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Slipping Futures: Native Slipstream, Stephen Graham Jones's *The Only Good Indians*, and Disrupted Models

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Native Slipstream, a term first used by Gerald Vizenor, is a narrative technique that that "infuses stories with time travel, alternate realities and multiverses, and alternative histories," allowing narratives to explore "time as pasts, presents, and futures that flow together like currents in a navigable stream" and that offer "nonlinear thinking about space-time" (Dillion 3). Stephe Graham Jones's (Blackfeet) *The Only Good Indians* (2020) deploys this technique in order to resolve the injustices of settler colonialism in the past and present through the projection of parts of the narrative into the future. By emphasizing Native Slipstream, I argue that Jones is able to slip seamlessly through various timelines without the usual narrative markers meant to moor a reader in a specific line of diachronic and narrative causality. Through this slipstream, Jones reveals hidden possibilities within the models of the world the narrative embodies and creates, thereby disrupting the calcification of the injustices of settler colonialism in possible futures and leaving space for alterity and possibility.

Introduction

The tensions amongst the past, present, and future are fundamental to the ways in which Indigenous peoples in the United States are forced to navigate their lived experiences and cultural memories, thereby filtering down into the tribal stories they tell in contemporary times. This is perhaps best seen in recent theorizing that reconceptualizes the settler colonial situation in which Native peoples find themselves to be analogous to a postapocalyptic reality, which in turn complicates the common theme in future-oriented speculative fiction. For Stephen Graham Jones (Blackfeet) in *The Only Good Indians* (2020), this tension becomes a matter of life and death. Through his mobilization of the speculative affordances of the horror genre, his narrative works through the tension—necessarily generational in nature—in order to reveal hidden possibilities within the models of the world the narrative embodies and creates, thereby disrupting the calcification of the injustices of settler colonialism in possible futures and leaving space for alterity and possibility.

Native Slipstream, a term first used by Gerald Vizenor (Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, White Earth Reservation), is a narrative technique that that "infuses stories with time travel, alternate realities and multiverses, and alternative histories," allowing narratives to explore "time as pasts, presents, and futures that flow together like currents in a navigable stream" that offer "nonlinear thinking about space-time" (Dillion 3). Jones's *The Only Good Indians* deploys this technique in order to make visible the injustices of settler colonialism in the past and present through the projection of parts of the narrative into the future. By emphasizing Native Slipstream as it appears in *The Only Good Indians,* I argue that Jones is able to slip seamlessly through various timelines without the usual narrative markers meant to moor a reader in a specific line of diachronic and narrative causality. More specifically, Jones's narrative elucidates the ways in which models of time too invested in the past possibly preclude the ability to survive in the present and move forward into a future in which the characters have increased agency both over their own lives and in the resilience of their communities.

The Postindian Aesthetic and the Future of Native American Literature

Jones has achieved commercial success and critical acclaim for his many novels and short stories (not to mention his ventures into other media, like comics). As such, his work has garnered a large amount of academic attention in recent years, with particular emphasis on the ways in which his fiction speaks to the experiences of contemporary Native Americans in the 20th and 21st centuries. In this way, Jones's

work has elsewhere been theorized as being a part of the postindian aesthetic[1] insofar as his corpus is less interested in "questions about identity and cultural authenticity" (Cox and Justice 3), which was perhaps the main focus of the Native American Renaissance. During the 1980s and 1990s, Native writers tended, in their work, towards claiming their own piece of the literary such that they could: take back the narratives that surrounded their identities; explore an "interest in the 'marvelous,' the expression of a magic spirit which leads to an unexpected alteration of reality;" and turn the quotidian into the magical (Cook-Lynn, "American Indian Intellectualism" 73). Jones's own words say it best: "This isn't the Native American Renaissance... that was a different generation, with different issues" and writers who were "resisting the invisibility that comes from colonial mythmaking" ("Letter to a Just-Starting-Out Indian Writer—And Maybe to Myself" xi). Jones, then, is telling the tribal stories of the current generation of Native Americans and, as his novels testify to, future generations as well.

In reading Jones's work, particularly *The Only Good Indians,* critics have explored a variety of themes through various lenses. Paulina Ambroży and Alicja Kozłowska read the novel in order to "to tap into the current critical interrogations of the Gothic genre and, following major postcolonial critics and the philosophers of the spatial turn, to discuss its Native American variety as an instance of a liminal and ultimately transgressive 'Third Space,'" emphasizing the ways in which the novel operates "between indigenous and Euro-American imaginaries of horror" (117). Kali Simmons argues that the ways in which the novel diverts from the conventions of the horror genre "are an enactment of epistemic and formal refusal" that "function[s] to both expose the constraints of settler-colonial subjectivity and story other modes of selfhood and relationality" (70). Hogan D. Schaak explores the literary history of gothic horror as it relates to "White North American subjectivity and regenerative violence," thereby examining how "Indigenous authors are engaging with horror to posit multiple Indigenous North American subjectivities" and therefore "reject White North American subjectivity and regenerative violence through metatextuality, closed cycles of justice, and generative violence while differing in important ways that are grounded in the concept of transmotion" (94). I myself have written on *The Only Good Indians,* emphasizing the ways in which the text uses the horror genre to address continuing legacies of settler violence as they play out in both the phenomenon of Missing and

[1] Postindian, as a term, was coined by Gerald Vizenor in *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (1999) and has become a useful frame through which contemporary Native American writing, especially that which breaks from traditionally literary gernes into the speculative. For more, see *Postindian Aesthetics: Affirming Indigenous Literary Sovereignty* (2022), edited by Debra K.S. Barker and Connie A. Jacobs.

Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) and the environmental degradations of the Anthropocene in order to "avoid revictimizing both, thereby refocusing the narrative on each one's generative agency such that new futures and possibilities remain open" (Tkacz 2). In these readings, we see a stress on the ways in which *The Only Good Indians* uses the horror genre to address various epistemic and existential violences contemporary Native Americans face.

The concern of the present article continues that work, with a greater focus on the treatment of time in the novel. In particular, the time slippages into the past and future found throughout the novel, narrativized through the technique of Native Slipstream, speak to the continued importance of conceptualizations of time in both settler attempts to erase Indigenous peoples from the past, present, and future and attempts by Native writers to reassert their own existences in those timelines. As Mark Rifkin observes in *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (2017), Indigenous peoples "occupy a double bind within dominant settler reckonings of time" in which they are either "consigned to the past" or "inserted into a present defined on non-native terms" (vii). The former engages in a definition of authenticity that "means to preserve forms of tradition that emanate from the past in pristine ways" and "means staging a version of pastness that disavows the 'complexities' of Native life" in the present (Rifkin 6). At the same time, the latter means a form of "temporal recognition," resulting in Native Americans "being folded into frames not of their making" and "that can normalize non-native presence, privilege, and power" (Rifkin 13). As such, Indigenous peoples are caught between times, forced to assert their own existences in the past, present, and future, timelines that dominant settler models of times have erased them from, and which forces them to conform to settler models of their own cultures in order to be recognized.

Another way to theorize this tension is through the simultaneously literal and metaphorical affordances of postapocalypse, especially in the Anthropocene. Lawrence Gross (Minnesota Chippewa) notes that "American Indians, in general, have seen the end of their worlds" and "are living in a postapocalyptic environment" made such by the condition of living under settler colonialism. This reality requires a shift in perspective, for Indigenous peoples and for scholars engaging with Indigenous writers, when considering the tensions between the past, present, and future and the way time works within the settler colonial context. Kyle P. Whyte (Potawatomi) argues that "there is something different in the Anthropocene for indigenous peoples" (209) precisely because they must "consider the future from what [they] believe is already a dystopia" (208). While traditionally the postapocalyptic genre has hinged on stories that narrate a return either to a better form of civilization or to a form of

human capability that civilization took away,[2] for Indigenous writers the genre sits in "uncomfortable closeness to everyday reality—a reality that has much to do with the past, present, and future of Indigenous peoples under and beyond colonization" (Gage Katahkwí:io Diablo [Mohawk]). The postapocalyptic lens focuses temporal tensions, especially in the settler state, and makes visible the near-impossible condition in which contemporary Native Americans find themselves where recognition in the present requires a potential abdication of presence in the future, through a performance of a stereotyped past form and projections of survival into the future enforces acceptance of settler chronologies and frames such that they are invested with a legitimacy that still further threaten indigenous lives and ways of being. Utilizing the affordances of the horror, I argue that, in *The Only Good Indians,* Jones begins to find a way of reconciling these tensions by refusing to consign his characters to a past or future determined by the parameters and narratives of the settler state, at once recognizing the importance for Indigenous peoples to recognize their pasts while being able to move forward in time that is not, crucially, a legitimization of dominant chronologies.

The Marias Massacre and Continuing Histories of Settler Violence

For Indigenous peoples in the United States, histories of settler violence saturate the models of time they have been forced to reckon with, and these histories, along with their attendant personal and generational traumas and enduring legacies of oppression still visible today, are necessarily a part of Jones's novel. Even as his characters are contemporary and face contemporary challenges, they often call back to the history of their tribe. In particular, the Marias Massacre, a "pivotal, defining [moment] in the history and literature of the Blackfeet Nation" (Hogue 17) and one that "remains in the Piikuni social and cultural consciousness" (Henderson 69), stands out as a past event that operates as something of an organizing principle of the text. On January 23rd 1870, the "U.S. Second Calvary under the command of Major Eugene Baker decimated Heavy Runner's camp without warning," despite the band having papers that indicated their "peaceful terms with the United States" (Henderson 50). Baker, ignoring these, ordered the killing of over 217 members of the Blackfoot Confederacy, mostly "elders, women, and children, including newborns" (60). This event is both structurally alluded

[2] Mark Payne, in *Flowers in Time: On Postapocalyptic Fiction* (2020), traces a strand of postapocalyptic literature that is concerned with "forms of human freedom, sociality, and capability" (3) and conceptualizes catastrophe as "the necessary ground for choosing the freedoms and capabilities we would want to see preserved in any future collective that might emerge from them" (34). Here, the postapocalyptic space allows "not just the recovery of bodily capabilities but that this recovery will lead to new forms of ethicality" (164) and thereby becomes "a space of freedom that a would-be subject of freedom can access in order to enact their emergence as free" (34).

to and explicitly referenced in the text: the staging of the Thanksgiving Classic, in which the four main male characters massacre a herd of elk laying in a small valley by shooting them from a vantage point above, matches descriptions of the positions of the perpetrators and victims in the Marias Massacre. Later in the text, when Denorah is running from the Elk Head Woman and finds herself in a scattering of bones, she thinks to herself:

> She-she can't be that far out, can she? Marias, that massacre or whatever? The bones from that wouldn't still just be lying out there, would they? Bones don't last that long. Unless. Unless she already died a few steps back, and is walking forward through her people's past now, maybe. Is that how dying works? (Jones 299)

It is necessary to note here that the speculative nature of the novel, which allows for supernatural elements, affords Denorah this direct engagement with the history of her people. This scene further highlights the tension Native peoples face in the push and pull between recognition of the violence they did and do face and the desire for justice and the need to move forward in order to survive, metaphorically represented in this the preceding scenes by Denorah running from the slow-walking Elk Head Woman (styled in classic slasher fashion). Denorah, in finding herself in this timelessly past place, is tempted to stay and die, is tempted to give up (Jones 301). We shall return to this moment later but suffice it to say that the tensions between the past and present are told such that the life and death nature of their dialectic is fore in the narrative and impossible for the reader to ignore.

It is also important to note that the Marias Massacre is a part of a larger history and project of forced relocation forced on Indigenous people in North America. The Massacre is directly tied to this settler project, in that it was done to "force [the Blackfeet] onto the reservations" (Henderson 55) and was a part of "the colonial tactics of enslavement, exploitation, exportation, and relocation" (Deer xxi) utilized in this project. This history can also, as the text does by pivoting the entire plot on the Thanksgiving Classic and through the Elk Head Woman, be connected to the continuing environmental crisis that is a part of the legacy of settler colonialism. As Kyle P. Whyte notes, "Indigenous persons see [their] current situation as already having been through a crisis that is ongoing" (227), running from the genocidal beginnings of colonization in North America to the present time. Additionally, this reality "links conversations from the past to the present and into the future" (Deer xxii) and then requires a form of understanding time that accounts for the need to reconcile past and present oppression with future possibility. We see here, then, two models of reality that have cascading effects on models of past

and future for both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. The title of the novel points towards the ways in which the historical events in the genocidal settler project of the United States entrenches itself in shared models through linguistic structures like idioms and thereby forces contemporary Native Americans to live with models of reality that take these histories into account.[3] In this light, *The Only Good Indians*—and perhaps other works by contemporary Native American authors—can be seen as narrative attempts to readjust these entrenched models such that new futures, futures that disrupt the trap of sedimented pasts, can be imagined and, therefore, achieved.

Indigenous Futurism as Indigenous Resistance

It is necessary to clearly mark Jones's text as a form of futurism, as it is the future-orientation of the novel that serves to focus its various generic strategies into a form of resistance against past and future histories of violence and resistance. Important here is the "the concept of 'Indigenous futurism,' coined by Grace L. Dillon and recast by John Gamber as 'Native Futurism' (30), or the idea that Indigenous perspectives can help reimagine Native pasts, presents, and futures" (Lush 312) and thereby "transcend[s] the dominant paradigms from non-Native artists" (Lush 315). Dillion conceptualizes this process as "narratives of *biskaabiiyang,* an Anishinaabemowin word connotating the process of 'returning to ourselves'" and "discovering how one is personally affected by colonization" in order to "[discard] the emotional and psychological baggage of its impact" and "adapt to our post-Native Apocalypse world" (10). The text achieves this through several slippages—Native Slipstreams—in time. As will be discussed shortly, one variation of this narrative strategy involves personal slippages through the character's thought processes and imaginations—that is, through their models of time and the world—that connect them individually to broader timelines and possibilities but that also anchor them to a past that precludes possibility in the future. Denorah, the one main character more future oriented in her thinking and therefore able to reconcile the tensions of the past, uses her imagination to see beyond the present moment and beyond the dominant chronologies that brough that moment into being. After one of her teachers compares spiral notebooks to the ledgers of past Native Americans, Denorah's imagination runs with the connection, going from the past into the present and then, crucially, into the future: "She imagined [her spiral notebook] being in a museum, even pictured a class of

[3] The title references the infamous idiom "The only good Indian is a dead Indian," which is a part of a long history of "proverbial invectives against minorities throughout the world" and which "has been in use in the United States since the 1860s" and "is still in use today" (Mieder 38-39). Linguistic memes like this have historically served to linguistically "justify killing thousands of [Native Americans] or driving the survivors onto inhuman reservations" through "attitudes and policies" that "reduced the Native inhabitants to 'wild savages'" (Mieder 39).

sixth-graders single-filing it up to the glass display case someday, to see how the old ones used to do it, back when spiral notebooks were everywhere" (Jones 140).

This moment, however, also contains a broader implication that connects to her personal imagination, her ability to imagine this future in which even her most mundane artifacts of modernity become museum-worthy. This future imaginary happens in tension with her present, "back in that handful of years when Indians only had reservations, before they got all of America back" (140). This moment points towards a future in which her personal imagination becomes the future reality, connecting her ability to imagine such a future to the possibility of that future coming to pass. The text makes the connection even more explicit, later introducing moments of slippage that are not tied to an individual character's imagination but rather are indicative of a narrative position revealing the future of the present, textual world. In these moments, the reader glimpses the storyteller, an "old man" who is telling Denorah's story—the very one the reader is engaging with in the present-tense—from some future time to "the children in the lodge with him" (Jones 303). Denorah, in his telling, becomes "the Girl" and her story becomes the story of what she did "for her whole tribe" (303–304). We see, then, one of the early ways in which Jones's narrative model collides with that of the real world. By telling this contemporary narrative from a future perspective in which the territory of the United States has been fully returned to Native Americans, Jones positions his narrative model firmly in that possibility, which in turn forces the audience to reconcile disparities into their own world-models by considering that future-possibility even while they attend to the more salient plot events at hand. In the tensions between a model of the world in which the entrenched events of the past close off future possibilities and a model of the world in which the future is a very different one than reality would have us believe as possible, a reconciliation (not, I wish to note, a compromise) is necessary. Jones's text points towards this necessity.

Revenge as Historical Engagement and Future Cyclicity

The genre in which Jones writes—broadly horror but slasher more specifically—puts this question of reconciliation, and the life or death nature of the problem, to the fore of the narrative. The novel, like many horror narratives, hinges almost entirely on a past wrong and on a quest for revenge by the victim of that wrong.[4] Jones makes the affordances of the genre clear in one of his subsequent novels, *My Heart is a Chainsaw* (2021), when his protagonist in that text writes, "[I]n the slasher, wrongs are always

[4] Some famous examples include: *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984); *Friday the 13th* (1984); *Cape Fear* (1991); *The Last House on the Left* (1972).

punished" (34). The slasher, in Jones's world, is ultimately concerned with that foundational human ideal that is intricately and inextricably tied to attempts to make sense of the world in a settler colonial state: justice. In the slasher novel, justice and revenge become so intertwined that the former is problematized, and the question of how to move forward becomes a part of the central concern, narratives through the characters' attempts to literally survive. As such, it has become "increasingly common for scholars and journalists to make claims of [horror's capacity] to engage with socio-political realities and, in so doing, identify grave social injustices" (Walker 194), in part because, as filmmaker David Cronenberg puts it, horror's ability to "show the unshowable [and] speak the unspeakable" (quoted in Lowenstein 2005, 145). In the case of *The Only Good Indians*, the unshowable is the violence that underpins the cycles of oppression and the fight for justice that requires a way of moving forward in time that reconcile those histories such that new possibilities are kept open.

The novel begins with a narrow revenge scene, immediately setting the stage for the engagement with revenge as a major theme. Ricky is beaten to death by a mob because they believe he damaged their trucks (Jones 9). Several notes bear mentioning here: the specifics of Ricky's death are that he is killed by a group of white laborers working in an extractive industry in the traditional American West for perceived damage to their property, clear reference to the historical and ongoing relationship between settler colonialism and extractive practices that contribute to environmental degradation. At the same time, this moment begins the broader revenge arc that animates the plot of the novel; the true culprit f the damage done to the trucks is an elk acting abnormally. As Ricky observes, "elk don't *do* this" (Jones 8). A few pages later, a herd of elk is the reason Ricky is caught by the group of men chasing him: "It was a great herd of elk, waiting, blocking him" from escaping (Jones 12). The elk, here, become the agents of revenge against the first of the main characters that participated in the Thanksgiving Classic, and, as the novel continues, the spirit of the herd comes to be represented by the Elk Head Woman, a supernatural elk spirit based on the stories of Deer Woman. I have written elsewhere about the ways in which the Elk Head Woman operates as a mobilizing metaphor for the continuing violence Native Americans, in particular women and children, face;[5] here, I want to emphasize the way in which this character and her story arc narratively represent, through the trope of the revenge arc, the tensions between the past, present, and future that the main characters, especially Denorah, are forced to reckon with.

[5] See Tkacz 2023 for more on this, as well as for more on the connections between settler colonialism and extractive economies that contribute to the destruction of the environment.

The Elk Head Woman, a resurrected form of the pregnant elk Lewis killed during the Thanksgiving Classic ten years prior to the main action of the novel, has been biding her time, told in the second person present: "You hide in the herd. You wait. And you never forget" (Jones 134). In the point of view and the tense of this utterance, several temporal and relational models already collide. The use of the second person pronoun collapses the distance between the world of the narrative and the world of the reader, forcing them to come into contact with one another. Furthermore, the use of the present tense refuses to relegate this story to an already resolved or completed past event; rather, this story, and its ramifications for both the worlds in which the story takes lace and that in which the reader exists (both worlds defined by settler colonialism, insofar as settler colonialism specifically and colonialism more broadly are fundamental features of modernity), exists in the always-already present. The text makes this transversal relationship to time explicit: the Elk Head Woman's revenge cannot be limited temporally, as, if she fails to get her revenge (again, remember that revenge here is a stand-in for justice, a juxtaposition I will return to later in this article), "she'll rise again years and years later, because it's never over, it's always just beginning again" (Jones 136). This is related to the characters' relationship to their own pasts, which in turn becomes one of the principal issues the text tries to work through. When Lewis, confronted by police over his dog attacking one of his coworkers, refuses to tell them what he actually thinks is going on, "that an elk from back home followed him all the way down here, is apparently on this big revenge arc" and is "using his own memories and guilt against him" (78), he is at once acknowledging his own complicity, through his own memory and conception of his past, and the fact that he has been unable to escape that past. At the end of the novel, Denorah's realization that "both her fathers have stood at the top of this slope behind a rifle, and the elk have always been down here" is coupled, importantly, with the subsequent understanding that "it can stop" and that revenge can't possibly close the cycles of violence: "her new dad shooting the elk beside her isn't going to bring [her biological dad] back." It is necessary to note, as referenced earlier, that in this moment Denorah is in the mass of bones that she at first mistook for the remains of the Marias Massacre but that is actually, albeit supernaturally, the remainders of the Thanksgiving Classic. That is, she is caught in the physical manifestations of both the deep past of her tribe and the more recent past of her family.

In that light, the crucial turn happens with two future oriented acts that both work to reorient the models of time at work here, in the narrative and in the reader. Denorah's breakthrough comes when she realizes that, "as long as she keeps dribbling behind her back when she doesn't have to, then her real dad won't even really be gone;" in other

words, the resolution of her internal conflict—the knowledge that her father is dead and that he was complicit in an act that mirrored the historical atrocities their tribe survived—happens through a projection of future intention: "keeps dribbling behind her back," a reference to her penchant in basketball for unnecessary showmanship, a character trait she attributes to her father's influence. It is in the future, then, that she keeps her father's memory alive. This is reinforced by a moment just prior, in the novel, where the narrative jumps in time and place—Native Slipstream—to "the old man telling this [story] in the star lodge... to the children sitting all around him" (303). This moment takes place in the future—presumably far in the future, as Denorah's character has been mythologized as Girl" in the old man's telling—and therefore casts the zone of resolution into the future: it is in the future that the ramifications of Denorah's decision to end to the cycles of violence that have defined her life through both deep and shallow time are made visible, arguing then for narrative models attuned as much to the future as the past when considering the injustices of that past.

Internalized Pasts and No Futures

Denorah's radical act of future-oriented understanding is best understood in contrast to the ways in which her father and his friends, the four other main characters of the novel, the participants in the Thanksgiving classic and therefore the targets of the Elk Head Woman, are completely unable to move on form the own pasts, deep and shallow. These four characters (at least until Denorah replaces them—replacement here is key) have had their models of the world so affected by their own histories that they are unable to escape. They are trapped in a model of the past that is always in tension with their own desires to move forward with their own lives and that pulls them back, much like the conventions of the revenge narrative. On the first page of the novel, we are introduced to Ricky's secondhand memory of the television on when his younger brother overdosed, a detail he is unable to "stop cycling through his head" (Jones 1). To some degree, this consistent cycling of their own pasts through memory is a feature of each of the four characters: Lewis is haunted by the way in which he killed the pregnant elk that would become the Elk Head Woman (116); Cass by his own past on the reservation (152); Gabe by memories of the promises of their youth (216). And each of them, in attempting to make sense of these past traumas, have avenues for moving forward that prove difficult to reconcile: Lewis's marriage to Peta and his move off the reservation ten years prior to the main action of the novel (16–17); Gabe's desire to be a part of his daughter's life (164); and Cass's budding relationship with Jo (154). The tensions between past, present, and future play out in the immediate histories of the characters, but it is necessary to note the way in which their own tribal histories are

also a part of the temporal dialectic they are navigating, making still more challenging their own attempts to reconcile such that they have lives of possibility rather than lives of continued oppression.

A constant feature in the novel for almost all of the characters is a consistent calling back to the experiences of Native Americans before the establishment of the Unites States of America. Often, this happens in comparison with their current state and experiences. Early in the novel, Ricky muses on being called, as the only Native American on the crew, "Chief": "he didn't mind being Chief, though he knew that, had he been around back in the days of raiding and running down buffalo, he'd have been a grunt then as well" (3). When interviewing for the job on the drilling crew, Ricky slips into the past; as he shakes hands with the foreman, "the modern world had fallen away for a long blink and the two of them were standing in a canvas tent, the foreman in a calvary jacket, and Ricky already had designs on that jacket's brass buttons" (2). For Ricky, this way of considering his present, in comparison to the past of his people, comes from a life living in the shadow of the stories of the "old-time":

> When he was a kid there'd been a picture book in the library, about Heads-Smashed-In or whatever it was called—the buffalo jump, where the old-time Blackfeet ran herd after herd off the cliff. Ricky remembered that the boy selected to drape a calf robe over his shoulders and run out in front of all those buffalo, he'd been the one to win all the races the elders had put him and all the other kids in, and he'd been the one to climb all the trees the best, because you needed to be fast to run ahead of all those tons of meat, and you needed good hands to, at the last moment after sailing off the cliff, grab on to the rope the men had already left there, that would tuck you up under, safe. What had it been like, sitting there while the buffalo flowed down through the air within arm's reach, bellowing, their legs probably stiff because they didn't know for sure when the ground was coming? (3)

There are three distinct temporal lines at work here, all of which combine into a model of time that Ricky works to understand: his current situation, having left the reservation and his community and working for the drilling crew in North Dakota, the memory of his childhood where he learned this story, and the deep past of Indigenous people in North America. His interest here is two-fold and indicative of the tenor of his relationship to the past. On the one hand, there is a sense of sublimity, of the epic, to the description of "the buffalo jump" clearly being contrasted with the mundaneness of his current moment, in a bar full of "roughnecks" (4). More importantly, however, is that this memory of a past he never experienced is connected to, for Ricky and for the others

later, his relationship to his community. In the moments before this recollection, Ricky is thinking about his brother and how his death spurred Ricky to "get out as well, screw it." This is coupled with the moment directly after the above, longer quotation, in which Ricky wonders, "What had it felt like, bringing meat to the whole tribe" (4). Responsibility to the tribe, when put in contact with his own brother's overdose and his break from the reservation, defines Ricky's relationship to his own past and to the past of his tribe as one of failure. He feels as though he is not living up to the history of his people and is therefore running to escape it.

This relationship to the past can be seen in the other characters as well. One of the driving factors in the Thanksgiving Classic is precisely this constant comparison to the past: "They'd almost done it last Thanksgiving, him and Gabe and Lewis and Cass, they'd meant to, they were going to be those kinds of Indians for once, they had been going to show everybody in Browning that this is the way it's done" (4). The sense of inadequacy, however, goes deeper even then their actions; just as there is a sense of deep time to their relationship with history, there is also a kind of depth in terms of their own racialized identities. Lewis feels "the guilt of having some pristine Native" (39) genes that will be mixed with his white wife's. He compulsively thinks, in the form of a headline, "FULLBOOD BETRAYS EVERY DEAD INDIAN BEFORE HIM" and fears that his decision means that "the few of his ancestors who made it through raids and plagues, massacres and genocide... may as well have just stood up into that big Gatling gun of history" (39). Nearly every moment of consequence is painted in this compulsive calling back to a past the characters never lived in but through which their contemporary lives are inextricably linked, a form of Native Slipstream that ties the narrative to those pasts of oppression and violence. When Lewis is remembering the Thanksgiving Classic, what he "hates himself the most for" is how much the moment was "like a century and more ago, when soldiers gathered up on ridges above Blackfeet encampments to turn the cranks on their big guns, terraform this new land for their occupation" (75). Cassidy, using an aluminum cup to scoop water onto the rocks during the sweat later in the novel, wonders, "What'd they use in the old days, wood? Horn? A bladder? The skullcap of a wolverine, because the old days were metal as hell?" (203). These examples serve to center the ways in which the temporal models four main characters of the novel live with are split between the past of their people and the contemporary era in which they live.

This split is not, for them, a choice, a form of reclamation of their own tribal pasts nor an attempt to reconcile those pasts and achieve justice in the present. Rather, they indicate an inability to find path through the tensions between the past and present, which proves to be deadly for both themselves and others. When the Elk Head Woman

rises up and sets into motion their deaths, she is able to do this precisely through past/present tensions that make up their models. For Lewis, it is his guilt about the Thanksgiving Classic that allows her to drive him to violence against Shaney and Peta. When he kills Shaney, the first victim, Lewis crosses a temporal line, the "line between who [he] used to be and who he is now" (116). Importantly, this moment does not contain the possibility of who he *will* become. Rather, his turn to violence is driven by his obsession with his past, is a continuation of the violences of his past (shallow as well as deep), and thereby closes off any possibility for a different future. The Elk Head Woman makes this closure clear when she begins the "ceremony" of Cassidy and Gabe's deaths outside the sweat lodge, thinking to herself "that this has been a circle, closing" (247). In this scene, the deaths of Gabe and Cassidy are thematically and literally tied to their models of time. When Cassidy tries to shoot Gabriel, it is because he believes that Gabriel has killed Jo, his partner and his chance for a future (236). And when Gabriel kills Cassidy, believing that Cassidy has accidentally shot his daughter Denorah, it again is tied to the future: "[Denorah] was going to make it out of here… Like nobody ever did" (239). The violence, then, and the deaths of these four characters are all inextricably linked to their models of time that lay out unresolved tensions with their pasts and hopes for the future, models necessarily built in relation to their own tribal pasts and have important ramifications for their abilities to imagine new futures.

Disrupted Models, Native Slipstream, and New Futures

In this tension between these models for past and future, Native Slipstream the becomes a narrative technique for addressing the disparities between them and for allowing the next generation of Native Americans, represented here through the character of Denorah, to begin to find a way through their pasts and to the future the novel indicates as possible. This is accomplished by the technique's purposeful unmooring of characters and of the reader from the normative chronologies insisted on by the settler project, in which Native erasure allows for the expansion of the settler state into the future. Native Slipstream forces changes to the model the reader carries with them into the experiences of reading the novel—a model of time built on and calcified by the long history of the oppression and violence of settler colonialism in the United States and around the world—by upsetting the chronological expectations of the narrative structure itself, forcing a cascade change in the way the reader perceives the model of the world the novel builds. This comes to a head in the climax of the novel, when Denorah finds herself running from the Elk Head Woman and, suddenly, "it's like all the roads are gone. Like the reservation's dialed back a hundred years, to before

cars" (289). This slippage in time begins to color her perceptions further; when she sees Nathan, who was shot after the sweat lodge, Denorah thinks he is a "dying Indian slumped forward on a horse, what she sees at every booth at every powwow: The End of the Trail" (293). Her slippages through time are complete, moving from the perceptual into the experiential, when she comes to the "[t]he place her dad would never tell her about, where him and his friends blasted all those elk ten years ago" (Jones 299–300). With "skeletons all around her," Denorah comes into direct contact with both the shallow and deep histories of her family and people. As mentioned earlier, she first mistakes the field of bones for the remnants of the Marias Massacre. Here, her model of time goes through a sudden and profound change. She realizes that "her dad really and truly… was the one slinging bullets, probably laughing from the craziness of it all" instead of "being the one down in the encampment, bullets raining down all around, punching through the hide walls of lodges like she knows happened to the Blackfeet, to Indians all over" (301). It is in this moment that her earlier observation that "[s]he's been running for years, she knows. For her whole life, maybe" (296) becomes cogent. Here, under the weight of the histories that have defined her life so far, that she considers giving up. "This is a good place," she thinks, coming near to choosing to "lie down here with [the dead]" (301). It is in this moment, when Denorah is closest to death, that she finds a way to reconcile the pasts the context of which she was born in with the present in which she lives.

Various timelines and worlds converge in this moment: the Marias Massacre and the Thanksgiving Classic but also the present, represented by the appearance of Denorah's stepfather, and the future, indicated by the future storyteller (303). The moment focuses the timelines on the relationship between Denorah and the Elk Head Woman; Denorah comes to understand the latter is only doing "what an elk mother does" (303), a flash of understanding matched by her sudden understanding of her father and of the history of her tribe. It is then that Denorah is able to make a choice that stops the cycle of revenge and violence. She puts "her small body between that rifle and the elk that killed her dad" and yells "in that cold air: No, Dad, No!" (Jones 304). It is in this moment, in this refusal, that the cycles that "have *always* been… can stop," indeed that Denorah at once sees and realizes that "*it can stop here if you really want it to stop"* (303, 304). Note the linguistic inclusion of the reader with the pronoun "you;" while the novel has primarily used the second person to narrate the Elk Head Woman's perspective, implicating the reader in the continued violence of settler colonialism that she in part represents, in this moment the reader is offered the chance to be involved in Denorah's decision, to make a choice for a different future, one that transcends the cycles of violence and offers new possibilities.

Conclusion

At heart in the differences between Denorah's fate and that of her father and his friends is the tension between the past and the present and how ways of engaging with that tension can lead to different outcomes, different futures. The four male characters are trapped in a cycle of violence precisely because of their inability to resolve their relationships to their own pasts, shallow and deep, such that they can find a way to move forward into a future that is not defined by those pasts. The same is true of their individual characters—they are themselves defined by their pasts to the point that escape becomes impossible for them, represented in this novel by the slasher cycle in which they become enmeshed and through which they die. It is Denorah who finds a path forward, a path that requires acknowledgement of her family and tribal pasts but that refuses to become defined by the histories of violence and oppression forced on her people by the settler state and the history of settler colonialism and thereby refuses to allow them to continue. Her ability to do this succeeds exactly where her the other characters failed: the four male characters have mental models of time dominated by their personal and tribal pasts in turn dominated by settler colonialism. These models, then, close off possible futures for them, as narrated through the genre conventions of horror. It is only Denorah that directly faces those pasts, in her direct confrontation with the Elk Head Woman and in her flash of insight as to her father's culpability in setting off the horrific events of the novel, that triggers a correction to her model and allows her to find another path from the present, one that leads to the future indicated in the narrative slippages—Native slipstreams—that punctuate the novel and point towards a future in which the ravages of settler colonialism have truly ended.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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