaabe knowledge and spirituality behind the impossible moments and therefore also attempt to make sense of Garnet's profound claim that "the land [...] is a feeling" (170).²⁸ Reading impossible moments in this chapter is thus about exploring Wagamese's and Garnet's spiritual journey towards realized belonging²⁹ through recovering Anishinaabe knowledge and spirituality. I will explore impossible moments by considering Garnet's feelings for the land as an interrelated bond between body, mind, spirit—and kinship with all living things. I also observe how this interrelated web simultaneously teaches both him *and* Wagamese to "pull learning" out, as Garnet puts it, from the land, and from the animals.

A Note to Reading this Chapter

I will here highlight some of the concepts that guide my exploration of *Keeper 'n Me* and *For Joshua*. My engagement with both texts derives from Wagamese's Foreword to *Keeper 'n Me* because it is there that he juxtaposes two approaches to reading the text: "There are those who believe that the root of our aboriginal belief lies in the realm of magic and mysticism. *Keeper 'n Me* shows that those roots are the gentler qualities of respect, honor, kindness, sharing and much, much love. These are

²⁸ Lene's voice: Understanding my own roots has been ongoing since I learned about the importance of land for Indigenous peoples. When I first read *Keeper 'n Me* about two years ago, I began a journey of reconsidering and perceiving how to spiritually engage with the land—something that also inspired me to practice experimental learning at Princess Point. Some days I have been at Princess Point for two hours, just observing life, and learning to slow down. Thinking through how land is part of me, I discovered that Princess Point guides my thoughts of how to (from a distance) think through my feelings for the Danish landscape. I found by being at Princess Point that I connect more profoundly with that area because of its wildness and wildlife. By engaging with the land and animals at Princess Point, I have come to learn that I need to look back in time in order to establish roots to the Danish landscape, specifically before Christianity was introduced, to learn more about the Nordic relations to land.

²⁹ I define belonging as described in the OED: the root word "long" in belonging indicates a desire or yearning (*OED*). However, by applying the prefix "be," the root word changes to an action or an affect in relation to owning property, to being in a group, or, to a feeling of belonging (*OED*). I consider "belonging" in terms of feelings connected from "inside" oneself to the land (and kinship) and to family.

the Indians that I have met, known and shared with..." (*Keeper 'n Me*). I am guided by this prefatory passage to *Keeper 'n Me*, because Wagamese sets up a reading of the novel that demystifies the traditional practices described throughout the novel. When Wagamese demystifies the roots of Anishinaabe knowledge and spirituality, he draws the reader's attention to underlying worldviews that may influence their reading. Wagamese asks the reader to consider general human qualities, such as kindness and courtesy above magical explanations. Following Wagamese's guidance in my reading of *Keeper 'n Me* and *For Joshua*, I explore the texts' underlying worldviews as the product of either Indigenous (tribal) and Western filters that constructs our reality. Moreover, I explore the "gentler qualities" of Wagamese's and Garnet's transition between Western and Anishinaabe knowings, and specifically how the protagonists' "gentler qualities" may be understood as related to spiritual practices in both texts.

In my pursuit to make sense of the feelings of the land and understand how these feelings eventually settle as a realized belonging, I employ Battiste and Henderson's concept of a "sacred space" (79) as a way of making sense of how realizing belonging is a spiritual process. Battiste and Henderson clarify the concept as generating order or balance, and argue that people who undertake such a spiritual journey "have a processual faith in the beauty of quiet consciousness and in the sacred space between thoughts" (79). In this chapter, "sacred space" is predominantly tied to the concepts of silence and the land as sacred.

The Structure of the Two Texts

The sense of a slowly realized belonging and recovery of Anishinaabe knowledge and spirituality is narrated in both *Keeper 'n Me* and *For Joshua*. The discourse of a longing to belong can be traced back to Wagamese's personal

experiences of being a foster child. Wagamese recalls that he had no idea he belonged somewhere before his brother, Charles, found him at age twenty-five (Wagamese, “Returning to” 157). Wagamese’s fictional character Garnet was also removed, at age three with his siblings, from their parental home³⁰ and placed in foster care in the late 1950s. Garnet retrospectively narrates his story five years after returning to White Dog (Wagamese, *Keeper ’n Me* 214).³¹ The discourse of being removed and returning home is expounded upon by Agnes Grant who says that the theme of searching for belonging in *Keeper ’n Me* is an experience only too familiar to Indigenous peoples: “[Wagamese] presents Ojibway culture from the point of view of one who is attempting to regain his rightful place within it” (131). Wagamese’s attentiveness to recovering Anishinaabeg knowledge and traditions throughout the two texts is narrated as a journey of coming to know oneself and committing to living a life in balance. Specifically, the two texts narrate a feeling of knowing “who [he] was created to be” (*For Joshua*, un-numbered prefatory passage).

The longing to belong is a theme that is expounded upon from different angles. Garnet recovers belonging not merely through learning about Anishinaabe knowledge and spirituality, but also when he comes home to his family on the White Dog reserve. However, I pay less attention to the narratives between Garnet and his family because

³⁰ “Home” is in this project perceived as a process of recovering home, discussed by Neal McLeod (Cree). McLeod defines an “ideological home” (19), which is described as a home that “provides people with an Indigenous location to begin discourse, to tell stories and to live life on their own terms” (19). McLeod further asserts that an “ideological home” (19) is not merely created by the individual, but by the “layering of generations of stories” (19). Home is, for McLeod, “to be part of a larger group, a collective consciousness; it involves having a personal sense of dignity” (19). McLeod understands the function of home as a place of narrative created by generations.

³¹ Garnet is the primary first person narrator; however, *Keeper* narrates nine smaller sections that could be characterized as a meta-layer throughout the novel. I describe the nine sections as a meta-layer because *Keeper* not merely narrates his own story, but provides historical and cultural context. The nine sections could simultaneously be considered different teachings for the reader. Briefly, the nine sections are about being a storyteller, keeping the traditions, different spiritual practises, the drum as a ceremonial instrument, living in balance, learning traditional ways of medicine power, union of the female and male principle, ceremonies to learn humbleness, and ceremonial celebrations of gratitude.

most of these family gatherings do not involve “impossibilities.” Both Wagamese’s and Garnet’s experiences of being displaced are narrated as traumatic events, and their traumatic experiences provide context for the importance of realizing belonging. For example, Garnet describes his experience of living in the foster care system, and the loss of contact with his family or culture, as a deep trauma. This is a trauma that left “little holes in [his] gut[s] and [...] eventually they all turn[ed] into one great big black hole in the middle of [his] belly and [...] on lonely nights it still felt like the wind was blowing and whistling through [him]” (*Keeper ’n Me* 23).

The trauma of being removed is a paramount theme in *Keeper ’n Me* and *For Joshua*. In Frances W. Kaye’s “Richard Wagamese – an Ojibway in Alberta,” she explains that, “Wagamese [...] writes about his own struggle – and the struggle of many Native people raised in the 1950s and 1960s” (141) when there was a “widespread ‘scoop-up’ of Native children” (141). Kaye’s reference to the “scoop-up” suggests that Wagamese positions both Garnet and himself in a collective experience of being removed (*Keeper ’n Me* 10). The Sixties Scoop refers to the number of Indigenous children in the foster care system, which rose from 1 percent to 30 to 40 percent in the 1960s (Episkenew 66). During the “Scoop,” Indigenous children were often forcibly removed by Children’s Aid with the intent to assimilate them into White society (67).

Wagamese employs narrative strategies in *Keeper ’n Me* that show how the traumatic experiences turn into a slowly realized belonging. Through tense changes and shifts in pacing, he draws attention to two narrative positions within the text: Garnet’s childhood in the foster care system and Garnet’s adult life on the White Dog reserve. Garnet’s flashbacks, which reveal his traumatic childhood, are narrated in

past tense, and time moves quickly. When Garnet undertakes his spiritual journey of finding belonging within White Dog, time slows down, and he lingers on the details of different stories. Wagamese describes Garnet's return as a physical and emotional connection to the family and extended family which "provid[es] the anchor" that Garnet needs (*Keeper 'n Me* 117). Indeed, Garnet's mentor, Keeper, and his teachings lead Garnet to reconnect to and recover his heritage. The structure of the novel mimics Garnet's displacement and return through four sections. The first one is "Bih'kee-yan, Bih'kee-yan, Bih'kee-yan," which refers to a song by Garnet's mother, Alice, which means "come home" (58). The second, "Beedahbun," means "first light" (74)—a concept that denotes sunrise ceremonies and time to offer prayers (78). The third, "Soo-Wanee-Quay" is described by Garnet as a feeling of coming home (149), and the fourth, "Lookin' jake" refers to Garnet's journey on the "red road" (212). Thus, the four sections illuminate and mirror Garnet's process of recovering belonging and home by learning different ways of knowing.

For Joshua, like *Keeper 'n Me*, is a story of a realized belonging. The text was originally written for Wagamese's son, Joshua, as a way of carrying the responsibility of introducing his son to the world through his story and life choices (9). Wagamese explains that he could not perform the traditional duties of a father, because he, at that time, was still struggling with alcoholism and fears of inadequacy (7). Traditionally, a man would introduce his child into the world, so that "the child would feel that it *belonged* [and] that the child would never feel separated from the heartbeat of Mother Earth" (8, emphasis in original). This parental introduction is later introduced as the first teaching of kinship, whereby "we are all, animate or inanimate alike, living on the pure breath with which the creator gave life to the universe" (9).

The longing to belong is unpacked more when Wagamese meets John. In him, Wagamese finds a teacher who listens to his stories and recognizes his value (16-19). John sends Wagamese off on a path of self-recovery by teaching him “about the traditions and teachings of [their] people” (19). Especially important is Wagamese’s vision quest,³² in which John instructs him to sit by himself in a circle on a familiar hill for four days while engaging with the surrounding land (26-27). During Wagamese’s vision quest, he recounts his life from childhood to adulthood. Narrating his different stories enables Wagamese to transform his pain and explore his Anishinaabeg roots. Wagamese highlights that “we [Indigenous peoples] can recreate the spirit of community we had, of kinship, or relationship to all things, of union with the land, harmony with the universe, balance in living, humility, honesty, truth, and wisdom in all of our dealings with each other” (224). By saying that Indigenous peoples can recreate what they have lost, Wagamese does not specifically mean pre-colonization: “the secret is that we can never bring back those days. We can never recreate the buffalo hunt. The world has changed far too much [but] as a people [we can] recreate and carry the spirit of those things in our hearts” (224).

Encountering Disparate Worldviews: Anishinaabe and Western Perspectives

At the beginning of *Keeper 'n Me*, Garnet emulates a Western, stereotypical view of “Indians,” by envisioning and making assumptions about what these “Indians” might be. Garnet surmises that Western films fed his stereotypical assumptions: “I always envisioned big fires with drums going crazy, people dancing

³² The instructions from John during the vision quest are for Wagamese to “go back to things, places, people. Try to remember how you felt at certain times in your life. It might be hard—you might cry, you may want to run away—but if you stay and do this thing, you’ll find things to be thankful for” (*For Joshua* 26). Battiste and Henderson further define vision quest as a spiritual engagement: “the vision quest is one way to make alliances with the *mntu’k* (the flux). These alliances with certain forces give dignity to both parties. As well as contributing to ecological harmony, these alliances are usually intensely private matters” (78).

around [...] planning a raid on the unsuspecting settlers” (66). At first, these stereotypical assumptions limit Garnet’s engagements in the community, especially when he learns that his grandfather belonged to the Midewiwin³³ society. Here, Garnet equates the Midewewin spirituality with that of paganism:

He [the grandfather] belonged to a society that called themselves Midewiwin. Some of our people called them medicine men and when I heard that I really wanted no part of it. To me medicine men were large painted-up guys with the scary faces shaking rattles and small dead animals around people’s heads and sending them off on the warpath. (67)

Garnet’s idea of the Midewiwin society and his word choices, such as “painted up,” “scary,” “shaking rattles” and carrying “dead animals” (67), demonstrate on a textual level that he experiences a kind of impossible moment that arises out of questions regarding how to engage with and comprehend what “medicine men” represent in Anishinaabeg society. As a reader, I am able to follow Garnet’s exploration of how to perceive the notion of medicine men without dismissing them. I am able to do so, because I, to some extent, can recognize Garnet’s stereotypical portrayal of “Indians” in American Westerns. By examining the pagan interpretation of the Midewewin society, we find that the worldview Garnet constructs his ideas from correlates with my discussion of the different worldviews we inhabit, specifically in relation to how we engage with and look upon what is unfamiliar to us.

The Western perception of Indigenous spirituality as a form of supernaturalism or paganism recalls Wagamese’s Foreword about demystifying the roots of Anishinaabe knowledge. In a similar vein, Battiste and Henderson elaborate that Eurocentric thought has “created a mysticism around Indigenous knowledge that

³³ Michael Pomedli defines Midewiwin as “the Grand Medicine Society” of Anishinaabe people (3). The members are referred to as “Mide.” Pomedli describes Midewiwin society as people who have “learned the healing mysteries of the Grand Medicine Society, or *Mide-wi-win*” (11).

distances the outsider from Indigenous peoples and what they know” (35). Their statement accords well with Wagamese’s Foreword, where he rejects Western terms like “mystical” or “mysticism” because they try to account for perceiving Indigenous knowledge and spiritual practices as are part of an experienced world for Indigenous peoples. Wagamese’s Foreword demonstrates that the Western, conceptual filter sees things (such as impossible moments) as “mystical” rather than seeing the “gentler qualities” of things.

Garnet’s assumptions about the Midewewin society derives from racialized experiences in the foster care system. For example, when Garnet, as a child, plays cowboys and Indians with the other children in the street, Garnet is cast as the “Indian”—a role he is confused by, as demonstrated when he says, “I don’t know how to be an Indian!” (13). Garnet’s childhood experience exposes the disjunction of how to negotiate belonging as a foster child. The fact that Indigenous children were once removed from their homes with the intent to assimilate them into Western society is played out in Garnet’s childhood memory; however, Garnet’s memory further reveals the profound racism underlying the foster care system, particularly as Garnet is still defined by his race and colour (13). As a result of Western society’s discrimination towards “Indians,” Garnet distances himself from his culture. Similarly, Wagamese himself recalls that living in the foster care system generated feelings of wrongness. He felt that “there [was] something wrong with [him]” (*For Joshua* 40) until those feelings grew into a sense of unbelonging (43). Wagamese and Garnet share an experience of living through colonial racism and trauma, exemplified by living in the foster care system. For Garnet, the Western worldview has taught him racialized ideas of “Indians” and “paganism,” which prevents him and even distances him from

reclaiming Anishinaabeg knowledge. In *For Joshua*, Wagamese reveals that he “carried this emptiness around inside him” (1) and that he was searching to “feel safe, secure, and welcome” (4). Wagamese’s journey from loneliness to finding belonging passed through a series of racialized experiences, such as being in “prison,” living in “poverty,” being drunk, abusing “drugs” and carrying feelings of “depression, isolation, and thoughts of suicide” (4). The feelings of desolation that Wagamese and Garnet live through demonstrate the profound necessity for them to demystify and make sense of Anishinaabe knowledge and spirituality.

Garnet’s and Wagamese’s experiences of alienation and racism in the foster care system draw attention to the worldviews they both inhabit. The disparateness relates to their unique position as intermediaries who occupy and navigate a space between Indigenous and Western worldviews. Both Garnet and Wagamese are on a journey to become aware of this role as intermediaries; Garnet becomes a storyteller (*Keeper ’n Me* 214), and Wagamese journeys to discover belonging by “travel[ing] inside [him]self” (*For Joshua* 3). By perceiving their journey as transitioning from a Western to an Indigenous worldview, I, as a reader, become more aware of how I read and interpret the texts. Garnet’s and Wagamese’s embodiment of different worldviews recalls Ermine’s ethical space. I can follow Wagamese and Garnet on their journey towards belonging from a Euro-Western perspective, but their transition to Anishinaabe knowledge complicates my reading because I lack cultural and spiritual context.

By observing Garnet’s transition between White Ontario and White Dog, I see that Garnet negotiates between different worldviews, especially pertaining to the conduct of spiritual practices. Throughout the novel, Garnet insists that the land is

“the feeling of mystery and magic” (5) in a variety of ways that also expresses kinship. For example, Garnet explains how hearing the heartbeat is connected to life around us, and it “tells us we’re never alone and that we’re part of everything” (176). Additionally, Keeper explains to Garnet at their first sunrise together that life is an interrelated bond: “them colors become part a part of you, them trees a part of you, rocks a part of you, animals part of you, [...] you’re a part of all of it too” (111). Later, Garnet conveys an inexplicit feeling of being part of something “bigger than everything” (156). These expressions of magic and kinship—of the individual as part of a larger community—seem to describe Garnet’s gradual awareness and relational engagement with the land. By unpacking this notion of magic, not as Garnet’s initial perception of the Midewewin society as pagan, we find that magic is used to describe an interrelated bond that makes Garnet feel the land and by extension, he is able to establish kinship with all living things.

Garnet’s feelings of magic become an active engagement with the land. For example, Garnet recalls his mother, Alice’s “belief in a common magic born of the land that heals us” (148). Moreover, Alice explains that the “magic’s born of the land and the ones who go places in life are the ones who take the time to let the magic seep inside them” (8). Garnet also refers to his mother’s explanation when, at night, they watch “those hills move. Like they’re breathing. It’s a trick of the light really. Something caused by distance and time and a quiet yearning of magic we all carry around inside us” (8). Garnet explains that “magic” shouldn’t be understood as “pullin’ rabbits outta hats [...] but more the pullin’ learning outta everything around [us]” (8). The active word “pullin’” (8) suggests that Garnet’s engagement with the land’s magic is active. He has to do something—“pull learning”—out of the land,

which indicates that he (and Alice) believe the land has something to teach, but that the lessons are not obvious; they require work (i.e. pulling). Indeed, Garnet's expression of magic is not about pulling out "something" (rabbits out of hats), but more so in believing that the land contains lessons and that we should exert ourselves to discover. By reading Garnet's expression of magic as an active commitment to "pulling out" teachings, magic becomes a kind of productive work that is practical instead of mystical.

The teachings derived from the land's magic suggest that the land has a different way of teaching than the Western education system I was brought up in. Simpson outlines how teachings are perceived in the Anishinaabe worldview from the concept "gikinawaabiwin" or "akinoomaage" (14), which explains how knowledge is generated. Simpson defines "akinoomaage" as a set of directions through "interactions and observations with the environment" (15). She quotes John Borrows who explains that in Anishinaabeg teachings:

People regulate their behavior and resolve their disputes by drawing guidance from what they see in the behavior of the sun, moon, stars, winds, waves, trees, birds, animals, and other natural phenomenon. The Anishinaabe word for this concept is gikinawaabiwin. We can also use the word akinoomaage, which is formed from two roots: aki: noomaage. Aki' means earth and 'noomaage' means to point towards and take direction from. As we draw analogies from our surroundings, and appropriately apply or distinguish what we see, we learn about how [to] love, and how we should live in our lands. (qtd. in Simpson 14-15)

Borrows' explanation of how Anishinaabeg knowledge is generated provides insight into how we might make sense of Garnet's and Wagamese's engagements with the land as magical and relational. I wonder, if, or how, Garnet's feelings of the land's magic and Wagamese's relational bond to the surrounding world establishes knowledge that by extension creates insight to feel belonging both within themselves

and to the larger world. Garnet's expression of the land as generating feelings of magic could be related to "noomaage" (Simpson 15) whereby Garnet takes directions or teachings from the land by "pulling learning" out of the land. Garnet's definition of magic thus seems to correspond to Borrows' explanation of how Anishinaabe peoples engage with and generate knowledge of the land's magic.

This process of "pulling learning" out of the land is explained by Wagamese. While he undertakes his vision quest, he reflects on his life choices; from being imprisoned (*For Joshua* 131) to finding work as a local reporter (137). Wagamese's reflections derive from observing a small tree that "was refusing to die" (133). The tree's intelligible essence seems to show Wagamese "that there is courage in merely hanging on. It was showing [him] that nature—life—will always find a way to its truest expression of itself" (134). Through observing the tree, Wagamese learns that "[his] purpose, like that of all creation, is to continue. Creation is intent on continuing towards its best possible fulfillment of itself—because that is the reason for life" (135). Wagamese's experience with the tree could be as simple as him projecting his emotions upon the tree. I relate my idea of projection to Cajete's references to philosopher Edmund Husserl who theorized a kind of "associative empathy"³⁴ between humans and other living things, which is grounded in the physical nature of bodies" (24). Husserl's notion of "associative empathy" helps me to think about how humans relate to objects or project emotions and spirit upon objects in the world, which was the characteristic of European literary Romanticism. Following this approach to reading Wagamese's engagement with the tree, I find I am reading the

³⁴ Cajete also quotes Abram, who relates the concept "associative empathy" to an empathic "biophilia" which is described as "the innate human instinct to affiliate with other living things as the biological basis for human love, human community, and various traits of human affiliation that have long been understood as products of human culture" (24).

tree as an “inanimate object” (27). Cajete further quotes Lucien Levy-Bruhl who observed that, in Indigenous worldviews:

‘Inanimate’ objects like stones or mountains are often thought to be alive and ... certain names, spoken out loud, may be felt to influence the things or beings that they name, for whom particular plants, particular animals, particular places, persons and powers may be felt to participate in one another’s existence, influencing each other and being influenced in return. (qtd. in Cajete 27)

Understanding Wagamese’s experience as emotional projections upon inanimate objects thus presents itself as a question of my reading strategy and its intertextual limitations. As for example, Levy-Bruhl raises questions about the “influence” between inanimate objects and people, and this “influence” demonstrates the limitation, because how may we characterize what “influence” signifies? Is the influence the kind of magic Garnet talks about? These questions illustrate that perceiving Wagamese’s experience with the tree as an emotional projection does not explain how Wagamese derives his philosophical conclusions of life’s purpose. Furthermore, the experiences would then also be a one-way communication that would remove the idea that the tree is an active part of kinship and agency.³⁵

Simpson’s account of the term “gaa-izhi-zhaawendaagoziyaang”³⁶ (10) perhaps allows us to read the “influence” as an interrelational bond between Wagamese and the tree. Simpson outlines that “gaa-izhi-zhaawendaagoziyaang” may be perceived as

³⁵ Lene’s voice: One day at Princess Point, I was reflecting on ways of communicating, because I was surprised by how difficult it is for me to learn English grammar; yet, while I was observing the trees (and interacting with them) I came to realize that although English and Danish grammar cannot be compared, what would then happen if I were to communicate with a tree, an intelligible essence, with its own kind of language? If I do not project human traits upon the tree, how would it then communicate? I found that the trees (for me) communicate in images and emotions—a non-verbal kind of communication in which I have to be open and rooted in the land to “hear” and thus engage with.

³⁶ Simpson maps out that “gaa-izhiz-haawendaagoziyaang requires love, the word zhaawen, a part of the word Gaa-izhiz-haawendaagoziyaang, means to have complete “compassion for another in one’s thoughts and mind. It has a connotation of bestowing kindness, mercy, and aid. It includes ideas of pity, empathy and deep unconditional love” (Simpson 10).

“intelligence [that] flows through relationships between living entities” (10). Simpson explains that in Anishinaabe knowledge *gaa-izhi-zhaawendaagoziyaang* “originates in the spiritual realm, coming to individuals through dreams, visions, ceremony and through the process of *gaa-izhi-zhaawendaagoziyaang* – that which is given lovingly to us by the spirits” (qtd. in Simpson 10) and “in order to gain access to this knowledge, one has to align themselves within and with the forces of the implicate order through ceremony, ritual and the embodiment of the teachings one already carries” (10). If one commits to the journey, the engagement with “*gaa-izhi-zhaawendaagoziyaang* requires long-term, stable, balanced, warm relationships within the family, extended family, the community and all living aspects of creation” (10). Considering how Wagamese gains knowledge through his ceremonial vision quest and from observing the tree, it seems plausible that *gaa-izhi-zhaawendaagoziyaang* exists between Wagamese and the tree. Indeed, the flow of *gaa-izhi-zhaawendaagoziyaang* seems to transform Wagamese’s feelings of failure from being imprisoned to finding inspiration through the little tree’s expression of itself and its refusal to die. The land’s magic as a teaching tool demonstrates that Wagamese’s and Garnet’s engagement with the tree and the land is not a mere projection of emotions, but instead takes an active willingness to learn through and from the land and the tree. This way of learning is described as an intangible flow of “magic,” “*gaa-izhi-zhaawendaagoziyaang*,” or “intelligence.” The “flow” establishes a form of communication that allows Wagamese and Garnet to reflect upon their lives and by extension generating self-knowledge and knowledge about the world.

The Intuition: Engagement Through the Body, Mind, Spirit—and Relational Kinship

As Original people we know how to honour this land. We know how to bless. We know how to approach it spiritually. We know how to take the lessons from that spirituality and give it back to the land [...] a real Indian is a person who lives feeling. Real Indians use the teaching tools of our way to travel inside themselves. Real Indians, having made the sacred journey, discover their own truth—their selves. (*For Joshua* 219)

[Silence is] the most beautiful sound you ever heard and it fills up your insides until you think you're gonna pass out from the pressure [...] When your ears get used to it you start to hear things you never ever heard in your life. Things you never knew were there ... the most beautiful music I ever heard. Full of notes of life and living we miss when we get away from it too long. The sounds that connect you to yourself and your life.³⁷ (*Keeper 'n Me* 156-157)

I highlight these two different passages to emphasize how Wagamese and Garnet describe spiritual engagements with the land. From examining the first passage, we find a strong connection between the land, lessons, spiritual feelings, and traveling “inside” oneself. In the second passage, the silence is what connects Garnet to the world that surrounds him. The spiritual journey they both describe seems to encompass ways of learning about oneself, of finding belonging, of gaining knowledge, and of establishing kinship to more-than-human entities. Learning to travel on this spiritual path is likened, by Garnet, to the silence that he “hears” on his grandfather’s ancestral land. Stonechild calls this spiritual “coming to know yourself” journey a life purpose: “the purpose of spirits who arrive on earth as humans is to learn how to become virtuous beings by living the ‘good life’ or ‘following the red

³⁷ Garnet gives these examples of listening to silence: “things like the whispers of old people’s voices when the wind blows through the tree. Little gurgles and chuckles like babies when the water from a creek rolls over the rocks. The almost holy sound of an eagle’s wings when it flaps above you, kinda like he’s breathing on you. Even something as quiet as your paddle moving through the water’s got a silky sound like the ripple of a lady’s shawl in a fancy dance. Far-off thunder sounding like a big drum in the sky and all the snaps and crackles, rubbings and scrapings that goes on in the bush at night when you can’t see anything. A thick blanket of sounds that tells you that darkness has a life too” (*Keeper 'n Me* 15-157).

road” (5). Garnet also discusses the concept of “the red road,” which he says has seven directions: “north, south, east, and west [and] up, and down and—inside” the seven directions make up “the complete journey” (212).³⁸ Embarking on this spiritual journey seems to require a different access to an intuitive knowledge production (i.e. inside oneself and from connection to the land).

The silence Garnet hears relates the spiritual journey to the “inside” with word choices, such as “fills up your insides” and a sound that “connects” you (156-157). There seems to be a connection between the ways we come to know our “insides,” the silence and the “pulling learning” out of the land. Garnet says the silence is something we “miss” (157) if we are away from it. The “silence” also shares similarities with Battiste and Henderson’s processual concept of a “quiet consciousness” (78) and a “sacred space between thoughts” (79), which suggests that there is a space in our thoughts that allows for, or responds to, a silence that helps us to travel “inside.” Stonechild clarifies that the connection between silences and traveling inside is a path of “discovering spirit” (61). He specifically explains that if we “follow our heart, experiences go beyond mere feelings to deeper truths that come from spirit” (61). Stonechild further outlines that during the process of the journey, and when one follows one’s heart, “one has to go back into the recesses of one’s mind through the silence of prayer [...] this is where you discover what your journey is” (61). The noun “recess” accords well with Battiste and Henderson’s “sacred space.” Furthermore, we have to actively engage with this space through listening to, or being in, silence.

³⁸ The seven directions are as follows: “East is the place of light where the sun comes from. You travel that road you learn illumination. The beginnings of knowing. South is the place of innocence and trust. Southern travelers learn to listen to the teachings with an open heart and open ears. West is the look inside place. Investigating what you feel. Growing. North is the place of wisdom. You pause. Look back along the path you followed and see the lessons, the teachings. Reflect. And the up and the down is the motion of life ... the last destination on that red road, is inside. The place of truth” (*Keeper 'n Me* 213).

Silence itself becomes an active component that supports realizing the journey “inside.”

Stonechild’s recommendation of following your heart on the spiritual path is connected to intuitive ways of learning. Garnet describes an intuitive way of listening to his “inside,” when he expresses a wish to return to his Grampa’s old trapline, saying, “something inside me was telling me that I needed to go there” (157). Keeper points out that Garnet’s feeling is “the first stirrings of that woman side in me calling out directions,” which is described as “intuition, the gift of the mother” (156). Alice agrees with Garnet’s wishes to leave by saying that “maybe now’s the time you went there an’ picked it up and brought it home” (158). Garnet’s wish to leave and his conversation with his mother seem to suggest that going back to the cabin will “give” Garnet something he has lost, something he needs to “pick up.” When Garnet locates the cabin, he knows the place is his grandfather’s because “his heart told [him] that” (169). The notion of “something inside” is continually referred to in correlation with relations to spirit and, or, the land.

Intuition may be considered related to an integral way of learning that requires engagement through the body, mind, spirit—and kinship with all living things. Battiste and Henderson expound upon the function of intuition as a way of generating knowledge: “Indigenous thought classifies ecological phenomena based on characteristics observed through experience; such classifications rely on a high degree of intuitive thought” (37).

Although Battiste and Henderson discuss intuition in terms of Indigenous research methods, their assertion of how to conduct research by applying our intuition seems

related to Garnet's experiences of "pulling out" learning from the land. Both are done actively and involve engagement with the land.

Making sense of intuition as an active involvement of "pulling learning out" of the land is an impossible moment because of the connections to spiritual concepts, such as "sacred space in thoughts," and "silence" that have different interpretations depending on what theoretical perspective we have, as well as what spiritual understanding we possess. I have to consider an intuitive way of learning that deviates from my Western education. Here, I turn to the OED that defines intuition as "the ability to understand something instinctively, without the need for conscious reasoning." Following the OED, Garnet's feeling of needing to go to "the beginnings" is an instinct, which the OED describes as "done without conscious thought." OED's definition of intuition echoes our brain's other unconscious functions that are regulated in the brainstem (e.g. controlling functions such as breathing, sleeping and muscle tone). A second, and possibly the most pop-cultural definition of intuition is that of having a sixth sense, which the OED defines as "*supposed* intuitive faculty giving awareness not explicable in the normal perception" (emphasis added). The word choice of "supposed" and outside the "normal perception" echoes Abram's discussion of how our perception of nature turns supernatural when we encounter a phenomenon we cannot explain. This concept rings true for a Western interpretation of intuition as a sixth sense we cannot quite explain. A third attempt to define intuition could be as a familiarity with certain sports activities in which we do not need to think logically or sequentially about the movements in our bodies; rather, our bodies move almost automatically.

Thinking through intuitive processes as familiarity with sports activities recalls Davidson's assertion of active participation with our bodies. Along similar lines, Battiste and Henderson's emphasis on observing ecologies "through experience" (37) seems related to the kind of familiarity we acquire from sports activities, by which I suggest that when we have enough experiences with, for example, "pulling out learning" from the land, it will become a familiar activity. Yet, at first, the familiar activity is done through a conscious way of "pulling" learning. From Garnet's example of "pulling out learning" we find that the intuitive thought processes involved in this learning process becomes embodied because he is actively participating with his body while he is learning. Furthermore, Garnet's "pulling out learning" is done on his ancestral land that slowly becomes familiar. While being at his grandfather's cabin, he describes the cabin as the "bones of [his] life" (*Keeper 'n Me* 170), a feeling he will carry "in [his] heart forever" (170), and he feels the "heartbeat of the land beating inside [his] chest" (173). These sentiments Garnet expresses resonate with Deloria's discussion of how the land becomes familiar because of the ancestors' spirits and bodies still being on or a part of the land. This intergenerational familiarity seems similar to Garnet's experiences of both learning and feeling belonging from being part of the ancestral land. Thus, the specific place (the cabin) ties Garnet's learning to the land—something Watts discusses as "Place-Thought" which she explains is a literal relation between the body, thought, and the land, as well as related to spirit that exists in all living things. Literality thus presents itself as the intersection between Garnet's "pulling out learning" of the land's magic, Garnet's intuition in relation to "sacred space in thoughts," "silence," and kinship with all living things. The intersection between consciously and actively "pulling" further

echoes Davidson's definition of the entangled paths between the body and mind—that which Cajete defines as the source of Native science.³⁹ Garnet's intuition led him to the cabin, led him to hearing the silence, and led him to feelings of kinship with the land, all of which demonstrate that Garnet's intuition allows for him to feel the land in his body and mind.⁴⁰

Building from how learning becomes embodied, Stonechild explains that vision quests are an “effort to establish a *tangible* connection to the spirit world” (61, emphasis added). I emphasize *tangible* because the adjective demonstrates that the spirit world is not an abstract dimension, but corresponds to something that can be felt, whether the tangible feeling presents itself through the body, the mind, the land, or as vision. The connection to the spirit world reminds us of the discussion that the spiritual world is a reality, and as Stonechild expounds, “all aspects of life have a spiritual dimension” (63). The notion that all living things have a spiritual dimension emphasizes the established interrelatedness between Garnet's intuition, the pulling of learning and the land's magic.

Wagamese's own vision quest may help us understand how intuition, embodiment, the relational flow between all living things are all part of a processual spiritual engagement that generates knowledge from the outside and inside worlds we inhabit. The first day of Wagamese's vision quest, he finds himself uneasy at dusk because he heard animals but “could see nothing but deep shadow. Nothing but what

³⁹ I discuss Cajete's explanation of the body-mind connection in relation to Native science on p. 26.

⁴⁰ Lene's voice: These thoughts about familiarity in relation to intuition are interesting. My engagement with horses and the land has presumably also established a familiarity I was unaware of, but something I just felt inside me. Not of the land as a reference point, but as an intuitive knowing of the horse and my body working together and how I felt the land through the horse's movement upon the land. This kind of familiarity with the land and horse was not magic or mysticism, but perhaps just plain familiarity; and as my example of horse riding demonstrates, familiarity also involves ways of embodying knowledge.

seemed like emptiness. I felt very alone” (59). As a city-raised person unfamiliar with wild animals, Wagamese is scared, so he begins to pray, and after a while his fears lessen and he realizes that he “had nothing they [the animals] wanted [and] unlike [him], the animals had always known where they *belonged*, knew who they were and knew how to be themselves” (59, emphasis added). Wagamese experiences a kind of existential fear that makes him reflect on his life in opposition to the animals he can hear. However, Wagamese is able to handle his fear by remembering to pray. He discovers that the animals know where they belong—a feeling I have emphasized because Wagamese possesses knowledge that allows him to come to this conclusion. His knowledge derives from an oral story of the Animal People, a story that gives him the advantage of perceiving the relational bond between humans and animals from an Indigenous perspective.⁴¹

The Animal Story provides my reading with a conceptual framework to explore the connection between “pulling learning” and intuition. Wagamese begins the story by explaining how the animals “had been given the role of becoming our greatest teachers” (60). He says, “before the arrival of Man, the Animal People knew each

⁴¹ Lene’s voice: I found Wagamese’s conclusions of belonging quite interesting, so one day I went out to Princess Point to figure out what I had learned. After three days of trying to make sense of how I consciously make use of my intuition, I got a major headache that lasted for almost a week. I had to give up reading and working, because every time I did, the headache was knocking. That was when I realized that learning about intuition is not an intellectual journey, but an intuitive way of feeling. I went back out to Princess Point and was just there, being and existing with the surrounding land. Because of my new approach, I found that I could suddenly feel the trees’ being. A month later, I felt like I was received when I came out and said hello to the trees and birds. Through this profound exchange between the trees and me, I wanted to figure out how I could engage more actively with the area. One day, I gathered some stones, and went to stand by the water. I thought about my horse, who died a few years ago. I have carried his death with me ever since, so I asked the stones to carry my pain and then I threw them in the water. Some kind of exchange happened between the water, the stones, and me and when I was walking back into the forest, I suddenly felt like I belonged. I was not belonging because of my act at the shoreline, or because of who I am, I belonged because “I was”—which can merely be described as a feeling “of being.” My feeling of belonging shares similarities with Garnet’s experiences of how actively engaging with the land enables feelings of kinship, of belonging, and of “pulling out learning.”

other very well and could speak with One Mind. They could communicate with each other and the Creator and there was balance and harmony upon Mother Earth” (60). While living in harmony, the Creator called the animals to a meeting to explain, “I am sending a strange new creature to live among you” (61). Here, Creator emphasized that Man would be different from the animals by two distinct features, “the ability to dream” (61) and “believing they must control Mother Earth” (61). Creator then gave the animals the responsibility of teaching Man “to live with Mother Earth” (62). The animals were born into the world knowing who they were; Man was instead given “the gift of Truth and Life” (62). The Creator hid the gift “*inside him*” and he was therefore compelled to search for it (64, emphasis in original). The Man and Animals’ relationship changed from harmony to fear, and when the animals disappeared “loneliness was born” (69).⁴² Today, to search for Truth and Life and to learn from the Animal People “takes [...] an open heart to hear the message in [the animals’] call, and a spirit ready to learn the teachings they carry” (76).

The Animal Story demonstrates the tension between having or feeling belonging, as the animals do, or searching for belonging through the spiritual journey of “Truth and Life.” Man’s gift is hidden-away and this hidden nature of the gift suggests that not knowing or having insight is fundamental to being human, and thus explains why Wagamese and Garnet undertake the journey “inside” themselves, also described as the red road. Wagamese’s vision quest makes us aware that his loneliness derives from never having “fed [him]self” (111) with “the nourishment that comes

⁴² The exclusion as presented in the Animal Story shares similarities to the Christian exclusion as discussed in my introduction. The similarity arises in where each worldview suggests we need fix the exclusion: the Animal Story suggests we rebuild practical relations (familiarity) with the earth and its creatures, while the Christian exclusion suggests we embrace the Scriptures in which Jesus, his death and resurrection guide our spiritual engagements. Another difference between the two “exclusions” is that the Animal Story is a nature-based one, where as the Christian is cosmological-based.

from being a part of a circle of friends, part of a community, [and] part of a people” (110). He explains that he “didn’t know that [his] conflict was born from [his] spirit crying for what it needed and [his] mind shouting for what it wanted” (90). Wagamese realizes through sitting on the hill that his spirit craves something he could not readily describe. By understanding his spirit’s craving, Wagamese begins the journey towards Truth and Life (or “inside”). The vision quest seems to provide him with knowledge of how to embark on the spiritual path by saying that the teachings “are meant to centre us, to take us right back to our hearts. To the truth of us. When we get there, we discover that the tools are merely aids, and that what really matters is what we carry in our hearts” (215). Through the vision quest, Wagamese realizes he “belonged on that hill” (136) and he elaborates that “[he] *belonged*. Just as [he] was, [he] belonged [and] despite the beliefs that [he] wasn’t enough, [he] had belonged all along” (136). The Animal People story helps Wagamese process Anishinaabeg knowledge which enforces his sense of belonging and kinship to the animals more profoundly

My reading of Wagamese’s vision quest and Garnet’s expressions of magic, intuition, and sacred land was not done without taking an imaginative leap. I employed words such as silence, “sacred space,” prayers, a tangible spirit world, visions, and the insistence that all life has a spiritual dimension. I described my approach as an imaginative leap because it would have been easy for me to read, for example, “prayers” as an act that mediated between Wagamese, the animals, and possibly a spiritual entity, such as Creator. A reading like that suggests that there are three separate things (Wagamese and the animals, Wagamese and Creator) and that a third entity (the prayers as mediator) somehow establishes the relation between Wagamese, the animals and Creator. My imaginative leap involves questioning my

own assumptions about what organizes our engagement with other living entities, and what prayer facilitates, especially because my Christian background informs me that prayers are meant for my relationship with God. Reading Wagamese's and Garnet's encounters and experiences in correlation with my own recalls Battiste and Henderson's assessment of different realities. Where Westerners face the rational body-mind and soul separation, most Anishinaabe peoples—according to the oral story—also embark on a journey “inside” by making animals their teachers. I have been trying to make sense of Wagamese's and Garnet's relational engagement and knowledge seeking, and it would seem that their spiritual endeavour generates the slowly realized belonging through the steps of connecting with intuition, with body, with land, animals, and with spirit.

The Slow Non-Methodical Ojibway Method: Slowly Realized Longing to Belong

Attending to the specific elements in Keeper's slow Ojibway method, I found that Battiste and Henderson outline what we may consider Garnet's journey towards knowing. They emphasize three areas of awareness: teaching, knowing, and practice. Developing these areas of awareness requires “extended conversations with the elders of each language group ... willing to take on responsibility associated with that knowing [and] putting the knowledge into daily practice” (41). Indeed, Garnet has extended conversations with Keeper, and the knowledge Garnet gains slowly becomes part of his daily practice.

Garnet builds upon his knowledge from different teachings, such as “slowness” and “balance.” Keeper explains that learning about balance is “somethin' you gotta have. Kinda like carryin' a load too big'n awkward for you. Make you walk all funny underneath it, maybe fall, hurt yourself. But you take time find a balance, that load's

easier to travel with” (128). This teaching of slowness and balance is about taking the time to learn, and Keeper explains that such teaching “comes from the eagle. See, bird gotta have balance to soar around us like he does [and] that eagle took a long time to learn about balance” (128). People who have learned how to live in balance are offered eagle feathers to “recognize someone for takin’ time to learn balance an’ put it into the way they live their life” (129). Garnet’s new perception of living with slowness and in balance is a first step towards practicing the slow Ojibway method and towards realizing his belonging.

The teaching of balance as a daily practice is also found in *For Joshua*.⁴³ Wagamese emphasizes the importance of daily practices by saying that although he surrounded himself with “rattles, hand drums, medicine shields, eagle feathers, artwork, carvings, and the sacred medicines [...] to dress up the outside, so that other people who looked at [him] and how [he] was living could think, ‘He’s a real Indian’” (206). However, as Wagamese explains, “I was still afraid to be me” (206). What Wagamese experienced was that although he embraced Anishinaabe practices, he only learned the knowledge “in [his] head” (206) and he explicitly says, “I still only really committed them to memory and not to action” (206). The difference between memory

⁴³ Lene’s voice: I have given this philosophy of practicing spirituality every day a great deal of thought. I have found that when I’m trying to understand the aliveness out at Princess Point, I have to stay present and observe, or else I cannot readily engage with the trees and birds. If my thoughts are too entangled in this project, I do not “feel” the flow of energies. For some time, I had great problems with writing this project, because of my implications of being White, and not having much knowledge or authority to write anything substantial. These feelings had grown into a painful awareness that hindered me in accomplishing and finishing my M.A., so mentally, I had to act and somehow change my way of thinking. I started to visualize how I send all my thoughts of inadequacy out the door, and then I closed the door. I began practicing meditation every day, and questioning how I found my own way through the concepts of intuition, slowness, and—by extension—asking what my spirituality is. Stonechild explains that the spirit, also described as *Manitow*, is *the* teacher and he specifically says that “spiritual changes occur when one begins to act on one’s spirituality” (61). I have come to learn that I cannot stop this spiritual process of knowing, or of following my spirit’s voice, and that I have to continue to listen, even though my post-colonial theoretical knowings tell me that I have looked too deep into Indigenous spirituality and maybe have forgotten to be in my own ethical space.

and action is key for Wagamese, and he recalls his teacher Walter's explanation that "everyone wants to live a Shake 'n' Bake life [...] nobody wants to have to sacrifice anything to learn. But sacrifice is always the price of admission to another level" (141). The notion of sacrifice is also established in the Animal People story, in which the gifts of Truth and Life "involve sacrifice" (76). The sacrifice is, according to Walter, common to everyday situations, such as giving up a day to learn, or "letting go of your pride [...] letting someone teach you [or] admitting you don't know" (141-142). So far, practicing the slow Ojibway method seems to involve key points, such as responsibility, sacrifice, talking with elders, and putting that knowledge into daily practice or action—concepts that echo "the gentler qualities" of responsibility, honour, and sharing the knowledge demonstrated by Wagamese's teachers, Walter and John, and eventually by Wagamese himself when he shares his knowledge with his son in *For Joshua*.

Learning to live in balance also means knowing different teachings, such as the concept of the drum. According to Keeper, the drum teaches "about the woman side and the man side of all of us and how we gotta learn to live in balance with both sets of gifts to be happy in this world" (147). In *For Joshua*, we might find the connection between living in balance and the drum. Wagamese recounts the story of how the Anishinaabeg peoples were presented with the drum in which a woman came from "the Land of the Spirits" and she came because the people "have allowed this time of scarcity to take away from the Teachings." Instead she presented them with a gift, "to remind you of the way in which you are supposed to live your lives. A gift that will remind you that you are connected to everything and that you have a responsibility to look after and care for all things. This gift is called Drum" (116-117). The woman

taught the people how to use it and reminded them “that Drum comes from the spirit of Woman,” and will teach them to live in balance with woman. “Drum will always remind you of those duties” (118). Wagamese recounts the story in a moment of great hunger while undertaking his vision quest, and he is reminded of the sacred story of the drum because of his own distress. The teaching of the drum illustrates that living in balance is about balancing inner emotions, regardless of the feelings of hunger, distress, anger, jealousy etc. Furthermore, conducting a life in balance seems to become an approach for how to align external influences (i.e. constructs of society, worldviews, and colonial consequences of racism, oppression and questions of belonging) as well as inner emotions, such as Wagamese’s and Garnet’s ability to process these external influences and balance them through remembering and learning the traditional teachings.⁴⁴

The relationship between teachings of the drum and living in balance is an impossible moment for me. When I turn to Pomedli, he outlines the drum’s importance by explaining how “the sound of the Water drum [can carry] its voice loud and clear, the sound of the water drum [can go] everywhere. Sound itself is the essence of the Midewiwin – Mide-win” (28).⁴⁵ The drum is connected to nature

⁴⁴ Lene’s voice: Wagamese’s way of balancing inner and outer emotions reminds me of establishing ethical space and how I, myself, balance what I learn through conducting this study, specifically in terms of facing discomfort between what the Indigenous knowledge pushes me to think or do in correlation with my thoughts of being an outsider. I find it to be a highly painful and lonely exercise. Painful, because I have to face my own limitation and push for change. Lonely, because I have very few people I can share this very personal journey with. Agonizing, because of the inside and outside requirements for writing this project is pulling me in a different direction—namely listening to Battiste and Henderson’s assertion of studying Indigenous knowledge is a different path, and my implication as a White reader and researcher.

⁴⁵ Pomedli explains the name Mide-wi-win can be divided into different segments and that “Midway in one translation means Sounding voice; Wi-win, translates as Good all over; hence, sounding good all over. The Mide would add to this interpretation that Midewiwin means, the way of the heart beat, the good heart sound of Life” (28).

through its components of “wood, animal skin, and water” (249),⁴⁶ and “when the drum is played, it communicates with the natural world” (29). Pomedli thus establishes kinship between the land, animals, people, and the drum. The impossible moment arises because the drum seems to function in similar ways as the example of prayers mediating between Wagamese, the animals, and Creator. When considering the prayers and the drum as communicative means that mediate, and, or establish a flow between organic boundaries, I wonder if they then establish the relationship between Wagamese, the animals, and Creator? Pomedli’s explanation of how the sounds reach everywhere gives the drum an energetic ability to penetrate organic boundaries and to establish some kind of relational bond that facilitates (non-verbal) communication forms. My reading of (and questions about) the drum’s function demonstrates that I do not have references or knowledge to interpret the deeper significance of the drum. Perhaps the verb “mediating” is also what interferes with my reading of the drum. “Mediating” is possibly not flexible enough to encompass what “happens” between the prayers, the drum, Wagamese, Garnet and their emotional (intuitive) responses. Considering this communicative, interrelated web, perhaps the prayers and the drum instead organize Wagamese’s and Garnet’s learning processes—processes that require silence, and intuitive, sensory engagements with the land, animals and spirit. The verb “organize” rings true because the drum and the prayers still have an active involvement in this interrelated web. The concept of *gaa-izhi-zhaawendaagoziyaang* (possibly Garnet’s concept of magic) is perhaps *the* facilitator.

⁴⁶ Pomedli elaborates on the function of the drum, “in Ojibway performances, the water drum is regarded as an other-than-human person” (249). He goes on to note that the drum is usually made of “Otter, whose skin stretches across the top; Snake, who coiled around the drum, holding otter’s skin tightly; Turtle who formed the base of the drum; Loon, who formed a stick from its beak; Rattlesnake, who fashioned the rattles; and the elder Tree, whose body makes the body of the drum” (29)

As Simpson explains, the concept of *gaa-izhi-zhaawendaagoziyaang* is something that is accessed through ceremonies, rituals, dreams, and visions (among other things) (10). The drum and prayers are part of ceremonies, which might explain why these “tools” organize kinship in an interrelated web.⁴⁷

The concept of slowness is possibly key when making sense of the interrelated web between the drum, the silence, the process of “pulling learning out,” etc. I turn to Abram’s personal experiences of cultivating and using his senses. Through his own experiences, he found that he “began to *see* and to *hear* in a manner [he] never had before” (20, emphasis in original). Abram’s personal experiences have great similarities to Garnet’s references to listening to the silence and “pulling learning” out of the land. Another similarity between Garnet and Abram is the value of “slowing down,” which recalls Keeper’s teaching of the slow Ojibway method (*Keeper ’n Me* 135). Similarly, Abram relates that he learned to “slow my pace in order to feel the difference between the one nearby hill and the next” (20) and he feels the difference as “communicated to my senses” (20). Abram also describes familiarity with the landscape, which he gains by slowing down to sense and feel the surroundings—a familiarity gained from daily, active participation with the landscape. One day he finds himself in front of a bison, and he explains how they engage through a non-verbal communication form:

Our eyes locked. When it snorted, I snorted back; when it shifted its shoulders, I shifted my stance; when I tossed my head, it tossed *its* head in reply. I found

⁴⁷ Lene’s voice: My discussion of the drum also recalls why I initially set out to understand Indigenous literatures. Perhaps in one way I too experienced this flow that the sound of the drum organizes. I definitely felt the drum within my bones, even though I left the powwow where I first heard it. Perhaps the sounds of the drum have some sort of “timeless” sound that can be felt, even though the drum has been removed out of Danish spirituality probably at least since the Reformation in 1536. Understanding Scandinavian-Nordic shamanism and spirituality is a field I have begun exploring on my own.

myself caught in a nonverbal conversation with this Other,⁴⁸ a gestural duet with which my conscious awareness had very little to do. It was as if my body in its actions was suddenly being motivated by a wisdom older than my thinking mind, as though it was held and moved by a logos, deeper than words, spoken by the Other's body, the trees, and the stony ground on which we stood. (21, emphasis in original)

From Abram's experience, it becomes clearer that intuition must be an active sensorial way of engaging with our surroundings that is not only an unconscious act or (only) a familiarity with sports activities. Intuition requires practicing connecting with our bodies as sensory organs as well as establishing relations to our surrounding world and spirit; listening to silence; traveling inside for Truth and Life, and slowing down by staying in present moments, all of which results in ways of generating knowledge through our intuitive embodiment, our surroundings, through spirit, and through more-than-human entities. I am aware that I repeat myself twice in the above sentences, but the way of "pulling learning" seems circular. I describe the process of knowledge as circular because the requirement to be able to establish an intuitive awareness is eventually what teaches Garnet, Wagamese, and Abram. Said differently, we need to develop and learn (for example) slowness in order to understand and obtain the knowledge given by more-than-human entities; however, we learn slowness from the teachings that come from the more-than-human entities—that is the circular way of learning. Abram is able to achieve this form of communication by employing

⁴⁸ Lene's Voice: Abram's experience with the bison reminds me of encounters with deer at Princess Point. One evening I was out walking at dusk and I found this beautiful deer standing on the path. The deer looked at me and tried to catch my scent, but it did not move. I was reminded of Abram's experience with the bison, even though I did not try communicating with the deer, I stayed present in the moment and considered what this deer might think about me? What kind of scent did I have? Maybe ten minutes later, the deer decided to leave, but my interaction made me aware that we had created a space for both of us, just as we were both part of Princess Point. While thinking through the encounter with the deer, I realized that my theory in this project is shaping how I think, most specifically Latulippe's assertion of the web of connections, but also Justice principles of kinship. These theories have changed my perspective from thinking about the deer as an animal to considering the deer as a relative.

slowness in his observations of his surroundings, and thus staying in the present moment. The intuition Abram employs to communicate with the bison is not just an intangible sense; rather, he describes using his “body and its actions” (21).

The circular way of producing knowledge is why exploring impossible moments in *Keeper 'n Me* and *For Joshua* has been complicated and highly challenging. I cannot easily take one element out of impossible moments, such as the land’s magic and the “pulling of” learning from silence, intuition, embodiment, relationality, kinship, balance, slowness, prayers and the drum, because they all contribute to the Anishinaabe knowledge and spirituality I have been attempting to understand. My approach has shown me that western literary techniques only are somewhat applicable when reading Wagamese’s texts. I would even say that Wagamese’s texts resist being analyzed, and that the texts ask something different of me in my reading process. My approach has further shown me that the impossible moments only occur when Garnet and Wagamese encounter and expand upon Anishinaabe knowledge and spirituality. What I have learned is that Garnet’s and Wagamese’s navigation of their intermedial role provided insight to the systematic racialized ways of removing Indigenous knowledge and replacing it with Western thinking that had made them question their tribal knowledge. I have additionally come to perceive that they engage with more-than human entities from a series of insights that link them to their surroundings. Through these series of insights they both travel “inside” themselves, which they were able to do when they both actively started recovering Anishinaabe knowledge and spirituality. As a result of Garnet’s and Wagamese’s spiritual insights they were both eventually able to realize their belonging.

Story as Transformational in Lee Maracle's *Ravensong* and *Celia's Song*

The bones in the broken longhouse giggled; their neglect will be avenged. Deep inside the mountain, another set of bones rattles. They want to know what the hell is going on. Why do they hear the serpent talking to itself? They wriggle and fight to get to the surface, but it is a slow difficult process, this business of climbing through layers of rock and dirt. These bones are older. They died long before the newcomers came. They sense the anger of the younger bones; it surprises them. Getting to the younger bones is urgent, but there is no hurrying the journey to the top. This is not going to end well. (27)

I love this passage! The bones—their *thinking* and *movement*, and the serpent “*talking to itself*” (27, emphasis added)—foreground two kinds of impossible moments. The first concerns agency, and the second poses the question of whether to “believe” or “know” that the activities of more-than-human entities exist simultaneously on a textual level as much as they are “real.” Throughout *Ravensong* and *Celia's Song*, we are presented with not merely the bones and the serpent, but also with Raven, mink, cedar, earth, mountain, and the spirit of first Alice, who all are active agents. Their unique roles bring me to the first impossibility: Treating more-than-human entities as active agents raises the question of whether these entities can possess agency—can move, can think and talk—all verb-based, active abilities—without human interference. By the latter I mean that we do not project human traits upon them, but, rather, that agency may be considered as an extension of the principles of kinship. The notion of agency recalls Deloria's insistence that the old stories are literally real, which brings me to the second impossible moment.

Real is about *knowing* that the bones talk (even though the bones belonged to deceased people). I understand “real” in so far as the bones once were skeletal structures of human bodies; however, when perceiving the bones as active agents

without a body, my imagination⁴⁹ takes over. I *suspend my disbelief* and merely *believe* that the bones talk—a believing that according to the OED is defined as “without proof.” The passage seems to ask whether I believe or know, which—in this moment of uncertainty between believing and knowing—produces the impossible moment. I attempt to believe, but can I know? And would I not, by claiming to know, conduct a colonial mastery? Instead, I recall Lai’s “epistemologies of respect,” in which she emphasizes the responsibility we have towards respecting differences as “a deep responsibility to find the new balance of the world and move towards it” (126). Lai’s assertion of the significance of respect informs my approach to reading in-between believing and knowing. I position myself in “ethical space” through an acknowledgment that the principles of kinship and the literal “real” are outside my frame of reference. Indeed, balancing my own frame of reference and profoundly exploring Maracle’s story that unfolds both an atrocious, colonial context and a realm of mythical beings creates the ethical space in this chapter.

⁴⁹ Lene’s voice: I guess that when we read or listen to stories that we all to some extent use our imagination and believe. I am not specifically thinking about creating images in our minds from the text, but that we are able to take an imaginative leap when presented with texts such as *Ravensong* and *Celia’s Song*. Deloria’s argument about how the old stories must be considered literally real suggests that Maracle’s novels push the boundaries for how I should read. The literality of the bones talking exists on a textual level, that much I understand. However, when considering that Deloria also says that the land is sacred because of the ancestors’ spirits and bodies are both are part of and still (in some way) present upon the land, how am I then to interpret this passage? Do I read with the understanding that outside the fictional universe, Indigenous knowledge presents me with a reality in which the spirit realm is real? This idea suggests that I should interpret this passage as literally plausible. If I interpret the bones’ talking as plausible and connect it to an understanding that bones have a similar agency outside the fictional world, I wonder if Maracle’s novels are just plain fiction, or if the novels are fictionalized narratives that could happen in the “real” world? What should I characterize Maracle’s novels as, if they are not fictional texts, but not exactly non-fictional either? Are these texts thus an example of the need for re-considering what literary fiction is or can do?

A Note to Reading this Chapter

I am here presenting a few guidelines for how to read this chapter. To support my readings of Maracle's novels, I am guided by the concept of *story being transformational*. In *Ravensong*, Raven is described as "the transformer" ("Toward" 83), and Maracle elaborates what it means to be a "transformer" by connecting it to the object of story in her article "Toward a National Literature," in which she indicates that "the object of story in Salish society is to guide transformation and conduct" (83). Furthermore, she elaborates that story involves our encounter with "the lessons, the teachings, and the conduct that we must arrive at personally and collectively to make the story work for us and to work with the story" (83). For me, transformational stories appear to convey a kind of esoteric knowledge; yet, Maracle provides some guidelines for an outsider. She informs my exploration of story through Salish understandings of the purposes of studying stories: "Salish study looks for the obstacles to growth and transformation, both in the external and the internal worlds. Once an understanding is achieved, the mythmakers story it up in a way that they hope leads humans toward social maturity and growth" ("Oratory" 57). I understand "story" as transformational in relation to personal development (to borrow a Western conceptualization of what Maracle maps out). This transformational way of thinking has similar resonances with both the ideas *within* (content) and the *operation of* (form) Wagamese's texts. Both his texts carry the notion of story as a way of coming home inside oneself. Garnet becomes a storyteller (*Keeper 'n Me* 214), and he explicitly says he is "shopping for a story... [to have] some hook to hang my life on" (167). In this chapter, I will attempt to unpack the concept of *story as transformational* with reference to Maracle's guidelines.

Second, I consider the principles of storytelling as mapped out by Jo-ann Archibald's (Stó:lō) *Indigenous Storywork*. Archibald expounds upon our interaction with story by highlighting seven principles from a "Stó:lō and Coast Salish theoretical framework" (ix), which are: "respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism,⁵⁰ interrelatedness, and synergy" (ix). The principles of storytelling shape the story, which resonates with story as being transformational. Archibald expounds upon the function of story as generating balance, something she identifies from how story permeates all areas of life, "stories have the power to make our hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits work together. When we lose a part of ourselves, we lose balance and harmony [...] only when our hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits work together do we truly have Indigenous education" (12). I highlight Archibald's assertion of the principles of story because it provides a framework for *Ravensong* and *Celia's Song* and an approach by which I can discuss the impossible moments of the two novels.

The Structure of the Two Novels

I will briefly recount and establish some of the characters' storylines before venturing into a reading of the two novels. Both novels are dense, which means I have been unable to explore and unpack all the threads presented in them. I have, however, focused on what I found most important when discussing impossible moments.

Ravensong and *Celia's Song* are a communal, family story. *Ravensong* is set in 1954 (25) and revolves around the vastly different lives lived in a village and in the neighbouring white town. The main characters are Stacey, Celia, their mother (Momma), their non-biological father (Jim), their brother (Jim), and the more-than-

⁵⁰ Archibald defines holism as "the interrelatedness between the intellectual, spiritual [...] emotional, and physical [...] realms to form a whole healthy person" (11).

human entities, Raven and cedar. *Ravensong* is told in third person from the perspective of Stacey and Celia, as well as Raven. Stacey is about to finish high school; her dream is eventually to become a teacher on the reserve. Celia is about thirteen years old. Raven tries through song to communicate with Stacey and Celia, but Stacey is unable to hear Raven, and although Celia hears the song and has a visionary gift, she lacks the knowledge of what to do with what she sees, hears, and feels.

Stacey is a keen observer of the differences between the villagers and white town, and Maracle narrates this separateness Stacey observes geographically, as two places divided by a river and a bridge. The bridge and the river serve as physical as much as psychological barriers. People on either side are unfamiliar and uninvolved with each other, which generates a paralysing silence. Raven—as the transformer—plans to break the silence by releasing another epidemic. Raven hopes that by doing so the villagers will wake up, cross the bridge and “drive them to white town to fix the mess over there” (14). The plan is about breaking silence, as much as it is about bringing shame to the White people. Yet each epidemic has not brought shame “among the people of white town” (191). Instead of providing medical support to the villagers during these epidemics, the White town residents only read in the newspaper “the controversy over the neglect of the Indian ‘flu victims” (93). The Hong Kong flu the villagers suffer from takes at least twenty-four people (93), among them Stacey and Celia’s father, Jim (84).

The main storyline revolves around the Hong Kong flu (25) Raven unleashes. Stacey identifies the communal storyline when she explains that the passing of villagers (who died from either the Hong Kong flu or previous epidemics) is

damaging an interrelational bond, described as missing pieces: “a missing person became a missing piece of the circle which could not be replaced” (26). Stacey’s observations demonstrate the fragility of the village, by which I mean that each epidemic kills not only individuals, but also the villagers’ access to knowledge and traditional practices, which is crucial for all the lives in the village.

Celia’s Song begins twenty-five years after the events in *Ravensong*. From the epilogue in *Ravensong*, we find that Stacey’s dream of becoming a teacher has been blocked. She explains: “In the end, they would not let us build our school. No one in white town would hire me either [...] ‘not allowed’ seemed to be all there was left to their life” (198). Twenty-five years later, they face a different kind of epidemic, a “paralysing silence” (197). The paralysing epidemic of silence is an essential theme in *Celia’s Song*. This silence is built upon Celia’s son Jimmy’s suicide; a suicide that takes place “outside” the narration in *Celia’s Song*. The silence is juxtaposed with the novels’ titles that both include the noun “song.” On a textual level, there is a struggle to break the silence, which corresponds to silence’s metaphorical association with the prohibition of the ceremonies known as the potlatch.⁵¹ “Song” is associated in the novel with breaking silence, generating healing, and restoring longhouse ceremonies.

The structure of *Celia’s Song* is more complex than that of *Ravensong*. In *Celia’s Song*, mink is *the* witness to the story, and also a first-person narrator. Other characters, who actively display qualities we think of as being attributable to

⁵¹ Carlson explains that potlatch refers to “traditional Stó:lō gatherings, such as a spirit dance, naming ceremony, wedding and funeral” all of which take place in longhouses (*You are* 184). Old Pierre (Coast Salish) expounds on the dancers’ abilities by saying that they “depend upon the power or talent they receive from special animals or bird spirit ‘partners,’ or helpers, who come from the mountain to assist them” (qtd. in Carlson, *The Power* 73). Here, Pierre establishes a spiritual kinship between the dancers and their helpers. This spirit source of power “well[ed] up inside people causing them to sing and dance and thereby regain health and vigour” (qtd. in Carlson, *The Power* 73).

conscious, living human bodies and therefore having agency, include the serpent, spider, and the spirit of the first Alice. These more-than-human entities, alongside Celia, Stacey, and Jacob are all narrated from a third-person perspective. Celia and Jacob are seers and lively relationships are established between them and the more-than-human entities. *Celia's Song* has more characters than I have introduced here. For example, the researchers Sam, Frederick, Davis, and Thomas (14) are introduced, but their thread disappears into the larger pattern. Likewise, the bridge from *Ravensong* does not have as dominant a role, and the disparateness between the villagers and white town becomes less defined with the acceptance of the (White) characters Steve and Judy in the intimate family circle.

The story's main focus is restoring song (i.e. longhouse ceremonies), but before being able to do so, Celia and the family are confronted with the serpent who "overtakes" the character Amos's body and mind through entering Amos's mouth (*Celia's Song* 40). The serpent demonstrates similar transformative power as does Raven, but in this instance the transformation turns destructive. Inside Amos, the serpent spins stories that eventually lead Amos and a friend to sexually and physically abuse the young girl Shelly—almost to the brink of her death. The serpent and Amos storyline demonstrates the effects of silence, and of neglect in the village, yet their storyline is also a key transformation point that allows the characters to break the silence. Eventually, it is not the Hong Kong flu that pushes Celia's family to restore song, but the healing of Shelly's mutilated body, mind and soul. They care for her, physically, as well as healing her with song. For example, while the family is singing, Celia hums along to their song. She does so while treating Shelly, who is barely clinging to life. When Shelly hears Celia's humming it becomes a sign of hope,

because Shelly can finally relax and feel safe, indeed, her body “stops quivering and [she] goes to sleep” (217). The family’s singing signifies the return of the longhouse tradition. The group breaks the silence through singing, which transforms their interaction and respect for one another, as well as restoring kinship with the more-than-human entities. The communal storyline resonates with Archibald’s assertion of the storytelling principle of holism, by reconnecting and restoring the intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical health of the family (and villagers). Indeed, the power of their story establishes balance and harmony.

Celia’s Visionary Gift: Colonial Patterns and Magical Realism

Celia’s attention is drawn to the sunken longhouse, downhill from Mink, close to the lagoon. She thinks she hears the bones in the longhouse talking; they seem to want this storm, behave as though they need it. She hears them say: “Someone has to pay for decades of neglect. Someone has to appease our need for respect.” She shudders. Up until now, her delusions have centred on humans in full form; even the dead she saw had bodies. This is the first time she’s heard bones talk (*Celia’s Song* 6)

This passage, in which Celia’s visionary gift is foregrounded, brings attention to a central issue of reading impossible moments. The premise that Celia hears talking bones and sees dead bodies cannot be ignored. I wonder how I should read Celia’s visions? Are her visions a literary technique that introduces “context” and “obstacles” (as described by Maracle) Could I explain her visions through the perspective of magical realism? Or, are her visions an example of layers of storytelling in which the bones’ and the dead people’s stories are principles of kinship? My questions cover a range of possibilities, because Celia’s visions are difficult to categorize and because I am not sure this passage can be explored from a single angle. I will unpack this passage more by close reading the nouns *delusions* and *visions* (as collective nouns for Celia’s ability to hear the bones and see dead people).

Close reading of *delusions* as a colonial discourse suggests that Celia's sanity⁵² is brought into question in *Celia's Song*. The "impossibility" of Celia's visions is here presented on a textual level, which means that Celia, her family, and the villagers' reactions towards her visions resemble "this unsettling kind of feeling" of how to make sense of her visions. At the beginning, the villagers are convinced "that [Celia] was half-crazed" (11); and they "*don't get her*" (35, emphasis in original). Celia describes her visions as "new images [that] invade her mind" (12), "hallucinations" (49), and "daydreaming" (70). The family considers her gift as "neurotic daydreaming" (129); that she is a "flake" (140); and that "Celia sees things, she wanders about lost in her own world most of the time" (261). Celia describes the way the visions come to her as though detracting from the physical world: "she pulls the curtain down on the room full of people, turns the volume off, and lets herself drift into her private world of scattered moving pictures, disconnected from current time" (45). This drifting into a "private" world (45) echoes the other negative words that describe her visions.

The description of Celia's visions as delusions seems telling, because, to some extent, it positions Celia outside her visions (i.e. as though they are separate and not integral to her being), and it further positions her as an outsider of the family and villagers. The OED defines "delusion" as "an idiosyncratic belief or impression maintained despite being contradicted by reality or rational argument, typically as a symptom of mental disorder." What we may take into consideration is to read her

⁵² While discussing Celia's visions I make use of words that are tied to a mental health history. I am aware that some of these words can come across as offensive, but I have chosen to keep these words (i.e. delusions, crazy, half-crazed, etc.), because they frame a psychiatric terminology that has permeated our ways of thinking and talking. Maracle's use of this psychiatric vocabulary demonstrates the westernized way of perceiving Celia as being mentally ill. In the lines of this thinking we find a colonial system that has replaced Stó:lō knowledge.

visions as reframing her story by placing it in relation to context and obstacles. The very definition of the word “delusion” reflects a colonial context. Indeed, “delusion” accords well with Abram’s discussion of the separation of body-mind and soul, because Celia experiences her visions as disconnected from her body. “Delusions” might imply that the colonial system permeates language and profoundly affects how Celia and the villagers perceive her visions. The relation between a colonial context and delusions is demonstrated by how the visions “invade” (*Celia’s Song* 12) her mind. The verb “invade” is a highly suggestive term that when used to describe Celia’s visions resonates with the colonial enterprise. The obstacles present themselves through Celia’s lack of knowledge of what her visions might signify. Furthermore, “this lack of knowledge” may be found in Stacey’s account of the elders who passed away in the epidemics. Without elders, there are no teachers to guide Celia to principles of kinship, when she hears and feels Raven’s song.

Magical realism might offer a different access point to explore the association between visions and, or, delusion in colonial contexts. Rzepa and Kristina Aurylaité both explore Celia’s visions in *Ravensong* as effects of memory and flashbacks. Rzepa expounds upon the notion of memory by explaining that Indigenous female authors “use magic realist techniques to open up for examination new spaces” (15) and at stake is “the recovery of memory” (15). Similarly, Aurylaité describes Celia’s visions in *Ravensong* as a “vision of the past” (86). Memory is a key term, and Aurylaité argues that Celia’s visions establish historical contexts. She demonstrates her statement by exploring Celia’s vision of the first encounter between the newcomers and the villagers. This meeting is mapped out as “construct[ing] racial, cultural, and gender borders between the two cultures” (86). Aurylaité’s argument accords well

with Celia's visions as memories of the past, because Celia sees "bighouses of the past" (10), and in the passage from *Celia's Song*, Celia sees "the sunken longhouse" and hears the "bones in the longhouse talking" (6) (i.e. bones as representing bodies of once living people). Likewise, Celia sees her grandmother who surveyed "the wreckage of the first 'flu epidemic long ago" (*Ravensong* 15). In *Celia's Song*, Celia herself describes her visions as memories that "don't come to her in the normal way memories do [...] they sit in her mind, independent of her voice" (46). All these images of past situations and past lives demonstrate the point that Celia's visions are indeed providing historical context. Moreover, Aurylaité characterizes Celia's visions (or memories) as "historical flashbacks" (87) and relates the first epidemic, in which Celia's grandmother's family dies, to the epidemic in 1954. Aurylaité argues that the flashback "predicts the destructiveness of the contact between indigenous people and white settlers, epitomized in the novel through the theme of a disease, a flu epidemic" (87). From examining Celia's visions from the perspective of magical realism, we find that Celia's visions are memories of past events. Yet her visions do nothing but establish historical, colonial context for the new Hong Kong flu the villagers face at the present time. Reading visions as memories allows us to make sense of her visions, but our reading does not take into account how Raven is trying to communicate with Celia through song.

The relationship between Raven and Celia seems paramount to make sense of her visions—as visions and not as delusions. To make sense of their relationship, we have to make sense of Raven's way of being as both an active agent and as a transformer. I turn to Cajete to make sense of Raven's being. Cajete explains that human beings are not the only beings in existence who have soul; in fact each animal

is “an animated being, a being within an anima, a soul; not a human soul, but a thing of marvellous beauty expressing some aspect of the divine” (154).⁵³ In *Ravensong*, however, Raven’s song, spirit and relation to the people have been forgotten. Maracle outlines that *Ravensong* “presents characters in the condition of patterned colonial movement” (“Oratory” 65), and she stresses the need for taking action: “we need to draw upon the tangled web of colonial being, thread by thread—watch as each thread unfurls, untangles, shows its soft underbelly, its vulnerability, its strength, its resilience, its defiance, its imposition, its stubbornness—rediscover Canada and First Nations people” (“Oratory” 68). Maracle strongly emphasizes that “the path to relationship” requires that “obstacles need to be seen” (68), and the obstacles are in this case making sense of Celia’s visions and rebuilding relations to Raven.

Considering Celia’s visions in relation to her body, mind and to the world that surround her offers a possibility for exploring her visions as embodied:

Her body began to float. Everything non-physical inside her sped up. [Raven’s song] played about with the images inside. She stared blankly at some indefinable spot while the river became the sea, the shoreline shifted to a beach she couldn’t remember seeing, the little houses of today faded. In their place stood the bighouses of the past. Carved double-headed sea serpents guarded the entrance to the village of wolf clan. (*Ravensong* 10)

By considering Celia’s visions as integral, we find in a passage like this that Celia’s visions derive from a flow between the movements of the song and her body.⁵⁴ Her

⁵³ Lene’s voice: I needed to stop what I was doing when I was reading Abram in a related discussion about the rational human’s soul being above all else in Western thinking. In fact, I needed to get away from my writing of this chapter. I went to the gym to move my body and think through what Abram was actually implying. I have read—and I guess I know from my Christian upbringing—that the human soul is “unique.” However, working with this project suddenly made me realize the loss of connection between human and more-than-human entities resulted from the rational body-mind separation. The Indigenous knowledge presented in this project expresses kinship with all living things, but if humans are to be considered above that, how can we then restore kinship? My thoughts about this dismal separateness took me beyond this project’s frame, and I wondered, what if humans existential loneliness is a loneliness of rationality?

⁵⁴ The flow between Raven’s song and Celia’s body recalls my discussion of prayers and the drum as mediators. I will not go into an elaborated discussion about this, but will consider that song could be a

vision as “flowing through” her body is an impossible moment, by which I suggest that the exploration of Celia’s visions as connected to the body is outside my frame of reference. Celia seems to share similar unsettling experiences with her visions (i.e. the visions also exist outside her frame of references). For example, Celia hears Raven’s song and sees the images that “floated up from her guts” (14), yet she reacts with fear, which is demonstrated when her “body seized up, [and] twisted itself into fetal position” (10), and she further finds herself “in a confusing state of numb[ness]” (14). Celia’s confusing embodied experiences of her visions suggest that she is unable to connect with or understand their significance. The images she sees are instead expressed as making little sense to her; they are indeed “disjointed from reality” (14). This disjointedness from reality recalls the obstacles of Celia’s lack of information and knowledge to connect to her visions, and instead she inhabits the worldview of body-mind separation. Furthermore, Celia is not actively participating with her body upon the land, or with Raven’s song, which might explain why her visions seem strange and unfamiliar (e.g. Garnet was actively participating with “pulling out learning” from the land through Keeper’s teachings and putting his knowledge into daily practice).

Celia’s embodied response to what she feels in *Ravensong* is elaborated upon in *Celia’s Song*. Through the character Jacob, and his interaction with cedar, in which Jacob feels how “cedar moves of its own accord in Jacob’s hand” (*Celia’s Song* 61). We find that Jacob reacts with a fear that resembles Celia’s because Jacob “fights cedar, tries to hold it still in his hand, but cedar refuses to be still. He feels panic rise

mediator or an organizer of embodied feelings that allow for Celia to respond to Raven’s song. Indeed, there could be similarities between the flow song creates and the flow that I have discussed thoroughly in the Wagamese chapter.

in his chest” (61). Jacob’s reactions derive from a lack of knowledge—because his aunt Celia is unable to pass knowledge on to Jacob. The lack of knowledge is demonstrated as unfamiliarity because Jacob “has no idea what cedar is doing and no context for believing what he is seeing and feeling” (61). While Jacob encounters Cedar’s activeness, Celia is listening “in” and thus “hears the panic in Jacob’s mind” (61), but although “Celia’s mind urges Jacob to be calm” she avoids talking directly to Jacob, and instead she “let[s] him figure it out by himself” (62). Here, Celia arguably witnesses Jacob’s feelings because “it is the same fear she felt so long ago, behind the woodshed. When she first saw those tall ships” (62). Evidently, both Celia and Jacob are alone in figuring out their visionary gift because they have no context for what happens to them. Their lack of knowledge demonstrates that the body-mind and soul separation was imposed on their people by the Western, rational way of thinking, which subsequently has permeated Indigenous thought and experiences. The explicit memories of their past have been silenced by the colonial endeavour—even if the body holds different memories (as demonstrated by Celia), the memories become silenced because they are thought of as mere delusions.

Raven’s Mean Plan to Restore Balance

Raven shrieked one more time in a last bid for the attention of those in the room. None heard. She began to think the plan might not work. Doubt invaded Raven’s spirit, her insides quivered slightly under the tensile thread of uncertainty. Hope shrunk inside Raven. She grew weary with the weight of its smallness. Then she left. It would be a long time before she returned in quite the same way. (*Ravensong* 54)

The colonial pattern is not so easily untangled because of its many threads, and in this passage Raven become unsure that her plan of unleashing another epidemic will result in breaking the silence. Cedar has already expressed these concerns and “disagreed

with Raven's plan—it was impossibly mean" (44). Raven's plan is another impossible moment. I can suspend my disbelief in Raven's agency and consider her agency and her plan as a literary device to set the story in motion, or ... I can attempt a reading that takes into consideration that Raven *is* a transformer. Raven's plan could be to push for transformation and give "power" to the story to restore balance and harmony—as expressed by Archibald. We might also consider Raven's plan from the aspects of growth and transformation that, according to Maracle, happens both within the "the external and the internal worlds" ("Oratory" 57). Considering Raven's role of transformation (and that it is an impossible plan) it appears that there are stakes in restoring balance and harmony. The villagers have to go through (another) epidemic where lives are lost. In other words, it is through pain that transformation happens—a statement that I think is universal. What ties the painful aspects of transformation to a Stó:lō context is that the transformation happens through story. Recalling Archibald's principles of storytelling, we find that transformation, in the context of Celia's vision and relationship with Raven, seems to be about establishing connectedness to oneself (inside),⁵⁵ and restoring kinship (relations between the villagers, between the villagers and people in white town, and between people and the more-than-human entities, Raven and Cedar).

Transformation is tied to the conduct of life and the telling of story. As Maracle puts it: "transformation is not only at the centre of our oratorical story tradition; it is

⁵⁵ Maracle's assertion that transformation happens internally and externally recalls Wagamese's and Garnet's struggle to find belonging and home within themselves.

the objective of life itself” (“Toward” 85).⁵⁶ More specifically, Maracle unpacks the Raven character from a Coast Salish perspective:

Salish people treasure *Ravensong* as a story that shows who we are and always will be. They study it in a specifically Salish way and come to know Raven as the transformer, not merely as a childlike trickster figure⁵⁷ who is sometimes silly and foolish. They need to answer only one question; is this story connected to our oratorical body of knowledge, our sense of Raven the transformer, and could it happen, even if it didn't? We already know that Raven is a major transformer, not a silly little trickster. He called us into being, stole light that we might see both the shadows and brightness of our humanity, that we might study shadow land and daylight and reach backward and forward for our humanity (“Toward” 83).

This passage puts the question of literality or believability to the forefront. Maracle's words, “could it happen, even if it didn't” (83), signals that Raven's plan and her agency is an impossible moment. From the above-mentioned passage it becomes clear that Raven is an active agent in *Ravensong*. What makes her an active agent is especially the noun *plan*, which demonstrates that she actively engages with the villagers; yet, as the passage illustrates, none of the villagers can hear her, except for Celia. The noun *hearing* may highlight that hearing is not an indication of the sound (i.e. the shriek), but of what Raven may say through different sensorial ways of

⁵⁶ Lene's voice: I have often experienced stories as being transformative from reading fiction. My worst—or best (depends how you look at it)—was a trilogy about King Arthur. I read these books, perhaps twenty-two years ago, but I still remember the pain of leaving the fictional universe. It was so painful that I made a conscious decision of never reading them again. However, that experience was nothing like reading Maracle's novels, because my readings have altered something inside me, and I have come to understand more profoundly what “net of connections” mean. Yet, because of being outside Stó:lō experiences, my understanding of transformation becomes entangled within me along side being a privileged reader who wonders about my implications of how to respect different knowledge systems, and to what extent I can engage with the knowledge I study through writing this project. The obvious result from undertaking this project is to learn, and to engage with these different epistemologies as they continue to unsettle my perception of knowledge. But to what extent can I claim transformation as described by Maracle?

⁵⁷ We may also observe here that the Trickster is a common phenomenon in Indigenous literatures, and according to Archibald the Trickster character existed “in our stories since ‘time immemorial,’ as our people say” (5). She further explains that “Trickster” is an English word that does not encapsulate the “diverse range of ideas that First Nations associate with the Trickster.” Instead, she maps out “the Trickster who sometimes is like a magician, an enchanter, an absurd prankster, or a shaman, who sometimes is a shape shifter, and who often takes human characteristics” (5). When we read about Tricksters in Indigenous literatures, we might meet other “well known Trickster characters [which] include Raven, Wesakejac, Nanabozo, and Glooscap” (5).

communicating. One example of communicating occurs when Celia “hears” Raven’s words (song) as visual images. My reading of Raven’s plan, her ways of communicating (i.e. as having agency) is an impossible moment because we know that birds have voices and that they communicate (the nightingale in the evening, birds asserting territories, etc.). We also know that among the birds, ravens and crows are among the most intelligent. How we observe the birds (or Raven) introduces Battiste and Henderson’s exploration of “intelligible essence.” This concept suggests there is the possibility that I might be able to perceive birds in their truer form (when they are not entangled in my preformed perception). However, if artificial filters influence my perception of reality, then, I cannot perceive the birds as having agency. I can recognize their form, and that they are alive, but perceiving their agency as purposeful engagement and communication is outside my frame of reference. From my example, it becomes clear that the ability to hear Raven’s communication is a matter of knowing enough about the various elements of communication to “understand” what they mean—like learning a language. Reading the impossible moment becomes a matter of degrees. I can believe that ravens are smart and that they communicate, but are they smart enough to create an elaborate plan that is invested in the future lives of humans? Celia’s and the villagers’ ability to hear is, like mine, based on their level of belief (or knowing). We may consider that the lack of hearing refers back to the body-mind and soul separation and the belief that humans are above animals. This rational separation generates the distance between Raven’s song and the villagers’ ability to hearing the song.

Raven’s plan of transformation is not “shiny rainbows” but demands struggle, pain, and sacrifice before balance and harmony are restored. Indeed, it appears that

transformation gives birth to desolate feelings, such as distance between the characters, and between characters, the land, and the more-than-human entities. In Celia's case, Celia's distance is triggered during the flu epidemic. The feelings of distance are demonstrated when Celia's mother sacrifices her relationship with Celia, by sending "Celia away from home until the epidemic was over" (*Ravensong* 55). Celia feels the distance as a pain that creeps into her body through her mother's "words [that] bit into her gut" (55). While going through the motions of pain she hides "under the folds of the cedar" (55). Celia seems distant to the world that surrounds her, a distance that is demonstrated in the way Celia's "feet touch[ed] dry dirt" (55), in which the connection between her feet and the soil is described as "unfeeling" (55). Raven's plan is demonstrated through Celia's pain, by which I suggest that Celia has an option to reconnect and restore kinship (i.e. between her family and more-than-human entities), or distance herself even further.

The distance between people and more-than-human entities is what eventually makes Raven doubt her plan. Raven can see that the villagers are "lacking" something, which is exemplified through Stacey, who cannot hear Raven's song. "Stacey was lacking something" (22) and Raven relates Stacey's "lack" to the "drought which seemed to plague the people. It was a drought of thought," which Raven also characterizes as a lack of "sacred thoughts [whereby] their thoughts avoided depth" (23). Raven contemplates how to "get the people to awaken" and restore "deep thinking" (23). Raven's song or plan introduces the imbalance and disharmony for a purpose—to restore deep thinking. Considering Archibald's storytelling principles, we find a lack of reciprocity and interrelatedness between Raven, Stacey, Celia and the villagers. The lack of this form of kinship may be found

in the prohibition of the potlatch ceremonies and song. Similarly, restoring deep thinking and sacred thoughts is accomplished through the rebuilding of spiritual practices.⁵⁸

Becoming Aware of the Colonial Pattern: A Spider and Serpent Story

Jacob sees the longhouse on the mountain, the one that had fallen forward, exposing the moulded blankets and the bones – so many of them. He sees a tangled spider’s web and in each silk strand he sees some aspect of the crisis everyone in the village is bound to. He intends to pull at this silk and unravel the whole damned mess. The mountain has brought him a song and the dream of rebuilding the longhouse. (*Celia’s Song* 216)

From this passage, we find that a spider’s web holds all the stories of the villagers woven into a larger story pattern. Jacob sees the pattern as different individual “aspect[s] of the crisis” (216), which accords well with Raven’s assertion that there is “something lacking”: a “drought,” as well as the paralyzing silence faced by the villagers. Jacob means to unravel the pattern, which echoes Raven’s attempt to “wake up” the villagers by unleashing the Hong Kong flu. The spider’s web is another impossible moment, by which I suggest that it is fairly easy to interpret Jacob’s observation of the spider’s web on the mountain as a metaphor for the many stories tangled together that bind his community together. Reading as though the spider’s web is a metaphor creates a parallel between “the unsettling” (the spider’s function as storyteller) and different aspects or experiences of the villagers’ lives. By reading

⁵⁸ Lene’s voice: Raven’s assertion that something is “lacking” in the villagers reminds me of Stonechild’s discussion of the TRC-report and his own studies of holistic, spiritual thinking and, or teachings in the classroom. The pupils Stonechild interviewed also expressed feelings of “something lacking.” From connecting Raven’s and Stonechild’s thoughts on “the lacking” we find that the lack is a product of colonial oppressive structures. I wonder how we establish conversation across barriers such as these? Although I openly discuss my own barriers and implications of being a privileged reader, it does not change that these oppressive structures always are at the forefront in this project as well as in conversations with people outside this project. Likewise, this history of oppression is present in my thoughts when I engage with the ecologies at Princess Point. I wonder then, when does my awareness of how I am implicated in the colonial enterprise enable me, and when do the same thoughts prevent me from conducting my studies of and conversations with people about spirituality and kinship?

spider's function as a metaphor, I suspend my disbelief, and merely believe that the spider possesses such a role. In other words, I draw a parallel between "the unsettling" and making sense of the drought, the "lack of something" and the silence. What we may consider here is that the metaphor of the spider's function possibly has similar significance in Indigenous and Euro-Western thinking (i.e. establishing meaning and understanding through metaphor). What is important to observe is the difference between suspending disbelief and considering the spider's function as literally real *as well as* a metaphor. What unsettles my reading practice is the tension between suspending my disbelief and considering spider's function as literal—because how do we make sense of literally real readings that exist outside the fictional universe?⁵⁹ I am faced with my limitations of how to interpret literal. I have, in university settings, been taught to read metaphorically, so how do I read literally—as in the case of more-than-human entities' agency and aliveness—that also could exist outside the fictional universe?

Garant's conception of mythic realism (contributing aliveness and agency to ecologies) offers a possibility for exploring spider's function from a different perspective. Mythic realism has been presented as a subgenre that may be helpful to explore agency and literality. From Schöler we learn that magical realism enables discussions of mythical and literal. Schöler identifies the link between mythical occurrences and a literal real reality that includes these mythical occurrences from

⁵⁹ Lene's voice: As I write, I have no frame of reference for how to perceive literality along the lines of what Deloria explains, but I can push my thinking and engage with what Deloria is teaching me. My approach to literality is to think of the more-than-human entities (e.g. serpent, spider, Raven and earth) as entities with agency and as entities tied to ways of "pulling knowledge" and making sense of the world that surrounds me. This latter thought suggests that stories may be metaphorical rather than literal, in that they stand in for the meaning they refer to. The connection between literal and metaphorical is perhaps not as divided—perhaps there is a literal context to a metaphorical teaching. By which I suggest that the more-than-human entities, just as the spirit realm, is literally real, but also carries a metaphorical meaning that teaches about, for example, principles of kinship.

close reading Leslie Marmon Silko's (Laguna Pueblo) *Ceremony*,⁶⁰ in which he emphasizes an interwoven net between "four story lines [that] form an organic whole of cosmic proportions" (69). I highlight Schöler's reading of *Ceremony*'s different storylines because this "organic whole" rings true for the spider in *Celia's Song* (i.e. spider's function as weaving the storylines of and between Raven, Cedar, Stacey, Celia, Jacob, Momma, Amos, Shelly etc.). Schöler also considers a literality that shares similarities with Deloria Jr.'s statement; however, Schöler relates his discussion of literality directly to Indigenous literatures, which encapsulates what my thesis is actually attempting to explore: "Native American literature *is* characterized by realism, but it is a realism which is qualified by features that the Western scholar tends to categorize as mythic, surreal, or even magic. To most Native American writers, however, these elements are really real and true. In other words, these authors treat so-called mythic occurrences as if they really happened or happen. Or rather, not "as if" because they do not seem to draw any distinction between the real and the surreal" (65, emphasis in original). Reading through the scope of mythic realism seems to expound upon the reading of spider's function as a metaphor to simultaneously consider literal meanings.⁶¹

⁶⁰ In *Ceremony*, Spider's name is Ts'its'itsi'nako, or Thought-Woman, and Silko begins the story from Spider's point of view, who is "sitting in her room / thinking of a story now" (1); and, while she is thinking the story, the narrator tells it. We may think of Spider as "creating," a concept that Paula Gunn Allan (Laguna Pueblo) elaborates upon: "all tales [are] born in the mind of the Spider Woman, and creation exists as a result of her naming" (119). What we discover from briefly examining *Ceremony* is that Spider is a storyteller who brings transformation through story.

⁶¹ In "Land as Pedagogy," Leanne Simpson identifies stories as theory. She explains that stories grow with the individual as the individual connects the story to life experience: "Theory" [...] is generated from the ground up and its power stems from its living resonance within individuals and collectives. Younger citizens might first understand just the literal meaning. As they grow, they can put together the conceptual meaning, and with more experience with our knowledge system, the metaphorical meaning. Then they start to apply the processes and practices of the story in their own lives (when I have a problem, I'll call my aunts or my grandparents), and 'meaning-making' becomes an inside phenomenon. After they live each stage of life through the story, then they can communicate their lived

From spider's function of carrying metaphorical and literal meaning, we may also consider "story" as external and internal transformational powers. In *Celia's Song*, we learn from Ned that spider "is a storyteller" (128). Ned cautions us to beware of becoming tangled in the web that she spins "across human pathways [...] [B]e careful to unhook the web on the far side and clear the path" (128). Ned's caution recalls the principles of storytelling and of having respect and reverence for spider's story. Spider is "a predator" and Ned warns that if spider is swallowed, she can spin stories "inside [which can twist] you in all kinds of crazed directions" (128). Celia describes the spider's spin as "the thread of bitterness" (245), and she contemplates that "as long as each holds onto some bitter thread, they cannot really give life" (244). By examining Celia's word, "bitterness" (245), we find that "bitterness" can be, among other things, a reference to her son, Jimmy's, suicide. Celia describes a devastating aliveness of story that has an unmistakable presence in Momma's house. The story (from Jimmy's suicide) "still hangs in the air," and is "torturing her with its images of her dead son," while she laments, "if only the story's feel would disappear" (43). Celia seems unable to move beyond the story, which illustrates that "story" has agency and power to keep Celia stuck in her story. Indeed, Celia describes how she is trying to let go of spider's threat, but it "feels sticky, spider-web sticky [...] she lets go, but it's stuck" (244). Ned and Celia demonstrate that spider's web of story is thought of as something real and alive. The swallowing of spider's story indicates an internal transformation, yet the spider web in Celia's hand and in the room is an

wisdom, understood through six or seven decades of lived experience and shifting meaning. This is how our old people teach" (7).

example of an external and internal feeling in which story is stuck to her hand and inside her.

The collective bitterness, “something lacking,” the “drought,” and the silence all correlate to the overall pattern of colonial oppression and specifically to the prohibition of the potlatch ceremonies. We find, by exploring this extensive pattern, that they are connected to the two-headed serpent (Loyal and Restless). We may consider the serpent as an active agent that, from looking at his names, Restless and Loyal, has a role of establishing or destroying balance. For example, the serpent craves nutrition, which in the olden days, according to Mink, was “*feasting and singing*” (2, emphasis in original), something the serpent describes as “spirit food” (27), which suggests that if the serpent is not fed through song, he feeds on humans’ spirit.⁶² The serpent’s actions are found in *Celia’s Song*, but we find a mention of him in *Ravensong*. In one of Celia’s visions, she saw the serpent attached to a sunken longhouse as “carved double-headed sea serpents [that] guarded the entrance to the village” (10), and similarly, in *Celia’s Song*, we learn that the serpent wrenched himself loose of the sunken longhouse because of the neglect of the longhouse for “two centuries” (21). The “original contract” between the people and the serpent has been broken (20). The original contract was for the humans “to honour [the serpent] (21) and in return the serpent’s obligation was “to protect the house from miscreant behaviour and from doubt consuming human will” (21). The two-century long neglect of the longhouse may be considered a direct result of the prohibition of the potlatch ceremonies. Mink (the witness) explains this when he elaborates that the “singing had stopped for the house protector [the serpent]” when the “newcomers arrived,” and

⁶² Also see Amos’s story with the serpent p. 64.

mink relates this to the “prohibition laws” (2). The significance of song is expounded upon by mink, when he says that the lack of song creates the pattern of bitterness:

Without song, the body cannot rest, cannot rise again, cannot face tyranny, cannot look at itself, cannot see, think, or feel. Without song, the body cannot grieve the dead, send them off to another dimension, cannot work or love. Without song the body cannot recover from loss, from divorce, cannot express its yearning, and cannot dream. Four generations of men and women have not been allowed to sing. Without song, all that is left is the thinnest sense of survival. This spiderweb of survival has snapped from whatever mooring it attached itself to and the silk threads lie all withered and tangled in a heap on the floor of a burned-down longhouse that has not been rebuilt (216, emphasis in original).

The passage describes how the prohibition laws have furthered the pattern of bitterness, even as it identifies the strength Celia’s family and extended community could gain from restoring song and longhouse ceremonies. This strength enables them to “face tyranny,” to “see, think, or feel,” to “recover from loss, from divorce,” and also to express spiritual “yearning” (216). The passage further accords well with the overall image of spider’s web that needs to be unravelled. Lastly, the passage demonstrates why Raven conceived the plan to push the villagers out of their silence and restore balance. The potlatch laws prevented song and ceremony, and as a result the serpent is loose in the world. The serpent and the spider seem to be sharing similar powers of transformation. To perceive our surrounding world as transformational, creative, and energized gives an idea about how spider’s story can be absorbed and be alive inside us, because “story” likewise exists in the transformational flux. Perhaps we may need to reassess our reading practices when making sense of “story,” of the serpent and the spider’s transformational powers. Instead of only reading metaphorically, we may consider that there is very real and literal meaning attached to these more-than-human entities who demonstrate that transformation, external and internal, needs to be surrounded by the right protocols of ceremony, songs, and

prayers to keep the serpent's dangerous power from taking over. The power of story (and the power of serpent and spider) is important for us to remember when we read metaphorically, and when we might romanticize Indigenous spirituality: the serpent and spider demonstrate that there is a dangerous, fearful side to these powers and stories that uninformed and untrained people need to respect. Indeed, the ravaging serpent and spider's web show us that the missing songs and ceremonies derive from the destructiveness of colonial oppression and that the resolution is to restore respect, balance and spiritual practices.⁶³ When I consider myself as actively participating in making sense of the literal real in these readings, Schöler explains that "the reader is not asked to believe the myths; the myths are simply presented as true and there is no possibility of disproving them, for they are in turn part of a veritable Pandora's Box of stories which the reader is made an accomplice to" (70).

Restoring Song: Jacob realizes the Spirit of Grandmother Alice is Real

He does not want to believe he is actually seeing a dead person [grandmother Alice]. She is making it difficult to believe he's imagining her.
 "Okay. I give up. You're real. What do you want with me?"
 "Your company," Alice repeats. "What is wrong with you? You deaf? Or don't you listen?"
 "I guess I don't believe you."
 Gramma Alice laughs, and then she tells him what she wants from him.
 (*Celia's Song* 198)

⁶³ Lene's voice: Spider as storyteller reminds me of how to understand *story as transformational*. I understand, from writing this chapter, that there is more to "story." Story is connected to the words we say out loud. Story is called into being from the letters I freely put down on paper. Somehow—story is alive! Story as knowledge is consumed and alive in Jacob. Story as destructive is consumed and alive in Amos. Story is a sticky web in Celia's hand. Story is a spider web that connects everyone—which resonates with the principles of kinship. Story seems to be what we know, feel, learn, and think; indeed, story resembles an ongoing circle from that perspective. If there are all these aspects to story, we then carry responsibility beyond what I have ever imagined. We have responsibility for story, for transformation, for what we say, for what we write, and for our relations to others through the larger spider web. That kind of responsibility of what we call into being, of how we treat others in our web is a completely different way of perceiving my world. Standing in ethical space allows for me to respect and find value in story, but I have by reflecting deeply on story moved beyond my own place in ethical space. I now carry the responsibility of what I now know about story. So... what do I do now?

Jacob's meeting with the first Alice is a great example of how the spirit of Alice becomes attached to a literal understanding. Jacob, himself, experiences an impossible moment, but realizes through his interaction with Alice that she must be real. Similarly, I experience an impossible moment. I am confronted with how to interpret "spirit." The faithful OED defines "spirit" as "the non-physical part of a person which is the seat of emotions and character; the soul" and as a "ghost." I am not sure how I would define spirit, but a Western interpretation often seems to encapsulate traits of spirit as something unfamiliar, dangerous or as related to a religious belief system.

What we may consider, by exploring spirit as a familiar (i.e. an ancestral individual) is Deloria's understanding of ancestors as spirits connected to the land. Deloria expounds upon the relationality between (living) humans, ancestors and the land by saying that spirits are part of the ecology that binds everything together; indeed, "we are not faced with formless and homeless spirits [...] but with an ordered and purposeful creation in which death marks a passage from one form of experience to another" (174). I find Deloria's statement intriguing because spirit becomes an entity with agency, by which I mean that spirit is part of a "purposeful creation" and as such must be able to actively participate (i.e. the spirit has purpose). Alice demonstrates her purpose by teaching Jacob to handle the serpent, but she also teaches him more traditional ways of being: "[Alice] walks him around the mountain, pointing out the foods he needs to eat, [and] she talks about the medicine too" (216). With every lesson Alice gives Jacob, he "swallows" (216). Jacob's "swallowing" of knowledge is similar to swallowing the spider and Restless. The "swallowing" of knowledge is in this instance more reaffirming than what we found when Amos swallowed the serpent. Jacob's swallowing of knowledge further suggests that

learning is a kind of sustenance, like food. This swallowing of knowledge then exists within the body, which accords well with Battiste and Henderson's assertion that "Indigenous peoples embody their knowledge" (125), and Cajete's assertion that the body and knowledge is "a central consideration in Native science" (25). Jacob's experiences between body and knowledge relates to Davidson's discussion of active participation through dance, by which I mean that Jacob actively engages with the knowledge through *walking* upon the mountain. Indeed, his body and mind are entwined from moving upon the land and absorbing knowledge. Jacob's way of embodying knowledge seems to confirm Battiste and Henderson's and Cajete's assertion of how Indigenous knowledge is produced. The more positive outlook on swallowing seems to create a different storyline, one that recalls the principles of reciprocity and of respect.

The new storyline makes it possible to rebuild the longhouse.⁶⁴ Indeed, when Jacob returns from the mountain, he explains that the mountain "has brought him a song and the dream of rebuilding the longhouse"—something that also reminds me of Watts's concept of "Place-Thought"—because the mountain becomes a specific place Jacob obtains his knowledge from. He does what Deloria states: Jacob is speaking with the mountain as his "reference point in mind" (62). Jacob's dream of building the longhouse introduces "the old man." The old man has "heard the longhouse calling him [...] the longhouse wants to be built" (*Celia's Song* 233). The old man is not

⁶⁴ Carlson explains different uses of longhouses: "Coast Salish settlements often consisted of a series of interconnected longhouses, stretching together as a single structure sometimes for hundreds of meters" (*The Power* 128). He further states that there were "carved house posts depicting family leader's spirit helpers" (129). Carlson also explains that the longhouses were used for ceremonies. He quotes Old Pierre (Coast Salish) who explains that longhouses were used for "winter dances [or spirit dances that] served the purpose of enabling people to rejuvenate themselves" (*The Power* 73).

given a name, which suggests that this man may have more-than-human qualities.⁶⁵ He helps Jacob and the men restore their knowledge by “unloading the basket of knowledge he carried until he thought they were ready to build a longhouse” (250). They re-establish the longhouse potlatch ceremonies by conducting ceremonies of naming babies and celebrating weddings (259), and from that we learn that villagers are “*restoring [the] original directions*” (213 emphasis in original).

Amos, because of his actions towards Shelly, has a crucial role in restoring balance and harmony in the village. Jacob “meant to dance him – really dance him into his comeuppance” (251), so once the longhouse is restored, they dance “all day and night for four days and then Jacob sings.” Through the dance, Amos’s body sweats “toxic memories [...] out through his pores” (255), so much that all “the horror stories his body collected float in his belly and leave his body through his song” (254). When Amos’s body succumbs to the dance, he sees “his grandma; behind her hundreds of people [...] he raises his face to his long-gone family and determine[s] to dance himself into their arms” (255). After Amos’s death, the second perpetrator is invited to dance in the longhouse too. Afterwards, Celia considers that “the death of the two men had been good for the village [because] it signified the birth of their beautiful smokehouse and its feasting ways, as well as the end of their sickness” (259). The atrocity of what Amos did to Shelly, and likewise, what happens to him during the dance is an impossible moment that profoundly unsettles my worldview. I am disturbed by what Amos did and what happens to him for two reasons. One, the

⁶⁵ Another characteristic of the old man is his transformational power to one minute being alive and the next moment passed on to the spirit world (or transformed into a different being). When the longhouse is accused of witchcraft, and the old man, Ned, Jacob and Jim are arrested; the old man demonstrates a kind of “magical” ability. Before arriving at the police station, the old man gets out of his handcuffs and, upon arrival, he is dead (*Celia’s Song* 259).

dance reveals the horrors he went through himself (including stories of being raped, of starvation, and of being bullied, 255). Two, learning Amos's story made me consider whether his death was done out of revenge (from molesting Shelly) or done as an act of mercy—or maybe both.

For me to make sense of what happens with Amos, I explore “Salish trance dancing” (161)—as outlined in Crisca Bierwert's book, *Brushed by Cedar, Living by the River*. Bierwert explains that the purpose of the Salish trance dance is “to support the singing of personal spirit songs” (161). She explains that the dance is done through “human passion embodied and expressed one after another” (163). Bierwert also brings attention to the dances' consequences in which people sometimes “gave themselves up” (175), people “[who suffered] from violence they produced, like wife beating and drug dealing” (175). These peoples' deaths discussed by Bierwert resemble Amos's story. From Bierwert we might find a connection between the danger of the serpent's power and its entwinement with Amos's story. She explains that spirit has a real meaning, by which she means that “vulnerability to spirit is a danger in Coast Salish peoples' lives” (176). Bierwert's observation of this danger of engaging with spirits echoes my discussion of not romanticizing Stó:lō spiritual conduct. Bierwert outlines a second ceremony called “black paint song” in which the dancers “utilize ‘clubbing’” (179)—an expression Maracle herself uses on page 258 in *Celia's Song* when narrating the two perpetrators' deaths. Bierwert explains that the black paint song is “particularly fierce and demanding” (179). From examining the black paint song we find that Coast Salish spirituality indeed holds danger and should be treated with reverence. Lastly, she observes that the spirit dance and singing can have a “cumulative effect” (174), which accord well with Celia's explanation that the

two deaths had helped the villagers restore balance (259). The notion of ceremonial dances, the cleansing of Amos's body, and that he sees his spirit family (in his trance) also establishes a fascinating link to Davidson's research on dance as a form of embodiment. In the Wagamese chapter, I discussed embodiment in relation to intuitive processes, but Amos's dance builds upon that by adding the concept of spirit or spiritual cleansing and death. What we learn from exploring the Coast Salish ceremonies is that they are tied to specific Stó:lō worldviews, and although I have tried to make sense of them through Bierwert's study, these spiritual activities exist outside my frame of reference.

Marian Scholtmeijer's study of *Ravensong* demonstrates why the Stó:lō worldview is outside my frame of reference and thus makes it challenging to grasp agency, more-than-human entities, the land, spirituality and (the kinds of spiritual) embodiment. I quote a passage of her study, in particular the scene when Celia sits under cedar while observing Stacey on the bridge: "Cedar brushed Celia's cheek with her lower branch, a soft caress from the smooth side of her needles" (*Ravensong* 62). Scholtmeijer observes that Celia and cedar's interaction in a Western perspective replaces the idea of cedar having agency to consider the interaction as a mere coincidence:

In the Euro-Western world, when a human encounters the branches of a tree, all action is with the human person. There is no thought that the tree might have reached out or that some motive force or feeling might be in the tree herself. To feel that one is caressed when one encounters a tree branch, or slapped, or brought into attention,⁶⁶ or otherwise acted upon rather than acting

⁶⁶ Lene's voice: Scholtmeijer makes an important observation with how a tree might be looked upon. I would like to connect the idea to a previous footnote p. 42-43 where I talk about communication with trees. We might perceive the tree, according to Battiste and Henderson, by means of the concept of intelligible essences. What I have learned from thinking through intelligible essences is that I have to bring awareness to my senses when observing and engaging with the tree. I can put my hands on the tree's wrinkled skin. I can see the different shades of colour, as the tree moves through the seasons. I can smell the sweet decay from its leaves as they rest on the autumn soil. I participate actively with my

encapsulates the difference between the Euro-Western view of the environment and that expressed by First Nation women writers. (Scholtmeijer 322)

Scholtmeijer perfectly sums up Western and Indigenous engagement with the world that surrounds us. From an Indigenous perspective, the more-than-human entities' agency comes from their spirit, something that recalls Watts's discussion of agency in which she says that all living things have spirit and therefore process agency (30). In Western thinking, agency is what we project upon all living things. Moreover, people are autonomous and separate from others and their environment (i.e. the body-mind separation). Moreover, these differences between agency and projection are related to the concept of intelligible essences. We (or I) cannot perceive that the more-than-human entities exist in their own lively essence. I only see the essence I project upon or imagine about them. When exploring impossible moments in Maracle's novels, it becomes clear that I am confronted with a fundamental difference between Western and Indigenous thinking. Indeed, it appears that the more-than-human entities illustrate what is at stake in engaging with Indigenous literatures from a Western perspective. The stakes are, among others, that I may silence the specific relational agency between human and more-than-human entities if I only see them as a construction in a fictional world. The impossible moments discussed in this chapter exemplify the difference between knowing and believing that the entities have spirit and purposefully interact with their surroundings. Battiste and Henderson's discussion of transformational flux in which they state that all matter has energy, as well as considering intelligible essences may lead to different considerations of how to

senses to engage with the tree. Scholtmeijer observes that if the branches touch you, it is most likely; we see it as coincidental—which means we have already projected our opinion upon the tree. We have decided the tree cannot make such a move on its own accord. But what if it did? What if we just do not consider it? Maybe that's the whole exercise with this paper—that is to consider—what if?

perceive story in an Indigenous (Stó:lō) context. In the case of Maracle's novels, story may be interpreted as transformational exploration between fiction and real reality embedded in a tribal knowledge system. From actively participating I am confronted with the colonial inheritance, with the context and obstacles the villagers face, and with the actions and agency of the more-than-human entities—all of which unsettles my reading practices and *then* I am asked to consider different knowings and the reality of story as transformational. This kind of reading makes the concept of fiction's suspension of disbelief redundant. The impossible moments in question throughout this chapter evoke two approaches to interpretation: one, the novels are fiction and thus treated as real, so that readers suspend their disbelief within the fictional universe. Two, following the protocols of oral narratives/oral literatures as the root of Indigenous knowledge, we can consider the impossible moments from actively engaging with the theory as described by Deloria, Watts, Schöler, Battiste and Henderson, Simpson, and Carlson as being more than an exercise in suspending disbelief, but that the content in the impossible moments are attached to a literal real meaning.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Lene's voice: a final note! I have come to learn that when you obtain or embody knowledge, it is quite difficult, and possibly not possible to forget that knowledge. I write this because of course this project took me down an unforeseen moonlighted path, one that twisted and turned, one full of stones I stumbled over, and yet beautiful and enlightening. Ethical space is indeed a difficult space to be in, when there is much to learn. I have actively participated in this project, and now, by studying Maracle's text, I have found that I to some extent can make sense of these impossible moments. I have moved through Princess Point, and I have moved through the theory and literary works in my thoughts. The movement through the forest and my mind resonates with Davidson's examples of how embodied knowledge is achieved through active movement, and it seems to be true.

Conclusion:

Reflections on Methodology

In this project, I explored what I conceptualized as impossible moments in Richard Wagamese's *Keeper 'n Me* and *For Joshua* as well as Lee Maracle's *Ravensong* and *Celia's Song*. Employing an analytical framework that intercepts what I identify as impossible moments in the texts was useful for considering what unsettled my reading practices, and therefore allowed me to push the boundaries of my own knowing. I was occupied with ways that I could engage with impossible moments because the "impossibilities," for me, represented what I could only label as supernatural occurrences. I questioned how the perspective of the supernatural would do a disservice to what Wagamese's and Maracle's works were attempting to convey. My proposed research objective sought out to explore transformational aspects of the literatures. Likewise, I argued that principles of kinship connected intellectual, spiritual, and embodied ways of producing knowledge.

To support my exploration of impossible moments, I have thought through Nicole Latulippe's research paradigm of "a web of connections and relationships" (4). I also employed Daniel Heath Justice's principle of kinship and Vanessa Watts's discussion of agency to establish a framework for exploring how relationality between all living things presented itself as having agency and possessing spirit. Latulippe's paradigm did not seem to tie it to an Anishinaabe knowledge system, but did establish an overall conceptual framework for re-thinking how to approach my readings: from the perspective of relationships and connections. The principles of kinship had a paramount influence when I was exploring the ways in which relationality with all living things is structured; however, I applied the structuring of kinship in a general

way even though Wagamese and Maracle narrate kinship differently. Wagamese and Garnet reflect upon the land as teachings, whereas the more-than-human entities in Maracle's texts are active agents and are a crucial part of organizing relationality with the human characters. Further studies in kinship as a reading method could reveal how to utilize kinship, and perhaps allow the organizing of relationality to become tied to tribal-specific narratives.

By thinking through different literary theories, I created an avenue to distinguish between readings that take the perspective of supernatural, magic, magical- and mythic realism and readings that apply principles of kinship. In the Maracle chapter, I utilized magical realism by exploring memories as flashbacks. I found that Celia's visions provided colonial context; yet, the same reading did a disservice when exploring the principles of kinship. Although magical realism demonstrated the tension between the characters and colonialism, I found that Maracle's principles of context and obstacles exposed the same tension while also revealing the prevailing obstacles to establishing kinship because of the breakdown of Stó:lō knowledge. Despite the fact that mythic realism is a sub-genre that was originally developed by Michael Ondaatje, a Canadian author of Sri Lankan descent, the term was nevertheless useful for reading for agency and kinship in Maracle's novels. Further studies may be done to determine if mythic realism is a subgenre that provides necessary tools to unpack what unsettles our reading practices, or if, in fact, applying mythic realism to Indigenous literatures is a case of non-Indigenous readers forcefully imposing terminology and making it apply in general and thus presupposing the universality of Euro-American genres.

The conceptual framework that guided my exploration of the Wagamese chapter mostly consisted of Marie Battiste, James (Sa'ke'j) Youngblood Henderson, David Abram, Gregory Cajete, Blair Stonechild and Leanne Simpson. Specifically, Battiste and Henderson's and Abram's discussion of the body-mind and soul separateness was productive for revealing the underlying worldviews that knowingly- or unknowingly guide our exploration of literatures. In correlation with the principles of kinship, the separation of body- mind, and soul exposed the devastating effect from colonial structures that removed the characters' knowledge of how to build kinship with all living things. Indeed, both Garnet and Wagamese himself, demonstrate (to different degrees) this separation of body-mind, and soul. Making sense of the ways in which Garnet and Wagamese reclaim Anishinaabe knowledge, I employed concepts such as "magic," "intuition," "embodiment," "sacred space in thoughts," and Simpson's concept "gaa-izhiz-haawendaagoziyaang"—concepts that identify the need for establishing a vocabulary that can encompass our readings and extend our thinking of spiritual engagements with the land and animals.

The question of applying or imposing terminology, definition and principles arises throughout this project. I have been careful to select Indigenous scholars' theoretical frameworks, which were taken, from Stó:lō, Cherokee, Anishinaabe, and Mi'kmaq tribal knowledge systems, among others. I found that I to some extent did impose theoretical definitions and interpretation. Indeed, although my frames of reference have been established in the backdrop of Indigenous knowledge systems, I still conducted a Western literary reading practice, by which I mean I tried to make generalizing statements about the four books that engage in Anishinaabe and Stó:lō tribal ways of thinking. Conclusively, the impossible moments demonstrate that we

need to reassess our reading practices and develop strategies that encompass readings of spiritual practices, and of different ways of exploring agency in correlation with an understanding that all living things possess spirit and are relatives. My findings through reading the impossible moments exposed the need for rethinking ways of theorizing Indigenous literatures by considering transformational aspects of stories as well as how these stories may be considered as having literal perspectives that reach outside the fictional world and take seriously the spirit realm.

Reflecting on Reading practices

I positioned myself as a reader in this project due to the ethical concerns of profoundly exploring Indigenous ways of knowing from an outside position. My purpose for conducting footnotes and presenting myself as an active participant was to reflect on how I read. I positioned myself in Willy Ermine's theory of "ethical space," and through Marlene Brant Castellano's definition of "ethical," as well as Larissa Lai's theorizing of "epistemologies of respect," in order to become aware of how I engage with different knowledge systems. I questioned myself about what my "deep values" are in order to consciously position myself in my own knowledge system while conducting my readings and writings. Helen Hoy's assertion of being a privileged reader exposed the emotional discomfort with conducting this research as a cultural outsider. As a reminder of my reading practice, and to balance my discomfort and ethical concerns both in my footnotes and within the body text, I established a framework to work through how to read with a "clear vision," "respect," "active participation," and "responsibility." This conceptual framework demonstrated that especially reading with "clear vision" gave the necessary tools to look critically upon my reading practices.

I found that practicing my set of ethical reading strategies was an agonizing yet deeply moving experience. As for example, while conducting my readings of *Keeper 'n Me* and *For Joshua*, I was especially guided by Garnet's expression of *feeling the land* (e.g. "pulling learning" from the land's magic, and sensory, intuitive ways of knowing), which presented a challenge. Here, my experimental learning at Princess Point helped to make sense of Wagamese's and Garnet's emphasis on feelings and how they, by extension, created feelings of belonging. Exploring Maracle's texts meant taking a different path—one that involved making sense of *story as transformational*. Maracle's texts asked me to actively participate within the story. After re-considering what her novels asked of me, I realized that I was also actively participating in Wagamese's texts, just from the position of making sense of *the land as feelings*. In the case of Maracle's novels, the transformation of story organized my active participation (such as writing footnotes, and obsessively contemplating what this transformation of story might be) and confronted me with the colonial context, with the obstacles the villagers faced, and with the actions and agency of the more-than-human entities—all of which pushed me out of my own familiarity with reading and guided me to consider different knowings.

The unsettling moments in my reading practices were helpful for considering new ways of engaging with my archive. From my new position, I was able to make (some) sense of Deloria's concept of the literality of the old stories as well as to regard literality as tied to Indigenous knowledge outside the literary (written) universe. From Deloria's statement I found the old stories' literality is about recovering knowledge and spiritual practices—that which is "pulled" out of the old stories as teachings of kinship with all living things. Indeed, all things *are* alive, and

we exist interchangeably within a transformational flux. I feel aliveness as literalness. Stories (as all parts of creation) exist because they are part of the transformational flux; they just exist differently than my human, physical body.

Transformation thus arises out of active engagement, which in this project is the act of an intuitive, embodied reading. Transformation further arises out of a new awareness of the limitations of my previous interpretive framework and from my willingness to enter into an ethical space, and consider concepts such as “intelligible essences” and the “flux,” which I found I cannot master or control by means of body-mind self-separation. Instead, I need to make sense of my new awareness by considering intuitive, embodied ways of engaging with the world that surrounds me. From my readings of Wagamese’s and Maracle’s texts, I found that “suspending my disbelief” would merely allow me to stay on the surface of their narrations. Yet, conducting sensory, intuitive ways of knowing within an academic setting that simultaneously asks of me to produce writings and uphold deadlines is extremely difficult. These kinds of embodied ways of knowing... are embodied, and articulating them into reasonable, academic sentences has taken some time—in fact, it took me more than three months to write about Wagamese’s texts, and after finishing my readings of Maracle’s texts, it took me ten days to write her chapter. I could only produce Maracle’s chapter so fast because I gave up conducting experimental learning. To profoundly make sense of and engage with the principles of kinship and of spiritual practices as presented in my archive, and by extension, to explore works of Indigenous literatures in general, would require more time than I have had to produce this project. Conclusively, reading with my new awareness brought forth feelings of deep responsibility to respectfully carry knowledge and find balance between my

Euro-Western knowings and not assimilate or use how I have come to look upon land and ecologies as relatives in a disrespectful manner.

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