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Literary Language Revitalization: nêhiyawêwin, Indigenous Poetics, and Indigenous Languages in Canada

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English

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Abstract

This dissertation reads the spaces of connection, overlap, and distinction between nêhiyaw (Cree) poetics and the concepts of revitalization, repatriation, and resurgence that have risen to prominence in Indigenous studies. Engaging revitalization, resurgence, and repatriation alongside the creative work of nêhiyaw and Métis writers (Louise Bernice Halfe, Neal McLeod, and Gregory Scofield), this dissertation explores how creative, literary applications of nêhiyawêwin (Cree language) model an approach to Indigenous language revitalization that is consonant with nêhiyaw understandings of embodiment, storytelling, memory, kinship, and home. Broadly, I argue that Halfe's, McLeod's, and Scofield's creative practices encourage the ongoing use, valuing, and teaching of Indigenous languages in ways that are commensurate with the philosophies and modes of living that are central to the languages themselves.

This dissertation puts literary studies into conversation with socio-linguistic, socio-legal, and socio-political/activist paradigms that affirm Indigenous peoples' rights to develop, use, and teach their cultural traditions, practices, and languages. Through a focused study of the creative work of nêhiyaw poet Louise Bernice Halfe (Sky Dancer), Métis storyteller Gregory Scofield, and nêhiyaw poet, painter, and scholar Neal McLeod, this dissertation attends to how creative writers include nêhiyawêwin and reflect nêhiyaw ways of being, holding relationships, and relating to land through poetry. The body chapters provide genealogical accounts of their respective frameworks, which analyze the invocation of revitalization, repatriation, and resurgence in discourses pertaining to sociology, anthropology, law, policy, activism, and literary criticism since the middle of the twentieth century. Pairing these genealogies with attention to nêhiyaw and Métis

creative writers' strategic uses of nêhiyawêwin to articulate nêhiyaw- and Métis-specific modes of language use and relationality, this dissertation highlights the complex circulation of creative writing alongside Indigenous Peoples' efforts to use, learn, and teach their languages.

Keywords

Indigenous literature; Indigenous studies; Cree; Cree literature; Cree language; nêhiyawêwin; Louise Bernice Halfe; Gregory Scofield; Neal McLeod; *Blue Marrow*; *Love Medicine and One Song*; *Gabriel's Beach*; *Singing Home the Bones*; *The Crooked Good*; *I Knew Two Métis Women*; language revitalization; repatriation; Indigenous resurgence; resurgence; Indigenous poetry; storytelling; Indigenous poetics

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nêhiyawêwin Glossary

Introduction

In his introduction to *Nēhiyawēwin Mitâtaht: Michif ahci Cree*, a Michif language textbook, Vince Ahenakew offers by way of dedication “a few of [his grandmother’s] words and the translations” (i), including: “*Nimwika pihik pisimohkan* / The clock (time) will not wait for you” (i). Likely intended to urge the textbook’s reader to begin and manage their own language education, these words also capture the sense of immediacy that is central to language revitalization paradigms in Canada—paradigms which necessitate respectful, thorough, and culturally-specific engagement with Indigenous languages that have been negatively impacted or devastated by centuries of colonial suppression and derogation through policy and genocide. At its broadest, as linguist Teresa McCarty notes, language revitalization is “an area of study and a social movement that emerged in response to the endangered status of Indigenous and minority languages around the world,” with an express focus on “establishing new contexts for learning the endangered language, [and] thereby creating more language users” (1172). The bitter terminological aftertaste of “endangerment” aside¹, it is imperative to include the following questions in one’s critical repertoire when considering the present and political implications of Indigenous language revitalization:

- What constitute generative “new contexts” (McCarty 1172) for language learning?
- How do the histories and conceptual underpinnings of different paradigms for articulating and advocating for Indigenous rights, including Indigenous language rights, inflect and shape specific revitalization initiatives?

- Which types of resources are particularly well suited to encouraging the ongoing use and teaching of Indigenous languages? Why?

These questions prompt a necessary evaluation of how, to what effects, and with what aims one intends to engage Indigenous language revitalization initiatives.

This dissertation puts literary studies into conversation with socio-linguistic, socio-legal, and socio-political/activist paradigms that affirm Indigenous peoples' rights to develop, use, and teach their cultural traditions, practices, and languages. Through a focused study of the creative work of nêhiyaw (Cree) poet Louise Bernice Halfe (Sky Dancer), Métis storyteller Gregory Scofield, and nêhiyaw poet, painter, and scholar Neal McLeod, this dissertation attends to how creative writers include nêhiyawêwin (Cree language) and reflect nêhiyaw ways of being, holding relationships, and relating to land through poetry. Specifically, I analyze these writers' creative inter-weavings of nêhiyawêwin with predominantly written English poetry, seeking to demonstrate their ability to theorize a language revitalization model commensurate with nêhiyaw philosophies of storytelling, wâhkôtowin (kinship), and language. From this, I contend that a "new [context]" (McCarty 1172) for using, teaching, and learning Indigenous languages can be found in creative work like poetry. However, this context is only "new" in terms of how it has been taken up academically; nêhiyawak (Cree people) have been learning nêhiyawêwin through stories and poetic means of storytelling for centuries. As Neal McLeod affirms in his introduction to *Indigenous Poetics in Canada*, "Indigenous people had poetics long before môniayawâk [meaning "European" or "settler"] and English departments existed in [their] territories" (4). Furthermore, McLeod affirms in *Cree Narrative Memory: From Treaties to Contemporary Times* that it is through "stories

and words” that nêhiyawak “hold the echo of generational experience” (6), and “*nêhiyawêwin* ... grounds [nêhiyawak] and binds [them] with other living beings” (6). Through language and relationships, “[s]tories act as the vehicles of cultural transmission by linking one generation to the next” (*Memory* 68). In this respect, my reference to taking up creative writing as a “new [context]” (McCarty 1172) for Indigenous language learning is a deliberate misnomer. Whereas story-based modes of language learning have been central to nêhiyawak for centuries, their potential “newness” as a context for contemporary language learning has been shaped both by the assumption that Western lexicography and dictionary-making are ideal strategies for documenting and learning Indigenous languages as well as by concerns regarding the suitability of textual resources (like books and collections of stories/poetry) for encouraging the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous languages. Thus while it is intuitive to read creative writing using nêhiyawêwin as a language learning strategy that is commensurate with the storytelling pedagogies central to the language, its speakers, and their histories, such an approach to reading also enables the reflective work of challenging how existing language revitalization paradigms have often excluded the perspectives of Indigenous peoples and their rights to their languages while purporting to act in their best interests. This necessitates a double engagement with (1) the histories and mobilizations of different paradigms for articulating and advocating for Indigenous rights and languages, and (2) a consideration of how Indigenous creative writing complements, contests, and creatively extends the limitations of such paradigms in ways that are consistent with the ontologies, histories, and cultural practices formative to specific Indigenous languages and approaches to storytelling.

In the interest of transparency and scholastic accountability, I want to make clear from this project's outset that I am not Indigenous; as such, my readings are necessarily limited by the perspective, knowledge, and privilege that I bring to my analyses. Yet as Adam Barker explains, "[i]t is not enough to simply state that Settler people are 'non-Indigenous', as is often done" (22). Rather, it is necessary to specify that settlers are "most peoples who occupy lands previously stolen or in the process of being stolen from their Indigenous inhabitants, or who are otherwise members of the 'Settler society' founded on co-opted lands and resources" (22). In the context of Barker's theorization, I am a settler in both senses of the term. I am someone who is non-Indigenous, who lives and works on Indigenous lands (as I always have), and I am a member of the Canadian society that has been "founded on co-opted lands and resources" (22). Indeed, my family's history centers, on one side, on white German settlers' seizure of Indigenous peoples' lands for their agricultural ambitions and, on the other, on white German settlers staffing a hotel frequented by fellow white settlers on the then-named Queen Charlotte Islands. From this history comes my recognition of my deep complicity in the structures of white settler dominance that shape and permeate both Canadian society and the academic systems that have supported my completion of this project. I articulate, affirm, and respect the limits of my knowledge, and emphasize that while the knowledge I possess informs the kinds of scholarship I can create, it does not provide an excuse to either retreat from analysis or meaningful engagement or to center analysis and critique *on* those limits such that whiteness, settler identity, and settler feeling occupy the central positions of my scholarship. In many ways, the biggest limitation of my position and therefore this dissertation is the lack of prolonged, sustained relationships between myself

and nêhiyawêwin teachers; this is a limit I aim to challenge and overcome in the following years. This is neither an excuse nor performative humility; it is an acknowledgment that this dissertation is hamstrung by the limitations I bring to the project, and an invitation for readers to critique the project and its readings so that more, better work can flourish.

I take cue from settler scholars Scott Morgensen and Sam McKegney, who have been up-front and careful about how they conduct work with Indigenous peoples and Indigenous peoples' creative works. Morgensen affirms that "White settlers who seek solidarity with Indigenous challenges to settler colonialism must confront how white supremacy shapes settler colonialism, our solidarity, and our lives" (n. p.). Likewise, McKegney affirms that "Although I endeavor to be as sensitive and respectful as I am able, as a non-Native critic I simply do not stand to inherit the adverse social impact my critical work might engender, and this, it seems to me, impacts the way my work functions and is something about which I must remain critically conscious" (58). Indeed, McKegney's note regarding the tendency of non-Indigenous scholars to employ self-reflexive approaches to Indigenous literature has been such that "non-Natives at times take this to a new level in which the actions of the critic become the primary site of inquiry rather than a cautionary apparatus designed to render the primary analysis more fertile" (59). The tendency of non-Indigenous scholars of Indigenous literatures to lapse into signposting that centres a white self or reader is common, and is something I have sought to avoid throughout this dissertation. I seek instead to be transparent about the limitations of my knowledge and my abilities to attain relevant knowledge for this dissertation while not using those limitations as excuses for either (a) poor, bland, and

uninformed criticism, or (b) an absence of critical thought (what McKegney refers to as “[dealing] in the purview of Non-Natives” [60], whereby one “examines the work of other non-Native scholars, critics, and theorists in order to explain away the textual product without having to engage much at all with the ideas of the text” [60]).

Métis educator and writer Chelsea Vowel, writing of ways non-Indigenous peoples can “concretely” work to offer their “help” to Indigenous peoples, affirms that ethical support and engagement with Indigenous issues is often fundamentally material and practical: “1. Believe that Indigenous peoples have the power to find solutions for ourselves. 2. Support our efforts in ways that ensure the solutions we enact continue to happen” (“How can I help’ answered concretely” n. p.). Vowel notes that practical modes of engagement, such as donating one’s money, time, and labour to support Indigenous-led initiatives “may not be glorious and glamorous revolution, but in my opinion, on the ground support is worth a thousand political speeches” (“How can I help?” n. p.). What Vowel’s points so astutely emphasize is the necessity of supporting Indigenous peoples’ “power to find solutions” (“How can I help?” n. p.) that are commensurate with their own understandings of current challenges, crises, and strategies for engagement. Moreover, she subtly invokes the latent emotional investments of white settlers in their efforts to “help,” whereby their support becomes tantamount to moral self-assertion or, worse, self-interest. Engagement that presumes an inevitable profundity of white settlers’ aid and concern not only centers the labour of white settlers over those of Indigenous peoples, who have been doing such work for far longer and with far greater personal and community investments, but also reifies the long-held supposition that meaningful change is only possible through the intervention of white bodies. Writing of

settlers' responsibilities for cultivating meaningful relationships with Indigenous peoples and the land in the wake of #IdleNoMore, Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox affirms that “[m]any settler allies support Idle No More on the grounds of moral responsibility, or self interest,” and “[relationships create] accountability and responsibility for sustained supportive action. This does not mean requiring Indigenous energies for creating relationship with settlers; it means settlers taking initiative to live on a personal level what they claim on a political one” (“#IdleNoMore: Settler Responsibility for Relationship” n. p.).ⁱⁱ What I see in Irlbacher-Fox’s articulation of the necessity of settlers taking responsibility for such relationships is an imperative to live by one’s political claims of support without impinging on Indigenous peoples by demanding their intellectual, emotional, and physical labour of encouragement that one is Doing Things Correctly. This dovetails with Vowel’s affirmation that genuinely beneficial “help” often takes the form of materially applying one’s politics to tasks that Indigenous peoples themselves have noted are beneficial or helpful. In this sense, engagement and support cease to resemble paternalistic “helping” that affirms the value and morals of the white, settler self, and instead take the shape of a robust demand for self-awareness, humility, accountability, and a commitment to transfer one’s political claims to one’s material life.

What this implies for scholarship at the graduate level is less clear, at least in terms of how to translate the necessity of material application, practicality, and accountability to independent, text-based projects that are completed in humanities departments, which have only recently begun to broaden their repertoires of what are considered acceptable and desirable research methods for a dissertation. In the absence of research methods like individual and/or group interviews, surveys and invited reflections,

relationships built through volunteer labour and commitment, and consultation/review of projects with communities (to name a few), I work with the abundant possibilities and deficiencies of citational practice. To this end, I am inspired by Métis scholar Zoe Todd, who tweeted in September 2017 from her handle @ZoeSTodd, “Stop. Researching. Us. Start. Citing. Us” (*Twitter* 2017). Citational practices in this dissertation center the words, labours, and perspectives of Indigenous peoples, while carefully applying the same rigorous level of engagement and critique to them as to non-Indigenous texts and thinkers. Chelsea Vowel’s reminder, tweeted from her handle @apihtawikosisan, that “Non-Indigenous ppl [people] who make their careers off studying Indigenous ppl need to be able to take Indigenous critique. Period” (*Twitter* 2017) is one that shapes both my approach to this dissertation and to reading Indigenous literatures and theories more broadly. It is imperative to not only create work that is respectful and rigorous, but to also invite and accept Indigenous peoples’ critique—to embrace deference, to take it upon myself to learn more and express that learning with greater clarity, and to respect the limits of my knowledge and experience while simultaneously pushing at the boundaries of what I have come to consider acceptable, valuable, and ethical thinking.

Touristic Lexicography and Textual Resources for nêhiyawêwin

“I trust that the work will be a valuable aid to any persons who may wish to study the language of the Cree Indians, whether it be from a love of philological investigation, or from the wish to be qualified to carry out trade amongst the natives, or from the higher and holier desires of the Evangelist to enlighten the minds and elevate the souls of the wandering outcasts of the wilderness” (v).
— Rev. Edwin Arthur Watkins’ *A Dictionary of the Cree Language*, 1865.

In this dissertation, I ask: what would a language revitalization model that is rooted in storytelling practices and textually manifest in poetry, as opposed to more commonly used materials for language acquisition and learning—e.g., textbooks and dictionaries, immersion classrooms, and tutoring—look like? What are the implications of this model? Can it address the need to develop Indigenous language revitalization initiatives that are aligned with the aims and perspectives of Indigenous peoples themselves? To start answering these questions, it is prudent to think critically about the history of existing textual resources for learning or documenting Indigenous languages—and, more broadly, the disciplinary biases attendant to work on Indigenous language revitalization. Disciplinary dependency on discourses of “endangerment” and “extinction,” for example, continue to resonate with 19th century mantras of the “vanishing Indian” or “vanishing race theory.” Daniel Nettle’s and Suzanne Romaine’s introduction to the 2000 edited collection *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World’s Languages*, for example, rests on the assertion that the “extinction of languages is part of the larger picture of worldwide near total ecosystem collapse” (ix). Nettle and Romaine affirm that “[d]espite the increasing attention given to endangered species and the environment, there has been little awareness that peoples can also be endangered. More has been said about the plight of pandas and spotted owls than about the disappearance of human language diversity” (ix). Pandas and spotted owls notwithstanding, Nettle and Romaine frame their account of Indigenous language loss and revitalization not by way of sustained critical attention to the “resurgence of indigenous activism from the grassroots level all the way to international pressure groups” (ix-x), but through invoking the spectre of racial and cultural extinction. This

approach has historically been used to frame Indigenous language revitalization as something that is worthy of non-Indigenous peoples' attention. The suggestion that "the disappearance of human language diversity" (ix) possesses a potential global, cross-cultural appeal is rooted in the involvement of all human parties, insofar as it implies that, as the welfare of Indigenous language revitalization programs contribute to the planet's ecosystem as a whole, all of humanity can benefit from their development and use and intergenerational transmission. The rhetorical dimensions of invoking Indigenous languages and planetary "diversity" alongside impending the threat of extinction are discussed at length in Chapter One of this dissertation.

With respect to *nêhiyawêwin*, understanding how textual resources and approaches to language learning have historically functioned, together with the supposition that Indigenous languages represent a precarious archive of unique cultural knowledge that must be preserved, provides useful perspective to the work of creative writers using *nêhiyawêwin* in ways that affirm the value of *nêhiyaw* histories, ways of living in the world, and speakers. For sake of organization, it is prudent to begin with the the colonial documentation of Indigenous languages in explorer- and settler-friendly dictionaries. As Theresa McCarty notes, "language policies have been operative in Indigenous communities since time immemorial," especially "in Native North America, [where] multi-lingualism was always highly valued as a tool of trade and survival in one of the most culturally, linguistically, and ecologically diverse regions of the world" (127). Initially considered part of a fur-trader's intercultural currency in Canada, Indigenous languages have been treated by colonial authorities both as impediments to "the process of assimilation" (Milloy 38) and objects of colonially orchestrated "linguistic genocide"

(Nicholas 26). Colonial attitudes towards Indigenous languages in both policy and social discourse have been characterized not solely by sneering condescension or unmitigated efforts at extermination, but also by reluctant admissions of the necessity of bilingual conversation in the 18th century, and, by the 19th century, surges of exoticized admiration following the gradual transition of Canada from a site of imperial trade to a burgeoning settler colony. Maliseet scholar Andrea Bear Nicholas avers that “[i]n the early years of colonization, the destruction of Indigenous languages in what is now North America was not considered essential. Traders needed Indigenous trappers to maintain their form of life on the land and explorers needed Indigenous peoples’ knowledge in order to explore and map the land” (6). This linguistic need is reflected in early dictionary resources; English explorer Henry Kelsey’s 18th century pamphlet *A Dictionary of the Hudson’s Bay Indian Language*, for example, is textually invested in transcribing nêhiyawêwin in order to support the economic survival of Anglophone fur traders. Language, for Kelsey and like-minded fur traders, must be accessible through text—not memory or practiced conversation with fluent speakers—in order to facilitate conversation (read: commercial exchange) with nêhiyawak. Kelsey’s short dictionary contains multiple words for beaver products—“pelt,” “coat,” and “skin” (2)—and their preparation for sale—“scrape a skin: mau tau hau” (5) and “scrapers: man ni tow aske” (6)—but no words for kin, women, or land, thus emphasizing that the fur trade is the system generative to his linguistic project. Moreover, the possessive apostrophe in the pamphlet’s title designates the land’s Indigenous inhabitants as already belonging to and claimed by the “Hudson’s Bay” (1) company. While the import of naming as a mechanism for asserting mastery and property over spaces and their inhabitants has been well-documented and theorized in post-

colonial and post-structural theory (Cf. Fanon, Said, Derrida), its resonance for nêhiyawî-itâpîsîniwin (“Cree worldview; literally, ‘a Cree viewpoint’” [*Memory* 105]), to use McLeod’s term, reflects the appropriation and linguistic transformation of the land following the incursion of settlers. McLeod explains that “the coming of newcomers to the territory of the Cree” effectively “transformed” the landscape “through a naming process” (6), whereby “*kistapînânihk*ⁱⁱⁱ became Prince Albert” and “Regina, named for the Queen, [was once] known as *oskana kâ-asastêki* (pile of bones) in nêhiyawêwin; instead of celebrating the empire, the name was a marker for the retreat of the buffalo from the land” (6-7). Colonial naming has functioned in Canada such that “the road maps of western Canada show little evidence that Indigenous people dwell in the territory, or that [they] have marked the place with [their] memory” (*Memory* 7). This is important because McLeod affirms that a “sense of place ... anchors [nêhiyaw] stories ... [and] links us together as communities” (*Memory* 6).

For example: the nêhiyawêwin word for the body of water now known as the Hudson’s Bay, for example, is “*Winni-peg*” (Brown 20), which Jennifer H. Brown explains, citing Omushkego storyteller and language teacher Louis Bird, as resulting from “an old legend” in which

the Giant Skunk, *Mishi Shiikaak*, was threatening and terrorizing the other animals. They combined to kill him and enlisted Wolverine to hold his bum so they would not be sprayed during the attack. But after the job was done, Wolverine had to let go and was hit by the smell. He was not allowed to wash in fresh water because he would pollute it; he had to make a great dash all the way to

the sea (Hudson Bay), where he plunged in to clean himself off. The sea has been dirty ever since. (20)

The re-naming of the body of water from a name describing an encounter between Skunk and Wolverine to a space of colonial ownership illustrates the function of language through naming to control, contain, and possess what is named. The *nêhiyawêwin* word for the Hudson's Bay Stores/Trading Posts reflects this, too: "kihci-âkawêwikamikowiîiniw" (Wolvengrey 59). *nêhiyawêwin* uses the prefix "kihci-" to signify that the noun, verb, or object that follows the prefix is "the best" or the "main one" (Wolvengrey 59) of its class. The *nêhiyawêwin* word for "Queen," "kihci-okimâskwêw" (Wolvengrey 60), similarly uses the "kihci" prefix to signify importance and hierarchy, insofar as the noun following the prefix, "okimâskwêw," combines the *nêhiyawêwin* words "okimâw," meaning "chief, leader, head person" (Wolvengrey 151) and "iskwêw," meaning "woman." In this sense, *kihci-okimâskew* literally means the highest or best woman leader/chief, and the prefix "kihci-" linguistically represents this status. Through translation the Hudson's Bay's *nêhiyawêwin* name, rooted in story, was replaced by an English claim to ownership, and the HBC stores are "the best" or the "main [ones]" because they became symbolic of the most lucrative trading relationships available to *nêhiyawak* for many years. With this in mind, the textual designation of *nêhiyawêwin* as the colonial property of Kelsey's document is, in its very title, invested in an understanding of language within an existing network of intercultural capital, as opposed to an embodied expression of a people's ontological connection to and movements within their lands. In short, here, textualization thus operates to (a) render comprehensible the alterity of non-English, non-textual modes of communicating, (b)

ease fur traders in their pursuit of capital, and (c) to lay insidious claim of ownership over Indigenous peoples, their resources, and their lands.

Similarly, Reverend Edwin Arthur Watkins' 1865 *A Dictionary of the Cree Language* is laced with discursive markers of Canada's transition to a settler colony. Describing his text's prescription for a standardized orthography for nêhiyawêwin, Watkins explains that spelling variations may occur in transcriptions dating from "before the orthography became actually settled by usage" (vi). Importantly, the "usage" (vi) to which Watkins refers is presumably that of settler lexicographers, those whose "love of philological investigation" overwhelms them, and/or Evangelists working to "enlighten the minds and elevate the souls of the wandering outcasts of the wilderness" (v). Indeed, Watkins' preface makes clear that his dictionary is geared towards settlers who find themselves fascinated by nêhiyawêwin. Furthermore, Watkins' emphasis on standardized orthography, a practice central to Western lexicography (Johnson 109; McCarty 145), reveals that using textual methods to communicate or represent a primarily oral language textually is akin to the process of settlement by way of its intent to eliminate difference and dissent via textual iteration of an authoritative "standard" by which all speakers, all subjects, must abide.^{iv}

Watkins describes his dictionary—reliant on his self-perception as the inaugural lexicographer of nêhiyawêwin, noting he received not even "the slightest assistance from [any] ... lexicographer" (iii)—as analogous to a "building," which he has "created," and which will see later generations of like-minded linguists "merely add decorations ... [and/or] remove some inequalities" (iii-iv). Here, the textualization of nêhiyawêwin is visualized by way of the solitary erection of material infrastructure that simultaneously

lays claim to both the land as well as its original inhabitants, much like the apostrophic title of Kelsey's *A Dictionary of the Hudson's Bay Indian Language*. As the settlers' buildings (houses and churches alike) purport to lay sovereign claim to the land, the textualization of language lays a claim to nêhiyawêwin: it is, in this instance, defined by the confines of a written medium resonant with exoticized preservation^v and intent to educate curious and fascinated settlers in the linguistic ways of the "wandering outcasts of the wilderness" (v). While the outcasts wander, the settlers lay down linguistic roots; nêhiyawak speak, the dictionary erects a solitary and immobile structure. Though there is negligible scholarship about Kelsey's and Watkins' dictionaries, their treatment of nêhiyawêwin and representations of its speakers illustrate the beginnings of a colonial genealogy of textualizing nêhiyawêwin that reflects the social and political climates and aims of the growing colonial state that became Canada. For Kelsey, the triangulation of nêhiyawêwin, English, and text-based language resources revolved around navigating trade environments,^{vi} whereby economy and exchange were enabled by the use of nêhiyawêwin and English. For Watkins, this triangulation presented a unique opportunity to extend settler curiosity about Indigenous peoples and affirm settlers' authoritative claims to Indigenous lands.

Indeed, the extent to which both Kelsey's as well as Watkins' early dictionaries are steeped in colonial belief suggests they are more than simply products of their time; rather, they, like their authors, are active participants in ideologies of colonial land theft, using language as their point of entry to debates about nêhiyaw cultural and territorial sovereignty. Beneath the creation, distribution, and favorable reception of these texts rests a process of exchange, alluded to above, which can, I suggest, be productively

illustrated by way of conceptual comparison to an early exchange process from the fur trade itself. In *Clearing the Plains*, James Daschuk notes that during the early years of the fur trade, one of the hottest material commodities sought by mercantile traders was a type of beaver-pelt garment colloquially known as “coat” or “greasy” beaver (15). These pelts “were the most desired by Europeans because, until the turn of the eighteenth century, processors lacked the technology to remove the unwanted guard hairs in the production of beaver hats” (15). As a result, traders actively sought out “greasy” (15) coats, which had been worn by nêhiyaw and Anishinaabe middlemen trappers “sometimes for several years” (15), and then exchanged those, subsequently shipping them off to the imperial centre for wear by fashionable European ladies and gentlemen.

Apart from the hilarity of this exchange—that fashionably bourgeois Europeans were, during the initial period of the fur trade, strutting about in sweaty cast-off clothing—there is a borderline taxidermic process at work, here. A coat made of beaver pelts, hand-trapped and processed into clothing becomes materialistic covering, emptied of its cultural import, for a wealthy European consumer. Daschuk notes that the initial creation of the coat would have been done in a way respectful to the role of beaver and their dams as crucial to ecosystem health and water conservation in the prairies (15, 11), and indeed this symbiotic reciprocity between Indigenous peoples and beavers is effectively erased from and emptied out of the final “greasy” (15) product for European consumers. At the end of the fur-trade assembly line, the pelts and their residual perspiration were worn open to the European public. Hollowed of history and relationships between Indigenous peoples and land through their consignment to fur traders and their buyers, they become filled with the belief that with enough money,

anyone can possess and display beaver pelt as proof of their disposable income.

I suggest there is a similar process undergirding the creation, distribution, and reception of fur trader and settler dictionary resources. Under the rubric of exchange, Indigenous speakers engage traders (and, later, settlers) in a process of conversational trade: offering up language for purpose of bartering, traders then take the language, largely emptying it of its complexity for purpose of accessibility, and enclose it within text while purporting to represent its essence to the text's own readership. As such, the circulation of these texts in an economy of trade and settlement works akin to the "greasy" coat beaver: wearing beaver for someone in Europe signifies not a recognition of the importance of beaver for ecosystem health, but rather (intentional or unwitting) participation in an imperial economy of exploitation. Likewise, the circulation of these dictionaries for fur traders or settlers following in the footsteps of Kelsey and Watkins hinges on perpetuating the sort of documentation and belief about language that the two men reflect in their work. Something is taken, hollowed out, and stuffed with the material of colonial ideology: for the dictionaries, language is taken and finds its core—its expressed connection to land and history—likewise replaced with colonial perspectives on nêhiyawêwin as a path to improved imperial trade or colonial settlement, and further fixed as an artefact by way of the textual form. However, this attitude finds contestation in poetry by putting on the page the ways in which nêhiyawêwin is, as Neal McLeod affirms, both a source of "connection ... to the land" as well as a way of "[marking] place with memory" (6-7).

Interestingly, in the second (1938) edition of Watkins' *A Dictionary of the Cree Language*, editor Richard Fairie, like Watkins, addresses the presence of "Indianized

English” (vii) amongst nêhiyawak, but is careful to concede that “[t]he Day and Residential schools have influenced the [Cree] language to the extent that many long Cree words and clumsy compounds have been discarded and the English words and synonyms substituted” (vii). Just as Kelsey’s treatment of oral textualization reflected the climate of the fur trade, and Watkins’ initial publication illustrated prevalent settler mentalities towards language at the time of his writing, the second edition of *A Dictionary of the Cree Language* reveals how colonial attitudes towards Indigenous languages in both ideology and policy turned finally to education in “English or French” in order “to stamp out Aboriginal languages” (Milloy 39) and thereby ensure “the separation [of Indigenous children] from savagery and the[ir] re-orientation as civilized” (Milloy 38). Fairies’ anticipation of a future which will see “no need for a work like the Cree dictionary” (vii), coupled with his repeated use of the term “student” (iv, v, vi) in reference to both the dictionary’s readers as well as nêhiyawak themselves illustrates the insidious dismissal of Indigenous linguistic practices that has been central to educational policies aimed at ensuring the erasure of Indigenous languages.

It is this turn to education as an assimilative strategy that is of crucial socio-historical import to this dissertation precisely because it frames contemporary debates concerning the ethics of language revitalization for Indigenous peoples and their communities by importantly asking which avenues and resources are best suited to facilitate education in Indigenous languages. Historically, education for Indigenous peoples in Canada has been mobilized by the state as a means to propel the loss of Indigenous languages and ways of life—particularly in terms of education systems and programs provided *by* the Canadian state. For example: Canada’s Indian Residential

School system (IRS), which operated between 1867 and 1996, was “created for the purpose of separating Aboriginal children from their families, in order to minimize and weaken family ties and cultural linkages, and to indoctrinate children into a new culture—the culture of the legally dominant Euro-Christian Canadian society” (*Honouring the Truth* vii). For over a century, state-sponsored education was the route through which to “indoctrinate” (vii) Indigenous children in the culture of white, Euro-Canadian settlers, and language was integral to this mission. John Milloy argues that “the Department [of Indian Affairs] and churches understood consciously that culture, or, more particularly, the task of overturning one ontology for another was the challenge they faced[, which] is seen in their identification of language as the critical issue” (38). It was, he explains, “through language that the child gained its ontological inheritance from its parents and community” (38). Mi’kmaw scholar Marie Battiste theorizes this didactic process as “cognitive imperialism” (160), whereby “educational curricula and pedagogy are built on a monocultural foundation of knowledge” (161) in order to shape learners’ minds and speech in the style of the preferred “monocultural foundation” (161). Battiste argues that this process leads Indigenous peoples and other “cultural minorities in Canada ... to believe that their poverty and powerlessness are the result of their cultural and racial origins rather than the power relations that create inequality in a capitalist economy” (161). From “1920, [when] the Indian Act was amended to allow the government to compel any First Nations child to attend residential school” (*Honouring the Truth* 62), Indigenous children and families were forced to contend with the state-sponsored and mandated erasure of their languages and ways of life through “cognitive imperialism” (Battiste 160) styled in the guise of paternalistic education.

What both Milloy and Battiste rightfully highlight is the way in which colonial education has been instrumental in inculcating and perpetuating notions of Indigenous peoples' "powerlessness" (Battiste 161) to rectify the ontological schism between their identities and their linguistic practices. According to the dictates of "cognitive imperialism" (Battiste 161) initiated by residential school education and maintained through contemporary monolingual, monocultural education, colonial authority has sought to split Indigenous peoples from their languages with the intent of cultivating generations whose felt experiences of existence are contingent upon covering under "education as the sword of cultural imperialism" (162). And, as suggested above, a prevalent strategy by which this occurred was via the derogation of oral traditions and practices alongside the privileging of textual ways of learning, using, and teaching languages.

However, contrary to the beliefs made popular by public history and perpetuated in the monolingual, monocultural education mentioned above, *nêhiyawêwin* has its own rich history and practice of textualization, which is evident in its syllabic writing system.^{vii} As Winona Stevenson notes, "Nêhiyawak ... were the first, and for a long time the only Indigenous peoples in present-day Western Canada with a written language" (19). The controversial origins of this system—or rather, how scholars and community members have differently interpreted its origins—are indicative of fundamental tensions between oral and textual practices for sharing history and language. Stevenson notes that "the origins of the Cree syllabary has long been credited to the ingenuity of the Rev. James Evans of the Wesleyan Methodist church," who,

[a]ccording to missionary records and other non-Indian documented accounts,

[had] arrived among the muskego-winiwak, Swampy Cree People, of Norway House in August of 1840 and by mid-November printed three hundred copies of the hymn “Jesus my all to Heaven has Gone” in Cree syllabics. A remarkable feat for anyone who had only been among Cree people a few short months and who continued relying on interpreters for the duration of his time in Cree country.

(19)

Terming the crediting of nêhiyawêwin syllabics to Evans a “great Canadian myth” (20), Stevenson affirms that the oral histories of nêhiyawak, specifically the story of “Badger Caller” (20) offers a different origin for syllabics—an origin separate from the civilizing imperative associated with missionary work to textualize nêhiyawêwin. Stevenson explains that Badger Caller was gifted with the syllabic writing system through dream, emerging from his dream-state with “some pieces of birch bark with symbols on them. These symbols, he told the people, were to be used to write down the spirit languages, and for the Cree people to use to communicate among themselves” (20-1). The disregard in contemporary studies (*Cf.* J. W. Berry & J. A. Bennett’s 1989 article “Syllabic Literacy and Cognitive Performance Among the Cree”) of the origin of syllabics from nêhiyaw history and dream demonstrates the extent to which oral histories and stories have been—both from educational and academic perspectives—considered subordinate to textually verifiable modes of knowledge production and sharing.

If language is, as Milloy asserts, the primary vehicle through which cultural “inheritance” (38) is passed, and language resources across Canadian history have operated first and foremost to wield textuality as a tool of cultural co-optation, derogation, and assimilation that is both political and methodological, then the continuing

assumption that traditional language-learning media such as dictionaries should remain the primary instruments through which Indigenous peoples seek to revitalize and restore their languages and oral traditions requires thoughtful engagement with how to purpose dictionaries and textual approaches to Indigenous peoples' own understandings of their languages and histories. Dictionaries such as Vince Ahenakew's *Nêhiyawêwin Masinahikan* and Freda Ahenakew's *Cree Language Structure: A Cree Approach*, for example, illustrate the labour that attends speakers' efforts to ethically and thoroughly document nêhiyawêwin and Michif with respect for both the languages and cultures which use them. Likewise, Jean Okimâsis' *Cree: Language of the Plains* helpfully and thoroughly uses the prefatory pages of her book to provide mini-lessons on nêhiyawêwin grammar and word formation, such that readers can understand *how* the language builds words and makes meaning. Though she is not Indigenous, Marie-Odile Junker's 2013 *Eastern James Bay Cree: A Thematic Dictionary (Northern Dialect)* and *Eastern James Bay Cree: A Thematic Dictionary (Southern Dialect)*, as well as her 2014 *Developing Thematic Dictionaries of Eastern James Bay Cree* offer examples of dictionaries that organize their many entries by way of "more than 140 themes and sub-themes covering many aspects of traditional and modern Cree life" (Marie Odile-Junker n. p.). Thematic dictionaries are a particularly interesting generic reconfiguration of the dictionary genre, as they structure entries in a way that more closely resembles nêhiyawêwin speakers' organization of the language (as opposed to imposed alphabeticization, which is a convention of lexicography that relies on the Roman alphabet).

Pointing to Poetics: Creative Work, nêhiyawêwin, and Intepretive Engagement

In addition to publications that re-imagine dictionaries in ways that extend beyond their colonial functions are textual resources that extensively utilize the words of nêhiyawêwin speakers, alongside English translations, to encourage readers to learn and use nêhiyawêwin. The Algonquian Text Society (ATS), a department of the University of Manitoba Press, has offered a unique approach to textually representing nêhiyawêwin for purposes of teaching and learning the language. Publishing “critical editions of Algonquian language texts” (“Algonquian Text Society”), the ATS sets up its editions such that each page of nêhiyawêwin and English text mirror each other. On one page is a nêhiyawêwin narrative, almost always from a fluent speaker, and on the other, facing page is an English translation that has been put together with input from the speaker and other fluent individuals. These publications, in addition to dedicating equal textual space to English and nêhiyawêwin, demonstrate a way to use textual modes of language documentation to encourage learning a language through the stories of its people and speakers. That noted, the Algonquian Text Society publications are relatively straightforward in terms of the strategies by which they textually organize, incorporate, and represent nêhiyawêwin and nêhiyaw modes of being—presumably because they are expressly didactic texts that encourage readers to model their existing reading habits and practices (e.g., approaching translations as having relatively straightforward, 1:1 equivalencies between languages) towards learning and understanding nêhiyawêwin. Reading the Algonquian Text Society publications is challenging, and they are impressive in their scope, approach, and rigour—but it is generally clear *how* they bring nêhiyawêwin into text alongside English, and it is clear what the overall intent and

purpose of that bringing together is: to help English speakers learn nêhiyawêwin by working through thorough, detailed translations of nêhiyawêwin stories.

In contrast, Indigenous peoples have used other modes of storytelling to textually incorporate and represent nêhiyawêwin and nêhiyaw ways of being—modes which not only re-imagine textual language learning resources, but also re-conceptualize the processes surrounding learning and using languages through text. Writing of Indigenous peoples' creative work with language and storytelling, Neal McLeod turns to the term "poetics" to refer to "the embodiment of Indigenous consciousness" ("Introduction" 4) through the "rhythms and movement [of] our respective languages, [and] the meaning and significance of Indigenous words, our poetic humour, and the societal context from which our words are derived" ("Introduction" 4). McLeod grounds Indigenous poetics as a creative and representational process in a "celebration of the elasticity within Indigenous languages" ("Introduction" 5), whereby "contextual narrative poetic play is created through the dense and compacted language of poetry" ("Introduction" 5). In this way, McLeod's theorization of Indigenous poetics and poetic modes of storytelling is less concerned with using text and stories to build translations between Indigenous languages and English than with following the densely layered, compacted cues of meaning that Indigenous writers incorporate into their creative works. Following these cues involves pursuing and shadowing the linguistic nodes of expression and storytelling that Indigenous writers use in their creative writing; it involves dwelling in the language and worlds that writers unfold through words and through text. McLeod uses nêhiyawêwin as his example, noting that "[o]ften in Cree, things are kiskino, pointed to, but never completely articulated," which "allows the listener or reader to arrive at his or her own

understanding” (“Introduction” 5) about what writers have presented. In this way, Indigenous poetics and poetic modes of storytelling that use Indigenous languages—specifically, per McLeod’s example, *nêhiyawêwin*—use the ambiguity enabled by language and creative forms of writing to “[expand]” “the possibilities” of “words or signs ... in our interpretation” (“Introduction” 5). McLeod notes that this expansion of meaning, and of interpretive possibility, can occur through placing “two ordinary words ... unexpectedly side by side” in ways that “energize each other” (“Introduction” 5).

In this sense, “poetics” is a more effective descriptor for Indigenous creative works that textually use Indigenous languages alongside English than “poetry,” which conjures specific, genre-based understandings of writing. McLeod explains he has avoided the term “poetry” in favor of “poetics” following Salish writer and scholar Lee Maracle’s suggestion that “poetics” allows one “to move beyond the conceptions of what poetry is from the Anglo-môniyâw interpretive matrix” (“Introduction” 3). However, I would note that while what McLeod theorizes as Indigenous poetics is clear in its affirmation of Indigenous-specific, Indigenous-led and -created modes of writing, the term “poetics” is certainly freighted with môniyâw histories and modes of writing—from Aristotelian poetics to Brian McHale’s *Descriptive Poetics*, the term carries its own histories of use by non-Indigenous writers, thinkers, and critics. Nonetheless, in addition to McLeod’s work to trace the specifically Indigenous resonances and methodologies of “poetics” is poetics’ emphasis on materiality, process, and practice—an emphasis that “poetry” does not carry. “Poetics” refers to modes of writing, practices of reading and studying, and processes of creation and interpretive engagement. In other words, whereas “poetry” describes or categorizes something already written, “poetics” guides the creation

of something, and facilitates interpretive engagement.

The poetic work of bringing things together, of layering words and expanding interpretation through unpacking creative and linguistic cues is central to the creative works that this dissertation engages. More specifically, it is central to how those works move between English and *nêhiyawêwin*; following the interpretive cues seeded throughout the Halfe's, Scofield's, and McLeod's creative works involves paying attention to how their collections poetically bring English and *nêhiyawêwin* together and move between the two languages—both in terms of their formal strategies and their prolonged dwelling within specific narratives and approaches to storytelling. I have chosen to look at collections from Halfe, Scofield, and McLeod that poetically align with the work that is central to Indigenous poetics, *nêhiyaw* poetics, and Indigenous language revitalization. I do not argue that these collections, dated between 1994 and 2007, inaugurate a novel approach to creative writing theretofore unknown or unseen. Indeed, it is worth noting from the outset that the socio-historical occasions that may have given rise to Halfe's, McLeod's, and Scofield's decisions to similarly create work that uses *nêhiyawêwin* and English does not fall within the scope of this dissertation—instead, this dissertation centers *how* their collections use *nêhiyawêwin* and English in ways that are (1) commensurate with *nêhiyaw* cosmologies of language, kinship, embodiment, and home, and (2) complimentary to prominent paradigms around which Indigenous peoples have mobilized to pursue their rights to teach, value, learn, and use their languages and pursue the return of their ancestors and objects of cultural patrimony. I make this choice to prioritize engaging these collections on their own terms and with deference to the cosmologies they engage; moreover, I make this choice to avoid lapsing into criticism

that centers interest on uncovering a causal, socio-historical chain of creative influence—on uncovering why writers like Halfe, Scofield, and McLeod have chosen to write the way they do, given McLeod’s assertion that poetic modes of storytelling that use *nêhiyawêwin* have pre-dated *môniyâw* approaches to literary analysis by centuries.

It is worth noting at this point that I use the term “creative work” throughout my dissertation in place of genre-specific terms like “lyric poetry,” “confessional poetry,” “prose,” and “fiction” (etc.) and the common, all-encompassing term “creative production.” My reasoning for this is twofold. First, I believe that while creative writers like Halfe, McLeod, and Scofield often take up and work within specific sub-genres of poetry and storytelling (Scofield’s *Sâkihitowin-Maskihkiy Êkwa Pêyak-Nikamowin / Love Medicine and One Song* skillfully blends confessional and lyric poetry with *nêhiyawêwin* and *nêhiyaw* understandings of love, medicine, and land, for example), referring to their collections first and foremost with reference to their genres does not adequately account for the collections’ efforts to create poems and stories that challenge or extend beyond generic conventions. Indeed, I do not want to suggest that Halfe’s, Scofield’s, and McLeod’s innovation with poetic forms, language, and methods of creating poems and sharing stories offer permutations of an existing genre, as such an approach centers attention on how their collections conform to or depart from existing genres, thereby situating their collections in the “Anglo-*môniyâw* interpretive matrix” (McLeod “Introduction” 3) mentioned above. These generic connections and departures are in and of themselves worthy of study, but such study must carefully balance its invocation of generic influences with attention to Halfe’s, Scofield’s, and McLeod’s efforts to ground their collections in *nêhiyaw*- and Métis-specific traditions of creating, sharing, and

responding to poems and stories. An approach that focuses chiefly on their collections' genres risks re-inscribing the genres as more worthy of study than the collections themselves. In this sense, I consider Anishnaabe thinker Andrea Landry's tweet from her handle @AndreaLandry1: "Rather than 'indigenizing' colonial systems we should be practicing indigenous systems" (*Twitter*, 2017). What constitutes "indigenous systems" (*Twitter*, 2017) is its own richly complex issue, but the emphasis on turning to Indigenous ways of living and thinking *over* "indigenizing" existing colonial systems or structures is one that requires sustained engagement with Indigenous peoples' efforts to live, work, and write in ways that *they determine* are consonant with their perspectives and experiences as Indigenous peoples.

I also use the term "creative work" to emphasize the labour-intensive nature of poetry and storytelling in a way that does not focus on the "production" of creative efforts. In a general sense, "production" resonates with "productivity" or "productiveness," whereby work and labour are valuable insofar as they *produce* something. To my mind, "creative production" hinges on a nearly oxymoronic pairing of imaginative labour and regulated productivity. This deep dive into terminological implications is necessary, to my mind, insofar as creative work like poetry is often considered a "labour of love"; in this sense, creative writers' labours are not considered intensive labour in their own right. The term "creative work" conjures a broad range of creative and material cultures and practices while simultaneously affirming the effort and dedication of Indigenous writers to nourish, create, refine, and develop their ideas into collections of poems or stories.

If one of the fundamental research concerns expressed in this dissertation regards what materials and practices constitute productive and responsible sources of language learning, it is necessary, too, to apply the same thoughtful rigour to which theories, philosophies, and criticisms are most productive and pertinent for framing and engaging such a project. The strategy of writing in Indigenous languages to pursue decolonial aims has been studied extensively in African and Caribbean postcolonial contexts, where figures such as Nigerian author Chinua Achebe and Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o have shaped debates concerning the strategy's effectiveness. Ngũgĩ's assertion that monolingual education in colonial languages was crucial to "the domination of the mental universe of the colonized" (16) resonates with Canada's policies towards Indigenous peoples, particularly considering the intergenerational impact of "the corrosive effect of education" (Milloy 198) resultant to the Indian Residential School system. In contrast, Achebe argues that writing in colonial tongues might potentially be a more effective medium for communicating decolonial sentiment, as such writing can be broadly (even globally) disseminated (344). Kamau Brathwaite's 1984 *History of the Voice*, in its analysis of "nation language" (13) in Caribbean poetry—a mode of speaking and writing decidedly English in its lexicon but not in cadence or syntax (12-13)—theorizes a model of poetic innovation whereby Caribbean poets disavow traditional poetic conventions associated with the English language (e.g., "the tyranny of the pentameter" [32] as an organizational rhythm for poetic expression) in favour of cadences more appropriate to the tempo of life and landscape of the Caribbean.

While non-Indigenous scholar J. Edward Chamberlin encourages a thoughtful embrace of "the fundamental insights of postcolonial theory" ("From Hand to Mouth"

132) for critical application to Indigenous literatures, nêhiyaw scholar Janice Acoose has expressed reticence about the benefit of such disciplinary crossovers. Acoose notes in “Honouring *Ni’Wahkomakanak*” that she is “cautiously guarded about nonindigenous theories that enclose and stifle the specificity of critical/creative work,” (223), and instead suggests Indigenous scholars and critics “research [their] own cultures of origin and, from [their] respective cultures, initiate cultural restoration projects” (219), thereby affirming the intrinsic value of their languages and oral traditions. In my understanding, Acoose’s dedication to cultural specificity in her academic work speaks to a model of critical engagement that neither homogenizes nor draws incomplete or ineffective comparisons between distinct cultural and experiential contexts—this is something I aim to model in my dissertation. Occasionally, I employ theoretical frameworks and approaches that are neither nêhiyaw nor Métis, but have sought to do so only in ways that helpfully illustrate and complicate both my readings and existing understandings of a collection, concept, or history.

Chapter Breakdown

In terms of its temporal focus, this dissertation engages the interconnected and interpenetrating frameworks of “revitalization,” “repatriation,” and “resurgence” from the middle of the twentieth century to the present day. These three terms, and the paradigms they carry, have become central to contemporary Indigenous rights movements following the work of Indigenous peoples to strategically mobilize their diverse significations and resonances in academia, law, activism, education, and policy. It may seem paradoxical to structure a dissertation about nêhiyawêwin, language revitalization, and poetics around three English terms. However, it is worth noting that although these terms are not

nêhiyaw in origin, and have been used variously by non-nêhiyaw and non-Indigenous peoples and groups, they can be productively re-thought and reconsidered in nêhiyaw and nêhiyawêwin-specific ways with the insight of nêhiyaw literary philosophy and approaches to storytelling and language. Though “revitalization,” “repatriation,” and “resurgence” signify differently, they are nonetheless intertwined in terms of (1) their uses by Indigenous groups and (2) their thematic reliance on issues to do with belonging, Indigenous languages, kinship, and land. I seek to read the spaces of overlap and connection between “revitalization,” “repatriation,” and “resurgence” and nêhiyaw poetics. The paired engagement of “revitalization,” “repatriation,” and “resurgence” with readings of nêhiyaw and Métis poets’ creative works written between 1994 and 2007, however, requires an understanding of the history surrounding nêhiyawêwin, linguistics, and language revitalization. This project is organized into three chapters, each of which takes up a distinct paradigm under and through which Indigenous peoples have worked to promote, value, teach, and use their languages and cultural practices. The chapters share a similar structure; each begins with an in-depth analysis of the genealogical and conceptual underpinnings of its respective term or framework. These analyses trace the mobilization of the terms “revitalization,” “repatriation,” and “resurgence” in academic, socio-political, socio-legal, activist, and policy-based literatures, arguing that their limitations and possibilities for purposes of language revitalization must be understood alongside the histories that have shaped their uses. Each chapter then turns to Indigenous thinkers’ and theorists’ articulations of practices and models of engagement with concepts that are central to “revitalization,” “repatriation,” and “resurgence.” Finally, each chapter concludes with readings of nêhiyawêwin and nêhiyaw and Métis approaches

to storytelling in specific poetry collections; these readings seek to complicate, challenge, extend, and re-shape understandings of both the possibilities and limitations of these frameworks to support the ongoing use and valuing of Indigenous languages in ways that are consonant with Indigenous peoples' own understandings of their languages and cultures.

Each chapter questions and negotiates the compatibility of its respective term with *nêhiyaw* approaches to and understandings of embodiment, home, belonging, and kinship. If “revitalization” has proven an effective terminology and framework for pursuing the increased and renewed use of Indigenous languages, then how can one pair “revitalization”’s dependence on vitality, corporeality, and speech with *nêhiyaw* and Métis articulations of language, embodiment, and storytelling? If repatriation has proven an effective socio-legal framework for pursuing the return of stolen human remains and objects of cultural patrimony, then how can reading “repatriation”’s reliance on concepts of belonging, return, and home *alongside* *nêhiyaw* and Métis creative writers’ use of language to imagine a return of and to *nêhiyawêwin* generate new ways of understanding what a return to language implies for its speakers? If “resurgence” has proven an effective and sea-changing framework for encouraging Indigenous peoples to live on their own terms beyond those of the Canadian state, then how does “resurgence”’s emphasis on intergenerational teaching and passing down of stories and knowledge encourage a mode of storytelling and Indigenous language use that affirms the prerogative of *nêhiyaw* and Métis creative writers’ to create and share stories of inheritance and relationships that center their perspectives on the necessity of relationships?

Chapter One begins by addressing the following question: How and through what histories has “revitalization” become the superordinate term for the work of encouraging Indigenous peoples’ efforts to use, teach, learn, and value their languages? Using Mark Rifkin’s concept of a “double-sided genealogy” (*When did Indians Become Straight?* 9) to address the simultaneously colonial and decolonial genealogy of the term, I trace the circulation of “revitalization” between academic, activist, and government policy discourses. Pairing this genealogical focus with attention to “revitalization”’s terminological dependence on notions of corporeality, embodiment, and vitality, I suggest that the use of *nêhiyawêwin* in Louise Bernice Halfe’s 2004 long poem *Blue Marrow* and Gregory Scofield’s 1997 collection *Love Medicine and One Song / Sâkihitowin-Maskihkiy Êkwa Pêyak-Nikamowin* craft a model of “revitalization” that speaks not of but *through* loving, connected bodies. In doing this, I follow McLeod’s assertion that “Indigenous poetics is the embodiment of Indigenous consciousness” (“Introduction” 4); I argue that *Blue Marrow*’s and *Sâkihtowin-Maskihkiy Êkwa Pêyak-Nikamowin*’s metaphors of bodily pain and pleasure, together with their extended references to *nêhiyaw-maskihkiy* (Cree medicine), theorize a revitalization of the speaking body and its sensations through what McLeod has termed the “embodied understandings” (McLeod “Cree Poetic Discourse” 113) of poetry, story, and language.

Chapter Two takes up the framework of repatriation (the return of human remains and objects of cultural patrimony after seizure) and pairs its concern with concepts of belonging, return, and home with Neal McLeod’s theorization of “coming home through stories” (McLeod *Memory* 61). In his introduction to *Indigenous Poetics in Canada*, McLeod affirms that “[o]ne of the challenges of contemporary Indigenous poetics is to

move from a state of wandering and uprootedness toward a poetics of being home” (10). For McLeod, this involves “trying to poetically resolve the trauma that Indigenous peoples have experienced” by “dwelling at home in English” through creative writing and storytelling. In this chapter, I engage the nêhiyaw concept of echoes and echoing to theorize a poetic echolocation that enables speakers to “[come] home through stories” (*Memory* 61) and language. Specifically, I read McLeod’s 2008 collection *Gabriel’s Beach*, Louise Bernice Halfe’s *Blue Marrow*, and Gregory Scofield’s 2005 *Singing Home the Bones* to argue that their use of nêhiyawêwin resonates with what McLeod calls “the echoes of Cree narrative memory” (*Memory* 61) and “the echo of old voices” (*Memory* 6), whereby resonance and reverberation become storied tools for speakers to re-locate themselves in the present through returning to their pasts.

Whereas Chapters One and Two examine how understanding the frameworks of revitalization and repatriation can enable culturally-specific readings of embodiment, kinship, return, and home in nêhiyaw and Métis creative work, Chapter Three engages “resurgence” with attention to its focus on Indigenous peoples’ imperatives to live by their own terms apart from those set for them by the settler state. In this chapter, I focus on the centrality of relationships and the intergenerational passing down and teaching of stories that has been articulated as central to the work of Indigenous resurgence. However, I do not define or name practices of resurgence per se, as such is not the prerogative of a settler like myself; instead, I focus on how the concept of “inheritance” has become central not only to Indigenous creative writers’ efforts to create and share stories that affirm their experiences and perspectives, but also to critical engagements with Indigenous literatures that use Indigenous languages alongside English. That is,

Chapter Three begins with an account of how understanding the inheritances of specific modes of reading, analysis, and critical engagement have limited and hamstrung readers' abilities to approach texts using Indigenous languages and English without centering the primacy of English, textual forms of storytelling—what McLeod has affirmed as “simple conventions of [Indigenous writers'] mimicry” (“Introduction” 4). After this analysis of critical inheritance, I turn to theories of Indigenous resurgence and apply their insights to reading two collections: Louise Bernice Halfe's 2007 *The Crooked Good* and Gregory Scofield's 1999 *I Knew Two Métis Women: The Lives of Dorothy Scofield and Georgina Houle Young*. I argue that these collections' infusions of nêhiyawêwin and nêhiyaw and Métis cosmologies of kinship and storytelling into predominantly English creative writing necessitates an engagement not only with how creative writers like Halfe and Scofield use nêhiyawêwin, but also of how they center nêhiyaw storytelling philosophies, understandings of kinship, and approaches to making and sharing creative work.

Note on Language and Terminology

Throughout this dissertation, I use nêhiyawêwin wherever possible, with translations integrated into the body of my writing. In addition, there is a glossary of nêhiyawêwin itwêwina (words), at the end of this dissertation in Appendix 1. The glossary is ordered alphabetically primarily because I am not fluent enough to organize the nêhiyawêwin itwêwina thematically or by their stem words. For an example of a dictionary that does such work, I refer readers to Marie Odile-Junker's 2013 *Eastern James Bay Cree Thematic Dictionary* (though, in keeping with the work of the authors at the heart of this study, this dissertation uses Plains Cree, not Eastern James Bay Cree). The translations in this dissertation's glossary are individually cited so that readers might

look beyond the pages of this project and engage themselves with the works of speakers and linguists who are fluent in *nêhiyawêwin*. I consider this citational practice in the glossary an extension of my commitment to center the words, perspectives, and labour of Indigenous peoples who have dedicated so much time to promoting, valuing, using, learning, and teaching *nêhiyawêwin*. When I use *nêhiyawêwin* in this dissertation, as I already have done, I do not italicize the text unless I am quoting a source which has italicized it. I make this terminological choice following Neal McLeod’s note in a class I took with him at the University of Manitoba in 2014. In this class, Cree Literature, he affirmed that italicizing *nêhiyawêwin* *itwêwina* in predominantly English texts visually segregated the *itwêwina* such that they appeared primarily as novel incorporations into English, whereby the “real” words are not italicized and the novel “borrowings” are. Though I can see the utility of italicizing non-English words in predominantly English writing, particularly for readers whose first languages are not English, I support McLeod’s position and have chosen to emulate it in my dissertation. *nêhiyaw*, Scottish, and Caribbean scholar Tasha Beeds has taken this position, too, arguing that “*Nêhiyawêwin* must be placed beside English in an equal textual position” (“Rethinking Edward Ahenakew’s Intellectual Legacy” 119). Affirming that she “[uses] “English as a means of discourse” but “[places] *nêhiyaw* language ... as a theoretical and a living space—a space where words carry spiritual power and a space that I call home” (119), Beeds counters the linguistic foreignness imposed on *nêhiyawêwin* by choosing not to italicize *nêhiyawêwin* *itwêwina*. Moreover, as *nêhiyawêwin* does not use capital letters—Beeds explains: “*nêhiyaw* words are also not capitalized according to the convention of the orthography built by Leonard Bloomfield, Ida McLeod, Freda Ahenakew, and H.C.

Wolfart” (119)—in cases wherein a nêhiyawêwin word begins a sentence, I have not capitalized it; however, if a nêhiyawêwin word has been capitalized in a quotation, I have left the capitalization in place out of respect for writers’ and scholars’ translational labours.

Chapter One

1 The Bones of Revitalization: Embodied Language in Louise Halfe’s *Blue Marrow* and Gregory Scofield’s *Love Medicine and One Song: Sâkihitowin-Maskihkîy Êkwa Pêyak-Nikamowin*

“Words matter, but so do the purposes for which they are directed”
—Daniel Heath Justice’s “Conjuring Marks.”

Due to its frequent use as the primary organizing or umbrella term for work across disciplines to promote, value, and use Indigenous languages, it is fair to claim that “language revitalization” is currently the primary superordinate label assigned to efforts—be they linguistic, literary, educational, or anthropological, to name but a few areas—seeking to ensure that Indigenous languages will not only continue to exist, but also flourish over time. Tracing the genealogy of language revitalization as a concept and educational paradigm—along with its attendant philosophies and the material processes that undergird its mobilization to value, sustain, use, and teach Indigenous languages—yields an abundance of terminology. Diverse in both their connotative resonance and their ideological timbre, the numerous terms describing the work of promoting, valuing, using, and teaching Indigenous languages provide, vis-à-vis their respective disciplines and the socio-historical contexts generative to their coinage, helpful indications of the status and weight that Indigenous languages have been afforded by academic, governmental, and community-based initiatives. “Revitalization” has been used by a range of thinkers, communities, and organizations with varying practical and terminological effects; while the term’s connotations shift depending on its usage, there are spaces of overlap—which will be discussed at length in this chapter—regarding not only its meaning, but also its shifting opportunities for use that is aligned with the cultural perspectives and practices of

Indigenous peoples. Some of the prominent terms used in scholastic parlance to describe the work of promoting the use and teaching of Indigenous languages, listed here in the approximate order of their entry into the field, include: language maintenance, language documentation (*Cf.* Peter K. Austin’s journal *Language Documentation and Description*; Sallabank 2011) language preservation (Nettle and Romaine 2000; Johnson 2012), reversing language shift (RLS) (Sallabank 2011; Nettle and Romaine 2000), language restoration, language revival, and language revitalization itself.^{viii} While of definite value to scholastic projects, this plethora of highly specialized, academy-centric terms for the ideas and processes surrounding language loss and revitalization risks alienating people outside of the academy. As a result, these terms limit dialogue between those fluent in the scholastic lexicon of language revitalization as a sub-category of linguistics, anthropology, and/or English literary study, and people outside or not affiliated with the academy who wish to learn or use Indigenous languages, become involved with research about how to more thoroughly value, use, sustain, and teach Indigenous languages, or to organize revitalization initiatives. As a result, if the general aim of language revitalization initiatives is to understand the value, cultural rootedness, and inner-workings of Indigenous languages so as to encourage their use and intergenerational transmission, then over-reliance on the terms listed above approaches the task not from within the communities which speak the languages, but from without, thereby fixing the power to name and articulate squarely in the pens of cultural outsiders. Certainly, this division of knowledge and its attendant power has frustrated many Indigenous leaders of linguistic and cultural revitalization projects (*Cf.* McIlwraith, McLeod, Armstrong). For instance, nêhiyaw poet, painter, and scholar Neal McLeod affirms that “[a]cademia has ... in many

ways, become an extension of the colonialism of Indigenous peoples and the subordination of Indigenous narrative knowing” (90). I argue that it is through accounting for the term as a framework, as well as how it has been mobilized, that (1) the limitations, possibilities, and utility of “revitalization” paradigms can be theorized, and (2) Indigenous-led or created initiatives to value, use, sustain, and teach Indigenous languages can be engaged with an eye to culturally-specific, culturally-rooted approaches to learning and using Indigenous languages.

The frustration concerning the academic mining of Indigenous knowledge and language for scholastic purpose finds clear expression in Métis poet Gregory Scofield’s “The Dissertation.” In this poem, Scofield explores the relationship of give-and-take—or lack thereof—between an Indigenous poet and an unnamed, voracious academic whose efforts to commandeer the power of his creative work is contingent upon the meticulous appropriation of Indigenous language. His speaker remembers:

... then arrived the microscope
 and she set to work, the academic
 prodding and jotting,
 jotting and prodding.
 She even annexed his speech,
 the Indian words she was so drawn to.
 It gave her own language authenticity. (*Kipocikhân* 125)

The speaker’s mention of “the microscope” (125) as the academic’s weapon of choice to “[annex] his speech” (125) is specifically important, here. Though her endeavour is presumably rooted in either the humanities or the social sciences, Scofield’s reference to

her metaphorical use of scientific equipment to magnify and isolate the component parts of his creative work is resonant with the efforts of the humanities and the social sciences to distance the researching academic's privileged social position from the work that s/he performs, presuming its divorce from the operations of power which permeate and influence her work's existence both ontologically and socio-politically.^{ix} In this sense, the microscope also metonymically indicates the academic's apparent objectivity; although her work seeks to "annex" and overtake the speaker's language to lend credence to her own speech, her tools suggest an impartial, scientific approach to study separate from the privilege and power she wields. This reliance on the tools of science to remedy or balance the inevitable subjective biases of researchers resonates with the social sciences' return to scientific, positivist research methods during the twentieth century (Ritzer 36, 200; Alexander 194-96). Generally, this return to scientific, positivist methods was borne of the Chicago school of sociology, which was largely influential in the 1920s and 1930s and espoused the "view that sociology must be interested in social reform ... combined with a belief that sociology should be scientific" (Ritzer 221). The result of this return was a desired transformation regarding the perception of social sciences research that emphasized its objective, unbiased nature. Linguist Joshua Fishman explains, for example, that throughout his career he has "struggled to approach language maintenance and language shift as fields of dispassionate scientific research" (*Reversing* xi). Likewise, linguist Michael Krauss explains that he experiences trouble "as a linguist who is supposed to view languages as objects of scientific study ... because every language has its own divine spark of life" (Krauss, 15). There is a double-move at work in sentiments like these; first, there is a recognition that linguistic work engaging Indigenous language

use and loss *should* be “dispassionate” (Fishman 1991, 15) and that Indigenous languages should be “[viewed] ... as objects of scientific study” (Krauss 15). Second, there is an admitted discomfort surrounding this duty to wholly treat Indigenous languages as scientific specimens, coupled with an invocation of their “divine spark of life” (Krauss 15), that implies they are pure, untampered expressions of peoplehood untouched by colonization—what Fishman, writing of Navajo, calls “the observance of the authentic traditions with which [language] use has so long been associated” (1991, 189). Thus the academic’s microscope in Scofield’s “The Dissertation,” together with her search for “authenticity” in poetry and language, illuminates the baggage of social sciences and humanities research with Indigenous peoples. Specifically, it does this by shining the mirror, so to speak, of positivist sociology onto literary studies, as Scofield’s academic is most likely a literary scholar possessing an excessive fascination with the poet’s creative work. The academic’s reading perspective mimics and replicates the tendency to treat Indigenous peoples and languages as specimens deserving the dispassionate inquiry of curious minds. Moreover, when she overtakes “his poetry like a landlord” (125), her taxonomic analysis leads her to assume presumptive ownership of and regulation over his creative work—that is, her microscopic dissection of his creative work becomes the occasion to possess and monitor the poem and its language.

Yet the academic is neither cognizant of her pushy, appropriative work, nor is she reflexive about the disrespectful nature of her intrusive methodology of “prodding and jotting” (125) the poet as he works to express himself creatively. By “prodding and jotting/ jotting and prodding” (125) the poem to feed her fascination with its use of “Indian words,” this academic effectively reduces the poet to an inanimate specimen

under her scholastic microscope, a sample to give “her own language” (125)—presumably the academic’s jargon-heavy lexicon—an “authenticity” (125) of the identity and cultural expression that her work seems to fetishize. Moreover, the speaker notes the academic’s preoccupation with her own labour as the central point of exhaustion relating to this work: “She suffers her life’s work / as does any great scholar” (125). As Sam McKegney affirms with reference to this poem, “To share one’s intimate imaginative creations—which so often work through both positive and negative personal, familial, and cultural experiences—involves vulnerability, a factor exacerbated by those who have been subject to dispossession, marginalization, and stigmatization” (45). The exposure of self and identity inherent in creative work, here, enables “the hegemonic voice of academic authority” to “[sterilize] the dynamism of the creative process, reducing poetics into discrete bits of information in an anatomy textbook” (McKegney 45). Specifically, “The Dissertation” engages academic manipulation of Indigenous experience and knowledge by using the poet’s body and speech as connected registers for intellectual violence: the academic is “prodding” (125) her subject, seizing his “speech” (125), and “[slipping] into his skin” (125) through her invasive research. Given the fact that “The Dissertation” is one of the original poems in Scofield’s collection *Kipocihkân*, a nehiyawêwin “slang word for someone unable to talk, i.e., a mute,” (*Alberta Elders Cree Dictionary*), the poem points to the contradictions surrounding embodied speech issued from someone who has been cast as mute in large part by academic discourse about Indigenous peoples.

Despite the problematic and appropriative histories surrounding academic and institutional work regarding Indigenous languages, I argue that there can be benefit in

engaging the diverse resonances of the terms clustering around efforts to promote, value, use, and teach Indigenous languages, primarily in comprehending their complex histories, points of divergence, and their overlaps and interdependence. This chapter focuses its attention chiefly on the genealogy and conceptual possibilities of the term “revitalization,” both as an interdisciplinary framework for promoting the use and rights of Indigenous languages as well as a jumping-off point from which to theorize Indigenous-led alternatives to revitalization whose approaches and methods are more commensurate with Indigenous ways of being in the world. In the spirit of this chapter’s epigraph, the import of “revitalization” for Indigenous language projects is contingent on its own conceptual register—its history, its uses—as well as the purposes and efforts that bear its name.

Working through “revitalization” as a term doubly shaped both by discourses of control and appropriation as well as Indigenous-led language teaching initiatives, I draw on and adapt Mark Rifkin’s concept of “a double-sided genealogy” (9) that he outlines in *When Did Indians Become Straight? Kinship, The History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty*. Engaging the complex circulation of “kinship” “between contested U.S. notions of sexual order and shifting forms of Native American political representation” (8), Rifkin explains that “kinship” as a category of social belonging and relationality has been mutually impacted by, on the one hand, state “efforts to reorganize native social life” (8) in the image of “compulsory heterosexuality” (8) and heteronormative family structures, and, on the other hand, “the political work performed by native writers’ depictions of quotidian elements of tradition . . . as [efforts] to register and remember modes of governance disavowed by the United States” (8). From this, Rifkin contends

that “kinship” is a valuable term for tracing both the state’s mission to control and order Indigenous peoples and families as well as Indigenous peoples’ efforts to “[affirm] the specificity, legitimacy, and rightful autonomy of their peoples’ forms of collectivity” (8). Though “revitalization” as a term and a rhetorical strategy underpinning government policy has not functioned in the exact same way that “kinship” has, it too has been mutually impacted by a “double-sided genealogy” (Rifkin 9) of usage. Both academic and state-led negotiations of Indigenous peoples’ rights to their languages and cultural practices as well as Indigenous peoples’ own efforts to claim, adapt, and mobilize the term for their own purposes are central to the term’s history, shifting uses, and possibilities.

Starting by tracing its etymological history in the English language, this chapter will account for “revitalization”’s development and connotative permutations as it has become increasingly used in studies across anthropology, linguistics, and the humanities over the second half of the 20th century (particularly in the years leading up to the millennium). In addition to engaging the term’s admittedly diverse use in academic parlance, this chapter will address the concurrent rise of the rhetorical use of the term “revitalization” in publications from the Canadian government following the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, arguing that the term’s official use by the Canadian state helped cultivate a marketable veneer of governmental support of Indigenous language rights while avoiding both legislative and financial commitment to revitalization projects. Moreover, following the conclusion of Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the rhetorical deployment of “revitalization” has trickled down from state policy papers and discourse to major public institutions such as public

universities.

Next, this chapter will explore why revitalization, with its etymological and conceptual emphasis on bodily expression and embodied vivacity is well suited to the task of promoting the use and intergenerational transmission of Indigenous languages. With particular focus on its compatibility with creative work and nêhiyawêwin grammar, morphology, and literary philosophy, this chapter theorizes that the benefit of understanding “revitalization” as a conceptual paradigm lies not only in addressing its socio-etymological history and political mobilizations within and without the academy, but also, and perhaps more chiefly, in its potential malleability when tailored to the languages it purports to impact.

Finally, after tracing the “double-sided” (Rifkin 9) genealogy and various mobilizations of “revitalization,” this chapter concludes with an effort to re-think language revitalization in a way that is compatible with nêhiyaw and Métis writers’ uses of nêhiyawêwin in their creative work. Reading the primacy of bodies—their pleasure, their pain, and their negotiation of personal autonomy balanced with romantic and familial love— and embodied language in Gregory Scofield’s *Love Medicine and One Song/ Sâkihîtowin-Maskihkîy Êkwa Pêyak-Nikamowin* and Louise Bernice’s Halfe’s *Blue Marrow*, I trace “revitalization”’s dependence on notions of vitality and recuperative health as a site of complementarity to Scofield’s and Halfe’s metaphors of bodily pleasure and pain that explicate and dismantle the colonial derogation of Indigenous bodies. By using the concept of nêhiyaw-maskihkîy (Cree medicine) as a primary referent for holistic wellbeing in the present, I argue that Scofield and Halfe offer a model of language revitalization that speaks not of but rather *through* bodies, addressing the

interconnected nature of *nêhiyawêwin*, embodied sensations, and relationships through storytelling.

1. 1 Back & Forth: Guiding Etymologies

Before addressing the term's permutations across disciplines (and the socio-political contexts which continue to influence its prominence) it is helpful to first trace an etymological narrative of the word "revitalization" in order to fully understand the historical baggage of the diverse human usage, transformation, and development of the word, which, in turn, informs its conceptual agenda. It is possible to view the ensuing analysis as a process of increasingly specific, detailed dissection, whereby dividing and scrutinizing the composite parts of a word might fulfil this chapter's aim to first validate my argument and interpretation of the word and its history, and, second, to illustrate that the term's etymological resonances are, in part, the key to understanding its mobilization as a linguistic and socio-political paradigm. Recalling my introductory reading of "The Dissertation," such an interpretive methodology would thus place my own work in alignment with that of Scofield's "prodding and jotting" (125) academic. Indeed this is inevitably true in some respect: such is the nature of scholarly literary study, of prolonged discourse analysis working to disassemble texts and their words to thereby posit their explicit or implied agendas and philosophies. And while turning the tools of Scofield's academic back on the language that gives her work power and popularity is, in its own sense, a way to palatably force English jargon to taste its own and oft-bitter medicine, such a justification too easily implies that the age-old "master's tools" are necessarily the go-to instrument through which to bludgeon its own structures of power and dominance out of existence, thus unwittingly reifying their primacy as the only means capable of

effecting demonstrable change.

As such, I wish to emphasize that for the following section my methodology rests neither solely nor predominantly on linguistic dissection. Rather, it takes its argumentative insights from the linguistic makeup of “revitalization” itself. The word’s Latin prefix ‘*re*,’ is most commonly interpreted as meaning ‘again.’ However, it is also (albeit less commonly) noted as signifying “back,” or “backward motion,” as in the word “return”—to direct oneself again towards something prior. I suggest that breaking down a word, separating its parts and positions, is less an effort of linguistic dissection, and more a process of moving backwards through its history and coming to understand and appreciate precisely how it came to exist in the present moment—as well as accepting its ongoing potentiality. While thus contingent on an initial “re,” a backwards move to a word’s apparent originary particles, the process of constructing and accounting for a word’s meaning over time is, I suggest, a process of interpretive *assembly*, of piecing together its diverse significations, combinations, permutations, and its disciplinary or popular iterations to arrive at its present definitions. In this process, the following questions are crucial:

- How has this word come to signify what it does, and does this development accord with how I understand the word and see it used?
- How has this word been used by others who have uttered or scribbled its syllables?
- Which, if any, of its connotative parts have endured to the present moment—and why have those endured those over others?

- How has the socio-political history of this word informed its development, and, moreover, does the word's history form the precondition for its future significations?

Asking such questions with thoughtfully backward regard is, I argue, an engaged and attentive method by which to recognize a word not as an artefact awaiting scholastic dismembering, but rather as an article in constant shift, for so long as a word is uttered, scrawled, typed, or thought, it is unfinished.^x

With that preamble in mind, so begins the process of moving backwards.

“Revitalization,” a derivative noun of the verb “revitalize,” is a relatively young word in the English language, with its first printed use as a pseudo-scientific term documented in and traced to 1850,^{xi} and its parent “revitalize” dated to just 16 years prior. However, since both “revitalization” and “revitalize” depend upon the adjective/noun “vital,” for their general signification and morphological structures, it is necessary to move yet further backward to understand the term. The history and development of “vital” in English extends back to the Middle English period in the centuries following the Norman conquest (or, arguably, to the era of the Roman empire). The Modern English word “vital” is an etymological descendant of the Middle English “vytalle,”^{xii} itself borrowed and adapted in the 13th century from either the Old French “vital,” or the Latin “vitalis”/“vita,” which mean “of or belonging to life” and “life,” respectively.^{xiii}

Regarding the word's entry into the English language, there are two possible theories, both of which lend insight to the word's contemporary resonance. The first and most widely accepted theory is that the word's entry into Middle English was prompted by the forced imposition of the French language in England following the Norman conquest of

England and its attendant effect on the structure, vocabulary, and grammar of English—especially considering its first documented use comes from the work of Geoffrey Chaucer 339 years following the Battle of Hastings, the decisive military event that inaugurated the Norman’s colonial occupation of England (“vital” OED). Second, it is possible that the word was incorporated into English directly from Latin, as it was, at that point, the official language of the church of England, and the Romans had already had contact with England long before the Normans set sail with aim to conquer.

While this history may seem distantly departed from this dissertation’s field and aims, it is useful to emphasize that from its genesis in the word “vital,” “revitalization” is a term borne not only of cultural contact but also, and perhaps more accurately, of forceful conquest by way of the linguistic and territorial colonization of England by the Normans. In light of this, the use of “revitalization” as the term *du jour* for organizing the work of empowering Indigenous languages contains within its history a conceptual reflection of the same methods of intercultural linguistic imposition that are often characteristic of colonial contexts between Indigenous peoples and settler states.

The implication of this history is that “revitalization,” at least etymologically, does not necessarily entail a strict and sole replication of a pre-existing *state* of “vita” or life. Returning to its Latin prefix “re,” meaning “back” or “again,” one can infer that the word is concerned not only with *return*, but also with *repetition*—to again instil and inspire vitality within something by taking its previous state(s) as a motivational model for dealing with the circumstances challenging its vitality. “Revitalization” takes the strength and vigour from the past not merely as a sign of weakness in the present, but as a standard from which to move forward, again. As such, the term does not require an

unquestioned return to or valorization of pre-contact, traditional uses and forms of the language. Rather, it implies that languages transform—whether organically or by forceful cultural contact—and thus to presume that focusing on the “life” inherent to something will restore its previous state without adaptation to the present moment is to actually divest its present incarnation of any remaining vitality. By extension, such an approach risks doing a disservice to those individuals who have sought to sustain the language’s continued vitality over time by implying that their efforts not only pale in comparison to the language’s past “golden age,” but also that the only viable strategy for countering the loss of vitality is to eschew the influence of the present moment and the strategies that individuals and communities have employed to ensure their languages’ continuances. Careful attention to how the etymological history of “revitalization” assembles to inform its present day resonances makes it possible to understand “revitalization” as not simply facilitating a return to an unchanged state of past vitality, or to resuscitate a vital spirit that has been lost or has waned over time. Instead, its concern with fostering renewed vitality in the present centers the work of moving toward a renewed state of healthy, vigorous vitality.

To delve further into the specific denotations of “vital,” its primary signification refers to “that immaterial force or principle which is present in living beings and by which they are animated” (OED, “vital”). Though this might seem to suggest that what is “vital,” as something “immaterial” or existing only as a “principle,” is fundamentally divorced from the body as a material site and/or subject, it is, I argue, quite the opposite: the immateriality of “vital” and the materiality of the body animated by its force are mutually constitutive. The conjoined immateriality of an ineffable, vital life force and the

body which generates and is sustained by it is reflected further in the word's permutation over time: from the 16th century, "vital" has possessed a "chiefly *poet.* [read: poetic]" (OED "vital, 2.c") meaning, signifying "of breath or air" (OED "vital, 2.c"), and "Conferring or imparting life or vigour; invigorating, vitalizing; life-giving" (OED "vital, 5"). The poetic permutations of "vital" indicate its inherent compatibility with creative expression; by extension, "revitalization" as a socio-linguistic and political paradigm can likewise be compatible with such texts.

Careful, critical attention to the strategic mobilization of "revitalization," both in terms of its etymology and its conceptual possibilities in academic, political, and creative discourses is helpful not only for engaging the work of revitalization as a paradigm to promote, value, teach, sustain, and use Indigenous languages; it is also helpful for tracing the term's "double-sided genealogy" (Rifkin 9) as it is freighted with the work of both non-Indigenous academics and policy-makers as well as Indigenous scholars, creative writers, and activists.

1. 2 Disciplining Revitalization: From Cargo-cults to Textbook Terminology

The disciplinary emergence of "revitalization" as an academic and socio-political paradigm has been shaped by its mutually impacting genealogy in linguistics and anthropology. Though the term's first use with reference to Indigenous languages is unclear, its emergence as a phrase in linguistics' popular parlance dates to the late 1990s-early 2000s. However, the use of "revitalization" as a conceptual mode of thought in anthropology is present from 1956 with Anthony Wallace's seminal essay "Revitalization Movements," the piece most often credited with the concept's genesis that continues to

influence scholarship uniting political and religious anthropologists studying the cultures and religions of Indigenous peoples in North America and the Pacific (Harkin et al. 2005).^{xiv} Seeking to bridge religious and social anthropology, Wallace engages how communities respond to periods of extreme change by fixing their eyes firmly on the past and its traditions. Wallace suggests that such cultural behaviour is “characterized by a uniform process” of the “attempted and sometimes successful innovation of whole cultural systems,” and he “[proposes] the term ‘revitalization’” (264) as an ostensible catch-all for the work of “a special kind of culture change phenomenon” (265) that centers the practices of the past as the route to ensuring a community’s continuance when faced with change.

Wallace’s theory of revitalization emerged from his study of a “new religion initiated by Handsome Lake, the Seneca prophet, among the nineteenth century reservation Iroquois” (264). Wallace affirms that Indigenous societies seeking the “attempted and sometimes successful innovation of whole cultural systems” (264) when faced with their impending decline or erasure will “take emergency measures to preserve the constancy of [their cultural] matrix” (265), thereby working to create a “more satisfying culture” (264) for themselves and for generations to come. For Wallace, what differentiates “revitalization movements” from other processes of cultural change is the “deliberate intent by members of a society” (264) to enact change. That is, while cultures may organically change over time as a result of the “gradual chain-reaction effect” (264) produced by, to use Wallace’s words, “evolution, drift, diffusion, historical change, [and] acculturation” (264), “revitalization movements” are borne of and sustained by the decisive work of communities to ameliorate their cultures by re-invigorating their once-

central beliefs and practices.

Although his work was inspired by Handsome Lake's religious revitalization, Wallace believed that his theory of "revitalization movements" was applicable to "thousands" (264) of cultural contexts—from "early Methodism" in Europe, to the "Xosa revival" in South Africa, to "the origin of Mohammedanism" and "the development of Sikhism" (264). Wallace's framework presents a taxonomy of the stages of cultural change, and he traces the four major stages leading to a revitalization movement, and the seven sub-stages of a revitalization movement itself, with broad, declarative affirmations about the similar manifestations of "revitalization movements" in diverse cultural contexts. For example: conceding a "few exceptions," Wallace affirms, "every religious revitalization movement with which I am acquainted has been originally conceived in one or several hallucinatory visions by a single individual" (270) and "almost every revitalization movement embodies in its proposed new cultural system large quantities of both traditional and imported cultural material" (276). What is conspicuously absent from Wallace's essay is an engagement with the *conditions* that prompt communities to fix their eyes to the past as a remedy or recuperative strategy in the face of cultural change. Why did Handsome Lake pursue the revitalization of Seneca religious belief and practice in the 19th century? What changes in this period impacted the Seneca's self-conception to the extent that Handsome Lake successfully revitalized a waning form of religious belief and practice? Other work by Wallace provides historical information about these questions (*Cf.* his 1969 monograph *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca*), but a consideration of how cultural power dynamics—such as colonization and colonialism—inflect communities' turns to revitalization is not central to his understanding of

“revitalization movements” generally. In short, Wallace’s ground-breaking essay is concerned with *how* “revitalization movements” unfold and operate cross-culturally, not with *why* they unfold in specific cultural and historical contexts. This is important because it illustrates that the transformation of the word “revitalization” into a descriptive anthropological term did not center the contexts generative to communities’ needs to revitalize their cultural beliefs and practices. Colonization and colonialism are latent in “revitalization movements,” but largely erased in favor of focusing on the dynamics of *how* “revitalization movements” propel themselves, succeed, and/or fail. In this way, the actions and efforts of peoples to revitalize their cultural beliefs and practices are not explicitly linked to the processes of exploitation, genocide, and land theft that *make revitalization necessary in the first place*. Instead, these processes are referenced to obliquely as “agencies responsible for interference with the efficacy of a cultural system” (269); they are merely the “representatives of Western European cultures” whose efforts to “acculturate” (269) individuals to Western European cultural norms produce the “extreme stress” (268) and “extreme pressure” (269) necessary to propel communities to seek a better cultural system.

Furthermore, Wallace focalizes his theory of “revitalization movements” through “an organismic analogy” (265), whereby “the total system which constitutes a society includes as significant parts not only persons and groups with their respective patterns of behavior, but also literally the cells and organs of which the persons are composed” (266). Wallace understands “revitalization movements” as decisive cultural efforts to remedy a threatened, stressed cultural group. If a “holistic view of society as organism integrated from cell to nation depends on the assumption that society, as an organization

of living matter, is definable as a network of communication” (266), then what Wallace misses in his analysis is an opportunity to engage how societies define themselves and are forcibly defined by others. The instrumentality of language as an embodied act of self-definition is not addressed in “Revitalization Movements” despite the fact that “revitalization” would later become the primary referent for promoting the renewed use of theretofore waning languages. Paul Kroskrity explains that “focusing on the intellectual heritage of the species [i.e., humans as a species inclined to change their cultures in particular ways] (rather than specific nations or cultural groups) ... erases key connections to the larger role of threatened languages in the sociocultural lives of their speakers” (180). It is unlikely that the processes and means of Handsome Lake’s revitalization movement would have been successful were they undertaken by, for example, an Indigenous group with an entirely different treaty history and arrangement than the Seneca. In this sense, Wallace’s neglect of how processes like colonization make revitalization movements necessary, together with his failure to differentiate between how revitalization movements manifest differently for distinct cultural groups and contexts makes it difficult to use his theoretical model for non-descriptive purposes.

While Wallace’s theorization of “revitalization movements” erases the word’s genesis in colonization and conquest, it centers the word’s emphasis on the body as the locus of individual and cultural vitality. Understanding the etymological history of “revitalization” lends insight to why certain aspects of the word’s history are privileged over others: Why does Wallace localize “revitalization” in the “[literal] cells and organs” (266) of individuals without engaging the complex power dynamics embedded in the *need* to pursue revitalization as a recuperative culture-change strategy? I argue that

Wallace's interest in putting forward a broadly applicable framework for understanding cultural change forecloses the need to engage with colonialism, even though the context generative to his term (Handsome Lake's revival of Haudenosaunee religious belief and practice) was no doubt shaped by the increasingly violent incursion of white settlers and the forced imposition of their lifeways on Indigenous peoples. In order to present a broad, descriptive model, Wallace *must* focus on the how at the expense of the why, and a strategic recourse to the body as both vehicle and analogy for cultural systems allows him to reduce "revitalization movements" from a response to colonial incursion and cultural imposition to a pan-human, pan-cultural phenomena that exists on a cellular level. If the need to cultivate renewed vitality when faced with pressure or stress is cellularly encoded into individuals and thereby their cultural formations, then "revitalization movements" are not a necessary and agential corrective to colonization, but a natural human response to change in general. This enables Wallace and those who have come after him to conduct comparative, cross-cultural analyses that assume a pan-human, pan-cultural mode of response to threat or change. Moreover, as Wallace is primarily interested in religious anthropology, invoking secular revitalization as an afterthought to religious revitalization, this mode of analysis lessens the need for contextually and historically grounded readings of specific movements—though Wallace does such grounded work in his career, the way "Revitalization Movements" frames the phenomenon does not require this grounding as its point of analytic departure.

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, "revitalization" is not the only term that has been popularly used to refer to the work of promoting, valuing, teaching, and using Indigenous languages. Two of the most popular terms besides "revitalization"

that refer to this work are “language endangerment/preservation” and “reversing language shift.” Like “revitalization,” these terms do not consistently include analyses of how colonization and colonialism have made revitalization initiatives necessary. Instead, they often center “tropes of quantification [and] a valorization of linguistic differences as ‘intellectual treasure,’” whereby “an implicit claim of ‘universal ownership’ of this vanishing fund of human knowledge” (Kroskrity 180) justifies the work of documenting, recording, and otherwise preserving what remains of a language.

Signifying “the action of preserving from damage, decay, or destruction; the fact of being preserved” (OED “preservation, n.” 1), the word “preservation” derives as a noun from the verb “(to) preserve” so that it is firstly a description of the work it references. It is this morphological derivation, I argue, which connotatively runs the risk of treating the action of preserving something as the process of *turning something into* a thing devoid of the capacity to change.^{xv} Consider, for example, “preserves” like jam, jellies, or pickles. As a process, preservation implies a protective freezing of an object, item, or phenomena in its present state with the assumption that if it were left untouched, its continued interaction with outside forces would likely ensure its destruction—fruit would rot, vegetables would decay. As a result of preservation, an animate, living organism becomes a static object: a verb becomes a noun. In this way, preservation does not encourage or demand a change in circumstances surrounding the use, value, and reception of something threatened with erasure. Rather, it conceptually removes the thing from a mobile temporal continuum. In this respect, language preservation as a conceptual organizing term implies that the work of promoting, valuing, teaching, and using Indigenous languages will consist largely of recording, in detail, what remains of a

language in the present moment, without necessarily urging the continued and expanded use/transmission of the language to broaden its base of fluent speakers.

“Language preservation” is a term that emerged in linguistics and anthropology alongside “language documentation” around the middle of the 20th century. Take Catherine Rudin’s “Omaha Language Preservation in the Macy, Nebraska Public School” for example. Rudin opens her paper by declaring Omaha “a dying language” that “is in all likelihood one generation away from extinction” (2). As the paper “evaluates ... language preservation efforts, including both oral language classes and written projects” (2) at an on-reserve school in Nebraska, Rudin laments that oral language learning strategies were not particularly effective, noting that “[n]either the teachers (Elders) nor the coordinator have any background in linguistics and language pedagogy” (4). By contrast, Rudin praises the textual language learning strategies, noting they “have obvious value” (5) and “are potentially very good teaching tools” (7). Rudin’s privileging of text-based linguistic training as a form that preserves language for future generations allows her to downplay the effectiveness of Elders’ labours to teach children their language and thereby create sustained, intergenerational relationships rooted in nourishing the ongoing transmission of languages through conversation. This, combined with her emphasis on the Omaha language’s precarious slide towards extinction and her reification of re-writing documented, textual narratives as the more effective language learning strategy, conceptually parallels the work of preservation to transform an animate, living thing into an inanimate, disembodied thing. Active conversation with Elders is devalued in favour of reproducing already recorded and transcribed resources.

Though the rhetorical dimensions of “endangerment” and “preservation” with

reference to human cultures and their by-products have been well-established, their application to Indigenous languages has been without similarly extensive analysis, perhaps due to only recently waning views about languages which hold they are not living things in their own right, but rather inanimate systems of exchange and information (Cf. Malik 2000).^{xvi} Recent scholarship that has contested the notion that languages are inanimate and undeserving of rights tends to approach the topic so that

moral indignation about the plight of endangered languages is generated by linking the issue to ecological concerns about biodiversity and the conservation of the earth's resources (which are seen in this context as including its array of human cultures), rather than—as would also be possible—to political concerns about human rights, social justice, and the distribution of resources among more and less powerful groups. (Cameron 270)

Indeed, linguistic analyses framed around “language endangerment” rarely account for the fact that colonization and colonialism continue to pose dangerous affronts to Indigenous languages. Instead, its recourse to a globally shared, pan-human concern with “the conservation of earth's resources” (Cameron 270) operates such that its “preservationist” rhetoric ... [justifies] the need for outside agents and expertise in a linguistic ‘rescue mission’ [which deflects] public attention away from struggles for land and/or political rights” (Kroskrity 180).^{xvii} Similar to the possessive apostrophe in Henry Kelsey's *A Dictionary of the Hudson's Bay Indian Language* that I pointed out in the introduction, the concern with a “vanishing fund of human knowledge” (Kroskrity 180) reifies colonial pretensions to ownership of Indigenous peoples and their intellectual traditions. Moreover, the preservationist impulse, propelled by discursive “language

endangerment,” provides an academic opportunity for “outside agents” (Kroskrity 180) to use their “expertise” to “rescue” Indigenous languages, thereby reifying the value of colonial savior mentalities.

Another common term is “reversing language shift.” Anne Pauwels notes that “there is a considerable degree of consensus that ... LS [language shift] emerged as a field of enquiry in the mid-twentieth century” (9) following Joshua Fishman’s 1964 “Language Maintenance and Language Shift as a Field of Enquiry. A Definition of the Field and Suggestions for its Future Development.” In academic vogue from the 1970s to the 1990s, “reversing language shift” is still occasionally used in contemporary linguistics to refer to the work of promoting, valuing, teaching, and using Indigenous languages. A derivative of “language shift”—which denotes the process of language speakers shifting their daily speech away from one language and towards another—“reversing language shift” refers to efforts to halt or undo such shifts by examining the “relationship between change or stability in habitual language use, on the one hand, and ongoing psychological, social or cultural process, on the other hand, when populations differing in language are in contact with one another” (Fishman 1964 49). Reflecting the mid-century “science-ing” of the social sciences discussed earlier in this chapter, “reversing language shift” is a term connotatively devoid of humanity, treating languages and their stories as sterile objects accessorizing human routine instead of embodied expressions of human lifeways and ontologies. This parallels the mode of academic engagement that McLeod terms “the epistemological straitjacket and the colonial box that the social sciences have often placed on Indigenous narratives” (89). For example, in the prefatory note to his seminal 1991 monograph *Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical*

and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Languages, Joshua Fishman laments that throughout his career he has “struggled to approach language maintenance and language shift as fields of dispassionate scientific inquiry” (xi)—as such an approach is the norm demanded by his field—and still experiences significant emotional and political investment in projects aiming to reverse language shift. Defending the “sadness” attendant to his work with language shift and loss, Fishman notes he often compared his work with documenting and reversing language shift to the work of a physician, explaining to colleagues:

doctors always realize that all of their patients will ultimately die and that they are powerless to do anything to counteract that unhappy fact. On the other hand, they can still derive considerable satisfaction from understanding the cause of various illnesses and, accordingly, attempting to avoid or overcome those causes and, thereby, to delay the inevitable as long as possible. (xi-xii)

Fishman’s analogy, saturated in defeat, not only emphasizes the apparent inevitability of language shift and loss, but also suggests that the primary satisfaction involved parties can draw from their work is not actually to reverse such shift or to interrogate and undermine the socio-political contexts which make such a reversal necessary.^{xviii} The joy instead comes from delaying the inevitable and, in the temporal space of that delay, to take comfort in understanding linguistic processes following their analytic dissection.^{xix}

In this way, “reversing language shift” treats language decline and loss as inevitable processes of human existence, whereby the inevitability of “language shift” forecloses the need to engage why, beyond perfunctory nods to colonial expansion and control (e.g., Fishman’s gesture to “ongoing psychological, social or cultural [processes]”

[1964 49]) certain languages—such as Indigenous languages in North America, for example—are consistently hovering near obsolescence, while others—such as English or French—become de facto modes of global communication that are prerequisite for intercultural human communication.^{xx} Pauwels explains in her description of “reversing language shift,” for example, that “the general consensus amongst LM [language maintenance] researchers . . . sees LS as the inevitable result of such language contact. Furthermore, its process is often completed within three generations, especially in communities with limited recourse to LM institutions” (154). The antiseptic quality of Pauwels’ language, with its emphasis on timely inevitability of “language shift” over three generations, betrays how the term sanitizes what “language shift” actually entails. *Why* do people stop speaking languages with which they have intimate cultural connections? “Shift” denotes a slight “movement to do something, a beginning” (“shift” OED 1.a), which implies a decisive change in orientation or position that *begins* or inaugurates something new. Yet in the context of efforts to renew the use of Indigenous languages, the “shift” away from Indigenous languages and towards either English or French has been neither slight nor led by the choices of Indigenous peoples. Writing of the Canadian state’s efforts to eradicate Indigenous languages, Maliseet scholar Andrea Bear-Nicholas coins her own noun, “linguicide,” to signify “the killing of languages without killing the speakers” (5). Bear-Nicholas capitalizes on the conceptual and homonymic resonance of “linguicide” with “genocide” to highlight the destruction that colonization and the Canadian state has wrought on Indigenous peoples and their languages. Bear-Nicholas uses her terminology to invoke the notion that languages are animate, organic things that can be killed, insofar as the English suffix “cide” refers to

“the sense ‘the killing of (the person, animal, etc., indicated by the initial element)’ of a word (“cide 2.” OED). Like “homicide” or “regicide,” “linguicide” endows the killed party with animacy. “[W]e can no longer accept that language attrition is a natural process,” she affirms, “Indigenous languages are not being ‘lost’—they are being systematically ripped from Indigenous peoples through submersion education” (7). Advocating for immersion education for Indigenous youth in their own languages, Bear-Nicholas stresses “the enormous benefits of education in one’s mother tongue” (8) as a recuperative strategy in the face of ongoing linguistic colonization. Implicit in Bear-Nicholas’s terminology is a dynamic whereby if *linguicide* signifies “the killing of languages” (5), then immersion-based educational programs could facilitate their revitalization. In order to work towards and advocate for such programs, however, Bear-Nicholas affirms that it is necessary to make explicit the damaging impact that colonization and colonialism have had and continue to have on Indigenous languages and their speakers; in her essay, she does so by theorizing language loss as a process of systematic cultural violence, not an inevitable “shift” or consequence of contact between cultures.

1. 3 A Rhetoric of Revitalization: “Language Revitalization” in Academia, Activism, and Policy

Tracing the double-sided genealogy of “revitalization” can be further extended by illustrating the term’s circulation between activist, academic, and legislative/policy discourses. The popularization of “revitalization” as the organizing term for referring to the work of promoting, valuing, teaching, and using Indigenous languages occurred in the

early to mid 1990s, following a complexly interconnected spread of the term across academic, activist, and legislative discourses between 1968 and the early 1990s. Until the explosion of the term “language revitalization” in both academic and policy discourse in the 1990s, “revitalization” was largely invoked with reference to Wallace’s theorization, whereby academics used “revitalization” as a framework to analyze the religious movements and innovations of Indigenous peoples. Prior to the 1990s, “reversing language shift,” “language maintenance,” and “language endangerment/preservation” dominated linguistic engagements with Indigenous languages. This changed, however, in the 1970s following the activist work of the American Indian Movement (AIM) in the United States. Central to AIM’s mission to advocate for strengthened Indigenous sovereignty through political activism was a “philosophy of self-determination ... deeply rooted in traditional spirituality, culture, language and history” (Wittstock and Salinas n. p.). AIM worked to promote a return to Indigenous cultural practices, understandings of sovereignty, and languages by consistently emphasizing the reconnection of Indigenous peoples to their cultural practices, languages, and spirituality *through* Indigenous-led education. From 1970, as Bruce E. Johansen notes, when “AIM [seized] abandoned property at a former naval air station near Minneapolis as a base for Indian education” (xviii), AIM developed numerous educational programs that centered teachings about Indigenous languages, cultural practices, histories, and spirituality.^{xxi} In the late 1960s, AIM self-described their work using the word “revitalization,” with a different terminological ring than anthropologists’ invocation of the term up to that point. In 1968, Akwesasne Mohawk chief Ernie Benedict founded the Native North American Travelling College “to promote Native cultural revitalization across Canada and the United States”

(Johansen 200). Similarly, in 1969, the Movement released the Alcatraz Proclamation, a document requesting a new treaty governing the return of Alzatraz Island to its original stewards. The proclamation demanded, among other things:

An Indian Center of Ecology, which will train and support our young people in scientific research and practice to restore our lands and waters to their pure and natural state. We will work to de-pollute the air and waters of the Bay Area. We will seek to restore fish and animal life to the area and to revitalize sea-life which has been threatened by the white man's way. We will set up facilities to desalt sea water for human benefit (Johansen 313).

Moreover, AIM's 1972 "Trail of Broken Treaties: 20 Point Position Paper" demanded the abolition of the Bureau of Indian Affairs "by 1976" in order "to provide for an alternative structure of government for sustaining and revitalizing the Indian-federal relationship" ("Trail of Broken Treaties" n. p.). AIM's use of "revitalize" and "revitalization" with reference to both political activism and educational work, as well as ecological restoration, indicates the interconnected nature of their projects; whereas anthropological studies would term their work an example of secular revitalization per Wallace's model, focusing on the connections between their political activism and spiritual teachings, AIM saw the teaching of Indigenous languages as intimately connected to other forms of cultural learning and renewal. Language was considered an integral part of this reconnection, and so began to fall under the rubric of the "revitalization" work that AIM carried out between the late 1960s and early 1990s.

Concurrently,^{xxii} AIM was scholastically termed a "revitalization movement."

Anthropologist Rachel Bonney affirms in her 1975 dissertation, for example, that "the

American Indian Movement may also be regarded as a form of political revitalization” and “the stages of revitalization through which AIM has progressed appear to follow Wallace’s (1956) processual model more closely than other forms of secular revitalization” (131). Moreover, in 1977, Bonney published an article in *American Indian Quarterly* which expressly used the term “revitalization” to refer to the work of AIM leaders to encourage Indigenous peoples to learn and reconnect with their cultures. In “The Role of AIM Leaders in Indian Nationalism,” Bonney explains that the “issues toward which AIM has directed its efforts include the eradication of negative stereotypic images of Indians, the revitalization of Indian sovereignty and treaty violations, and the development of Indian nation” (212). It was at this point, I argue, that AIM’s activist discourse, the language of the academy vis-à-vis Wallace’s “revitalization movements,” and legislative/policy discourse started to interpenetrate one another. In the same year, the Minnesota State Legislature enacted the *American Indian Language and Culture Education Act*. The act does not expressly invoke the term “revitalization,” but it marks the first instance by which AIM’s political activism, theretofore self-described with reference to “revitalization,” was enacted in law with specific focus on the instrumentality of Indigenous languages to the movement’s overall mission to revitalize culture, relationships, and relationships to land. There is little by way of published sources tracing the lead-up to the *Act*; however, in his autobiography, former Minnesota State Senator Allan H. Spear reflects on the 1977 *Act* and expressly connects it with the political climate in Minnesota following AIM’s activist work. He states:

The militancy of the 1960s had spread to the Indian community and Minneapolis became the center of the best-known national Indian protest organization, the

American Indian Movement (AIM) ... In my second term, I authored the American Indian Language and Culture Act, one of the legislative achievements of which I remain most proud. (290-91)

The 1977 *Act* outlined specific strategies and funds designed to hire Indigenous peoples to teach their languages and cultural practices to “American Indian pupils in the state of Minnesota” (*Act* Sec. 2 126.46). Moreover, it specified that “the state board of education shall appoint an advisory task force on American Indian language and culture education programs” (*Act* Sec. 9 126.53), illustrating one of the first instances in which a government “task force” made up largely of Indigenous peoples was charged with investigating and evaluating work that could be of benefit to revitalizing Indigenous languages. The years following the *Act* saw more scholars using the term “revitalization” to refer to the work of AIM.^{xxiii} Moreover, in 1990, following the work of Indigenous Hawaiian educators to demand legislation similar to the 1977 *Act*, but on a federal level, came the *Native American Languages Act*. The 1990 *Act* also does not expressly use the term “revitalization,” but is noteworthy insofar as it affirms that “the status of the cultures and languages of Native Americans is unique and the United States has the responsibility to act together with Native Americans to ensure the survival of these unique cultures and languages” (*Languages Act* Sec. 102[1]). The 1990 *Act* builds on the commitments of the 1977 *American Indian Languages and Education Act*, but more expressly notes the state’s “responsibility” to revitalize Indigenous languages *in partnership with* Indigenous peoples. This recognition of responsibility, together with its invocation of the “unique” situation of Indigenous languages by 1990 (a terrible euphemism for centuries of colonial eradication), inaugurates the tendency of task force and policy discourse to, when

outlining the need for and means by which to revitalize Indigenous languages, articulate the issue in terms of Indigenous peoples and the state “[acting] together” (*Languages Act* Sec. 102[1]) in harmonious concern for Indigenous languages and cultures.

In the years following the 1990 *Act*, “revitalization” became a much more popularly used term to refer to the kind of work that AIM (and other Indigenous community projects, though the scope of this dissertation restricts focus to the central for of AIM) had done for decades prior—as opposed to Wallace’s theorization of “revitalization movements.” Finally, in 1994, the first “Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Symposium” was held at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona. The proceedings of this symposium indicate that by 1994 the term “revitalization” had become significantly more popular than “reversing language shift” or “language maintenance,” insofar as education scholar Jon Reyhner uses the term 25 times in his 14-page introduction to the proceedings, “Some Basics of Language Revitalization.” The symposium was very successful, and subsequent gatherings have been held annually since 1994.

The way that “revitalization” as both a term and a framework was taken up by Indigenous-led activist discourse on the one hand, and settler anthropologists and lawmakers on the other, indicates the extent to which “revitalization” has been mutually impacted by a “double-sided genealogy” (Rifkin 9) of usage and signification. While AIM used “revitalize” and “revitalization” with reference to their politically-engaged, holistic approach to reconnecting with Indigenous cultural practices and spirituality, anthropologists continued to put forward the term and apply it to the work of AIM in ways that bears the imprint of Wallace’s original theorization. However, as the years

went on, the term began to be used academically (following the 1990 *Native American Languages Act* and the “Stabilizing Indigenous Languages” symposia) in ways more commensurate with AIM’s use of the term than Wallace’s.

In terms of the above genealogy’s connection to this dissertation’s focus on Indigenous language revitalization in Canada, it is helpful to remember that by the time the term “revitalization” became popular as an organizing label for the work of promoting, valuing, using, and teaching Indigenous languages in the early 1990s, the Canadian government had already begun its work to collect information that would later be published as part of the final report of the 1992-1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). It thus makes sense that, from RCAP’s final report onwards, the word “revitalization” is present in many Canadian task force and policy documents concerning Indigenous languages and cultures. What becomes apparent, however, is that over time the Canadian state’s mobilization of this term in such documents has often come without meaningful commitment to supporting the use, teaching, and learning of Indigenous languages. In this way, the use of “revitalization” as a term of reference for the work of promoting, valuing, teaching, and using Indigenous languages has an almost entirely *rhetorical* function in Canadian state discourse. Moreover, following the release of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its *Calls to Action* in 2015—which makes extensive use of the term “revitalization” with reference to Indigenous languages—the term “revitalization” has trickled down into the discourse of public institutions in similarly rhetorical fashion, albeit styled in the guise of corporate self-promotion.

Appearing in the years following RCAP, the emergence of “revitalization” in the

landscape of Canadian governmental and political texts followed a decade of unprecedented government and inquiry work with Indigenous communities. In addition to illustrating revitalization's growing popularity, the state's mobilization of the term at that specific temporal juncture demonstrates the ways in which "revitalization" as a conceptual framework and inspirational mandate has become incorporated into the government's lexical apparatus of articulating its apparent dedication to Indigenous affairs leading up to the turn of the last century. Following the conclusion of RCAP in 1996, the Canadian government published an extensive four volume final report, which frequently invokes "revitalization" with respect to culture, languages, and relationships. It is worth noting by way of introduction that RCAP relied on multiple Indigenous commissioners for its work to meet with and hear from Indigenous communities across Canada. RCAP's final report, however, was published by then-named Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (now Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada). In this sense, RCAP's final report signals INAC's bureaucratic response to the years of work that went into RCAP, whereby the words of Indigenous peoples and commissioners were translated into a series of documents that centered the aims and approaches of the Canadian state. Volume 2 of the final report, *Restructuring the Relationship*, notes "In Volume 3, Chapter 6 we examine how public policy can support the efforts of Inuit, Métis and First Nations people to document, maintain, and revitalize their languages and traditions" (609). This chapter in Volume 3, *Gathering Strength*, affirms an aim to "give particular attention to the cultural institutions and programs necessary to . . . conserve and revitalize Aboriginal languages" (549). *Gathering Strength* echoes the language of the 1990 *Native American Languages Act* when it notes:

Canadian governments have an obligation to support Aboriginal initiatives to conserve and revitalize Aboriginal languages and as much as possible to undo the harm done to Aboriginal cultures by harshly assimilative policies. These measures must be undertaken, however, only after careful evaluation of what can be achieved and after developing an understanding of the roles public policy and Aboriginal communities and nations should have in pursuing language revitalization. (564).

Like *Restructuring the Relationship*, *Gathering Strength* is consistently attentive to the role of public policy and institutions as determinants of both healthy Indigenous cultures and healthy relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Moreover, *Gathering Strength* expressly connects the language of “revitalization” with comments on a “renewed partnership” (7) between the Canadian government and Aboriginal peoples. The report notes: “we make recommendations for changes in the structure of political and economic relationships between Aboriginal people and Canadian society to dismantle the last vestiges of colonial relationships and give impetus to social, cultural, political and economic revitalization” (68). In this sense, the report suggests that the revitalization of Indigenous languages is key to a relational fresh start. While the languages are to be “preserved” and “protected” in their existing states by the paternal government, the relationship under repair will be made new. Moreover, terming the ongoing social and economic inequality experienced by Indigenous peoples “the last vestiges of colonial relationships” (68) is particularly unsettling, insofar as it implies that such inequality is an unfortunately stubborn hangover of “colonial relationships” that have otherwise been mended or transformed in the years following contact.

Attendant to the promises from *Gathering Strength* was the Department of Heritage's 1998 pledge to allocate \$5 million per year over four years to eligible Indigenous communities and organizations seeking to teach Indigenous languages (Galley 262). This was the Aboriginal Language Initiative (ALI), the objective of which was "to support the preservation and revitalization of Aboriginal languages for the benefit of Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians" ("Aboriginal Language Initiative—Aboriginal Peoples' Program" n. p.). By 2003, the initiative's final report—the *Aboriginal Language Initiative (ALI) Evaluation Final Report*—was submitted to the Department of Heritage by Consilium Consulting Group, a firm dedicated to working with Indigenous groups at the local, provincial, and federal levels in issues related to economics, policy, research, and training.^{xxiv} The fact that this responsibility fell not under the purview of then-titled Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (now Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada), but under the Department of Heritage, deserves pause. First, this signals the Canadian state's appropriation of Indigenous languages under the ever-widening umbrella of "Canadian heritage." In this way, the Canadian state accepting responsibility for promoting the use and intergenerational transmission of Indigenous languages reflects a concern with preserving its *own* heritage, not with rectifying or redressing the centuries of state-led abuse that led to the languages not being spoken as frequently or by as many people. This is supported by the fact that the ALI's stated objective was to support the revitalization of Indigenous languages "for the benefit of Aboriginal peoples *and other Canadians*" ("Aboriginal Language Initiative—Aboriginal Peoples' Program," emphasis added). Second, the Department of Heritage's pledge rhetorically aligns Indigenous languages with the past, insofar as "heritage" reflects

history and inheritance more than it does present-ness and futurity. Indeed, this resonates with some of the language of RCAP's final report, too, insofar as "revitalize" is often invoked alongside "conserve," which conjures specifically ecological and environmental modes of protectionism and preservation (e.g., conservation areas and conservation laws) that themselves have been noted as constitutive of "language endangerment/preservation" paradigms (Cameron 2007).

Despite these points of contradiction, the language of the ALI report is explicitly future oriented, citing its "long-term objectives," (15) "future directions," (31) "future program delivery" (37) by the Department of Heritage, and "future joint-initiatives" (64) between Indigenous communities and the Canadian state.^{xxv} The document's concurrent use of "revitalization" and emphasis on the "need for a long-term, strategic approach and multi-year funding for language revitalization and retention" (65) highlights the co-signification of "revitalization" and futurity. To again make something as healthy as it was in the past, "revitalization" mobilized in this way discursively lays the groundwork for a future in the present by way of recuperating the vitality of the past. On one hand, a publication like *Gathering Strength* invokes "revitalization" in ways freighted with the assignation of Indigenous peoples and their languages to the past—to a realm of "heritage" that connotes conservation and endangerment. On the other hand, the ALI's *Final Report*—which was created following the promises of *Gathering Strength*—uses "revitalization" in an expressly future-oriented way. This demonstrates that "revitalization" is not only "double-sided" in an etymological or genealogical sense; indeed, as it manifested in task force reports and state policy discourse, "revitalization" has signified in ways that are simultaneously restrictive and expansive, negating and

affirming, colonial and decolonial.

Multiple other task force reports and suggested policy documents regarding Indigenous languages were authored in the years following the ALI's final report. The 2005 Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures' report *Towards a New Beginning: A Foundational Report for a Strategy to Revitalize First Nation, Inuit, and Métis Languages and Cultures*, for example, uses the term "revitalization" (albeit occasionally interchangeably with "preservation"), as does the 2007 *Assembly of First Nations National Language Strategy* (1-31 & following). Following its use in documents presented to the government, the term also became popularly used in state-issued publications. In 2007, Mary Jane Norris, then "senior research manager with the Research and Analysis Directorate, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada" published an article titled "Aboriginal Languages in Canada: Emerging Trends and Perspectives on Second Language Acquisition" in *Canadian Social Trends*, a journal published and disseminated by Statistics Canada. Norris' article uses revitalization frequently, which is noteworthy given that some of her other, later work (such as her 2012 article "From Generation to Generation") has favoured terms like "preservation" and "language documentation." In this sense, her use of "revitalization" when writing for Statistics Canada indicates that, by 2007, the term had become a central part of the state's vocabulary. Finally, also in 2007, "Article 13" of the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) affirmed:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for

communities, places and persons.

2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected and also to ensure that indigenous peoples can understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means. (7)

UNDRIP's terminology is particularly salient given Canada's initial, prolonged hesitation to sign on to UNDRIP's mandates despite spending 20 years helping to draft the final declaration. In 2010, the Canadian government (then led by Stephen Harper's Conservatives) issued its "Statement of Support on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," which notes that UNDRIP is "an aspirational document" (n. p.) Obliquely explaining Canada's self-perceived inability to implement UNDRIP, the statement explains that "Aboriginal and treaty rights are protected in Canada through a unique framework" (n. p.). The word "unique," which was used as an unintentional metonym for "colonized" in the 1990 *Native American Languages Act* in the United States, is also used to reference "the extent to which Aboriginal peoples and their cultures contribute to Canada's uniqueness as a nation" (n. p.). Thus Canada's 2010 statement of support centers its attention not on how to implement UNDRIP, but on how Indigenous peoples' cultures make *Canada* unique—Indigenous peoples become the jewelry sparkling on Canada's navel as it gazes down with rhetorical admiration. In a 2014 open letter to then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper, labour activist Paul Meinema noted that "[i]n practical terms, the federal government has done little if anything to breathe life into UNDRIP within Canada and seemingly has no intention to" (n. p.). Indeed, despite the government's documented commitment to Indigenous language initiatives—a

commitment that has been increasingly couched in the language of vitality, health, and revival—there has been little by way of genuine support from the state to support the revitalization of Indigenous languages apart from the ALI. Meinema’s metaphor of “[breathing] life” (n. p. 2014) into UNDRIP is apt. Recalling this chapter’s previous analysis of the etymology of “revitalization,” its central concept (deriving from “vital,” of “belonging to life” [“vital 1.” OED]) of animate vitality is something that has rarely been present in Canadian policy beyond rhetorical displays of support.

Following the Trudeau government’s adoption of UNDRIP in 2016, Minister of Justice and Attorney General Jodi Wilson-Raybould echoed the Harper government’s assertion that implementing UNDRIP into Canadian law was not a feasible pursuit. Speaking in the Assembly of First Nations in May 2016, Wilson-Raybould affirmed that “simplistic approaches, such as adopting the UNDRIP as being Canadian law are unworkable and, respectfully, a political distraction to undertaking the hard work required to actually implement it” (9). Wilson-Raybould references “undertaking the hard work” (9) to “actually implement” (9) UNDRIP, and explains that “the UNDRIP will be articulated through the constitutional framework of section 35” (10). Wilson’s note that Section 35 of the 1982 *Constitution Act* will be the apparatus through which to articulate UNDRIP recalls the 2010 Harper government’s “Statement of Support,” which cited the “unique framework” (n. p.) of the Canadian state’s Treaty relationships with Indigenous peoples as a pesky yet central hurdle blocking the implementation of UNDRIP. Moreover, also in May 2016, Indigenous Affairs minister Carolyn Bennett spoke for the Trudeau government, noting: “[b]y adopting and implementing the declaration, we are excited that we are breathing life into Section 35 and recognizing it now as a full box of

rights for indigenous peoples in Canada” (“UN indigenous rights declaration” n. p.). Bennett’s metaphor of “breathing life” into Section 35 (“UN indigenous rights declaration” n. p.) recalls Meinema’s 2014 criticism of the Harper government; per Bennett’s use of metaphoric “breath” to restore vitality and animacy to something, it is the *Constitution Act* that will be revitalized and reanimated through the government’s adoption of UNDRIP. What is absent from both Wilson-Raybould’s and Bennett’s statements is an acknowledgement of *how* this implementation could and will unfold in Canada. The focus remains, rhetorically, on the benefit of the adoption and implementation *for the state* and the necessity of working within its limitations.

The 2008-2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) dedicated significant labour and attention to affirming the integral role of Indigenous languages for their speakers’ efforts to live on their own terms, unencumbered by state efforts to mandate either English or French literacy only. Upon the release of its final report, the TRC released 94 Calls to Action, 6 of which expressly center Indigenous languages, noting that “[t]he federal government has a responsibility to provide sufficient funds for Aboriginal-language revitalization and preservation” (2). In “Reconciliation and the Revitalization of Indigenous Languages,” Valerie Galley affirms that the TRC offered Canada “the opportunity to reveal the truth of the Indian residential school system with respect to Indigenous languages and to make corresponding recommendations for revitalization” (255). She argues that the Canadian state “cannot undo what it has done [to Indigenous languages] as it gears up a reconciliation process while gearing down funding efforts to revitalize languages” (254). Indeed, as with previous eras of documented government concern or commitment, the Canadian state’s investment in

supporting Indigenous peoples' rights to revitalize their Indigenous languages continues to be largely rhetorical. Following the government's response to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, which affirmed the status and rights of Indigenous languages, the Liberal government under then-Prime Minister Jean Chrétien promised a whopping \$127 million over 11 years starting in 2002. However, by 2006, under the new Conservative government, then-Minister of Heritage Bev Oda removed the remaining funds in an effort to trim the budget (253). It is apparent from this literature analysis that the language of revitalization has become increasingly prominent not only in academic texts, but also in task force and state publications. Yet, as I have suggested above, the ideology that undergirds the Canadian state's adoption of this terminology warrants investigation: For what purposes do official, state-sponsored or state-issued texts utilize "revitalization" as a conceptual and terminological paradigm?

I have previously utilized Mark Rifkin's concept of a "double-sided genealogy" (9) to read the ambivalent significations of "revitalization" across activist, academic, and legislative/policy discourses. In terms of how "revitalization" signifies in state-sponsored or state-issued documents, it is helpful to more thoroughly unpack how Rifkin approaches the concept of "kinship" in *When Did Indians Become Straight?: Kinship, The History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty*. Rifkin engages state-initiated ideologies of normative filial formations, arguing that their coercive heteronormativity, when manifest in documents and government discourse, constitutes a "rhetoric of kinship [that] translates social formations by viewing them through a conceptual/ideological paradigm ordered around the biologically validated nuclear family, in which [deviations] can appear as perversely aberrant or a special exemption" (15). Rifkin notes that the blanket of this

rhetoric of kinship operates such that “social formations that do not fit the liberal framework are recast as deviations from heteronormative homemaking” (12).

Importantly, while Rifkin is careful to note the destructive power of the rhetoric of kinship to isolate, dismiss, and deny rights to subjects deemed beyond the bounds of the state’s conception of ideal citizens, he also emphasizes that “the rhetoric of kinship . . . can enable a rethinking of the ways the component parts of ‘sexuality’ may index forms of native political autonomy that are distinct from settler policy logics” (10). At once destructive and destabilizing, a rhetoric of kinship mobilized by Indigenous communities and creative writers capitalizes on the state’s tools of rhetorical exclusion in order to recast and rethink discussions of Indigenous autonomy with an understanding of the state’s prerequisite conditions for engagement.

Following Rifkin’s analytic approach to reading “kinship,” I propose that the strategic inclusion of the term and concept of “revitalization” into the Canadian state’s lexicon works to cultivate a political rhetoric which, like that of kinship summarized above, works to contain and control Indigenous languages as valuable parts of Canadian “heritage” that might, through their revitalization, reinvigorate the Canadian state’s public image by highlighting its commitment to improve its relationship with Indigenous peoples. That is to say, if Indigenous language rights and projects are articulated within the state’s aims and purview—whether as reclamations of national “heritage” or the conditions for renewed relationships—then their potential revitalization would fall under the umbrella of state responsibility. This explains, in part, why the Canadian state has produced abundant research to inform policy that centers the revitalization of Indigenous languages and cultures but has failed to significantly *implement* such policies or legislate

them. Yet just as Rifkin notes the American state has co-opted the concept of “kinship” relations to signify a narrow, exclusionary social model, the Canadian state has adopted “revitalization” into its lexicon to present a marketable veneer of commitment to Indigenous peoples’ rights to their cultures and languages without funding long-term projects that can actually enact or work towards Indigenous language revitalization. This Canadian rhetoric of revitalization gestures towards the way in which the state’s commitments—despite its frequent declarations in official documents—are rarely accompanied by financial or otherwise material backing; instead, they are predominantly rhetorical gestures or hypothetical nods of support. In this context, a useful and potentially transformative concept has been appropriated and malformed. Its concurrent use in linguistics and Canadian state policy since the 1990s points not necessarily to an informed and ethical engagement with the field and the state of Indigenous languages by the Canadian state, but rather to a strategic appropriation and re-deployment of the term in official documents to give the impression that the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state *is itself being revitalized*. Endowed with new life and vigour, this respect and partnership is then reflected in the language of the official documents it produces.

Oneida scholar Roland Chrisjohn and Cree thinker Tanya Wasacase have noted this rhetorical strategy at work in the deployment of the term and idea of “reconciliation.” Writing of former Prime Minister Stephen Harper government’s public commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and its diverse aims, they explain:

What Indigenous peoples and Canadians-at-large have been subjected to in the entire runup [sic] to the apology for residential schools and the creation of the

Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been rhetoric, a concerted effort to manipulate our perception and understanding of what is happening ... and, as such, is a form of discourse similar to political campaigning, advertising, spin doctoring, and other situations where the sizzle is more important than the (possibly non-existent) steak. (220)

Building on their conception of government discourse surrounding reconciliation, apology, and the TRC, Chrisjohn and Wasacase note that the word “reconciliation” itself implies that “at one point, [two parties] must have been *conciled*” (221). As such, the government’s use of the term and concept of “reconciliation” to characterize its support for Indigenous rights is fundamentally fallacious, “an attempt to insinuate a revised and bogus history of Indian/non-Indian relations in Canada” that is characterized by the idea that “once upon a time, Indians and settlers lived in peace and harmony” (222). Though Chrisjohn’s and Wasacase’s argument does not entirely accord with the concept of language revitalization, as there was indeed a state of previous vitality enjoyed by these languages, it parallels the state’s preoccupation with crafting a narrative of Canadianness predicated on a past that did not exist—a partnership characterized by mutual respect and shared “vitality” which might be reanimated by dismantling the “last vestiges of colonial relationships” (*Gathering Strength* 68). This demonstrates what happens when “revitalization” is harnessed by the state and deployed in a manner akin to “reconciliation.” Beginning with *Gathering Strength* and the emphasis on a “collective past” and “renewed relationship” (7), and developed between the 1990s and the present day, this rhetoric of revitalization re-frames the task of endowing a language with health in order to posit a shared, harmonious future between Indigenous and non-Indigenous

peoples/the state, which is premised on the false assumption that there was once a past state of vitality upon which to *model* a future.^{xxvi}

Tracing the scholastic genealogy of “revitalization,” “language preservation/ endangerment,” and “reversing language shift” indicates how the terms are freighted with the conceptual and methodological perspectives of the words themselves as well as those who use them. Likewise, tracing the use of “revitalization” in task force reports and state policy discourse indicates the rhetorical function that the term has accrued in the absence of meaningful, sustained commitment to the renewed use and teaching of Indigenous languages. However, I include this lengthy history not to discourage use of the term; rather, I seek to demonstrate how “revitalization” has been used not solely as a word, but also as a rhetorical concept mobilized to serve the ends of various disciplinary or political ideologies. In the spirit of this chapter’s epigraph, —that the purposes for which words “are directed” (Justice “Conjuring Marks”) are just as crucial as their utterances and significations—understanding the diverse mobilizations of the term “revitalization” not only helps shape a contemporary understanding of its continued prominence in describing the work of promoting, valuing, teaching, and using Indigenous languages. It also lays the methodological groundwork for the following pages, which emphasize both vigilance to history and an awareness of using language with precision, clarity, and attention to the permutations and plethora of possible significations encased in and radiating out from a word.

In the interest of moving beyond the purely linguistic terminologies that I have reviewed above, this chapter will now address theoretical alternatives to “revitalization” that arise from Indigenous understandings of storytelling, embodiment, and holistic

wellbeing. In this way, I seek to foreground the utility of a turn to reading Indigenous languages and literature through noting the conjoined nature of Indigenous languages, creative work, and embodiment. First, I turn to Indigenous literary scholars' work that signals the value of storytelling-based approaches to learning, teaching, and using Indigenous languages. Next, as this dissertation engages nêhiyaw and Métis writers' uses of nêhiyawêwin in their creative work, it is helpful to address how nêhiyawêwin and nêhiyaw-specific paradigms of language revitalization center speaking bodies as integral actors in ensuring the ongoing use and learning of Indigenous languages. Third, I address nêhiyaw and Métis understandings of embodiment, holistic wellbeing, and storytelling in order to illustrate the intimate connections between language revitalization and speaking bodies. From this, I read embodiment, nêhiyawêwin, and medicine in Gregory Scofield's *Love Medicine and One Song/ Sâkhitowin-Maskihkîy Êkwa Pêyak-Nikamowin* and Louise Bernice Halfe's *Blue Marrow* to suggest that the morphological and grammatical capabilities of nêhiyawêwin facilitate the creation of holistic, speaker-centered approaches to revitalizing Indigenous languages. Specifically, I argue that they present a mode of revitalization that does not descriptively render language, bodies, and the vitalities thereof, but rather speaks *through* and *to* bodies in ways that address the interconnected nature of embodiment, nêhiyawêwin, and relationships through storytelling.

1. 4 Speaking of Medicines: Storytelling, nêhiyawêwin and Embodiment

Many Indigenous scholars have theorized conceptual possibilities and mobilizations of language revitalization by offering perspectives on language that are

paired with Indigenous philosophies of education, land, and storytelling. Anishinaabe author and historian Basil Johnston, for example, draws on Anishinaabe models of teaching via stories in order to consider how and what individuals can learn *through* thoughtful use of language. He encourages individuals questioning their relationships to language learning to “think of [how] children” (43) learn through listening, whereby they develop an acute awareness of how sound shapes their environments. For Johnston, learning Indigenous languages and education through storytelling are about “learning the vitality of words” (47) and indulging in the affects that words and stories prompt. Outbursts such as laughter will come first, he says; thought and contemplation will follow.

Similarly, Syilx writer, scholar, and theorist Jeannette Armstrong writes of using her Indigenous language, *nsilxcen*, and affirms: “[t]hrough my language, I understand that I am being spoken to, I am not the one speaking. The words are coming from many tongues and mouths of Okanagan people and the land around them” (181).^{xxvii} For Armstrong, speaking her language is to become an embodied conduit through whom the land and its peoples talk. Speaking is not an act executed in solitude and without consequence, and to speak is not to conform to a solitary identity. Armstrong understands *nsilxcen* as a system of sounds, as communication provided by the land and her ancestors to guide her instruction. In this context, the vitality or health of a language reflects that of the land and peoples through whom it flows. Like Johnston, Armstrong theorizes the use and faculty of teaching and speaking Indigenous languages by way of reference to her understanding of the language’s unique history and the cosmologies it reflects, not to its potential rescue through classificatory or descriptive studies.

Likewise, Cree, Ojibwe, Scottish, and English scholar Naomi McIlwraith affirms “[p]eople need language as one of the conventions by which they belong to each other, to carry forward their history, their customs and their hopes to future generations” (75). McIlwraith centralizes the import of language as a tool with which to “carry forward” (75) the history of a people. Instead of relegating a language’s era of bygone fluency or popular usage to a past at sharp remove from the present, McIlwraith notes that a language’s continued use in the present enables a sort of line traced backwards, whereby the past is always part of the present, its legacy informing an ongoing process of identity negotiation. To “carry forward” (75) one’s history emphasizes how the present is not a moment that freezes cultural remnants as the hangovers of the past. Rather, it is but a step in a walk towards “future generations” (85) who will likewise “carry forward” (75) the traditions of those before them. This temporal stance emphasizes Indigenous languages’ futures as intimately connected to multiple generations of speakers. Whereas the “future” has elsewhere been mobilized vis-à-vis Indigenous languages in a way that is conceptually aligned with the processes of “modernity”—such as Kenan Malik’s position in his inflammatory article “Let them Die,” which argues that Indigenous languages are anterior to ameliorative social progress—McIlwraith’s fluid, mutually informing conception of past, present, and future challenges the grounds upon which a “modernity” like that espoused by Malik rests: the extermination of Indigenous peoples and their languages as a progressive social good. Importantly, McIlwraith refers to the work of “language retrieval,”^{xxviii} further corroborating the temporal notion of repetition and return that is present in “revitalization” insofar as one must visit the past to inhabit the present moment and thereby the future. McIlwraith’s conception of language

revitalization not only troubles the supposition that Indigenous peoples, their languages, and their traditions are anterior to progressive modernity, but also capitalizes on the equation of Indigenous peoples with a bygone era to theorize a way for the past and futurity to co-exist through “carrying forward” tradition.^{xxix} Ensuring the continuation and use of Indigenous languages is, for McIlwraith, a matter of speaking and teaching across a temporal continuum, whereby “recovery,” “retrieval,” and “renewal” can co-signify the work of revitalizing Indigenous languages and the work of connecting generations through language. Moreover, McIlwraith’s conception of “[carrying] forward” (75) Indigenous languages resonates with McLeod’s writings on *nêhiyaw* narrative memory, which he notes is “overtly futuristic in its orientation” and “embodied within our lives and bodies” (*Memory* 94). McLeod explains further that “Cree narrative memory is an ongoing conversation, a constant play between present, past, and future” whereby “the Cree language and traditions are the threads that hold this particular fabric [i.e., narrative memory] together” (*Memory* 95).

For these scholars, to revitalize a language is to respect the vitality of words and how bodies and minds respond to them. It is to recognize a language as intimately connected to the territories and bodies of its speakers, as opposed to a collection of scientific data whose study may ameliorate scholastic or legislative understandings of language and culture. It is to encourage models of learning and engagement that reflect the languages themselves and the cultural practices of their speakers.

These scholars’ insights highlight the necessity of an approach to language revitalization that grows from the insights of the languages and cultures that are being revitalized. If storytelling and creative work (like writing and poetry, for example) are

central features of Indigenous peoples' approaches to learning and using their languages, then it is helpful to consider how literary studies, in conversation with discussions of language revitalization, can help advocate for language revitalization models that build vitality through story. Indeed, Johnston, Armstrong, McIlwraith, and McLeod offer approaches to learning, using, and teaching language that are attuned to the cultures and peoples who speak a language. In this sense, it is helpful to understand *how* an Indigenous language creates meaning for its speakers in order to understand the connection between culturally rooted approaches to revitalizing a language and the cultural practices and histories of its speakers. For nêhiyawêwin, the language's unique morphological structure enables significant terminological experimentation. Whereas English relies primarily on syntax to build sentences and thereby convey meaning, nêhiyawêwin conveys meaning through a flexible yet complex morphological system whereby words are adapted and modified via prefixes, suffixes, vowel inflection, medial theme signs, etc., to signify multifaceted concepts and processes. For example: If English were to describe different modes of fishing, it would do so through modifying the adjectives and adverbs that surround the verb "fish." A speaker could say, "s/he fishes with a net," or "s/he fishes with a hook and line." nêhiyawêwin works differently, modifying different stems to express the two modes of fishing with single words. "pakitahwâ," for example, signifies "s/he fishes by net," (Wolvengrey 166) and "kwâskwêpicikêw" means "s/he fishes (with rod and reel)." (Wolvengrey 81). The words are not recognizably similar in their makeup or sound. For kwâskwêpicikêw, the word comes to its meaning through combining "kwâskwê," meaning "upwards," (Wolvengrey 81) or to "jump up quickly," with "pici(w)," meaning "s/he moves" (Wolvengrey 180)

Thus kwâskwêpicikêw, via its combination of different morphological parts, actually describes the movement of an actor pulling up a fishing line to reel in a potential catch. This example not only highlights the morphological dexterity of nêhiyawêwin, but also illustrates its intensely descriptive nature and focus on embodied action, which can enable a speaker's sustained engagement with the actions, actors, and processes that are contained in a word or phrase.

In addition to its morphological dexterity and focus on embodied processes, nêhiyawêwin nouns are organized not by gender, as is often the case in Indo-European languages, but rather by animacy (whether a noun is living or not).^{xxx} By extension, nêhiyawêwin's animate/inanimate organizational system impacts the language's classification of verbs. That is, there are different classes of verbs in nêhiyawêwin depending on the animacy (or lack thereof) of both a verb's actor as well as the recipient of its action. In its simplest incarnation, as noted above in my etymological analysis, "revitalization" is chiefly concerned with the life force that inheres within an object or process. nêhiyawêwin's reliance on animacy to organize its nouns suggests its compatibility with the conceptual aims of revitalization to nourish and support the vitality inherent in a language and those who speak it.

nêhiyaw thinkers have utilized nêhiyawêwin's linguistic malleability to theorize their own linguistic and philosophical paradigms about language revitalization that extend beyond the limitations of English, and to offer thought that is more commensurate with their understandings of nêhiyaw storytelling practices that are central to language learning and use. For McLeod and McIlwraith, for example, nêhiyawêwin offers greater potential than English for theorizing the use of Indigenous languages and philosophies in

both creative as well as educational contexts. In “Cree Poetic Discourse,” McLeod describes “the process of poetry ... as mamâhtâwisiwin (the process of tapping into the Great Mystery), which is mediated by our historicity and wâhkôtowin (kinship)” (91). Together, these two processes enable “ê-ânisko-âcimocik,” which

Literally translated, means: “they connect through telling stories.” The central strand in which Cree poetic discourse flourishes and continues is through the connection of contemporary storytellers and poets to the ancient poetic pathways of our people. By drawing upon the epic and traditional narratives of our people, we can ground ourselves in cultural-specific references and linguistic anchors ... (91)

For McLeod, the expressive abilities of nêhiyawêwin in contemporary creative works and literary philosophy draws a through line from the “ancient poetic pathways” (91) of nêhiyawak to their contemporary incarnations. It is the language, together with nêhiyaw philosophies of storytelling, kinship, and land that “anchors” (91) such thought, thereby cultivating the conditions for ensuring its further continuation. Moreover, as noted above, McLeod emphasizes the embodied nature of this process, whereby “stories are embodied memory [that] profoundly influence how we live and understand our lives” (*Memory* 72). For McLeod, nêhiyawêwin and wâhkôtowin are the vehicles through which “memory is ... embodied in the land and in our bodies” (*Memory* 92). This reflects not only the cultural practices and histories of nêhiyawak, but the structure of nêhiyawêwin itself; the language’s focus on embodied process that are contextually oriented enables and facilitates speakers’ ability to *use* nêhiyawêwin to connect generations of nêhiyawak through storytelling. McLeod further emphasizes the primacy of the body and its faculties

for nêhiyaw storytelling when he explains “All poetic pathways are embodied understandings,” in which “Stories are not abstract and cut off from the living world around but completely enmeshed in the concrete world of sensations and physical connections” (“Cree Poetic Discourse” 113). In this way, “[e]mbodied memory is the connection to sensations of the body” that is mediated by “kinship/relationships” (“Cree Poetic Discourse” 113) and expressed through nêhiyawêwin. As McLeod explains, speaking nêhiyawêwin enables speakers’ embodied connections to their sensations, opens up poetic “pathways” (“Cree Poetic Discourse” 91), and facilitates their connections to and with kin.

Likewise, McIlwraith uses her nêhiyawêwin fluency to offer a thought about what learning an Indigenous language asks of potential students. “*piko sa-kôhki-nitohtaman ka-nisitohtaman nêhiyawêwin âhpo êtikwê êkâ ka-âkayâsimoyan mistahi*,” (88) she writes, which she translates loosely as: “You must listen very hard to understand the Cree language and maybe not talk in English so much” (88). To return to McIlwraith’s conception of language revitalization as the work to “carry forward” (75) linguistic traditions, critical engagement with nêhiyawêwin and its malleable expressiveness can become one of the methods by which to support the language’s futurity. Through using and unpacking the language, thinkers like McLeod and McIlwraith are able to broaden nêhiyawêwin’s signifying repertoire, to use its words and grammar to explain and nuance their analyses, and in so doing promote its transmission to future generations. nêhiyawêwin signifies through past, present, and future, “[threading]” (*Memory* 95) these timeframes and those who speak nêhiyawêwin together through stories and embodied memory. In these contexts, promoting the use of Indigenous languages is not

terminologically guided by a requisite return to a past or bygone state of vitality, but rather through an acknowledgement of Indigenous peoples' ongoing commitments to teach and write in their languages—and not to use English as frequently.

It is not my aim in this chapter or anywhere in this dissertation to, as McLeod and McIlwraith have done, coin a term that might be used to signify language revitalization, education, or expression in a nêhiyaw-specific ontology.^{xxxii} Instead, I take my cue from McLeod's attention to storytelling, creative works, embodiment, and nêhiyawêwin, asking: How can creative work, specifically writing, that engages nêhiyawêwin and emphasizes the primacy of embodied feeling theorize different conceptual approaches that, aligned with the aims of revitalization, do not primarily rely on linguistic or social-scientific terminologies to account for Indigenous peoples' efforts to teach, use, learn, and value their languages?

For Indigenous peoples, the body has been and continues to be the primary conduit through which colonial power exercised its forces of containment, abuse, and control. For example: The colonial state's control of Indigenous peoples' nutrition (by fundamentally altering Indigenous diets through insistent removal of traditional hunting networks), agriculture (manifest with respect to rationing through Indian agents and ill-stocked reserve stores, prompting generations of poor nutrition and bodily adaptation to the foods provided to Indigenous peoples), sexual reproduction,^{xxxiii} and sexual expression and identity (by foisting heteronormative partnership on Indigenous peoples, and through systematic sexual abuse and shaming in Residential Schools) illustrate that controlling and doing violence to Indigenous peoples' bodies was instrumental to the state's effort to control and eradicate Indigenous peoples. Truly beyond the scope of this project, the

lengths to which the Canadian state has gone to police and constrain the bodily vitality and expression of Indigenous peoples has been part of a centuries-long project to strip Indigenous peoples of, among other things (e.g., sovereignty, self-determination, self-sufficiency) their abilities to experience joyous embodiment.

With this history in mind, the creative use of Indigenous languages can be an avenue through which to bodily express the pleasures, capabilities, connections, and pain of a person and a community. As Métis scholar June Scudeler explains, Indigenous peoples' use of their languages to "[write] our own stories" creates narratives that function as "powerful *maskihkîy*—medicine" (194) which work to remedy the deeply felt legacy of colonialism. Similarly, in "Why Cree is the Sexiest of all Languages," *nêhiyaw* writer Tomson Highway avers that *nêhiyawêwin* celebrates "the human body in all its pleasurable capacities," (39) whereas "English, at one point in its history, was evicted from the body" (38). It is the delight that *nêhiyawêwin* takes in the body and its desires and functions which Highway capitalizes on when teaching, noting that he will "thrill [students] to the bone in Cree to the point where they will wiggle and shake and rattle and roll" (36) with laughter and joy. Indeed, the ability of Indigenous languages to inspire bodily wellbeing is becoming increasingly apparent in realms educational, creative, and medicinal. A 2014 study from the University of Alberta has engaged the holistic importance of Indigenous peoples maintaining links to their languages, showing that "First Nations that have been better able to preserve their culture may be relatively protected from diabetes" (Oster et al. 51), and "First Nations with greater than 50% of members having Indigenous language knowledge [have] youth suicide rates six times less than those First Nations with less than 50% of members having Indigenous language

knowledge” (51). The correlation between health and wellbeing for Indigenous peoples and, to use Oster et al.’s phrase, “cultural continuity” (51) is paramount. The concepts of language and story, culture and tradition as healing, as medicine, are not simply conceptual. Indigenous languages nourish the health of their speakers, with one participant in the University of Alberta study affirming: “Who we are is determined through our language. We speak our language and that determines where you [sic] come from, what your culture is ... It comes in terms of how we eat, and in terms of how we educate ourselves and conduct ourselves in that full circle” (154-5). Other participants emphasized their language’s connection to “a holistic view of health that includes mind, body, spirit, emotions” (155), and thus it is through their speech, engagement, and knowledge of traditional tongues that speakers can embody the holism so crucial to their cultures.

Indeed, medicine often grounds Scofield’s and Halfe’s storied uses of *nêhiyawêwin* in *Blue Marrow* and *Sâkihtowin-Maskihkîy Êkwa Pêyak-Nikamowin*. Referencing either the word itself (as in the title of Scofield’s collection) or the processes involved in bringing someone or something back to a state of health, both collections are concerned with how *nêhiyaw* medicine continues to impact and influence *nêhiyawak* in their contemporary lives. Scofield emphasizes, for example, that “[a]mong many First Nations people, love and the old-time medicines are very much a part of our spiritual reality and existence” (*Sakihitowin* 11). Likewise, Halfe notes in her 2007 interview with Ian Ferrier, “when I was at home as a little girl I had watched my grandmother in her lodge, in her sweat lodge, and doing her medicines” (WordsAloud n. p.).^{xxxiii} Halfe affirms that learning about medicine from her grandmother is a central part of her

traditional upbringing that she has carried with her. In these collections, the curative potential of *nêhiyawêwin* and storied memory—what Scudeler terms the “powerful *maskihkîy*” (194) of telling one’s own stories—come together with *nêhiyaw* medicine to present a concurrent regeneration of bodily and linguistic vitality. In this way, *Blue Marrow* and *Sâkihtowin-Maskihkîy Êkwa Pêyak-Nikamowin* enact a sort of *nêhiyawêwin-maskihkîy*, which uses language to mend bodies scripted as inhuman or unfeeling by colonial discourse by focusing on their inherent capacity for pleasure, joy, and creative expression. Just as the collections reference medicine, and, per Scudeler, *are* *maskihkîy* in their own rights, they illustrate the interconnected nature of speaking Indigenous languages, telling Indigenous stories, and uplifting and affirming the sensations of Indigenous peoples’ bodies.

Considering the interrelation of health, language, and culture, the power of what McLeod has termed “embodied understandings” (93) lies in their call for attention to the body’s vitality and wellbeing when accounting for its expressive agency. How does the body connect and respond to its sensations? How do sensations inspire language and creative thought? Moreover, how does one creatively reckon with embodiment in a state that has for centuries sought to destroy the vitality, joy, and expressive abilities of one’s body? It is with these questions in mind that this chapter will now turn to the poetic texts of Louise Bernice Halfe and Gregory Scofield. These poets’ storied uses of *nêhiyawêwin* craft a mode of revitalization that speaks not *of* language, the body, and its potential or inherent vitality, but rather speaks *through* the body. Sharply individual yet similarly complex, *Blue Marrow* and *Sâkihtowin-Maskihkîy Êkwa Pêyak-Nikamowin* theorize a revitalization of the body and its various sensations through the “embodied

understandings” (McLeod “Cree Poetic Discourse” 113) of poetry, story, and nêhiyawêwin.

1. 5 Medicine, nêhiyawêwin, and Loving Bodies in Louise Halfe’s *Blue Marrow* and Gregory Scofield’s *Love Medicine and One Song/ Sâkihtowin-Maskihkîy Êkwa Pêyak Nikamowin*

Louise Bernice Halfe’s *Blue Marrow* was originally published in 1998 as a collection of poems, and was republished in 2005 as an extended long poem; in this chapter, I build my readings from the second, long poem publication of *Blue Marrow*. The long poem is difficult to paraphrase due to its impressive scope and poetic project to tell the stories of nêhiyaw and Métis women left out of or forgotten by mainstream histories of the fur trade. *Blue Marrow* imagines the lives and thoughts of generations of these women by way of a recurring poet-speaker who punctuates the poem’s overwhelming number of voice and character changes with calls to her ancestors as well as her own poetic reflections. The poet-speaker, who is named the Keeper of the Stories, or âcimowinis, meditates on her poetic task to recuperate the stories of nêhiyaw and Métis women forgotten by mainstream history—women who affirm their forced, disembodied silence: “They tore our tongues out” (19)—thereby filling the deliberate elisions of both archaic textual resources (such as the dictionary resources mentioned in this dissertation’s introduction), as well as popular understandings of Indigenous women’s role in shaping the fur trade and the colonial nation that grew from it. By presenting these stories, *Blue Marrow* imagines a concurrent revitalization of both the body as well as language; despite the use of their bodies as intercultural currency in the fur trade, items to be pawned between men to demonstrate good favour, *Blue Marrow*

highlights the agential desire and bodily expression of nêhiyaw and Métis iskwêwak (women).

Blue Marrow begins with “Voice Dancer ... the Guardian of Dreams and Visions, prayer” remembering how nimosom—her grandfather—would “open a big book. His fingers traced the path of *cahkipêhikana*, mouth moving quietly” (1). *cahkipêhikana* is the nêhiyawêwin word for the syllabic writing system, and thus the first text *Blue Marrow* introduces is a book in syllabics that her grandfather teaches Voice Dancer through tactility: his mouth moves quietly, his fingers trace the page. After her grandfather’s death, Voice Dancer laments: “my memory went to sleep. I woke in the mountains lying in the crook of my white husband’s arms” (1). The blank space in Voice Dancer’s memory between her grandfather’s book and her new identity as a fur trader’s wife is resonant with the text’s larger focus on the stories of nêhiyaw and Métis iskwêwak left out of, forgotten by history: What comes between the girl tracing a text in her people’s tongue and the bartering of her body in a growing network of imperial capital? The “big book” (1) that Voice Dancer’s grandfather uses to teach her language through touch is never named; it could, however, be a copy of the Christian Bible. In an interview with Ian Ferrier, Halfe uses the phrase “went to sleep” with reference to her loss of contact with nêhiyaw culture while she was at the Roman Catholic Blue Quills Indian Residential School as a child. Referencing a trip she took in her mid-twenties, Halfe explains that reconnecting with the Alberta landscape “renewed and revitalized what had been damaged ... and that’s where it began, my journey of reclaiming and resurrecting what had gone to sleep” (WordsAloud n. p.). Exposure to colonial religious indoctrination through text, for Halfe, was the occasion for her memory’s prolonged slumber. Thus

Voice Dancer's memory going "to sleep" (1) following her grandfather's death, and an encounter with his "big book" (1)—however intimate and gentle that encounter may have been—mirrors Halfe's understanding of her own journey to remove herself from the colonial state's attempted destruction of her nêhiyaw consciousness. Waking to reconnect with the land and her language through beckoning the voices of her ancestors, Voice Dancer's memory of her grandfather's literate touch becomes a reflection on the embodied tactility generative to her language-learning as a child.

After she wakes from slumber, Voice Dancer returns to her grandfather's cabin, and explains she "filled the pocket between the logs with papers, stacked the walls with my books" (1). Stuffing her home with text, Voice Dancer cocoons herself in the house lined with papers like those her grandfather traced when she was a child, and she notes after settling in: "I'm awake now and remove my ring" (2). Here, Voice Dancer uses the books of her past to create an insulating lining for her home, thereby protecting herself from the intrusion of her trader husband. After stuffing the walls to fill the blank space of her slumbered memory, she jolts awake, removing the metallic band that bound her in confusion to a white husband. nêhiyaw, Scottish, and Caribbean scholar Tasha Beeds, writing of the connection between storytelling and kinship for nêhiyawak, affirms that "the mind [is like] a 'house of being ... [that] has the ability to recall the narratives that provide the paths to identity, purpose, and responsibilities to wâhkôhtowin—the paths to being who we are as nêhiyawak" (67). Voice Dancer's efforts to insulate and thereby inure her home against the incursion of her white settler husband occurs at the very beginning of *Blue Marrow*, and in this sense it enables her to "recall the narratives" (Beeds 67) of wâhkôhtowin that have provided her "paths to identity, purpose, and

responsibilities” (Beeds 67) to her relations. Voice Dancer prioritizes her relationship to her grandfather over her relationship with her husband, and insulating her house with materials like the ones he used to teach her both wakes her up after her “memory went to sleep” (1) and lays the groundwork for her meditation on how storytelling and wâhkôtowin become embodied through nêhiyawêwin.

Moreover, Halfe emphasizes the tactility generative to Voice Dancer’s engagement with her language—to trace a page, or to physically stuff the walls with many pages—in a way reminiscent with McLeod’s contention about the necessity of understanding the role of one’s body vis-à-vis language and story. It is her bodily connection via her grandfather’s literate touch and the physicality of her labour to insulate her house with pages that actively links together the power of her language and her efforts to wake herself from an imperially imposed slumber. In the opening to *Blue Marrow*, embodied relationality between family overtakes textuality as the site of language learning for Voice Dancer such that the “big book” (1) is remembered through their encounter, not through the words in its pages. In this sense, textual forms of language learning become generative when they are grounded in wâhkôtowin, and work to build specific “paths to identity, purpose, and responsibilities” (Beeds 67). In this instance, texts do not “have obvious value” (Rudin 5), and they are not “very good teaching tools” (7)—as text-based models of language documentation and revitalization have affirmed—because of their formal function to preserve, archive, and materially manifest words. Rather, texts like Voice Dancer’s grandfather’s “big book” (1) are invested with value and potential for language learning when they become part of processes that teach language through relationships and story. Though Halfe’s *Blue*

Marrow does not position itself as an example of language revitalization, its opening pages set up a dynamic of language use that center embodied learning, obligation to kin, and creative reflection—what Beeds notes as the mind’s “ability to recall the narratives [and] ... the paths to being who we are as nêhiyawak” (67).

Meira Cook writes about how relationships and embodied encounters are central to *Blue Marrow*, noting that “the reader discovers the love story as betrayal, violence, appropriation, dispossession, seduction, perfunctory trade, and erotic barter ... [and] at the same time, the narrator is healed by the love of the foremothers, a maternal vocation expressed by the sharing of story and memory” (157). The character “Grandmother Bargain” (54) illustrates the contradictory states of feeling generative to such relationships. Traded to a white man for foodstuffs and supplies, she explains “*My father saw / my future husband*” (55), and provides a catalogue of the goods bestowed upon her father following her marriage. Among them is “*tea—maskihkîwâpoy*” (55). Though the single line translation-by-dash seems innocuous, the nêhiyawêwin word reveals more about this tea and what its role might be in Grandmother Bargain’s impending future. The word’s beginning, “maskihk-,” for example, indicates that it is a modification of maskihkîy, thereby alerting readers that this tea is medicinal in nature. Moreover, the glossary clarifies its definition: “*makhkîwâpoy*, 1. Medicine tea, 2. Labrador tea” (105). Labrador tea is a medicinal beverage used by women to induce miscarriages in the event of unwanted pregnancies. Given that Grandmother Bargain’s notes that she already has a nêhiyaw child^{xxxiv} who, like their father, “kept watch” (55) as the fur trader encloses upon her, the gift of Labrador Tea simultaneously alludes to the bodily autonomy available through nêhiyaw medicine and forecloses an opportunity for Grandmother Bargain to

exercise that autonomy once she has been forced to marry a trader. When Grandmother Bargain's father looks at her, he sees only "the trade" (55); she becomes a bounty of items he will receive in exchange for surrendering his kinship obligations to her and her child. It is the translation of the nêhiyawêwin word, together with Halfe's provided glossary, that makes these implications clear. Here, nêhiyawêwin explicates registers of nêhiyaw medicine that afford Indigenous women the power to maintain their bodily autonomy while simultaneously highlighting how colonial relationships of barter, which treated Indigenous women's bodies as objects to be bought and sold, undermine that very power.^{xxxv}

In contrast to Grandmother Bargain's experience, which illustrates the restriction of bodily autonomy as nêhiyaw iskwewak were treated as instruments of the fur trade, a vignette introduced by "kayas-âcimowin nôtoskwêsiw wîhtam/ a grandmother lifted a scraper against a hide" offers an example of how *Blue Marrow* express the bodily desire and vitality of nêhiyaw iskwewak. The poet-speaker notes that "as she/spoke, fur gathered at her feet" and "the story unfolded" (25). nôtokwêsiw, the poem explains, lay outside the home of a fur trader with whom she was enamoured, wrapping her naked body in a buffalo robe for him to find. "*driven / by [her] need of him*" (25), nôtokwêsiw recalls consummating their mutual desire, culminating with "*the loud moan of my need freed*" (26). Her desire for the trader is her prerogative, and she engineers the entire encounter to free the need she feels for him—a freedom vocalized in a bodily exhortation of pleasure. Moreover, telling her story is a process of unfolding: it is the same motion that her lover performed when he "lifted the corners" (25) of the robe she waited in to begin their union. Moreover, nôtokwêsiw revels in the pleasure and agency she felt

during their relationship: “*I don’t regret those days*” (26) she affirms, “*I’d have him again. / I’d have him/ again*” (26). The fact that *nôtokwêsiw* refers to their union this way is telling: It is she who “had” the white trader—he was in her possession during their union. Despite the instrumentalization of these women’s bodies in a system of exploitative capital, *Blue Marrow* often highlights their pleasure and desire. Not simply passive recipients of the actions foisted upon them, they revel in their bodies—their pleasure, their childbearing, and their mothering—insofar as *nôtokwêsiw*’s lack of regret contains her admission of her “*belly / swollen with winter feed*” (26)—and their beauty.

In addition to the bodily sensations *Blue Marrow* notes in these women, its references to breath—figured frequently as “*yôtin*” (56), wind—demonstrates the power of the Grandmothers’ speech to sway and shape the words of the poet-speaker. Earlier in this chapter, I noted the significance of “breath” vis-à-vis “revitalization”’s root in the word “vital,” whereby the word “vital” possesses a poetic etymology to do with “breath or air” (OED “vital, 2.c”) and “[c]onferring or imparting life or vigour; invigorating, vitalizing; life-giving” (OED “vital, 5”). This poetic permutation of “revitalization”’s central concept, vitality, illustrates the compatibility between “revitalization” and creative work that engages “breath or air” (OED “vital, 2.c”) as an animating force for speaking bodies. However, in *Blue Marrow* the poet speaker’s invocation of “*yôtin*” (56) as both breath and wind demonstrates a *nêhiyaw*-specific understanding of the power of breath to flow through and animate one’s creative language through intergenerational storytelling. After she has initially beckoned the grandmothers to speak to her, to guide her telling, the poet-speaker affirms “*I hold / the wind*” (24). The word “hold” implies capture and confinement in English, yet the poet-speaker invokes it to signify carrying the

grandmothers' breath within herself. In this way, she embodies the breath that flows through her and animates her poetic task to tell the stories of the nêhiyaw and Métis women left out of mainstream history—indeed, their breath informs the poet-speaker's "embodied understandings" (McLeod "Cree Poetic Discourse" 113) of her connection to the women who came before her. It is her poetic conversations with the grandmothers that is life-giving; their breath blows through the poet-speaker and animates, revitalizes, her as a speaking body who can share their stories. Shortly after, the grandmothers address the poet-speaker, saying:

We will speak
 We will fill each leaf
 Pages of song ...
 We will hold you
 We will fill your lungs
 We will be there. (28)

Despite the ephemerality of wind as an element, it forms the fuel within the Keeper of the Stories' body—it is something she holds or carries within herself to power her poetic task. The grandmothers also offer another signification for "hold," insofar as to hold something in their context is to embrace, to encircle, the poet-speaker as she begins her work. Later, the "*kahkiyaw iskwêwak, nôtokwêsiwak, /câpanak, êkwa ohkomipanak*" respond to the poet-speaker's request that they "Climb down" and tell her stories: "they scold with a wind/ that shakes leaves" (54). The movement between "leaf" and "leaves," here, is noteworthy, as it demonstrates the homonymic play between words signifying text, pages of story, and the arboreal leaves stirred by their presence in the landscape.

That is, just as the grandmothers' voices and *nêhiyawêwin itwêwina* (words) impact and shape the environment surrounding the poet-speaker, they too impact and shape the stories contained in the leaves of *Blue Marrow*. The grandmothers' breath and the stories issued therefrom function as the life force, the catalyst, for the long poem as a whole; its emphasis on storytelling grounded in *wâkôhtowin* and *nêhiyawêwin*, transmitted through the grandmothers' breath and the movements of the prairie landscape, provide a *nêhiyaw*-specific understanding of the power of breath and speech to animate and guide the poet-speaker's poetic task. In this way, *Blue Marrow* imagines a mode of language use that literally speaks *through* the bodily vitality of the poet-speaker; as the conduit through whom the grandmothers' voices flow, her body, her *nêhiyawêwin*, and her "Pages of song" (28) mutually create and shape the grandmothers' stories.

When *âcimowinis* begs her grandmothers to "Sing. Sing, *nôhkomak*. / Lend me your wind" (63), her use of *nêhiyawêwin* demonstrates a trend that runs throughout *Blue Marrow*. The poem refers to many characters by way of modified family terms: mother, daughter, grandmother, grandmothers, grandfather, grandfathers, et cetera. This is important because in *nêhiyawêwin*, kinship terms do not exist as regular nouns like they do in English. When English speakers say "grandmother," they can either modify it with a prefatory pronoun to show possession or use it on its own. "That reminds me of something *a* grandmother would wear," one could say. In *nêhiyawêwin*, however, kinship terms are a type of noun class called dependent nouns. That is, they do not exist on their own, but must always already be conjugated so that they belong to *someone*. When the poet-speaker beckons the grandmothers' chorus with "*pê-nîtaciwêk nôhkomak* / Climb down, my grandmothers," and "*nôhkomak*" is the word for "grandmothers," it is the

prefix “n” which indicates that grandmothers belong to the poet-speaker: they are hers. If one were to refer to the grandmothers generally, one would necessarily have to say “ôhkomak,” adding the possessive prefix “o” to make clear the grandmother belongs to a third party: her/his grandmothers. Understanding these filial markers reveals how many of the poem’s voices—specifically the poet-speaker and the grandmothers’ chorus—are contingent on one another. They are dependent both relationally and linguistically on their family members for their identities as articulated in that kinship network. It is worth circling back, here, to an early textual resource for learning and using nêhiyawêwin: Henry Kelsey’s 18th century pamphlet *A Dictionary of the Hudson’s Bay Indian Language*. As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, Kelsey’s pamphlet completely omits kinship terms, as they were irrelevant to his business ventures, even though his trading was dependent upon relationships with nêhiyawak. In leaving these terms out, Kelsey not only betrays his mercantilist agenda: he also helps inaugurate a tradition of textual resources for learning and using nêhiyawêwin that are divorced from the speakers and relationships so central to the language’s ongoing use. In *Blue Marrow*, the reciprocity between the poet-speaker and her grandmothers, lending the wind to catalyze stories or providing nourishment to acquire the wind, is literalized in *Blue Marrow*’s inclusion of nêhiyawêwin. Cook’s analysis corroborates and extends this concept when she suggests that “the narrator hears the voices of grandmothers flowing thick as marrow in the bone[,] as she is a conduit between the grandmothers who speak and the reader who listens” (161). Thus the poet-speaker’s borrowed wind breathes life into the text as a whole, illustrating the bodily connection, desire, and expression felt by nêhiyaw and Métis iskwêwak over history.

Gregory Scofield's third poetry collection *Sâkihtowin-Maskihkîy Êkwa Pêyak-Nikamowin* was published in 1997; in this collection, Scofield offers a series of "medicine songs" that "come from a sacred place within" (*Sâkihtowin* 12) himself and "celebrate human relationships with the land, and with the bodies of ourselves and our lovers" ("Love Medicine and One Song" n. p.). Whereas *Blue Marrow* deals predominantly with nêhiyaw maskihkîy that remedies ailing bodies, with her speaker gathering materials and extolling their remedial or destructive potential, *Sâkihtowin-Maskihkîy Êkwa Pêyak-Nikamowin* uses the ambivalent concept of love medicine to structure a series of tender poems to his former lover, Dean, "the source of shadows and songs" (14), and his "partner and friend" (14) Kim. As the title suggests, his collection both reflects as well as provides an example of love medicine. In his memoir *Thunder Through My Veins: Memories of a Métis Childhood* (1999), Scofield writes of his experience crafting the poems in *Sâkihtowin-Maskihkîy*, and notes that his aim was "to create poems that were highly lyrical: songs that were rich with the images of the northern landscape and nêhiyawêwin" (*Thunder* 195). Scofield affirms that "Many of the poems [in the collection] came to me in Cree, and in keeping true to *their* spirit and rhythm, I wrote them this way. Furthermore, my most significant experiences of love—love between men—seemed to find a natural voice" in the poems (*Thunder* 195, emphasis in original). Thus the collection functions, as Scudeler argues, as "stories of self acceptance" (190) which enable Scofield to come to terms with his sexual identity and identity as an Indigenous man without his previously felt sense of shame. Though Scudeler deftly reads the poems of *Sâkihtowin-Maskihkîy* as narrative examples of maskihkîy in their own right and expertly situates the collection within Scofield's greater oeuvre, her essay glosses

over the contradictory and unpleasant sensations that are attendant to what becomes a narrative of self-acceptance. Though *Sâkihtowin-Maskihkîy* poetically revels in the embodied joy that is constitutive of Scofield's self-acceptance, the collection also considers the underside to such affect by tracing Scofield's heartache and loneliness—the consequences of love medicine's effect on a person. Reading the interconnection of *nêhiyawêwin*, embodiment, and storytelling, I ask: How do Scofield's poems arrive at self-acceptance, and how does his body bear these paths through its expressions and sensations?

I have noted previously that Scudeler theorizes the poems of *Sâkihtowin-Maskihkîy* as examples of “powerful *maskihkîy*—medicine—that heals writers, readers, and communities” (190), yet the type of medicine Scofield's collection details is fundamentally ambivalent, by turns sacred and destructive. Métis writer, filmmaker, photographer, and scholar Warren Cariou explains that love medicine “connects bodily experience with spiritual experience, and it is fundamentally about responsibility as well: our responsibility to each other and to the natural world that is the source of our sustenance” (qtd. in Scudeler 199). However, he also cautions that “medicine is something over which humans can never exercise full control. Love medicine can bring many pleasures and benefits but can also create great suffering if it is used without proper respect” (qtd. in Scudeler 199). Likewise, *nêhiyaw* storyteller Alice Ahenakew notes the perilous ambivalence attendant to *nêhiyaw* medicine in *They Knew Both Sides of Medicine: Cree Tales of Curing and Cursing*. Ahenakew explains that “it is powerful, the Cree form of worship” (81) and she concedes that “some people, of course, used evil medicine when they were angered” (123). Thus *nêhiyaw* medicine, particularly love

medicine, can be generative as well as destructive, and thus must be used with respect and caution. Scofield echoes this in his introduction to *Sâkihtowin-Maskihkîy*, explaining:

I remember hearing old-time stories about love medicine. It is said that under its powerful spell one becomes completely obsessed, inexplicably determined to be near the person who cast it. I have always been warned about such medicine. “Pêyatihk,” the old people would say. “It is not to be taken lightly for the consequences are great and, if used improperly, fatal.” (9)

Congruent with Scofield’s, Cariou’s, and Ahenakew’s affirmations about the uncertainty and potential danger inherent to love medicine, Scofield’s poems utilize metaphors of bodily pain, of ambivalent sensation and affect between partners as a register for his loving relationship with Dean. For example, early in the collection Scofield figures himself as the bodily recipient to his lover’s action. He is the drum upon whom Dean pounds, he is the ears into which Dean’s sounds will flow. In “My Drum, His Hands,” Scofield’s body metaphorically becomes the drum on which his lover beats:

over the bones, over the bones

stretched taut

my skin, the drum

softly he pounds” (39).

The incongruence between “softly” and “pounds” (39) initiates the conjoined sensations of gentle affection and aching contact. Importantly the *nêhiyawêwin* words for “drum”—*mistikwaskihkw* and *pakahamân* (Wolvengrey vol. 2 340)—are animate nouns; however,

the *nêhiyawêwin* “hand” is inanimate, as it is considered an appendage to the body that is incapable of action without the physique which controls it. Like the family terms previously mentioned in Halfe’s long poem, “hand” in *nêhiyawêwin* is also a dependent noun, as it is something which must belong to—i.e., must be attached to—someone. As such, the hands are dependent on their greater body for their continued motion. They cannot exist independent of that frame. In the context of the poem, the only animate object with which Dean’s “hands” come into contact is the “drum”—Scofield’s body. The gentle pounding of Dean’s hands on his body connects the two lovers, showing that just as Scofield’s painful and pleasurable sensations become conjoined, so too do his body and that of his lover’s. Moreover, the “drum” in Scofield’s poem an animate object acting as metaphor for *another* animate object—his body. This suggests that even though his body is the recipient of potentially rough action, he welcomes its submission and relishes the experience: “my drum aching” (39) becomes a pleasurable sensation.

The ambivalence of “ache” becomes apparent later in the collection, when Scofield laments: “I ache in my smallest bones / but still you won’t come / to defend this love” (66). Here, the bones which once formed part of the drum his lover softly beat upon now “ache” (66) in yearning as

the days go on jagged

beneath the skin,

my sinew slack drum. (67)

Once “taut” (39) but now “sinew slack” (67), his body is no longer connected with Dean’s; his pleasurable bodily ache has transformed into an indication of loneliness and

separation. Dejected, Scofield wonders: “Whose hands pulled you from my dreams?” (67). In the poems following “My Drum, His Hands,” the metaphoric trio of the drum, a bodily ache, and hands re-signify upon confronting a love that has become distant. Hands no longer join with Scofield’s drum—which has collapsed limply without Dean’s stimulation—but are instead imagined as the instruments of a stranger seeking to pull Dean away, and so Scofield aches, beckoning for his lover who “won’t come” (67).

Tracking his grief and memory after the end of his relationship with Dean, Scofield starts to approach a new perspective on his past-lover, and explains in “Kisê-pîsim”:

Like black bear
 I count the days ...
 gather my medicines
 snort and paw
 pound and chew. (80)

Nearing the end of his year of mourning, during “The great moon of returning hope” (80), Scofield gathers medicines to “hang ... in corners / above the door, my bed” (80). In his room, like Voice Dancer’s house in *Blue Marrow*, Scofield seeks to insulate his personal space—the space where he pursues his artistic creations—with protective maskikhkîy, tempering his romantic mourning with medicine of his own. As black bear, Scofield pounds and chews the medicine he gathers, using his strength and taste to consume the remedy to the effects of the pounding motion previously associated with his lover. “Kisê-pîsim” counts the days and the season with nêhiyawêwin, and concludes the poem by beckoning the upcoming “niski-pîsim” (“goose moon” [81]) to “Pîmatisiwin

Pêtamawinân” (81). Scofield translates his final call as “Bring us life” (81); with the spring comes “life,” (81) the return of health following heartbreak, and an end to Scofield’s poetic slumber of solitary remedy. Scudeler refers to “Grandfather Black Bear” as the guiding force Scofield consults as he seeks to undo the damage of love medicine, as he is the “Cree healer and keeper of medicines” (196). Ahenakew, too, notes the widely regarded healing virtues of bear medicine “to use on [people] ... with various kinds of sicknesses” (65), noting that her husband’s bear medicine was known to cure even cancers (71). Scofield’s specific imagining of *himself* as black bear is specifically noteworthy, as it reflects the beginning of a process whereby Scofield looks within himself for remedy. He is no longer the recipient of sensation coming from without his body—the drum on which Dean is “softly pounding” (39), the ears filled with his lover’s “flute” (40)—but rather his body is the locus of sensation, and that begins a curative turn. Like Halfe’s poet-speaker who holds “the wind” (24) of her grandmothers within herself, Scofield holds within himself “the medicine of me” (96) which he wishes to “sing loud” (96) into the “medicine songs” (12) that make up the collection; his search for medicine nourishes him and brings him back to help, and *nêhiyawêwin*—together with embodied sensation and poetic reflection—become instrumental to his work to cultivate vitality within himself.

Scofield’s role as a purveyor of medicine who connects language with remedy is expanded in “Medicine Lodge” and “Ceremonies,” wherein he imagines his and his lover’s bodies as the objects around which to center ceremonies. In “Ceremonies,” his lover’s groin heats “the stones” for the “sweat lodge” that is Scofield’s “mouth,” where his lover will “come” (91); in “Medicine Lodge,” Scofield “[lies] and [waits] / heavy with

birth / plump with songs” (90). Scofield’s mouth, the orifice through which he will “sing loud” (96) his medicine of self is also the ceremonial “sweat lodge” (91) for his lover’s body that is “plump with songs” (90). In these poems, *nêhiyaw* ceremonies combine with Scofield’s poetic collapse of the distance between bodies and their sensations, whereby Scofield’s body becomes a collection of items of ceremonial import that can facilitate what he refers to in the preceding poem as the work to “heal / all that is lost” (90) to him. The songs with which he is “plump” (90) before ceremony are presumably the “medicine songs” (12) that comprise *Sâhkihtowin-Maskihkîy*, and it is his “embodied understandings” (McLeod “Cree Poetic Discourse” 113) of his relationship with Dean that occasions the songs translation from body to language by way of ceremony.

Yet the yearning returns when Scofield meditates on the ongoing desperation for bodily sensation that love medicine has prompted in him in one of his final poems, “*Sâhkihtowin-Maskihkîy: Love Medicine.*” Once more “Helpless against this love,” he considers

trading

sunsets and stars

for even the faintest

hint of medicine (105)

Scofield frames the stanzas which detail his longing for love and its remedy with the instruction of “the old people” to “*Pêyahtihk,*” (105), which means “to give something great thought, to walk softly” (106). The imperative of walking “softly” and giving “something great thought” (106) is apparent in Scofield’s final call to his lover:

across the river

standing upon the bank

just over there

my sweetheart (107)

As he reckons with his determination “to be near the person who cast” (9) love medicine upon him, he uses his dreams to relive the sensations he once treasured: “dream flute songs” and “chase the echo / in my heart’s canyon” (104). Scofield relies on his poetic language and embodied memories to conjure the sensations of Dean’s touch. The poem’s final chorus, in *nêhiyawêwin*, again demonstrates the ambivalence and heartache that has shaped his desire:

âstam ôta nîcimos

ôtantâyan, ôtantâyan:

come here my sweetheart,

I am here, I am here

kaya mâto nîcimos

kinîtôhtan, kinîtôhtan:

don’t cry my sweetheart,

I hear you, I hear you (109)

Despite his longing for Dean’s return, the commands Scofield issues in *nêhiyawêwin* indicate that he is no longer the sole receiver of action or commands. After his wintry slumber of gathering medicines and finding recovery within himself, Scofield commands

Dean to “*âstam*” (109): “come here!” (Wolvengrey vol. 1 25). Moreover, at this final dreamed meeting, Scofield imagines them both weeping along “the reeds” (107) that separate them in the water. As Dean stands across the river, “just over there” (107) yet nonetheless out of his reach, their shared sorrow in separation brings their bodies together in tears. At the end, his *nêhiyawêwin* lamentations soothe his bodily discomfort by expressing tiredness and admitting tears as *he* soothes *Dean*: “don’t cry my sweetheart” (109) he implores. Scofield’s preface notes that the poems of *Sâkihtowin-Maskihkîy* were dreamed into being, and, in the collection’s end a dream allows him to imagine an open-ended, bittersweet farewell with the man he loved. The poems end in the same manner as their creation, and dream and *nêhiyawêwin* express the “natural voice” (*Thunder* 195) of Scofield’s experiences of love. Indeed, for Scofield, joy does not wash out sorrow, nor does sorrow erase joy. Ambivalent sensations associated with love medicine ebb and flow through his body, his language, and his being. Through his work to “sing my experience of love in both my languages, Cree and English” (12), Scofield speaks *through* the body to articulate a mode of using *nêhiyawêwin* and “embodied understandings” (McLeod “Cree Poetic Discourse” 113) of self through poetry to extoll the lasting impact of loving relationships on the body once its sensations have transformed into memory. This is the route through which he arrives at the “self acceptance” Scudeler terms central to *Sâhkitowin-Maskihkîy*, and it invokes *nêhiyawêwin* and loving embodiment as the tools to nourish Scofield’s vitality and health.

1. 6 “Listen to the Bones”: Skeletal Frameworks, Linguistic Marrow

What *Blue Marow* and *Sâhkihtowin-Maskihkîy Ekwa Pêyak-Nikamowin* share beyond their thematic reference to bodily sensation/vitality and creative uses of

nêhiyawêwin is their use of metaphors and images surrounding bones, bone marrow, and skeletons. From the ancestral remains buried in the prairies, to morsels of nourishment, to the spiritual makeup of the body's core, bones in these collections have both communal and individual resonance. It is generally recognized that bone marrow is instrumental in cultivating health and strength by way of producing blood cells for the body and, as such, can function more broadly as a metaphor for the substance in one's corporeal core which nourishes its supportive frame. Metaphorically, the word "marrow" is "used to signify the innermost part of a person's being" ("marrow 1.d" OED) and "([t]he seat of) a person's vitality and strength" ("marrow 2.c" OED). In *Blue Marrow* and *Sâkihtowin-Maskihkîy*, nêhiyawêwin itself becomes a conceptual marrow representing the nourishing core of a cultural body of people, a substance at the center of and running through a group of peoples. Through its usage, nêhiyawêwin supports the connection of relations "through telling stories" (McLeod 93) characteristic of nêhiyaw poetic practices. In this sense, a healthy communal group made in the image of a vigorous corporeal being with all of its parts working in symbiosis is fueled and animated by the linguistic system as its core. For Scofield, that community is small, romantic, and intimate by nature—often consisting only of him and his lover, Dean, and occasionally expanding to include his partner and friend Kim. As such, nêhiyawêwin as the marrow of his romantic community is often invoked with aim to nourish these relationships and uphold their stability; however, this is an aim which, as Scofield's poetry demonstrates with its double invocation of pain and pleasure, ebbs and flows with the flux of love medicine. In contrast, Halfe's community is expansive, comprised of nêhiyaw and Métis iskwewak across generations, and nêhiyawêwin is one of "the threads that hold [the] particular fabric" (McLeod *Memory*

75) of “embodied memory” (McLeod *Memory* 72) together across the pages of *Blue Marrow*. As the Keeper of the Stories’ mission to “listen to the bones” of her ancestors both spiritual and territorial unfolds, her use of and reliance on *nêhiyawêwin* animates the stories of the women who came before her, and the bones she encounters impel this animation in specifically corporeal ways.

For example: *Blue Marrow*’s project to recuperate and tell the stories of *nêhiyaw* and Métis *iskwewak* becomes clearer with an accompanying comprehension of the structure of *nêhiyawêwin*, insofar as the title *Blue Marrow* is initially unclear in its signification: What exactly does Halfe imagine “blue marrow” as a substance to be? Considering the poem is invested in writing the stories of grandmothers and daughters left out of history to reclaim the life and vitality of the past—to help the speaker understand where and who she is in the present—understanding why this life-giving marrow is imagined as “blue” is important. Cook explains that the “blue marrow that provides both title and extended metaphor for these lovelorn, grief-stricken poems” (163) is the ink of the poet’s pen, and thus the title *Blue Marrow*, the formal umbrella under which the poem’s content rests, is actively engaged in contemplating the relationship between the creation of poetry and language—the poet’s ink—and its thematic recuperation of forgotten, discarded histories. Jean Okimasis explains that in *nêhiyawêwin* colours are not predominantly adjectives or nouns as is most often the case in English; rather all “colours are verbs” (7), and “combining colours with nouns to make new words is ... a unique structure” (7) found in *nêhiyawêwin*. With this in mind, one could potentially translate the poem’s title as “*sipihkowînih*.” The *nêhiyawêwin* “*sîphiko*,” (Wolvengrey 289) meaning blue, combines with “*wînih*,” (442), meaning bone

marrow, with the resulting translation approximating something akin to the English phrase: “the marrow blues.” As such, the present action of *being* blue, or something *blue-ing*, comes together with the noun, the thing, of marrow to offer the title as a descriptive process—and this is telling for the poem as a whole. When the marrow comes to resemble the ink of the poet’s pen, the poem turns ink into something nourishing, a life-giving substance which embodies the present and the future. Instead of signifying the distant past—as bones primarily suggest long-dead or decayed bodies, and as a text can signify, as noted in the first half of this chapter, the reductive and inanimate preservation of language and memory instead of an active recuperation and practicing of it—the nourishing ink of the poet’s *nêhiyawêwin*-inflected pen uses the passing on and sharing of stories to vision a present and future premised on vital, *nêhiyawêwin*-speaking bodies. The poet-speaker references the bone-as-pen early in *Blue Marrow*: “my bone / filled with the fists of women / of the fur trade” (14). Specifically, she holds a “jawbone of elk lined with pearly teeth” that she “bathed” in “sweet grass” and “laid ... under [her] pillow” (15). After laying the jawbone under her pillow, the poet-speaker recalls: “Winds swept through me. This path has chosen me, / this chosen walk is a blizzard whiteout” through which she is “Cree-ing alone in the heavy arm of snow” (15). Apart from the allegorical “whiteout” of a whitewashed history through which the poet-speaker is chosen to walk, the fact that her tool is a “jawbone” deserves pause. Early in the poem, the grandmothers warn the poet-speaker: “They tore out our tongues” (19). Silenced through the violent severing of their bodies and speech, the grandmothers use their breath, their wind, to choose the poet-speaker, who uses a jawbone—an instrument from an elk’s mouth—to compose their stories and share their voices in her poem.

Cook avers that Halfe “chooses the metaphor of the bone to express the agonizing process through which stories calcify into writing” (162), and while Halfe has affirmed that through her composition of poetry “the elusive becomes concrete” (qtd. in Cook 162), I suggest that in the context of *Blue Marrow*—as explained in the previous section—the writing process is partly an expansion and continuation of the breath of the grandmothers and their lent wind. Instead of calcifying, the bones open and are strategically emptied of their nourishing marrow to allow the flow of breath and ink through their hollowed frames. “The Prairie is full of bones,” Halfe’s speaker notes, which

stand and sing

and I feel the weight of them

as they guide my fingers on this page (2)

In light of the poem’s frequent comparisons between singing and breath, I argue that the standing bones, here—which agentially remove themselves from rest beneath the prairies—issue their guidance as they sing to the poet; their breath works in tandem with their weight to guide the poet-speaker’s creative task, and when she feels “the weight of them” (2), she acknowledges the responsibility that accompanies her poetic task. This, too, recalls Beeds’ affirmation of the centrality of wâhkôtowin to grounding “identity, purpose, and responsibilities” (67). As I have noted previously, this chapter aims to articulate how creative work using nêhiyawêwin models an approach to language revitalization that is compatible with, but not dependent upon, “revitalization” as a term doubly shaped by colonial and decolonial valences of meaning. When *Blue Marrow*

poetically addresses the importance of breath and wind as a mode of creative composition and accountability to relations (in terms of the poet-speaker “holding” the wind of her ancestors), the poem highlights the generative potential of textual modes of language revitalization *when they are paired with nêhiyaw-centric modes of learning and intergenerationally transmitting languages*. In this sense, it is the bodies who speak nêhiyawêwin to one another, who hear the voices of ancestors reverberate through the present to guide the future, and hold the pen to “weave, bend the blue marrow” (46) of their stories that so powerfully thread together embodiment and nêhiyawêwin.

Regarding the actual excavation of these bones, *Blue Marrow* offers images of characters consuming and ingesting marrow for sake of either satisfying hunger or cultivating bodily health. One character, “Long Term Memory Grandmother speaks as if she’s sucking on a cracked thigh bone, she draws out the marrow” (76)—her speech is literally inflected by her work to “draw out the marrow” of a cracked bone. The chorus of “All men. Grandfathers and Eternal Sleep Grandfathers” speak of a wife for whom they jointly “crack my bone/ feed her marrow” (78), and the “Nameless *mama* ... sucks marrow making pucker sounds” (93). In *Blue Marrow*, there is literal consumption of bone marrow for purpose of care, for survival, and for metaphors explaining the capability of story. The emptied bones conjure popular conceptions of mainstream histories that are largely emptied of the presence and role of nêhiyaw iskwewak, but instead of replicating narratives hollowed of their lives and stories, *Blue Marrow* uses them to story the experiences and lives of the women buried beneath the prairies. As their guiding bones “stand and sing” (2) on the poet-speaker’s page, they become the tools with which she crafts her narrative. When the bones in *Blue Marrow* are sucked dry

by the poem's characters, they are excavated by hunger to become vessels for the poet's ink, for her storied reclamation of history through embodied memory and language. Her bone is filled with the bluing marrow, and her effort to "weave, bend / the blue marrow" (46) is powered by the might of the women, her ancestors who are connected to her by *nêhiyawêwin* and *wâhkôtowin*, who came before her. In this sense, bones "provide the charmed touchstone for a communal recognition of memory ... [but] they are also weapons" (Cook 161). With their fury and with their stories, the poet-speaker transforms language, like the bones, into a medium for filling the blank spaces of history, for writing the agency and sensations of *nêhiyaw iskwêwak*'s bodies.

This consumption of marrow is also resonant with a *nêhiyaw* practice that is central to annual Give-Away Dances. In *Severing the Ties That Bind*, Katherine Pettipas notes that the Give-Away Dance was "the most conspicuous public demonstration of the distribution of goods," and "was pledged by the person who had received the spiritual prerogative from *Pâhkahkos* (bony spectre)" (54-55). Rarely seen, *Pâhkahkos* is described as a skeletal figure who makes its presence known by whistling, and is noted as one who "sacrificed itself so that others may live," and thus is "associated with starvation" (55). Pettipas explains that *Pâhkahkos*' favourite food is hardened bone grease, and thus the product, its gifting, and its consumption is widely associated with the figure. More broadly, she affirms that "Give Away ceremonies functioned to re-affirm existing kinship ties and establish new networks among households and between diverse communities" (56)—to, in short, demonstrate gratitude to the spectre whose sacrifice enabled the vitality and continued consumption of its community. Halfe's first collection of poetry, *Bear Bones and Feathers*, contained a poem titled "*Pâhkahkos*," in which the

speaker imagines the skeletal spectre as a friend, an ally with whom she reconciles after years of frightening encounters (9). Sharing with Pâhkahkos “the drink of healing” and jointly smoking “the smoke of truth,” (9) the speaker’s communion with Pâhkakos figures a confrontation with hunger and personal sacrifice for the sake of a broader community which ends with the two “[carrying their] bundles/ side by side/ bones and flesh” (9). Their parallel stride highlights the conjoined nature of flesh and bones, working in tandem to build a body cognizant of its responsibility to those who have sacrificed themselves to make its existence possible. Through her words and her stories, Halfe, here, does the work McIlwraith theorizes as “carrying forward” nêhiyawewin and nêhiyaw culture into the present, affirming their ongoing presence and impact in the daily lives of nêhiyawak.

In Scofield’s *Sakihitowin-Maskihkîy*, bones are the deepest registers of sensation; they are the structural apparatuses through which affect and loving connection resound. In his essay “You Can Always Count on an Anthropologist (to Set You Straight, Crooked, or Somewhere In-Between),” Scofield wonders whether the act of sex itself can be considered “two-hearted” (163), asking “does it simply come down to our bones and our quest to discover their ancient meanings, our own anthropological dig into self and spirit?” (164). In the context of this collection, his poetic process of excavation parallels that of Halfe’s characters in *Blue Marrow*, insofar as speaking bodies crack open the apparatuses which give them life and feast on the nourishment inside. Yet whereas Halfe’s characters largely do so in a generative, holistic manner which facilitates the creation of story this process in Scofield’s collection is done in a way which not only empties the body of one of its most vital substances, but also hollows out the bones into

vessels which viscerally reverberate from the memories of sensations lost—creating an “echo” in the “canyon of [Scofield’s] heart.”

Writing of Dean, Scofield affirms: “he is a mountain lion / chewing bones, tasting marrow” (22). Foreboding in his visceral consumption, Dean feasts on the energy of his lover’s bones, tasting the marrow’s power. Dean preys on Scofield’s marrow, emptying him of the nourishing substance at his core before ending their relationship and leaving Scofield to pursue remedy through his own medicine, through *nêhiyawêwin* and poetry. When Scofield muses about his lost love and resultant yearning, his affection runs so deep that it resides in the core of his being: “love medicine” he writes, is “seeping into my bones” (40). After his separation from Dean, he laments “and my bones did crack” and “from my mouth / grew unhappy weeds” (42); “The lake in me is a dry bed / cracking to the bone” (65). Once love medicine has oozed into his bones and replaced the marrow that Dean excavated, he is not nourished but rather desiccated, parched, and deprived of the nurturing substance. Where once a “sacred song” (26) tumbled from through his lips, Scofield now grows “unhappy weeds” (42). In this context, the multiple meanings of “marrow” in English are helpful for understanding the diverse ways in which Scofield’s use of bones signify. In addition to its literal referent of bone marrow in the human body, marrow in English can also denote “A companion, fellow worker, a partner [c.f marrow n2.a]” as well as “To join, associate; to bring together” (“marrow 4,” OED). The double signification of “marrow” as both “partner” and “to join” or “to bring together” is congruent with the intimate, conjoined relationship central to *Sakihitowin-Maskihkîy*. The bones and their core come to symbolize Scofield’s joining together with his partner; they are bound in their bones through the echo of their shared sensations.

After Scofield's bones have cracked from the unpleasant effects of love medicine, he calls them "a mere formality" (82) and writes to his lover: "you are my borrowed bones" (83) as their union retreats into memory and longing. Scofield figures Dean as a loaned structure to support him after the end of their relationship, extending their conjoined bodies through the conceit of their shared bones. After borrowing Dean's bones to recreate their conjoined bodies and sensations, Scofield offers a farewell to his lover, affirming: "my tongue will know / your language" (86). Even if they never share a proper goodbye, Scofield and Dean are conjoined through knowing each other's languages, through knowing and sharing each other's bodies, and through the ambivalent pains and pleasures they shared during their relationship. Scofield's series of "medicine songs" (12) commemorate this relationship, whereby *nêhiyawêwin* and poetic metaphors of *nêhiyaw* ceremony and bodies nourish and reanimate Scofield's vitality as he navigates the ambivalent effects of love medicine.

1. 7 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to trace a genealogy—etymological, academic, and socio-political—of the term and paradigm of "revitalization" with specific focus on its numerous permutations across history and its potential compatibility with *nêhiyaw* understandings of language, storytelling, and medicine. The academic genealogy of "revitalization" shifted focus between 1956 and the early 1990s from curious classifications of Indigenous peoples' religious innovations to their holistic, culturally-rooted efforts to practice their cultures and use their languages in the face of ongoing colonialism. Moreover, the rhetorical adoption of "revitalization" in Canadian task force reports and policy discourse has been mobilized to emphasize the state's commitment to

revitalizing not Indigenous languages and cultures, but its own relationship with Indigenous peoples. Approaching “revitalization” as a term and a paradigm mutually impacted by a “double-sided genealogy” (Rifkin 9) of academic, governmental, and activist uses makes clear both how “revitalization” has come to be the superordinate term assigned to efforts to promote, value, teach, and use Indigenous languages as well as how the term can be strategically tailored to use with reference to specific Indigenous languages such as nêhiyawêwin. Grounding analysis of nêhiyawêwin in creative texts *in* nêhiyaw understandings of language, storytelling, and medicine makes clear how language can function *as* medicine for the characters in a collection. By focusing on how bodies are central to language and the work of “stories [as] embodied memory” (McLeod *Memory* 72), this chapter has argued that Louise Bernice Halfe’s *Blue Marrow* and Gregory Scofield’s *Sâkihtowin-Maskihkîy Ekwa Pêyak-Nikamowin* present a model of revitalization that speaks not *of* language, the body, and their potential or inherent vitalities, but speaks *through* the body to address the interconnected nature of embodiment, nêhiyawêwin, and relationships through storytelling.

Chapter Two

2 “our stories are echoes”: Repatriation and Poetic Echolocations in Neal McLeod’s *Gabriel’s Beach* and Gregory Scofield’s *Singing Home the Bones*

“the story lives on
old stories give our bodies shape
and guide the path of sound
like trees guiding the wind.”

—Neal McLeod’s “Meditations on *paskwâw-mostos awâsis Gabriel’s Beach*”

“Standing at the foot of a map of loss is clarity.”
—Leanne Simpson’s *As We Have Always Done*

Just as “revitalization” has come to signify a framework for pursuing the increased use, teaching, and valuing of Indigenous languages and cultural practices, “repatriation” has acquired a reputation as a legal framework through which Indigenous groups have successfully challenged the state-sanctioned theft and seizure of Indigenous human remains and objects of cultural patrimony,^{xxxvi} brokering their overdue return through legal, activist, and community organizing. This chapter engages the concept of “repatriation” as a framework through which to pursue the continued work of “[carrying] forward” (McIlwraith 75) Indigenous languages—not with aim to displace “revitalization” as a paradigm of value, but rather to illustrate the multidimensionality of approaches that are possible for reading creative works which sustain, use, value, and teach Indigenous languages. The strategic appropriation and deployment of “revitalization” for the purposes stated above (and discussed in Chapter One) indicates the utility of engaging creative works’ resonances with frameworks that Indigenous peoples have mobilized for contesting and/or undermining colonial theft, dispossession,

and dismissal. For this chapter, using a framework like repatriation to engage nêhiyawêwin and nêhiyaw storytelling in the creative writing of Neal McLeod, Louise Bernice Halfe, and Gregory Scofield necessitates paying attention to how their writings linguistically re-imagine concepts that are central to repatriation. Concepts like belonging and ownership, home, the relationship between the past and the present, and return become thematic grounding for an extended exploration of how creative work (specifically writing), nêhiyawêwin, and repatriation might triangulate in ways particular to nêhiyaw ontologies of story, language, place, and kinship. As such, this chapter suggests that the rhetoric and history surrounding the discursive, political, and material uses of “repatriation” are helpful for imagining the potential of creative work to intervene in questions surrounding “belonging,” “property/ownership,” “return,” and “home” from the perspective of nêhiyawêwin and nêhiyaw modes of being in the world. This chapter does not argue that repatriation can, should, or might replace “revitalization” as a new superordinate term for the field; rather, I apply the framework of “repatriation”’s concerns with property, home, and peoplehood to creative projects working with nêhiyawêwin. Moreover, this chapter suggests that the history of repatriation, which has relied on a strategic appropriation of Western logics of “patria,” citizenship, and inalienable possession, makes this kind of application of the framework to such creative works particularly pertinent. How—and to what effects—does creative work that negotiates these logics and the concepts underpinning them dovetail and diverge from the culturally-specific ontologies of language, home, and belonging that are central to such writings’ perspectives?

Insofar as repatriation entails the overdue return of seized or stolen remains,

artefacts, or objects of cultural patrimony, it is freighted with tensions surrounding property, ownership, belonging, and possession. To whom do things deemed metonymic signifiers of the “past,” as opposed to items cared for by a community, belong? In the context of contemporary repatriation debates, the answer is mostly affirmed as obvious: The artefacts and remains of the past belong to the peoples from whom they were originally taken. Within global Indigenous studies particularly, belonging is conceded to the peoples whose connections to such things extend beyond the frameworks of capitalist exchange and museological confinement that typically define their present functions and ongoing value. The bodily remains of ancestors and objects of cultural patrimony belong, so to speak, to the peoples with whom they have inherent, historical, or ongoing cultural connections—a broad categorization of belonging and property that has been outlined and affirmed by legislation and task force papers concerning repatriation (e.g., *NAGPRA* [1990] the first legislation of its kind to set parameters for ensuring the end to unlawful seizure of Indigenous remains and artefacts, in the United States, *Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships Between Museums and First Peoples* [1994] in Canada, *The Alberta First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act* [2000] in Alberta, Canada, and the *Human Tissue Act* [2004] in the United Kingdom).

Yet inherent in the word, and thus the concept, of repatriation is the notion of a “patria” or homeland (literally: “A person’s native country or homeland” [“Patria” n.]), a model for “home” that is primarily inflected through Enlightenment concepts of nationalism and unity, and is often fundamentally at odds with Indigenous cosmologies of peoplehood and community. This means, in the words of Kavita Singh, that “[a]t the heart of any nation’s call for repatriation lies the idea of the patria, the homeland, an

entity that can demonstrate its legitimate claim to the artefacts being repatriated” (133). For example, *Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships Between Museums and First Peoples*, the 1994 report of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples, emphasizes that “First People communities should be able to demonstrate direct prior cultural connection and ownership with regard to collections in question” (5).^{xxxvii} Likewise, the amended *NAGPRA* states that “ownership or control of Native American cultural items” is to be first yielded to “lineal descendants” of human remains, and, in cases for which “lineal descendants cannot be ascertained,” ownership is vested “(A) in the Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization on whose tribal land such objects or remains were discovered; [or] (B) in the Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization which has the closest cultural affiliation with such remains or objects and which, upon notice, states a claim for such remains or objects” (170). In these contexts, the onus of proving ownership is directly related to Indigenous groups’ abilities to state their claims and make their cases for “direct prior cultural connection” (*Turning* 5) and/or “closest cultural affiliation” (*NAGPRA* 170) to bodies with legislative or policy decision-making power. Moreover, they must do so in ways that directly appeal to concepts of lineal descent and land occupation that are pre-determined by the bodies with such powers. This process presumes an understanding of an aggregated, population-based “organization” (*NAGPRA* 170) whereby a mass mobilized cultural collectivity must politically assert its connection to objects, remains, or “tribal land” (*NAGPRA* 170) as constitutive of prior ownership and thereby a place to affirm as “home”—a patria in its own right.

Accompanying this notion of “patria,” with its concern for group identity forged through connection, comes the issue of “belonging,” an issue immediately charged with

its pertinence to possession or the acquisition and holding of property over time— concepts thoroughly steeped in late-capitalist articulations of personhood, citizenship, and communal identity. That is to say, just as *something* can belong to *someone* by virtue of the rituals of capitalist economy through which it has passed—for example, through the exchange of currency or otherwise valued goods for a product—*someone* can belong to *someplace*, a homeland, by virtue of having passed through the rituals and qualifications surrounding citizenship that have been outlined by that land’s governing authority—such as, for example, birth, studious dedication testing one’s knowledge *of* a place, economic participation through labour and acquired residency, marital union, et cetera. In addition, “patria” as a rubric for belonging and collectivity conjures “patrilineality,” the organization of descent and inheritance through the male line of a family. The gendered implications of “patria,” particularly in terms of how “belonging” becomes organized by the presumptive male-ness of a citizen or inheritor, is important to consider when addressing how parties invested with the right to possession of an object or the ability to *belong* to a collective are presumptively masculine. Indeed, the rubrics for belonging as “possession” and belonging as “fitting in” may sometimes function similarly, but their mobilization for the sake of repatriation poses serious questions regarding the strategic deployment and/or appropriation of these concepts by Indigenous peoples seeking the overdue return of their ancestors and artefacts. How does one, for example, articulate a group’s connection to an object of cultural patrimony—that it belongs *with* that group—when the nature of such connection exceeds or is fundamentally incongruent with state-articulated models of possession and ownership? Does the strategic use of these concepts by Indigenous peoples necessitate a subscription—even if a temporary one—to the norms

of belonging set by the colonial state? How can Indigenous peoples benefit from such legislation while, at the same time, place themselves and their own laws or perspectives on belonging and ownership apart from those governing current debates on repatriation?^{xxxviii} These are but a few of the intersections one must navigate when mapping the conceptual possibilities and limitations of repatriation both as a material process and a framework for engaging Indigenous-authored creative works.

It may seem that the previous preamble has little to do with this dissertation's wider project of exploring literary mobilizations and articulations of Indigenous language revitalization projects. Quite the contrary is true, however. At its broadest, this chapter asks: given its widespread success and invocation by Indigenous communities and studies for the purpose of affirming Indigenous peoples' rights to their histories and the artefacts thereof, what are the limitations and possibilities surrounding frameworks of "repatriation" for approaching Indigenous language revitalization in Canada? Can one "repatriate" a language or system of expression that, despite potentially waning use, has not been wholly alienated from its home regardless of attempts to eradicate its presence in the land and speakers who breathe life to it?^{xxxix} If so, what would this look like, and what are the conceptual implications of such a framework? Moreover, what are the parameters and protocols through which a group or an individual might seek to repatriate—i.e., "return home"—primarily non-tangible things such as language, story, and memory?^{xl} Similarly, how are these issues complicated in contexts wherein territorial referents for "patria" are not only incommensurate with Indigenous peoples' understandings of land and community, but also either treated as entirely absent—e.g., in the case of the Métis—or complicated by existing legislation surrounding Indigenous

lands and their uses? Which resources and methods are best suited to this work, and how are existing texts compatible with such a model?

With aim to constellate these wide-ranging questions, this chapter will first engage at length with the concept of “repatriation”—linguistically, legally, and socially—to begin theorizing its compatibility with language revitalization projects, particularly as they intersect with language as an expression of nation, of “patria” and its incongruence with nêhiyaw understandings of history and peoplehood. Second, the question of repatriating intangible elements, like stories and memories, will be interrogated: Is this possible, what does it look like, and how might it be used? Drawing upon nêhiyaw theories of poetic return and temporality—namely Neal McLeod’s concept of “coming home through stories” and his explanation of the nêhiyaw “echo” of old voices through time and space, this chapter will engage Neal McLeod’s *Gabriel’s Beach*, Louise Bernice Halfe’s (Skydancer’s) *Blue Marrow*, and Gregory Scofield’s *Singing Home the Bones*. Following the counselling speeches of Onion Lake elder and storyteller Jim Kâ-Nîpitêhtêw, Neal McLeod notes in *Cree Narrative Memory* that an “‘echo’ metaphor has often been used by nêhiyaw storytellers as a way of describing the past coming up to the present through stories” (6). He explains, for example, that “Jim Kâ-Nîpitêhtêw ... said that what he knew [as a storyteller] was like an ‘echo of older voices from a long time ago’” (6). Likewise, McLeod recalls that Edwin Tootoosis, a nêhiyaw storyteller who would visit McLeod and his father, commented: “‘môy ê-kistawêt’ (It does not echo)” (6), referencing the nêhiyawak’s land following colonial appropriation and seizure. “He was referring to the land,” McLeod explains, “and the fact that the land no longer had sound in the same way it had before” (6). In this context, an echo is not only the refracted

lingering of an initial sound, but also a network through which sound-as-memory and the sounds of a people's stories and experiences with the land reside and rebound. *To echo*, too, is to affirm or to double—to create at the same time as one replicates (e.g., “I echo your assertion”). Engaging nêhiyaw storytelling philosophy's concept of the trans-spatial, trans-temporal echo as a grounding or otherwise locative force for a people's knowledge, in this chapter I read the three aforementioned poetry collections with aim to theorize how their texts enact a poetics of echolocation.

Typically, “echolocation”—or “the location of objects by means of the echo reflected from them by a sound-signal” (OED “echolocation” 1)—brings to mind the sensory navigational system possessed by bats and technologically adapted by sonar systems. In this way, echolocation involves surveying one's surroundings in order to (a) determine the number and location of objects otherwise less determinate, and (b) locate oneself in space amidst those objects and surrounding terrain. Importantly, echolocation is not solely a mode of physical location; it is also a sophisticated communication system employed by non-human animals such as bats and porpoises, whereby they speak to one another through the air and water by sending out sound signals which reverberate across their bodies as they move through space. I suggest that the presence of nêhiyawêwin in creative texts orchestrates the “echo of older voices” across the space of the page: words resound and rebound off of one another through their repetition, their strategic variations, and their poetic play in order to, as McLeod theorizes, enable their speakers to “come home through stories” and begin to “find their way out of colonialism” (*Memory* 9). Precisely, the inclusion of nêhiyawêwin functions to, among other things, provide a rubric through which speakers can understand themselves in the present by virtue of their

language's and stories' echoes through time and space. Understood in this context, a nêhiyaw poetics of echolocation, which centers the interplay between land, language, and stories, works to approximate a creative, chiasmatic enactment of repatriating language through story, and story through language.

2.1 Contexts of Repatriation

The etymological, social, and legal contexts surrounding repatriation are diverse. Historically, “repatriation” has referred not to the return of artefacts or other objects of cultural import, but rather to “the return and restoration of a person to his or her native country” (“Repatriation 1.a”). The word first appeared in English in the 16th century as a creative translation of a Tuscan phrase; in diplomat and politician Sir Henry Wotton’s conversation with a foreign dignitary, said dignitary exclaimed: “I wish your Honour (in our Tuscan phrase) a most happy Repatriation” (Repatriation 1a”)—meaning, simply, a return to his home country. Despite its origin as a product of linguistic play in translation to signify a return journey or trip, its development over time has been such that one of its primary connotative significations has been the return of human remains to their country of origin, especially following circumstances of an overseas or otherwise international death “in theatre” (CAF “Repatriation”)—that is, in combat.^{xli} Certainly, the sentiment underlying this practice in a military capacity is the desire to afford some measure of dignity and respect to those who have died in service of the armed forces, and the process is one which hinges on the concept in the word’s core: “patria,” a homeland or nation to which one might belong and thereby return. Admittedly, one cannot be a member of any armed force without also being a citizen of the nation for which such force exists, but if one broadly does not possess citizenship, a “patria,” or identify with a state that qualifies

as a “*patria*,” one cannot technically *be* repatriated under this framework.

It is only in recent decades (with its first recorded use of this nature dated at 1967) that the definition of “repatriation” has expanded beyond its original scope of returning a person or her remains home to also signify “the return or restoration of money, historical artefacts, etc., to their country of origin” (“Repatriation 1.b”). This re-signification is of crucial import for considering Indigenous peoples’ strategic mobilization of the concept of repatriation for returning home objects and/or remains wrongfully seized by colonial authorities. As such, I will pause to spend some time tracing out the key concepts involved in repatriation debates and legislation which are crucial to my reading of conceptual repatriation—the return of language through stories, and of stories through language. More specifically, the model of return that I emphasize throughout this chapter does not imply previous and complete separation, and is, I argue, centrally articulated by way of appeal to *nêhiyaw* ideas of home, land, and history.

In the context of Indigenous peoples’ efforts to repatriate stolen remains and objects of cultural patrimony, it is rather easy to answer the following questions: “For whom were these things held away from the peoples and lands comprising their kin? To whom did their holders presume they belonged?” Sentiment at the time of their seizure was often clear; widespread exhumation and theft was done in service of creating a comprehensive “civilizational record” of Indigenous peoples’ bodies, material cultures, and cultural practices so as to give material form, for later generations, to the bodies and cultures at that point consigned to an era forever apart from modernity.^{xlii} Pauline Wakeham, in her analysis of taxidermy in museum installations relating to Indigeneity and Indigenous histories, notes the correlation between anthropological seizure of

Indigenous human remains and “Western culture’s persistent obsession with otherness and with fetishizing Native populations as the biological remainders—always in peril of vanishing—of an archaic past which holds the clue to human origins” (200). In this sense, Indigenous remains and objects of cultural patrimony belonged to an abstracted sense of human “history,” whereby the colonial narrative comprising “history’s” purported authority as a singular tale of civilizational “progress” justifies the theft of objects and bodies deemed crucial signifiers of human history’s supposedly unmodern stages. The ignorance embedded in such a perspective has been thoroughly and rigorously documented (sections of this dissertation’s first chapter, for example, noted the pitfalls of discourses of disappearing Indigeneity with respect to Indigenous languages), and yet similar sentiment continues to undergird some contemporary museal practice, albeit translated into the lexicon of “custodianship.”

As a term relevant to repatriation debates, “custodianship” signifies the presumption that museums and their staff are better suited, with their ample resources and professional training, to take care of such objects than the people from whom they were originally taken—that such remains and objects will be safe in the “custody” of cultural institutions (Kramer 172; Singh 141). Similarly, it signifies the presumption of entitlement to such objects on the parts of curators and their staff. Indeed, these kinds of misguided and incorrect assumptions regarding the abilities of Indigenous peoples to house and care for such objects pose distinct sets of challenges when Indigenous peoples seek the overdue return of these remains or objects to their communities. Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh, who conducted a survey regarding Indigenous peoples’ perspectives towards the impacts of *NAGPRA* on pursuing repatriation cases, notes that while his

participants “generally [acknowledge] some positive outcomes of the law, many emphasized that these benefits were secondary, if not irrelevant, to the law’s primary purpose of establishing a process for repatriations” (282). Specifically, Colwell-Chanthaphonh explains that issues surrounding financing repatriation cases (284), the accessibility of pertinent information that museums and private collectors provide tribal groups about objects/remains (285-86), and a lack of transparent explanations regarding custodianship and care (281-84) makes pursuing repatriation claims under *NAGPRA* and custodianship difficult. With regard to such assumptions, the following question seems to be of paramount import: Whose interests would such a return serve beyond those of a comprehensive civilizational record that is publicly funded and made available for public viewing and/or research? By way of aside, it is important to note that such theft and seizure is not simply a hangover of the past; rather, it continues to happen, taking new forms in (to name but one context) the global medical and pharmaceutical marketplace, whereby Indigenous peoples’ traditional knowledge and genetic resources (e.g., DNA, human tissue, and blood samples) are collected under false pretences—typically the auspices of benevolent medical care—and subsequently used in studies for the collectors’ personal or financial gain.^{xliii}

I have previously alluded to the complicated distinction between the two primary valences of “belonging” that are associated with ideas of “money, historical artefacts, etc.” and a “country of origin” to which something might belong—indeed, these valences shape the fields of debate surrounding repatriation as a legal, social, and methodological concept. First, there is the idea of “belonging” in the sense of “fitting in” or “being part of” something and, second, there is the concept of “to belong to [someone]” in the sense

of ownership and possession (or “belonging[s]” as a term for such items on their own). It is at this juncture where repatriation as it signifies presently—i.e., the return of cultural artefacts—takes on both its broadest conceptual resonance and its most glaring set of contradictions, whereby the lines between citizen and member, possession and owner, become blurred. Does citizenship, for example, belong *to* someone at the same time as it functions as an indication of someone’s belonging to a particular nation state? Recent Canadian legislation (*Cf.* Bill C-24, the *Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act*) suggests that in the framework of the contemporary, neoliberal nation, citizenship cannot belong to someone in an inalienable way; rather, it is bestowed upon “deserving” parties by a state’s governing body. In the case of Indigenous peoples’ rights in Canada, long-standing legislation—such as the *Indian Act* and its amendments under Bill C-31—has articulated the frameworks through which Indigenous people can claim citizenship or membership to a particular Indigenous group, an exercise of power which deliberately disregards Indigenous peoples’ own methods of articulating membership and peoplehood. Certainly, it is an exercise which seeks to disqualify those methods entirely. In terms of the latter register of “belonging,” that of ownership or property, repatriation legislation often invokes and relies upon two core concepts to assert the need for rightful return of seized objects and remains: “cultural patrimony” and “inalienability.” The 1990 *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act* defines “cultural patrimony” and “inalienability” together. In this context, the *Act* describes relevant material for return as

an object having ongoing historical, traditional, or cultural importance central to the Native American group or culture itself, rather than property owned by an individual Native American, and which, therefore, cannot be alienated,

appropriated, or conveyed by any individual regardless of whether or not the individual is a member of the Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization and such object shall have been considered inalienable by such Native American group at the time the object was separated from such group. (*NAGPRA*, n. d.)

Parsing the legal language in this section reveals the idea that some things, be they objects of cultural import, human remains, et cetera, are fundamentally inseparable and indistinguishable from those peoples and/or communities to whom they belong. Under this rubric, then, what is being sought are not solely items or material objects from a bygone era. Rather, they are part(s) of a people/culture themselves, pieces which cannot be consigned to a specific time period in terms of their value. They are of the present in terms of their ongoing value, and in terms of their continued relationships with the peoples for whom they are constitutive parts of their identity *as* a plurality. From this, then, “inalienability” implies that despite the physical distance between an object and the peoples from whom it was taken, it has never actually become the property of anyone else. Despite its confinement in the hands of private collectors or museums, to name but two examples, it has *always* belonged to its original people, as it is *part* of that people. Thus, the return of the object or remains in question is not simply a process of transferring ownership back to the original holders from new owners; it is a reunion between a people and a long-separated piece of their collective self-identification, their histories, and their ontologies. Take the example of the recent repatriation of the remains of nêhiyaw chief One Arrow, incarcerated in 1885 for his allied involvement with Louis Riel’s 1885 resistance to the Canadian state at Batoche, Saskatchewan. After he was returned to and interred in his traditional lands in 2007, One Arrow’s great-great-

grandson Richard John affirmed: “It feels good to have him back, it’s been a long time coming” (“Riel Rebellion Figure Repatriated”). John spoke of One Arrow in a way that implies two things. “It feels good to have him back” suggests that John lived alongside One Arrow prior to his departure, and so he can colloquially express relief at One Arrow’s return. Second, “a long time coming” implies a sense of inevitability to his return; he was always going to come home, to come back, and his repatriation and reburial in 2007 was primarily the fulfillment of that inevitability. His burial in Winnipeg post-incarceration, post-alienation from his people, was not viewed as something permanent by his great-great-grandson, or for the people who, generations after his death, waited and worked for his return. “His spirit has been here,” John explained of One Arrow and his homeland, “but now we have his body” (“Riel Rebellion Figure Repatriated”). The physical return of One Arrow was but the final step in a process of reunion, enabling what Chief Lawrence Joseph of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations termed “a celebration and a return of one of the original leaders of this great nation of ours” (“Riel Rebellion Figure Repatriated” n. p.). The return of One Arrow leads to several other questions about the terms of discourse underpinning repatriation: One Arrow can be returned to his homeland following his unlawful arrest and burial in Winnipeg precisely because his territory is recognized not only by *nêhiyawak* over time, but also by the Canadian government. There is a reservation, a legally marked territory narrated as mirroring the Canadian concept of “*patria*” to which One Arrow can return—despite the function of reservations to subjugate and contain Indigenous peoples to delimiting spaces. Thus when Chief Joseph speaks of returning One Arrow to “this great

nation of ours” (n. p.), his reference to a nation invokes the parameters of repatriation as it has broadly signified for centuries.

Yet despite the potential of strategically utilizing colonial-state models of citizenship and belonging to pursue Indigenous peoples’ rights to their histories and artefacts, there is a limit to the effectivity of such a strategy in terms of what the actual return of objects looks like and implies—and, more broadly, the conceptions of “home” and “belonging” upon which such return rests. It is important to note that it is quite rare for Indigenous peoples to frame their pursuit of such rights through rubrics of citizenship, kinship, and belonging as articulated by colonial states—despite “repatriation” necessarily conjuring these concepts and finding its legal footing through relying on them. Dominant powers possessing remains, artefacts, or objects of cultural patrimony rarely articulate their claims to continued possession with recourse to nation-state-centric models of belonging either. Rather, they often make reference to broadly anthropological categories of membership and ownership as the foundational schemas through which to identify a collective Indigenous people or a singular Indigenous person who could assert ownership.^{xliv} Indigenous peoples have long asserted that government parameters for articulating collectivity by way of citizenship is fundamentally incommensurate with their own conceptions of peoplehood (*Cf.* McAdam 2015; Sákéj Henderson 2002; Johnson 2017). *nêhiyaw* legal scholar Sylvia McAdam (Saysewahum) explains, for example, that for *nêhiyawak*, “wâhkôhtowin (kinship) is critical and necessary to the foundation of nationhood” (59)—precisely that *nêhiyawak* are bound together as a collective not solely through their shared adhesion to a framework of regulated membership, but through their relationships with one another across generations. Plains

Cree scholar Paulina Johnson echoes this assertion in her dissertation (41-43), and affirms that “[l]anguage is a powerful method to understand traditional governance and Nêhiyaw way of life and perception” (101). Likewise, Chickasaw and Cheyenne legal scholar James Sákéj Youngblood Henderson describes colonial legal frameworks and systems as “the modern boundaries of [Indigenous peoples’] imprisonment,” noting that they “are both cognitive and physical” (14). Similarly, Cara Krmpotich, describing her work with Haida people pursuing the return of their ancestors’ remains, affirms that “repatriation committee members generally spoke of repatriation in ways that evoked past, present, and future relationships, especially relations of kinship” (*The Force of Family* 40)—not “a complete replication of cultural practices, or the complete transmission of genetic material” (*The Force of Family* 176).

The assertion that community and continued connection to remains, objects, or items of cultural patrimony are not defined by state-centered logics requiring “complete replication” (176) of past forms of cultural practices functions doubly. First, it undermines the state’s modes of conceptualizing ongoing connection by challenging the authenticity-based assumption of what constitutes community over time. If Indigenous peoples do not practice their cultures in the same ways that they did at the time of the seizure of remains or objects of cultural patrimony, that does not mean that they no longer have a claim to the remains or objects they seek to return home. Second, it centers the perspectives of Indigenous peoples themselves—namely, their means of articulating kinship and belonging—so that anthropological, legal, and scientific pleas for continued colonial stewardship can be seen as what they are: attempts to continue ignoring Indigenous peoples’ voices, which, though brazen in their nakedness, attempt to cloak

themselves in discursive concern for artefacts and remains as precious remnants of a curiously fascinating past.

Elizabeth Burns Coleman affirms that the logic underpinning repatriation discourse—the same logic that endows it with the legal power to physically send objects back to their places of origin—is not wholly commensurate with Indigenous peoples’ conceptions of property and identity worldwide. Though such a statement disavowing global pan-Indigeneity seems obvious, Coleman’s careful work to distinguish “between the concepts of ‘inalienable possession’ and the concept of ‘property’ in terms of the identity relationship contained within the concept, and the sense that an object properly belongs to someone” (85), illuminates the oft-overlooked trap of repatriation legislation and discourse. Coleman affirms that the notion of inalienable ownership necessarily implies that the thing whose ownership is questioned is not something that is “external to” its possessor, but rather is “a matter of identity” (84) for that possessor. The possessor is not the owner of the thing; the thing is part of and partly constitutive of the owner’s identity. She uses the example of a human head as something fundamentally inalienable from its body, and thus the human cannot be separated from her head lest she cease to live and breathe.^{xlv} For Indigenous peoples, she argues, inalienable possession is actually ill-equipped as a term and framework insofar as it denies “indigenous groups the autonomy to reinterpret their institutions” (91), to decide on an ongoing basis which objects are and are not alienable from one’s individual and communal sense of self. Coleman argues that “the concept of inalienable possession [rests] on an error of reasoning” (93), insofar as it assumes that “[t]he idea that a right is inalienable has two interpretations. The first is that the right in question cannot be transferred, and the second

is that it cannot be waived” (84). As such, she argues that “while it is a social fact that rights are intrinsic to [Indigenous peoples’] identity, the idea that these rights cannot be alienated also constitutes a demand that the structure of a group itself remains frozen in time” (91). Coleman’s work thus presents a dilemma for the potentiality of “repatriation” as it is dependent on this foundational notion of possession and belonging: how can Indigenous peoples work within these frameworks to their strategic benefit without compromising the integrity of their own customs and traditions for articulating ownership and belonging? Moreover, how might they conceptualize alternative interpretations of inalienability that do not imply temporal stasis and the continued consignment of their peoples to the past?

To expand further on the concept of atypical contexts for or challenges to the logic of repatriation, in recent years “virtual” and “digital” repatriation have become options of “return” that are offered to Indigenous peoples as compromises regarding the return of their remains or objects of cultural patrimony—particularly in cases whereby “items that fall under [the purview of repatriation legislation] have not been repatriated because the tribes do not have facilities to care for them” (Resta et al. 1). That is to say, if an object is materially fragile, physically weathered by time, or considered to be of great financial and/or historical value, then those who currently possess the object insist that return threatens its continued existence. Insisting that Indigenous peoples seeking its return are ill-equipped to be custodians, this reasoning implies that to return the object would be to consign it to certain destruction or deterioration (which could be averted should the object remain put). However, if such reasons for refusal are employed to justify the actions of those who have seized and continue to hold Indigenous objects, then

sending replicas, photos, or otherwise digital/virtual media not only undermines the notion of inalienable connection between an Indigenous group and the object in question (insofar as the object's holder presumes that an image or video is "close enough" to the original object, and will probably suffice in its stead), but also continues to indulge and uphold the paternalistic ideologies that undergirded its original seizure (insofar as the object was vital to preserving a civilizational record of an Indigenous culture, and would apparently be left to rot if kept in the custody of its original owners).

Returning to Kavita Singh's "Repatriation without Patria: Repatriation for Tibet" is helpful, here. Singh outlines a non-typical context through which traditional notions surrounding the meaning of repatriation—and all of the concepts underpinning its existence and utility—become complicated, thus prompting a need for new modes through which to think about repatriation. Singh explains that Tibet challenges the framework of repatriation as it has traditionally been employed for human remains and objects of cultural patrimony by way of its implicit suggestion "that there is a natural home and a natural community that awaits their return" (132). Singh asks: "Since one usually repatriates to a place, what is to be done if one claimant in a repatriation demand, here the community in exile, contends that the nation no longer exists in a physical form, but has become virtual and survives as an idea? In such a case, the physical 'place of origin' is no longer synonymous with the object's 'proper home'" (133). In the North American context, the processes through which treaty negotiations redrew territorial maps, dislocated Indigenous peoples, and sought to force a geographical narrowing of where and what constituted "home," repatriation is hardly simple.^{xlvi} What happens when territorial seizure and dislocation complicates the "proper home" (133) to which an object

might return?^{xlvi} In this respect, one might draw careful parallels between Tibet and the territorial uncertainty surrounding the Métis, denied rights to their traditional lands by the colonial state, which contended that they were not “authentically” Indigenous by virtue of their shared heritage with some French voyageurs and Scottish settlers in the prairies.^{xlviii}

The 2013 repatriation of the historic “Bell of Batoche” demonstrates this tension; the bell, which hung in the church at Batoche, Saskatchewan, during the North-west Resistance of 1885 (termed “the North-west Rebellion” by colonial historians), has long been considered an item of intense historical import. Its “pockmarked” form bearing marks from “the bullets fired by Canadian military forces at the Battle of Batoche” (Annis, n. p.), the Bell was returned to the Métis via the bishop of the diocese of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan during a mass at the annual Back to Batoche Days festival. After its return for the summer celebration, though, the bell was sent to “the St. Boniface Museum ... located in the French Canadian/Métis district of Winnipeg” (Annis n. p.). Presumably, St. Boniface was chosen because (a) Louis Riel, one of the central figures of the 1885 resistance, is buried in St. Boniface cemetery, and (b) the neighbourhood has been built on and around the territory of the historic Red River settlement. The return of the Bell to Back to Batoche Days, and then to St. Boniface, is particularly resonant for the Métis given Back to Batoche Days’ function to bring together geographically dispersed Métis peoples who share ancestral and communal connections to the Red River settlement. Moreover, though the Bell was initially housed in a museum, it was and remains the property of a prominent Métis organization, the Union Nationale Métisse Saint-Joseph of Manitoba. Thus the decision to display the Bell in a museum was made in ways that are consonant with Indigenous peoples’ rights to ownership, connection, and stewardship vis-

à-vis their objects of cultural patrimony. In the context of Singh's article, the return of the Bell of Batoche demonstrates the maneuvering that attends returning objects of cultural import to communities that have multiple places of gathering, of "home": Batoche and the lands of the original Red River settlement.

The repatriation of the Bell of Batoche, like the repatriation of One Arrow mentioned earlier in this chapter, highlights the complex nature of return, insofar as the material processes of return are freighted with conceptual notions of belonging, home, kinship, and ownership that vary between Indigenous groups and between Indigenous peoples and the state. Keeping these complexities in mind, I ask the following questions in the remaining sections of this chapter. How can language repatriate stories and the memories they hold? How can stories repatriate language and the richness of expression and cultural identity it holds? Part of this process, I argue, necessitates broadening and rethinking what "home" means beyond an authentic, fetishized singular place of origin, thinking of "home" as a shifting space of kinship and identification. It also requires an interrogation of what that identification is *with* (i.e., history, family, territory, cultural and ancestral affiliation, community) in a way that emphasizes its simultaneous fixity and malleability, such that "home" is not limited by the spectre of the "authentic Indian" statically bound in space and time. I wish to emphasize that this reconceptualization does not begin to undermine Indigenous peoples' rights to their traditional lands: "home" can signify multiply and at the same time for one person—to identify as "home" somewhere perhaps beyond the purview of one's traditional territory does not infringe upon their right to that land as their own; it is but a different dimension of what "home" might mean.

2.2 Beyond material(s): Poetic Echoes and Repatriation in nêhiyaw storytelling

Repatriation is a valuable term and paradigm for thinking not just about the return of material culture but also of intellectual property and traditions—for a return not just “of” those things, but a return “to” them as well. Indeed, the physical repatriation of a material thing is but one dimension of the processes surrounding its return; with the return of a material thing also comes the associated and, in many cases, newly invigorated affective return of peoples’ connection to or relationship with the thing in question—to be sure, it may not have been wholly lost, but its return has perhaps endowed its rightful stewards with new feeling and energy through its physical return.^{xlix} The “long time coming” (“Riel Rebellion Figure Repatriated” n. p.) of nêhiyaw chief One Arrow’s return “is closure” (“Riel” n. p.) for the descendant who “laid [his body] into the sacred earth of his homeland” (“Riel” n. p.), inasmuch as it is both a physical homecoming for his body and “a celebration and a return” (“Riel” n. p.) of his life achievements, his activism, and his ongoing connection with nêhiyawak in the present.¹

If repatriation implies the renewed or strengthened affective connection to the thing that is returned, then how, and to what extent, are creative writing and repatriation compatible frameworks for promoting the use, learning, and teaching of Indigenous languages—specifically nêhiyawêwin? Theorizing this compatibility requires a consideration of the agential power inherent in the processes and pursuit of repatriation: who pursues it? What kinds of affects and actions surround and attend repatriation? These questions are not new, however, and have been considered in ways that account for both creative engagements with repatriation and the affective dimensions of return. Jennifer Kramer, for example, coins the term “artist warriors” referring to Indigenous artists whose “artworks, as declarations of a native artist being received by a non-native

audience, are social agents doing the work of repatriation and constructing contemporary native identities through deconstructing former ones” (174). Similarly, Russell Thornton broadly refers to repatriation as a process that works towards “healing the wounds of the past” (17), a designation worth pause and reflection. While true in certain cases, the broad application of this articulation risks reducing the “wounds of the past” to abstractions of the processes of seizure and recovery, whereby the overdue return of stolen material or remains signifies an end, or closure, to the initial violence which prompted its theft under the rubric of settler colonialism, which continues to negatively shape and impact the lives of Indigenous peoples. As such, when considering the potential of creative work to engage and mobilize a linguistic return or repatriation for Indigenous peoples, I am mindful of the necessity of tempering ideas about the profundity of creative expression on its viewer/reader with an awareness of the potentially slippery, passively conceptual way in which terms like “warrior” and “healing” are used, particularly in academic discourse. Moreover, I am mindful of how their application to conceptual, non-tangible contexts of return can complicate and nuance our understandings of what it means to fight for the return of one’s traditions, histories, and the remains or objects thereof. As such, I will trace the connections between repatriation, return/reconnection, and creative work with primary reference to the insights of nêhiyaw storytellers, writers, and literary critics who have articulated how storytelling, language, and creative work have functioned as interdependent pillars of cultural survival and transmission for generations of nêhiyawak.

In conversation with Sam McKegney, Louise Bernice Halfe (Skydancer) addresses some of the primary issues which arise from using the word “healing” to

describe an engagement with creative work, explaining: “art doesn’t heal you. It’s your own action and process and insight and willingness that heals you. I mean, there’s great artists all over the world and ancient artists that have died of alcoholism or self-inflicted wounds or some sort of suicide. Their art never healed them. It was their process” (55). Halfe’s frank comments about the power of creative process over art objects speaks to her valuing of a curative experience that results from investing one’s imagination and energy into making creative work. It is engaging with creative work, making it, interpreting it, reading it, that can offer an avenue of therapeutic recovery—not simply exposure or proximity to the art object itself. For Halfe, it is not the destination (the art object) but rather the journey (its process) of creation, composition, and refinement that facilitates a sustained engagement with oneself—with the emotions, thoughts, and memories that are channelled into the object’s creation. McLeod’s theorization of the work of “coming home through stories”—a process that will be discussed in more detail shortly—works similarly to Halfe’s statement when he explains that “Words are like arrows that can be shot at the narratives of the colonial power. Word-arrows have transformative power and can help Indigenous peoples come home. They help to establish a new discursive space” which resists “the destruction of our [nêhiyawak’s] collective memory” (*Memory* 67). Creative writing, as per Halfe’s articulation, pursues and values process. In this respect, the logic of repatriation as a process centered on return and reconnection aligns with the processes of both McLeod’s “coming home through stories” and Halfe’s process of creative writing. The three pursue therapeutic return through creative *process* and resist investing the end result (a poem, a return home, repatriated remains and/or objects of cultural patrimony) with a power to heal. How and to what effects stories—through

process and as “word arrows” (*Memory* 67)—enact return, however, are dependent on their writers and, indeed, their readers.

The importance of creative work for ensuring the ongoing vitality and intergenerational transmission of nêhiyaw culture is emphasized by McLeod, Hubbard, and Janice Acoose—to name but three thinkers. Hubbard, building on McLeod’s “Cree Poetic Discourse,” explains that “One of the central ways we [i.e., nêhiyawak] make connections to other humans and to the rest of the living world is through the arts” (11). Likewise, Janice Acoose notes that McLeod’s theorization of “coming home through stories” “functions as an important vehicle for cultural transmission” through its placing “in written-English signifying language, his storytelling ancestors, and Nehiyawêwin oral and written stories” (223). Comparing McLeod’s creative inter-weaving of nêhiyawêwin and English to a textually embodied medicine bundle, Acoose affirms: “As the medicine-powered words transfuse the text, organisms within the cultural body become revitalized” (223). Acoose and McLeod both stress the importance of promoting a restoration of nêhiyawak’s connection to their language and stories: “McLeod maintains that as long as Nêhiyawak ‘choose to take the time to learn the stories and the language,’ Nehiyawêwin will survive” (Acoose 223). In this sense, creative work that incorporates and uplifts nêhiyawêwin is actively engaged in facilitating both “cultural transmission” (Acoose 223) and “[making] connections to other humans and to the rest of the living world” (Hubbard 11), thereby laying the groundwork for what McLeod himself terms “the attempt to recover collective narrative memory and to reconnect to the territory of our ancestors” (*Memory* 71). This process, which McLeod refers to as “coming home through stories,” recognizes that “[t]he loss of language is one facet of the process ... of spiritual

exile” (*Memory* 95), and seeks to “resist colonialism and exile” through “[retaining] the echoes of Cree narrative memory” (*Memory* 61) and stories. Creative work and storytelling are thus central to nêhiyaw approaches to cultural (re)connection and transmission, and the use of nêhiyawêwin in creative work and storytelling seeks to remedy “spiritual exile” (*Memory* 95) from nêhiyaw ways of being in the world.

Returning to McLeod’s explanation in *Cree Narrative Memory: From Treaties to Contemporary Times* that “a sense of place ... anchors [nêhiyaw] stories,” it is necessary to remember his assertion that “[t]he connection Indigenous peoples have to the land is housed in language. Through stories and words, we hold the echo of generational experience, and the engagement with land and territory” (6). Part of recuperating nêhiyaw memory through storytelling, then, involves listening for the resonance of past voices, and to understand their importance to the present. This is what I have referred to in the introduction to this chapter as poetic echolocation—a re-sounding through nêhiyaw storytelling that helps repatriate nêhiyawêwin and stories to nêhiyaw homelands. Reading the following collections, I argue that poetic echolocation may not always be modelled in terms of its spatial, territorial resonance on the page of the poems themselves (i.e., of words bouncing off of one another in terms of stanza layout, for example). Rather, it often takes the shape of the poetic representation of speakers working to again carry sound, via nêhiyawêwin, thereby feeling language and story resonate through both themselves and their additions to existing narratives. This dimension of echolocation is present through both the names of people, places, and events and the memories of individual experience, as well as re-tellings of nêhiyaw stories and histories. Language returns to reading and speaking bodies, and, in the context of the poems themselves,

language helps to strengthen the forged connection between nêhiyawak and the land from which they came—particularly in resistance to what McLeod terms “spatial exile” and imposed alienation from one’s ancestral territories, ways of life, and understandings of history.

McLeod explains that for centuries nêhiyawak have spoken of “a sacred place, where people would go to pray; [and] people speak of its healing qualities” (*Memory* 19). McLeod is referring to giant stones on the Saskatchewan prairie known in nêhiyawêwin as “mistasiniy,” meaning “grandfather stones.” nêhiyaw storyteller Barry Ahenakew gives an account of one of these stones, Buffalo Child Stone, noting that it was “sacred,” and that “[y]ou wouldn’t find a boulder that large on the prairies except for there. And the shape of this huge stone was like a buffalo, like a buffalo sitting down” (5). In Ahenakew’s telling, the stone lay in the prairie as the result of a fortuitous relationship between a young nêhiyaw boy—who became separated from his human family by falling off the back of a moving travois—and the buffalo roaming the land. Instead of paraphrasing, I will quote at length from Ahenakew’s narrative to provide a précis in the words of the storyteller who generously shared the story of Buffalo Child Stone.

Some buffalo came, came along, and these buffalo heard a strange sound, the sound they heard was a baby crying. So they checked it out, inquisitive, being inquisitive and the way they said it was the buffalo people ... So the inquisitive buffalo searched for the sound, where the sound was coming from and they came upon this little baby who was now hungry. The younger buffalo recognized him as a little human being and they wanted to stomp him, to crush him but it so happened that there was a buffalo bull chief and that buffalo bull chief put a stop

to what they were intending to do, and he held them at bay and he told them that the child was innocent, the child had never hurt them, this human being child, and that he was going to take him as his own ...

One time they went to drink water in a lake, it was a beautiful mirror lake, calm day, the water was just like a mirror and they all ran into the edge of this lake, all to fill up with water, and as he drank water himself he noticed that the ones drinking water beside him had big heads, horns, which he had seen before, but when he looked at himself in the ripple that they created he could see that he didn't look like them, and that shocked him. That was the first time he realized he was different, and yet he could communicate and he could talk with them, the buffalo language, and they had accepted him so much into their way of being buffalo, of being a buffalo, so that he never thought he was anything else but a buffalo until then when he looked in the water. He felt sad after that. He talked to his adopted father, the old bull, one of the bull chiefs, and the bull chief told him, "I won't hide anything from you. When you were small, we found you and we raised you. I adopted you. I brought you up as one of us. True, now you know you're not one of us. You're really a human being. You're free to go, you're free to go. If you want to go, go. Find your people. You have a mother and you have a father out there somewhere that's a human being." Being inquisitive to a great degree he left. He bid adios to his buffalo family and he left ...

Being a handsome young man, clothed now, with clothes, he eventually lived with not just one woman, they used to have women, sisters or relatives or whatever that would join together and work together under one husband. And

that's how he ended up with about five wives, five women through time, meaning that he was a provider, but the one thing he would never do was eat buffalo, he'd never chase buffalo, he'd never eat buffalo. He knew how to use bow and arrow, but he'd go after elk, the occasional moose, anything else but buffalo. He would never touch buffalo. None of his family would touch buffalo out of respect for the people, the buffalo people that brought him up. I don't know what caused him, the old people never said, what caused him to leave except for the fact that he became lonely for his buffalo father and his buffalo mother, a loneliness that crept into his mind and body and ate away at him, that caused him to leave. So he bid adios to his human people, his human family now with his wives and his children that he had with these wives. He bid adios to them and he said he'd be back and he left. He found buffalo ...

And as he was with them that time, there was a group of people, human beings that came upon them, that started chasing them, whooping and yelling; thundering herd of buffalo, thundering hooves. He was running along with these buffalo and he now knew what was going on. All these buffalo people could be getting skinned and gutted and made into drying meat hanging on racks in these human beings' village, and it made him feel, it sickened him, never made him feel good. So him and, in a hidden area, him and his bull father buffalo ran into a hidden area which turns out to be by the elbow and the turning river, where the river turns, katitipichiwak, and there his father told him, "If you do not want to be a human being anymore I'll tell you and show you a way that you will turn into one of us all the time. But if you don't want to be one of us all the time, you can

roll over four more times and you'll be one of us all the time. But you will also turn into stone. It's your choice." And he thought about it and he did as his bull father buffalo told him. He rolled over four times and he stood up. He was on four legs - he was a bull buffalo. He could hear whooping and yelling and buffalo being chased and he thought I love being a buffalo, and I love being a human being. I've got family with the buffalo and I've got family with the people human beings. I can't take it. I'm going to roll over four more times. And when he rolled over four more times, as he sat, that's how that stone grew and he turned into a buffalo. And that's the sacred story of the Buffalo Child Stone. I've been trying to keep it alive. (5-6)

In "all versions" of the Buffalo child story, McLeod explains, "Grandfather Buffalo tells the young man, 'I will provide for you.' The stone was a physical reminder of the relationship between people and the rest of creation, particularly the buffalo. But the stone was also a concrete reminder of some of the most treasured values of Cree culture" (*Memory* 23). McLeod further affirms that *mistasiniy* "are called Grandfathers" because they "show our kinship to the territory" on which they rest (*Memory* 24). Despite the cultural import of *mistasiniy* and the *nêhiyaw* and Assiniboine reverence for these stones, they were blown up by the Canadian government in 1966 to facilitate the creation of the Gardiner Dam and thereby Lake Diefenbaker—a connection Neal McLeod notes is particularly ironic given Prime Minister Diefenbaker's genial relationship with Indigenous peoples (*Memory* 21). In 2014, however, Saskatoon-based diver Stephen Thair began working with Tyrone Tootoosis (son of Wilfred Tootoosis, who sought to prevent the stones' demolition in the 1960s) to successfully locate fragments of

mistasiniy at the bottom of Lake Diefenbaker. Though the stones never left the land *per se*, their re-discovery inspired new generations to learn the story of mistasiniy: as Ahenakew notes, “[i]t’s bringing awareness to the Buffalo Child Stone and it’s bringing awareness to that location. . . . It’s something great to be bringing it back to light, that this place is a sacred place” (*Indian Country Today*, n. p.). Moreover, with Thair’s and Tootoosis’s plans to make a documentary about their locating and recovering mistasiniy, Ahenakew “said he is glad the history will be brought to life with a documentary, and that even though the pieces are underwater, the spirit of the Buffalo Child Stone—the name he uses to refer to the sacred rock—remains” (*Indian Country Today* n. p.).

When Ahenakew affirms that this “sacred story of the Cree . . . goes a long time into the past” (Ogg n. p.), his comments affirm the way in which time is a place marker because of the connections made between Indigenous Peoples and the land over long stretches of time. Thus, as Johnson explains: “Cree narratives are . . . constructed in relation to space and location rather than linear time and therefore exist through long stretches of time” (74)—*nêhiyaw* narratives persist across generations and are neither formed nor told in isolated, small-span temporal spaces. In other words, if “space and location” (Johnson 74) are centrally generative to *nêhiyaw* narratives, the ongoing resonance of narratives depends on their spatial contexts, not on the temporal frames of their origins. In this way, stories persist and remain relevant, interesting, and affirming over time—they do not become relics of the past. The story of Buffalo Child Stone illustrates this, and McLeod’s poetic re-telling of the story in “*mistasiniy*,” a poem in his 2008 collection *Gabriel’s Beach*, extends this power of words and language, telling readers that “stories and names are food” which “helps keep the life force / *waskawîwin*

flowing” (37). In McLeod’s version of the Buffalo Child stone story, he describes the young boy “in a travois,” whose pulled path prompts “wood cut earth / makes marks” in the prairie ground (36). These paths are “*tâpiskôc nêhiyawasinahikêwin* / Cree writing, syllabics” (36). McLeod partially translates his *nêhiyawêwin*, here, offering the English “Cree writing, syllabics” for the *nêhiyawêwin* “*nêhiyawasinahikêwin*.”^{li} “*tâpiskôc*,” however, is untranslated in the body of the poem: *Gabriel’s Beach*’s glossary informs readers that “*tâpiskôc*” means “like, just as if” (111). With this partial translation, McLeod refrains from offering a simile in the English portion of his poem; though his *nêhiyawêwin* emphasizes the imaginative comparison between the “wood cut earth” (36) and syllabic writing, the English telling equates the two: The marks in the prairie *are* syllabics, and the boy’s movement sees “paths [open] up” in the earth (36) so that his movement across the prairies inscribes stories of his journey into the prairie land. Nêhiyaw/Métis scholar and filmmaker Tasha Hubbard, in her reading of McLeod’s “*mistasiniy*,” connects these inscribed pathways to the geography of the prairies, noting “[t]he stories themselves can be found embedded in the land in shaped geographies such as buffalo paths, carved over millennia and still visible today” (41). In addition, Hubbard notes that McLeod refers to the buffalo as “*mosôm* buffalo,” who

gave stories

holding memory

his body moving

ê-waskawît (37)

Hubbard explains that “[m]osôm is Grandfather in Cree, and the gifts he [i.e., the buffalo]

gave are continuing into the present, demonstrated by how McLeod ends the line with the Cree word for ‘he is moving’” (42). Like the boy in the travois, moving through the prairie and inscribing his stories into the land, the buffalo, too, moves, signifying his continuing provision for nêhiyawak over time. Later in the poem, when “people in the boy’s camp / knew he was coming back” (37) to them after living with the buffalo, “*awa ê-kî-kosâpahtahk*” meaning, “the one who foresaw it” (107) “performed the ceremony” to return him home, and s/he “opened the ground and sang songs / he came back, came home” (37). Ceremonially opening the ground to return the boy, now grown, to his community links back to the “paths opened up” (36) by the boy in the travois. The songs that the community sing fill the air with nêhiyaw sound, thereby drawing the boy home through the widening syllabic paths of his past. In order to access the imaginative, conceptual qualities of the poem a reader must visit the glossary—altering typical reading experience characterized by sustained immersion—and revisit the poem to doubly envision the “wood cut earth” (36) that the poem conjures. Broadly, McLeod’s poetic retelling provides an example of “returning home.” Buffalo Child is sung home to his community through opening the marks, the syllabics, his journey cut in the ground; the story laid the path for his return, and the poem itself enacts that return through the words, images, and events of his life.

The next poem in the collection, “Meditations on *paskwâw-mostos awâsis*,” reflects on the “open prairie / heavy and old standing earth / broken by dynamite” (38), recalling the government-led obliteration of mistasiniy, and remembers that the shattering of the earth “tears the line of old relationship” (38). In this context, the “old relationship” can refer doubly to the longstanding relationship between nêhiyawak and the stone/the

land upon which it rested, and the newer treaty-based relationship between nêhiyawak and the Canadian state. However, “even though the stone is gone,” the speaker explains:

the story lives on
 old stories give our bodies shape
 and guide the path of sound (39)

It is the story of paskwâw-mostos awâsis—which McLeod retold only a page prior to this affirmation—that shapes the bodies and guides the sounds of the speakers who breathe life to it in the present. The Buffalo Child story and the contexts surrounding its contemporary rememberings and retellings lay useful groundwork for considering how creative expression and production can encourage and enable repatriation of things that are immaterial, intangible. In McLeod’s “*mistasiniy*,” for example, nêhiyawêwin functions doubly to enable and facilitate Buffalo Child’s return. Like Richard John’s words about the enduring connection between nêhiyawak and his repatriated great-great-great grandfather, One Arrow, the poetic return to the Buffalo Child story ensures that “the story lives on” (GB 39) for future generations of nêhiyawak. As noted above, the return that “*mistasiniy*” visions is facilitated by the confluence of nêhiyawêwin and poetic language in the pages of McLeod’s collection, the syllabic marks in the prairie ground, and the voices of his community singing him home. Their voices, McLeod’s nêhiyawêwin, and the marked earth together “[open] up” (GB 36) “poetic pathways” (GB 39) for the return of an intangible but nonetheless enduring and powerful return—a model of return, of “repatriation” that is rooted in nêhiyaw articulations of language, community, and place, whereby language returns story and story returns language.

Reading *Gabriel's Beach*, *Blue Marrow*, and *Singing Home the Bones*, I argue that what McLeod calls “the echoes of Cree narrative memory” (*Memory* 61) are not always modelled in terms of a spatial, territorial resonance on the pages of the poems themselves—i.e., of words bouncing off of one another through carefully organized stanzas—or of multiple narrative voices echoing or doubling throughout a collection. Instead, these echoes often catalyze embodied processes surrounding reconnection to memory, remembrance, identity, and family. In all three collections, speakers and characters work to again carry sound, *nêhiyawêwin*, within their memories and their bodies—they seek to feel language and story resonate through themselves as they draw upon and contribute to narratives that are simultaneously beyond them—in scope, time, and context—and fundamental to them—in terms of personal, cultural, and familial resonances. Through centering the names of people, places, and events, and through the storied memories of individual experience and traditional *nêhiyaw* stories and histories, McLeod, Halfe, and Scofield poetically return *nêhiyawêwin* to reading and speaking bodies. In the context of the poems themselves, *nêhiyawêwin* strengthens the forged connection between *nêhiyawak* and the land from which they came, resisting what McLeod terms “spatial exile” (*Memory* 56) and imposed alienation from one’s ancestral territories, ways of life, and understandings of history so that speakers might return “home ... to dwell within the landscape of the familiar, of collective memories” (*Memory* 54).

2.3 *nêhiyawêwin* and a Poetics of Echolocation: “Coming Home through Stories” in Neal McLeod’s *Gabriel’s Beach*

“our words come from land and places
 our stories are echoes
 of the land of our ancestors
 clusters of sound become our bodies.”
 —Neal McLeod, “Word Map for Lost Sons,” *Gabriel’s Beach*

Neal McLeod’s second poetry collection *Gabriel’s Beach* (2008) tells of the experiences of generations of nêhiyaw nâpewak (Cree men), centering first on poems about McLeod’s grandfather, Gabriel Vandall, and his experiences during the Second World War as a soldier fighting at Juno Beach. Second, the collection also reflects upon the events surrounding the signing of Treaty 6 (primarily the resistance of mistahimaskwa [Chief Big Bear] and the historical conflict popularly termed the Northwest Resistance of 1885). Third, the collection also engages with memories and events from McLeod’s own life and his struggles with alcoholism. Fourth and finally, the collection imagines hope for future generations of nêhiyaw nâpawek, suggesting that they might overcome and transcend the violence of the past with the support and care of nêhiyaw iskwêwak (Cree women) who “have been strong in their stories,” (*GB* 104) who “gave us [nêhiyaw nâpewak] stories to help us find our way back to . . . our language and culture” (*GB* 11). McLeod traces nêhiyaw nâpewak’s dislocation and lost-ness to contexts of combat and armed confrontation; as I noted earlier in this chapter, “repatriation” is often typically associated with efforts to return soldiers’ bodies to their homes after death in combat. However, *Gabriel’s Beach* extends its historical scope to indicate that the dislocation and lost-ness which prompts a *need* for return does not begin with the Second World War—it is rooted in centuries-old processes of colonial disempowerment and disenfranchisement. Thus return home, for McLeod, does not entail a state-guided

affirmation of masculine sacrifice accompanied by public grief, but rather a return to ways of being that recuperate what was taken from nêhiyaw nâpewak by colonization.^{lii} As McLeod reflects on the experiences and voices of nêhiyaw nâpewak ekwa iskwêwak (Cree men and women) formative to both his sense of self and a cultural sense of self and dislocation, he draws extensively on the concept of a poetic echo. As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, an echo can be more than a lingering initial sound; it can also be, via echolocation, a network through which sound-as-memory and the sounds of a people's stories can reside and rebound. In addition, an echo can also be an affirmation or doubling of an original sound/statement. McLeod's poetic motif of voices that echo across time, space, and the pages of his collection illustrates the ways in which the poetic use of nêhiyawêwin complements and refines his treatment of home, return, and belonging—all while promoting and making extensive use of the language's poetic capabilities. At the same time as he conceptually draws on the work of the echo in nêhiyaw literary philosophy, he echoes and affirms the insights of the okihcitâwak after whom he implores nêhiyaw nâpewak to model their lives. Throughout *Gabriel's Beach*, nêhiyawêwin echoes are both the route and the destination of his poetic task. In doing this, McLeod's collection presents a model for return home that is consonant with nêhiyaw ontologies of language, storytelling, and home.

Gabriel's Beach is divided into three sections: "Dreaming on Gabriel's Beach," "Sons of a Lost River," and "Words for my Sons." The first section is the collection's most historically-focused, beginning with McLeod's poetic meditation on his grandfather's service in the Second World War. Subsequently moving through time to write of other male figures in McLeod's life—including Peter Vandall and John R.

McLeod—the section threads the events of the Second World War, particularly the landings at Normandy together with the events of 1885 at Batoche and the popularly termed “Northwest Rebellion,” Cutknife Hill, and the organized resistance of nêhiyaw leader mistahi-maskwa (Big Bear) following the signing of Treaty 6 in 1876. The second section, “Sons of a Lost River,” takes up the legacy of the historical moments that were woven throughout “Dreaming on Gabriel’s Beach” to demonstrate their resounding effect on generations of nêhiyawak—nêhiyaw nâpewak in particular. How can nêhiyaw nâpewak pull their minds and bodies from the currents of what McLeod has termed the “false river”?^{liiii} How can they return to the ways of the nêhiyaw nâpewak who came before them, nâpewak like mistahi-maskwa, Peter Vandall, John R. McLeod, and Gabriel Vandall, whose lives were anchored in nêhiyaw land and an affirmation of nêhiyaw ways of being? The third and final section, “Words for My Sons,” is the collection’s shortest, and expresses McLeod’s belief in the wellspring of opportunity for the men of his sons’ generation to “be honest about the past” and live by “the honour of the old *okihcitâwak*” (103). This brief synopsis demonstrates that *Gabriel’s Beach* is multiply-focused: temporal moments are threaded together through McLeod’s exploration of nêhiyaw masculinity and space.

In an interview with Sam McKegney, McLeod offers the question that prompted the collection’s creation:

How did we get to the point that we are at today, as Cree and Métis men? What is the historicity of that? How do you make sense of that? How do you make sense of being men in a context in which a lot of our power has, until relatively recently, been taken? ... So, I think that’s what the book of poems is about. It’s about

trying to find your way back from that place of dislocation. It's not enough to talk about your loss—how do you find yourself back? How do you make your way home? How do you find your balance, collectively and individually? (“Tending the Fire” 204)

Indeed, the process of making one’s way home after a recent history marked by the seizure, dislocation, and alienation of one’s identity dovetails with this chapter’s broader focus on repatriation, insofar as the process of “return” is delicately linked to that of “belonging”—for *nêhiyaw nâpewak* in the present (at least those about whom McLeod is writing), they belong not to an order like that of the *okihcitâwak*, but to a group linked through loss, through “[living their] lives in the shadows of thunderbirds” (103). If finding the “way home” (“Tending” 204) is dependent upon being “honest about the past” (*GB* 103)—which demands an engagement with how, what, and why something has been lost, and how it might be recovered—then what are the strategies through which one could approach such a return? What has been lost, and how might it be returned?

McLeod affirms in *Cree Narrative Memory* that “Cree collective memory is anchored in places and landscape” (19), and, as many scholars have noted, settler colonialism operated (and continues to operate) on the imperative of shattering the connection between Indigenous peoples and their lands, of uprooting the anchoring McLeod speaks of, to claim the land and its resources. Using the specific contexts of 1885, *mistahi-maskwa*’s resistance to Treaty 6, and the Second World War, McLeod addresses what happens when colonial violence—be it legislative, treaty-based, or martial—uproots anchored, place-based memory. Importantly, the contexts his collection references are ones around which narratives of the strength, loyalty, and bravery of

nêhiyaw nâpewak cluster. *Gabriel's Beach* skillfully threads together both these distinct historical events as well as discussions of nêhiyaw masculinity and the consequences of a severed connection between Indigenous peoples, their collective memories, and the land. McLeod does this through, among other things, recursive reference to both the kisisâciwani sîpiy (the Saskatchewan River, literally “the fast flowing river”) and the okihcitâwak (a society of nêhiyaw nâpewak, literally “worthy men”). The okihcitâwak were “hunters, providers, and soldiers” (11), McLeod explains; they were the men whose support and bravery ensured the safety and prosperity of their people. As part of his “Cree word a day” project on Facebook, McLeod defined and briefly explained the word and concept of the okihcitâwak as “providers” (Ogg, n. p.). He elaborates that they

are the ones that would provide for others. i have heard it said that they would often eat last—after everyone else had been feed [sic]. they were also the ones who would protect the camp from danger. i have heard oral history that women were also part of these societies sometimes. english speaking academics have translated okihictâwak as “warriors.” this is misleading as it limits their function and purpose. okihcitâw is a VTA verb^{liv}—it means “to provide for others.” (Ogg, n. p.)

In *100 Days of Cree*, McLeod expands the above definition, explaining that the singular form of the word, “okihcitâw,” means ‘worthy young man.’ It is both a noun and verb, meaning ‘a provider’ and ‘to provide for people’” (*100 Days* 9). Per these definitions and McLeod’s discussion of the word in *Gabriel's Beach*, the okihcitâwak were a selfless order of nêhiyaw men whose ways of being (hunting on their lands, providing for their families and communities, and fighting to defend their communities

from outside incursion) were shattered following the events of 1885 and the signing of Treaty 6, which “changed the life and land of Indigenous people in a profound way” (*GB* 10-11). Crucial to shattering of the okihcitâwak society was their estrangement from the kisisâciwani sîpiy (the Saskatchewan River), the “ancient pathway river” that “guided old travellers” (61) and “had once given so much life to Indigenous people” (*GB* 11). Indeed, McLeod affirms that the “rivers were our highways in the old days, and the source of so much life and many gifts. In Treaty Six, the flow of rivers was one of the things by which the old Crees made a pledge—the classic line: ‘as long as the rivers flow.’ The rivers flowed, and wound through the territory, and gave people life” (*100 Days* 58). The kisisâskiwani sîpiy was thus territorially central to the nêhiyawak, providing sustenance as they lived off of their traditional lands, and conceptually central, as it grounded the reciprocal relationship between nêhiyawak and the lands and waters generative to them. With the river “lost to a new order, its name muted in the English language ... [Indigenous people and Indigenous men] also became lost in the wake of the changes that occurred.” “[W]hen the river of our ancestral dreams was lost,” McLeod explains, “we, too, become lost” (11). This is why McLeod refers to the “lost river” throughout *Gabriel’s Beach*; once a source of independence for nêhiyawak, the kisiskâciwani sîpiy ceased to be a central lifeline generative to travel, food, and survival. Instead, as “the land was cut up into grids to suit colonial fantasies of what the west should be” (*GB* 11), nêhiyawak were forced to rely on the state for subsistence, and the kisiskâciwani sîpiy watered new, geometrically distributed, agrarian lots. Indeed, the signing and implementation of Treaty 6 after 1876 was primarily intended, on the part of colonial authorities, to seize and parcel out land adjacent to the kisiskâciwani sîpiy for incoming

European settlers (*Memory* 35)—whose settlements would be primarily agricultural, and would rely upon the kisisâciwani sîpiy to water livestock and support the growth of crops. No longer “hunters, providers, and soldiers” (*GB* 11), nêhiyaw nâpewak “become lost” (*GB* 11) and lacking the sense of purpose and responsibility for community provision that their forebears valued. When McLeod advocates for a return to the ways of the okicihtâwak, then, it seems possible only through a return to the kisiskâciwani sîpiy, through remaking the multiple connections that colonialism shattered: “we need to find our way back to *kisisâciwani sîpiy*, the Saskatchewan River, the river of our language, of our ceremonies, and our honour” (105). With that return, McLeod theorizes, can come a return to the “ideas of bravery, courage, and selflessness” (105) that enabled a sense of positive, collective belonging between nêhiyaw nâpewak as okicihtâwak.

McLeod opens *Gabriel’s Beach* with an introduction to his grandfather, Gabriel Vandall, whose “strength, bravery, and character” shone through the stories he heard from his father and uncle. McLeod affirms that he understood Vandall’s “life as an extension of the ideals of the *okihcitâwak* (‘worthy men’) from *kayâs* (long) ago” (10). Yet despite Vandall’s embodiment of “the ideals of the *okihcitâwak*” (10), his life as a soldier was defined primarily by his service overseas in the Second World War; no longer an okihcitâw, a provider protecting nêhiyawak, he was a soldier of empire, and his body was deployed in service of the same authorities that sought to dissolve the roles of nêhiyaw nâpewak through the subjugation of nêhiyawak via the signing and imposition of Treaty 6. In *Cree Narrative Memory*, McLeod wonders

why my grandfather fought for Canada when the same country had treated him so badly. What inspired him to fight for a nation that did not recognize his rights

as an Indigenous person? Part of the answer lies in the military traditions of the family. *môsom*'s ancestors were soldiers, and so was he ... [but he was also] seeking a dignity and recognition not available to him in his own country. (80)

In addition to confirming McLeod's assertions that Vandall's life and service in the military functioned largely as an extension of the roles of his ancestors as *okihcitâwak*, this passage carefully emphasizes how Vandall's "actions as a decorated soldier" (*Memory* 80) were instrumental in his search for "dignity," for "recognition" beyond the offerings of the colonial state. Indeed, his desire to be "honoured by the army" was an example of him "trying to find [his] place in a radically transformed world" (*Memory* 80-81)—of working within the traditions of his family to broker "honour and respect" (*Memory* 81) following the loss of the tradition of the *okihcitâwak*.

McLeod traces out the ways in which the beach that was so formative to Vandall's sense of self was not the banks of the *kisisâciwani sîpiy*, but the shores of Juno beach—shores whose only provisions to their visitors were "artillery cutting / smoke fragments," and "short hollow breaths" that "coughed up sand" (*GB* 17). McLeod affirms later in the collection that "he carried the beach / with him all of his days" (*GB* 40). Unlike the shores of the *kisisâciwani sîpiy*, whose "ancient pathway ... guided old travellers" (*GB* 17), those at Juno Beach witness carnage and devastation marked by "cutting," "ripping," and "fragments," a destruction of bodies and of form through the technology of modern warfare—technology deployed in the interests of colonial states' (present and former) intertwined alliances and conflicts. By the time Vandall stood on the shores of Juno Beach, the presence of the *okihcitâwak* and the reliance of the *nêhiyawak* on the *kisisâciwani sîpiy* were already significantly restricted—or stopped entirely—by

colonial authorities. However, McLeod's efforts in these poems to trace the obliterating, destructive effect of the fighting at Juno Beach, an effect which is chiefly disorienting, highlights the contrast between the provisions of the *kisisâciwani sîpiy* and the shores of empire: one guides, one destroys. Though the collection's introduction notes that Vandall fought with "his friends and comrades" (*GB* 10) on the shores of Juno Beach, the obliteration of their bodies in combat (which is rendered graphically: a "friend . . . hit by loosened shell / head falls from body frame / bursts like ripe summer berry" [*GB* 17]) likewise obliterates the relationships between the men. They can no longer stand together, united in purpose; rather, as their bodies are blown apart so, too, are the bonds which held them together as soldiers.^{lv} McLeod explains in *Cree Narrative Memory* that "Gabriel's people, my people, carried the embodied memory of being torn from our homeland" (80), and this notion of "being torn" (80) from one's home resonates with the "ripping water skin" (*GB* 17) that Vandall witnessed at Juno Beach. The bodies of his friends and comrades are ripped apart in and beyond the water, as he and his people were ripped, torn from their lands thousands of miles away. Expanding on his initial description of Vandall in *Cree Narrative Memory*, McLeod explains that Vandall "fought to find meaning in the world, and to shape his life with narrative and story. Having experienced profound political and spiritual turmoil, soldiering allowed him to connect to an embodied past, to an embodied experience" (*Memory* 91). McLeod's poems about Vandall's experiences on Juno Beach highlight in extremity the embodied nature of his soldiering, emphasizing the violence constitutive of that embodiment.

In "Words for My Sons," McLeod recalls: "I remember when I was five . . . and my fingers reached for water, but, like Gabriel on the beach, they could not find form,

only the empty spaces of stories, empty sound without words” (103). McLeod’s childhood dislocation from stories and words is of crucial import to *Gabriel’s Beach* as a whole; when McLeod searches for a framework of reference to describe the unformed emptiness that welcomed his search for the waters of the kisiskâiwani sîpiy, he turns to his grandfather Gabriel’s experiences at Juno Beach, finding the empty, shapeless, and formless void which obliterated sound and bodies. In “Mosôm Gabriel’s Uniform,” McLeod describes the memory of his grandfather’s service and subsequent capture thusly: “they say his mind / ‘floated above the water’ / lost at sea” (16). The quotation marks around “floated above the water” (16) are important, here, in the context of how the collection employs (or, in this case, omits) nêhiyawêwin. At the University of Manitoba’s 2014 Summer Institute in Cree Language and Literature, McLeod, teaching this collection, explained that the phrase “floated above the water” is used by nêhiyawêwin speakers to refer broadly to post-traumatic stress disorder (hereafter PTSD).^{lvi} In the sense that the phrase implies, PTSD is a dislocation from one’s body, an inability to *embody* the memories and feelings of one’s past and one’s ancestors—to anchor or ground oneself in those memories. In the context of Gabriel Vandall’s service and capture, it suggests the extent to which his mind lingered airy above the waters of the beaches of Normandy, away from the currents of the kisisâiwani sîpiy that ran through his home. It is helpful to remember one of the primary meanings of “repatriation”: the return of human remains to their country of origin following military death overseas or “in theatre” (CAF “Repatriation”). Gabriel did not die in combat, though his mental state following life as a soldier implies significant injury and trauma that prevented him from fully returning home and anchoring himself in the place of his people. For Gabriel, return

home is not as simple as the physical repatriation of his body following combat, nor is it resultant to his recovery from the experience of solidering—particularly considering McLeod’s note that Vandall saw his service as an extension of the ways of the okihcitâwak. Rather, his return is dependent upon a reconnection to the people and places from which he has been disconnected. In this sense, the nêhiyawêwin term for PTSD provides an account of Gabriel’s dislocation that hints at its remedy: immersion in the waters of the kisisâciwani-sipiy, and filling “the empty spaces of stories, empty sound without words” with the narratives of nêhiyawak so as to give “form” (*GB* 103) and purpose to his life as a nêhiyaw nâpew.

In another poem, “*Mosôm Pâcinîs*,” McLeod recalls the life of his great-grandfather, Patrick Vandall, who “led his people / in the summer” (28) to hunt, after the events of 1885. McLeod notes that Vandall was the son of Maria Vandall (whom the collection most often refers to as cîhcam), who was

born daughter of *masaskâpaw*

touches the bottom of the water

like name strands

touching the bottom of water (*GB* 28)

McLeod moves backwards through his family history, from Patrick Vandall (*mosôm pâcinîs*), to cîhcam (Maria Vandall), to his great-great-great-great Grandfather Joseph Vandall, *masaskâpaw*. *masaskâpaw*'s name translates to “Stands on the Bottom of the Water” (*GB* 109) in English, and demonstrates his rootedness in the waters of the kisisâciwani sipiy: unlike Gabriel and the men whose minds are “lost at sea,” floating

“above the water” (*GB* 16), masaskâpaw can touch its bottom, immerse himself in its waters, and, thereby, the relationality and histories generated through the nêhiyawak’s relationship with its currents. To return home, to return one’s mind to one’s body from above the water is thus to imagine a return *to* that water, an anchoring in its place and history, to be a man like masaskâpaw—hence McLeod’s variously repeated refrain to “find our way back to the river” [11]), to “find the river again” (103). McLeod’s refrain becomes an echo in its own right; throughout the poem, his refrain resounds to indicate the necessity of re-homing after dislocation. Moreover, while McLeod does not use the nêhiyaw word in *Gabriel’s Beach* for this psychological condition, his strategic enclosure of the English phrase it approximates in quotation marks signals, for those aware, not only the interplay of English and nêhiyawêwin in the poems’ content, but also the complexity of this mental state—the state that characterized Gabriel’s return home from the war, where his mind lingered far away, above the waters in Europe. Moreover, describing the process of this PTSD-like dislocation, “*Mosôm Gabriel’s Uniform*” states: “floating to the bottom / of deep water, *timikamîhk* / not light enough / to journey back” (*GB* 16). The phrasing might seem odd, here: If trauma and dislocation is characterized by “floating above” the water, then why would McLeod use the phrase “floating to the bottom / of deep water” (*GB* 16)? It is, I contend, the impossibility of such a motion, of floating to the *bottom* of water, that accounts for this oddness. Vandall does not “touch” or “Stand on” the bottom of the water, like masaskâpaw before him; rather, McLeod plays with the mobility of “floating,” and the aimlessness it implies, to highlight the darkness of Vandall’s loss after the war. He cannot “journey back” from the “bottom / of deep water,” (*GB* 16), but he cannot ground himself within it. In terms of sound echoing

through water and thereby becoming a locative force, Vandall's inability to make sound echo and travel through space poetically links the waters of Juno Beach to those of the kisisâciwani sîpiy. Sound, story, and memory cannot resonate through the waters of Juno Beach, as Vandall's experiences in the war were ones of dislocation and violent alienation. Vandall carries this lost-ness home with him, and the watery images of floating through loss and dislocation characterize his struggle to ground himself in the waters, stories, and lands of his home.

Furthermore, the nêhiyawêwin word "*timikamîhk*," which McLeod's glossary defines as simply "in deep water" (*GB* 111), reflects the absurdity of this un-grounded grounding, this submersive floating. In *nêhiyawêwin: itwêwina*, Arok Wolvengrey explains that, often, nêhiyawêwin modifies nouns to "indicate place or location" (xxxv). These nouns are appropriately called "locatives," and they are usually made by adding an "-ihk" suffix, called a "locative suffix," to nouns. The nêhiyawêwin word for Saskatoon, for example, is "mînisihk," which McLeod notes in his *100 Days of Cree* "means, literally, 'at the berry'. mînis by itself means 'berry'. The -ihk ending means 'at'—for neechie nerds, this part of the word is called the locative, and it commonly marks place names" (*100* 17). With this in mind, McLeod's use of "*timikamîhk*" after the English "deep water" in "*Mosôm Gabriel's Uniform*" is not an example of one-to-one translation between nêhiyawêwin and English. Instead, the nêhiyaw word grammatically *locates* Vandall in the "deep water" of postwar trauma. Locative suffixes are used infrequently in McLeod's collection, and their placement is, I argue, indicative of the collection's project to re-locate dislocated, torn nêhiyaw nâpewak to a sense of responsibility, belonging, and relationality with the land, nêhiyaw iskwêwak, and with each other—to "find [their] way

back to *kisisâciwani sîpiy* ... the river of [their] language” (105). In this sense, the language of “*Mosôm Gabriel’s Uniform*” literally locates Vandall’s trauma; his inability to ground himself at the bottom of the water or to emerge from “the dark places / without end” (*GB* 16) begins to clarify “how we became lost, how we lost our way” (*GB* 104). McLeod’s poetic use of a feature of *nêhiyawêwin* that demonstrates location and rootedness *in* a place begins his enactment of a return to the language through a return to place.

After the opening poems dealing with Gabriel Vandall’s experiences in the Second World War, the collection moves further back in history, offering four songs for *nêhiyaw* chief *mistahi-maskwa* (Big Bear). These poems ground *mistahi-maskwa*’s refusal to take treaty (that is, to commit himself and his people to the stipulations of Treaty 6) in the events of 1885. Though it is beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a thorough history of the reasons for, resistance to, and abuses of the promises outlined in Treaty 6, “one of the numbered treaties that was negotiated ... [because of] the need for land for European settlers” (*Memory* 35), it is nonetheless necessary to provide some historical context to clarify my readings of McLeod’s “Songs” for *mistahi-maskwa*. McLeod notes that *mistahi-maskwa* was largely resistant to the numbered treaties, because he did not see how colonial governments could, through them, propose to take care of Indigenous peoples in the way that, up to that point, the land had. His famous assertion “‘*môy ê-nôhtê-sakâpêkinikawiyân,*’ ... / ‘I don’t want to / be pulled like a horse’” (*GB* 46) encapsulates his attitude towards the terms of Treaty 6, which sought to render *nêhiyawak* dependent upon the crown and its representatives for their survival. His desire for self-determination and independence, to lead himself and his people without

colonial oversight, led to conflict when “[o]ut of frustration and hunger, some men in mistahi-maskwa’s camp eventually took up arms, and only after the Northwest Resistance of 1885, ê-mâyakhamikahk, (‘where it went wrong’), did the Dominion of Canada begin to deal with the Indigenous people’s opposition to expansion” (*Memory* 36). However, after 1885, as a punitive measure “the government imposed a series of policies that stripped the nêhiyawak of our roots” (*Memory* 54). McLeod’s collection sees the resistance of mistahi-maskwa, the events of 1885, and the aftermath of both, as crucial contexts enabling the effective emasculation and infantilization of nêhiyaw nâpewak under threat of crown punishment.^{lvii} Since the treaty process was initially seen by nêhiyawak as “an extension of the positive relationships that had emerged” during the fur trade, “[t]he notion of reciprocity (*miyo-wîchitowin*, ‘helping each other in a good way’) was the core of [these relationships]” (*Memory* 35). The translation of “ê-mâyakamikahk” as “where it went wrong” thus highlights not the “rebellion” of nêhiyawak against the crown, but rather the failure of the crown to continue the positive relationships of the fur trade by enabling sincere reciprocity—since such reciprocity would require allowing nêhiyawak continued access to their lands and waters to remain self-sustaining and self-determining.

Describing mistahi-maskwa’s voice and political leadership, McLeod notes that “the one called *mistahi-maskwa* / bear claw around his neck” had a “booming voice / twisting echo / *ê-kâh-kistawêt*” (*GB* 43). The “echo” of mistahi-maskwa’s voice is important, here: McLeod is writing about a point in time when nêhiyaw leaders were “brave and generous, former *okihcitâw*” (*GB* 44) like mistahi-maskwa. The echo of mistahi-maskwa’s voice through the waters of Sounding Lake as he speaks to his people

“brought sleeping thunder . . . to the sky” (43), connecting the waters and their contents with the air above. Unlike Gabriel Vandall, who “floated above the water” (*GB* 16), or “floated” to the bottom of deep water, mistahi-maskwa rouses his people and their lands, and his words reverberate through both.^{lviii} There is a connection, enabled through his voice and language, between the people and “the earth / which provides” (*GB* 44) for them. In this sense, then, the songs for mistahi-maskwa recognize and honour mistahi-maskwa as one who made nêhiyaw survival possible, especially considering McLeod’s affirmation that “ê-mâyahkamikahk (1885) radically altered our ability to govern ourselves and to perpetuate our stories” (*Memory* 55). When McLeod writes of ê-mâyahkamikahk in “*Mistahi-Maskwa*, Song Three,” he refers to the events by conjuring “Treaties stripped of honour” and “old, heavy voices / fall from the written script” (*GB* 45). Whereas the booming, twisting echo of mistahi-maskwa’s words to his people resounded throughout their bodies and the land, the “old, heavy voices” written on the treaty script “fall” from its pages, and

buffalo bones

become dry and chalky

melt into the earth

with calming slow rain (*GB* 45)^{lix}

Considering mistahi-maskwa’s belief that the government ought to provide for nêhiyawak in the same way as the “Great spirit” and land had “supplied plenty of buffalo” (*Memory* 45), the “dry and chalky” (*GB* 45) buffalo bones illustrate the desiccated, hollow promises embedded in “the written script” (*GB* 45). They neither echo

nor reverberate, neither rouse nor converse, but rather “melt into the earth” (*GB* 45), their provisions dissolved and absorbed into the territory to which the crown sought to lay sovereign claim as an extension of British patria.

In their representation of mistahi-maskwa’s words, these poems catalyze the poetic motif of the “echo”—which I explained immediately before the beginning of this section—to facilitate McLeod’s reckoning with the dislocation of nêhiyaw nâpewak and their potential return “home through stories.” The four songs for mistahi-maskwa share a similar structure: each poem, near its beginning, offers either a phrase/saying from mistahi-maskwa or a description of his words, and then briefly portrays the effect of his words as they move through the landscape. As mentioned above, “*Mistahi-maskwa, Song One*” depicts how his “booming voice” and its “twisting echo ... brought sleeping thunder” (*GB* 43) from beneath the shores of Sounding Lake. “*Mistahi-Maskwa, Song Two*” provides, in quotation marks, his principle as an okihcitâw: “‘put others before yourself / ‘give away freely’” (44). The effect of his words is that he “gathered wind / from all directions” and “he made his voice / cause the water ... to stand to the sky” (*GB* 44)—much like he did in “*Mistahi-Maskwa, Song One*.” “*Mistahi-Maskwa, Song Three*” opens with “‘ê-mâyahkamikahk” (*GB* 45), the effect of which, as noted above, is the dissolution of “dry and chalky” buffalo bones and “old, heavy voices” (*GB* 45) into the earth. “*Mistahi-Maskwa, Song Four*” opens with mistahi-maskwa’s anti-treaty assertion “‘môy ê-nôhtê-sakâpêkinikawiyân,’ ... / ‘I don’t want to / be pulled like a horse’” (*GB* 46), and his words are followed by a “cool prairie wind” which

creates new spaces

between trees

reshapes water

in new ways (*GB* 46)

The connection between mistahi-maskwa's voice and the wind that blows through the landscape points to the ways in which voices and the stories they tell shape the history and the surroundings of those engaging them: mistahi-maskwa's voice literally moves through the land to reshape and rouse thunder from water, to guide and assert the rights of his people. McLeod's assertion that "[t]hrough stories and words, we hold the echo of generational experience, and the engagement with land and territory" (*Memory* 6) is particularly pertinent here, as it is in these songs for mistahi-maskwa that McLeod actively sets up this "echo of generational experience" (*Memory* 6) by literalizing the echo of mistahi-maskwa's words as they ripple through waters and blow like wind through the landscape. When McLeod affirms that mistahi-maskwa "knew what was coming" and that "he was spiritually powerful / and shared his gifts / with the people" (*GB* 46), he is, presumably, referring to the events that would transpire after the signing of Treaty 6. I suggest that mistahi-maskwa "shared his gifts / with the people" (*GB* 46) to provide them a point of reference for future return, should "what was coming" (*GB* 46) seek to prohibit "the old way of life [of] hunting buffalo and preserving traditional ceremonies" (*Memory* 42) that mistahi-maskwa valued. The echo of his words also gives further clarity to the import of water to *Gabriel's Beach*: Water becomes the space and medium through which connection to home, belonging, and land reverberates in large part due to its instrumental role as the recipient and facilitator of the words of "former okihcitâw" (*GB* 44) mistahi-maskwa. As such, it anchors and enables the possibility of *returning* home after dislocation, and it does so in ways informed by nêhiyaw narrative

memory. Thus for McLeod, return is possible following sustained, enduring connection to the histories, narratives, and places formative to oneself. If one is alienated or dislocated from those narratives and places, then the physical repatriation of or return *to* a place alone does not allow one to dwell within “home”; the echoes will neither sound nor reverberate in resonant ways. Throughout *Gabriel’s Beach*, McLeod demonstrates that understanding what has been lost is the precursor for poetic return; the process of return is not as simple as suturing “the wounds of the past” (Thornton 17) closed through material return. Rather, the desire “to move from a state of wandering and uprootedness toward a poetics of being home” (“Introduction” 10) is intimately connected with how “contemporary Indigenous poetics” (“Introduction” 10) navigates the intersections of lost-ness, return, history, and language. Thus while the insights of repatriation are generally valuable in their emphasis on return, reconnection, and restoration, the echoes that McLeod traces as routes to “being home” (“Introduction” 10) are deeply shaped by nêhiyawêwin, poetry, history, and relationships to people and place.

McLeod explains that “on one level, *Gabriel’s Beach* tells the story of Juno Beach in 1944,” and “[o]n another level, Gabriel’s beach represents violence in a wider, historical sense” (11), and his collection explores that change and its attendant losses and transformations through the stories of his grandfather, mistahi-maskwa, and himself. Along with these two senses of violence that shape the collection, *Gabriel’s Beach* expresses two senses of the word “lost”: to *be* lost, and to *have* lost. This chapter’s analysis has set up both senses, but has not yet made them explicit: to *be* lost, certainly, refers to the dislocated formlessness experienced by men like Gabriel Vandall, men like McLeod himself—men whose minds “floated above the water” (*GB* 16) or who “reached

for water, but...could not find form” (*GB* 103). Similarly, to *have* lost refers to the severed connection between *nêhiyawak*, the land, and their traditional ways of being and living *on* that land. To *have* lost, thus, is to have experienced the shattering of belonging, the dislocation from home and from one’s collective memory, that has been outlined above. Both senses of the word “lost” are represented throughout *Gabriel’s Beach* by McLeod’s recurring motif of a “lost river,” following the dislocation of *nêhiyawak* from the *kisisâciwani sîpiy*. In conversation with Sam McKegney, McLeod explains the phrase “lost river” thusly:

“I call it ‘The Lost River’ because it’s a poetic journey, a poetic remembrance of the experiences, particularly of Cree and Métis men, after this time period [following 1885]. What are the consequences of getting institutionalized in terms of connections to land and territory, but also in terms of not being able to become initiated into *okihcitâwak* societies, and instead having to go to residential school? What are the consequences of that? What are the consequences of not being able to go freely to sacred places of fasting and honouring powers, such as *mihkomin sâkahikan*, that means Redberry Lake, or all the other places close to the Saskatchewan river?” (“Tending the Fire” 204)

The men for whose experiences McLeod seeks to enact “a poetic remembrance” (“Tending” 204) are termed “sons of a lost river” throughout the collection. They are the men who “carry Gabriel’s beach” (*GB* 61) as an inheritance from their fathers, who “have been dragged to the bottom of the water, pulled into a space without colour and form, a place without ancestral memories” (103). The Sons of a Lost River cannot find their way home to ground themselves in the *kisisâciwani sîpiy* because, per Edwin Tootoosis’ “it

does not echo” (*Memory* 6), they cannot locate or hear the echoes of voices from the past, from the voices of leaders like mistahi-maskwa. McLeod affirms that Sons of a Lost River “wander / in land empty of echoes” and

without ancient songs

you will be sons of a lost river

unable to find

your home

on any beach (61)

Indeed, even if the land could still echo to them, McLeod is careful to note that it is these men’s alienation from the land that makes their lost-ness so alienating, so disorienting. As a result, the men McLeod terms “sons of a lost river” (*GB* 61) drift in what he terms “the false water” (*GB* 50), meaning alcohol, much like Gabriel Vandall’s mind floated airy above the waters of Juno Beach.^{lx} For example: in “Lost,” McLeod remembers

the days

crushed and hollowed out

drained of all love and light

my father taught me

the rage of Gabriel’s beach (52).

McLeod’s note that the days are “drained of all love and light” (52) reminds readers of the empty, formless water of the Lost River—it is “drained” of intimacy, and without

light it recalls Vandall's "deep water" from which it is "not light enough / to journey back" (*GB* 16). Demonstrating the intergenerational transmission of "the rage of Gabriel's beach" (*GB* 52), McLeod emphasizes how dislocation from the past has bled into the present through filial connection, prompting generations of *nêhiyaw nâpewak* linked in mutual sorrow and rage:

these moments wrap around me

and give me my place

in the world

and give me

my words (52).

The speaker's envelopment in the moments of pain, violence, and rage that he inherited from his father shapes his "place in the world" and thus the "words" (52) that he uses to make sense of his identity. The slant-homonym pairing of "words" and "world" iterates this connection between language and space. As the mouth moves similarly to utter both, the paired words inform one another in sound, structure, and impact, just as the "land empty of echoes" (*GB* 61) mentioned in "Sons of a Lost River" informs the "engagement with land and territory" (*Memory* 6) that he can experience. Without the echoes of ancestral words and stories, *Sons of a Lost River* cannot find a "place / in the world" (*GB* 52) beyond the formless, aimless space of the Lost River. McLeod expands this yet further when he affirms that "as men, we all lost our way / unable to find the paths / that guided ancestors" and "helped make them / good and honourable" (*GB* 52). This phrasing sums up the double meaning of "lost" in the collection: first, the literal possibility of

losing one's way, "unable to find the paths," resonates with the "ancient pathway river" (49) of the kisisâciwani sîpiy. Second, as a result of *being* lost, McLeod explains

I lost my body
 I could no longer
 carry sound
 my dry and brittle bones
 unable to hold
 old *kâyas* ago memories (53)

Like the "old, heavy voices" of the "written script" of Treaty 6 and the "dry and chalky" "buffalo bones" (*GB* 45) that dissolved into the earth, calcified and empty of nourishment, McLeod's lost body becomes silent, "brittle." He can no longer carry sound, and thus can no longer hear the echo of voices like mistahi-maskwa's through the water.^{lxi} Unable to find "home / on any beach" (*GB* 61), McLeod dwells in darkness, in "hollowed water / no longer shaped by the wind of dreams" (*GB* 63).

In "Mosom's Aid," for example, McLeod likens his alcoholism and being lost to his grandfather's capture and confinement during the war: "my sickness was like the pit / hidden and sunken in the earth" (51), and in "*Ê-kî-pê-kîwêyân itê kâ-tipiskšak* I Come Home to the Darkness," he resides in "darkness hollowed," and "[lays] in this darkness / make myself home / like my grandfather Gabriel" (*GB* 55). The "hollowed" quality of the darkness, of the water with which McLeod surrounds himself, relates back to "the water of vodka," that is "empty" (*GB* 50) of the echoes and histories of the "good and

honourable” (GB 52) okihcitâwak; the water and darkness are not “hollow,” but “hollowed,” they have been excavated of that history as he loses himself “in this false water” (GB 50).

At this point, I have spent many pages reading the dislocation and aimless alienation of nêhiyaw nâpêwak like Gabriel Vandall, like Neal McLeod, following the signing of Treaty 6 and the events of 1885. Yet despite its intricate, extended focus on “how [nêhiyaw nâpêwak] became lost” (GB 104), McLeod’s collection is, in many ways, concerned with the multiple ways nêhiyaw nâpêwak might “come home” to a space and to a sense of belonging that has been “lost” and threatened with erasure by, variously, the violence of colonial policy and historiography, and individual and cultural alienation through substance abuse. If the dual sense of the word “lost” is clear, as are the two senses of violence to which the collection responds, then how does *Gabriel’s Beach* theorize or propose remedying this lostness, this loss? What does “coming home” and “return” mean for McLeod? In the context of the collection, it means a return to the kisisâciwani sîpiy, certainly, but it also means a return to the stories of the past: to grounding oneself literally—by hoping to touch the bottom of the water—and figuratively—by immersing oneself in the stories and words of the past so as to live as worthy men in the present. For McLeod, “[t]o ‘be home’ means to dwell within the landscape of the familiar, of collective memories, which was the world *mistahi-maskwa* was trying to protect” (54) by resisting Treaty 6. Moreover, being home “means to be a nation...and to have political control” (54) apart from that of a colonially imposed patria. It means that one can be a citizen and a protector of a citizenry, as per the actions of the okihcitâwak centuries ago.

In this spirit, McLeod's poems trace a movement from "spatial and spiritual exile" (*Memory* 54) to "coming home through stories" (*Memory* 55). "Spatial exile" is the "removal of an Indigenous group from their land," (*Memory* 55), and "spiritual exile" is "the internalization of being taken off the land" (*Memory* 58), the alienation of Indigenous peoples from their languages, their stories, and their ways of life on the land. From this, "To come home through stories is to anchor ourselves in the world" (*Memory* 70) through "an exercise in physical and spiritual cartography [which aims] to find a place of speaking wherein the experiences of the present can be understood as a function of the past" (*Memory* 70). Coming home through stories is not simply telling narratives, but using Indigenous languages, seeking to embody the principles of stories, and "[providing] the basis for an anti-colonial political imagination that struggles to preserve the Indigenous political system and identity" (*Memory* 78). How, then, does one begin to address the lostness and loss that *Gabriel's Beach* illustrates? I argue that the collection offers two potential strategies. The first strategy is to, at the risk of sounding reductive, swap the tools of colonial control—those which led to the dislocation and alienation of *nêhiyaw nâpêwak*—for those of self-determination and belonging. Crucial to this, per McLeod's assertions, is removing oneself from the "false water" of alcohol and the "lost river," and instead seeking to place oneself in relation with the *kisisâciwani sîpiy*. However, as I have noted above, just as one's place in the world shapes the words that one can use to articulate belonging and identity, without the words and echoes of the past, one cannot hope to locate oneself beyond the place in the world to which they have been relegated. As such, it is necessary to, in effect, change the words and narratives, and thereby the moments, that give *nêhiyaw nâpêwak* their places in the world.

McLeod does this through turning to the invaluable work and strength of *nêhiyaw iskwêwak*, who he notes “have been strong in their stories” while *nêhiyaw nâpewak* “have been weak in [their] silence” (*GB* 104). In doing this, McLeod affirms the strength of Indigenous women, highlighting the instrumentality of their labours to pass down stories and affirming visions of self and community to *nêhiyaw nâpewak*. Regarding the gendered implications of “*patria*” that I noted at the beginning of this chapter, McLeod’s turn to *nêhiyaw iskwêwak* as the guiding figures presents a model of return and home that centers matrilineal, non-masculine modes of descent and belonging. Toward the end of the collection’s “Sons of a Lost River” section, the poem “Word map for lost sons” points to a possible return to the ways of the *okihcitâwak* by offering the guidance of the late Beatrice Lavallee, whose “words we [i.e., *nêhiyaw nâpewak*] must remember” (96). Her affirmations that *nêhiyaw nâpewak* “must remember ... to speak well” and “guide [their] sons with love and not anger” (*GB* 97) initially seem to echo the principles of the *okihcitâwak* expressed by *mistahi-maskwa* earlier in the collection: “‘put others before yourself’ / ‘give away freely’” (*GB* 44). However, whereas *mistahi-maskwa*’s words rely upon imperative verbs—commands to “put,” “give”—Lavallee’s verbs are infinitive: “to speak,” “to guide,” “to choose,” et cetera. The effect of this is that Lavallee’s guidance for “lost sons” emphasizes, without command, *to whom* *nêhiyaw nâpewak*’s actions should be directed: to their “sons,” to their “lovers,” to the “women” in their lives (*GB* 96-97). Lavallee’s words offer direction to the Sons of a Lost River by specifying the relational responsibilities these men must enact if they are “to be guided by old principles / of the *okihcitâwak*” (*GB* 97). They must make the choice to enact these principles and live by these actions if Lavallee’s guidance is to operate as a “word map” to lead them

out of being lost and aimless. If “returning home,” as McLeod outlines, is a “temporal and spatial” process which primarily involves people trying “to move beyond the alienation experienced through colonialism,” (*Memory* 55) then creating, reading, and navigating “word maps” provides a recursive compositional and reading strategy through which to reconnect with, to return home in one’s mind, to the stories of generations of men harmed by colonial violence. That is, nêhiyaw nâpewak must remember and carry not “the rage of Gabriel’s beach” that has been “drained of all love and light” (*GB* 52), but rather the “old principles” (*GB* 97) of “love and not anger” (*GB* 96) that are present in the “thank-you song” of birds who “sang the sun into the first day” (*GB* 97)—those are the words that “come from land and places” which echo “the land of [the] ancestors” (*GB* 96). This model of return is shaped by the ways of the okihcitâwak, but is guided by the words and knowledge of nêhiyaw iskwêwak.

Another woman to whom McLeod expresses gratitude and relief for their work to help orient him, help return him home from being lost, is his great-great-great-grandmother Maria Vandall (cîhcam). In “*cîhcam*,” McLeod explains “her body was our blanket / gave us life and language” and she “was grandmother to us all” (*GB* 47).^{lxii} Cîhcam’s body figured as a blanket resonates with McLeod’s note that the anger of his father would “wrap around” him and “give me my place / in the world” (52). In this sense, his father’s anger positioned him as both an inheritor and perpetrator of masculine rage, and being “wrapped” in this feeling is a claustrophobic, almost suffocating experience. By contrast, his envelopment within cîhcam’s body and the connection to her words “bring sanctuary of stories” and “air back to lungs” (*GB* 49)—they provide the “air” that is necessary to “carry sound” (*GB* 53) and thereby use the “echo of old stories”

(*Memory* 6) to locate oneself in the present. Her words “give form / to the moments of our birth” (*GB* 49) insofar as they operate to positively shape and locate McLeod’s sense of place in the world. As such, cîhcam’s stories, her language, contest the empty formlessness of Gabriel’s beach, which saw men float through “empty spaces of stories, empty sound without words” (*GB* 103). cîhcam thus provides both sound and form to Sons of the Lost River, and when McLeod affirms that “storytellers and poets / hold traces of her / echoes and songs,” that she could “wake sleeping water / to the sky,” (*GB* 49), he gestures to the possibility of using the echoes of *her* words to dwell in water that is neither hollowed nor empty. That is to say, the Sons of a Lost River might not be able to hear the echoes of mistahi-maskwa’s voice, which once reverberated through and reshaped land and waters, but they can hear and rely on the stories of women like cîhcam so as to be guided by her “ancient poetic pathways” (*GB* 49). Terming cîhcam’s stories “ancient poetic pathways” (*GB* 49) links her words directly to the collection’s reference to the “ancient pathway river” (*GB* 61), the kisisâciwani sîpiy, and thus implies that a way “to find the river again” (*GB* 103) is to be “her living body” (*GB* 49) and *embody* the words and principles she lived by.^{lxiii}

Indeed, the concept of “word maps” comprised of guidance and stories is in line with McLeod’s affirmation that stories enable nêhiyawak to “find [their] place in the world” (*Memory* 68), insofar as stories “act as the vehicles of cultural transmission by linking one generation to the next” (*Memory* 68). The intergenerational transmission modelled by McLeod’s cîhcam’s words and ceremonies, as well as by Beatrice Lavallee’s guidance for nêhiyaw fathers to raise their sons “with love and not anger” (*GB* 96) contrasts with the intergenerational linking of nêhiyaw nâpewak through the rage and

sorrow of Gabriel's beach. In these contexts, the work and guidance of nêhiyaw iskwêwak model the turn away from colonial tools of control in favour of a turn towards tools of belonging and self-determination: it is "Through women such as Grandmother cîhcam and the late Beatrice Lavallee [that] Indigenous men like me have been able to find our way home" (GB 11). Moments of darkness and rage are replaced by light and love, "great silence" (GB 104) is replaced by the "echoes and songs" (GB 49) of strong nêhiyaw iskwêwak, and, as a result, the formless "lost river," the "shimmering ... water of vodka" (GB 50) are replaced by the "ancient poetic pathways" (GB 49) to the "ancient pathway river" (GB 61) of the kisisâciwani sîpiy.

The second strategy through which to address the lostness and loss that McLeod expresses in *Gabriel's Beach* is to begin to remake or recreate what has been lost: to live by the principles of worthy men and to raise sons who might live by those principles as well. Indeed, such re-making or recreation is dependent upon receiving the tools, the words, and the moments which enable one to live by the "old principles" (GB 97). One of the collection's final poems, a prose poem titled "Words for my Sons," moves towards this recreation, modeling Lavallee's directive to "guide ... sons with love and not anger" (GB 96). McLeod explains to his sons: "I speak of these things [i.e., of Gabriel's beach and the loss of the river] to you because I love you ... I want you to find the river again, the river of our ancestors" (GB 103). As I have mentioned above, McLeod notes that returning to the river, returning home, and living as a worthy man/raising worthy sons is only possible by being "honest about the past" (GB 104). Indeed, the preceding hundred pages of *Gabriel's Beach* have sought to do just that: to be transparent and open about what it was like for McLeod to live as "part of a chain that stretched to the past, a

darkened legacy which had its roots in *ê-mâyahkamikahk* ‘where it went wrong’ 1885” (GB 104). The collection’s invocation of multiple temporal contexts demonstrates how the past reverberates through the present, and how the present—through remembering the strength and bravery of *nêhiyaw iskwêwak* and *nâpewak*—can reshape the ways in which one reads the past. When McLeod ends his collection with the affirmation: “I need to find my way back to the river like my father before me” (GB 105), he emphasizes the necessity of working backwards, working through the past, to “find [his] way back” (GB 105) to what he has lost. In this sense, *Gabriel’s Beach* resists the closure of a verifiable return home at its end; instead, it focuses on explaining and providing the tools through which McLeod can begin to find the river and, thereby, ensure that “through [his son’s] lives, the river can be found again” (GB 103). This model of return, as articulated previously in this section, extends beyond state-centric mechanisms for return and repatriation, whereby the emotional “wounds of the past” (Thornton 17) are closed following the return of and reconnection to something that has been lost.

Across its pages, *Gabriel’s Beach* offers a complex imagining of return: through *nêhiyawêwin* and through stories, the collection theorizes a return to oneself and one’s history that is apart from the forces that seek to injure or cloud one’s ability to belong somewhere, to live in ways that are commensurate with the history of one’s people. Together, McLeod’s poems trace a movement from the injuries and hurt of the past, to the dislocation and alienation experienced by young *nêhiyaw nâpewak*, whom McLeod terms “sons of a lost river,” (11) to the potential for their nourishment and relocation, with their potential wholeness afforded through the words of women like *cîhcam* and Beatrice Lavallee. Yet physical return—like the repatriation of bodies following combat,

or the return of objects of cultural patrimony—is not the primary strategy through which to dwell at home and remedy the dislocation felt by nêhiyaw nâpewak. Rather, it is through using nêhiyawêwin, through connecting to the land and the stories of one’s past and one’s people—particularly how the events of 1885 shattered nêhiyaw masculinity and communal organizing—that one might return home.

2.4 Returning Storied Kinship in Louise Bernice Halfe’s *Blue Marrow*

Louise Bernice Halfe (Skydancer)’s collection *Blue Marrow* (originally published as a collection of poems in 1994, and republished as a long poem in 2005) enacts a poetic echolocation similar to that in McLeod’s *Gabriel’s Beach* through its efforts to orchestrate the voices and stories across its pages. Hubbard explains that the collection “strips back layers of history to reveal the injustices [experienced by nêhiyaw and Métis women], understanding itself as a necessary part of the recovery of Indigenous ways of knowing” (134). Indeed, it is necessary to consider how *Blue Marrow*’s thematic “recovery of Indigenous ways of knowing” (Hubbard 134) is reflected by both its use of nêhiyawêwin and the way that it presents and structures the voices of multiple speakers. To reiterate introductory material covered in this dissertation’s first chapter, much of *Blue Marrow* is structured by way of a call and response dynamic between the main poet-speaker and her grandmothers. Conceptually, this dynamic operates to support the poem’s agenda to wake up memory and understand history—to help the speaker understand her own location and identity in the present. The formal innovation through which Halfe’s poem structures the resounding “echo” of old voices and stories is, I argue, a sort of poetic echolocation. This echolocation—or “location of objects by means of the echo

reflected from them by a sound-signal” (*OED*)—can be productively applied to *Blue Marrow*’s thematic project as well. Similar to the “word maps” that McLeod references in *Gabriel’s Beach*, the call and response dynamic between Halfe’s speaker and her grandmothers challenges the patrilineality that is inherent in “patria,” and thereby “repatriation,” as a model for the return of stories, bodies, and histories. Throughout *Blue Marrow*, the poet-speaker’s grandmothers return their words and stories to her, and guide her to a poetic affirmation of self. Both the model for the speaker’s return and the space to which she returns are made possible through an understanding of belonging and descent that is expressly non-masculine and matrilineal, whereby nêhiyaw iskwêwak’s labours of memory and storytelling are expressed through nêhiyawêwin and story. In the present, the speaker carries the weight of her forebears, and uses their stories and words to direct her own poetic meditation on what she sees as her obligation to “weave, bend / the blue marrow” (46) of her poems into a narrative that centers the experiences and histories of nêhiyaw and Métis women. Through its numerous derivatives and variations of âcimowina, I suggest that *Blue Marrow* not only highlights the importance of changing, adapting, and sharing stories to recuperate the echo of “Old voices” (McLeod 11), but also facilitates what McLeod refers to broadly as “coming home through stories” (67).

The poetic work of an echo, like in McLeod’s *Gabriel’s Beach*, helpfully articulates this dynamic as it works in *Blue Marrow*. McLeod’s note in *Cree Narrative Memory*, mentioned above, that the “‘echo’ metaphor has often been used by nêhiyaw storytellers as a way of describing the past coming up to the present through stories” (6) is worth repeating here. He explains, for example, that “Jim Ka-Nipitehtew, an elder from

Onion Lake, said that what he knew [as a storyteller] was like an ‘echo of older voices from a long time ago’ (6). Likewise, to recall Edwin Tootosis, land “*môy ê-kistawêt*’ (It does not echo) or have sound in the same way it had before” (McLeod 6). If, as previously affirmed, part of recuperating *nêhiyaw* memory through storytelling involves listening for the resonance of past voices and understanding their importance to the present, then McLeod’s suggestion that “the ancient poetic memory of ... ancestors finds home in our individual lives and allows us to reshape our experience so that we can interpret the world we find ourselves in” (*Memory* 11) is especially relevant for reading *Blue Marrow*. Indeed, this is almost exactly the project of *Blue Marrow*, almost exactly the situation of its main speaker, The Keeper of the Stories: She must listen to the responses of her grandmothers, eternal and ancestral, to make sense of her life in the present. The Keeper of the Stories affirms early in the poem: “I bring to you / these Voices I will not name” (18), referring to those of her late grandmothers. Later clarifying “My Grandmothers were country wives-- / bartered, traded, stolen, bought and sold” the poet-speaker re-affirms:

I do not recognize who speaks.

I give you these offerings

from their *âcimowina* and tie tobacco

to their ribs. (61)

Despite her admission that she might not recognize or name the voices she catalogues, she decisively gives “these offerings / from their *âcimowina*” (61) to her readers.

âcimowina become *Blue Marrow*’s way of recuperating the echo of the past. Thus it is

not only in concept that *Blue Marrow* engages the echo of old stories, but also in form, through its use of *nêhiyawêwin* to structure the interplay of the voices of the Keeper of the Stories and her grandmothers. In terms of *Blue Marrow*'s work to engage the "echo" of old voices and stories for sake of pursuing poetic return, it is helpful to parallel the collection's treatment of the grandmothers' stories and the work of repatriation broadly. While *Blue Marrow* does not expressly invoke repatriation, it frames the grandmothers' stories as obscured and whitewashed by colonial histories in such a way that they have been decisively held apart from the peoples for whom they are resonant. The poem's opening catalogue of Indigenous women's names, for example, expresses the litany of experiences that have been left behind and overlooked in service of crafting a narrative of the fur trade that privileges settler efforts to build a nation through trade and resilient labour. In this sense, an intervention aimed at returning the voices and experiences of these women is not only affirming, but also a powerful turn to the necessity of returning *nêhiyaw iskwêwak*'s voices and experiences *through* their words and stories.

Near the poem's beginning, after being beckoned or called by the poet-speaker, the "Grandmothers, and the Eternal Grandmothers wail in unison" (30) a series of commands and requests to the Keeper of the Stories—things to do, to keep in mind, as she orchestrates these voices in the pages to come. They command:

Kkahkiyaw iskwêwak, nôtokwêsiwak, câpânak,

êkwa ohkomipanak

Grandmothers, and the Eternal Grandmothers wail

in unison

sôhkêyimo. sôhkêyimo.

pimâtisi. âcimostawinân.

Strive in boldness. Strive in strength.

Live.

âcimo.

âcimowinis

Smoke shrouds the dried meat

hanging on a tripod ...

I puff small winds ...

She is there. She is not. A dog howls. (30-31)

In this exchange, “the women’s strength is woven into Halfe’s words, and she explains how the voices of her grandmothers guide her own poetic voice” (Hubbard 134). Their *nêhiyawêwin* not only signals who is speaking, but also provides a powerful reminder that, as *nêhiyawêwin* is not organized by gender (but rather animacy), the instructions that the grandmothers issue to the poet-speaker about what to do, how to tell her story, and how to return their stories, is shaped by a language that does not privilege masculine modes of speaking and address. Like their model of return through matrilineality, their language departs from the masculine-inflected “patria” as a site to which to return. For the grandmothers, the stories and language of *nêhiyaw* and Métis *iskwêwak* is the route to and site of return.

In the passage cited above, Halfe's use of indentation for *nêhiyawêwin* strategically identifies which words are to be attributed to which speaker; as such, readers can infer that it is the collective voices of Grandmothers issuing commands to *âcimowinis*. Beginning with their command "*âcimostawinân*," meaning "you tell us stories (right now)," Halfe takes the inanimate noun "*âcimowin*," and turns it into a transitive animate verb in the immediate imperative, whereby a second person singular party acts on or towards a first person plural party. A transitive verb in *nêhiyawêwin*, like in English, requires both a subject performing the action of the verb as well as an object that might receive the action of that verb (e.g., compare the intransitive "She arrived" with the transitive "She wrote a letter"); the addition of animacy that structures *nêhiyawêwin* nouns extends to verbs, too, so that a transitive, animate verb refers to an action with a do-er and a receive-er, one or both of whom are animate. The imperative form of "*âcimostawinân*," however, functions differently than the imperative form that English verbs take. In *nêhiyawêwin*, imperative verbs issue commands that are either immediate or future. Whereas English relies on the addition of the adverb "now" to make clear that a command should be immediately followed, *nêhiyawêwin* imperatives are communicated with suffixes. By virtue of "*âcimowstawinân*"'s theme sign "i"^{lxiv} and suffix "-nan," (and one can account for the "w" between the theme sign and the suffix because of the double vowel sounds bracketing it, which *nêhiyawêwin* does to make words easier to pronounce), "*âcimowistawinân*" effectively instructs the poet-speaker to immediately tell stories *to* the grandmothers, to organize the voices she hears and imagines after waking them from their slumber. That is, upon starting her project to rouse the voices of her grandmothers and thereby listen to the echoes of the past, The Keeper of

the Stories must give her “offerings” (61) if she expects to receive guidance from her grandmothers.

A few lines later, another version of *âcimowina* appears: the animate intransitive verb “*âcimo*” (31). After a brief translation of the grandmothers’ other commands—to “*Strive in boldness. Strive in strength. / Live*” (31)—Halfe provides not a translation of “*âcimostawinân*” (30), but rather another version of the word. Here, the inanimate noun “*âcimostawinân*” (30) becomes an animate intransitive verb meaning “tell stories, tell news” (Halfe 103). In the space of a few lines, with the repetition of variants of *âcimowina*, readers can track a movement from, loosely: “You tell us stories right now,” to “tell a story.” Just as the noun *âcimowina* becomes the verb *âcimostâwinân*, a thing—a story—becomes a guide to performing its action. As I noted in the introduction to this section, the model for the speaker’s return (listening to the stories of her ancestors and forebears) becomes the guide by which to arrive at an affirmation of self that places her in line with the women who came before her. The speaker does not return to a “patria” that is ordered by masculine right of inheritance and belonging; rather, she engages the women who came before her and accepts her obligation to affirm and center their stories through her own creative labours. Moreover, when this word appears in multiple forms, it actually structures the way the stories appear on the page: they cluster around and are held between repetitions and variations of *âcimowina*. This word, spoken back and forth between the poet-speaker and the grandmothers, becomes the post across which these voices reverberate. When the grandmothers “wail in unison” (30) to the Keeper of the Stories, their guidance for her project is bracketed by and reverberates with the various iterations of ‘*âcimowin*’: it is this concept of the story, of its telling, of the command to

tell at all, which resonates throughout the poem, and keeps finding new form around the actual words of the stories themselves.

Moreover, the fact that the Keeper of the Stories is referred to as “*âcimowinis*” (25) is worth pause, too. A diminutive of *âcimowin*, *âcimowinis* literally means, by virtue of its ‘-is’ suffix, “little stories” (Halfe 103). By giving the poem’s major narrative voice this title *Blue Marrow* is, I suggest, stressing that despite her prominence in the narrative she remains but a small part of a bigger picture: she is not the grand purveyor of these *âcimowina*, but rather someone who, like her little stories—humbly stitches together these various little stories for her own purpose. Moreover, understanding the structure of the poet-speaker’s name as a diminutive, as something “smaller than the norm” (Okimasis 13), helps further inform the poem’s resonance with *nêhiyaw* literary philosophy. McLeod affirms that for *nêhiyaw* storytellers, “Humility is a primary characteristic,” because it “acknowledges that narratives are open-ended” (17), that “No story is complete in itself” (5). McLeod explains that even the most skilled or knowledgeable *nêhiyaw* storytellers would “begin with ‘*namôya mistahi ê-kiskêyih tamân*’ (I do not know very much)” (16). As mentioned previously, the poet-speaker does indeed admit to her lack of knowledge at the poem’s beginning: she concedes “I do not recognize who speaks” (61), highlighting both her lack of knowledge and her inability to recognize the voices of women who have theretofore been left out of history. With the name “*âcimowinis*” (21), this humility, this acceptance of a storyteller as but part of a larger, ongoing narrative, is translated to *nêhiyawêwin* and subsequently used as a narrative device to organize the poem’s other voices. To be blunt, when the grandmothers’ voices echo across time to the speaker, her efforts to orchestrate them into *Blue Marrow* as a poem are but one of many

possible attempts at such a project.

As a concept on its own, echolocation depends on finding or locating something by way of bouncing or reverberating sound signals. With respect to *Blue Marrow* and its poetic echolocation, it is necessary to address what is located and to what effect. McLeod explains that invoking *nêhiyawêwin* in poetry can often enable speakers and readers “to be home,” which, for him, “is to dwell within the landscape of the family, a landscape of collective memories” (17). Though it is beyond the scope of this chapter to further read *Blue Marrow*’s structural uses of *nehiyawêwin*, I suggest by way of conclusion that *Blue Marrow*’s final image of the poet-speaker illustrates McLeod’s concept of “coming home through stories” (17) on the page. After asserting that “Long ago Grandmother danced in glades” (97), the poet concludes her organization of numerous stories with the following image:

I return to the Moon glade,
 turn up the sod,
 lift up my songs.
 Dream...
 Grandmother, the woman in me.
 A pagan. Again.
 All my relations. *ahâw* (98-9).

At *Blue Marrow*’s close, the poet-speaker returns to “the Moon glade,” the space of where her “Grandmother danced” (97) in years past. She has returned, as McLeod notes, to a “landscape of family” (17), where she then delivers her final affirmation. To use Cook’s phrasing, at this point of *Blue Marrow* the poet-speaker “navigates her way out of

amnesia and into memory presented as story” (161). As a result of the extended conversation with her grandmothers, her ancestors, and nêhiyaw iskwêwak across history, the poet-speaker understands how “Grandmother” exists at the core of her identity as a woman, and affirms a return to herself as “A pagan” (99), staunchly opposed to the imposed Christianization of nêhiyawak and nêhiyaw iskwêwak throughout colonial history. Through the “echo of old voices” (*Memory* 6), the poet-speaker finds her place in the present, understanding how it relates to the history of her family and, more specifically, the women who came before her.

If, as Hubbard suggests, language for Halfe “becomes a metonym for colonial struggle” (134), then her efforts to thread nêhiyawêwin throughout *Blue Marrow*—indeed, to make it elemental to the collection’s stories and perspectives—illustrates the ability to use an Indigenous language to “battle the rift between our Native tongue and the foreigner’s language” (Walker and Halfe qtd. in Hubbard 134) in ways that center the *ability* of language to enable connection, cultural transmission, and an affirmation of nêhiyaw identity. More specifically, Halfe’s use of nêhiyawêwin to thread together and orchestrate the echo of voices across the pages of *Blue Marrow* allows the Keeper of the Stories “to dwell within the landscape of the family, a landscape of collective memories” (McLeod 17). In doing this, *Blue Marrow* poetically takes up what McLeod outlines as “[o]ne of the challenges of contemporary Indigenous poetics,” which “is to move from a state of wandering and uprootedness toward a poetics of being home” (“Introduction” 10). The Keeper of the Stories’ poetic return home is chiasmatic; nêhiyawêwin facilitates, guides, and represents her return to the stories of nêhiyaw and Métis iskwêwak, and, in turn, the stories, through the collection’s echoing voices, return nêhiyawêwin to the

speaker so she can locate herself in “a poetics of being home” (McLeod “Introduction” 10).

2.4 Smaller Returns: Song, nêhiyawêwin, and Family Spaces in Gregory Scofield’s *Singing Home the Bones*

“Ida, the bones of you
are without marking”
—Gregory Scofield’s “Ida, But Still.”

Whereas McLeod’s and Halfe’s poems of return, home, and reconnection are often cosmic in scope, tracing an individual’s place and movement within a collective, social order like the okihcitâwak, or across a vast history like that of nêhiyaw and Métis women throughout the fur trade, Métis poet Gregory Scofield’s poems of return and reconnection in his 2005 collection *Singing Home the Bones* are smaller in their scope. Though they explicitly invoke the concept of repatriation as a framework for return and restoration, the “home(s)” around which they affirm the possibility of return are personal, and not a state-centric patria. The poems of *Singing Home the Bones* are domestic, familial, and individual; Scofield traces the memories of his childhood and his Métis background through the household items and rituals of his ancestors, through the stories that linger in walls, dwell in photographs, and float through rooms. In *Singing Home the Bones*, the return “home” of peoples, language, and memories centers around the creative possibilities of renaming and mourning. I argue that Scofield’s invocation of nêhiyawêwin in his efforts to memorialize and thereby sing home the bones of his Métis family enacts a poetic remembrance that uses creative writing as the occasion for issuing sound-as-memory, for initiating an echo of voices across time and space. Whereas McLeod’s and Halfe’s collections draw heavily upon the words of nêhiyaw storytellers to

guide their respective poetic projects, thereby engaging the echo of those storytellers' voices and using their language to animate the pages of *Gabriel's Beach* and *Blue Marrow*, Scofield in *Singing Home the Bones* issues his own echoes. Admitting his struggle to hear and connect with the voices of his ancestors, that his "mother knew little about her father's childhood, or of the half-breed women who lived in the marrow of memory" (*Singing* 102), Scofield initiates an echolocative process by poetically remembering his ancestors with the language that they spoke and the stories that shaped their lives. In this sense, the collection's ongoing invocation of domestic space and of family houses not only illustrates the intimate nature of the poems, but also provides a series of spaces through which the words and stories he issues might resound. Moreover, like *Gabriel's Beach* and *Blue Marrow*, *Singing Home the Bones* imagines the process and spaces of return with specific reference to the guidance and labour of women, so that the "patria" as a concept of descent and belonging signifies with primary reference to the work of women to nourish, guide, and build spaces of accountable relationality and loving care between kin.

A brief detour concerning Scofield's stated understanding of "home" and identity is helpful before engaging the poems of *Singing Home the Bones*. In his memoir *Thunder Through My Veins: Memories of a Metis Childhood* (1999), Scofield illustrates his understanding of "home" as a fluid, multiply signifying concept that is not constricted by temporal linearity or, albeit to a lesser extent, territorial fixity. Indeed, Scofield's understanding of "home" is not reliant on the same models of belonging that, per legal frameworks of repatriation, constitute a space *to which* one might seek or broker return. In the memoir's opening, Scofield explains that some of his numerous childhood homes

have faded from his memory, and are now “submerged in that river of my blood that has always been home” (xiii). From the outset, his readers are alerted to the corporeality of home: Scofield notes that it permeates his physical being, and he carries it with him as he moves and grows into adulthood—despite the routes and destinations of his territorial journey. In “Diaspora and Nation in Métis Writing,” Sophie McCall affirms that a “sense of displacement and ambivalence shapes Scofield’s process of learning about his Métis roots” (24). Home, for Scofield, is a journey of accepting himself as a gay Métis man and of accepting the Métis people and their lands as constitutive of his identity—particularly insofar as his exposure to Métis history and identity was formed through public school “history books, talking about crazy Louis Riel and the useless half-breeds” (*Thunder* 164). In *Thunder Through My Veins*, this journey reaches its peak when he visits Batoche as a young adult, where the land and the people function as the catalysts for his recognition: “I felt oddly attracted to these people ... I felt such a mixture of emotion. A surprising new feeling had awoken within me. I looked around the theatre and saw *my* people. I knew I had come home at last” (*Thunder* 165-66). Understanding Scofield’s journey to conceptualize “home” is useful for this chapter insofar as it helps to challenge the idea that, should something return “home” under the rubric of repatriation, then it must go to a physical, locatable place that has been predetermined and verified by the legal network which enables someone to lobby for its return.

Singing Home the Bones, Scofield’s fifth poetry collection, consists of three main parts: “Conversations with the Dead,” “Conversations with the Missing,” and “Conversations with the Living.” In the first section of *Singing Home the Bones*, “Conversations with the Dead,” Scofield meditates on and explores the ways in which his

ancestors—particularly nêhiyaw iskwêwak, but not solely—were subject to colonial conventions of burial and naming. In “Ida, But Still,” which reflects on Scofield’s search for “*the grave of [his] great-grandmother at St. Bede’s Cemetery*” for example, Scofield writes:

Ida, but still the old church
 is without records
 and the crocuses along the gate
 have only a seasonal memory (22)

Scofield’s lament that the “old church” has no records of those who are buried in its cemetery prompts his turn to “the crocuses along the gate” (22), gesturing to the land as an alternative indicator of the passage of time. Yet crocuses are not Indigenous to North America; they are imported plants whose chief value is ornamental, and thus their “seasonal memory” (22) does not remedy the fact that Ida’s bones “are without marking” (22). With neither record nor story about Ida’s grave, Scofield wonders:

who is to know ...
 if the bible of you
 Ida, was free to burn wordlessly
 and all who were written there
 would become still still
 like the tea leaves settling

at the bottom of my story cup (22-23)

Scofield has often written about the role of tea in his life, noting that its brewing and consumption was often the occasion for his mother (Dorothy Scofield) and his Aunt Georgina (Georgina Houle Young) to share stories and reminisce about their lives (*I Knew* n. p.). The “story cup” (23) in which, through simile, Scofield imagines the quiet, settling remnants of those “written” in the “bible” of Ida (23) counters the bible’s wordless burning. Even the destruction of “the bible” of Ida (23) is imagined as an occasion marked by silence. Indeed, Scofield does not and cannot know “all who were written” in “the bible” of Ida (23), as he has no insight into who and what might have filled its pages, who might lay beside her unmarked, unrecorded grave at St. Bede’s. Similarly, the stories formative to Ida’s life—the same narratives that might be shared over tea—are instead left “still” like “tea leaves settling” (23). Despite this, Scofield’s use of the “tea leaves” and “story cup” demonstrate the ways in which his creative remembering of his ancestors, of women like Ida, become focalized through his engagements with domestic objects and rituals. Though he can neither hear nor tell the story of Ida’s burial, though he cannot find her body and visit her grave, the ritual of story with which he grew up remains present in this contemporary meditation on the “century of silence” that her “hands hold upright” (23) without record. In this respect, the poem itself becomes the words that come from the “story cup” (23), and Scofield’s meditation on his inability to locate the grave of his great-grandmother is him reading “the tea leaves” that have settled at its bottom to imagine what might have happened in the cemetery, what might have happened to the records. In the notes at the end of *Singing Home the Bones*, Scofield remarks that Ida had “broken conventions of the day by getting

pregnant with my grandfather by a half-breed farmhand” (105). The taboo surrounding her pregnancy and her relationship with the “half-breed farmhand, Johnny Cusitar” (105) led to her story being “shut away in the minds” of Scofield’s relatives (105). He explains that learning more about her life and writing her story was part of his desire to “[give] her a place of honour” (105). In this sense, recuperating her memory from the burned, silenced “bible of [Ida]” (22) plays on the concept of a family bible, which often served as a place of family record-keeping for births and deaths, to offer a new testament to her presence in the absence of “records” from “the old church” (22) and his family’s candor.

In another poem about his great-grandmother, “The Repatriation of Ida M. Scofield,” Scofield invokes a “*Family Portrait*” from “*Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, c. 1904-1905*” (17) to imagine the dissonance between Ida’s pristine, posed portrait—in which she is rendered “sepia-toned” (17) and silent—and her desire to cease posing. Just as the photo is “unravelling” (17), so too does Scofield imagine Ida herself on the brink of losing composure,

waiting

to tear off the thick brocade dress

and throat pin, this presentation

of perfect ordinance

caught in tatters fraying apart (17)

In his notes for the poem, Scofield describes how he once took the photograph and “held her image to the light ... [and] realized that she was speaking. She was singing as free women do, and I haven’t stopped listening” (105). The visual, silent representation of Ida in the photograph speaks to Scofield so that it becomes the source material for his poems, the words of a “free” woman countering her directed pose in the photograph itself. Her posed silence, met with his desire to “[imagine] her life through the medium of a photograph” (*Manitowapow* 314) through listening as opposed to viewing, prompts his poetic remembrance and affirmation of her life and voice. Broadly, the photographs and domestic miscellany surrounding Ida become the channels through which to remember and reanimate her in Scofield’s memory. Explicitly taking up and responding to the concept of “repatriation,” Scofield’s language and poetry re-work, re-narrativize the contours of his mind and his family’s history so that the memories of his ancestors are conjured by and linked expressly to Ida’s relationship with Johnny Cusitar, which is seen not as a source of family “[s]hame, secrecy and disapproval,” but rather as “the repatriation of the truth” (105) of her story.

Another song from “Conversations with the Dead,” “Prayer Song for the Returning of Names and Sons,” takes up the work of remembrance and re-naming to illustrate how language forms and shapes identity. In this poem, Scofield offers “â-haw, ni-châpanak Charlotte, / Sarah, Mary ekwa Christiana,” “*an invocation*” to his “*ancestral grandmothers*” (28) so that he might return to them “the spirit of [their] iskwêw names” (28) through “my song, nikamowin / âw, / this song I am singing” (27-28). Scofield denounces the English (or Anglicized, in the case of Christiana) names bestowed upon his “*mothers of long ago*” (27), noting they were “birthed from the belly” of colonizers’

“ships,” and “taken / from their manitowimasinahikan,” their “great naming book” (29). The “great naming book” from which the names were taken is presumably, in this context, the bible.^{lxv} Like “the bible of you” (22) in “*Ida, But Still*,” the colonizers’ reliance on manitowimasinahikan to name Scofield’s grandmothers demonstrates the enduring function of the bible as a text through which women can be made knowable and comprehensible. Scofield throws the four names “back across the water,” giving them back “to their God / who had two hearts, two tongues” (30). In “*Prayer Song*,” Scofield initiates the process of restoration through language with an act of return. His own “prayer song” (30) rejects and replaces the two-hearted, two-tongued God, whose promises of salvation and divine love were underpinned by the violence of colonial genocide and erasure. Importantly, “*Prayer Song*” precedes its work to return these names with a catalogue of other, material items that Scofield likewise sings to “give ... back” (29). These items, from “the sewing awl, the birchbark bundle” to “the drawing stone” (29), are the types of physical items likely to be held as “artefacts,” preserved for viewers behind glass in a museum. Scofield’s return of these items invokes museological collection and seizure as a foil against which to carry out his work to poetically repatriate the names of his grandmothers.

Scofield does not provide the nêhiyawêwin names of his grandmothers *in* nêhiyawêwin in the body of the poem, however. In the notes for the poem, he explains that he is “certain my châpan Sarah, my kayâs ochi nikâwi” (meaning “my mother from long ago”) “came to my [non-Indigenous] ancestor/grandfather carrying a name too sacred for him to pronounce” (106). Sarah’s name, Scofield notes, is recorded in York Factory parish records as “*Wife: Sarah, an Indian woman*” (106), reducing her to a

Christian name, a signifier of domestic property, and of racial alterity. Scofield's note about his grandmother's name being too sacred for his grandfather to pronounce clarifies his decision not to include the returned, *nêhiyawêwin* names of his grandmothers in the body of "Prayer Song for the Returning of Names and Sons." The poem enacts returning through remembrance and renaming, focusing on the work of return as opposed to providing readers with an intimate glimpse of the sacred quality of *what* that return actually entails. As such, Scofield's strategic use of English to present the returned names reflects his respect for what he calls the "ceremony that cannot be recorded" (107), denying his readers the opportunity to glimpse something intensely personal and sacred. To connect this to the broader concept of repatriation, which saw settler collectors and anthropologists seize sacred objects of cultural patrimony for sake of "preservation" and to better understand a radically dissimilar culture, Scofield's denial of translation effectively resists the impulse to possess, control, and own through encounter with something sacred. Though he "asked her to help me, her little *nichâpanis*, to find and sing the proper names" (106-107), the poem refuses to entertain the possibility of a reader being able to pronounce, record, and/or engage the sacred quality of what was taken from his grandmothers outside the context of a ceremonial experience. In this instance, return and repatriation are not processes of public healing of past wounds, but a ceremonial process of reconnection. Moreover, it is the omission of *nêhiyawêwin*, as opposed to its inclusion or centering, that facilitates both return and reconnection.

By returning the *nêhiyawêwin* names to his grandmothers, to "the half-breed women who lived in the marrow of memory" (*Singing* 102), Scofield not only contests histories that erase their *nêhiyawêwin* (Cree-ness), but actively pens a new history that

highlights their centrality to his family history and lineage, insofar as naming them in a matrilineal kinship system names him as their eventual son. He affirms:

I am singing

to bring back

your stolen sons

whose sons and sons

and their missing bones

are unsung geese

lost in a country

across the water (32)

Scofield explains in his notes for “Prayer Song” that it

was common practice among the [Hudson’s Bay] Company’s chief factors to send their ‘country born’ sons back to England or Scotland on furlough, where they would receive a formal education and continue in the service of the Company. In many cases, these sons did not return to Canada, thus leaving behind the connection to their mothers and to their Cree or Ojibwe heritage (107).

Scofield imagines the sons of his grandmothers, severed from their families, communities, and languages and interpellated into a network of imperial capital, as diasporic, migrating geese who never returned home. It is his song that brings back these

“stolen sons” (32), enabling his own reconnection to them, insofar as he traces his identity backwards through time to his grandmothers.

As I have noted earlier in this chapter, repatriation entails both return and restoration. The return of an object, of remains, or of a narrative, is accompanied by a concomitant restoration of, or reconnection to, what has returned. For Scofield, this entails restoring the names of his ancestors through story and imagination. Singing the names back to them in *nêhiyawêwin* not only takes away from the authority of the great naming book of the colonizers that bestowed Christian names on these *nêhiyaw iskwêwak*; it also enacts a naming process that reclaims the land, the earth, the bones, and the blood that were taken from them and used as the foundation for “an empire” (33). Scofield’s work to throw their English, Christian names back across the water from whence they came demonstrates how his voice issues a call, as opposed to relying on the stated call of *nêhiyaw* storytellers or the voices of the women themselves. He does not recuperate and engage the “echo of old voices” (*Memory* 6) per se, but rather issues his own voice as the beginning of a newly resounding echo. As an echo of story and names, it re-establishes the names of these women and poetically remembers them not as subjects of empire, but as agential *nêhiyaw iskwêwak* who were subject *to* and foundational *to* the building of empire. Moreover, emphasizing the life that they made possible and nurtured, this echo imaginatively returns their “stolen sons” (32) by centering their *nêhiyawêwin* as the grounds for connection following its colonial severance.

Throughout *Singing Home the Bones*, Scofield illustrates how, for him, home is the memories and dwellings of his loved ones—particularly the women in his family. This is symbolized by Ida’s domestic space and miscellany, by the continuous reference

to houses throughout the collection, by figuring Scofield's body as a house in its own right, and by the house Scofield shares with his partner and in which he meditates on the spectral presence of his ancestors. As he imagines each dwelling, Scofield feels the whispers and movements of his loved ones. In "Conversation My Mother Would Have Had With Me *When I think about leaving*," Scofield imagines the words of encouragement his mother would have offered him in response to his desire to leave their shared home. She notes the unkempt, cluttered kitchen, with "dishes piled in the sink" and "bed that need changing" (38) as reasons for his departure, and cautions him to question whether the home he plans to build outside of hers is made of his bones, is of his self in the same way that their shared residence has been. "You are the chance of my bones," she says, "You are my miracle / my blessed, blessed boy" (40). Their residence is the space in which their bond develops, and it emphasizes the connective marrow at the foundation of their relationship. Before Scofield can imagine departure, he must reckon with return; if their home is both a site of domestic chaos and loving kinship, and any other dwelling he could build would not be of his bones, then he will always be lured by the possibility of dwelling in that space with her. Ida's experiences and domestic miscellany, his grandmothers' *nêhiyawêwin* names, and his mother's loving construction function similarly throughout the collection; Scofield recognizes his debt to these women, and uses his language to consider how returning their memories, names, and experiences necessitates an engagement with their work to build the spaces of belonging that make his writing possible.

By contrast, the poem "Conversation with My Stepfather," in the collection's "Conversations with the Missing" section, explores the ways in which domestic violence

ruptured the comfort of Scofield's childhood home, turning the loving bones of its construction and the kinship relationships within it—"the chance of [his mothers] bones" (40)—into his mother's broken bones from the "wrecking ball of [his Stepfather's] fist" (52). In "Conversation with My Stepfather," Scofield collapses his own body and the domestic dwelling ravaged by his stepfather's violence:

Now that I've bundled my mother's bones,

Sang them home ...

It'll take more than the wrecking ball

Of your fist, the hoe of your heel

To rattle this house, undo

The frame of my timbers (52)

The instruments of his stepfather's violence, a "wrecking ball ... fist" and a "hoe ... heel" (52) are figured as tools of domestic construction. Following his work to bundle and sing home the bones of his deceased mother, Scofield affirms the invincibility of his body and home. Scofield concludes the poem by affirming:

I've built my house

From the last of your marrow,

From the last of your bones. (54)

The construction of and return to a strong, inviolable home is made possible through Scofield's poetic efforts to memorialize and sing home the bones of his mother after her death—and to imaginatively use his stepfather's remains to make a stable present and future out of an unstable past.

Furthermore, towards the poem's end, Scofield issues a series of anaphoric statements and questions to his stepfather: "Put your eyes on her jawbone / What voice will you give it?" (53). The repetition of the imperative verb "Put" indicates Scofield's verbal strength as he rejects his stepfather's violence, and his invocation of his mother's bones—"jawbone," "cheekbone," "collarbone," "wristbone," "shinbone," and "backbone" (53)—doubly conjures her bones as sites of traumatic impact and the occasion for various forms of paying respect and offering remembrance. Unlike museal collections of seized skeletal remains kept for forensic or anthropological purposes, his mother's bones are storied to emphasize his stepfather's violent failure to uphold his obligations, turning to violence instead of speech, song, or generosity. Scofield implores his stepfather to "give" to the "jawbone," to "speak" to the "cheekbone," to "sing" to the collarbone, et cetera. Scofield's commanding, imperative tone, together with the designation of his stepfather as "Missing," indicates that these commands and queries are reflective more of his own poetic project than of any restorative gesture his stepfather could make. Scofield's statements and questions resonate with his own poetic task: to "give" voice to the "jawbone" of his mother, to "speak" a prayer to her "cheekbone" (53). In this sense, Scofield's conceit of his body as a house, together with his construction of a new, strong home through singing home his mother's bones, become the space that receives his persistent calls. Issuing his words, he continues to enact the process—

poetically singing home—that allowed him to recover and give voice to his childhood and his Métis family history.^{lxvi}

In the notes for “Conversation with My Stepfather,” Scofield explains that he has “written a great deal about [his] stepfather, trying in some way to give voice to the little boy and the woman he terrorized” (109). Scofield describes that his stepfather “has been the source of bad dreams” for years (109). Scofield notes that it was a song, “a song that came from [his] spirit” and came to him in a dream “of four white horses” that ended his nightmares about his stepfather. In the dream, he explains, “I began to sing a song that came from my spirit, a song given to me by the Grandmothers and Grandfathers. The horses drew near. As I kept singing, I climbed onto the fourth horse. My face was painted and I rode to a new house, carrying my mother’s bundle of surviving bones. The bad dreams disappeared” (109). The song of his dream, together with the poetic songs of remembrance for his mother, carry Scofield “to a new house,” (53) locating him in a space of resolve and strength away from the violence of his childhood.

I will conclude my discussion of *nêhiyawêwin*, poetic remembrance, and return in *Singing Home the Bones* with a reading of the poem “Prayer for the House” (72). In the notes for “Prayer for the House,” Scofield explains that the poem, which bids a farewell prayer to a house in *nêhiyawêwin* as its inhabitants prepare to leave, refers to “a small wartime house in a working-class neighbourhood in Edmonton, Alberta” (109) that he shared with his partner. Scofield notes that, over time, the house “came to symbolize a healing lodge” (109) for him; importantly, the collection’s only other reference to a lodge is a poetic representation of his mother’s womb, the nurturing body which gave him life and kept him safe in utero: “the lodge she pushed me out of” (47). Scofield likens

listening to the voices in the house, to the “Bones of pride. Bones of kindness. Hard-working Bones. Bones of love and struggle—all good bones” (109) of the house’s original owners to a “process of unwrapping the house’s sacred bundle” (109-110), and he notes that this process “was like visiting an old storyteller” (110). In the poem, Scofield imagines the voices of those bones speaking *nêhiyawêwin* as he and his partner announce their intent to leave: “*tânte-ê-wi-tohteyin, / tânte-ê-wi-tohteyin?*” (73).

Scofield notes that it was while living in this house that he learned “how to move through the seasons of my own cranky bones” (110), bringing the connection between his reference to the house as a “lodge” and the comfort of his mother’s “lodge” to a circular close. The process of the “lodge” shifting from his mother’s womb to his and his partner’s loving home not only illustrates the fluidity of Scofield’s concept of “home,” but also resonates with Halfe’s assertion that it is the process, not the object, of creative work that offers therapeutic effects. His work to make, write, and offer a series of prayers and conversations, particularly in this final house, coalesces to create a healing home. In this respect, the fact that he imagines the voices of the house responding to his prayer *in nêhiyawêwin*, wondering where he will go, indicates that *nêhiyawêwin* is the language with which he bids farewell or with which to express caring concern about one’s future wellbeing. “*tânite ê-wi-tohteyin,*” the voices ask, “*where are you going*” (73)? Instead of seeing his departure as an indication of the house’s failure to provide a space of connection and nourish creative productivity, he focuses on the stories that his bones and those of his partner have left for the house’s new owners, suggesting “[p]erhaps it will tell them about us, about the poems that were made there. And perhaps it will say in a new language, *âya, kotak mîna niwî-âtotên, sâkihan ê-wî-acîwak; Now, I will also tell*

another story. I am going to tell about love” (110). The final nêhiyawêwin-to-English translation is the last line of the collection. His experiences with the house in Edmonton—both the love he shared there with his partner and the communication they both shared with the bones of its previous owners—occasions the possibility of a new language, of new stories, that center the joy of their speakers. It is nêhiyawêwin that animates his farewell to the home, and inspires his turn to telling stories of love.

In *Singing Home the Bones*, the “home” to which one might return through story and language is multiple and literal, insofar as Scofield’s childhood houses, the houses of his ancestors, and the house in Edmonton he shared with his partner become metonyms for his poetic exploration of kinship, history, and belonging. Whereas Neal McLeod and Louise Bernice Halfe, in their respective collections, poetically unearth voices and stories from nêhiyaw storytellers and ancestors, using them as catalysts for their own writings, Scofield’s voice in *Singing Home the Bones* highlights the lack of voices, the lack of history, surrounding his family history and thereby himself as a Métis man. Scofield’s poetic invocation of nêhiyawêwin issues echoes through the halls and rooms of these houses, thereby centering his remembrance, renaming, and mourning of his ancestors and family members as the occasions for returning home the bones of those who came before him—those whose labour, bodies, language, and bones provide the scaffolding upon which he builds his own home.

2.6 Conclusion

In their respective collections, Neal McLeod, Louise Bernice Halfe (*Skydancer*), and Gregory Scofield engage what McLeod calls “the echoes of Cree narrative memory” (*Memory* 61) and “the echo of old voices” (*Memory* 6), using resonance and

reverberation to re-locate themselves and their speakers in the present through returning to the past. In addition to the poems' structural layouts illustrating the reverberating impact of these voices, their embodied use of *nêhiyawêwin* to negotiate reconnection to memories, identities, and family not only inspires its continued use and vitality, but also poetically returns *nêhiyawêwin* to reading and speaking bodies. *Gabriel's Beach*, *Blue Marrow*, and *Singing Home the Bones* show that a return and reconnection to language depends upon centering the storied memories and histories from which a language springs. For all three collections, *nêhiyawêwin* becomes a source of storied memory, cultural reconnection, and cultural transmission, and it is the labour and guidance of *nêhiyaw iskwêwak* that builds opportunities for the work of poetic return.

Chapter Three

3 Resurgence, Inheritance, and nêhiyaw Poetics in Louise Halfe's *The Crooked Good* and Gregory Scofield's *I Knew Two Métis Women*

“I decided to write. I made the paper my friend, and I talked to it.”
—Maria Campbell's “Strategies for Survival.”

Inheritance is a term that carries the weight of property, succession, and ownership, and is most often used with principal reference to “[h]ereditary succession to property, a title, office” (“Inheritance” 1. OED). More broadly, inheritance refers to “Any property, quality, or immaterial possession inherited from ancestors or previous generations” (“Inheritance” 3.b OED). While Euro-Western uses of the word in law and governance structures like the monarchy focus on the transmission of property and status, in this chapter I want to focus upon the ways that the concept conjures processes of intergenerational teaching, sharing, and giving. Similar to the previous chapter's work to re-imagine, in non-Eurocentric ways, the work of repatriation, this chapter considers how inheritance can be re-imagined and mobilized in ways commensurate with nêhiyaw cosmologies of language and kinship. To inherit something can connote both bodily and material succession: to inherit a parent's features or mannerisms, or to receive lessons or teachings from a previous generation. Implicit in both material and abstracted notions of inheritance is a concern with the continuance of the past/past generations into the present and future. How do the things people inherit, the things that are passed down to them, persist in the present, and how do they shape the kinds of futures that are possible—either by one's own making or under the rule of systems beyond oneself? With regard to the hereditary, property-centric connotation of the term, inheritance and its attendant

processes emphasize certain *kinds* of futures, insofar as the legal gifting of items or title from past generations privileges the present only as a recipient of the past's offerings, and the future as an iteration of the present that has been positively impacted by the progressive march of temporal movement. Inheritance in this sense highlights the past's debts to the present, manifesting them in terms of material items or titles which carry the promise of material gain and prosperity (e.g., noble titles, title to land). By extension, this understanding of inheritance situates the future as a temporal realm of growth and progress, in which the problems of the present and the past have been resolved. Thinking about inheritance differently, beyond its materialist connotations, thus requires re-thinking the relationship between the past (the party or parties that has something to offer, teach, or give to subsequent generations), the present (the party or parties that accept or work with those offerings or teachings), and the future (the party or parties that comprise generations to come, who themselves will reckon with what has been passed down, taught, or given). How does an approach to inheritance that emphasizes the debt of the past and present to the future—namely, to future generations—encourage methods of teaching, giving, and sharing that actively seek to create the conditions for vibrant, joyful futures for generations to come?

Whereas the first two chapters of this dissertation engaged distinct socio-linguistic and socio-legal paradigms—revitalization and repatriation, respectively—with the intent of reading their compatibility with both *nêhiyaw* understandings of language and history and efforts to promote the continuation and renewed use of Indigenous languages, this dissertation's third and final chapter turns to the expansive, growing concept of resurgence. How and in what ways is resurgence compatible with the revitalization of

Indigenous languages? Can resurgence promote and celebrate what I have in this dissertation been referring to as literary language revitalization? This chapter explores the linguistic dimensions and possibilities of Indigenous resurgence, asking: How are predominantly textual modes of storytelling—namely poetry—supporting the ongoing use and learning of Indigenous languages, and enacting a *mode* of using Indigenous languages to affirm and celebrate the cultural histories and presents from which they arise? To engage these questions, this chapter turns to Louise Bernice Halfe’s 2007 collection *The Crooked Good*, and Gregory Scofield’s 1999 collection *I Knew Two Métis Women: The Lives of Dorothy Scofield and Georgina Houle Young*. Specifically, this chapter considers how these texts grapple with the connections between resurgence and inheritance, paying attention to how both concepts affect how stories are shaped, shared, and received by diverse audiences both within and without the pages of a collection. This dissertation has thus far emphasized the ways in which predominantly textual media can be re-purposed towards thematic recuperations of nêhiyaw history, memory, and embodiment, but beyond introductory reference, it has not yet dwelled on the ways in which the relationship between text, oral tradition, and Indigenous languages triangulate in collections using both nêhiyawêwin and English. As such, this chapter will explore that triangulation in-depth, primarily with aim to query how this relationship impacts not only the creation and dissemination of texts using both nêhiyawêwin and English, but also the resulting critical engagement of such texts.

Considering this chapter’s research questions, it is essential to again (albeit with much greater brevity) address the ways in which textual media and literacy have been utilized for centuries as tools of colonial control in order to:

- Interrupt Indigenous peoples' established practices for sharing stories and learning language (Johnson 70);
- Construct English and French text-based literacy as an ideal skill that Indigenous peoples could not master—and thus could not wield in negotiations that heavily depended on textual expressions of relationship and sovereignty (e.g., with respect to signing treaties, levelling claims of abuse against textually literate parties in legal courts, etc.)^{lxvii} (Milloy 171; Miller 200); and
- Transform Indigenous peoples' understandings of education, insofar as mastering textual reading and writing skills were considered the primary indicators of one's intelligence (Battiste 161; Stevenson 19; Miller 16-22).

This history has been central to much academic and critical writing about Indigenous peoples' efforts to use, sustain, revitalize, and teach their languages and stories in self-determining ways, particularly insofar as many such efforts have made strategic and/or necessary use of textual media and learning strategies.

There have been copious amounts of scholarship engaging the interplay between predominantly textual forms of storytelling and Indigenous languages, between textuality and spoken languages, and between textuality and oral traditions. I will engage with this scholarship later in this chapter, but what is worth emphasizing here is this scholarship's tendency to overdetermine the revolutionary potential of blending textual and oral modes of storytelling, often at the expense of prolonged engagement with the *content* of such storytelling—or, in some cases, engagement with storytellers' own guidance for interpreting their formal innovations. Largely, these types of analysis rely upon tools of

critical interpretation from the academy, invoking disciplinary terms of reference and theories from linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and English literary studies as the primary instruments of reading Indigenous storytelling that generates a dynamic relationship between textual and oral modes of reading, writing, and learning. At the core of this scholarship is thus a mode of reading that takes its interpretive cue from beyond the stories in question (and their writers), instead emphasizing the utility of understanding Indigenous storytelling through pre-existing academic frameworks. The resulting implication is that therein might lie the possibility of usurping or destabilizing the primacy of text, and of English, for creating, housing, and sharing Indigenous stories.^{lxviii}

This tendency to approach interpretation from outside a text and its contexts is something that theories of Indigenous resurgence explicitly address with their emphatic calls for affirming and celebrating Indigenous modes of living, thinking, and doing that exist independently beyond the limitations articulated by the settler state and by settlers themselves. Indeed, many theories of Indigenous resurgence explain that such affirmation and celebration are vital for ensuring the futurity of Indigenous lifeways. With this in mind, I ask: How does resurgence, with its focus on imagining and enabling vibrant futures for Indigenous cultures, languages, and stories intersect with the creative and critical inheritances of past approaches to Indigenous creative writing in English? What kinds of critical possibilities emerge from reading creative work by writers like Louise Halfe and Gregory Scofield—whose works have frequently been read through the scholastic approaches that I have described above—with attention first to their content, to the concepts, histories, relationships, and experiences that their works explore?

Methodologically, this approach to reading signals a decisive shift for this

dissertation. The first two chapters of this dissertation sought to perform culturally-specific and linguistically precise readings of primary texts so as to illustrate their compatibility with and creative extensions of revitalization and repatriation. In doing so, I sought to purpose sustained close reading and linguistic analysis towards thematic explorations of different paradigms that have been central to organizing and affirming Indigenous peoples' efforts to ensure the continuation of their stories, languages, and cultures. In short, I sought to use specific examples of how the poetic form, linguistic structure, and language of various primary texts challenge, re-imagine, and creatively extend the thematic principles of those two paradigms—I sought to use form (and content too, albeit to a lesser degree) to comment on themes, content, and broad debates about approaches to studying Indigenous literatures and promoting the revitalization of Indigenous languages. In this chapter, however, I do the obverse. The reading methodology for this chapter first engages the *content* of its two primary texts in order to comment on the relationship between stories, their form(s), and their reception, thereby considering (1) their possibilities under the umbrella of resurgence, and (2) how they have been taken up by past trends in scholarship. My focus is not on what these collections *do* or *achieve* on a formal level through their innovation, play, and experiments with textuality, English, and linguistic or poetic genres. That is, this chapter will not make a critical intervention by naming *The Crooked Good* and *I Knew Two Métis Women* as examples of linguistic resurgence whose primary function is to destabilize the power, primacy, and utility of English, textual modes of storytelling. This is not a choice I make to foreclose the possibility of these collections being read or noted as examples of linguistic resurgence; rather, it is a decision borne of a double recognition: First, it is

neither my prerogative nor my place to argue what does (or does not) constitute Indigenous resurgence—that is the purview of Indigenous peoples alone, not of settlers. Second, analyzing the compatibility of revitalization and repatriation with Indigenous creative writing relies heavily on wading through the discursive muck of the Western academy that has surrounded the terms’ uses and development—much of which has been penned by settler scholars. By contrast, engaging the possibilities of resurgence necessitates a different analytical approach that is attuned to the aims of theories of Indigenous resurgence. That said, I believe it is crucial to consider the role that scholarship has played and *can* play in supporting Indigenous resurgence vis-à-vis the revitalization of Indigenous languages and cultural practices.^{lxix} I make this methodological shift to conclude this dissertation with an extended consideration of the intersections between Indigenous poetry and languages, as well as related criticism and theory. I do not suggest that scholarship inherently equals resurgence, or that it is necessary to detour through academia to truly comprehend what Indigenous resurgence is, what it makes possible, and how creative work can be instrumental to both. Rather, I contend that if resurgence prioritizes tuning people to the power, strength, and vitality of Indigenous communities at the community level, then teaching scholars how to look differently at Indigenous literature, and how to create ethical, respectful scholarship on the terms of Indigenous peoples for Indigenous peoples, requires an understanding of what has been done and how it has functioned primarily in the interests of settler scholars. Attending to the intersections between both Indigenous creative writing and theories of Indigenous resurgence, as well as related criticism and theory, opens avenues to engage not only with how Indigenous creative writers use their languages in

predominantly textual spaces, but also how to read and interpret the insights of such work.

As such, this chapter first engages the emergence of theories of Indigenous resurgence, considering the ways in which, while the values and practices emphasized as central to Indigenous resurgence are by no means new, the term itself and many of the thinkers who use it to frame their works reckon with the inheritance of previous modes of conducting scholarship about Indigenous histories, politics, and cultural production. Understanding how resurgence is itself impacted by critical inheritances indicates the importance, which theories of Indigenous resurgence consistently emphasize, of conducting and supporting scholarship that is aligned first and foremost with the perspectives, values, and cultural practices *of* Indigenous peoples *for* Indigenous peoples. Next, this chapter will address how the inheritance of specific modes of reading have shaped the ways in which writing like *The Crooked Good* and *I Knew Two Métis Women* has been received, engaged, and invested with the revolutionary potential to usurp and undermine the primacy of textual media by virtue of its formal experimentation with English—thus replicating in critical conversations the very tendencies, relationships, and assumptions that the turn to resurgence sought to downplay or escape. That is to say, if resurgence emphasizes de-centering colonial, state-centric modes of being in the world, then centering the English resonances and textual capabilities of Indigenous creative writing runs the risk of reifying English as the most interesting, valuable object of analysis for literary study in the very act of ostensibly celebrating its destabilization.

Third and finally, this chapter turns to the aforementioned critical possibilities emerging from reading texts that use both English and nêhiyawêwin with attention to

how their content shapes and guides their formal innovations. Specifically, I argue that the poems of *The Crooked Good* and *I Knew Two Métis Women* engage the relationship between text, language, and oral tradition not only through their invocation of nêhiyaw language and nêhiyaw and Métis stories (i.e., through their formal engagements with text and language), but also through their exploration of the *relationships* surrounding the creation, transmission, and reception of stories. Both collections emphasize that stories are taught to and inherited by their speakers, and it is their emphasis on the ways in which stories are taught and inherited, *together with* their formal innovations that so productively reflects the dynamic relationship between text, oral tradition, and Indigenous languages. In this context, the chapter will conclude its readings of *The Crooked Good* and *I Knew Two Métis Women* by addressing the ways in which the revitalization of Indigenous languages is interconnected with other forms of creative media, such as visual art, photography, song, and music. Read under the umbrella of resurgence, these poetry collections suggest that the revitalization of Indigenous languages may be complemented by the renewed practice and celebration of other forms of Indigenous material culture and creative production. Considering this, I ask: how does reading a collection like Gregory Scofield's *I Knew Two Métis Women* with focus on the intergenerational inheritances of its speaker enable a mode of critical engagement with the dynamic relationship between textuality and orality that avoids reproducing the same binaric divisions between textuality/orality, between English and nêhiyawêwin, that previous generations of scholarship sought to challenge? How does Louise Halfe's *The Crooked Good*, which dots its pages with visual renditions of the collection's central subject, shape and share stories that are compatible with challenging conceptions about

the suitability of textual spaces for housing and enabling Indigenous stories without reifying text as the primary mode through which such challenge is possible? How does Halfe's use of *nêhiyawêwin* as a crucial component of storytelling complement and extend her collection's invocation of other approaches to storytelling—both oral and visual? Furthermore, how do these multiple invocations of Indigenous creative and material culture intersect in ways that actively grapple with what it means to inherit not only those cultural forms, but also to inherit the legacies of their former tellings, their erasures, and their presentations in textual forms historically purposed to subdue or eradicate their existence?

To this end, theories of Indigenous resurgence are invaluable for considering the ways in which inheritance, textual/oral representation, and critical engagement intersect and challenge one another. Thus this chapter grapples with inheritance doubly, considering both the inheritance of Indigenous stories of cultural and personal import with which Indigenous writers work to express themselves, and the inheritance of a *form*—text, that is—for sharing those stories that has in the past actively worked to ensure they are not shared at all, let alone celebrated. Halfe's and Scofield's efforts to include other dimensions of Indigenous creative and material cultures *into* the space of a written text do broaden the capabilities of text, making other forms of telling possible while still emphasizing the fact that such texts, such stories, depend not on form for their creative possibilities, but on the relationships that made their passing down and inheritances possible. In short, *I Knew Two Métis Women* and *The Crooked Good* grapple with inheritance in both their form and content, thereby engaging with the multiple ways in

which to imagine vibrant, living futures steeped in celebratory engagements with Indigenous cultural histories and creative works.

3. 1 Theorizing Resurgence

Before turning to Louise Halfe's *The Crooked Good* and Gregory Scofield's *I Knew Two Métis Women*, it is important to first provide some historical and contextual information regarding theories of Indigenous resurgence. In recent years, the concept of "resurgence" has been used by Indigenous peoples to re-claim Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies, and lifeways, as well as articulate visions of self, peoplehood, creative production, sustainable living, and cultural reconnection (to name but a few areas of engagement) that are independent of the constraints and limitations imposed by settler states, their governments, and their non-Indigenous citizens. In Jeff Corntassel's words, "Indigenous resurgence means having the courage and imagination to envision life beyond the state" (89). The centrality of prioritizing Indigenous, non-state centric visions of peoplehood contrasts with decades of what Dene scholar Glen Coulthard has termed "the politics of recognition" (*Red Skin* 25), whereby Indigenous peoples must conform to state-articulated frameworks of identity and culture if they hope to make any progress toward affirming their collective rights. While the state's turn towards "recognizing" limited forms of Aboriginal and treaty rights initially appears to signal a shift toward a more accommodating and respectful process of settler governance, Coulthard asserts that "state recognition and accommodation ... remains structured around achieving the same power effect it sought in the pre-1969 period: the dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority" (25). That is, the state has not adjusted its perceptions and stipulations regarding what constitutes sovereignty or peoplehood.

Likewise, Coulthard notes the tendency of another framework for returning self-determining authority to Indigenous peoples—namely, reconciliation—to privilege the state over Indigenous peoples. He affirms that reconciliation as a framework situates “the abuses of settler colonialism firmly *in the past*” (*Red Skin* 21), whereby Indigenous peoples’ anger with ongoing colonial dispossession is presented as an affective roadblock to creating a state of harmonious co-existence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and between Indigenous peoples and the settler state. Under the framework of reconciliation, Indigenous peoples are articulated in apparent debt to the state’s and non-Indigenous peoples’ expressions of condolence, and are urged to prioritize the needs of the state and non-Indigenous peoples over their own needs and struggles for land and community regeneration lest they be scripted as “unable or unwilling to ‘move on’ because of their simmering anger and resentment (*Red Skin* 22). In contrast to recognition and reconciliation, resurgence places self-determining authority squarely in the hands of Indigenous peoples, and emphasizes the necessity of re-claiming and reconnecting to Indigenous lifeways, languages, lands, and cultural practices.

In a review of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, poet, and musician Leanne Simpson’s 2008 edited collection *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence, and Protection of Indigenous Nations*, Corntassel and Stella Spak refer to the then-“emerging field known as ‘Indigenous Resurgence’” as an area of study “concerned with community regeneration by reconnecting Indigenous people with the sources of their spiritual and cultural power (relationships, homelands, ceremonial life, languages, histories, etc.)” (135). These definitions are broad, and deliberately so: Resurgence has been mobilized so multiply and by so many different groups of Indigenous peoples that

offering a succinct definition of the paradigm is particularly difficult. Different invocations of resurgence emphasize various aspects and qualities of the paradigm, depending on the purposes for which they are intended. For example, Maximilian Aulinger's recent (2015) graduate thesis on the work of the Skownan Anishinaabek First Nation to promote "local food production practices" (i) uses the term "resurgence" to refer to how efforts to locally produce and source food for Indigenous nations "represent[s] a resurgence of pedagogical principles rooted in Anishinaabek conceptions of nationhood" (93). Likewise, Ann Clements' 2015 article "Maori *Waiata* (Music): Re-Writing and Re-Righting Indigenous Experience" affirms that "the Maori cultural resurgence of today is being constructed through music" (135), using resurgence as the paradigm through which to engage the ongoing importance of traditional music for contemporary negotiations of Maori cultural identity. Métis writer, educator, and legal scholar Chelsea Vowel has suggested that comedy and humour can also be considered expressions of Indigenous resurgence in her interview with Anishinaabe comedian and writer Ryan McMahon.^{lxx} Despite the diverse usages of the term as an approach to Indigenous cultures and creative work, however, the different invocations are not necessarily incommensurate or incompatible with one another. What the majority of contemporary invocations share—from Aulinger's conception of food sovereignty to Vowel's discussion of comedy and "sense of humour" (n. p.)—is a concern for, above all else, centering the words and perspectives of Indigenous peoples about their own cultures and experiences, and doing so in ways that reflect Indigenous peoples' unique relationships to their cultures, histories, and languages that are beyond the limitations imposed by the settler state and non-Indigenous peoples' understandings of those things.

In addition, theories of resurgence emphasize practicality and the material application of centering these perspectives. Theorizing and reflecting upon the benefits of community gardening and food sovereignty is indeed aligned with the aims of resurgence, but it is planting seeds, nourishing crops, and harvesting and using the resultant food that *enacts* the aims of resurgence—particularly insofar as it materializes the conditions necessary to ensure that future generations can live with comfort and thrive. In this respect, and given the expansive range of the term’s application and connotations, it is helpful to give an overview of the term’s development and use in recent years before explaining how resurgence is compatible with *nêhiyawêwin*, inheritance, and textual modes of storytelling.

In 2011, Simpson noted in *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence* that there existed “very little in the [contemporary] academic literature conceptualizing and exploring resistance and resurgence from within Indigenous thought” (20). Instead, there was an abundance of literature from non-Indigenous scholars, who worked diligently to explore and expound the possibilities of renewed relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, of “‘reconciliation’ at every turn” (20). Indeed, this was the result of the primacy of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), which ran from 2008 to 2015. The TRC’s presence in public discourse is evident in the extent to which it permeated academic and otherwise erudite (i.e., public intellectuals’ and thinkers’) writing, too. The TRC’s mandate to address the abuses of the Indian Residential School (IRS) System by “travelling to all parts of Canada to hear from the Aboriginal people who had been taken from their families as children, forcibly if necessary, and placed for

much of their childhoods in residential schools” (*Honouring the Truth* v) emphasized the necessity of survivors of the IRS system giving voice to an “experience that was hidden for most of Canada’s history” (*Honouring* v). This emphasis on voicing a previous hidden experience privileged the development of “a new vision” for the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, “based on a commitment to mutual respect” (*Honouring* v). The TRC’s final report is careful to note that “reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country” (*Honouring* 6), emphasizing the Commission’s belief that “Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one” (*Honouring* vi). During and after the TRC’s tenure, the TRC often centered approaches to reconciliation that were grounded in renewing relationships on an individual level, whereby the state’s burden of answering Indigenous peoples’ calls for reparations and the restitution of lands and resources was perhaps unintentionally consigned to citizens as brokers of the Commission’s “new vision” of harmonious, newly reconciled relationships (*Honouring* v). It is unfortunately beyond the scope of this chapter to account for the volume of work that sought to challenge the TRC’s articulation of a reconciliatory future for Indigenous peoples in Canada.^{lxxi} For this chapter, it is important to emphasize the discursive primacy of relationship-building in scholarly literature produced during the TRC. Moreover, it is important to consider how this focus on relationship-building, together with the TRC itself and scholars’ engagements with a potential future predicated on reconciliatory harmony between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, coalesced to create, per Unangax scholar Eve Tuck’s and K. Wayne Yang’s insight in “Decolonization is not a Metaphor,” an “attempt to reconcile settler

guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity” (3) from meaningful confrontation with ongoing colonial violence and dispossession.

Much of this literature—particularly during the first few years of the TRC’s tenure—tended to focus less on Indigenous peoples’ self-articulation of their futures and more on how Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples could together explore the possibilities of renewed relationships on which to base future engagements, negotiations, and understandings of shared histories and territories.^{lxxii} A growing body of scholarship approached “Reconciliation [as fundamentally] about healing relationships, building trust, and working out differences” (Rice and Snyder 45) between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and numerous monographs, articles, and think-pieces were penned to investigate the therapeutic potential of renewed relationships and the responsibilities of (predominantly white) settlers. Paulette Regan’s 2010 monograph *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada*, for example, noted that “the healing metaphor” that had theretofore been used with reference to recovery from the abuses and intergenerational legacy of the IRS system, had “been used almost exclusively with regard to Indigenous peoples. We have heard far less about the settler need to heal” (175).^{lxxiii} Though Regan emphasizes that “we should not lose sight of the ultimate need for substantive changes to existing economic structures, political institutions, and legal systems,” (175) she more frequently notes that settlers must “[think] about and [work] through the difficult emotions associated with the various ways in which we are implicated” (175) in centuries of colonial abuse and dispossession. In order to move from “self-knowledge,” through “moral [witnessing]” and “whistle blowing,” to “living outside the lie” that the settler state has told about the benevolence of

(white) settler identity and history, (177), settlers must “*recognize and respect*” the “inherent dignity” of Indigenous peoples, “thereby restoring our own” (177, emphasis in original). Regan’s focus on the dignity and healing of settlers is deliberate, and no doubt shaped her own experience working as the Director of Research for the TRC immediately after the publication of her monograph. Nevertheless, it illustrates the scholastic climate of her time: Focusing on the emotive experiences of settlers, *Unsettling* examines the exculpatory power of bearing witness to the horror of the IRS system in a way that treats the “inherent dignity” (177) of Indigenous peoples as a stepping stone to recovering the dignity of settler listeners. Bearing witness in this sense can, she suggests, destabilize Canada’s “peacemaker myth” (114) so that “victims are empowered, perpetrators are humbled” (196).

Likewise, the 2010 edited collection of essays *Alliances: Re/Envisioning Indigenous-non-Indigenous Relationships* offered multiple engagements with how non-Indigenous peoples might ethically position themselves for engagement with Indigenous peoples’ creative works, political realities, and visions for the future. Prevalent in some of the essays in this edited collection, much like Regan’s *Unsettling the Settler Within*, albeit to a lesser extent, is an inward focus on the part of non-Indigenous peoples: How, these writings pondered, can non-Indigenous peoples reckon with their guilty consciences, their tendencies to colonize even when approaching allyship with the best of intentions, and their implication in an ongoing history of dispossession and abuse?^{lxxiv}

Concurrent with and following these types of analyses were a number of writings, talks, and demonstrations indicating the extent to which “reconciliation” had come to function not “as an act of transformative liberatory resistance that is infused with critical

hope” (Regan 228), but rather as something “being promoted by the federal government as a ‘new’ way for Canada to relate to Indigenous peoples” (Simpson *Dancing* 21), and as fundamentally flawed in its core approach to rectifying the abuses of the past and remedying relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.^{lxxv} Thinkers like Leanne Simpson, Chelsea Vowel, Secwepemc leader Art Manuel, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, and Kahnawake Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred noted the extent to which reconciliation had come to function discursively as an extension of the state’s political power to displace and subjugate Indigenous peoples, with Simpson worrying, “As reconciliation has become institutionalized, I worry our participation will benefit the state in an asymmetrical fashion” (*Dancing* 22). In his talk “Reconciliation as Recolonization,” for example, Alfred notes that the absence of discussions at and after the TRC regarding the transfer of lands back to Indigenous peoples rendered the process of reconciliation empty of any explicit, meaningful acceptance from the Canadian state and from settlers of the ongoing exploitation of Indigenous resources—something Alfred had emphasized years earlier in his oft-cited essay “Restitution is the Real Pathway to Justice for Indigenous Peoples.” In his talk, Alfred affirmed that “reconciliation without land is non-Native people being able to feel good about themselves moving forward, non-Native people being able to say that this country [i.e., Canada] has done right by Native people” (“Reconciliation as Recolonization”) while performing primarily symbolic gestures. Referring to the absence of meaningful commitment to returning land and self-determining authority to Indigenous peoples in the era of reconciliation, Coulthard’s *Red Skin, White Masks* notes that settler states “purposely disentangle processes of reconciliation from questions of settler-coloniality” (108) so as to continue “Canada’s

longstanding policy of colonial dispossession” (128). In this sense, Indigenous peoples’ refusal to forgive both past and ongoing colonial abuses is presented as their fundamentally unhealthy ability to “get over” (126) an apparently ended, past system of governance. The aftermath of symbolic gestures—such as official apologies, for example—then become opportunities for the state and non-Indigenous peoples to malign Indigenous peoples’ “indignation and persistent anger at being treated unjustly by a colonial state both historically and in the present” (126) by claiming that their “angry and vigilant *unwillingness to forgive*” (126) is the primary obstruction to achieving harmonious co-existence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Similarly, Métis educator and artist David Garneau’s “Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation” notes reconciliation’s preoccupation with the pain, frustration, and anger of Indigenous peoples, wondering: “How do we prevent reconciliation from being primarily a spectacle of individual pain?” (36). Garneau affirms that “the government apology and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are important, but the deeper work of conciliation will be among individuals who recognize themselves as also other than agents of the State” (38), illustrating the generative possibilities that lie beyond the framework of state-sponsored and -led reconciliation.

Tuck and Yang affirm that the metaphorization of decolonization implicit in the rhetoric surrounding reconciliation is fundamentally incommensurate with the material outcomes of decolonization—namely, “the repatriation of Indigenous land and life” (1). With regard to “decolonizing” frameworks that ostensibly equate decolonization with “things we want to do to improve our societies and schools” (3), Tuck and Yang explain that “Reconciliation is about rescuing settler normalcy, about rescuing a settler future”

(35) more than it is about affirming or enabling the conditions necessary to ensure that future generations of Indigenous people are able to live in self-determining ways, on their own lands, without interference from the state or its settler citizen-advocates.

The growing recognition among Indigenous peoples that “reconciliation” has demonstrated potential to function as yet another strategy of domestication and containment of Indigenous peoples *by* non-Indigenous peoples and the state, was followed by a resounding turn *away* from scholarship and creative works centered on the reconciliatory possibilities of the TRC and of renewed relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, in favour of a turn *toward* what Simpson, paraphrasing Alfred, articulates as “[refocusing] our work from trying to transform the colonial outside into a flourishing of the *Indigenous* inside” (17).^{lxxvi} The turn towards promoting and nourishing “a flourishing of the *Indigenous* inside” (17) is by no means new (*Cf.*, for example, Alfred’s *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Freedom and Action and Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*, Simpson’s *Lighting the Eighth Fire*, and Margaret Kovach’s *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*, and Marie Battiste’s edited collection *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*), but the proliferation of work in recent years demonstrates the extent to which contemporary Indigenous thinkers, writers, activists, community members, artists, and more, are privileging work and conversations which center Indigenous peoples’ own experiences, histories, and visions of possibility for the future.^{lxxvii}

In the context of this dissertation, “resurgence” is helpful insofar as it hinges on a different interpretation of the prefix “re” than “revitalization” and “repatriation.” The first two chapters of this dissertation noted that the Latin prefix “re” was formative to how

“revitalization” and “repatriation” operated as expansive paradigms engaging Indigenous histories, politics, and creative expression, insofar as both rely on the prefix to connote a movement backwards, again—a repetition of sorts that also signifies “back,” or “backward motion,” as in the word “return”—to direct oneself again towards something prior. Resurgence, however, does not work in entirely the same way; “revitalization” and “repatriation” both make implied reference to a former state of vitality or patria to engage, or to which to return, so as to assemble or imagine alternative *presents*, whereby those alternative presents form the grounds for possible futures. For “revitalization,” the temporal occasion for much of the work guided by the term is the state of a language in the present, whereby the present’s focus on investing a language with animated vitality responds to the past—to efforts to halt a language’s use and intergenerational transmission. For “repatriation,” the temporal occasion for the overdue return of stolen remains and/or objects of cultural patrimony is, unsurprisingly, the past; moments of theft and seizure prompt present engagements with the legacy of colonial theft so that the future can be one marked by respectful, overdue closure and putting to rest. Though I have sought to show how nêhiyaw creative writers have challenged, extended, and complicated these frameworks in ways commensurate with their languages and histories, the frameworks on their own are freighted with these temporal points of reference. By contrast, theories of resurgence emphasize a forward-surgng motion that centers the present as the grounds for creating vibrant futures, with *guidance* from the traditions and lifeways of the past^{lxxviii}—what Glen Coulthard articulates in *Red Skin, White Masks* as “[building] on the value and insights of our past in our efforts to secure a noncolonial present and future” (149). To this end, Simpson affirms that “[c]ontemporary Indigenous

storytelling in its variety of formats—whether it is performance (theatre, spoken word, music, performance art), film and video, literature, or oral storytelling—plays a critical role in rebuilding a culturally-based artistic renaissance and nation-based political resurgences because it is a primary way we can collectivize alternative visions for the future” (“Bubbling” 110). Likewise, Alfred notes that “Indigenous resurgence is a concept that has emerged mainly out of academia, but it’s starting to work its way into politics now, and the phraseology of resurgence is attractive, I think, to a lot of people ... because it’s kind of a counter to a number of other ideas” (“Reconciliation as Recolonization”). Cornthassel has suggested, for example, that resurgence relies upon “applied decolonizing practices,” as “[b]eing Indigenous today means struggling to reclaim and regenerate one’s relational, place-based existence by challenging the ongoing, destructive forces of colonization” (“Re-envisioning” 88). In this sense, “processes of resurgence ... reflect the spiritual, cultural, economic, social and political scope of the struggle” (“Re-envisioning” 88) to affirm one’s Indigenous identity, connection to place, and relationships with kin, community, and history. These thinkers’ shared focus on material application (as opposed to abstract postulation) and lived futurity situates resurgence as a theory capable not only of extending identity beyond that which has been scripted for Indigenous peoples by settler states, but also as one capable of actively *living* by the practices it imagines and conceives as liberatory in this way. In the surge forward, imagining and enacting vibrant futures, how do the inheritances of the past impact, shape, and challenge the kinds of resurgence that are possible for Indigenous peoples?

To further connect this chapter’s focus on inheritance with the aforementioned

theories of Indigenous resurgence, I wish to emphasize that, in addition to resurgence itself reckoning with past generations of scholarship, the concept of passing things down, and seeking to understand the impacts of what has been passed down through history, is something that has been central to Indigenous studies—literary and otherwise—for some time. In “Truth About Residential Schools and Reconciling History: A Michif View,” Rita Flamand affirms that “the effects of colonization and its mission are intergenerational and have resulted in the many social problems affecting today’s generation” (73). Indeed, the intergenerational quality of colonialism’s impact is temporally resonant with the import of the past for shaping Indigenous peoples’ present realities: “the many social problems affecting today’s generation” (Flamand 73) can be traced back in time, understood through recognizing the complexity of overlapping experiences of those who came before, who laid the foundations for the present. Similarly, in “The Great Unlearning,” Alfred emphasizes “the fact that Canada is built on the assumption of a perpetual re-colonization of people and land that allows settler society to enjoy the privileges and the prosperity that are the inheritance of conquest” (n. p.). Inheritance thus works doubly, in ways that echo the unequal distribution of opportunity and safety for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. In this spirit, reading *The Crooked Good* and *I Knew Two Métis Women* with attention to inheritance’s multiple functions—to how speakers have inherited the stories and experiences they share, and to how the collections’ forms bear marks of the inheritance of misguided readings—enables a dynamic, sustained engagement with the relationships between textuality, orality, storytelling, and literary criticism.

3. 2 Reading Resurgence: Creative Writing, Criticism, and Textual Fixations

As I have noted in previous chapters, Indigenous peoples have for decades insisted upon the inherent worth and vitality of their languages (McCarty 137-8), waging “struggles for language rights ... in tandem with those for cultural survival and self-determination” (McCarty 137). In the years following the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which affirms that “Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, [and] oral traditions” (“Article 13”), Indigenous writers have increasingly incorporated elements of their languages and oral traditions into creative works written predominantly in English. In Canada, which finally became a full, non-objecting signatory to UNDRIP in 2015, these efforts to promote the learning and use of Indigenous languages challenge the state to make good on its claims of support for the revitalization of Indigenous languages.^{lxxix} Specifically, creative engagements with Indigenous languages make visible both the possibilities and limitations of writing in English for purposes of promoting the revitalization of Indigenous languages. My dissertation has thus far put literary studies into conversation with these broader socio-political projects of affirming Indigenous language rights and revitalizing Indigenous language systems, reading how contemporary *nêhiyaw* and Métis writers creatively interweave culturally-specific linguistic traditions with predominantly English, written narratives in ways that affirm their traditional languages and storytelling pedagogies. Despite putting these things into conversation, I have not yet dwelled at length on the implications of this creative inter-weaving for the forms and genres with which it works. I

have argued that this experimentation with language, text, and poetic forms facilitates the renewed use of marginalized linguistic practices, thereby offering language revitalization models commensurate with Indigenous storytelling pedagogy. Yet in order to examine the possibilities and limitations of such models, it is imperative to query: How have these texts been read, received, and analyzed? Particularly, what does existing scholarship suggest about the possibilities of such texts to encourage people—readers or not—to learn and use Indigenous languages?^{lxxx} How are such texts structured to better facilitate the inclusion of *nêhiyawêwin* and adaptation of English, and how do those structural choices intersect with the thematic explorations central to the texts themselves?

Working towards, as Jeannette Armstrong theorizes, “the reinvention of the enemy’s language for our perspective as indigenous writers” (175), Indigenous creative writers’ uses of English has been the subject of significant scholarly debate. In recent years—temporally overlapping with the run-up to and operation of the TRC, with relevant articles, chapters, and essays included in this chapter ranging in date from 2004-2014—scholars, many of whom are non-Indigenous, have produced work engaging Indigenous creative writing using both Indigenous languages and English in ways that have been heavily weighted toward attention to textual technique, form, and structure. Indeed, the choice to look critically at the structure and form of literary texts has been a sub-field of literary criticism since the structuralist turn in the early 20th century. From the belief that analyzing the form or structure of a creative work can potentially offer significant insight into the content that it engages, literary criticism has adapted the linguistic and anthropological insights of structural approaches to language, communication, and culture (developed by Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Levi-

Strauss, respectively), applying them to ask: What is the import of a creative work's form to its content or overall project? However, this analytic approach has at times lent itself to quasi-obsessive fixations on formal detail at the expense of sustained, informed engagement with what a text explores throughout and as a result of its composition.^{lxxxix}

Métis writer, filmmaker, photographer, and scholar Warren Cariou affirms, for example, that contemporary poets have relished structures, with their writings “inscribed into the DNA of bacteria; they are being written by algorithms” (31).^{lxxxii} This excessive attention to form and structure, he implies, sterilizes the potential of poetry to move beyond “an arena of edges and boundaries” (31) and towards a “moving across the lines of class and race and epistemology toward something more elemental” (32). Invoking the value of intersectional approaches to creative writing, Cariou highlights the ability of Indigenous writing to infiltrate “colonial aesthetic categories and [show] them that there is more to art than drawing distinctions” (31). Specifically, Cariou affirms that Indigenous poetry can “help decolonize the imagination by bridging the ideological boundaries that often separate the beneficiaries of colonialism from those who are objectified and impoverished by it” (32). Certainly, part of this process involves interrogating the suppositions surrounding, as nêhiyaw poet Duncan Mercredi explains, “Who dictates what is to be considered serious writing” (21). Mercredi affirms it is most often “those among academia who decide” what is and is not serious writing, and thereby who is and who is not a serious writer. I argue that the academic fascination with taxonomic analyses of poetic texts has become false ground upon which to assess not only a poetic text's worth or “mastery”^{lxxxiii} of a literary craft, but also of its writer's merit for engagement and study from scholars and students alike. To resist the “elitist” (Mercredi 21) supposition

that adherence to the mutating “algorithms” (Cariou 31) characteristic to contemporary poetry indicates quality, Mercredi affirms that Indigenous writers must not sacrifice their “voices ... that have been evolving for generations” (22) for sake of inclusion in or commendation from academic circles.

Yet despite the potential pitfalls of this type of analysis, it has often been the first analytical route through which scholars of Indigenous literary studies account for the linguistic or formal innovation of the writers they study. Much of the existing scholarship on the creative work of nêhiyaw and nêhiyaw-Métis writers Louise Bernice Halfe, Gregory Scofield, and Neal McLeod has engaged their innovative uses of nêhiyawêwin in socio-linguistic terms. Their literary practices have been variously framed as examples of “code switching,” (Stigter 48), “holophrastic speech” (Neuhaus 228), “calques” (Gingell 38), “interlanguage” (Gingell 35), “linguistic hybrids,” and “creolization” (Gingell 38). Shelley Stigter, for example, terms Scofield’s and Halfe’s formal innovations a type of “code-switching” (48) which asks readers “to participate within both the First Nations and hegemonic cultures” (58) embodied through nêhiyawêwin and English, respectively. Stigter’s analysis does not attend to either the local significance of using nêhiyawêwin in English texts or to its significance for individuals fluent or at least rudimentarily familiar with nêhiyaw language or culture. Instead, Stigter’s article subsumes such stories into a protest-based genre which is premised upon a cultural “outsider’s” engagement. When Halfe invokes nêhiyawêwin and English side-by-side on the page, it is important to ask: in what contexts does she do so, and to what effects? In *Blue Marrow*, for example, Halfe’s poet-speaker worries, at the beginning of the collection, about the weight of her poetic task. Recalling her “Cree-ing alone in the heavy arm of snow” (15), she notes “I

couldn't say this before," and "I won't have to live / in whiteouts much longer" (15). She then offers an extended call in nêhiyawêwin to her grandmothers to "*pê-nihtaciwêk*" (16), to climb down from the skies and offer "*kimaskihkîm*," (16) meaning "Your medicine so powerful" (17). Here, English and nêhiyawêwin are juxtaposed not to invite a reader—especially a non-speaker of nêhiyawêwin—to "participate" in a "First Nations ... culture" (Stigter 58). Rather, the linguistic juxtaposition invites a thematic recall of Halfe's speaker's ongoing reckoning with her own work of textual composition, and with her complicated relationship vis-à-vis text following the histories penned in its name. In this sense, the "whiteouts" (16) that her grandmothers can help free her from metaphorically stand in for both the overwhelming whiteness of missionaries and their settler descendants, "the black robes" she fears "will burn me / stake me to their cross" (16) as a result of invoking nêhiyaw ancestral memory, and the snowy landscape into which she shouts "Cree-ing alone" (15). Moreover, the juxtaposition highlights the symbolic function of text to erase or obscure the voices and stories of women like her and her ancestors, while simultaneously highlighting the recuperative project of using text to compose something like *Blue Marrow*.

Susan Gingell, publishing prolifically on the topic of orality in text, offers the term "textualized orality" (286) to define a writer's "representation of non-standard speech habits and oral strategies of communication" that reflects the spoken reality of life and language for "speakers of a variety of languages other than that of the dominant socio-cultural group" (286). Seeking to carve out an educational approach to teaching oral traditions in text-based sources, Gingell emphasizes the "power" (297) of postsecondary educators, power she affirms must be vested "in the service of people of

Aboriginal ancestry” (297). Though Gingell’s “textualized orality” (286) is helpful in its intent to offer a framework to categorize texts utilizing oral tradition or language, her proposed pedagogy centers around fostering engagement with such literatures by reminding “students ... that oral traditions are alive and well even in our secular culture” (286),^{lxxxiv} thereby presenting oral tradition as homely, manageable, and nonthreatening within a pre-existing and psychically ingrained hierarchy of cultural production. Perhaps, I suggest, it would be prudent to first encourage students to grapple with the sheer alterity of oral traditions relative to the textual traditions of literary expression which typically structure the ways non-Indigenous pupils approach storytelling. Next, educators could work to cultivate an appreciation for the manner in which they are freighted with political and cultural affirmations of identity and vitality. This way, the resultant analysis of oral practice in text would be attentive not only to the way writers use traditional languages and orality to communicate the content of their stories, but also to the political implications of such aesthetic labour.

Gingell’s “Lips’Inking: Cree and Cree-Métis Authors’ Writings of the Oral and what they Might Tell Educators,” though more rigorous in its attention to specific poetic details working to conjure orality into textual space, is similarly bound up with accounting for the presence of orality by way of a fundamentally non-Indigenous schematic of linguistic devices. Now, this is not to contradict assertions I have made elsewhere regarding the potential value of cross-disciplinary borrowings and conversations, or the potential insularity of only producing “culture specific” (Acoose 219) research (see the introduction of this dissertation). Rather, I stress that when theorizing strategies for the inclusion of orality in written texts, scholars should privilege

Indigenous ways of understanding oral tradition without “[enclosing] or [stifling] the specificity of critical/creative work” (Acoose 223) by way of bracketing such work as contemporary incarnations of pre-existing linguistic concepts. For example, “Lips’Inking” is heavily reliant on philological and phonetic terminology such as “linguistic hybrids,” “interlanguage[s],” (35), “calques” (38), and “code-switching” (38), frequently using these terms as definitional apparatuses for the ways in which Scofield, Halfe, McLeod, and Maria Campbell work to convey “how their people speak ... rather than being focused on making their English conform to the rules of standard Canadian English” (35). As her article is again rooted in a pedagogy of “[arguing] for acceptance” (35) of non-standard varieties of English, her methodological reliance on framing these writers’ poetic practices by way of appeal to accepted linguistic concepts implies that the avenue to “acceptance” (35) is paved with deference to Western modes of linguistic thought—not through re-inventing, questioning, or outright rejecting the supremacy of a colonial language. As a result, Gingell’s privileging of linguistic terminologies over *nêhiyaw* concepts detailing *nêhiyawêwin* and Michif language and philosophy^{lxxxv} forecloses the opportunity for sustained analysis of precisely *how* poems and stories by Halfe, Scofield, Campbell, and McLeod enact the “reoralizing” (48) of their languages in text. Moreover, her essay’s endnote, which explains the *nêhiyawêwin* *itwêwin* Neal McLeod provides for “Prince Albert, *kistapinânihk*,” notes: “because *kistapinânihk* is an oral naming, it is not necessarily stable across time and communities” (58). Gingell points to *nêhiyawêwin* speakers’ correction of McLeod’s name for the place as an indication of this instability. Instead of considering how the vast territorial movements and groupings of *nêhiyawak* likely impacted the multiple *nêhiyawêwin* *itwêwina* for the place now

referred to as Prince Albert, Gingell's recourse to the instability of oral tradition and communication is troubling. Specifically, it demonstrates another instance whereby engagement with the stories and cultural histories surrounding the use of a word is foregone in the interest of almost reductive generalizations regarding the unreliability of oral knowledge when it has not been mediated by textuality.^{lxxxvi}

Similarly, Mareike Neuhaus' "What's in a Frame?: The Significance of Relational Word Bundles in Louise Bernice Halfe's *Blue Marrow*" reads Halfe's use of *nêhiyawêwin* by considering *Blue Marrow*'s "textualization of orality [one which] relies upon what I call relational word bundles" (221) or, as she later explains, "holophrases" (228). While Neuhaus is absolutely right that holophrastic speech—"a one-word sentence or clause" (223)—is a grammatical structure present in *nêhiyawêwin*, her focus on charting how such word bundles "create the poem's cyclical narrative ... thus ensuring the passing on of Cree history in print" (234) forecloses an opportunity to contextualize the image of the word bundle in existing *nêhiyaw* literary study.^{lxxxvii} To reference Acoose again, she affirms that in her own writing she "[bundles] memories, [creates] medicine words, and [ties her] medicine bundle in the fabric of written English" (232). Thus while Halfe's use of relational word bundles may well be a representation of holophrastic speech and thereby "textualized orality" (Gingell 286), such a reading does not account for the effect of such linguistic innovation, and misattributes the source of word bundles to Neuhaus herself when she notes that *Blue Marrow* relies on "what I call relational word bundles" (221). Adding Acoose's theorization of English as the "fabric" with which to "tie" a "medicine bundle" (232) of story, one might read Halfe's use of holophrases and compound words as a specific attempt at bundling, in textual form,

curative knowledge from the very stuff that sought to denigrate and erase it.

Concerning Blue Marrow's extended use of *nêhiyawêwin*, and the text's glossary of *nêhiyawêwin itwêwina* "Prepared by Louise Halfe [and] edited and expanded by Jean Okimâsis and Arok Wolvengrey" (*Blue Marrow* 103), Neuhaus contends in a different version of this essay, found in her book *That's Raven Talk*, that

even through a glossary, an act of editorial intervention ... the translation of the Cree words and phrases into English does not automatically ensure that non-Cree readers will understand their meanings. Ignorant of the contexts of the words and phrases listed in the glossary, non-Cree readers might be compelled to do research to understand the Cree words in *Blue Marrow* ... [as] translations merely give the words' approximate equivalents in English, not their cultural contexts. ("Cree ing'" 206)

Neuhaus astutely points out the difficulty of translating "Cree toponyms and kinship terms" (206), but her note that the glossary is merely "an act of editorial intervention" (206) dismisses the knowledge and labour of Halfe, Okimâsis, and Wolvengrey to put the glossary together, and to ensure that it was commensurate with Halfe's use of *nêhiyawêwin* throughout the collection. Her note that "non-Cree" (206) people, as opposed to non-speakers of *nêhiyawêwin*, might struggle with these context-dependent translations is interesting, as Wolvengrey, a prominent and exceptionally fluent *nêhiyawêwin* linguist, is neither *nêhiyaw* nor Indigenous. His professional and personal relationship with his wife, Jean Okimâsis, another prominent and fluent *nêhiyawêwin* linguist who is a *nêhiyaw iskwêw*, has surely helped him become fluent and aware of these contexts, but Halfe has thanked Wolvengrey for his help and labour in nearly every

collection of hers that uses a glossary (in *The Crooked Good*, Halfe thanks Okimâsis but not Wolvengrey). While the jointly-compiled and edited glossary on its own surely cannot provide the contextual information Neuhaus rightly notes is essential to understanding some of the nêhiyawêwin itwêwina in *Blue Marrow*, and doing research to better understand those contexts is desirable, it is troubling that Neuhaus' formal approach to the glossary as an extra-textual appendix neither recognizes nor considers how its composition was intimately related to the text itself.

Common to the scholarship mentioned above and endnoted below is a tendency to theorize a schematic formula—or a series of formulae—by which to chart the presence of oral tradition or voice in text. Whether through linguistic terminologies or appeals to the apparent familiarity of oral practice in colonial culture, Stigter, Gingell, and Neuhaus offer little by way of meaningful engagement with the *content* of Halfe's, Scofield's, Campbell's, and McLeod's storied worlds. Their intensive focus on the linguistic strategies of incorporating Indigenous languages and oral tradition in text—their need to name and categorize them, chiefly—takes focus away from the characters, histories, and complex allusions these poets carefully craft for and present to their readers. This type of scholarship has approached the efforts of Indigenous writers to model their poetics on oral tradition less as a resurgence of that tradition and the relationships, ethics, and practices that surround it, and more as a series of linguistic paradigm shifts or thought experiments which, by virtue of their potential to de-center the primacy of English, created fundamentally anticolonial texts. Yet these efforts to de-center and destabilize the primacy of English end up reifying English, its colonial legacy, and the various manipulations thereof, by treating it as the subject of primary interest and value for

contemplation and study. Moreover, it implies that the primary benefit of such scholarship is its ability to alter or challenge the reading practices and textual assumptions of monolingual, non-Indigenous readers—either by giving them an opportunity to experience a non-hegemonic “First Nations . . . culture” (Stigter 58) or by pedagogically broadening the minds of non-Indigenous undergraduates (Gingell 286). Certainly, the resurgence of nêhiyaw storytelling principles, practices, and epistemologies is about much more than balancing English and nêhiyawêwin or offering unique ways to address the reading practices of non-Indigenous peoples. It is not about using nêhiyawêwin to make creative writing in English more interesting, or to center English even further. Rather, it is about enacting a resurgence of storytelling through language and relationships *on the terms of* the cultural practices and perspectives of nêhiyawak.

In an interview with scholar Michael Jacklin (“Making Paper Talk: Writing Indigenous Oral Life Narratives”), Maria Campbell notes “linguistics—which is how Indian languages are taught, Cree and those languages—wasn’t enough because those things were soulless. They didn’t have any guts. They didn’t have any life in them. They just became like the alphabet. It was stories that was important to retaining language and also retaining culture” (58-59). In the spirit of Campbell’s note that “stories” are the key “to retaining language and also retaining culture” (59), I return to this chapter’s focus on theories of Indigenous resurgence, arguing that the above scholarship’s reliance on academic, Western linguistic terminology is antithetical to the fundamental aim of resurgence: living beyond the frameworks and limitations of the settler state, and the institutions and apparatuses that have worked in its service. Structurally, using linguistic terminologies to explain the innovations of Indigenous authors groups such writers into a

larger canon of creative writers working with multiple languages, whereby their creative works function as another example of linguistic innovation handily summarized with recourse to the jargon of the Western academy. At a broad level, it parallels the supposition that Indigenous peoples' cultural practices are best articulated and understood through the language of an outside perspective. In contrast, what happens when one centers the relationships and dynamics that make the poems and stories in these texts possible?

From this, I ask: What does scholarship like the kind mentioned above contribute to language revitalization pedagogies and projects beyond another approach to the ways in which linguistic theory can explain away the innovations of Indigenous writers? How does such scholarship intersect (or foreclose opportunities to intersect) with the thematic explorations of those writers, and the political realities that their works so heavily conjure through their innovations? In an era of Indigenous resurgence, this type of analysis seems particularly ill-suited to address the capabilities and possibilities of Indigenous creative writing as it situates engagement and critique from within the lexicon of the academy, with its distinctly Euro-Western baggage. Again, it is not my claim to do what I suggest these scholars have fundamentally failed to do—as mentioned before, it is neither appropriate nor possible for me to theorize or postulate why and how texts like *The Crooked Good* and *I Knew Two Métis Women* are examples of Indigenous resurgence, or why they offer a specific theorization of nêhiyaw linguistic resurgence through poetry. What I will do instead is premise my engagement with their use of nêhiyawêwin and on their thematic explorations of inheritance and the relationships that make storytelling and language use and learning possible. In this vein, I ask: How do their representations of

inheritance and relationships present a uniquely nêhiyaw and Métis understanding of the connections between passing down or telling a story, relationships, and language?

Scholarship by other thinkers has taken up these questions in culturally-specific ways that neither center critical lexicons of the academy nor sacrifice intellectual rigour to account for the creative innovations of Indigenous creative writers. For example, Neal McLeod's "Cree Poetic Discourse" engages the presence of oral tradition and nêhiyawêwin in Halfe's *The Crooked Good* with attention to both linguistic innovation as well as its situation within culturally-specific traditions of storytelling. Like Gingell, Neuhaus, and Stigter, McLeod analyzes the linguistic and structural work of Halfe's poetry, but he combines this analytic tactic with insight from nêhiyaw philosophy. By illustrating how *The Crooked Good* creatively represents mamâhtâwisiwin—"the process of tapping into the great mystery" (109) as a poetic endeavour, and wâhkôhtowin—"kinship" (109), McLeod insists that the "ancient poetic pathways" of the nêhiyawak "are not a mimicry of colonial narrative structure, but are rather grounded in [their] own traditions and worldviews" (112). McLeod privileges nêhiyawêwin as the window through which to engage Halfe's use of what Gingell has termed "textualized orality" (285), but he does so with detailed attention to how the content of her narrative is as crucial to her innovation as is her formal play.

Other thinkers have worked similarly, centering the relationships that are formative to the sharing and learning of stories over the forms that stories take. Anthropologist Julie Cruikshank, writing about the inclusion and function of oral traditions in textual forms, argues that such a practice is fundamentally social, contingent not just on creative translation and a writer's ability to "manipulate English" (Campbell

10). Cruikshank, for example, conceives “storytelling as communication-based social action” (155), and argues that “Oral tradition permits continuous revision of history by actively reinterpreting events and then incorporating such constructions into the next generation of narrative” (155). For Cruikshank, oral stories allow tellers, via their embodied tellings, opportunities to “[signal] the importance of land and kinship as attachment points for memory” (158)—and, I would argue by extension, the ability to communicate such “attachment points” (158) is present in creative works engaging the presence of orality in primarily textual sources.

Anishinaabe scholar Kimberley Blaeser explains in “Writing Voices Speaking: Native Authors and an Oral Aesthetic,” that often one goal of adapting text to accommodate orality is “to destroy the closure” of texts themselves “by making them perform, turning them into a dialogue” (56) and solidifying “a response-ability and responsibility to the telling” (64) regarding the listener’s role. For Blaeser, the invocation of oral tradition in written texts inaugurates the destabilization of textual closure: When a stories’ pages have run out, it has not finished. Rather, it remains present in both the reader’s “response-ability” (64) to engage the story’s continuing political and aesthetic resonance as well as its political implications. Louise Halfe’s *Blue Marrow*, discussed in chapters 1 and 2 of this dissertation, creatively models the social aspect of oral stories highlighted by Cruikshank and Blaeser. Across her poem, Halfe multiply enacts storytelling relationships between both different speaking characters as well as her text’s potential readers. To offer a brief example, when one character, “The Keeper of the Stories – *âcimowinis*” (21) speaks, she often calls on “*kahkiyaw iskwêwak, nôtokwêsiwak, câpânak, êkwa ohkomipanak / Grandmothers, and the eternal Grandmothers*” (22) to

inspire her poetic telling of their lives and, in a repeated refrain, they respond to her “in a chorus” (22). Appealing to her grandmothers for poetic inspiration, “*âcimowinis*” (21) takes up her “response-ability” (Blaeser 64) to her maternal ancestors after “*waking [their] bones*” (22) from silent slumber. She responds to their stories as they insist they “*cannot carry [her] burden*” (22) to write and, in so doing, *âcimowinis* alerts the poem’s readers to the temporal continuation of story beyond the confines of the page upon which she works to “Listen to the bones” (19) of her grandmothers. Thus, the “textualized orality” (Gingell 285) in the pages of *Blue Marrow* is not a homely invocation of speech rendered written through a schematic of vernacularization or dialect-poetry; rather, it is a textual call to ancestors forgotten and/or marginalized by colonial history.

Furthermore, Blaeser’s note that, when enacting an essentially social “oral aesthetic” (53), many Aboriginal authors seek to replicate oral speech patterns by offering “multiple voices to create a cacophony of reality” (62) is also present in *Blue Marrow*—Meira Cook notes that “the variety and abundance of voices that speak, rage, sing, and recant” in the poem “destabilize a centrifugal authority of voice or vision” through their vast “miscellany” (169). Cook productively reads Halfe’s use of multiple voices in *Blue Marrow* by way of, although without explicit reference to, Blaeser’s theory, and she does so by rightfully noting the political implications of such an aesthetic strategy. As just noted above, *Blue Marrow*’s textual dialogue between a woman and her ancestors actively contests by way of poetic innovations in language the monologic authority typically attendant to poetic “voice” in English.

Leanne Simpson’s *Dancing on our Turtle’s Back* explicitly connects the importance of relationships to storytelling, and of those relationships to oral tradition, and

of both to theories and practices of Indigenous resurgence. She emphasizes the transformative potential of storytelling, noting that

it is at its core decolonizing, because it is a process of remembering, visioning, and creating a just reality where Nishnaabeg live as both *Nishnaabeg* and *people* ... [and it] becomes a lens through which we can envision our way out of cognitive imperialism, where we can create models and mirrors where none existed, and where we can experience the spaces of freedom and justice. (33)

Yet it is oral storytelling that carries the greatest transformative possibility, due to the way it “reinforces the web of relationships that stitch our communities together” (33).

Simpson notes that the dynamism inherent to oral storytelling blurs “the lines ... between storyteller and audience” as “storytellers adjust their tellings based on their audiences, and audiences “make non-verbal (and sometimes verbal) contributions to the collective event” (34). The ability to respond orally and physically—through laughter, bodily indication of suspense and enthrallment—is thus central to the ability of stories to strengthen, reinforce, and transform the relationships between readers and tellers. In this respect, Simpson notes that when stories are “mediated through print or recording devices, these relationships become either reduced (technology that limits interactivity) or unilateral (as in print, film, or video when the creator cannot respond to the reaction of the audience)” (34).

Accepting the inevitable limitations attendant to storytelling in textual form seems necessary, then, to avoid overdetermining the transformative potential of a text. However, this is not to say that Indigenous writers cannot work with text—and other forms of media and representation—in ways that seek to address a broader range of storytelling

experience. This is precisely how *The Crooked Good* and *I Knew Two Métis Women* function as a result of employing multiple types of representational media in their textual collections. They do not—indeed, cannot—enact or replicate the dynamic that Simpson refers to, or that McLeod has referred to (*Memory* 7-8), but they nevertheless foreground the relationships central to their writings, and use various forms of representational media to carry and pass on readings that are more than textual.

Finally, before I begin my close analyses of *The Crooked Good* and *I Knew Two Métis Women*, I wish to provide some clarifying contextual information regarding the position I bring to these texts as a reader—especially as a white settler inheritor of the past forms of scholarship that have been used to read such texts. It is not my claim that the proliferation of work invoking resurgence is merely a reactionary pivot away from focus on reconciliation-as-renewing-relationships, nor do I suggest that tracing critical and theoretical genealogies is the only key to conducting ethical, informed analysis of Indigenous creative writing. I pause at this juncture and reiterate that this chapter does not articulate a specific vision of what constitutes linguistic resurgence for nêhiyawak and nêhiyawêwin more broadly. Simpson’s affirmation that “the process of resurgence must be Indigenous at its core in order to reclaim and politicize” (20) Indigenous thought (though Simpson is writing with specific reference to “Nishnaabeg thought” [20]) is one I aim to approach with care and deference. As a white, non-Indigenous person, I am not only a beneficiary of imposed textual literacy, but actively invested in the possibilities of textual literacy, not least insofar as my time learning the field of English literary studies makes the completion of this dissertation possible. While I cannot and thus will not propose to theorize a model of linguistic resurgence that is particular to nêhiyaw texts, as

such work should and indeed must be done by nêhiyawak primarily *for* nêhiyawak, I do aim to engage the ways in which texts like Gregory Scofield's *I Knew Two Métis Women* and Louise Halfe's *The Crooked Good* resonate with existing theories of Indigenous resurgence and the importance of language for sharing, passing down, and creating stories.

3. 3 A Story and its Tellings: Storied Resurgence in Louise Halfe's *The Crooked Good*

“These days, ancient legends work their way
into how I've tasted, ate and swallowed my life.
I reframe them, hope they will live another way.”

—“Dear Magpie,” in Louise Halfe's *The Crooked Good*

Louise Halfe's 2007 poetry collection *The Crooked Good* threads together the stories of a nêhiyaw family and a mythical nêhiyaw iskwêw, cihcipistikwân, or “Rolling Head.” When she was a child, the collection's main narrator, ê-kwêskit, whose name means “S/he turns around” or “Turn-Around Woman” (Halfe 130), hears her mother aspin tell the story of cihcipistikwân, her husband, and her sons. ê-kwêskit meditates on this story her mother gave to her, wondering how cihcipistikwân's story of woe and betrayal relates to how her own relationships, desires, and identity have been impacted and/or shaped by the expectations of vengeful, jealous men and the women who support them. Most broadly, *The Crooked Good* models the resurgence of a traditional nêhiyaw story through the retelling of cihcipistikwân's narrative and its use of nêhiyawêwin and nêhiyaw storytelling philosophy to frame and share the story. More specifically, however, *The Crooked Good* examines the complex inheritances which make its retelling and ê-

kwêskit's prolonged contemplation not only possible, but also necessary. ê-kwêskit, Halfé, and readers of *The Crooked Good* jointly consider how different dimensions of story—spoken, written, dreamed, and drawn—interact to begin what ê-kwêskit calls “the gathering of self” (19). Reading *The Crooked Good*, I engage two interconnected dimensions of inheritance that I believe are central to the collection. First, I address the legacies of previous tellings of the cihcipistikwân narrative, paying particular attention to how ê-kwêskit has been impacted by the colonial heteropatriarchal overtones that the story has accrued over time. Second, I address how the collection's work with textual forms for creating, housing, and sharing stories demonstrates a way of modelling a textual collection on nêhiyaw storytelling principles that centers not only nêhiyawêwin but also the utility of interweaving textual forms of storytelling *with* nêhiyawêwin and nêhiyaw storytelling principles, so that the inclusion of nêhiyawêwin in a predominantly English, textual collection is not the sole metric by which to consider its investment in promoting, valuing, using, and teaching nêhiyawêwin. I address this second dimension of inheritance with reference to existing scholarship that has taken up nêhiyaw writers' use of nêhiyawêwin and English in creative writing with primary focus on how nêhiyawêwin can modify or challenge English as the apparent lingua franca of textual storytelling. With Leanne Simpson's affirmation that “living in a good way is an incredible disruption of the colonial meta-narrative in and of itself” (*Dancing* 41) in mind as I engage ê-kwêskit's narrative and linguistic “gathering of self” (19), I argue that *The Crooked Good* creatively works through these twin inheritances to illustrate how the inheritances of a story's previous tellings shape its capacity to, at best, imagine, and, at worst, prescribe, the kinds of identities and relationships that are conducive to a good life.

Before proceeding to my reading, however, it is necessary to understand the content, genre, and history of the cihcipistikwân story. The cihcipistikwân narrative is an example of what McLeod has called âtayôhkêwina, which are “narratives of the elder brother (*wîsahkêcâhk*) ... [that give] insight into the way in which Cree people are related to their ecology and the environment, and with other beings” (*Memory* 17). Anishinaabe writer and scholar Lesley Belleau confirms this, stating that in *The Crooked Good Halfe* integrates a “sacred Cree story into a contemporary narrative plain through the lens of her feminine perspective,” and that “Halfe’s use of the sacred is evident as she re-tells the sacred story of cihcipistikwân, who is the mother of *wîsahkêcâhk*, who is a sacred figure in Indigenous culture” (335). *nêhiyaw*, Scottish, and Caribbean scholar Tasha Beeds explains that “[f]or *nêhiyawak*, these sacred narratives demonstrate our relationship to land, articulate a set of laws that govern people, and contain both our spiritual history and the core of our philosophies. [Moreover, t]hey mark *wâhkôtowin* (kinship/the way we are related to one another and the rest of Creation) and show us what happens when those relationships are out of balance” (63). Beeds affirms that learning, engaging with, and living by *âtayôhkêwina* enables *nêhiyawak* to “become [their] own guides” (Beeds 64) and “gain more understanding” (Beeds 63) about their identities *as nêhiyawak*. To repeat material that I have paraphrased elsewhere in this dissertation, the distinction between every-day and sacred stories—between *âcimowina* and *âtayôhkêwina*—functions, particularly in Halfe’s work, to illustrate the complex interplay between narratives of spiritual character, which tell of the land’s creation and the relationships that order its balance, and narratives of individual or community experience and history. The interplay between *âcimowina* and *âtayôhkêwina* is crucial to Halfe’s retelling of the cihcipistikwân

narrative, and to *The Crooked Good*'s broader efforts to show how the legacy of âtayôhkêwina shapes the lived existence of nêhiyawak. Beeds emphasizes the centrality of wâhkôhtowin and nêhiyawêwin to comprehending the ongoing importance of âtayôhkêwina for nêhiyawak (65), and is emphatic that “âtayôhkêwina cannot be analyzed solely from a non-Indigenous perspective” (63). I recognize both the sacred nature of âtayôhkêwina and the fact that it is neither ethical nor respectful for a thinker like myself to turn them into objects of analysis. As such, what follows in this reading is a consideration of how Louise Bernice Halfe's *The Crooked Good*, in its adaptation and re-imaginings of the cihcipistikwân âtayôhkan, works through two dimensions of inheritance to spur a resurgence of nêhiyaw linguistic and creative processes, on the terms of nêhiyawak and their stories.

The versions of the cihcipistikwân narrative that stand in contrast to the version Halfe presents in *The Crooked Good* indicate the imbalance of relationships between men, women, and non-human animals on the land, insofar as the narrative illustrated not kinship obligations and the sorrow resultant to their breakdown, but rather the feminized failure of cihcipistikwân to adhere to Christianized interpretations of serviceable motherhood. Revisiting the cihcipistikwân âtayôhkan, ê-kwêskit's poetic “gathering of self” (19) comes to parallel Beeds' affirmation that learning, engaging with, and living by âtayôhkêwina enables nêhiyawak to “become [their] own guides” (Beeds 64) and “gain more understanding” (Beeds 63) about their identities *as* nêhiyawak. In order to approach this gathering of self, however, ê-kwêskit must work through what I have referred to above as the collection's twin inheritances of the cihcipistikwân narrative's heteropatriarchal overtones and the baggage of textual forms for sharing stories.

Halfe explains in her keynote address “The Rolling Head’s ‘Grave’ Yard” that the cihcipistikwân narrative “is ancient” and “[n]o one knows its origins” (“Keynote Address” n. p.), and it was one of many stories she “grew up listening to” (“Keynote Address” n. p.). Understanding how the cihcipistikwân narrative has been told over time, and how its tellings have been shaped by colonial norms surrounding family and femininity, is helpful for understanding Halfe’s work in *The Crooked Good* to re-frame and re-tell the narrative through ê-kwêskit’s poetic musings. First, it is worth noting that the cihcipistikwân narrative is not particular to nêhiyawak: Gary Granzberg’s “The Rolling Head Legend Among Algonquians,” for example, accounts for 41 different versions of the story across different Algonquian^{lxxxviii} groups from Turtle Island. Granzberg’s summary of the cihcipistikwân narrative, though replete with the very issues and misconceptions that this reading seeks to contest, offers a nonetheless helpful overview of the story’s common arc shared by its various tellings:

the legend may be described as an account of how a once successful and harmonious family is torn apart by the interference of self-serving forces (usually adultery between the mother and her lover and desire for revenge by her jealous husband). The mother is separated from her lover, her husband and her children. Her body and severed head pursue the fleeing children. They use magical objects to thwart her pursuit and, in the process, create mountains, valleys, forests and rivers. She is defeated when she falls into the river and is transformed from a cannibalistic, food-consuming, food-withholding, witchlike object to a succouring, food-providing, sustaining water animal. (4)

As I mentioned above, Halfe notes that she heard the *cihcipistikwân* narrative many times as a child, emphasizing both its ancient quality and the fact that “no one knows how much of it has been framed to suit the needs of a society in transition” (“Keynote Address” n. p.). Indeed, many of its recently recorded tellings have reflected not only the tellers’ biases about *cihcipistikwân*’s behaviour and desires, but also the biases of the broader social environments from which the tellings flourished. Halfe affirms, for example, that “Unfortunately, Catholicism continues to wave its twisted tongue and confuse our stories and our beliefs” (n. p.). *nêhiyaw* storyteller Cornelius Colomb’s version of the story, collected in *Ācaḏōhkīwina and ācimōwina: Traditional Narratives of the Rock Cree Indians*, refers to *cihcipistikwân* only as the “old lady” or “that woman” or “that old bitch” (10), and notes that she was unhelpful around the family’s camp, domestically delinquent, and “out in the bush all the time” (9)—taking “No time to dry meat or fix up the place” (9). Her affection for her “lover,” (9) a “big snake” (10) prompted her husband’s jealous rage, who cut the head off the offending reptile and, following a prolonged confrontation, decapitated his wife. In the same collection, *nêhiyaw* storyteller Jeremiah Michael’s recollection of *cihcipistikwân* is that the “woman married a snake ... [and] she was dreaming of the snake” (47), and thus the violent confrontation between her and her husband was the result of her disloyal dreaming: “*opawāmīwin* (‘her dreams’) did that to her” (48). Granzberg’s summary opinion of the Rolling Head narrative is that it “appears to be recognized as the beginning of the *wīsahkīcāhk* cycle” (58), suggesting that its primary value lies in its anthropological function as the inaugural *âtayōhkan* of the Rock Crees, not in how its representation of *cihcipistikwân*, female desire and gendered punishment, and/or fractured kinship coalesce

to demonstrate (dis)ordered, (im)balanced relationships.

Perhaps the most commonly cited version of the *cihcipistikwân* story, however, is Edward Ahenakew's 1929 version of the narrative in "Cree Trickster Tales." An Anglican clergyman of *nêhiyaw* heritage, Ahenakew dedicated his life to conducting missionary work on *nêhiyaw* reservations; he was a fluent speaker of *nêhiyawêwin* and a vocal advocate for on-reserve education. His *Voices of the Plains Cree* presents what his niece refers to as "The Indian way of preserving and passing on knowledge from one generation to the next ... through story-telling or oral history" (*Voices* vii), and "Cree Trickster Tales" functions similarly, with each included story "[retelling] some aspect of history, teaching traditions, values or mores of the culture. The children's stories used humour and startling consequences to illustrate a point" (*Voices* vii). In the Rolling Head section of "Cree Trickster Tales," this strategy is particularly evident. Ahenakew's work with the Anglican church and his familiarity with Christian texts are evident in his version of the narrative, and both shape the character of *cihcipistikwân*. That noted, this is not to suggest that Ahenakew's version of the story is intimately allied with Christian norms of kinship by virtue of his work as an Anglican minister. Beed affirms that "[o]ften, Ahenkew's vital role in the preservation of *nêhiyaw* (Creeness) is not taken into account by many scholars simply because he was a Christian minister," arguing that scholars have downplayed Ahenakew's dedication to *nêhiyawêwin* and *nêhiyaw* by casting him as a man in "conflict" with two cultures, thereby "removing [him] from the paradigm of *nêhiyaw* culture" ("Rethinking" 122). When I refer to the presence of Christian overtones in Ahenakew's Rolling Head narrative, I do so with deference to the great cultural work he did for, and continues to inspire in, *nêhiyawak*.^{lxxxix}

With that background in mind, I ask: how does Halfe's *The Crooked Good* reckon with the legacy of previous versions of the same story, the cihcipistikwân narrative, which relied on condemnation and vilification as primary tools for representing its central nêhiyaw iskwêw? By extension, how does Halfe's speaker, ê-kwêskit, reckon with the inheritance of the stories that shaped her sense of self—from cihcipistikwân's narrative to those of her mother's life? Reframing and retelling narratives that were doubly impacted by colonial heteropatriarchy and English, textual methods of telling is in itself an act of resurgence, no doubt, insofar as such a practice relies on an embodied affirmation of Indigenous presence, of continuation, at the same time as it involves "recasting Indigenous people in terms that are authentic and meaningful" (Alfred "Being and Becoming" n. p.). Alfred's reference to "authentic and meaningful" ("Being and Becoming" n. p.) recastings of Indigenous peoples refers to the ways in which Indigenous resurgence works with and through as well as against the inheritances of colonization: Rather than ignoring or erasing the impact of colonialism, theories of Indigenous resurgence seek to develop returns and continuance to these "authentic and meaningful" ("Being and Becoming" n. p.) ways of being *in the face of* colonial history and ongoing processes of colonization. I argue that throughout *The Crooked Good*, ê-kwêskit reckons with the inheritances mentioned above by considering how the myth of deviant feminine sexuality has been forced upon her by both men and the women who supported them as a result of internalized, inherited conceptions of womanhood prescribed by colonial norms. Addressing how ê-kwêskit's desires and body become instruments of critical reflection, incubation, and power, in tandem with how the relationships formative to this inheritance impact her reckoning with this myth, I argue that Halfe reflects on this inheritance

through not only the content of cihcipistikwân's story, but the forms through which she chooses to tell the stories.

In terms of reckoning with the inheritance of Ahenakew's telling—and other, similar tellings—of the cihcipistikwân story, *The Crooked Good* is careful to sketch out a complexly human version of cihcipistikwân. Ahenakew's narrative focuses on cihcipistikwân's "restless preoccupation" (309) and her "marked reluctance" (310) towards obeying her husband's commands, for example, and over-emphasizes the "human abhorrence of the snake" (310) that is so intricately linked to the satanic serpent invading an Edenic space. Belleau notes that the "patriarchal overtone" and representation of the "sinning female" (342) archetype in Ahenakew's story is largely due to the "political atmosphere of governmental aggression ... [and] intense Christianization of people and land" (341) of his time. Ahenakew's version of the cihcipistikwân story resonates with biblical images of nature infiltrated by a serpent (or many serpents, in this case) and a woman who partakes in sin, insofar as she "fondled" (309) the creatures which should provoke not erotic affection, but rather, as mentioned above, "human abhorrence" (310). Similarly, following her sons' flight, the awl, rock, flint, and beaver tooth are thrown at cihcipistikwân with variants of the command: "Let there be a mountain from one end of the earth to the other" (311). Reminiscent of the biblical "let there be light," the son's throwing commands further illustrate the "Christianized overtones" (342) of Ahenakew's story.

Belleau affirms that Halfe's poem "offers a feminine perspective within the story of cihcipistikwân (Rolling Head)" which "actively retrieves the feminine voice from the poetic pathways of the narrative past" (331). Contrasting Halfe's interpretation with

Edward Ahenakew's, Belleau calls the two versions "two different dreamings coming from the same bed, one from the masculine and one from the feminine" (334), and certainly this is reflected in the way that *cihcipistikwân* is characterized in each. Belleau provides a rich and detailed account of the two tellings and where they diverge, and is careful to neither condemn one nor blindly praise the other. Instead, she demonstrates how they are both informed by their respective contexts—to either the detriment or empowerment of "feminine voice" (331)—and one must read each with an eye that is careful and attentive to such details. In *The Crooked Good*, for example, the snakes are not simply *cihcipistikwân*'s "pets" (Ahenakew 311), but rather "*her* [lovers]" (Halfe 24), which Belleau notes shows "the woman's loneliness and the solace she found in the company of her snakes" (342). Moreover, in *The Crooked Good*, the hurled awl and tooth are left deliberately ambiguous: "*Icy fingers threw / their father's awl*" (27) and "*a beaver's tooth flew*" (29). Though readers can infer that the boys are the ones doing the throwing, since they are the ones to whom their father gifted these items,^{xc} the fact that Halfe does not repeatedly ascribe the actions to them distances them from the willful, angry throws of their "Cree Trickster Tales" counterparts—they fear *cihcipistikwân*, but perhaps they do not share their father's loathing and condemnation, instead believing their father's characterization of their mother as monstrously violent.

Ahenakew notes that *cihcipistikwân* does not experience the "human abhorrence" (309) humans typically feel in reptilian company, immediately implying that there is something not quite human about her, even before her husband butchers her body and renders her "bleeding all over" and "furious" (311) in pursuit of her sons. Moreover, Ahenakew notes that she is "imbued with unnatural power" (311). As such, it seems odd

that she is condemned for her “evil ways” which caused her to lose her family, “the highest [bond] that [a] mortal can attain” (313). That is, if the story never quite considers her mortal—insofar as she is unbothered by the snakes prior to her beheading, and “unnatural” (311) afterwards—why is she held as the paragon of “evil-at-heart” (Belleau 342) mothers who separate themselves from family responsibility? In this respect, the final line of Ahenakew’s telling deserves pause: he notes that “even against her evil will she made herself useful to man by becoming the fish now found in our rivers called by the Cree Indians, *namao*” (313). “*namao*” (313) is an orthographic variation of *namêw*, meaning “sturgeon” (Wolvengrey 553), referencing Rolling Head’s final transformation into a sturgeon after her failed pursuit of her sons. While “man” (313) here is likely but a reference to “humankind,” the disdain with which the speaker notes that *cihcipistikwân* “made herself useful” (313) despite her efforts to the contrary certainly lessens the possibility that, within the narrative, her humanity extends beyond her selfishness and its fodder for a cautionary, startling tale. Moreover, it suggests that if her “evil ways” (313) guided her desire to be useless or otherwise troublesome, then she still failed, despite her bloody chase. First she failed her family and then she failed to embody her sinister nature to the end. In this respect, if she hadn’t “fondled” (309) the snakes and incurred her husband’s wrath, her sole purpose of existence would have been to make “herself useful to man” (313)—not to mother her children, to share her partner’s love, and to contribute to the family’s survival and vitality and so partake in a respectful family dynamic, but to be serviceable. Her eventual utility “against her evil will” (311) thus functions as a final reminder that she cannot escape her obligation to others. Admittedly, I read this obligation with a critical eye to its implications—that as *namêw*, *cihcipistikwân* can be

consumed, though she did not provide sustenance as a human—but certainly concede that the contexts surrounding the story’s telling, and its teller, impart specifically gendered relationships and expectations to it.

Perhaps the clearest way Louise Halfe intervenes into existing tellings of *cihcipistikwân* is by encouraging readers to empathize with the character and her fate, as opposed to condemning her actions as purely symptomatic of “her naturally wicked nature” (Ahenakew 313). Belleau notes that this aspect of *The Crooked Good* reflects Suzanne Keen’s and Neal McLeod’s insights about practicing narrative empathy. By making “the reader more empathetic toward a subject within a fictional poetic work,” Belleau affirms that the practice effectively “produces an understanding” about the character’s identity and motives “on the part of the reader” (Belleau 340). For example: when Ahenakew’s *cihcipistikwân* is chasing her sons and encounters the thorny bramble after the awl lands, she realizes she must “force her way through” (311), and proceeds to do just that, “screaming with pain and fright as the thorns pricked her” (311). In this telling, Rolling Head wails at her physical hurt, emerging from the brush “more furious than she had been before” (311). Her murderous fury and indignation are resultant to and fuelled by the damage done to what remains of her body and her son’s refusal to submit to her calls, not her loss or betrayal. “no creature exists that can exceed the fierceness of a woman, thwarted in her vengeance and humiliated at the same time” (312), Ahenakew affirms. By contrast, Halfe’s *cihcipistikwân* “*begged*” her sons to “*âstamik. pê-kîwêk. Come home. Come home,*” calling: “*I love you my babies. My babies. My sons*” (27). In this respect, *cihcipistikwân*’s abject perseverance is neither vengeance nor humiliation; rather, it is an indication of her desperate love for the kin who fear her, feeling “*Their*

father's wrath / coiled” in “*their gut*” (27). While she too forces her way through the debris erected by “*their father's awl*,” she does so weeping while “*the boys ran*” (27). She weeps not for her own suffering, but for the loss of her children and the multiplying barriers between them. Indeed, she visits further destruction on her body, with aspin noting that she “*ripped / her face, gouged her eyes*” (27). Unlike Ahenakew’s version of her, Halfe’s *cihcipistikwân* has no regard for her own body, caring only for the boys who run from her. *cihcipistikwân*’s grief is so palpable that it fills the heart of a nearby fox, who leads her through the mountain pass in search of her boys because he is touched by her loss; by contrast, Ahenakew’s *cihcipistikwân* simply follows the path of a “monster worm” (312). Importantly, too, when *ê-kwêsît*’s mother tells the story of *cihcipistikwân* chasing her sons, the poem notes that as “*The head wept. Sang. Rolled. Bumped along*” (26) after her boys, they are not the only ones being chased. Instead, the head, too, is chased by the “*flames*” that engulfed her family home, and the poem notes they “*raced toward her*” (26) as she begins her journey. While Ahenakew’s version of the story emphasizes the furious manner in which *cihcipistikwân* pursued her sons with murderous intent, Halfe’s re-telling takes care to note that *cihcipistikwân* is also chased by the destruction and violence brought to her home as she pursues her children. Ahenakew’s belief that *cihcipistikwân* embodies an archetypical sinning female makes her fundamentally undeserving of empathetic recognition. Despite *cihcipistikwân*’s visceral loss and sorrow, *ê-kwêskit* identifies with her when aspin passes the story down to her.

When the collection sets up the *cihcipistikwân* narrative, it does so by invoking a sense of sickness and search for medicine, and it strategically layers images of feminine sexuality and sexualized punishment with the multiple, layered narratives through which

ê-kwêskit considers her inheritances from aspin and from the cihcipistikwân narrative. In “Braids,” ê-kwêskit remembers “the beginning” of cihcipistikwân’s story, noting that “Nothing can / suck out the fester” and “clash of thunder and lightning” (19) that precedes her pain and sorrow. Listing traditional medicines—“Rosehips boiled in honey,” “Skunk oil in lungs,” “Snake dripped in ears” (19)—ê-kwêskit affirms they are “not enough” to protect against the pain of the story. Indeed, in the collection’s next poem, “Listen: To the Story,” aspin tells cihcipistikwân’s tale and recalls her brutal chase through the prairies. “The head begged [her sons] . . . Thorns, rosehips, brush, thistles, brambles, burrs sprung and crowned the Rolling Head” (27). The same medicine, rosehips, that was insufficient to temper and prevent the pain of the narrative become Rolling Head’s own crown of thorns, *The Crooked Good*’s own sideways allusion to the biblical undertones of the story’s past tellings. The poem’s final stanza, describing cihcipistikwân stretching “through her watery sleep . . . Through a membrane,” (19) gestures to her slow waking from slumber. The description of cihcipistikwân waking after “Centuries of waiting” (19) recalls a womb, the safety of enclosed uterine protection. When aspin “sang for the Rolling Head,” her arms raised “toward the teepee’s mouth,” ê-kwêskit notes that “Snowflakes drifted through the parted skin” of the teepee, paralleling cihcipistikwân parting “the belly of her eye” (19) as she stirs from slumber. The warmth inside the teepee as aspin shares cihcipistikwân’s story is its own enclosed space of rest and thought where “the gathering of self” might “begin” (19). Indeed, the “gathering of self” (19) in the teepee refers to the way in which ê-kwêskit’s poetic self-gathering is catalyzed by her narrative exposure to cihcipistikwân’s story and her connection with cihcipistikwân’s plight and sorrow. The cracking of the egg membrane resonates with the

parting membrane of cihcipistikwân's slumber, which, in turn, links with "the clash of thunder and lightning / in Rib Woman" (19) that led to aspin sharing cihcipistikwân's story. Halfe has spoken about the parallel between the "menstrual cycle" and "the shedding of the snake's skin" (n. p.) as similarly cyclical processes; thus the occasion for the collection of poems and its central story, as well as the space of its telling and the envelopment of its sacred subject in slumber are all ordered around similarly yonic structures, each providing distinct opportunity for gestation, creation, and meditation.

These images are extended in "Bottom Feeder," when ê-kwêskit recalls her mother's "fevered sleep" and admonishment that

You're a loose woman, have been all your life.

We will staple your spoon, make it look like perogy and send you to a medicine man to remove your stitches" (120).^{xci}

After aspin's admonishment, ê-kwêskit explains that "Sin, to her [aspin] was an egg, a membrane that pulsed, waiting for lightning to crack its shell. Once cracked, the sinner entered the other shore" (120). In this context, the extension of yonic images points to the violence visited upon women's bodies for their perceived indiscretions or deviant desires, and the search for medicine that ê-kwêskit engaged for her own narrative, curative purpose has been transformed into a sealing-off of her body and her pleasure—the "clash of thunder and lightning" (19) becomes the force that can "crack [the] shell" (12) of sin, rupturing its hymen-like membrane and stranding the sinning woman, alone, on a shore apart from her family.

In an interview with Sam McKegney, Halfe noted that Indigenous women's vernacular use of the word "spoon" means "vagina" (Halfe and McKegney 50). Halfe

explained that “the term spoon has often been used in a derogatory way. So, I have used the word ‘spoon,’ ... to turn it around in my public presentations, and to talk about not only the power of spoon but the community of spoon where people are nurtured from it, where we give feast to the people, they lick it, they eat it, they nurture themselves with it, and they give birth from it” (50). In this context, aspin’s dismissal of her daughter’s sexuality, deriding her as “loose” and threatening to staple shut her vagina, highlights the ongoing fear of female sexuality and desire as the epitome of sin—an ongoing inheritance of considering women as lustful enablers of temptation. Moreover, in this context the pejorative “*loose woman*” (120) uncomfortably reminds readers of the bodily associations of the insult, whereby vaginal looseness is bodily shorthand for promiscuity, and tightness—hyperbolized in the stapled shut vagina—is bodily shorthand for chastity and desirability associated with heterosexual male pleasure. Transforming the vagina into a “*perogy*” (120) reverses its ability to nourish and nurture, effectively rendering it an object for consumption and subsequent expulsion or abjection. In the same interview with McKegney, Halfe suggests that “what is between [women’s] legs can devour [men]” (49), and his response, that transferring one’s understanding of “sexual relations between male and female” from an encounter that is “penetrative” to one rooted in “envelopment” or “devouring ... places power within the female element of copulation” (49), indicates the threat that is attendant to a recognition of the power of feminine sexuality and bodies. In addition, the poem’s title, “Bottom Feeder,” references both the sturgeon into which *cihcipistikwân* transforms as well as a person of low, undesirable social status or rank. To return to Granzberg’s summary of the Rolling Head narrative, his explanation that *cihcipistikwân*’s transformation “from a cannibalistic, food-consuming, food-

withholding, witchlike object to a succouring, food-providing, sustaining water animal” (4) resonates with the poem’s grisly image of halted female desire. The vagina no longer consumes but is consumed—it no longer has the power to withhold, but instead provides sustenance to others. Finally, this inversion—of consuming to consumed, of providing to provided—resonates with Ahenakew’s note that “even against her evil will” cihcipistikwân “made herself useful to man by becoming the fish now found in our rivers” (313), namêw. The multiple narratives through which ê-kwêskit works—the cihcipistikwân narrative as told by aspin, the storied recollection of aspin’s shrewd perspective on her daughter’s sexuality, and ê-kwêskit’s own narrative of her desires and lovers—provide the occasions for ê-kwêskit to gather her self as a layered, multiply-inheriting subject. Comparing her poetic task to a search for medicine allows ê-kwêskit to consider how medicine has been warped and presented, through layered yonic conceits, as a force commensurate with sexualized punishment, so that the saving grace of womanhood like ê-kwêskit’s or cihcipistikwân’s is its ability to relinquish individual consumption in favour of becoming something to be consumed and enjoyed by others.

Yet the layered narratives and narrative structure of *The Crooked Good* challenge the effectivity of this understanding of feminine desire and sexuality. In terms of structure, Ahenakew’s version of the cihcipistikwân narrative finds himself the sole teller of the story, whereas Halfe embeds the story of cihcipistikwân within ê-kwêskit’s remembering of her mother telling the story. The dynamic between ê-kwêskit and aspin is important, insofar as ê-kwêskit, or Turn-Around Woman, as her nêhiyawêwin name suggests, has the ability to figuratively “turn around” and re-vision her life and the life of someone like cihcipistikwân after hearing her story. This is reflected in the nêhiyawêwin

grammar of her name, too. Her name's prefix, "ê," is a nêhiyawêwin "*grammatical preverb*" which "*defines a changed conjunct clause*" (Wolvengrey 33). What this means generally is that nêhiyawêwin "ê," when used as a preverb before a conjunct clause—that is, a clause beginning with a co-ordinating or subordinating conjunction, as opposed to a subject—works to retroactively transform a noun-phrase that names a person, place, or thing into a *process* of the thing that the noun-phrase describes. Thus "kwêski" simply means "turning" (Wolvengrey 81), but "ê-kwêskit" means "s/he turns around" (Halfe 130). ê-kwêskit's name linguistically embodies the processes of her poetic retrospection, and thus I argue that her nêhiyawêwin moniker gives name to the reflectiveness present in her character: she looks back on the story, understands how it affects and resonates with her in the present, and then uses her communication with cihcipistikwân after aspin's story has ended to piece together her own life. ^{xcii}

Likewise, aspin's name provides insight into her character, too. Meaning "Gone for Good" in Halfe's translation, the word also means "since," "ago," and "gone for the present" (Wolvengrey 11). In this respect, aspin's internalization of colonial heteropatriarchy can be optimistically read as a symptom of a viewpoint that has disappeared, that is gone for good, and a product of perspectives from "ago." After the story has been told, ê-kwêskit continues to hear and to listen to cihcipistikwân's command to "*Pick your lover out of your skin*" (51)—to, in effect, separate her sense of self from the men she desires and who desire her. Halfe has noted that the "fascination and ambivalence with women's power and their ultimate demonization has been with humankind since the beginning of time," ("Keynote Address" n. p.) and that fascination prompted her "own bewitchment with this story ... in childhood" ("Keynote Address" n.

p.). This fascination resultant to hearing cihcipistikwân's story in childhood extends to ê-kwêskit, too, and “conjures excitement, fear, mystery, and even anger” (“Keynote Address” n. p.). “It sends shivers, with immediate images of beheaded women, violence, and a frantic chase” (Halfe n. p.), with the apparent effect of illustrating the necessity of women behaving in accordance with moral norms vis-à-vis desire, provision, and sexuality. In “*mâmaskâc* – Amazing!” ê-kwêskit remembers: “We know / Rolling Head touched us, / though I haven't figured out how” (68). In terms of how that vision impacts ê-kwêskit's self-understanding, she expresses an initial sense of irreverent shame at being “a crooked good” and “never ... a maiden” (4). ê-kwêskit remembers that

ancient legends work their way

into how I've tasted, ate and swallow my life.

I reframe them, hope they will live another way...

I listen,

and eventually

the voices penetrate my thick skull

where my heart attempts

to understand. (123-24)

Understanding with the heart instead of with the skull returns to the importance of empathy as a tool for comprehending and working through inheritance and experience. When Alfred theorizes resurgence as “unlearning” lessons of colonial control and self- and community-denigration, he emphasizes a return to or “a restoration and a resurgence

of an original way of being” (n. p.). I am mindful of the ways in which models of resurgence that are centered around “authenticity” and “original” modes of being can be mobilized in ways that are inevitably inflected by the influence of centuries of colonial heteropatriarchy, whereby deviations from what is “authentic” or “original” are deemed examples of performative or internalized colonization. My note in Chapter Two regarding the need to consider *how* traditional or non-colonial modes of being themselves involve reflecting on inclusivity and ethical relationality is pertinent here, too. *The Crooked Good* emphasizes ê-kwêskit’s work to unlearn, through her heart and listening to the voices of story keepers, the colonial heteropatriarchy latent in earlier tellings of cihcipistikwân’s story. Specifically, *The Crooked Good* makes clear that ê-kwêskit must reckon with her mother’s internalization of colonial, heteropatriarchal norms of womanhood.^{xciii} In doing this, the collection wades through and works against the legacy of gendered violence that has become intimately connected with other versions of the story that have themselves been considered examples of traditional, original ways of how partners and families relate to and care for each other. In “Excavating,” ê-kwêskit shares “this story, / through a small pain only” (74), telling of her consuming desire for her lover: “I show my want,” she remembers, and her “Knees stagger from this whorish inflammation” (74). Yet her lover

walked away from another. He doesn’t

reveal names. I know, say her name ...

Inheritance at work.

Swallow this bitter root. (74)

This recalls earlier in the collection when ê-kwêskit admits she “didn’t know” that “women wept when their men / slept in my bed” (4), and her jealousy and obsession with her lover is the work of an “Inheritance” (74) that shames women for acting on their desires. The bitter root of jealousy she must swallow also parallels her mother, whose voice telling the story of cihcipistikwân came from her “bitter-root mouth” (37)—and whose “bitter root spews” bile at her daughter when she verbally hurls investives at ê-kwêskit: “*Sperm donors, that’s all she collects*” (80). aspin told the story of cihcipistikwân’s sexual deviance with her bitter root mouth, the same mouth that admonished ê-kwêskit for her desires, threatening to suture her vagina shut and have her promiscuity healed by a medicine man. In “Excavating,” ê-kwêskit reckons with the multiple inheritances of aspin’s story: of her own sexuality causing other women to weep in loneliness, of swallowing the “bitter root” (74) of her mother’s words. The damaging inheritance of aspin’s internalized misogyny saturates ê-kwêskit’s memories not only of the cihcipistikwân narrative, but also of her relationship with her mother more broadly, after hearing the story. The relationship central to the passing down of both the cihcipistikwân story and prescriptive, colonial norms of womanhood forms the basis of the collection’s ongoing negotiation of self, story, and inheritance. In this sense, ê-kwêskit’s figuring of “bitter root,” a nêhiyaw medicine, as a hateful, spiteful substance spewing from her mother’s internalized misogyny parallels the ways in which a sacred story about a nêhiyaw family has been historically figured as a narrative showcasing the dangers of feminine desire and sexuality. Just as the cihcipistikwân narrative has been represented and passed down in ways that demonize its central figure, bitter root is represented as the excretions of an angry figure whose teachings condemn *The Crooked*

Good's central figure, ê-kwêskit.

At the level of narrative structure, the insertion of the story within ê-kwêskit's own poetic contemplations enables prolonged reflection on the speaker's various inheritances: of language, of story, and of moral expectations for women. ê-kwêskit wonders, after hearing aspin tell her of cihcipistikwân:

if I filled my being with her breath

would I be butchered too? Would I give chase to

what my loins delivered?

Would I be spurned? (26)

Firstly, when ê-kwêskit queries whether she might find herself in similar plight to cihcipistikwân, she effectively returns cihcipistikwân back to the human realm of experience. Emphasizing cihcipistikwân's desires, loneliness, and love for her children as natural extensions of her body and heart, *The Crooked Good* imagines a future for Rolling Head: in the collection's final poem, "Gave my name – *âtayôhkan*," Rolling Head has been transformed into a "spirit being; spiritual entity; ancient legend spirit" (130), who warns:

I'm earth

born each moon,

waxing and waning,

bleeding eggs...

I swim the caves in lakes

where my head sinks

and I drink to roll again. (126)

cihcipistikwân's transformation into âtayôhkan aligns her with "*âtayôhkanak*" (3), the people who physically manifest spiritual gifts through language, the people who aspin reminds ê-kwêskit, are "*scattered here, there, everywhere*" (3). Furthermore, in addition to her note that she will "*roll again*" (126), cihcipistikwân describes herself as "earth," continuously regenerating with lunar cycles, continuously birthing reptilian reminders of her loss through ongoing hemorrhage.

The effect of multiple tellers is also reflected in how both *The Crooked Good* and Ahenakew's version of the cihcipistikwân narrative are structured. In Ahenakew's version, "after the head is severed, the narrative voice is either that of wisahkecahk or of a third person narrator. When the voice is detached from the mother, the listener or reader is more inclined to question why the woman would act in a certain way" (Blind 104). By contrast, in Halfe's version, after cihcipistikwân is decapitated, aspin's sections of the poem which relay her story as cihcipistikwân are expressly presented from the point of view of cihcipistikwân herself, thereby enabling the "listener or reader . . . to understand the thoughts and actions of the woman" (Blind 104) who is the focus of this story. *The Crooked Good* notes that aspin "sang for the Rolling Head" (28) after narrating her loss and trauma: cihcipistikwân and her sorrow, her love for her sons, becomes the occasion for remembrance and storytelling—not her deviance or inhumanity.^{xciv} Moreover, in terms of the collection's broader reckoning with the inheritance of such limited approaches to storytelling, ê-kwêskit extends the reflexivity of turning around that she embodies to listeners/readers: "You can tell me," she notes, "after you hear this story / if

my name suits me / I've yet to figure it out" (3). ê-kwêskit invites narrative reflection into her recollections, expressing an uncertainty about her own ability to turn around, to revisit, and retell. That those listening to and reading her story are encouraged to similarly turn around and revisit her telling highlights the collection's meta-poetic storytelling, whereby the collection's efforts to reckon with the inheritance of cihcipistikwân's story blends with ê-kwêskit's reflections on the impact of the story and listeners'/readers' reckoning with *how* the collection chooses to represent such inheritance and reckoning.^{xcv}

Though it is beyond the scope of this chapter to account in-depth for the many variations between Edward Ahenakew's version of cihcipistikwân in "Cree Trickster Tales" and Louise Halfe's version in *The Crooked Good*, it is apparent that the two approach the identity and character of cihcipistikwân with radically different perspectives. Whereas Ahenakew's portrayal often terms cihcipistikwân an inhuman creature, "furious" (311) and terrifying as the result of her "evil ways" (313), Halfe's interpretation is rooted in cultivating the narrator's and readers' empathy for her plight and loss. Halfe's poem is able to do this with greater attention to the multiple dimensions formative to cihcipistikwân's personality in part because she is careful to frame the narrative within other existing stories: that of aspin telling it to ê-kwêskit and wâpan, of ê-kwêskit reflecting on the story and its applicability to her own experiences, and of readers encouraged to reflect on ê-kwêskit's reckoning with the impact of the story on her life. In so doing, Halfe's poem opens its retelling of cihcipistikwân to multiple interpretations, thus embodying within a single text the nêhiyaw storytelling concept that "No story is complete in itself" (McLeod 8), that stories and their reflections will change with their

tellers and with time. Belleau explains that within “Halfe’s poetic visioning, the reader is amidst a clamour of voices” (333), and this multi-voiced nature of *The Crooked Good* provides an important point of contrast between the two versions of the story. While both Ahenakew and Halfe offer multiple narrative perspectives on the cihcipistikwân story, Ahenakew’s version never centers the narrative around cihcipistikwân herself. If, as McLeod affirms, stories are “as unlimited as experience itself,” and thus so too are the dynamics which inform the potential “perspectives and vantage points” (*Memory* 8) from which they can be shared, then Ahenakew’s decision not to include the “vantage [point]” (*Memory* 8) of the story’s central subject illuminates the limitations of his version of the narrative, despite its impressive work throughout “Cree Trickster Tales” to “[recreate] the topography of the English language[,] covering it with nêhiyawî-mâmitonêyihcikan, and creating a space of nêhiyaw-itâpisiniwin—a space the people and beings that are grounded in the landscape will recognize” (Beeds 62).

I have suggested above that *The Crooked Good* considers how different dimensions of story interact to begin what ê-kwêskit calls “the gathering of self” (19), as well as how the inheritances of a story’s previous tellings shape how it impacts listeners/readers. Thus far I have considered how the genealogy and iterations of the cihcipistikwân narrative point to the complex inheritances that these tellings have made possible for a speaker like ê-kwêskit. At this point, however, I will shift focus to consider how *The Crooked Good* engages multiple dimensions of story not only in terms of the *content* of the cihcipistikwân narrative, but also in terms of the *forms* through which it represents the story and ê-kwêskit’s own poetic reflections. The collection’s numerous, layered narratives depend on the interplay of voice, text, dreams, and drawings, as each

becomes formative to *The Crooked Good*'s engagement with inheritance, language, and storytelling. *The Crooked Good*'s use of densely layered narratives and forms recalls McLeod's explanation that Indigenous poetics generates "contextual narrative poetic play ... through the dense and compacted language of poetry" ("Introduction" 5). Unfolding these layers of story, and the language and forms that are central to their creation, involves considering how *The Crooked Good* animates ê-kwêskit's inheritance of self and story through poetics. Halfe's collection layers these narratives and forms for sharing them in ways that center both nêhiyaw understandings of the importance of the cihcipistikwân narrative and the importance of nêhiyawêwin. To repeat Beeds' affirmation, âtayôhkêwina enable nêhiyawak to "become [their] own guides" ("Remembering" 64) and "gain more understanding" ("Remembering" 63) about their identities *as* nêhiyawak; as such, it is helpful to remember that the "contextual narrative poetic play" (McLeod "Introduction" 5) central to *The Crooked Good* is created and shared on the terms of nêhiyawak, for nêhiyawak. To my mind, reading the collection's use of numerous forms for creating and sharing stories without centering attention on its roots in nêhiyaw storytelling and poetics risks replicating modes of reading that address and/or explain Indigenous writers' creative work with reference to the scholastic lexicon of literary studies—which, as I have noted above, is a critical practice that is fundamentally contra to supporting the aims of Indigenous resurgence.

Concerning *The Crooked Good*'s use of dreaming, for example, Belleau affirms that "By thinking of Rolling Head as a dreamer, Rolling Head comes to embody a spirit of stories, an embodiment of the self as dream and dreamer. It is quite possible then to view the story of Rolling Head as a story of dream embodiment, where the possibility

exists and the perspective of the dreamer prevails” (335). Belleau’s argument is sophisticated and thorough in its analysis of *The Crooked Good* as a text that centers the retrieval of feminine narratives and the possibility of dreaming “as a potent part of reality and communicating” (334) per nêhiyaw consciousness. However, I would extend Belleau’s interpretation by suggesting that in addition to its work to center and uplift dreaming as journeys of story and communication, *The Crooked Good*’s frenetic balance between dream, memory, and story is paralleled by its equally frenetic invocation of different *media* surrounding both dream and story. That is, in addition to *The Crooked Good*’s retelling of the Rolling Head story to emphasize cihcipistikwân’s grief and humanity—thereby reckoning with and challenging the negative inheritances of the Ahenakew’s biblically-tinged narrative—the collection also engages with *how* stories, dreams, and language continue to impact the present, how they have the power to build and shape self-image and encourage (or discourage) balanced kinship relationships.

In “Intense Dreaming: Theories, Narratives, and Our Search for Home,” Tanana Athabasca scholar Dian Million explains that Western universities typically resist “the oral knowledge and language production of [Indigenous] communities and ... Western academic discourse continues to monopolize our conversation” (314). Million expands, noting “[d]reaming to me is the effort to make sense of relations in the worlds we live, dreaming and empathizing intensely our relations with past and present and the future without the boundaries of linear time” (314-15). For Million, dreaming is an activity and a communicative medium/catalyst that allows one “to creatively sidestep” the classificatory systems which regulate Western modes of critical and creative thinking, inviting the dreamer to think across boxes, across time, and across fields of inquiry. The

import of dreaming is central to McLeod's theorization of Cree narrative memory and poetic discourse, too, insofar as he connects the import of a "dream helper, *pawâkan*," who links "a person to the rest of creation" (*Memory* 29) with "*mamâhtâwisiwin* ... a central process of Cree consciousness and knowing" (*Memory* 30) that is foundational to nêhiyaw creative work and storytelling. Expanding on the centrality of *mamâhtâwisiwin* in his essay "Cree Poetic Discourse," McLeod affirms that "[p]oetic thinking involves dreaming" and "[a] poetic way of thinking allows us to rethink the surface of things, like a dreamer" ("Cree Poetic Discourse" 92). Dreams' abilities to "[bend] time to a single point of consciousness" ("Cree Poetic Discourse" 92), together with their ability to extend beyond the confines of Western discourses of time and relationships, indicates a richness of creative approaches to sharing stories that are shaped and built by working through dreams. Moreover, considering how dreams are used to guide creative writing necessitates a negotiation with *how* such writing communicates the contours of time, obligation, and relationships inherent in dreams themselves. Writing of nêhiyaw atayohkewina, Beeds explains that writers like Ahenakew and Halfe (along with McLeod, Scofield, Rosanna Deerchild, Duncan Mercredi, Freda Ahenakew, Joseph Dion, Marilyn Dumont, and Maria Campbell) work to "re-Cree-ate English with nêhiyaw-itâpisiniwin (Cree way of seeing/world view), [thereby] shape-shifting English textual bodies" ("Remembering" 61). Specifically, she affirms that these "writers have 're-fused' traditional European based literary constructs and boxes with nêhiyawiwîn (Cree-ness)" ("Remembering" 61) through their works, thereby extending "the pathways between the oral and the written" ("Remembering" 61) that were characteristic of nêhiyaw storytellers' early work to use English to tell their stories. Beeds' note that these writers'

“re-fused” pathways between oral and written approaches to storytelling shift and open “European based literary constructs and boxes” (“Remembering” 61) resonates with Million’s and McLeod’s insights about the ability of dreams to similarly expand and rethink how stories are told in ways consistent with Indigenous storytelling principles and practices. Indeed, Halfe has noted the instrumentality of dreaming to her own poetic process, explaining in her acknowledgements to *The Crooked Good* that “I have dreamt, been given and collected many stories over the years. The themes are all too common but their expressions so varied. I offer this story as a way to go inward, so that one may go forward perhaps a little more intact” (135). Dreaming is formative to *The Crooked Good* not only in terms of its creation through Halfe’s imaginative and rigorous delving into nêhiyawêwin and the cihcipistikwân narrative, but also through ê-kwêskit’s own dreams that are generative to the poems throughout the collection. I argue that *The Crooked Good*’s articulation of ê-kwêskit as a dreamer enables the collection’s exploration of the inheritance of textual forms of storytelling, whereby dreams transform text on the page. ê-kwêskit dreams a new, balanced story out of her inheritances such that she is able to carry the past with her as she works to challenge its prescriptions for her self in the present. In *The Crooked Good*, nêhiyawêwin, âtayôhkêwina, and dreaming come together to transform the textual legacies of stories-on-paper, extending what Beeds has referred to as the work of past generations of nêhiyaw storytellers to “re-fuse” nêhiyawêwin and English, and to carve pathways between oral and written ways of knowing and passing down stories. In this sense, *The Crooked Good*’s use of nêhiyawêwin and nêhiyaw stories aligns in a genealogy of wâhkôtowin not only in its content--in ê-kwêskit’s task to harmonize her sense of self with what her mother has passed down to her through

manipulated stories--but also in its relationship to other storytellers' works of past generations. Referencing the cihcipistikwân narrative, Halfe has explained that as she "made an effort to understand the depths of [the] story," she, "[i]n the attempt to arrive at the interior ... had to delve deeper into the Cree language" (Keynote n. p.). Halfe's note that the versions of the story that she heard growing up contained a damaging narrative of deviant feminine sexuality suggests an interesting interpretation of Beeds' note that atayohkewina indicate when relationships between kin, the land, and creation are out of balance. Halfe implies that this version of the narrative, which was shaped by Catholicism and a society in transition, itself indicated imbalance, and in order to re-balance and remedy that discordance, she delved into nêhiyawêwin and her own poetic processes of creation.

The collection's use of two, interconnected timeframes—that of cihcipistikwân and of ê-kwêskit—is what principally enables this. Indeed, the relationship between ê-kwêskit and aspin is the foundational connection through which *The Crooked Good* explores complex issues of inheritance, transmission of knowledge and stories, and the legacy of colonially-imposed mores of decency and chastity on Indigenous women. aspin is both a keeper and sharer of stories, whose knowledge empowers ê-kwêskit to begin her contemplative journey, as well as a staunch defender of the notion that women should be sexually chaste, monogamous, and domestically useful. ê-kwêskit affirms: "my mother, Gone-For-Good, would say" that the

gifted mysterious people of long ago ... never died.

They are scattered here, there, everywhere, somewhere.

They know the language ...

these ancient story keepers (3)

Gone-For-Good's affirmation that the manifestation of spiritual gifts in the bodies of nêhiyawak from kâyas continues to reside "*here, there, everywhere, somewhere*" highlights the continuation of "*ancient story keepers*" (3) and their use of nêhiyawêwin, "*the language*" (3), to communicate their narratives to subsequent generations of nêhiyawak.^{xvii} ê-kwêskit concedes she is "not one of them," but rather "was taught by Old People" (3), who showed her "how to unfold night visits," to recognize "all of it [i.e., the content of her dreams] was real," and to "cry with the Thunder" (4). Recalling "where I grew up" (6), ê-kwêskit remembers she and her siblings "inherited laughter, mule skulls, working hands ... We all had loves. Secret loves. Snake-tongued lovers. *aspin* believed in medicines ... My medicine came from the Old Men, the Old Women, I have no roots, no herbs. Just Dreams" (7).^{xviii} ê-kwêskit's constant return to what she inherited and learned from her family, from the Old Men and Women who taught her to trust and read her dreams, emphasizes the therapeutic potential of dreams, which she has already told her readers/listeners come to her "awake. Asleep. On paper" (4). Ostensibly, her dreams "On paper" (4) form the pages of *The Crooked Good*, the pages she encourages readers to critically review "after [they] hear this story" (3). The collapsed distinction between "hearing" the story of ê-kwêskit, and reading her paper-dreams leads those who encounter the collection to consider how the medicine she learns from the Old Men and Women leads to the creation of the poems on the book's pages, how they are the medicine that result from the "three binders" on her bed, whose "bellies [are] ink-filled" (5).

Moreover, Halfe's presentation of dreams as serious forms of representation and

storytelling undercuts assumed veracity attached typically to textual modes of storytelling. When Michael's version of the Rolling Head story references *cihcipistikwân*, for example, he notes that it was "*opawāmīwin* ('her dreams') [that] did that to her" (48), putting the blame for Rolling Head's betrayal at the hands of her husband squarely on her. Her dreams are flights of delusional fancy; saturated with ill fortune, they are more than anything else time better spent performing domestic help at the family's camp. Similarly, in *The Crooked Good*'s "Father Francis du Person 27th of April, 1639," Halfe presents adapted text from Jesuit missionary Father Francis du Person's *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*. The text offers du Person's perspective on "[his] savages," whose "*actions ... are dictated to them directly by the devil*" (8). This dictation, du Person explains, comes to them "all ... in dreams" (8). Here, like in Michael's *cihcipistikwân* narrative, dreams are the representative route to uncivilized downfall, whereby ruin follows from trusting dreams as a reliable source of information and guidance. By contrast, Halfe's *ê-kwêskit* centers dreaming as foundational to her knowing, affirming "I, *ê-kwêskit*, am a dreamer. I dream awake. Asleep. On paper" (4). The deep delve into *nêhiyawêwin* that Halfe pursued in order to contemplate the *cihcipistikwân* story parallels her acknowledgement that *The Crooked Good* is an opportunity to "go inward," to retreat into and examine the self so as to "go forward perhaps a little more intact" (135). Importantly, Halfe's note about the necessity of self-reflection and mindful action as grounds for visioning and living futures that are "a little more intact" (135) than the present resonates with the aims of Indigenous resurgence to "build on the value and insights of our past in our efforts to secure a noncolonial present and future" (Coulthard 149). *ê-kwêskit*'s dreams on paper enact what Beeds refers to as

creating pathways between “the oral and the written” (“Remembering” 61), whereby her engagement with nêhiyawêwin, a nêhiyaw âtayôhkan, and the multi-voiced nature of nêhiyaw storytelling guides her through her poetic task of “gathering [her] self” (19). Textuality’s ambivalence is apparent when it comes together with dreams, so that “paper” both forms the surface for ê-kwêskit’s own medicine in her poems and, as mentioned previously, the point of contrast for her ancestors’ knowledge, who considered “*the dream / as master of their lives*” (8).

The ambivalence of textuality is present later in the collection, too, when ê-kwêskit remembers that “Rolling Head gave us her bundles” as “Slowly / *aspin*’s words unrolled” (26). Referring to the story as a bundle that “unrolled” (26) through *aspin*’s words—conjuring an image of a long scroll of paper unfurling, even though *aspin*’s story is spoken—reminds readers of cihcipistikwân’s husband prepping himself and their sons for escape: “*He filled his bundle; tobacco, stone axe, arrows and bow / Gave his sons an awl, a flint, a rock, a beaver’s tooth. / Told his sons the medicine’s secrets / to be used only when the sky was red*” (24). The contents of the husband’s bundle are meant to ensure his survival, and to offer his sons medicines of defense against their pursuing mother. Indeed, the bundle’s contents shape the “ecology and the environment” (*Memory* 17) of the prairies, as the thrown flint and awl shape the landscape upon landing. In addition, they prescribe relationships with “with other beings” (*Memory* 17). Thus Rolling Head’s words as a shared bundle parallels the husband’s bundle; with his sons he shares tools of survival, and with her listeners/readers Rolling Head shares her story of woe and betrayal which prompts ê-kwêskit to consider her own survival in an environment shaped by latent misogyny and reverence for chastity. In contrast to the

medicine of sexualized punishment that aspin consults and spews, it is ê-kwêskit's own story that becomes the medicine with which she can perform such reflection and rebalance disordered relationships.

More broadly, Halfe's extended reference to bundling throughout *The Crooked Good* recalls the general import of the bundle in nêhiyaw literary philosophy. McLeod's explains that a "bundle [as] *nayahcikan*, which means 'something you put on your back, something you carry' ... is a spiritual embodiment of collective memories and is added to and subtracted to as time goes on" (*Memory* 9).^{xcviii} Moreover, as referenced previously, Acoose and Scofield have both noted the ways in which bundling words through story is reminiscent of therapeutic sharing with others. Scofield notes his belief that "some bundles ... are meant to be untied and opened ... [and some] are meant to remain closed" ("Poems" 318). In ê-kwêskit's reflection, the image of her "ink-filled" (5) binders contrasts with the "unrolled" (26) words of aspin's story. Yet if we consider the pages of *The Crooked Good* to comprise "this story" (3) contained in those binders, then ê-kwêskit herself enacts an unbundling, an unfurling, an unrolling of her reflections, and she does so through opening her binders, sharing the words she stored in text so that words and pages come together in the act of unfurling and sharing their insights. Remembering and narrating the relationships formative to ê-kwêskit's ability to interpret and draft her dreams, the medicines that these relationships and dreams taught her, that she bundled for survival, become transposed onto the pages of her collection. Thus it is the connection between ê-kwêskit, aspin, the "Old Men and Women" (7), and what they have taught ê-kwêskit, that enables her poetic reflections to function as medicine that unfurls with the pages of *The Crooked Good* for the reader's own reflective, dynamic engagement with

nêhiyawêwin and nêhiyawiwîn in voices, texts, and dreams.

Indeed, Halfe emphasizes that Rolling Head's final form fixes her as a dreamer: Rolling Head eventually drowns. However, the "head" has its own symbolic meanings. It houses the brain and hosts much of humankind's ability to make moral judgements, decisions, thoughts; to create, imagine, and dream. When she entered the underworld, she sank into the silent dark depths of the waters, where she made dreams for the visionary, the poet, the dreamer, the singer, and the painter. She became a muse [for others]. (Keynote n. p.)

In this sense, it is the dreams that cihcipistikwân created which have impelled *The Crooked Good*'s creation as a collection of poetry and stories that seeks to re-tell the narrative while centering nêhiyaw modes of kinship, relationality, and reflective storytelling. When the collection's final poem, "Gave my name," sees ê-kwêskit, who has transformed into "the sturgeon of the depths" (126) affirm "I never sleep" (126), it calls attention to the ways in which dreaming is generative and does not equal silent slumber. After her transformation, ê-kwêskit becomes the dreaming muse beneath the waters just like cihcipistikwân was before her, thereby illustrating the ongoing continuity of the âtayôhkan in the present through her poetry. Halfe's immersion in the depths of nêhiyawêwin parallels cihcipistikwân's and ê-kwêskit's submersion in the watery space of creative dreaming. As such, immersing oneself in and using nêhiyawêwin, particularly in order to understand a story, is akin to creating through dreams—particularly when they become dreams "on paper" (126). ê-kwêskit surfaces from the watery space of dreaming "with camera, telephone, television / and a big screen" (126), expanding the tools in her repertoire to dream her stories, "to roll again" (126) following the collection's close. As

the poem's two columns of text—one representing ê-kwêskit and one representing cihcipistikwân—converge, her admission she will “roll again” (126) signals the ongoing creative inspiration generated by the narrative. Understanding how Halfe and ê-kwêskit center dreaming, and how that centering is intimately connected to nêhiyawêwin and nêhiyaw storytelling, makes it possible to read the collection's resonances with Cree poetic discourse and practice beyond how its use of nêhiyawêwin alters or destabilizes a predominantly textual form for sharing stories. Even in the moments that *The Crooked Good* does not use nêhiyawêwin, it is saturated with nêhiyaw approaches to creating and working through stories, and is thus intensely invested in the resurgence of nêhiyaw stories and storytelling. Furthermore, when the collection's timeframes intersect via ê-kwêskit's transformation into cihcipistikwân, *The Crooked Good* demonstrates the ongoing centrality of cihcipistikwân for generations of future nêhiyaw iskwêwak. Gesturing toward a perpetual process of rebirth and reflection—itsself resonant with the forward-surgng motion of theories of Indigenous resurgence—the collection centers the present, ê-kwêskit's poetic reflections and transformation, as the grounds for similarly reflective futures that take shape with *guidance* from the stories, traditions, and lifeways of the past.

This investment in telling and sharing nêhiyaw stories is present in *The Crooked Good*'s strategic presentation of ê-kwêskit as a “translator” (58) for her monolingual nêhiyaw father. In “A Trek,” ê-kwêskit translates her father's “[explanation] in Cree” of “the give-away of his youngest / to this green-eyed stranger” (58). Set up like a near-anthropological interview, ê-kwêskit's curious, white lover requests information about her father, and ê-kwêskit must linguistically ferry between the two men. The poem

highlights the uneven quality of her translations between nêhiyawêwin and English; when her white, “green-eyed” (58) lover asks her, “*What does your father do?*” (59), the poem presents an italicized reverie of watching her father work “*in the excited sun,*” (59) where he farmed “*sugar beet*” and “*skinned, stretched beaver*” (59). The italicized reverie is like her dreams: lush, rich, and extensive in her descriptions and memories. Yet her reply is framed by a blunt concession that

My English is not good enough.

I answer,

*“My father is a common labourer
and lives on skid row.”* (60)

ê-kwêskit’s translation is reductive and incomplete, and slyly highlights the difficulty of translating her father’s work on the land; she cannot linguistically convert his mode of living, and so pitches her lover a short narrative replete with stereotypes surrounding Indigenous labour. The details of his work, and of her memories of his strength and skill, do not translate in the interview exchange. More broadly, just like ê-kwêskit translates for her grandfather at his kitchen table, she translates her dreams and memories “*awake. Asleep. On paper*” (4) to create *The Crooked Good*. She translates between languages, between media, between perspectives, and between different versions of a story, bringing them all together with dreams and threads of nêhiyawêwin.

Inheritance functions multiply across *The Crooked Good*. For ê-kwêskit, for the sons of Rolling Head, and for the generations of nêhiyaw iskwêwak who came of age with an understanding of the kind of prescriptive version of womanhood that the story

demands. The two dimensions of inheritance—of textuality and a story’s previous tellings, and of ê-kwêskit’s inheritance of prescriptive womanhood from her mother—that I have traced above intersect in the *The Crooked Good*’s inclusion of visual media alongside Halfe’s poems. Throughout the collection is a drawing done by Saskatchewan artist Paul Lupointe, of cihcipistikwân. This drawing emphasizes the relationship between cihcipistikwân, snakes, eggs, and the sturgeon, insofar as the winding, twisting shape of her body in the drawings mirrors the form and undulating movements of the snake above ground and the sturgeon in water, thus highlighting their connection through the story and the collection’s invocation of it. For example, the drawings show cihcipistikwân’s braids twisting through the snake’s throat, emerging from its mouth as a forked tongue. Halfe’s inclusion of Lupointe’s illustration demonstrates her use of visual modes of storytelling to reinforce and extend the connection between cihcipistikwân and the snakes that the collection’s poems highlight, extending that connection beyond its expression in the written word. Moreover, the illustration punctuates the collection’s different sections, appearing on its own before the beginning of every new section and at the collection’s end. The illustration rotates with each appearance, mirroring the image’s own twisting bodies and ê-kwêskit’s own narrative recursivity as she uses story, dreams, and memory to gather herself in the present.

The Crooked Good presents an extended exploration of the connections between storytelling, inheritance, and language, recuperating a sacred nêhiyaw story through an engagement with how it has been passed down and what its past iterations have passed down *to* those who heard it. Throughout the collection, the relationships surrounding the transmission and interpretation of the cihcipistikwân narrative are central to both ê-

kwêskit's task to "gather" herself and reckon with what she was taught, and the story's capacity to, at best, imagine, and, at worst, prescribe, the kinds of identities and relationships that are conducive to survival and living a good life. Grappling with how *The Crooked Good* works through and represents these inheritances involves considering, per theories of Indigenous resurgence, how what is passed down, and how it is passed down, creates the conditions for certain kinds of futures. Throughout the collection, Halfe's modelling of her poetry on nêhiyaw creative processes functions to, as Beeds puts it, "re-Cree-ate" ("Remembering" 61) textual forms so that they are aligned with and created on the terms of nêhiyawak. In this way, *The Crooked Good* demonstrates and models the complexly interconnected dimensions of inheritance that are attendant to the cihcipistikwân narrative, and uses nêhiyawêwin, dreams, paper, and memory to vision a future of "[rolling] again" (126) through story.

3. 4 Language, Poetic Form, and Kinship in Gregory Scofield's *I Knew Two Métis Women*

"It must be
because I've been told so,

because I know
two Métis women who sing

beyond the blue."

— "I've been told," Gregory Scofield, *I Knew Two Métis Women*

Gregory Scofield's 1999 collection *I Knew Two Métis Women: The Lives of Dorothy Scofield and Georgina Houle Young* "recreates the world of his childhood and celebrates his Métis family" (Gabriel Dumont Institute, n. p.), offering a prolonged

“poetic remembrance of his mother and aunt” (Justice 45) through a series of poems, songs, recipe cards, and photographs detailing the sounds, styles, and memories of his childhood home and the women who raised him. While Louise Halfe’s *The Crooked Good* explores the complex histories and relationships formative to the inheritance of traditional, sacred stories, or âtayôhkêwina, through its reading and retelling of the cihcipistikwân narrative, *I Knew Two Métis Women* explores Scofield’s âcimowina, his everyday stories of intimate relationship with the music, voices, and memories of his mother, Dorothy Scofield, and his adoptive aunt, Georgina Houle Young. After their deaths in 1993 and 1996, respectively, Scofield notes that his “greatest fear was that I’d forget the sound of their voices, their laughter and the way they strung words together to make songs and stories” (*I Knew* n. p.). Scofield remembers his “aunty Donna, [his] mom’s younger sister, quoting a verse from the Hank Williams’ [sic] song ‘Beyond the Sunset’” at Dorothy’s funeral: “‘memory is one gift from God that death cannot destroy’” (*I Knew* n. p.). The verse played “over and over in [his] head” after the funeral, and he affirms: “If memory ... was God’s gift then I certainly wanted to keep it, to unwrap as much of it as I could ... There were times, of course, I could hear my mom say, ‘Oh, darling. That’s such a powerful poem’ or I could feel my aunty pinching me, scolding, ‘Wak-wah, ki-macimanitow! You gan’t write dat about me’” (*I Knew* n. p.). Though Scofield has not written about his religious beliefs, and thus it is difficult to postulate from this reflection on how the intersection of “God” (and what “God” actually is for Scofield and his family) and “memory” functioned for him as he explored the things and people formative to his Métis childhood, his collection illustrates how the legacy of Dorothy’s and Georgina’s experiences not only shaped his memories of home, but also

his desire to “unwrap” (*I Knew* n. p.) the memories of their strength and survival—to keep what they had passed down to him close to his heart after their deaths. Scofield has explained “I do not see myself as a poet. I see myself as a community worker and a story teller,” noting that the poems in *I Knew Two Métis Women* are fundamentally “stories of hardships, pain and triumphs. [The collection] is like a mirror, giving life back to the Aboriginal people. Instead of showing just ugly pictures, I wanted to show the beauty, the strength, and the love of the women in our communities” (Gladue n. p.). Scofield’s effort to positively mirror the “beauty, the strength, and the love” (Gladue n. p.) of the Métis women who raised him simultaneously highlights the instrumentality of storytelling for representing loving, intimate relationships between Indigenous peoples that center “the indelible memories of . . . Métis women, and their communities” (Gladue n. p.). Simpson’s and McLeod’s assertions that relationships are foundational to the resurgent storytelling paradigms are important, here, as they provide rigorous theoretical perspectives through which to account for the intersections between a collection like *I Knew Two Métis Women* and Indigenous resurgence through storytelling.

It is worth noting that little has been written about this collection despite its variety of rich, complex poems; indeed, *I Knew Two Métis Women* might seem like an odd choice for this dissertation, insofar as it does not invoke *nêhiyawêwin* and structure its poems and pages via *nêhiyawêwin* in the same way that some of Scofield’s other collections—such as the two read earlier in this dissertation—have done. However, I make this choice deliberately, choosing to read the intersections between language, inheritance, and storytelling in *I Knew Two Métis Women* precisely because of the multiple ways (from poems to photographs, and songs to recipe cards) in which it tells its

stories and centers language and orality via prolonged meditations on kinship. It is possible that *I Knew Two Métis Women*'s form, which uses less nêhiyawêwin, is part of the reason why it has not been taken up as much by scholarship—the collection does not lend itself to the type of linguistic, “code-switching” (Stigter 48) analysis that has often characterized scholarship on Scofield's writing. Instead, I want to explore how *I Knew Two Métis Women* grounds the sounds, sights, memories formative to what Scofield has inherited from his mother and his Aunty, so that they, too, become central to the resonance between Scofield's work and nêhiyaw poetic processes that center wâhkôhtowin and place. In his introduction to *Indigenous Poetics in Canada*, Neal McLeod explains that “Indigenous poetics is the embodiment of Indigenous consciousness” (4), and thus using poetry in a textual form to express that consciousness is a powerful affirmation of Indigenous identity that “is inherently political because it is the attempt to hold on to an alternative centre of consciousness, holding its own position despite the crushing weight of English and French” (12). Reading Scofield's poems in *I Knew Two Métis Women* as distinctly Métis articulations of wâhkôhtowin, place, and memory involves accounting for *how* Scofield's sense of himself as an Indigenous man—a Métis man—have been shaped by the relationships, spaces, and rituals he traces as formative to his experience. As Scofield affirms these relationships, spaces, and rituals as central to his understanding of his consciousness as a Métis man and poet, I aim to follow his explorations and work through *how* those things intersect and mutually inform one another by virtue of his creative engagements with text, music, photographs, and nêhiyawêwin.

McLeod notes in *Cree Narrative Memory*: “I understand Cree narrative memory through the stories I have heard and the relationships that sustain them” (12). Likewise, Simpson asserts that the “relationship between the storyteller and the listeners become the nest that cradles the meaning” (*Dancing* 104) of a story. Scofield highlights that his “mom and aunty just happen to be the storytellers” (*I Knew* n. p.) of *I Knew Two Métis Women*, and he simply “budded in a few times” (*I Knew* n. p.), phonetically mimicking his mother’s and aunty’s nêhiyawêwin-inflected English to reference his insertion of his own voice and creative choices when creating the collection. In this respect, Scofield’s collection actively engages the complex relationship between stories, their tellers, their listeners, and the media through which they’re told, and it does so in ways which are centered around the passing down of memories and signifiers of Métis identity—both for Scofield, the inheritor of these memories and signifiers, and for readers, as Scofield articulates his role as poet as a curator of Dorothy’s and Georgina’s stories, a figure who will “unwrap” the memories and lessons these women gave him. This also recalls his perspective in “Poems as Healing Bundles,” wherein he notes his belief that his “approach to writing” is to “[untie] and [open]” the bundles of memory, of “the medicine that we carry from our communities of origin” (“Poems” 318). With respect to *I Knew Two Métis Women*, he notes “make no mistake . . . It’s through them [Dorothy and Georgina] we get the chance to visit our own mothers and aunts, grannies and sisters. It’s through them we get to see the strength of our women. And above all, we get to wear ourselves proudly, rags and all” (*I Knew* n. p.). Scofield’s collection uses text, sound, and visual art to communicate the inheritances of the two Métis women so foundational to his sense of self, and his sense of growing up Métis—even if, as will be discussed shortly, it

took him time to accept himself *as* Métis and recognize the strength of emphatically embracing such an identity. The collection dwells in the instrumentality of relationships for visioning what has been called Indigenous resurgence, and it does so in ways that actively extend the capabilities of text to communicate the effect of such inheritance to listeners, to readers—all without overdetermining the revolutionary potential of such capabilities to usurp or destabilize text itself. The collection’s focus is on the stories themselves, and how they shape a sense of self that is “able to listen to something other than our own voices,” and “create a sound—a sound with names—the names of our ancestors . . . the names of ones who gave us strength and gave us hope” (Scofield “Poems” 319). *I Knew Two Métis Women* is Scofield’s poetic exploration of the sound of his childhood, of the voices of Dorothy and Georgina; the collection is not concerned with how they might be *purposed* toward an outside goal of undermining the primacy of textual literacy or media. Rather, as the collection’s back-cover description aptly summarizes: “In this stunning collection, Gregory Scofield takes a leap forward by looking back” (n. p.). Centering the relationships that make stories, which are themselves central to fostering a sense of Métis identity, possible, aligns with theories of Indigenous resurgence, and encourage the ongoing transmission and reading, writing, and speaking of these stories for future generations.

I Knew Two Métis Women highlights the ongoing importance of plains Métis culture for forming a sense of self and community beyond the geo-spatial borders of that territory, particularly on the “wet, grey coast” (105) of British Columbia where Dorothy Scofield, Georgina Houle Young, and Gregory Scofield made a home together. In “A Métis Perspective on Truth and Reconciliation,” Trisha Logan affirms:

“Métis identity is not based on genetics. What distinguishes Métis is their attachment to culture and communities that are distinctly Métis, rooted in a historic lifestyle that involved seasonal hunting, periodic return to fixed trading bases, and mobile art forms of song, dance, fiddle music, and decorative clothing. A central component of Métis distinctiveness is the Michif language that blends components of French and Aboriginal languages in a unique way. (Logan 74)

Logan’s note that “Métis identity is not based on genetics” (74) serves to disavow the suggestion that traces of Indigenous ancestry qualify one as Métis, a belief system whereby Métis identity is equated with “mixed-ness,” not with specific cultural and kinship ties to “the experience of a collective Métis political and cultural life” (Gaudry 16) that it itself connected to the peoples and history of the Red River settlement. Reading Scofield’s poems in *I Knew Two Métis Women* with an eye for how the things Dorothy and Georgina passed down to him—from *nêhiyawêwin* to “the melancholy strains of George Jones and Tammy Wynette” (*I Knew* n. p.)—shaped his sense of self as a Métis man is complicated, however. In his memoir, *Thunder Through My Veins: Memories of a Métis Childhood*, which was published the same year as *I Knew Two Métis Women*, Scofield contemplates the “mixture of blood and history running through my veins. I am neither from one nation nor the other, but from a nation that has struggled to define itself in the pages of Canadian history, in the face of continued denial and racism” (xvi). Though Scofield’s invocation of his Métis identity through the image of mixed-blood stands antithetical to the self-articulation of the Métis by scholars like Adam Gaudry, Chris Andersen, and Chelsea Vowel as fundamentally *more* than “mixed,” he is still emphatic in his note that the Métis are “distinct yet valid people” whose “aboriginal

heritage and inherent rites ... have yet to be fully recognized by our Native and non-Native relations” (xvi).^{xcix} Logan’s affirmation that Métis identity is rooted in distinct cultural practices is something that Scofield invokes in *I Knew Two Métis Women* when he meditates on the music, stories, and language that Dorothy and Georgina passed down to him, thereby affirming the experiences that, by turns joyful and melancholy, make him “proud and honoured” (*I Knew* n. p.) to share the things that have shaped his sense of self as a Métis man. Scofield takes care to mention the “jig-steps of visitors from out of town,” the “whisper of records being slipped back into their dust covers,” and “the sound of [his] mom and aunty’s voice” that together comprised “the sound of home” (*I Knew* n. p.). Sustained discussion of how *I Knew Two Métis Women* invokes specific cultural and community practices resonant with Métis identity will follow shortly, after this chapter has set up the importance of kinship relations for how stories are shaped, shared, and received in Scofield’s collection.

The collection’s central focus on the relationships formative to the sharing of language, song, and stories begins early in the collection with a poem for Scofield’s grandfather, Dorothy’s Métis father: “Mooshom, A Sung Hero” (15). In his memoir, Scofield explains “I have always been hungry to unearth my grandfather’s legacy, my mother’s inheritance” and “the shame my grandfather carried throughout his life, for being Métis” (6). Scofield emphasizes regret for “never knowing my grandfather,” and notes that “his silence, the denial of his heritage, has left hundreds of unanswered questions and, I strongly believe, deeply affected each generation of my family” (*Thunder* 11). However, the intergenerational impact of Scofield’s môsom’s self-denial has, by his account, “become the catalyst for my own self-acceptance, love, artistic

expression, and ultimately, survival” (*Thunder* 11). Dorothy passes down the stories of Scofield’s môsom to him through playing songs about him, “her fingers waltzing / guitar strings” (*I Knew* 15). Scofield notes “Mom brought to life” (15) his môsom’s memory so that Scofield could hear songs that billed him “a sung hero” (15). Thus working through that complex inheritance via his mother’s voice in both song and story, the records that played at home, and the pictures of him on the wall catalyzed Scofield’s eventual self-acceptance. The relationships and tools that storied Scofield’s memory of his môsom highlighted the passing down of both self-denial and of continued presence—insofar as Dorothy “always said” that Scofield “looked just like him” (*I Knew* 17)—and demonstrate an enactment of Blaeser’s “response-ability” (54). Scofield carried the stories, photos, and songs with him after their tellings, and their catalytic function enabled his own creative response, a meditation on the import of understanding what has been passed down from previous generations, and how what has been passed down impacts one’s sense of identity, pride, and belonging. In this sense, it demonstrates how wâhkôhtowin shapes and impacts the stories Scofield tells about himself and his family, and the languages he uses to tell those stories. Scofield’s choice to use “*Mooshom*” and “*Cheechum*” in “*Mooshom – A Sung Hero*” to refer to his grandfather and great-grandmother, respectively, indicate the value of nêhiyawêwin for communicating a culturally-specific affirmation of kinship. His grandfather and great-grandmother are two of his family members who were Métis, who spoke Michif and/or nêhiyawêwin, and referring to them with (phonetically spelled) nêhiyawêwin kinship terms counters their self-denial of their identities, instead naming them outright as sources of pride and relationality.^c

In terms of showing the relationships between Scofield and Dorothy and Georgina, *I Knew Two Métis Women*'s two poems "Two Cradle Songs," (26) and "Aunty" (28) function as paired versions of each other, each detailing the bedtime rituals Dorothy and Georgina respectively took when looking after Scofield as a child. In "Two Cradle Songs," Scofield notes that Dorothy would "rub my back / draw letters that spelled / GREG or LOVE" (*I Knew* 26) as he drifted off to sleep. He notes that she would

comb my hair with fingers

that'd counted change

the days till Christmas

or my birthday, the hours

till dawn, lulling my heart

even now, her song

safe, assuring as ever (*I Knew* 26-27)

Scofield carries the memory of his mother's tactile lullaby, in which her fingers penned tracings of gentle words on his skin. Writing, song, and memory intersect here and assure Scofield, "even now" (27) after her death, of her presence. Dorothy's writing on her son's body names him and expresses her parental love in an embodied, tactile ritual of relationality, whereby writing, a conventionally textual mode of expression, combines with touch and voice to affirm the primacy of maternal relationships for Scofield's sense

of self. This is not a mode of representing writing whose non-standard iterations might refine broad understandings of the capabilities of textuality to express Indigenous modes of being; rather, it is an intimate portrait of the combination of touch, text, voice, and affection central to Scofield's poetic remembrance of Dorothy. Likewise, "Aunty" recalls how Georgina would tuck Scofield in before bed, "tuck / her homemade quilts / under my chin" and "count the patches in Cree / starting sometimes at nine, / ten to see if I was listening" (28). "I'd laugh and say / Keeskwiyan, / just the way she taught me" and then

wait

the song

a bluebird on her lips

lifting me to dreams (29)

Importantly, the attached Jimmie Rodgers lullaby is "from re-recorded cassette by Georgina Houle Young" (29). Scofield cites Georgina's cassette in the poem about their bedtime ritual, sourcing the recording from his Aunty's labour.

For Scofield, Dorothy and Georgina were both parental figures in terms of their impacts on his life and their roles raising him and shaping his worldview, and his invocation of distinctly Métis cultural practices function in *I Knew Two Métis Women* to cultivate Scofield's understanding of what it means to be Métis—an understanding that has significantly changed over the course of his life, as illustrated in *Thunder Through My Veins: Memories of a Métis Childhood*. By the time of Dorothy's and Georgina's deaths, Scofield's perspective on Métis identity and culture had changed from one marked by "poverty and shame," (*Thunder* 8) by "useless halfbreeds" (*Thunder* 164) and

“little if anything to be proud of” (*Thunder* 8), to one marked by a recognition of “a dignified history” (*Thunder* 166) and self-ownership: “we called ourselves *Brois brulé* (Burnt-wood people), half-breeds, Métis, mixed-bloods, or *Ka-tip-aim-soo-chick* (The People Who Own Themselves)” (*Thunder* 170).^{ci} Scofield’s use of self-identifying terms for the Métis indicates the shift in his perspective from what June Scudeler notes as his “desire to be Cree rather than Métis because of the negative portrayals of Métis” (129) to an embrace of the Métis as a resilient, strong people. As a result of this change in perspective, he is able to exuberantly invoke the musicality, aesthetic, and stories of the Métis women who raised him. As Scudeler explains, it was “[a]s he became more secure in his Métis ancestry, [that] his poems became more grounded in Métis history and culture” (132), and his poems about Dorothy and Georgina express this.

McLeod affirms that family and kinship relationships, *wâhkôhtowin*, “keeps narrative memory grounded and embedded with an individual’s life stories ... [enabling] the transmission of Cree narrative memory: people tell stories to other people who are part of the stories and who assume the moral responsibility to remember” (*Memory* 14-15). Dorothy Scofield and Georgina Houle Young lead and pass down their perspectives and lessons to a young Scofield through music, through humour, and through language and song. As a child, he forms a conception of the creative and cultural insights of the Métis that is rooted in vibrant expressions of joy, sorrowful self-conflicts of identity and place, and a material, musical aesthetic of country-Western clothes and songs. The poem “Not all Halfbreed Mothers,” dedicated to Dorothy and Maria Campbell, whom he has noted as a surrogate mother figure in *Thunder Through My Veins* (202), sums up how these things have been passed down to him. Dedicating the poem to his mother and to

Campbell uses a textual convention to model a mode of relationality and kinship, that of maternal guidance and mentorship, that his collection traces as central to his understanding of being Métis. “Not all halfbreed mothers,” he notes, “wear cowboy shirts or hats, / flowers behind their ears / or moccasins / sent from up north” (102). Here, his invocation of country-Western clothing is paired with traditional, handmade footwear “from up north” (102) and “flowers” (102) worn on the body to indicate free-spirited-ness and an appreciation for the land and its growth. Scofield notes in his memoir and in *I Knew Two Métis Women* that Dorothy spent many of her formative years living in the Yukon.^{cii} Both women, he recalls, missed the lands up north where they came of age. The fact that the moccasins they wear are “sent from up north” (102) conjures the migratory lives and connections to other territories that Logan notes is central to the Métis sense of place, simultaneously emphasizing rootedness and movement. Scofield brings the syncretic collection of these signifiers of style together, presenting and expressing pride in the multitude of cultural influences generative to his mothers’ self-expression.

Conceding at the poem’s end that his mothers “just happened / to like it / Old style” (104), Scofield alludes to a sort of classicism surrounding the symbols associated with his “halfbreed mothers” (102). Things typically considered markers of social delinquency—cheap beer,^{ciii} tabloid literature like *The Star*, *The Enquirer*” (103), and knowing how to “hotwire a car / or siphon gas” (103)—become signifiers of Métis maternal guardianship, and the lessons learned from them function as simultaneous indicators of resiliency in the face of poverty and vulnerability. Their tendency to “crave wild meat” (102) and “speak like a dictionary / or Cree hymn book” (103) references the experiences of his mother and Campbell living in close connection to the land and

learning their languages; likewise, when he notes they “pine over lost loves, / express their heartache / with guitars, juice harps” (102), Scofield recalls how the instruments of country-Western Opry music became the tools through which they narrated their experiences. In *Halfbreed*, a text formative to Scofield’s understanding of Métis identity, Maria Campbell affirms that “No one can play a fiddle and a guitar like a Halfbreed. They can make these instruments come alive—laugh, cry and shout” (100). Dorothy and Georgina do not simply absorb the notes and tunes of the genre, but actively produce their own songs and renditions of famous songs, using the tools of the genre to customize it to their experiences as Métis women. Moreover, their cravings for “wild meat” and settling for “hand-fed rabbits / from Superstore” (102) references the seasonal hunting and trapping upon which the Métis relied for sustenance (Logan 74), and juxtaposes “wild” with “hand-fed” and “Superstore” to highlight how capitalist monopolies on food and colonial restrictions on the Métis’ abilities to conduct their seasonal hunting and trapping has impacted their routines and options for sustenance.

Similarly, in “Picture 3 (1979),” Scofield recalls his mother’s country-influenced style, noting her “old Stetson” that she “steamed over a pot” so as “to keep its shape, / like the hats of the old-timers / who debuted on the Opry” (57). Dorothy’s hat, and the “boots” in which she would “clomp down the street” (57) contrasts with the “useless but pretty” hands and jewels of Scofield’s friends’ mothers, aligning her instead with the markers of the country-Western greats whose music was central to “the way [she and Georgina] strung words together to make songs and stories” (*I Knew* n. p.) of heartache and humour. In the poems mentioned above, Scofield connects the country-Western inflected music and style with markers of Métis-ness that are central to his celebration of

Dorothy and Georgina, and thereby his Métis childhood. Scofield's invocation of country-Western aesthetics and music poses an interesting contradiction: How can a genre so closely linked to stereotyped figures of pioneering settlement—namely “cowboys” and “Indians”—function as an affirmation of Indigenous kinship? Reviewing *I Knew Two Métis Women* for the Aboriginal Multi-media Society, Yvonne Irene Gladue references the connection between country-Western music and Indigenous peoples, noting:

Back when penny loafers, bubble gum, high heeled shoes and head scarves were the rage, women all across the backwoods of Canada polished their vocal chords with coffee or blue ribbon tea and a cigarette. Out would come the guitar and the music would begin. Sounds of raw emotion would pour forth from pursed lips as the performers would emulate the music of Lynn and Wells with their songs of lost love and broken dreams. Somehow these songs healed the singer, as they realized they were not alone in what they were feeling, that somewhere out there in musicland someone was feeling, hurting or loving as they did. (n. p.).

The emotional connection between the music of singers like Loretta Lynn and Kitty Wells—both of whom are mentioned in Scofield's collection—and “women all across the backwoods of Canada” (n. p.) join the collection's soundscape as Scofield “weaves the music of country and western legends Hank Williams, Kitty Wells, the Carter Family, Hank Snow, and Loretta Lynn into the laughter, the pain, and strength of his mother and aunt” (Gladue n. p.). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to work through this contradiction and the ways in which country-Western music has become largely synonymous with whiteness despite the instrumentality of people of colour in developing

the genre—particularly in the absence of direct engagement with and feedback from Métis people who share and recognize this connection. In addition to the popularity of country-Western music among the Métis, as noted by Scofield, the genre is prevalent in and popular with other Indigenous peoples as well, and occasionally permeates their creative works and material cultures.^{civ} What is apparent, however, is that country-Western aesthetics and music become a powerful—if unexpected—vehicle for tracing both wâhkôhtowin and place throughout *I Knew Two Métis Women*.

In “Ode to the Greats (Northern Tribute)” (131), Scofield traces how country-Western, Opry music has influenced the Métis, noting both the music’s persistence over time and generations, from “before electric heat” (132) and “before power lines, oil rigs” (133), as well as its ongoing resonance with the northern lands Dorothy and Georgina pined for as they aged in British Columbia. Scofield connects the Appalachian crooners Hank Williams and Patsy Cline, and the starry lights of the Opry scene in Nashville, Tennessee, with the sounds and sights of the Yukon (where Dorothy came of age and where Scofield recalls his first home with her) and northern Alberta (where Georgina grew up in Wabasca). For example, Scofield describes

Clinch Mountain bluegrass

lonely

as muskeg reeds, spring frogs

pitching into chorus (134)

Comparing the Clinch Mountain ridge of Appalachia with the muskeg swamps of the Yukon and northern Alberta, Scofield’s simile connects the landscapes through their

shared loneliness; “spring frogs” join a “chorus” (133) of “autoharp strings” (134), together effusing the affect of the two territories. Scofield’s later simile terms “the northern lights / bright as Opryland” (134), and thereby tunes the natural splendour of “up north” (134) in visual consonance with the grandeur of the Tennessee amusement park that served as a gathering point for musical acts for decades—the same musical acts who “signed [Dorothy’s] songbooks” (57). Similarly, Scofield recalls,

Patsy’s syrup voice and sweet dreams

flowed from maple trees,

echoed far and wide

loons on the lake

crooning stars, pulling the moon

down

and through the voice box (133)

The sweetness of Patsy Cline’s singing voice comes together with the excreted fluid of maple trees, and the “loons on the lake” (133) in the north sing to the stars so that the skies reverberate through her songs on the radio. Scofield affirms that the “rockabilly crooners” that Dorothy and Georgina lionized were present “up north” and “they cuddled up to the woodstove” in days “before electric heat” (132). In the time before migration, before leaving the north and re-making home in other territories, these musicians were intimately connected to the “toes tapping” in the poem’s great refrain, “up north” (132).

He notes that the sadness and heartache central to country-Western Opry music were felt by generations of Métis people. “their generation,” referring to Dorothy’s and Georgina’s, were

half crazy on home brew
 turning hand-me-down guitars,
 feet stomping
 and lifting higher,
 breaking into jigs
 sweeping plywood floors (133)

Scotfield emphasizes the lack of material affluence associated with their lives, so that “plywood floors” and “hand-me-down guitars” (133) transform from signifiers of material poverty to instruments of creative expression, to the grounds on which one might translate emotion to bodily movement by dancing through and dancing away one’s “pining lonesome” (131) troubles.

Just as Dorothy and Georgina, and others like them, inherited the sounds of Opry music, so too do these women pass down those sounds and the spirits therein to Scotfield. At the poem’s end, Scotfield turns to how Dorothy and Georgina themselves were “Greats” in their own right, due to their own lyrical effusions about the lands, experiences, and memories formative to their lives. “my Greats,” he terms them,

those two
 homesick rounders

spoke of the north,

the glory days

as if it were only yesterday

as if

one small ocean

could ever claim

their spirits untamed,

sharp and tuned

as Hank's guitar. (136-137)

Through these interconnected comparisons, Scofield harmonizes the sounds and sights central to the music his mother and Georgina loved, and those central to the lands in which they grew up. The prevalence of country-Western Opry music was a creative outlet that women like Dorothy and Georgina inherited from those who came before, and in ways that connect with Campbell's assertion of the abilities of Métis to skillfully animate musical instruments through emotional acts of composition and performance.

Indeed, the passing down of music and aesthetic markers of Métis identity impacted Scofield's perspective on language, and his perspective of himself as a storyteller like Dorothy and Georgina were before him. In "Mom, as I Watched her

Leaving,” Scofield recalls sitting by Dorothy’s bedside as she lay ill in the days before her death. In this poem, Scofield notes that language could not reach his mother as she approached death:

the sound of my voice

drifting above her

lost vowels

... muted (108)

In addition, her death recalls the moment of his birth: the tubes in her body are the counter-image to his infant head leaving her body at the moment of his birth: “the tubes invading her body” that give her “what was first ingested air” (108) give way to a recollection of

a wailing song then scream

as the stretch and tear

of my wet head

poked out

and knew by instinct

her language (108)

This highlights their intimate, embodied connection at a moment when language and words can no longer perform their function to establish connection and loving, comforting communication. In the absence of words, their connectedness occurs instead

through breath and body, through memory and metaphor: As an infant, Scofield knew “her language,” and just as he entered the world with an instinctive language to communicate with her, as she leaves the world it is that same language of breath and vowels that they together speak. Scofield remembers:

But in the end the final moment

I bend to her ear, offer

my own breath

which comes deep and prosperous

sing

my twenty-six years

of memories and songs ...

And she hears. She hears

as the world closes,

swallows my every vowel,

cuts my every chord releasing

her to a place

where all language
is obsolete. (110)

In the moment of her death, Scofield gives his breath and words to Dorothy, returning the breath and vowels that she gave him by bringing him into the world and teaching him language, the tools of expression and communication. Scofield emphasizes the centrality of this kinship bond with his mother, of *wâhkôhtowin*, to his ability to use language to express himself and share stories. McLeod's assertion that "*wâhkôhtowin* keeps narrative memory grounded and embedded within an individual's life stories" (15) resonates with Scofield's act of returning breath and words to his mother, insofar as it is his relationship with Dorothy that has mediated and shaped his words, and has "[grounded] the transmission of Cree narrative memory" (*Memory* 15) between Dorothy and her son. Giving her breath and words, and sharing his memories of her with the linguistic gifts she nurtured in him, Scofield enacts his "moral responsibility to remember" (*Memory* 15) her stories after she has passed away. Indeed, the pages of *I Knew Two Métis Women*, with the collection's subtitle, *The Lives of Dorothy Scofield and Georgina Houle Young*, and its dedication, "*For those two most incredible women*" (5), enact this responsibility, whereby textual conventions of titling and dedication are modelled toward fulfilling *wâhkôhtowin* obligations through poetry and story.

The collection's next poem, "Picture 4 (1995)" (111), recalls Scofield's first visit to his mother's home following her death. He imagines she is still there, sitting and playing the guitar while smoking and singing,

Till each golden chord

Strung together became a song—

Her favorite Old Carter Family tune

Or Cree love call

Or robins in spring (*I Knew* 112)

In Scofield's description, his mother's song is the hybrid sound of country-Western music, of *nêhiyawêwin*, and of springtime birds—a blending that illustrates the sonic complexity of inheriting *nêhiyawêwin* and Métis modes of creative expression following centuries of colonization. It is a song that he recalls as he steps “into her empty house” (113) for the first time after she has died, where he is enveloped by “silence, transparent” (113), and his grieving heart strings become the now untouched strings of the guitar she once played. In this moment of intense grief, the absence of her, her songs, and her breath, paralyzes him into the silence that he feels in the house. Yet it is in silence, a “wordlessness / within” (114) that he ends the poem. In this moment of grief, without the present, embodied relationship with his mother, he struggles to emerge from silence with words, and from loss with remembrance. His move to a “wordlessness / within” (113), however, functions as a yearning connection with Dorothy after she has died. In the last poem, “Mom, as I watched her leaving,” recalled Dorothy's movement to “a place / where all language / was obsolete” (110). Thus his grief-stricken retreat in the immediate aftermath of death into silence and wordlessness is not an abandonment of the possibility of words, songs, and stories to remember and affirm presence (the poem's existence alone indicates no such abandonment occurred); it is a deliberate emotional retreat into a space

like the one he now imagines his mother to inhabit after death. Scofield uses his words, his poetic language in “Picture 4 (1995),” to affirm a wordless connection to his mother after the sounds of her voice and guitar have been muted by her passing—he unwraps the memories of this loss, and their impact on his ability to speak, write, and poetically remember.

I Knew Two Métis Women affirms the intimacy and complexity of the relationships between Scofield, Dorothy, and Georgina, commemorating and enacting another example of the kinds of inherited stories and lessons that Scofield learned from the two women.^{cv} Yet in addition to the substance of the relationships, the things that were passed down to Scofield and the things that he came to associate with Métis identity through the two women, is the way in which *I Knew Two Métis Women* invokes multiple forms of creative media to communicate the ways these relationships were formed, and the *ways* these things were passed down to him. Scofield recalls:

The more I listened to the sound of auto-harp strings and the whine of the steel guitar, even the deep scratches on the records, the more I realized they’d lived a life of poetry, poetry that had given them voice as women, as wives and mothers, as lovers and fighters. And it was this poetry that defined them as survivors, this poetry that spoke to their perseverance of spirit. (n. p.)

It is important to note that the memories and experiences passed down to Scofield were not always empowering or uplifting. They do not unilaterally affirm joyous futurity in their content; rather, they often emphasize the heartache and melancholy that was formative to both Dorothy’s and Georgina’s lives, as well as Scofield’s own life as he struggled to come to terms with his Métis identity. Instead, they affirm futurity in their

presence on the page, in the notes of Scofield's voice, crooning the poems like one of the country superstars he celebrates in the collection. Ten years after the initial publication of *I Knew Two Métis Women*, the Gabriel Dumont Institute released a new edition of the collection, for which Scofield included two accompanying CDs. The CDs feature recordings of Scofield reading the collection's poems and the music that the collection alludes to—often together in the space of a single track. Each track corresponds with a poem in the collection, and thus readers are encouraged to *listen* to the collection as much as they are encouraged to read it textually and visually (insofar as the collection, in its first and second editions, features family photographs alongside the poems). Scofield's voice croons like the Opry "Greats" (102) he celebrates in the collection, demonstrating the musical resonances of country-Western music in performances of his poetry. The tracks yet more animate the women, words, and stories on the pages of the collection, and they function to more fully capture the storytelling dynamics that were formative to the collection's creation—not to mention, by extension, the storytelling dynamics that critics like Simpson and McLeod have invested with transformative, resurgent potential for tellers and listeners alike.

For example: Scofield's reading of "Ode to the Greats (Northern Tribute)" opens with a radio recording from the Opry stage. The announcer gushes: "Folks, I think it's about time to get all our Opry stars back out on the stage, and get a number out of all of them together," and then a singer bellows: "You're always welcome, welcome back indeed, don't forget to join us for our next jamboree!" (Disc 2, Track 16). As the singer's choral refrain, "It's the Grand Ole Opry, the Grand Ole Opry, the Grand Ole Opry time" fades, tinny and echoing, Scofield's voice interjects: "Live! From the Grand ole Opry"

(Disc 2, Track 16) to begin his reading of the poem. His words echo the musical intro that is not included in the textual version of the poem, and he reads them in a way that makes clear the joyful, exuberant tone that saturates his tribute to these various musical giants. Getting everyone “back on the stage” to sing together is a reunion, which Scofield has created space for in his collection. When he reads, Scofield connects the poem’s words so that they flow into one another. The lines “pale in comparison / those rockabilly crooners” are conjoined, with their hinging “n” and “th” sounds fused into a nasal, lisping digraph. As he reads through the poem, Scofield emphasizes the long vowel sounds in “sang,” “tamed,” “generation,” “dreams,” and other words with similar long “a” sounds. He speaks them with a slight upward inflection, drawing out the vowel in a way that eases his transition to the next word. It is not until the poem’s final word—“guitar”—that his inflection drops, signalling the end of his own crooning, his own “Live!” tribute to the giants of his life. In her reading of “sound identities” (Gingell “Nerve” 273) of nêhiyaw and nêhiyaw-Métis writers’ works, Susan Gingell notes that *I Knew Two Métis Women* “plays the soundtrack of the country and western songs the two women loved so much” (273-274), noting that “The Cree part of [Scofield’s] sound identity [was] nurtured in him principally by his Cree-speaking Auntie Georgina,” and that identity “sings out from his earliest poems” (273). Gingell affirms that “No poet better illustrates the importance of music for Indigenous sound identity than Gregory Scofield,” and contends that across his oeuvre (particularly in *Singing Home the Bones*’ “Prayer Song for the Returning of Names and Sons”) Scofield “rebalances Cree and English” (274). While Gingell is absolutely right to highlight the importance of music in Scofield’s poetry, and how music is inter-woven with nêhiyaw song and nêhiyawêwin to cultivate a specific identity

dependent upon dynamic interplays of sound, her reading of *I Knew Two Métis Women* does not situate the collection's use of country-Western Opry music in either Scofield's performances of the poems or the significance of the genre for Dorothy and Georgina, nor does it account for the ways in which this "sound identity" is distinctly and undeniably Métis, per Scofield's understanding of Métis identity.

Moreover, Gingell does not comment on how Scofield's choice to include *nêhiyawêwin* in a way that does not use *nêhiyaw* orthographic conventions (e.g., accented letters to indicate long vowel sounds) or syllabics, but rather phonetically mimics the sounds of Dorothy's and Georgina's voices. Scofield's writing works to blend the sounds of their *nêhiyawêwin* words into the English words on the page when he writes Georgina's and his mother's speech to emphasize their accents, thereby privileging the words' sounds over their textual representations. Specifically, Scofield does this by accentuating the way that their English words orally resemble *nêhiyawêwin* speech habits. For *nêhiyawêwin*, stops like "t" and "k" are pronounced as "d" and "g" when they are in medial positions of a word. For example: The *nêhiyawêwin* word "otâhkosîhk," meaning "tomorrow," (Wolvengrey 159) is pronounced more like "otâhgosîhk," and the *nêhiyawêwin* word "kâtanohk," meaning "secret hiding place" (Wolvengrey 57) is pronounced more like "kât^danohk." When Scofield reads these invocations of accented English and *nêhiyawêwin* (as in Disc 1, Track 8 and Disc 2, Track 14), he, like in his reading of "Ode to the Greats (Northern Tribute)," draws out the sounds so that they flow into one another, and that the accented words echo his unaccented punctuations. Scofield notes in his memoir that when he first met Georgina, he wondered if she was Indigenous, and reflects on her accented English, noting: "she talked funny, pronouncing her *t*'s as

d's, and I thought she might be from Europe—maybe even Italy” (*Thunder* 40).

Scotfield’s endearing naiveté aside, his remembrance that “she talked funny” (*Thunder* 40) deserves pause. Georgina’s voice marked her as other, as a cultural outsider to Scotfield as a child, and in this respect his decision to map the sounds of her voice onto the pages of his collection, and to then blend those sounds with his unaccented English in his readings, serves to contest the “funniness” of the sound, to instead present an unbroken stream of sound and words that parallels the close connection between different kinds of language, and of voice, that formed the stories Scotfield heard as a child.

Beyond the sound component of the accompanying CDs, the collection includes multiple family photos, song lyrics, a recipe card on the inside for Georgina’s “Sunday bannock” (*I Knew* n. p.), and each page is visually marked with a drawing of a fiddle beside the bottom-right page numbers. The photographs on the book’s cover, for example, triangulate Dorothy Scotfield, Gregory Scotfield, and Georgina Houle Young. The photo of a grinning young Scotfield is nestled between those of Dorothy and Georgina, just below theirs, so as to emphasize their joint influence on him and foreshadow their passing *down* of things to him. Likewise, each section of the collection begins with a family photograph, paired with relevant song lyrics, highlighting the connection between Scotfield’s family and the music in a way that relies on the interplay between visual, oral, and textual modes of representation. Through these things, story becomes embodied in different media, offering a way of carrying memory and narratives that is more than textual and, per his reflections, distinctly Métis. In his forward to the collection’s second edition, Scotfield recalls that after Georgina’s death, he “could barely cope,” and “when [he] wasn’t writing” he “copied [his] aunty’s beadwork, designs and

baked her famous ‘Sunday’ bannock” (*I Knew* n. p.). In this respect, the forms of expression and creation that enabled Scofield to cope with his loss and engage with what was passed down to him—at that point literally, as he had inherited the records and writings of Dorothy and Georgina—actively demand reflection on *what* they enabled to be passed down in the first place. Baking the bannock resonates with the hospitality of his aunty and his mother (which he extends to the readers and listeners of his collection when he writes in the forward “Pull up a chair, pour yourself some li tea and take a piece of puhkwayshikan ... It’s going to be a long, long night” [*I Knew* n. p.]), writing resonates with the two women’s embrace of music for sharing woe and joy, and playing the music recalls the dynamic relationships that undergirded the way he was able to learn, share, and live by their stories. In doing this, Scofield does precisely what I alluded to earlier in this chapter: He crafts a mode of sharing stories that affirms and celebrates the cultural histories and presents from which they arise, using *nêhiyawêwin* strategically to highlight the relationships—whether through kinship terms, or the teasing words of his aunty at his bedtime ritual—and media—song, craft, and embodied storytelling—to remember and celebrate the Métis women who raised him and nourished his creative spirit. He works with the inheritance of language, music, story, and form to center the relationships that enabled him to, in turn, pass on the things that have been formative for his sense of himself as a storyteller and as a Métis man.

Readers of *I Knew Two Métis Women* are invited to experience the multitude of sounds, stories, and songs that were formative to Scofield as a child, but not in a way that seeks to overdetermine the revolutionary potential of form or usurp the primacy of text. Instead, the collection makes clear that, in order to reckon with what has been passed

down, one must immerse oneself as wholly as possible in the world and relationships that made such an inheritance possible. To lay the groundwork for a future that reckons with, and respects, the past, it is necessary to engage with the *conditions* for the future it enables: how stories are told, but also what they tell.

3. 5 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have sought to unpack how infusions of *nêhiyawêwin* and *nêhiyaw* cosmologies of kinship and storytelling into predominantly English creative writing function. Indeed, addressing the intersections of resurgence, *nêhiyawêwin*, and inheritance in *The Crooked Good* and *I Knew Two Métis Women* necessitates an engagement not only with how creative writers like Halfe and Scofield use *nêhiyawêwin* in their collections, but also of how they center *nêhiyaw* storytelling philosophies and approaches to creative writing—whether they are guided by insights from *nêhiyaw âtayôhkêwina* or by lessons of kinship. That is to say, when considering the creative strategies by which *nêhiyaw* and Métis creative writers incorporate *nêhiyawêwin* and *nêhiyawiwîn* into their written works, it is not enough to affirm that by virtue of using textual media to represent their language in print, *nêhiyaw* writers “textualize” their oral cultures in ways that might benefit non-Indigenous or even non-*nêhiyaw* peoples and educators. It is necessary to also consider *how* they use or adapt text as a vehicle for their creative and poetic traditions and processes in ways commensurate with those traditions and processes themselves—particularly insofar as the teaching and passing down of those traditions and processes are freighted with intergenerational obligations. What this chapter has sought to model is not a way of arguing that a collection is or is not an example of resurgence, but rather a way of *reading* indigenous creative writing that

engages the complex relationship between inheritance, language, storytelling, and resurgence in ways that are commensurate with and on the terms of the people and peoples who shape and have been shaped by those stories.

Postscript

“The place was frozen, dead, but he could detect something. There was distant crunching snow and what sounded like a heart-beat. Andros moved towards it, hugging the walls and working his way closer to the sound of origin. ...

‘kinistotananâw ê-ohcicêwek Bastion ochi êkwa mîna ê-nîcipayiyêk.

‘We understand you are of Bastion and have descended from the stars.’

‘kikêhtê-ayâminanâw kîkî-wîhtamânânak niwâhkomonkanân kâwi-kiwêtik’

‘Our old ones have told us someday our relatives would return.’

‘mahti wîtapik ka-âcimostâwitâhk nitiyidineskinân.’

‘Please sit with us so we can share the stories of our people.’

Andros understood now who he was sitting with. This was the mainframe, the archive and the pilots of Those-who-would-not-go. These were the intergenerational knowledge transferors. ... He had so much to share and so much to learn.”

—Damon Heit’s “The Inheritors”

The short science fiction story from which the above epigraph is taken, Damon Heit’s “The Inheritors,” tells of an android, Andros, who pilots and navigates the “galactic ark” (82) *Bastion*, which has moved through space after humans abandoned an ecologically wrecked planet Earth. On *Bastion*, human children are schooled to see themselves as “keepers of multigenerational knowledge” (81) who maintain the connection between humans and *Bastion*’s “massive repository” (81) of organic life so that they may “acquire and sustain the living” (85) in the millennia following Earth’s apparent collapse at the hands of human greed and wastefulness. When Andros grows aware of his inhumanity and becomes weary of his mission to support humans’ ongoing mission “to propel humanity and the genetics of Earth’s life forms into the cosmos to guarantee its continued succession” (88), he launches himself into space where he floats in quiet reflection. When Andros lands on a frozen planet that we later learn to be Earth,

he detects human life and is brought to hear the stories of the people who refused to abandon Earth upon its collapse. Known as “Those-who-would-not-go,” these “intergenerational knowledge transferrors” (93) speak to him in *nêhiyawêwin* and explain that there are “numerous other peoples across [Earth’s] frozen world who had survived” (93). Andros eagerly listens to the knowledge transferrors, learning their language and helping them to prepare for *Bastion*’s eventual return to, presumably, re-colonize Earth. Recognizing this return is likely “many millennia” away, Andros takes comfort in knowing that “[u]ntil then, there was only time and stories” (94). Heit’s short story points to the enduring survival and use of Indigenous languages thanks to the labour of Indigenous peoples to use their languages to tell stories and teach others. Moreover, its use of *nêhiyawêwin* to characterize the knowledge transferrors expressly links Indigenous languages with futurity; on Heit’s imagined, post-climate-collapse Earth, it is Indigenous peoples and their languages who have survived and found the tools to rebuild what human greed and wastefulness have destroyed. Indeed, McLeod affirms that “Cree narrative imagination is overtly futuristic in its orientation, which is embodied within our lives and bodies, and can reshape our social space” (Memory 94). As the knowledge transferrors and Andros prepare for the return of *Bastion* and the possibility of a new era of planetary colonization, they take comfort in *nêhiyawêwin* storytelling. While Heit’s story challenges the supposition that Indigenous peoples and their languages are somehow anterior to futurity, it also points to the ways in which languages like *nêhiyawêwin* have become means of cultural survival and affirmation for Indigenous peoples. Andros’ return to Earth is prompted by a growing awareness of embodied sensation, and when he remarks he has “come home” (93), he immediately learns

nêhiyawêwin and seeks to build relationships with the knowledge transferrers through sharing his own stories and listening to theirs. In doing so, Andros aligns himself not with the “inheritors” of global colonialism, but with those whose words, stories, and actions have survived and challenged its supremacy.

This dissertation has sought to highlight the interconnectedness between Indigenous literatures and government policy, activism, and academia by engaging three frameworks that Indigenous peoples have used to affirm their rights to their languages, remains of ancestors, objects of cultural patrimony, and cultural practices alongside creative writing that uses nêhiyawêwin and nêhiyaw/Métis approaches to storytelling, kinship, belonging, and home. Engaging these complex interconnections has meant paying constant attention to the temporal frames of reference for efforts to promote, use, value, teach, and learn Indigenous languages. If Indigenous peoples, their languages, and their cultures have historically been considered symbols of “past-ness” or “primitivism,” then articulating understandings of language use that emphasize present use and futurity become a valuable corrective to beliefs about the temporal anteriority of Indigenous peoples and practices. In order to theorize models of revitalizing Indigenous languages that are consonant with Indigenous peoples’ own understandings of their languages and storytelling traditions, it is necessary to interrogate deeply held suppositions about what methods, resources, practices, and perspectives are valuable for encouraging more people to learn and use Indigenous languages. Turning to creative work like poetry and poetic storytelling has been my mode of engagement primarily because of the work of nêhiyaw and Métis thinkers and creative writers to affirm an intimate connection between poetic modes of expression and nêhiyaw and Métis cosmologies of language, kinship, place, and

home. However, what Heit's story illustrates is that other types of creative storytelling, such as short stories, prose fiction, and science fiction, can be similarly rich in their uses of *nêhiyawêwin*—that they, too, can enact what McLeod affirms as a “critical Cree consciousness” that “allows [one] to reimagine narratives, and to envision and imagine new possibilities for the future” (“Cree Poetic Discourse” 102).

McLeod's affirmation that “critical Cree consciousness” brings together *nêhiyaw* pasts, presents, and futures through the embodiment of “ancient poetic pathways” (“Cree Poetic Discourse” 102) resonates with Beeds' explanation that *nêhiyaw âtayôhkêwina*, “sacred narratives,” are “living stories . . . that permeate our past, present, and future” via “the paths of *wâhkôtowin*” (“Remembering” 68). McLeod and Beeds both emphasize the ways in which futurity is central to *nêhiyaw* poetics and consciousness insofar as both are guided and animated by the insights and instructions of *nêhiyaw âtayôhkêwina*, which teach *nêhiyawak* “to understand [themselves], [their] place in the world, and [their] relationship to each other and other beings” (68).

Concluding this project, I suggest that although much of this dissertation has hinged on extended analyses of the past (in terms of how it informs the present, and the foundations it has laid or sought to lay for the future) it is imperative to turn an eye to how Indigenous peoples are creating and modeling the conditions and practices necessary to ensure vibrant, affirming futures. This involves turning an eye to responsibility, to enacting deference to *iyinitowiyiniw-kiskêyihtamowin* (“Indigenous knowledge”), and to scholarship that is committed to ethical *tôtamowin* (“doing”). As noted above, this dissertation has traced the interconnected nature of Indigenous literatures and government policy, activism, and academia (primarily in Canada). The interconnectedness between

these discourses means that shifts in the Canadian political landscape reverberate through the fields of Indigenous literatures, literary studies, activism, and policy. Between 2013 and 2017 (the years during which I wrote this dissertation), the Canadian political landscape has shifted in a variety of ways—some obtuse, others minute. The transition from Stephen Harper’s 2006-2015 Conservative government to Justin Trudeau’s Liberal government, for example, initially seemed to signal a shift in the Canadian government’s prioritization of issues affecting Indigenous peoples—particularly with Trudeau’s declaration that “No relationship is more important to Canada than the relationship with Indigenous Peoples” (“Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada on National Aboriginal Day” n. p.). However, it has become clear that Trudeau’s government has rhetorically prioritized Indigenous peoples’ rights but has done little to materialize this prioritization in policy or legislation. Six days after the November 2016 announcement that his government had approved the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain Expansion Project, which was protested by many Indigenous groups (“Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s Pipeline Announcement” n. p.), Trudeau “announced his government would introduce an indigenous-languages act with the goal of ensuring the preservation, protection and revitalization of First Nations, Métis and Inuit languages” (Galloway, n. p.). In 2017, political figures such as New Democratic Party (NDP) leadership candidate Guy Caron and NDP federal party leader Jagmeet Singh, have mentioned Indigenous languages in their proposed policies; however, whereas Caron’s policy offered an extensive breakdown of proposed policy changes regarding Indigenous languages (“Nation-to-Nation”), Singh’s is less thorough and more conceptual in its approach (“Indigenous Justice Agenda”), focusing instead on the Canadian state’s ongoing “responsibility” to

“invest” in Indigenous languages following their “decline.”

Similarly, the Government of Canada has funded an “Aboriginal Languages Initiative,” which “supports the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages through community-based projects and activities” (“Aboriginal Languages Initiative” n. p.). At the same time, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada continues to solicit research projects that consider “How ... the experiences and aspirations of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada [are] essential to building a successful shared future” insofar as “the richness of endangered languages and cultures of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples contribute to global human heritage” (“Future Challenge Areas and Subquestions” n. p.). As I noted in Chapter One with respect to the 2003 *Aboriginal Language Initiative (ALI) Evaluation Final Report*, approaches to revitalizing Indigenous languages (and cultural practices more broadly) that emphasize their “richness” and value “to global human heritage” (“Future Challenge Areas and Subquestions” n. p.) rhetorically align Indigenous languages with the past, insofar as “heritage” comes to signify history and inheritance more than present-ness and futurity. The persistence of this type of language in Government discourses indicates the enduring quality of this limited, state-centric approach to encouraging the revitalization of Indigenous languages.

The Canada Arts Council, meanwhile, has centered its policies and funding initiatives around reconciliation, such that grants are available to artists, storytellers, filmmakers, etc. who “promote artistic collaborations that look to the past & future for new dialogues between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada” (“{Re}conciliation” n. p.). These major funding and governmental bodies continue to frame the revitalization of Indigenous languages in ways that affirm their necessity and

value as part of “shared heritage,” as “valuable investments,” and as routes to mend relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. In this respect, conceptualizing Indigenous languages’ futures *on the terms of Indigenous peoples* and their approaches to learning and using their languages is urgently necessary, given the various ways in which public policy, government priorities, and academic discourse inevitably intersect with conversations about Indigenous languages and literatures.

With this in mind, a significant question remains: How can literary studies and criticism meaningfully contribute to language revitalization in this political climate and those to come in the future? How can literary studies and criticism create thought and work that ethically envisions and lays groundwork for Indigenous languages’ futures, and Indigenous futures more broadly? A turn to poetics, storytelling, and literary criticism might seem counterintuitive in light of sustained political efforts to affirm largely rhetorical support for Indigenous languages. However, Indigenous peoples have emphasized the centrality of poetics and storytelling to political processes, practices, and governance. McLeod affirms, for example, that “the power of Indigenous poetry” lies in part in its ability “to transform political spaces,” and “Indigenous poetics is inherently political because it is the attempt to hold on to an alternative centre of consciousness, holding its own position despite the crushing weight of English and French” (“Introduction” 12). Likewise, in *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*, Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, poet, and musician Leanne Simpson grounds political practices, processes, and governance in stories and Indigenous knowledge. She explains: “[t]heory and practice, story and practice are interdependent, cogenerators of knowledge. Practices are politics. Processes are

governance. Doing produces more knowledge. This idea is repeated over and over again in Nishnaabeg story” (20). McLeod and Simpson make clear how storytelling and poetics are intimately connected to Indigenous political realities; governance and practice are related to “origin stories” (Simpson 21) and embodied, material “doing,” and contemporary poetic negotiations of Indigenous consciousness and language can “transform political spaces” (McLeod “Introduction” 12). In this sense, engaging storytelling and poetics can be a powerful way through which to support and enact the revitalization of Indigenous languages, and to envision and enact ways of living in the present that lay groundwork for vibrant futures. This is what Simpson refers to as “a *presencing the present*” (20), what McLeod refers to as embodying and “[re-travelling] ... ancient poetic pathways,” (“Cree Poetic Discourse” 101), and what Beeds refers to as “[becoming] our own guides when once the âtayôhkêwina are with us” (“Remembering” 63). These understandings do not center the perspectives or needs of the state, or of non-Indigenous peoples; rather, they work within existing histories of Indigenous knowledges and practices to affirm the centrality of storytelling to Indigenous peoples’ political realities.

In *As We Have Always Done*, Simpson expands on Jarrett Martineau’s theory of “affirmative refusal” (198), whereby Indigenous peoples—particularly artists and creative writers—enact “a refusing of forms of visibility within settler colonial realities that render the Indigenous vulnerable to commodification and control” (198). Simpson theorizes “affirmative refusal” as a creative and political “resurgent practice [that] is a disruptive and a deliberate act of turning away from the colonial state” in order to embrace “Indigenous intelligence as theory and process” (198). For Simpson, living by

and producing work that affirms and aligns with the instructions seeded into Nishnaabeg stories and worldviews is a way to embody Indigenous presence in the present, thereby building on existing frameworks of past Indigenous intelligence which vision and generate vibrant futures for Indigenous peoples, their cultures, their languages, and their ways of living in the world. It also, incidentally, refuses to center the perspectives and priorities of non-Indigenous peoples and the state. For scholars—particularly non-Indigenous scholars—seeking to produce work that similarly supports and is invested in such futures, this means following the example of an academic Simpson references in her book, Professor Paul Driben. Simpson notes, “By taking such a radically different approach to both community and research, Paul divested his power and authority as an academic that had been placed on him by the academy and then by an Aboriginal organization and placed that responsibility where it belonged: with the leaders and the intellectuals of the community” (15). Producing work in literary studies and criticism that is attentive to and engaged with Indigenous peoples’ efforts to value, use, teach, and learn their languages involves divesting oneself of the scholastic authority attached to one’s name, deferring to Indigenous peoples’ intelligence and experience, and engaging their creative works with attentive, engaged consideration of how their uses of language, form, and narrative practices articulate perspectives and ways of living whose benefits have little to nothing to do with the state’s aims to harmonize Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships, or to protect a valuable archive of Indigenous cultural knowledge.

With this in mind, I end bluntly: the field of literary studies has an opportunity to meaningfully contribute to discussions both about how to promote, use, value, learn, and teach Indigenous languages, as well as how to revitalize larger cultural systems and

practices of which languages are a single, albeit integral, part. However, as an established field that is dominated by settler scholars, literary studies and its practitioners must work to better themselves. They must be like Paul Driben—willing and able to take Indigenous critique, and attentive to the ways in which centering and valuing Indigenous knowledges—and modes of storytelling, languages, and experiences—can asymmetrically benefit or center non-Indigenous peoples and the state. Through broadening its existing repertoire of methods, strategies of analysis and questioning, and modes of engagement in ways that center doing, building relationships, and embracing deference, literary scholarship can work to support the generation of vibrant futures for Indigenous peoples and their languages.

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Appendix 1

nêhiyawêwin Glossary

- “mîsahikewin,” and “pimâcihêw/apisisin” (to name but two) approximate potential cousins to the term, meaning “to restore,” and “to revive,” respectively
- âcimo: “tell stories, tell news” (Halfe *Blue Marrow* 103).
- âcimowina: “stories” (Halfe *Blue Marrow* 103).
- âcimowinis: Keeper of the Stories (Halfe *Blue Marrow* 20).
- âcimostawinan: “you tell (us) stories (right now).”
- aspin: “Gone-for-Good” (Halfe *The Crooked Good* 130).
- âstam: “come here” (Scofield *Sâkihitowin* 109); “come, come here” (Halfe *Blue Marrow* 103).
- âtayokhan: “Spirit Being(s), sometimes translated as ‘granfather(s)’ or ‘grandmother(s)’” (McLeod *Memory* 101).
- âtayôhkêwina: “narratives of the elder brother” (McLeod *Memory* 17); “spiritual history, sometimes translated as ‘sacred stories’ or ‘legends’” (McLeod *Memory* 101).
- awa ê-kî-kosâpahtahk: “the one who foresaw it” (McLeod *Gabriel’s Beach* 107).
- awasis: child (Wolvengrey 14).
- cahkipêhikana: “Syllabics” (Halfe *Blue Marrow* 103).
- cihcihpistikwan: “Rolling Head” (Halfe *The Crooked Good* 130).
- ê: “grammatical preverb [that] defines a changed conjunct clause” (Wolvengrey 33).
- ê-ânisko-âcimocik: “they connect through telling stories” (McLeod, *Memory*, 91).
- ê-kî-mistâpâwêhisocik: “‘They drown themselves’” (McLeod *100 Days* 114).
- ê-kwêskit: “S/he turns around”; “Turn-Around Woman” (Halfe *The Crooked Good* 130).
- ê-mâyakamikahk: Literally “where it all went wrong”; the Northwest Resistance of 1885 (McLeod *Gabriel’s Beach* 107).
- ê-waskawît: “his body moving” (McLeod *Gabriel’s Beach* 37).
- ekwa: and
- iskwêw: “woman” (Halfe *Blue Marrow* 104; Wolvengrey 39).
- iskwêwak: “women” (Wolvengrey 39).
- iskwêsis: “girl” (Wolvengrey 39).
- itwêwin: word (Wolvengrey 44).
- itwêwina: words (Wolvengrey 44).
- iyinitowiyiniw-kiskêyihtamowin: “Indigenous knowledge” (McLeod *100 Days of Cree* 177).
- kâtanohk: “secret hiding place” (Wolvengrey 57).
- kâyas: long ago (McLeod *Gabriel’s Beach* 108).
- kihci-âtawêwikamikowiîiniw: Hudson’s Bay Company (factor) (Wolvengrey 59).
- kihci-okimâskwêw: “Queen” (Wolvengrey 60).
- kimaskihkîm: “Your medicine so powerful” (Halfe *Blue Marrow* 17).
- kipocihkân: a mute, someone unable to talk (*Alberta Elders Cree Dictionary* n. p.).
- kisisâciwani sîpiy: The “fast flowing River,” the Saskatchewan River (McLeod *Gabriel’s Beach* 109).
- kistapinânihk: location name for Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, meaning: “the great of rich

- dwelling place” (McLeod *Memory* 103).
- kwâskwê: “upwards” (Wolvengrey 81).
- kwâskwêpicikêw: Fishing with a hook and line (Wolvengrey 81).
- mamâhtâwisiwin: “the process of tapping into the great mystery” (McLeod, *Memory*, 91).
- manitowimasinahikan: “great naming book” (Scofield *Singing Home the Bones* 29); “The Holy Bible or God's writing” (*Alberta Elders Cree Dictionary* n. p.)
- masinahikan: “book” (Wolvengrey 88).
- maskihkiy: “medicine” (Wolvengrey 91).
- maskihkiwâpoy: “1. medicine tea 2. Labrador tea” (Halfe *Blue Marrow* 105).
- matotisân: “sweat-lodge” (McLeod *Gabriel's Beach* 51).
- mînis: “berry” (McLeod *100 Days of Cree* 17)
- mînisihk: “at the berry” (McLeod *100 Days of Cree* 17).
- mihkomin sâkahikan: “Redberry Lake” (McLeod & McKegney “Tending the Fire” 204).
- mistahi-maskwa: Chief Big Bear
- mistasiniy: “grandfather stone(s); literally, ‘big stone(s)’” (McLeod *Memory* 104).
- mistikwaskihkw: drum
- miyo-wîcihitowin: “helping each other in a good way”; “reciprocity” (McLeod *Memory* 35).
- môniyâwk: Europeans, from singular “môniyâw in Plains Cree means ‘European’” (McLeod “Introduction” 13).
- (ni)mosôm: “grandfather” (Hubbard 42)
- namêw: “sturgeon” (Wolvengrey 553).
- nâpêw: “man” (Wolvengrey 127).
- nâpewak: “men” (Halfe *Blue Marrow* 106).
- nêhiyaw: “Cree” (Wolvengrey 129).
- nêhiyawak: Cree people
- nêhiyawêwin: “the Cree language” (Wolvengrey 130).
- nêhiyâwiwin: “Creeness” (Beeds “Rethinking” 122).
- nêhiyawî-itâpisiniwin: “Cree way of seeing/world view” (Beeds “Remembering” 61); “Cree worldview; literally, ‘a Cree viewpoint’” (McLeod *Memory* 105).
- nêhiyawî-mâmitonêyihcikan: “Cree consciousness” (Beeds “Remembering” 62).
- nêhiyaw-maskihkiy: Cree medicine
- nîcimos: “my sweetheart, my lover” (Wolvengrey 140); “sweetheart or lover” (Scofield *Sâkhitowin* 92).
- nimwika pihik pisimohkan: the clock (time) will not wait for you” (Ahenakew *Michif Achi Cree* i).
- nitânisak: “my daughters” (Halfe *Blue Marrow* 107).
- nikâwiy: “my mother” (Halfe *Blue Marrow* 106).
- nôkhom: “my grandmother” (Halfe *Blue Marrow* 107).
- nôsisim: “my grandchild” (Halfe *Blue Marrow* 107).
- ochi: “from there” (Wolvengrey 148).
- okihcitâw: “worthy young man” (McLeod *Gabriel's Beach* 11).
- okihcitâwak: “hunters, providers, and soldiers” (McLeod *Gabriel's Beach* 11)
- opawâmîwin: “(‘her dreams’) did that to her” (Michael qtd. in Granzberg 48).
- oskana kâ-asastêki: location name for Regina, Saskatchewan, meaning: “pile of bones” (McLeod *Cree Memory* 6-7).

otâhkôsîhk: “tomorrow” (Wolvengrey 159).
 pâhkahkos: “Bony Spectre, Hunger Spirit, spirit being” (Wolvengrey 173).
 pakahamân: drum (Wolvengrey 165).
 pakitahwâw: “s/he fishes by net” (Wolvengrey 166).
 paskwâw-mostos: buffalo (McLeod *Gabriel’s Beach* 111).
 paskwâw-mostos awâsis: Buffalo child (McLeod *Gabriel’s Beach* 111).
 pawâkan: “dream helper” (McLeod *Memory* 29).
 pêyak: one (Scofield *Sâkihtowin*).
 picî(w): s/he moves (Wolvengrey 180).
 sâkihitowin: “love” (Wolvengrey 199).
 sîphiko: blue (Wolvengrey 208; Okimâsis 198).
 sîphikowinih: blue marrow
 tâpiskôc: “like, just as if” (McLeod *Gabriel’s Beach* 111).
 timikamîhk: “in deep water” (McLeod *Gabriel’s Beach* 111).
 tôtamowin: “doing” (SOURCE)
 wâhkôhtowin: “kinship” (McLeod *Memory* 106).
 waskawîwin: life force” (McLeod *Gabriel’s Beach* 37).
 wîsahkêcâhk: “Elder Brother” (Beeds “Remembering” 62-63).
 wîni(h): bone marrow (Wolvengrey 245).
 yôtin: “wind, it is windy” (Halfe *Blue Marrow* 109).

ⁱ The rhetorical use of “endangerment” and “preservation” to frame language revitalization projects is discussed at length in Chapter One.

ⁱⁱ Irlbacher-Fox concludes her essay with a note that “[a] gift that [the Idle No More movement] stands to impart to settler society is one of both awareness and self-awareness, sustaining a basis for a fundamental shift toward decolonizing settler consciousness, creating a tool for fashioning a shared future of all of our children in the shape of justice” (“#IdleNoMore” n. p.). I am wary of Irlbacher-Fox’s concluding sentiment, insofar as it centers the transformation of settler consciousness as the “gift” of #IdleNoMore. I presume, however, that this centering of the settler self is deliberate, and, since the essay was written in 2012 as the #IdleNoMore movement was exploding into Canadian consciousness, done with strategic intent to pitch #IdleNoMore to settlers so as to ensure greater numbers of support for the movement.

ⁱⁱⁱ Which McLeod defines as “the great or rich dwelling place” (103).

^{iv} Though the authority, here, stems not from cultural knowledge of nêhiyawak or the ontologies, histories, and social realities formative to their language. Rather, it stems from and is analogous with the forceful imposition of a “standard” colonial approach to living *on* Indigenous land—an approach which negates Indigenous peoples’ relationship with the land and, moreover, their inherent right to it.

^v Insofar as Watkins emphasizes that the text offers readers “the structure of a beautiful language” and “its native richness of expression” (v).

^{vi} Watkins frequently references “Indianized English” (xix) in his dictionary, noting that nêhiyawêwin has, upon extended contact with English, incorporated new terms into its vocabulary.

^{vii} The nêhiyawêwin syllabary consists of a repertoire of written symbols which, in isolation, represent one of the forty-two syllable sounds used by nêhiyawêwin. These symbols are used to translate nêhiyawêwin words by virtue of their syllabic compositions. In syllabic writing, nêhiyawêwin is represented textually as: ᑕᐃᐅᐃᐅᐃᐅ.

^{viii} It is worth noting, too, that even within these categories there are copious numbers of sub-categories used to classify both the present states of languages (i.e., “moribund,” “endangered,” “extinct,” et cetera [Nettle and Romaine 2000; Austin et al.; Malik 2000]), as well as the documentary processes and approaches which linguists and anthropologists use to describe revitalization projects.

^{ix} Cf. Fishman, Johnson, Sallabank.

^x To be niggling, even after a word is “finished” in its usage, its continued resurrection in studies, recordings, conversations, and texts resists finality.

^{xi} The term appears in the first volume of American spiritualist and self-proclaimed clairvoyant Andrew Jackson Davis’ encyclopedia *The Great Harmonia*, in which he affirms that “[t]here are exhausted elements or gases . . . which require emancipation or revitalization; and there is no element so well adapted to accomplish this end, as electricity” (“Revitalization” OED). The term’s first use as a pseudo-scientific process for “exhausted elements or gases” is worth keeping in mind, as this early signification spiritually parallels “revitalization”’s anthropological mobilization regarding Indigenous cultural practice following the publication of Anthony F. C. Wallace’s seminal “Revitalization Movements” essay (which is discussed in the pages to follow).

^{xii} This is but one of six noted spellings of the word. As it seems to be the most common spelling, I have chosen it as broadly representative of the word's Middle English form.

^{xiii} It is also worth noting that the Old French "vital" is a descendant of the Latin "vitalis" / "vita." As such, the question of how the word entered the English language is not "what was its original parent word?" but rather "what were the processes by which it was the introduced or incorporated into English?" This is because such processes would reveal the intercultural linguistic politics surrounding the word's inclusion in the English language.

^{xiv} Wallace concedes similarity between his concept of a "revitalization movement" and Marian Smith's 1954 term "vitalistic movement," meaning "any conscious, organized attempt of a society's members to incorporate in its culture selected aspects of another culture in contact with it" (Smith qtd. in Wallace 280). However, despite this concession, he affirms that Smith "uses the term for what I would call nonnativistic revitalization movements with importation (rather than revitalistic) emphasis" (280). Presumably, Wallace means that Smith focuses on dominant cultural forces and their efforts to appropriate from other cultures, as opposed to Indigenous cultures' efforts to revive and reclaim their own traditions and practices.

^{xv} Interestingly, both the verb "preserve" and the noun "preservation" signify processes directly related to medicine, with "preserve" referring "to protect or save from ... (injury, sickness, or any undesirable eventuality)" ("preserve, v.1a") and "preservation" referencing "a medicine or other agent that gives protection from disease or infection" ("preservation, n.2").

^{xvi} The term "preservation" most often appears in concert with "language endangerment," (Cf. Cameron 2007; Patrick 2007; Sallabank 2011), whereby "preservation" becomes the reparative strategy mobilized in response to a language's dwindling usage over time. This is important, as—to echo Pauline Wakeham's argument in *Taxidermic Signs*—terminologies of "endangerment," when used with reference to Indigenous peoples, evoke tropes of Indigenous animality, sub-humanity, and zoology. That is, they consign Indigenous peoples to the realm of non-human subjects whose existence must be policed and regulated—if allowed at all—by rational human subjects (i.e., colonial officials).

^{xvii} Shaylih Muehlmann's "Defending Diversity: Staking out a Common Global Interest?" skillfully traces the complex and contradictory ways in which language revitalization and biodiversity have become linked so that "their interconnections have been simplified" (32).

^{xviii} This attitude bears resemblance to the close relationship between "salvage ethnography" and narratives of the "vanishing Indian"; Dakota historian Philip Joseph Deloria notes this close relationship in *Playing Indian*, affirming (with respect to Indigenous peoples in the United States):

Americans often denied the physical and social presence of real Indians, reimagining vanishing Indian savages as now-noble parts of a unified American past ... Taking Indian disappearance seriously, feeling bad about it, and being in contact with native people pointed ... [to] Salvage ethnography—the capturing of an authentic culture thought to be rapidly and inevitably disappearing. (90)

The melancholic inevitability of Fishman's recognition consigns languages experiencing "shift" to disappearance while enacting a disciplinary "feeling bad about it" (90).

^{xix} Interestingly, “reversing language shift” has also been used with reference to social justice and community-engaged scholarship. Teresa McCarty, Lucille J. Watahomigie, and Akira Y. Yamamoto affirm, for example, that they “use Joshua Fishman’s terminology of reversing language shift (RLS). RLS is the practice of social justice; it affirms the basic principle of a community’s right to use its language, no matter how small the number of speakers, for community defined purposes” (3). It is likely, however, that McCarty, Watahomigie, and Yamamoto’s perspective on the activist possibilities of “reversing language shift” is borne of their focus on conducting work in the field of linguistic anthropology that centers respectful collaboration with Indigenous communities. In this sense, the activist possibilities of “reversing language shift” reside in the methodological mobilization of the term, not necessarily its scholastic use to classify or survey language loss.

^{xx} Writer and broadcaster Kenan Malik’s inflammatory 2000 essay “Let them Die” epitomizes this sort of dismissal of colonial histories. Malik dismisses language revitalization projects as “backward-looking, reactionary visions” (475) which use the buzzwords “linguistic diversity” and “minority rights” (475) in order to deny “nativist” cultures their collective and symbolic “ticket to modernity” (477) via the adoption of a majority—read: dominant—language. Malik affirms “the human capacity for language certainly shapes our way of thinking. But particular languages do not” (475). In affirming this, Malik expressly challenged his contemporaries’ (Nettle & Romaine’s) contention that languages are reflections of cultural ontology. Malik’s argument not only implies the inevitability of language shift, but also deems it a process characteristic of modernity. As an apparent wellspring of globalized human culture, language shift is necessary for “the native’s” contractual entry into modern life, whereby her language is anterior to the goals of contemporary social order.

^{xxi} See the 1972 establishment of the Red School House in St. Paul, Minnesota (Johansen xix), the Movement’s 1978 efforts to lead education programs from Stillwater Prison (Johansen xxi), the 1977 establishment of the Daybreak Star Center (Johansen 141), and the Native North American Travelling College in 1968 (Johansen 200-201).

^{xxii} Although anthropologists’ use of “revitalization” was more aligned with Wallace’s theorization of “revitalization movements” than with AIM’s own use of the word, the genealogy of the term implies that scholars were, so to speak, beaten to the punch by the Indigenous leadership of AIM in terms of labelling their cultural work examples of “revitalization.” I hesitate to offer a declarative statement of “who-came-first” regarding this genealogy in light of the fact that other, non-textual modes of history may offer different accounts of how the term became popular around the 1970s, leading up to its explosion in the 1990s.

^{xxiii} Cf. Philip D. Roos, Dowell H. Smith, Stephen Langley, and James McDonald’s 1980 article “The Impact of the American Indian Movement on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation” and Robert Jarvenpa’s 1985 article “The political economy and political ethnicity of American Indian adaptations and identities,” for example.

^{xxiv} Consilium’s website notes it is “a division of 8983186 Canada Inc.,” (“Company Overview”) which is a Federal Corporation operating under Industry Canada, and governed under the *Canada Business Corporations Act*. While this corporation is not a state actor, and is independent from the federal government to which it submitted the ALI

report, it has been contracted by the state to produce the report and its research. As such, Consilium does not qualify as a community or non-governmental organization, and its use of “revitalization” thus cannot be considered either a government publication *or* Indigenous-led/NGO/community/academic publication. Rather, it falls somewhere in between, and demonstrates the interpenetration of discourses utilizing the terminological framework of “revitalization” to articulate its aims.

^{xxv} It is worth noting by way of aside that the ALI report’s use of future-oriented language and thought is something likely dependent upon, at least in part, the Liberal Party’s 1997 “Red Book” *Securing Our Future Together: Preparing Canada for the 21st Century*. Upon its election, the Liberal Party of Canada inaugurated the initiative. Though it does not use the word “revitalization,” opting instead for “sustaining” (83)—thus further corroborating my suggestion that language policy documents of this era move between language fixed in a temporal “present” and a “past” or “future”—*Securing Our Future Together* addresses “Aboriginal Language Rights” by including them within an overarching rubric of Canadian identity. “The rich and varied cultures and languages of Canada’s Aboriginal peoples are an integral part of our national heritage,” (83) the party book affirms, explaining “these languages . . . are a vital component of Aboriginal culture and Canada’s heritage” (83). The party book suggests that in order to “prepare” Canadians for the impending future of a new millennium, the Canadian state must ensure traditional Indigenous languages are not lost, lest an integral part of what the public understands Canadianness to be begin to slip away.

^{xxvi} This rhetorical mobilization of “revitalization” has also trickled down to public institutions following the conclusion of the TRC. For example: Western University, the publically funded research institution at which I have studied since 2012, boasts in its 2017 *Indigenous Strategic Plan* that it “recognizes its role and responsibility in responding to calls to action from The Truth and Reconciliation Commission” (4). Part of Western’s work of responding includes “[s]upport[ing] and [enhancing] existing and new language revitalization initiatives through the Native Language Centre” (13), and “[expanding] off-campus and community-based language course offerings and language revitalization initiatives in partnership with Indigenous communities” (7). After the approval of the strategic plan, Western’s Provost and Vice-President (Academic) Janice Deakin explained to the Western University publication *Alumni Gazette* that the *Plan* is “an important step toward fulfilling a commitment made in the university’s overarching strategic plan (Achieving Excellence on the World Stage)” that “also provides some direction for how we will respond to the calls to action outlined in the 2015 report issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada” (n. p.). Deakin’s connection of the *Plan* to the university’s mission to fashion itself a leader in “excellence” on “the world stage” indicates Western’s use of the *Plan* for self-promotion and self-betterment, whereby metaphors of theatricality undergird the institution’s commitment to the revitalization of Indigenous languages and cultures. Western’s stated commitment to implementing the TRC’s calls to action and translating those calls in ways that prioritize the hiring of Indigenous faculty members and offering more Indigenous studies course options indicates the institution’s desire to publically align itself with the work of valuing, teaching, and promoting Indigenous languages. Yet the major strategy to implement the Plan, which the document notes as part of its “Accountability” (17)

section, is a “Provost Task Force on the Implementation of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recommendations and Indigenous Strategic Plan goals and priorities, which will be established upon the launch of the Indigenous Strategic Plan” (18). That is, an internal task force about how to implement the TRC’s calls to action is the first listed strategy in a document that Western’s Vice-Provost has touted as providing “direction” (n. p.) for how Western can begin to implement the TRC’s calls to action. As a final aside, I offer the following personal anecdote. In 2013, as a second-year Ph.D. student in the Department of English and Writing Studies, I was discouraged from taking Western’s “Anishinaabe Language and Culture” course as my Department-required language credit, because it was not clear whether it would be accepted as a secondary “research” language for a doctoral student. Other Ph.D. students before me had taken this course as a language credit, but I was hesitant to create an administrative hurdle for myself by contesting an administrator. Instead, I chose to take an online “Reading in French” course, which I completed while taking summer courses at the University of Manitoba’s Summer Institute in Cree Language and Literature. The discordance between Western’s official statement of support for Indigenous languages in 2017 and the inconsistent execution of its administrative processes that guide students to actually take relevant courses illustrates the rhetorical impact of invoking revitalization without the infrastructure in place to support a commitment to revitalize Indigenous languages on campus. In the interest of critical self-reflection, I use this example of Western’s disharmonious commitment to its principles to indicate the troubling possibilities resultant to rhetorical invocations of “revitalization.”

^{xxvii} Armstrong’s use “Okanagan” instead of “nsyilxcen” signals a translational reference to engage a wide readership, many of whom may not know the word “nsyilxcen.”

^{xxviii} Interestingly, this term is not commonly used in the literature of this field. Its only cousin is “cross-language retrieval,” which refers to a database function of information retrieval between two different languages (i.e., entering a query into a database in one language, and receiving search results in another).

^{xxix} McIlwraith’s essay also levies critique at language revitalization projects based out of universities, using her home institution—the University of Alberta—as an example. Asserting that many of the debates peripheral to the actual work of teaching and learning Indigenous languages—such as orthography, syllabics and their invention, the ethics of non-Indigenous participation—“consume precious time that could be used more effectively in really teaching and learning *nêhiyawêwin*” (87). While McIlwraith rightly emphasizes the urgency of cultivating teaching programs primarily dedicated to the languages themselves and not the discourses which surround them, her suggestion that such debates listed above are taking up too much “precious time” (87) is troubling, insofar as it seems to imply that the remedy to postsecondary preoccupation with these discussions is to jettison them in favor of “really teaching and learning” (87). But how can educators begin to really teach, and how can students begin to really learn, without a critical awareness of and situatedness within existing debates of the field? Such issues, I suggest, cannot be separated from language education given the intensely political history surrounding Indigenous languages—and education—in Canada.

^{xxx} Importantly, the assignation of animacy to certain nouns does not always accord with Western assumptions of what qualifies as living (i.e. possessing an identifiable—oft

anthropocentric—life force). Rather, culturally important items—or internally powered items, such as cars and sleds—are considered animate. This will be addressed later in this chapter with respect to Gregory Scofield’s “My Drum, His Hands.”

^{xxxix} Certainly, as McIlwraith asserts, “a common struggle is to translate a concept from one language to another: some essential quality in the original language escapes the colonial language’s ability to express it” (88). All translation is, at its best, approximation. As such, it makes little sense to search nehiyawêwin for a concept equal in resonance and denotation to what English would call “revitalization” in order to engage creative work using nêhiyawêwin. Indeed, there is no word in nêhiyawêwin which parallels the English word ‘revitalization’ and its connotations, but similar words, such as “mîsahikewin,” and “pimâcihêw/apisisin” (to name but two) approximate potential cousins to the term, meaning “to restore,” and “to revive,” respectively. Many of these terms, too, directly relate to the role of the body in processes of restoration and revival, with “apisisin” referring specifically to revival “after a death or sickness” (“apisisin,” *Cree Dictionary Online*).

^{xxxix} Regarding the embrace of intermarriage and miscegenation as a colonial strategy to eliminate Indigenous peoples from the Canadian landscape and thereby assimilate them into the larger—read: white—body politic; *Cf.* Karen Stote’s *An Act of Genocide: Colonialism and the Sterilization of Aboriginal Women*, which addresses the Canadian state’s eugenic project to sterilize Indigenous women and prevent the birth of Indigenous children (2014).

^{xxxix} This grandmother, Adeline, makes an appearance early in *Blue Marrow*, when the speaker recalls her as a “Huge, forbearing medicine woman” (8).

^{xxxix} Importantly, the nêhiyawêwin address to the child which confirms it is hers: “nicawâsimis” (55), she says, which means “my child” due to the “ni” prefix.

^{xxxix} It is worth noting that *Blue Marrow*’s invocation of medicine stands in stark contrast to Fishman’s medical analogy of tragic linguists who, like Doctors working to save terminal patients, seek to “reverse shift” or revitalize languages that are doomed to extinction. Fishman’s invocation of medicine as analogy sees himself and like-minded scholars as the purveyors of treatment; *Blue Marrow* imagines the abilities of nêhiyaw and Métis iskwêwak to medicinally heal themselves.

^{xxxix} A discussion this term will come in the following section.

^{xxxix} *Turning the Page* does concede, however, that “[t]here is a wide recognition that concepts of ownership may vary, [and] therefore, a case-by-case collaborative approach to resolving repatriation based on moral and ethical criteria is favoured rather than a strictly legalistic approach” (5). *Turning the Page* does outline the “moral and ethical criteria” (5) by which it proposes cases should be adjudicated, although the passive voice phrasing of the above sentence does make a reader wonder: By whom are these approaches favoured? Who takes part in the “wide recognition” (5) of the multiple approaches to understanding ownership to which the report alludes? And, most interestingly, are “strictly legalistic” (5) approaches themselves bereft of moral and ethical concern?

^{xxxix} It is important to note that though this chapter takes up the history of repatriation legislation and task force reports as outlined in *NAGPRA* and *Turning the Page*, there is currently no repatriation legislation in effect in Canada beyond *The Alberta First Nations*

Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act (2000). As such, my comments relate to such legislation's critical and rhetorical impacts on understandings of return, home, and belonging—not on how Indigenous peoples' efforts to repatriate remains or items of cultural patrimony have played out in Canada.

^{xxxix} These attempts range from treaty negotiations wherein colonial negotiators mistranslated their intentions to Indigenous peoples so as to seize land (thus disempowering Indigenous languages as systems of intercultural communication and negotiation), to the forced removal of Indigenous children from their homes and their relocation in residential schools (where they were forbidden to speak the languages of their peoples and homes), to the legislative efforts of the Canadian state to eradicate Indigenous peoples' rights to speak, teach, and enshrine their languages in official capacities (via early *Indian Act* legislation).

^{xl} This is not to rehearse tired assumptions that oral cultures are defined by their apparent ephemerality, are elusive in their ability to resist textualization, and thus are all the more fascinating for academics when their stories *are* textualized. Rather, “intangibility” is a term I use primarily for sake of contrast between language, history, and memory and objects of cultural patrimony or human remains. Such objects and human remains are literally tangible—tactile, material—and their return is thus primarily referencing the physical, migratory return of the things themselves (and, in so doing, the return or reaffirmation of the affective connection associated with them). By contrast, things like language, memory, and history have no singularly identifiable locative space: They reside multiply in the pages, stories, minds, hearts, and landscapes of those who hold them.

^{xli} The Canadian Forces notes that their policy of bringing home the remains of fallen personnel is intended primarily for the families of the dead to “know that their loved one has been honoured in death,” but conceded that it “is also essential for the morale of those who must carry on” (“Repatriation” CAF). In its military capacity, repatriation carries connotations of improving the spirits of the communities who remain after a loss has occurred. Indeed, this affective dimension of repatriation is important to note, as its “essential” nature to “morale” functions as a justification for state authority to return home the bodies and remains of those who have died in combat—i.e., those who have died in service of the state. The same affective register of honouring one's dead and ameliorating the challenged morale of a community that has suffered a loss does not seem to apply to cases of Indigenous peoples pursuing the return of remains or objects unlawfully seized and held *by* and *under* state authority.

^{xlii} A harmful and erroneous assumption, to be sure, this belief stemmed from colonial efforts to eradicate Indigenous bodies and presence so as to lay stronger claim to Indigenous lands and resources (*Cf.* “Repatriation of Human Remains”; Wakeham 3-8).

^{xliii} See, for example, the case of the Nuu-chah-nulth: Between 1982 and 1985, many Nuu-chah-nulth community members participated in a study addressing the inordinately high occurrence of rheumatoid arthritis in their community, only to find that the study's chief researcher had absconded with hundreds of vials of community members' blood, and used their contents for research purposes at Oxford University that were beyond the purview of the consent given for the original arthritis study (the researcher, Dr. Richard Ward, made his career using the Nuu-chah-nulth samples as fodder to “trace the

evolutionary history of First Nations by studying their DNA” [“Nuu-chah-nulth blood returns to the West Coast”). Through the action of the Nuu-chah-nulth’s Tribal Council to create a Research Ethics Committee and lobby Oxford University for the samples’ return, the blood was, in 2004, returned to the community—though members never learned the results of the initial arthritis study.

^{xliv} The right of possession or “stewardship” has, in high profile cases, been articulated in terms of genetics, whereby Indigenous peoples must demonstrate a connection that is coded in the DNA of both living peoples and the remains themselves. In this sense, the prerogative to demonstrate ongoing cultural connection falls on Indigenous peoples in a way that conjoins anthropological and scientific metrics of belonging and kinship. Indeed, such was the case for the legal struggles for repatriation of the remains of Kennewick Man, a Holocene skeleton whose potential “return . . . for reburial to five local Native American tribes (the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla, the Yakima Indian Nation, the Nez Perce tribe, the Wanapum band, and the Colville Confederated Tribes)” prompted “a maelstrom of protests from anthropologists and archaeologists throughout the country, eight of whom promptly filed a lawsuit requesting that the bones first be turned over to them for study before reburial” (Crawford 211).

^{xlv} In the context of *nêhiyawêwin*, as the previous chapter discussed at length, this conception of inalienability is linguistically manifest as “dependent nouns”—items, body parts, other people, from whom the possessor cannot be separated and continue to exist as possessor.

^{xlvi} Such dislocation and redistribution of land with intent to fracture Indigenous conceptions of “home” does not even address the logics through which a colonial state would need to accept the patria—the nation—of an Indigenous group as legitimate in order to broker a return. That is to say, beyond the geographical complexity of return lies the challenge of state recognition: If the state refuses to recognize Indigenous nations *as nations* in their own rights, as patrias on par with the Canadian state, then how might one pursue a repatriation *to* that home?

^{xlvii} Scholars working to explore the relationships between Indigenous peoples and urban spaces, for example, have noted the extent to which mainstream settler culture imposes a matrix of residence and belonging upon Indigenous peoples that is contingent upon “the physical and imaginative erasure of Indigenous bodies from modern society (which is imagined as anywhere outside of reservations). Thus we [read: settler society] can only imagine Indigenous peoples to be backwards, savage, living on reservations that separate Indigenous peoples spatially and culturally, and practicing a monolithic ‘traditional’ Indian culture” (Henderson n. p.). As a result, Indigenous peoples residing off-reserve are deemed inauthentic (oft doubly, as Gregory Scofield has noted with regard to the relationship politics surrounding residence and membership on many reservations [*Cf. Thunder Through My Veins*]), and somehow anathema to spaces not stereotypically “Indigenous.” Worse, too, is that this relegation, while passively policing Indigenous peoples’ prerogatives to identify for themselves what constitutes “home,” is often done with the veneer of supporting Indigenous peoples’ rights to their traditional territories. That is to say, non-Indigenous peoples assume that stereotypically “modern” landscapes are antithetical to the inhabitation of Indigenous peoples—they have their own lands on which to reside, and to therefore deny Indigenous peoples’ mobility of residence and

spatial identification effectively denies the possibility that “urban histories and Indigenous people are not mutually exclusive entities” (Henderson n. p.).

^{xlviii} Métis writer, scholar, and educator Chelsea Vowel’s “Who are the Metis?” helpfully explains the complexities surrounding the Metis’ Indigeneity, territory, and identity, taking care to disavow the contention that the Red River Métis are not Indigenous per the declarations of the Canadian state. She affirms that the Métis are “a post-Contact Indigenous people with roots in the historic Red River community” (n. p.), and that the “fur trade itself did not create the conditions through which the Métis became a people” (n. p.). The Métis became a people, she explains, by virtue of the breaking off of mixed, matrilineal families into their own communities apart from those of the Cree, Anishinaabe, and French (to name but three) groups from which their families initially grew. Vowel tells readers that what “solidified Métis identity was created around a series of events wherein the Métis needed to act as a people to defend themselves and the territory they lived on” from the incursion of surrounding groups, naming the “Pemmican War, the Battle of Seven Oaks, and the Riel Resistance” as some of the “events that saw the Métis continue to evolve as a people with a culturally distinct language, social and political organization” (n. p.).

^{xlix} Certainly, “new feeling and energy” is vague, and deliberately so: One cannot homogenize the array of felt responses accompanying the repatriation of an object of cultural patrimony, or of ancestral remains.

ⁱ The term “closure” deserves brief pause, here. Though it appears in a quotation from Chief Lawrence Joseph, I do wish to emphasize that narratives of repatriation which center “closure” do not always account for the ongoing nature of colonial theft and seizure of Indigenous peoples’ bodily remains and objects of cultural patrimony. I use the example of One Arrow’s return not to set up an example of the strategic “closing” of theft-based relationships between Indigenous peoples and the colonial state that is possible through repatriation; rather, I use it to emphasize the affective dimension surrounding a return *to* something that can accompany the return *of* something. In the context of Chief Joseph’s comment, “closure” refers to the felt contentment and satisfaction that attends One Arrow’s return, and to the renewed possibilities of engagement with his memory and stories of his life.

ⁱⁱ It is worth noting, however, that *nêhiyawmasinahikan* literally means “Cree book,” not “syllabics” (the *nêhiyawêwin* word for syllabic writing is *cahkipêhikana* [Halfe *Blue Marrow* 103]). In providing a general translation of “*nêhiyawmasinahikan*,” McLeod broadens the word’s signifying repertoire to include a range of textual practices for using *nêhiyawêwin* to tell and share stories.

ⁱⁱⁱ Considering the self-conscious recuperation of tradition, particularly for *nêhiyaw nâpewak*, it is necessary to be mindful of the ways in which “tradition” can be inflected with patriarchal norms of relationality as it is carried forward in the present. Métis scholar Emma Larocque writes of this necessity, affirming that Indigenous women “are being asked to confront some of our own traditions at a time when there seems to be a great need for a recall of traditions to help us retain our identities as Aboriginal people” (14). However, she cautions “women” to “be circumspect in our recall of tradition. We must ask ourselves whether and to what extent tradition is liberating to us as women . . . We know enough about human history that we cannot assume that all Aboriginal traditions

universally respected and honoured women” (14). To this end, when I write of McLeod’s self-conscious recuperation of and return to prior ways of being for nêhiyaw nâpewak, I do so with focus on how these ways of being center modes of relationality and accountability that are both consonant with his (and others’) understandings of nêhiyaw storytelling and kinship paradigms as well as dissonant from models of interaction and engagement that affirm and uphold settler heteropatriarchy.

^{liii} McLeod’s collection centers around the relationship between nêhiyawak and the kisiskâciwani-sîpiy (the Saskatchewan River). McLeod notes that the kisiskâciwani-sîpiy, which “had once given so much life to Indigenous people,” was “lost” (*GB* 11) after the dishonouring of Treaty 6 in 1885. The terms “false river” and “lost river” are central to *Gabriel’s Beach*, with the former broadly signifying alcohol and alcoholism, and the latter signifying a lost connection to the kisiskâciwani-sîpiy (the Saskatchewan River). The import of these terms to the collection and its use of nêhiyawêwin and nêhiyaw storytelling will be discussed at length later in this chapter.

^{liv} “VTA” “means a verb of the “transitive, animate” (Wolvengrey xlvi) variety—that is, it is a verb describing an action whereby the subject and object are both animate. For example: In the verb phrase “he provides for them,” “he” and “them” are both animate, with “he” doing the action of “providing,” and “them” receiving the action.

^{lv} Vandall’s subsequent capture and solitary confinement as a prisoner of war, alone in a pit, further illustrates this, insofar as he is left in formless solitude with neither companions nor comrades.

^{lvi} The nêhiyawêwin word and its definition are not available in existing dictionary resources.

^{lvii} See pages 37-53 of *Cree Narrative Memory* for a detailed discussion of this history.

^{lviii} Indeed, McLeod’s translation for “ê-kâh-kistawêt” is “it echoes repeatedly” (*GB* 107).

^{lix} McLeod offers the term “ê-kî-mistâpâwêhisocik” to refer to the over-hunting and death of the buffalo, which means: ““They drown themselves”” (*100 Days* 114). Noting that his “câpân kôkôcis had stories” of the buffalo drowning themselves “when the world was changing” (*100 Days* 114), McLeod demonstrates the impact of the changing landscape on the buffalo and, by extension, the nêhiyawak for whom they were so central. With this in mind, McLeod’s image in “*Mistahi-Maskwa*, Song Three” of buffalo bones melting into the earth after the treaties were dishonoured resonates with the buffalo’s retreat from the transformed landscape.

^{lx} It is important to emphasize that the lost-ness, aimlessness, and dislocation of nêhiyaw nâpewak that this chapter takes up is done in the spirit of McLeod’s work—both his literary theory and his creative writing. This chapter does not suggest that *all* nêhiyaw nâpewak experienced such dislocation and aimlessness following the signing of Treaty 6 and the events of 1885. Certainly, such a claim would dismiss generations of men whose dedicated labour sought to strengthen nêhiyaw communities, connect with and act as stewards of the land, and pursue self-determination. As such, the arguments contained in this section primarily reflect the affects and experiences articulated in *Cree Narrative Memory* and *Gabriel’s Beach*.

^{lxi} Importantly, though the Sons of a Lost River may not have the “ancient songs” (*GB* 61) referenced here, they do have the songs for mistahi-maskwa that McLeod uses as vehicles to trace out the nêhiyaw leader’s principles and actions.

^{lxii} McLeod also notes that cîhcam was the “neice of *atâhkakop* / Star Blanket” (*GB* 47), a nêhiyaw chief who, like mistahi-maskwa, was involved in the negotiations surrounding Treaty 6. However, unlike mistahi-maskwa, who did not wish to take treaty, atâhkakop was “willing to make accommodations in order to survive” (*Memory* 42) after recognizing that his people were facing serious changes to their traditional ways of living following the decline in the buffalo population. He did, however, petition for mistahi-maskwa’s release from prison (*Memory* 51), and was a vocal proponent for continuing to live off the land. “*cîhcam*”’s continued figuring of cîhcam as a blanket who “brought stars from the sky” (*GB* 47) is no doubt a reference to how she embodies the principles of her ancestors.

^{lxiii} McLeod notes that cîhcam would throw a blanket over “her kitchen table” and “put rocks on skillet floor” to create “improvised ceremony” (*GB* 49)—that is, to transform her kitchen into a makeshift sweat-lodge. McLeod mentions that “the warmth of *matotisân*” (*GB* 51), the sweat-lodge, was one of his only comforts when he was struggling with being lost and dependent upon “false water” (*GB* 50). This, paired with the recognition that Treaty 6 and the subjugation of nêhiyawak post-1885 sought to forbid ceremonies like sweats, points to the multiple ways in which cîhcam is a figure in McLeod’s life whose positive embrace of nêhiyaw practices comforted him, and offered him reprieve from the dislocation of the lost river.

^{lxiv} A theme sign indicates from whom and to whom the action described in a verb is directed.

^{lxv} Importantly, placing the manitowimasinahikan on par with the colonizers’ ships highlights the interdependent function of Christianity and nautical exploration and expansion as weapons of colonization.

^{lxvi} *Singing Home the Bones* also includes two poems for Scofield’s biological father, with whom he explains he has neither a relationship nor a clear understanding of identity. These poems, too, are multilingual, invoking not only nêhiyawêwin with reference to his mother’s desire and connection to “her kohkomâk” (46), but also Hebrew, as his father was Jewish. While the multi-lingual quality of these poems engages the multiplicity of identities formative to Scofield’s sense of home and self—and dislocation from a sense of home and self—it is important to note that he uses Hebrew as a way of imagining the kinds of linguistic affirmations of identity that he might have performed *had he known* his father later in life. This is not to say that the invocation of Hebrew functions similarly to that of nêhiyawêwin or with the same effect; in the context of Scofield’s collection, the invocation of Hebrew does touch on similar thematic concerns regarding how language can affirm and uplift one’s sense of self and being. However, whereas Scofield makes clear that his invocation of nêhiyawêwin is freighted with recuperative and restorative purpose, his invocation of Hebrew highlights his alienation from his father, as the poem wonders about and offers theories about who the man may have been: “I have only this photograph / of you” (49), he laments, later offering a version of Ofra Haza’s song “Kaddish” to memorialize his father. Scofield uses nêhiyawêwin to share the stories of the nêhiyaw iskwêwak who were his ancestors, of his mother, and of his home with his partner, thereby voicing in nêhiyawêwin the identities that colonization sought to strip them of through English naming. Scofield uses Hebrew, by contrast, to imagine what he

does not know, to conjure possibilities and thereby highlight his lack of knowing, and his fundamental inability to use language to affirm a connection with his father.

^{lxvii} Scott Richard Lyons' *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent*, for example, explores the ways in which the textual symbol of a signature—the mark not only of consent but also of assent on contracts like treaties—has shaped the contemporary construction of Native American identities, and the ways in which different Native American groups (in the United States, at least) have grappled with the legacy of textual expressions of self and presence.

^{lxviii} This is not to say that scholarship engaging the relationship between textuality and orality in Indigenous writing has been unilaterally misguided, ill-applied, or ineffective—nor is it to say that using terminologies or approaches to Indigenous literatures that rooted in academic study is unilaterally misguided, ill-applied, or ineffective (if such were the case, then this dissertation would be an exercise in prolonged irony). Rather, what I wish to emphasize here is the extent to which such criticism has often reproduced and reinforced the very structures and limitations it has sought to challenge or destabilize, and that the *result* of such criticism has been relatively little engagement with how the content of stories guide and inform their uses of Indigenous languages and oral traditions. Critics have focused so heavily on *how* stories are told that they have occasionally missed *what* the stories tell.

^{lxix} Critical thinking and interpretation has been central to theories of Indigenous resurgence, with many proponents and key figures working within universities and colleges to teach, write, publish, and communicate their work to audiences beyond the academy.

^{lxx} It's worth noting, too, that “resurgence” has been used with reference that seems contra to its intent to center Indigenous peoples' own conceptions of self and culture. For example, CBC journalist Jesse Kinos-Goodin referred to the recent explosion of Indigenous music—using the Indigenous electronica group A Tribe Called Red and Inuk singer Tanya Tagaq as examples—as “A resurgence. A revolution. A renaissance,” insofar as Tribe's and Tagaq's music gestures towards “a significant moment in the history of Canada's relationship with First Nations, and it's reflected not just in the proliferation of indigenous music, but also in its mass acceptance by the mainstream” (n. p.). In this context, the use of “resurgence” to refer to the contemporary emergence of Indigenous music that is ostensibly palatable to mainstream listeners immediately yokes the term to a “significant moment in the history of Canada's relationship with First Nations” (n. p.). In doing so, Kinos-Goodin's uncritical use of the term re-inscribes the very relationships that resurgence seeks to displace: those between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and Indigenous peoples and the settler state.

^{lxxi} Cf. Cornassel and Holder's “Who's Sorry Now? Government Apologies, Truth Commissions, and Indigenous Self-Determination in Australia, Canada, Guatemala, and Peru,” Andrew Woolford's “The Limits of Justice: Certainty, Affirmative Repair and Aboriginality,” Eva Mackey's “The Apologizer's Apology,” and Dale Turner's “On the Idea of Reconciliation in Contemporary Aboriginal Politics.”

^{lxxii} I use the euphemistic term “shared territories” to refer to Indigenous peoples' occupied lands deliberately, as such has been characteristic of writings centered on this approach to reconciliation. The TRC's *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*,

for example, affirms: “Reconciliation must inspire Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to transform Canadian society so that our children and grandchildren can live together in dignity, peace, and prosperity on these lands we now share” (8). Likewise, Paulette Regan’s *Unsettling the Settler Within* uses various forms of the phrase “our shared colonial past” (115) with reference to the history of the IRS system.

^{lxxiii} Regan’s reference to “the healing metaphor” (175) reflects not only the ability of the TRC’s forums for sharing experiences to provide therapeutic benefit to survivors of the IRS system, but also then-current scholarship that emphasized the healing abilities of truth telling, testimony, and creative expression for Indigenous peoples. Jo-Ann Episkenew’s influential 2009 monograph *Taking Back Our Spirits: Indigenous Literature, Public Policy, and Healing* noted, for example, that “[c]ontemporary Indigenous literature serves two transformative functions—healing Indigenous people and advancing social justice in settler society” (15), and posited that “Indigenous writers and theatre artists are well aware of the need for healing and hope within in our communities” (193). Likewise, Qwo-Li Driskill’s oft-cited 2008 article “Theatre as Suture: Grassroots Performance, Decolonization, and Healing” theorizes that “[i]f colonization is a kinesthetic wounding, then decolonization is a kinesthetic healing ... [and] [t]heatre aids in decolonization because through it we can learn what decolonization and healing *feel* like” (155). Jo-Ann Archibald’s 2005 monograph *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit* similarly invokes the therapeutic aspect of Indigenous creative writing, noting that “principles of holism, interrelatedness, and synergy work together to create powerful storywork understandings that have the power to help with emotional healing and wellness” (x). It is not my contention that such scholarship is not valuable—such a claim would ignore the bravery of Indigenous peoples who both did and did not attend residential schools, and their efforts to both share their experiences and ensure that such sharing could be of therapeutic benefit to themselves, their families, and listeners. Rather, I provide this contextual information about Regan’s invocation of “the healing metaphor” (175) with aim to indicate how the concern with healing permeated academic writing that was produced concurrently with the run of the Canadian TRC.

^{lxxiv} Other examples of this type of scholarship include: Natalie A. Chambers’ “Reconciliation: A “dangerous opportunity” to unsettle ourselves” and Steffanie Pinch’s “Revolution 101: How to be a settler ally.”

^{lxxv} Roland Chrisjohn and Tanya Wasacase’s frequently cited and taught essay “Half-truths and Whole Lies: Rhetoric and the TRC Apology,” for example, famously observed that in order to become reconciled, peoples/groups must first have been conciled, which is a state of relations that has never truly existed between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples or between Indigenous peoples and the state. The influence of this article is clear in the TRC’s final report, which notes: “[t]o some people, reconciliation is the re-establishment of a conciliatory state. However, this is a state that many Aboriginal people assert never has existed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people” (6).

^{lxxvi} This turn towards resurgence was propelled by, among other things, the #IdleNoMore movement, with its focus on “[asserting] Indigenous inherent rights to sovereignty and [reinstating] traditional laws and Nation to Nation Treaties by protecting the lands and waters from corporate destruction” (IdleNoMore “The Story”). Its eruption in 2012, in

the middle of the TRC's mandate, catapulted its efforts to "build sovereignty & resurgence of nationhood" (IdleNoMore "The Vision") into Canadian cultural consciousness. Mi'kmaq lawyer Pamela Palmater notes in "Idle No More: What do we want and where are we headed?" that "[t]he Idle No More movement is part of a larger Indigenous movement that has been in the making for several years," but #IdleNoMore's inclusivity "empowers Indigenous peoples to stand up for their Nations, lands, treaties and sovereignty" in ways that were "purposefully distanced from political and corporate influence" ("Idle No More" n.p.). Similarly, Simpson's *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back* opens with a discussion of a peaceful demonstration of "presence," and emphasizes the instrumentality of the #IdleNoMore movement in fostering a new culture of resurgence.^{lxxvii} This is not to say that work concerning reconciliation and its potential to ameliorate the lives and living conditions of Indigenous peoples is no longer of concern to current and emerging scholars; indeed, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada announced on March 16, 2017, that it planned to allocate "\$695,000 for 28 research projects on the experiences of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples," primarily with aim "to support the continued engagement in research by and with Indigenous peoples, as well as to foster truth and reconciliation efforts through collective action. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada is co-funding several of the projects" ("Government of Canada Invests" n. p.).

^{lxxviii} Yet the distinction between "revitalization," the focus of this dissertation's first chapter, and "resurgence" is often blurry: Is revitalization not itself an example of resurgence? Does resurgence not necessarily entail a revitalization of Indigenous languages and cultural practices? Recent scholarship has collapsed the distinction between the two terms, with a 2016 graduate thesis explicitly arguing "that Idle No More (INM) in Canada represents an Indigenous resurgence that can be explained by the revitalization of Indigenous peoples' cultural practices, beliefs, and spiritual sense of responsibility to protect their lands, sovereignty, the right to live their lives without pressure to assimilate, and right to their own unique identity" (Coleman 16). Yet resurgence, as I have come to understand it, evokes a broader paradigm for encouraging and promoting Indigenous peoples' return to traditional practices commensurate with their specific epistemologies and ontologies. That is to say, revitalization is certainly an example of resurgence, though the terms may not always signify the same thing, due to revitalization's longstanding relationship with the academy (see Chapter One of this dissertation).

^{lxxix} It is noteworthy that in Canada, the implementation of UNDRIP has dovetailed with the TRC's 94 calls to action following the conclusion of its 7-year mandate, insofar as the Liberal government under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has pledged to, "in partnership with Indigenous communities, the provinces, territories, and other vital partners, fully implement the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, starting with the implementation of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*" ("Statement," n. p.). Trudeau's Liberal government made implementing UNDRIP part of its 2015 campaign strategy, noting in the party's platform document *A New Plan for a Strong Middle Class*, that it would "support the work of reconciliation, and continue the necessary process of truth telling and healing ... [by working] alongside provinces and territories, and with First Nations, the Métis Nation, and Inuit, to enact the

recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, starting with the implementation of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*” (48). The near verbatim similarity between Trudeau’s 2017 statement and the Liberal party’s 2015 platform document aside, it is clear that in the context of contemporary struggles for securing Indigenous self-determination, the state’s rhetoric has become intricately linked to processes of “healing” and “reconciliation.”

^{lxxx} To be sure, these critical engagements represent a narrow window of possibility.

^{lxxxi} The inseparability between form and content is the formative concept to structuralist and poststructuralist theories of textuality and meaning. The problem with such models, I suggest, comes from the singular focus on form, with “form” almost always metonymically representing Euro-Western settler models of textual expression.

^{lxxxii} Cariou is alluding to Christian Bök’s copiously funded *The Xenotext* (2015), which sought to encode poetic composition into a DNA sequence, implant the sequence into a bacterium, and thereby create a series of self-replicating poetic mutations.

^{lxxxiii} This term is fraught with conceit, admittedly—particularly considering the extent to which it foists critics’ or “experts” beliefs about what constitutes skill onto creative writers.

^{lxxxiv} Gingell does this by offering quaint examples of pop-culture oral refrains (“Trick or treat, trick or treat, give us something good to eat” [286]) that typical non-Indigenous undergraduates might recognize—an organizational move which risks infantilizing oral tradition from her argument’s inception. Oral traditions for Indigenous peoples are not choral aphorisms whose recitations purpose community-building; rather, they are expressions of cultural history, memory, and narrative which exceed the temporal bounds of Canadian history and social organization. Her reference to “our secular culture” (286), too, is noteworthy in its setup of a dichotomy between settler-Canadian culture and Indigenous cultures, whereby settler-Canadian culture is devoid of religiosity or spirituality. Though the intimate connection between oral tradition and spirituality has been noted by Indigenous scholars (*Cf.* Simpson, Alfred, McAdam, McLeod, and Blaeser), Gingell’s essay does not take care to distinguish between the popular connotations of “secular” and “secularity” and the specific ways in which Indigenous peoples’ oral traditions function dissimilarly, or with different undergirding principles and beliefs. In addition, the elision of oral tradition in non-secular settler culture forecloses an opportunity to engage with how, for example, religious institutions, such as the Catholic church, also rely on oral recitations for the transmission of doctrinal knowledge.

^{lxxxv} She follows “literary critics and social linguists interested in language education” to theorize Maria Campbell’s variation of English as an example of what she terms “Michiflish,” instead of using and unpacking Campbell’s own term “village English” (37-8)—which Campbell herself has explained in conversation with Michael Jacklin (*Cf.* “Making Paper Talk: Indigenous Oral Life Narratives”).

^{lxxxvi} Reading Gingell’s note about kistapinânihk, I am reminded of the small town of DISH, Texas, which “formerly known as Clark, agreed in 2005 to change its name as part of a deal with the Dish Network satellite TV service. In exchange, existing and new residents can receive basic service (nearly 200 channels), as well as installation and equipment like a digital video recorder, all for free” (Fernandez “Marketing Deal”). The

town's changing name was mediated by various modes of literacy and community tradition—from “experimental marketing” (Fernandez “Marketing Deal”) on television and through post, to town hall meetings and a sparsely attended vote—indicating perhaps a greater instability surrounding place-naming inflected by non-oral, capitalist traditions than that Gingell attaches to nêhiyaw oral tradition.

^{lxxxvii} It is worth noting, too, by way of aside, that Neuhaus' chapter makes reference to bundling only when tracing her terms and relating those terms back to Halfe's text. *Blue Marrow* actively explores the image of the bundle, with one character (“Nameless Mama”) noting: “*I'll carry these memories / deep in my Bundle*” (93). Neuhaus' analysis could be extended and strengthened by considering how various speakers in *Blue Marrow* engage the concept of bundling on a thematic level as a sheaf of memory, words, and medicinal materials.

^{lxxxviii} I briefly use “Algonquian” as Granzberg does, for sake of terminology that is consistent with his own.

^{lxxxix} I would direct readers to Beeds' articles “Rethinking Edward Ahenakew's Intellectual Legacy: Expressions of nêhiyawî-mâmitonêyihcikan (Cree Consciousness or Thinking)” and “Remembering the Poetics of Ancient Sound: kistêsinâw/wîsahkêcâhk's maskihkiy (Elder Brother's Medicine)” for more thorough explorations of Ahenakew's efforts to live by and center nêhiyaw ways of being in his life and work.

^{xc} And aspin does concede that “*The eldest boy threw a flint*” (29).

^{xcî} aspin's reference to a “*perogy*” (120) is likely informed by the interaction between nêhiyawak and Polish and Ukranian settlers in Saskatchewan after their mass migration to the prairies in the 19th century. This is not made explicit in *The Crooked Good*, however.

^{xcii} McLeod, in *100 Days of Cree*, defines ê-kwêskit thusly: “‘s/he turns around. With this word, I was thinking of a way to say ‘to regain honour.’ We have all made mistakes, but perhaps when we turn our lives around, when we atone, then we move toward regaining our honour” (9-10). McLeod includes ê-kwêskit as a nêhiyawêwin vocabulary word related to honour and the okihcitâwak (discussed at-length in Chapter Two of this dissertation). While Halfe's ê-kwêskit does not personally seek atonement or the regaining of lost honour, McLeod's definition does highlight the extent to which the word relies on a retrospective recuperation or revisioning of one's past self. This is precisely what Halfe's ê-kwêskit contends with throughout *The Crooked Good*.

^{xciii} In this respect, Halfe offers an unsettling challenge to the oft-touted strategy for Indigenous writers to promote a resurgence of Indigenous ways of life through learning from women. ê-kwêskit indeeds learns from the women in her life, but their internalization of colonial heteropatriarchy does not present a particularly affirmative vision for Indigenous womanhood.

^{xciv} My continued reference to cihcipistikwân's “deviance” deserves an aside, as it prompts the query: from what? From what moral code has cihcipistikwân so terribly deviated? In the context of Ahenakew's telling, the code is clear; in *The Crooked Good*, it is cihcipistikwân's husband who has broken a moral code, thereby destroying his partner, himself, and his family.

^{xcv} If one were to read these characters' nêhiyawêwin names per the kinds of scholarship I'd outlined above, one might end up with focus purely on the formal impact of including

the names, without engaging how these names thematically reinforce the women's characters and the perspectives they bring to bear on the Rolling Head story.

^{xcvi} Ahenakew's version of the Rolling Head story does not use any nêhiyawêwin beyond an Anglicized spelling of the name for Rolling Head's son, wîsahkêcâhk ("Wesakaychak" [Ahenakew 312], also known as "Elder Brother"). This is likely due to the fact that his version of the story was published in 1929 in the *Journal of American Folklore*, which was principally read by non-Indigenous peoples. In this sense, Ahenakew's sharing of the narrative seems aligned with his hope to, through nêhiyaw âtayôhkêwina and âcimowina, "show how an Indian thinks about the world ... [and tell] stories from a Cree point of view and describe Cree philosophy in a positive light, with a minimum of comparison between the philosophy and Christianity" (*Voices* xiv). Though Belleau has noted and I have also noted the extent to which Ahenakew's version of the Rolling Head story is saturated with Christian belief, Ahenakew shared nêhiyaw stories to challenge "The prevailing Christian/pagan dichotomy and the judgemental nature of writing about Indians in the early part of [the 20th] century" (xiv.) Stan Cuthand, in the forward to the 1995 edition of Ahenakew's *Voices of the Plains Cree*, remarks that "Ahenakew was a humble Christian" who "would probably find it ironic that in death he is remembered for his Cree stories and praised for recording Cree cultural beliefs, when in life he vigorously championed the Anglican faith" (*Voices* xix). Though throughout his career Ahenakew championed nêhiyawêwin, it is not my aim in this reading to comparatively imply deficient use of the language in "Cree Trickster Tales," as I recognize both the balance he sought to strike between his Anglican faith and his adherence to nêhiyaw philosophy, as well as the fact that the early 20th century *Journal of American Folklore* was not the publication in which he would likely have made the case for using and learning nêhiyawêwin. Though that balance is not always apparent, it is worth noting that the *Journal of American Folklore* published these stories during the height of the residential school system, during which speaking and celebrating languages like nêhiyawêwin was either discouraged or outright forbidden.

^{xcvii} The "Snake-tongued lovers" (4), a reference to cihcipistikwân's reptilian company, not only highlights the apparently untrustworthy quality of the snakes' tongues, their abilities to tell a story, but also loosens the distinction between cihcipistikwân's snakes and the lovers of ê-kwêskit and her siblings. The effect of this is that "human abhorrence" (Ahenakew 31) for snakes and their ilk becomes less sure.

^{xcviii} McLeod also references Winona Stevenson's doctoral dissertation, *Decolonizing Tribal Histories*, noting that in her research she "uses the metaphor of the 'bundle' to describe stories" (9).

^{xcix} It is also worth noting that although *Thunder Through My Veins* sees Scofield affirm, after years of self-struggle and conflict, his pride and comfort with being Métis (xvi-xvii; 166), it also details the ways in which such self-struggle and conflict have continued to impact him as he's grown older (179). It seems ungenerous to hold Scofield to this metaphor for identity that he presented nearly two decades ago, and thus I wish to note how Scofield's account of his Métis identity, and the childhood that was so formative to this identity, simultaneously affirms and contradicts the work of contemporary scholars like Gaudry, Andersen, and Vowel, whose rigorous, expansive analyses of Métis

nationhood and culture have emphatically denounced the equivocation of M/métis as synonymous with “mixed-blood” or “mixed-race.”

^c It is beyond the scope of this chapter to account for the ways in which Scofield’s *Thunder Through My Veins* works through the inheritance of the most famous Métis memoir, Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed*, though it is a topic deserving of further study. See Armand Garnet Ruffo’s “(Re)Constructing Community: Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* and Gregory Scofield’s *Thunder Through My Veins*” in *Canada and Decolonization: Images of a New Society* and Kristina Fagan’s, Stephanie Danyluk’s, Bryce Donaldson’s, Amelia Horsburgh’s, Robyn Moore’s, and Martin Winquist’s “Reading the Reception of Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed*.” Fagan et al. affirm that “Scofield’s sense of the Aboriginal intellectual network that is evoked through *Halfbreed* provides him with a sense of connection to a larger community” (268) as he became a writer, and, quoting Daniel Heath Justice, the authors contend that *I Knew Two Métis Women* “is a fine complement to Campbell’s autobiographical work” (Justice qtd. in Fagan et al. 270).

^{ci} See Adam Gaudry’s doctoral dissertation, *Kaa-tipeyimishoyaahk - ‘We are those who own ourselves’: A Political History of Métis Self-Determination in the North-West, 1830-1870*, Chris Andersen’s “Métis”: *Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood*, and Chris Andersen’s “Moya ‘Tipimsook (‘the People Who Aren’t Their Own Bosses’): Racialization and the Misrecognition of ‘Metis’ in Upper Great Lakes Ethnohistory” for discussion of this self-identifying term for the Métis.

^{cii} Scofield also notes that Georgina Houle Young grew up in Wabasca, Alberta, though this poem is not addressed to her.

^{ciii} Specifically, he references “Kelowna Red, Labbatt’s Blue” (102) as the beverages of choice for his mothers. This is noteworthy for two reasons. First, the two brands of affordable beer are attached to local signifiers of colonial history. Kelowna, a small city in British Columbia on unceded Syilx territory, owes its name to a rough translation of the Syilx word for “grizzly bear,” adopted by town planners in 1892. Prior to 1892, the region had been christened “L’anse au sable” by Oblate missionary Charles M. Pandosy (after whom one of the city’s main streets is still named). Labbatt’s Blue, referring to the popular lager put out by Labbatt’s Brewing Company, conjures the company’s founder, John Kinder Labbatt, who supported railway building in southwestern Ontario (a process notoriously central to colonial expansion and laying false claim to land). Second, the Métis Nation’s flag, with its centrally situated white infinity symbol, has been historically placed on both red and blue backgrounds. Thus the invocation of these two brands simultaneously highlights the ongoing ways in which colonial histories undergird the consumption and branding of products in Canada, as well as the traditional colours around which the Métis have cultivated a presentation of collective, national identity.

^{civ} Tetlit Gwich’in author Robert Arthur Alexie’s *Porcupines and China Dolls*, for example, emphasizes main character Jake’s cowboy boots (202), Tomson Highway’s seminal play *The Rez Sisters* incorporates Patsy Cline’s “Walkin’ After Midnight,” (53-54), Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach* features extensive reference to the cultural impact of Elvis Presley (52; 148), Louise Bernice Halfe aligns “Roy Orbison [and] Hank Williams” with “Buffy St. Marie ... Louise Erdrich” and “Maria Campbell” in *Blue Marrow*, and Ojibwe author Richard Wagamese makes mention in *Indian Horse* of an

“Old Time Saloon” that hosted “wild country dances,” noting it was part of “the local geography” (25).

^{CV} This is not to say that Scofield’s writing about the women in his life is beyond reproach; there are moments in *I Knew Two Métis Women* which risk romanticizing the gendered trauma so formative to the experiences of Georgina Houle Young and Dorothy Scofield. In “Half of Another Story,” for example, Scofield alludes to his Aunty Georgina’s death and a violent sexual assault she had experienced, which her then-partner, Harry, covered up. Scofield notes that Harry “took money / to keep her mouth shut” (91). The haunting nonchalance with which “Half of Another Story” deals with Georgina Houle Young’s rape—Scofield notes her rapist “ripped her so bad / she had to be sewn up” (91) with no resultant comment beyond his own reaction: “I know the whole story” (92) despite Harry’s belief of his obliviousness—deserves pause. By contrast, however, “Too Many Blueberries” traces Dorothy’s and Georgina’s joint experiences with domestic abuse and the failures of medical and law enforcement professionals to intervene or recognize signs of abuse and approach their experiences with care and respect. In “Too Many Blueberries,” Scofield uses the fruit of the prairies as an extended metaphor for the “eyes / so black and blue” (96) Dorothy and Georgina received from their abusive partners. At the poem’s end, Scofield notes:

I carry their bones
Their tears

Like a basket of berries,
Blue and heavy,
Rotting black
Like crows hovering

Till the last gets picked” (98).

The image of Scofield carrying their bodies “Like a basket of berries,” (98) a receptacle of their physical grief and trauma while “crows hovering” seek to steal the “Rotting black” fruit, resonates with the vulture-like mentality of trauma-poaching, insofar as it is not simply their bodies that were marked, used, and discarded by scavenging masculine figures. It was their stories, too—their words “Not to worry, not to hate,” (98) which Scofield recalls before delving into the basket metaphor. In this poem, Scofield’s attentiveness to the ways in which Indigenous women’s bodies and stories have been fodder for the voyeuristic poaching of outsiders makes his use of their traumatic experiences more measured, more purposeful beyond imagining the impact someone else’s trauma had on his own sense of self.

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EDUCATION

- 2012-2017 Ph.D in English Language and Literature
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- 2014 Summer Institute in Cree Language and Literature
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- 2016 Western University's Department of English McIntosh Prize Winner
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RELATED WORK-EXPERIENCE

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- 2016 Teaching Assistant for Dr. Allan Pero's English 2210G: Contemporary Theory and Criticism at Western University
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- 2012-2013 Teaching Assistant for Dr. Taiwo Adetunji Osinubi's English 2310E: Global Literatures in English at Western University
- 2013 Research Assistant for Dr. Allison Hargreaves at UBC Okanagan
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CONFERENCE AND ROUNDTABLE PRESENTATIONS

- 2017 "We're all downstream now.": Seeing through Oil in Karen Solie and Warren Cariou." *Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English (ACCUTE)*, Ryerson University.
- 2015 "Digital Revitalization and Indigenous Languages." *Canadian Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS) Annual Aboriginal Roundtable*, University of Ottawa.

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