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Dreamscapes as Sites of Resistance: The Unconscious State, Decision-Making and Community-Formation in *Elatsoe* and *Firekeeper's Daughter*

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Indigenous YA exposes younger audiences to the ongoing and brutal effects of colonial oppression, while at the same time, it tends to highlight community-formation as a form of resistance to a structurally unequal world. By focusing on two recent examples of Indigenous YA, Darcie Little Badger's (Lipan Apache) *Elatsoe* (2020) and Angeline Boulley's (Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians) *Firekeeper's Daughter* (2021), this article examines how dreams function as spaces of resistance and community-formation. Both novels feature young protagonists who, in the wake of a loved one's death, take on the role of detectives. Their dreams become crucial investigative tools, specifically because they establish spiralic time and thus disrupt Western notions of linear temporality. Instead, they offer a site for intergenerational contact where Indigenous knowledge systems offer inspiration and guidance. Thus, the knowledge remembered or learned in dreams empowers the protagonists to solve the case and to offer some healing to their communities. By interrelating Indigenous terminologies, storytelling devices, and epistemologies, these dreamscapes serve as sites of resistance to colonial power.

1. Dreaming and Indigenous Young Adult Fiction

Indigenous young adult fiction tends to present both the harsh realities of colonial heritage and the presence and resilience of Indigenous peoples. In effect, Indigenous YA often confronts the unequal structures faced by its protagonists while still leaving space for hope and resilience to emerge. In their introduction to the special issue *Indigenous Young Adult Novels* (2022), Eric Gary Anderson, Angela Calcaterra, and Christopher Pexa explain:

> Notably, Indigenous YA writers do not sugarcoat colonial horror and trauma but offer ways of positioning it and understanding it in the contexts of Indigenous cultural continuity and in the interest of Indigenous futurities, even when that continuity and those futurities are most at risk. (267)

Hereby, Indigenous YA also presents a means to create connection and coherence while, as Megan E. Cannella remarks with reference to Cherie Dimaline's (Métis) *The Marrow Thieves* (2017), also "serv[ing] a parallel purpose of informing, if not warning, a rising generation about the transgenerational trauma into which they were born" (116). Indigenous fiction for young adults thus serves as both a reminder of ongoing structures of oppression while also establishing the significance of community formation and continuity. In *Self-Determined Stories: The Indigenous Reinvention of Young Adult Literature* (2019), Mandy Suhr-Sytsma shows how said community formation interrelates with individual agency. She argues that Indigenous YA, in contrast to non-Indigenous YA, correlates individual with communal growth. Connecting with one's community, then, benefits a sense of agency rather than taking away from it (xvii). In this article, I draw from this emphasis on community formation in Indigenous YA and correlate it with the speculative landscapes of dreams.

The importance of the speculative mode for Indigenous authors has long been recognized but came to further attention in 2012 with the release of Grace Dillon's groundbreaking anthology *Walking the Clouds,* in which she coins the term "Indigenous futurisms." She summarizes that "[w]riters of Indigenous futurisms sometimes intentionally experiment with, sometimes intentionally dislodge, sometimes merely accompany, but invariably change the perimeters of sf [science fiction]" (3). One element of said "dislodg[ing]" proves to be particularly prominent for this article: Dismantling Western concepts of time. As Lou Cornum explains, Indigenous futurisms "is a profound deconstruction of how we imagine time, progress, and who is worthy of the future" (n.p.). The emphasis on "imagin[ing] time" already indicates that the speculative mode enables Indigenous authors to express an understanding of time beyond the

chronological structure commonly associated with Western meaning-making. In effect, it gives narrative form to the continuity of Indigenous communities.

In her analysis of two works of Indigenous speculative fiction for young adults, Suhr-Sytsma emphasizes that speculative texts enable a sense of continuity and of ongoing community formation "across time" (139). Simultaneously, these texts also suggest the pervasiveness and ongoing quality of structures of colonial oppression. The past, then, is not simply over in many works of Indigenous speculative fiction. Here, conceptions of time themselves come to the fore, specifically, spiralic time offers a frame that allows for connection across time and different generations. Lisa Brooks explains: "This spiral is embedded in place(s) but revolves through layers of generations, renewing itself with each new birth. It cannot be fixed but is constantly moving in three-dimensional, multilayered space. It allows for recurrence and return but also for transformation" (309). The spiral thus allows for both connection and change across generations and resonates with an emphasis on place in Indigenous epistemologies. In her analysis of *The Marrow Thieves* and Idle No More, Laura Maria de Vos emphasizes this understanding of time as spiralic and connects it to community formation. She argues: "Spiralic temporality allows us to see how embodied experiences of Indigenous cultural continuity are related across moments in time, and how these relations (embodied in practices) can structure the present and inform the future to ensure Indigenous thriving" (15). Spiralic time thus allows for the appreciation of recurring structures and illustrates how they connect beyond the limits of linear time. The understanding of time as spiralic also resonates with Dillon's reading of Native slipstream which "also appeals because it allows authors to recover the Native space of the past, to bring it to the attention of contemporary readers, and to build better futures" (4). In the spiralic nature of time, the intricate ties between past, present, and future come to the fore: By engaging with the past and its enduring importance, Indigenous futures are envisioned and brought into being.

In this article, I want to draw from the significance of spiralic time and its ties to community formation by focusing on one element that allows for border crossings of different forms and that creates a specific anti-colonial space: the dreamscape. "Dreaming" hosts a complex set of meanings but also leads to further "searches for meaning" as Dian Million underlines in "Intense Dreaming" (314). In this sense, dreaming is no mere passive activity but is directed toward the future and allows for (political) change. Million observes that "[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). Here, dreaming and the concept of spiralic time can fruitfully be brought into conversation:

Beyond linear time, dreaming enables for continuity and community formation "across time," to echo Suhr-Sytsma's sentiment. In approaching the significance of dreams in Indigenous speculative fiction for young adults, it is vital to note that dreams and their interpretation play a pluripotent role in Indigenous communities and cannot be approached as a cohesive whole. In Anishinaabe traditions, which are of specific interest for this article given their centrality in *Firekeeper's Daughter*, dreams are taken "very seriously" as Leanne Simpson argues (n.p.). She further notes: "Knowledge is often transmitted from the spiritual world to humans through dreaming and visioning" (n.p.). The significance of transmitting knowledge is vital for my following reading of *Elatsoe* and *Firekeeper's Daughter*, specifically because both novels focus on detective work: By relying on their dreams, the protagonists thus also relate to the significance of dreams for knowledge production. In this function, dreams and storytelling align, as literary scholar Margaret Noodin[1] emphasizes:

> Dreams, visions, and transformations are some of the ways Anishinaabe stories present possibilities. Stories are not always composed carefully for large audiences; they are sometimes given to Anishinaabe people individually in dreams, through visions, or as part of an epiphany. (133)

Noodin not only presents dreams and storytelling as interwoven, but she furthermore emphasizes the individual nature of dreaming. The connection between dreams and stories is further underlined in Noodin's account of the first story in Anishinaabe, in which a boy "exhausted by the cold, decided to rest beneath the shelter of a great stone, a dreamer's rock. There, in the curve of the earth, he heard the first story" (20). Storytelling and dreaming are interconnected, and dreams are presented as a creative and inspiring force.

The significance of dreams in different Indigenous groups is also mirrored in Indigenous YA. In fact, dreams meaningfully shape the narrative and form the basis for protagonists' decision-making in several texts of Indigenous speculative fiction for young adults. In *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* by Aboriginal author Ambelin Kwaymullina (Palyku) (2012), the unconscious state facilitates reliving past events. Annika Herb emphasizes the underlying significance of time for Kwaymullina's novel that is also relevant to my discussion of dreams: "She [Kwaymullina] draws from the past and present and casts it into the future, while simultaneously recognising that

[1] There has been debate surrounding Noodin's Ojibwe ancestry, with Noodin being cleared by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. For further reference on the debate see Meyerhofer et al.; for further reference on the clearance see Blake.

all three are linked and circular—events are repeating and being relived" (n.p.). It becomes obvious that the state of dreaming breaks with linear temporality and instead establishes spiralic temporalities. The dream, I want to suggest, thereby becomes a de-colonial space of community formation and resistance. The significance of dreams is also underlined in Cherie Dimaline's acclaimed *The Marrow Thieves* (2017), which presents a future version of today's North America in which non-Indigenous people have lost the ability to dream. As Indigenous people are being hunted for their bone marrow to restore the ability, Dimaline positions dreaming as central—and in the speculative realm, even exclusive—to Indigenous communities. Drawing from this centrality of dreams in the field of Indigenous YA, I want to focus on two examples: *Elatsoe* and *Firekeeper's Daughter*. These are exemplary because they establish dreams as a source for knowledge production: Both protagonists rely on their dreams to solve the mystery they are investigating. Hereby, dreams are positioned as epistemological tools that circumvent colonial structures. Read within the concept of spiralic time, dreams offer an exclusive place for community formation across temporal separation.

Elatsoe (2020) is the story of the title-giving Elatsoe, usually called Ellie, and her quest to find justice for her deceased cousin, Trevor. In her search to unravel why her cousin was murdered, her dreams open a space in which she can engage with Trevor. Thereby, dreaming intersects present and past and enables contact beyond the separation of death. Darcie Little Badger (Lipan Apache) published *Elatsoe* to critical acclaim in 2020 and received the Locus Award for Best First Novel. *Firekeeper's Daughter* was published the following year and also triggered popular interest: it was chosen by Reese Witherspoon's book club (Witherspoon) and was optioned by the Obamas' production company, Higher Ground (Ehrlich). The author Angeline Boulley is an enrolled member of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians. As protagonist Daunis helps the FBI investigate the distribution of drugs in her community, Boulley understands her as an "Ojibwe Nancy Drew" ("Author's Note" 490). *Elatsoe* and *Firekeeper's Daughter* share an interest in a young Indigenous woman's growing sense of agency in her community, and thus follow Suhr-Sytsma's understanding of a connection of engagement with community and growth in agency in Indigenous YA (xvii). This notion is also underlined by tribal affiliation: Ellie is Lipan Apache, and Daunis becomes an enrolled member of the fictionalized Sugar Island Ojibwe Tribe in the course of the novel. Social injustice is portrayed as systemic in both texts, given that Daunis has to face the brutal fact that her sexual assault will not lead to an investigation (*Firekeeper's Daughter* 473), and Ellie is described as not "trust[ing] the police" (181). Hereby, these young protagonists with agency and individual abilities are deliberately positioned in an unequal world that might not change according to their will.

By focusing on their young protagonists' struggles, Boulley and Little Badger contribute to the canon of YA by offering rounded Indigenous protagonists. Little Badger herself explains in an interview that her novel was inspired by a question, namely: "How does a young woman like Ellie seek justice for somebody she loves in a world that so often seems to be stacked against her?" (Levine Querido 0:0:40). The struggles Ellie faces, then, also oppose the absence of Indigenous protagonists, an absence that, Little Badger explains, led her to "sto[p] reading science fiction. It's hard to enjoy a future where you no longer exist" (Roanhorse et al.). Here, speculative Indigenous fiction for young adults reveals its centrality as a means of representation and reaffirmation. Boulley, too, underlines the significance of an Indigenous protagonist for younger audiences and explains:

> With Daunis, I wanted to give Native teens a hero who looks like them, whose greatest strength is her Ojibwe culture and community. When making decisions for our tribe, we look seven generations ahead, considering the effect on our descendants. My hope is that, in sharing our Anishinaabeg experiences, *Firekeeper's Daughter* will have that impact on future generations. ("Author's Note" 490)

It becomes apparent that within the realm of YA, a realm that has repeatedly been criticized for a lack of representation,[2] Boulley's text inserts Indigenous peoples in a complex net of human relations.

In the following analysis, I want to discuss Ellie and Daunis's search for justice in a structurally unequal world and establish the ways their detective work is not only grounded in the clues they encounter while awake but prominently shaped by knowledge derived from dreams. As Ellie and Daunis turn to their dreamscapes as a source of information and a link to the past, dreams reveal their political potential and their role in individual and communal meaning-making. By granting significance to the processes of dreaming, this article proposes the protagonists' dreamscapes as sites of resistance to forms of suppression. In this reading, I prominently draw from the connection of spiralic time, dreams as a site of knowledge production, and the link between individual agency and community formation in Indigenous YA, as suggested by Suhr-Sytsma. Hereby, I want to show that the dreamscape correlates with visions of Indigenous futurisms, which, as author Elizabeth LaPensee (Anishinaabe) explains, "recognizes space-time as simultaneously past, present, and future, and therefore

[2] For further reference on the representation of race in speculative YA, see Mary J. Couzelis's "The Future Is Pale". Elizabeth Thomas offers an overview of the discussion in her introduction to *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from* Harry Potter *to* The Hunger Games.

futurisms is as much about the future as it is about right now" (Roanhorse et al.). By abandoning linear time, the dreamscape becomes a place of resilience and offers Indigenous epistemologies to their protagonists' search for truth and justice in the unequal world they inhabit.

2. Waking the Dead: *Elatsoe* by Darcie Little Badger

Elatsoe lives in a world that resembles present-day Texas and that still decisively deviates from what contemporary readers may expect: Fantastic creatures, such as vampires and fairies, roam Ellie's version of the U.S. Little Badger's speculative reimagining is deeply entangled with Indigenous storytelling, as is prominently revealed in Ellie's talent: She has been taught to resurrect ghosts, an ability that has been passed on by "eight generations of Apache women" (224). The inclusion of stories of Ellie's ancestors deliberately ties into both the author's and the protagonist's affiliation with the Lipan Apache tribe. In fact, Little Badger remarks that her own grandmother served as the inspiration for her heroine, as she too was called Elatsoe (The ONWARD Project 0:49). The name, however, not only relates to the author's ancestry; it also serves as a first instance of the significance of dreams: In the novel, the protagonist is named after the Lipan word for "hummingbird" because her mother dreamed of the animal the night before her birth (180). At the same time, Elatsoe is also the name of Ellie's influential ancestor: her monster-slaying, story-inducing six-great-grandmother, usually called Six-Great. Even though Ellie is thus familiar with encountering ghosts, she is shocked to meet her recently deceased cousin Trevor in a dream and even more shocked to have him reveal his murderer's name. As Ellie starts her detective work, her search for justice is inseparably connected with the teachings of her tribe, her talent to engage with the afterlife, and the information she gathers in her dreams.

In the novel, Ellie's detective work is positioned in spiralic time and links past and present: As Ellie shares her family's talent, a continuity with the generations that came before her is evoked. This continuity, however, is not only suggested with reference to the impact of her tribal teachings. It is also presented in the structurally unequal position that Ellie finds herself in, a structure that is given concrete form in the town of Willowbee and its mayor, Abe Allerton. Willowbee is presented as separate from Native life and forms an opposition to Ellie's dreamscape. Ellie's mother explains: "We never had any business with Willowbee. *Never*" (159, emphasis in original), thereby suggesting that Willowbee is exempt from a continuous link between Lipan Apache tradition and land. Little Badger employs a speculative element to further tie Willowbee to colonial practices: the town physically moves and changes location. Hereby, colonial land claims and mapping practices are echoed in the speculative realm. As the town claims different spaces, its

new English houses stand at odds with its Texan surroundings and further underline the ongoing, timeless repercussions of colonial practices on Indigenous communities.

In the following discussion, I draw from this significance of spiralic time in *Elatsoe* by illustrating the significant role of dreams as a site of resistance that ranges beyond the impact of colonial practices epitomized by Willowbee and Allerton. Hereby, dreams establish tribal continuity and reveal that Ellie's reliance on Indigenous knowledge systems finally empowers her to solve the case.

Ellie's first dream begins as an abstract mixture of events she has just experienced, for instance, meeting her friend Jay at the railroad bridge, on the one hand, and ominous signs on the other. Prominently, the moon is "a yellow Owl eye" and alludes to the owl's role as a bad omen in Apache belief ("Our Culture"). The dream functions as a liminal space in which lived experience, imagination, and elements of Apache storytelling intersect. Soon, she encounters her cousin Trevor, whose car accident has left his face "swollen, broken, and bloody" (17). While Trevor lies in a coma in Elatsoe's non-dream world, he can communicate in her dream and immediately explains that his impending death is no accident:

> "A man named Abe Allerton murdered me." He pointed to his battered face. "Abe Allerton from Willowbee."
>
> "Murder? Why?"
>
> . . .
>
> "Don't let Abe hurt my family," Trevor said.
>
> "I promise."
>
> "Thank you. Xastéyó."
>
> In a moment of clarity, Ellie could see Trevor smiling, his young face uninjured. (17)

The dream's epiphanic nature is evident: while dreaming, Ellie discovers that her cousin has been murdered and is presented with a suspect. Her incredulity ("Murder? Why?") substantiates that the dream does not serve as a storytelling device to introduce suppressed information to the narrative. Instead, Ellie learns about the crime against Trevor in her unconscious state. At the same time, the dreamscape allows for the intermingling of past and present: At the beginning of the quote, Trevor has a "battered face", after he has passed on his knowledge about the crime, he appears "uninjured". Speaking his truth and hoping for justice is introduced as a

healing prospect. Even more, Trevor thanks Ellie in Lipan ("Xastéyó") and thereby refers to their shared heritage. In effect, Ellie's dreamscape also becomes a site of Lipan Apache community formation.

Yet the dream does not only relate Ellie to her cousin; it also enables fruitful conversations with her family. As her spiritual abilities are part of "family knowledge" (185), she discusses her dreams with her parents, who grant her dreams equal significance to her waking moments. The dreamsite is thereby established as an alternative frame for meaning-making that is closely linked to Ellie's Indigenous identity. The significance of familial ties is further underlined when Trevor's widow is jealous that it is Ellie who communicates with Trevor in her dreams (92). This differentiation substantiates the link between Ellie's dream and the spiritual capacities passed on from generation to generation. Her dreams root Ellie in family tradition, establishing her identity as part of a living community and a lineage of gifted women. The dream, then, allows for connections along two lines: It enables her to speak with Trevor, and it connects her to the eight generations of women before her who shared her ability.

By positioning Ellie within the traditions of her family and her community, her dream also intersects with oral storytelling. This link is prominently suggested after Ellie wakes up: "Most dreams were REM-stage fiction. Silly, scary, mundane, meaningless. Her conversation with Trevor felt different. In fact, it reminded her of a story. One that chilled Ellie to the core" (19). The connection between dreaming and storytelling appears obvious and presents both as meaningful contributions to her task. Ellie thinks about the story of her ancestor, Six-Great, tracking down a monster after an epiphanic dream (20) and begins her detective work. This connection between her search for justice and Six-Great's adventure is repeatedly emphasized, for instance, when Ellie explains that her cousin spoke to her the "[s]ame way that drowned boy told Six-Great-Grandmother about the river monster" (25). By likening the murderer of her cousin to the monster hunted by Six-Great, Ellie's endeavor becomes part of the ongoing story of her family. In their reliance on their dreams, Ellie and Six-Great form an "intergenerational team" (72) and thus create a space for community formation beyond the dictates of linear time.

Hereby, the novel intersects Ellie's lived experience with the narrated events of her ancestor's life. The novel's narrative structure further reinforces this interweaving of generations: While the illustrations convey the tale of Six-Great, the written word narrates Ellie's journey. The page itself thus creates an instance of spiralic time, in which the story of the young adult and that of her ancestor are simultaneously told

and intrinsically related. This narrative framing resonates with Little Badger's own appearance in a *YouTube* clip that shows her discussing her work, in which she is flanked by her mother, Hermelinda Walking Woman, who is the director of education and policy of the Lipan Apache Tribe of Texas, as well as a painting of her grandmother, Anita Elatsoe Soto (The ONWARD Project 5:00). A sense of continuity is suggested as three generations appear within the same frame, with the youngest member presenting a work of fiction named after her ancestor.

Breaking free from linear time, Ellie steps into her dreamscape and enters a space where tribal protocols take precedence: Prominently, she is expected not to pay attention to her deceased cousin. In a chapter opening with "Ellie dreamed about family that night" (253), the protagonist encounters her family gathered underneath a mesquite tree. Speaking of the plant, Hermelinda Walking Woman explains that "[i]t's been a big part of our history, of our tribe, that we would gather this and use it for food" (Hudes). The reference to the tree positions the dream in Apache territory and the tribe's use of the land. While the tree is tied to nourishment and family, Ellie's dream also reiterates Lipan Apache protocols to not pay attention to the deceased, given that Trevor is waiting nearby and is ignored by the family. Michael Britten observes the need to stay distant from the deceased in Lipan Apache funeral rites, telling someone who has died that "he must go away peacefully and must not look back or bother his surviving relatives in any way" (80). This distance, however, can be undercut in dreams, and Britten notes: "To think or dream about ghosts or the dead was dangerous, as it drew their attention" (81). The dream is thus understood as a realm in which the boundary between life and death can be blurred[3] and in which ghosts may be drawn back to the living. As Sherry Robinson remarks in *I Fought a Good Fight: A History of the Lipan Apaches* (2013): "Apache believed that a ghost could harm the living unless it quickly traveled to the afterword and remained there" (128). These teachings are embedded in Ellie's behavior, for instance, when stopping to use the deceased's name (31) and are presented as vital for her safety: *Elatsoe* is based on the assumption that "[i]f Trevor returned, he could tear the neighborhood apart like a hurricane with hatred at its core" (86). The significance of Apache belief systems concerning funerals and mourning is thus an integral part of the novel's world-building.

The crucial importance of adhering to protocol becomes clear when Ellie can no longer ignore Trevor. While Ellie partly adheres to what she has been told and

[3] The relation between dreaming and death is repeatedly emphasized in the novel. Fittingly, Kirby, Ellie's ghost dog, does not dream but returns to the underworld when he sleeps (18), and Ellie's gift is framed as waking ghosts (58) who fall asleep quickly (169). Visiting dreamscapes and visiting the underworld become comparable endeavors. It is only fitting that when her daughter does, in fact, visit the underworld, Ellie's mother asks: "Maybe you were dreaming?" (177).

vehemently denies touching her cousin, as she knows that it would bring him back to life, Trevor's toddler, Gregory, walks up to him in a dream and reaches for his father:

> "I knew my boy was talented," Trevor said. "He found me. Just like you, Cuz. Promise you'll teach him the family secret? It'd be a terrible waste if you didn't."
>
> . . .
>
> "Is this a dream?" Ellie asked.
>
> "Sort of," Trevor said.
>
> "You and Little Greg are both sleeping." He closed his eyes, tilting his face up, basking in magma-hued light.
>
> "But I'm wide awake." (256)

Clearly, the dreamscape has turned sinister: while it still allows for intergenerational contact and transgresses boundaries between life and death, it might, in fact, bring Trevor back in an altered form. It is vital to note that Trevor's return – him being "wide awake" (while dead) while Gregory and Ellie are "sleeping" (while alive) – is related to the latter's breach of protocol. It is Ellie, who neglects her family's advice to keep her distance from Trevor, and Gregory, whose ignorance of protocol is based on his young age, who facilitate Trevor's return. Thus, Lipan Apache rituals are acted out in the speculative realm and become decisive for the story's developments. In other words, upholding Indigenous protocol is central not only for keeping the family's traditions alive but also for keeping the family safe. The dreamscape is thus enforced as a space of Indigenous knowledge in which linear time is abandoned, and Lipan Apache beliefs are revealed as decisive and world-changing.

Drawing from this discussion of two dreams, it becomes clear that dreams play a versatile role in Little Badger's novel. As dreamscapes establish spiralic time, they allow for intergenerational contact and community formation while highlighting the relevance of Indigenous tradition and protocol. Ellie's dreamscapes are closely related to her Lipan Apache identity and give space to her resistance to colonial power. These powers are prominently exemplified by Abe Allerton, the murderer of her cousin, and his hometown, Willowbee. Just as Willowbee "claims" North America by shifting location, Abe Allerton claims Indigenous bodies by switching injuries from settler bodies to native ones (238). To his community, Allerton appears as a valued member, a physician embodying medical progress; to Trevor, however, it is no coincidence that Indigenous peoples are exploited at his hands (296). The physician's subordinating practice thereby becomes part of structural injustice and functions

as a speculative representation of medical experimentation on Indigenous groups, which occurred in different form throughout U.S. American history. For instance, Rebecca Tsosie discusses the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1803, in which President Thomas Jefferson sent an expedition to learn more about unchartered Western territories. She explains: "This scientific expedition had a direct and enduring effect on indigenous peoples. They were studied as objects of scientific inquiry, much like the region's plants and animals" (1144). Regarding experimentation, Ian Mosby and Jaris Swidrovich quote former Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Grand Chief Sheila North in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*: "Back in residential school days, [people], that are now elders, remember being used as guinea pigs or [having] vaccines tested on them when they were children without their permission or their family's permission" (qtd. in Mosby and Swidrovich E 382). The performance of medical procedures without consent on Indigenous peoples also resonates with the forced sterilization of Indigenous peoples in the U.S. and in Canada (Pegoraro 161–165). Trevor's death in *Elatsoe* might be based on a fictional medical intervention; nevertheless, it is positioned within the colonial, land-claiming framework of Willowbee and draws a connection between medical practice and colonial structures. It thus becomes apparent that Willowbee, Allerton, and the medical practices he employs form an opposition to Ellie's dreamscape: While Ellie's abilities are ultimately used as a means of community formation, Allerton's are presented as a tool to subjugate, control, and disenfranchise. Clearly, in Ellie's America, colonial practice has changed form, its existence, however, remains painstakingly clear.

In her dreams, then, Ellie gives voice to what Allerton, Willowbee, and the colonial practices they epitomize attempt to silence: to her cousin, whose body has been mutilated, and to Lipan Apache traditions that land claims attempt to erase. The speculative mode enables the discussion of historic injustices and injustices still experienced today by Indigenous communities. Her dreams are sites of spiralic time in which Ellie encounters another epistemological frame to assess Trevor's murder. Hereby, the dreamscape both creates and reveals continuities that live on in Ellie and Trevor's son, Gregory. Returning to Anderson et al.'s sentiment, *Elatsoe* does "not sugarcoat colonial horror and trauma" (267), yet it also presents a protagonist who already carries the resilience she needs within herself – in her dreams, in fact.

3. Unearthing Forgotten Knowledge: *Firekeeper's Daughter* by Angeline Boulley

In contrast to *Elatsoe*, *Firekeeper's Daughter* presents a world more common to the reader: There are no vampires or fairies in the narrator's small town in Northern Michigan. The novel can be read as an example of YA detective fiction: Similar to Ellie, the protagonist,

Daunis, is forced into action by the death of a loved one and relies on her dreams and Indigenous teachings to solve her murder and stop the distribution of drugs on Sugar Island. Even though *Firekeeper's Daughter* may not align with conventions of Indigenous speculative fiction, it is interesting to note that the novel deliberately plays with what could be considered fictional or even speculative. Prominently, the text includes the presence of Little People.[4] While the FBI read their presence in the accounts of a group of young Indigenous people as a sign of a shared group hallucination (*Firekeeper's Daughter* 157), Daunis understands that they have come to warn the group of the drug's effect. She explains:

> The Little People found the kids in the woods and scolded them. The FBI assumed whatever had been added to the meth-X was a hallucinogenic mushroom, because the Anishinaabe kids who tried that particular batch of meth saw something that didn't make sense.
>
> The team working the investigation was alarmed by the group aspect of the hallucination and thought it was an unusual side effect of an unknown variety of mushroom. Whatever was added to the batch of meth-X, it didn't cause hallucinations.
>
> Because the Little People are real. (*Firekeeper's Daughter* 322)

Here, the novel deliberately presents two readings of the same incident: From the outsider's (the FBI's) perspective, the Little People are fictional and a sign of hallucination. From the insider's (Daunis's) perspective, they are part of the lived experience of Anishinaabe people, they are, as she explains "real". This knowledge and her reliance on her traditional teaching allow her to appreciate the truth in storytelling and dreaming, which ultimately lead to her solving the case. Even though *Firekeeper's Daughter* may not be characterized as speculative Indigenous fiction, it interrelates Indigenous storytelling and the realist mode and suggests that what is perceived "fictional" in the first place relies on cultural framing. Aside from this shared mode, it offers a focus comparable to that of *Elatsoe*: It also presents the dreamscape as a site of spiralic time and emphasizes that the reliance on the unconscious state allows for obtaining information crucial for solving the case. By reading both books in conversation, I thus want to suggest that dreams also serve as a medium to surpass the rigidity of linear time, a transgressive force that is needed to further tribal community and that presents a space of resistance to colonial structures.

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[4] Little People occur in a variety of forms in Indigenous stories, for an overview of Little People in Native American and Irish contexts see Cooke.

Similar to Ellie, Daunis is forced to make prominent decisions in the course of *Firekeeper's Daughter*: she becomes an enrolled member of her fictional tribe, and she decides on a field of study. The coming-of-age of the eighteen-year-old is informed by intersectionality and a sense of not quite belonging, given that Daunis's father was Ojibwe, and her mother is non-Indigenous. Angela Calcaterra emphasizes that Daunis finds herself enmeshed in a complex web of communal relationships, stating that "Daunis's force as a character accumulates by way of relationality" (226). One central relationship is destroyed when her best friend, Lily, is shot by her ex-boyfriend, Travis, in front of Daunis. In an effort to investigate the drug distribution in her community that forms the basis for the brutal act, Daunis decides to help the FBI. However, as Calcaterra remarks, "the investigators (despite being Native themselves) will never understand the depths of her community" (228), and Daunis continuously shares and withholds knowledge to best serve her community, as was already illustrated with reference to the Little People. Daunis's search for justice also resonates with Noodin's assessment that "[i]f there is any theme to modern Anishinaabe novels, it might be one of naming evil – the robbery of artifacts, the eruption of murderous *wiindigoog*, the commodification of stories" (32). In a particularly troubling turn of events, Daunis discovers that her brother participates in the distribution of drugs, taking on responsibility for her community thus also implies "naming evil", to use Noodin's term, despite the pain it may cause. The narrator Daunis, then, cannot be approached without also considering her role in her community, a role that also shapes her investigation. Prominently, it is not only her love interest and member of the FBI, Jamie, but her Elders who support her in her search. Both non-Indigenous science and Indigenous epistemologies inform Daunis's detective work, and she commonly switches between terminologies: "In Ojibwe it's called wiingashk, and in science it's *Hierochloe odorata*" (Boulley, *Firekeeper's Daughter* 53). Here, "science" is introduced as another language, and both languages, Ojibwe and "science", are equalized. As Hatice Bay suggests, Daunis "also shows that scientific practices depend on cultural values, traditions and beliefs" (6). At the same time, a hierarchical reading of what constitutes "science" in the first place is abandoned, as Calcaterra notes: "Anishinaabe methods are, Boulley suggests, scientific" (229). Daunis's search for the truth thus incorporates different knowledge systems and abandons binary oppositions.

Central to this article is her reliance not only on clues from her investigation but also on information gathered in her dreams. While similarly to *Elatsoe*, *Firekeeper's Daughter* features dreams to present new insights to the protagonist, the supernatural quality of Daunis's dreamed discoveries remains uncertain. Rather, her dreams unearth parts of unconscious knowledge and allow Daunis to engage with the traumatic event

of her best friend's passing. Hereby, dreams introduce key aspects to solve the case and correlate with Noodin's assessment of Vizenor's fiction: "Dreams and visions are also a means of giving readers collateral information" (162). Additionally, the function of the fictional dream as a means of accessing the unconscious can be related to Freud's often-quoted understanding that "[t]he interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind" (604). Without running the risk of oversimplification, these "unconscious activities" can be applied to the variation of Daunis's dreams and her continued internal return to the scene of her trauma that gradually reveals more about the circumstances of Lily's death. While Ellie's dreams are immediately introduced as being of epiphanic quality (she awakes with the knowledge of who murdered her cousin), Daunis's dreams develop in sequence and as flashbacks to the traumatic event of experiencing her best friend's death. Hereby, dreams serve to restructure memories and, specifically given their neglect of linear time, are also impacted by the experience of trauma. Deidre Barrett remarks in her study *Trauma and Dreams*: "The severity of the incident, including the degree of a sense of threat or horror, may increase traumatic dreaming" (10). Daunis's dreams and her return to the same moment may indicate the prevalence of trauma, while at the same time, her unveiling of memories also establishes spiralic time and ties into her task as a detective. As Daunis follows the clues from her dreams, the dreamscape makes past events accessible and interrelates them with elements of Indigenous knowledge systems. By focusing on four dreams, my following discussion emphasizes that dreams serve as bases for meaning-making and, furthermore, contribute to community formation as Daunis relies on her Elders to decipher the information she has received.

In her first dream, Daunis witnesses Lily being shot by Travis, and her dream version is similar to her previous description of the event. In her dream, however, smells are added to Daunis's depiction. Daunis's initial, non-dream account focuses on her shock and disbelief, prominently suggested in her eyes "darting from the gun to Lily's horrified expression. Gun. Shock. Gun. Disbelief. Gun. Fear" (*Firekeeper's Daughter* 86). The staccato phrases align with the narrator's incapacity to make meaning from the experienced events, while the positioning of "gun" intersects and governs any other emotion. The dream, on the other hand, introduces another layer of impression: it offers a sense of smell. Ranging from "the smell of earth" to the "WD-40 [used] to clean the gun" and finally to "scents that don't belong in the woods. Copper. Acetone. Urine" (*Firekeeper's Daughter* 159), the dream opens further understanding by introducing Daunis's sensory impressions. The significance of these details is suggested as Daunis comments upon waking: "It's the first time I've dreamed the smells from that night" (*Firekeeper's Daughter* 160), thus indicating that she might have

had similar dreams before. Furthermore, the impact of the first dream is established when Daunis finds a bag filled with meth and assesses its contents by smell: "The hair at the nape of my neck stands on end an instant before my brain registers the whiff of … *Travis's hand shakes, making the revolver jiggle*" (*Firekeeper's Daughter* 145, emphasis in original). Smelling the bag's contents, Daunis is thrown back into her dreamscape: The sense of smell added in the first dream thus becomes a tool in her detective endeavor. It is interesting to note that the dream does not serve as a mere traumatic rendering of what she has encountered, instead, it becomes a source of information: Daunis is able to make meaning from what she encounters by referring to the dream. This notion is enforced by the italics also used in the depictions of her dreams: What Daunis remembers is deliberately tied to her dream. In effect, the dream serves as more than a mere nightmare of a traumatic event, it becomes a tool that Daunis employs in her efforts to solve the case.

The second dream adds yet another layer to Daunis's encounter in the woods: spoken word. While in her previous dream, Lily's "mouth moves" (*Firekeeper's Daughter* 159), the second dream introduces dialogue to the fight between the former couple. Here, Lily's determination to leave Travis offers context for his murder-suicide. Interestingly, the thus revealed information appears startling to Daunis. After she wakes, she is unsettled by her dream:

> I wake up, choking on the smell of Travis's body odor. Chemicals and sweat that seemed more pungent than ordinary guy stink.
>
> Why haven't I remembered what they said to each other before now? Was Ron right when he said that I had to trust that the answers will be revealed when I'm ready? Will the rest of my memory come back? Or am I creating something out of nothing? (*Firekeeper's Daughter* 260)

Daunis's reaction upon waking reiterates the significance of smell and suggests that her dreams develop and build on one another. Moreover, the dream causes speculation; following Daunis's assessment of her trauma, the reader, too, may be uncertain whether she is in fact "creating something out of nothing". Even though this uncertainty is never fully dispensed – as it is in *Elatsoe* – the dream's impact is undeniable: It becomes a basis for decision-making. Prominently, and similar to how her detective work is impacted by what she smells in the dream, Daunis decides against a relationship with Jamie based on the dialogue revealed in the second dream: "Something heavy drops inside me. Into a deep cavern, where Travis's words to Lily bounce off jagged walls. *Tell me what to do and I'll do it. I can't do it without you. I need you*" (*Firekeeper's Daughter* 476,

emphasis in original). Regardless of its role as part of Daunis's memory or imagination, the dialogue holds significance beyond the dreamscape: it becomes a basis on which Daunis makes a responsible choice.

The first two dreams thus add new information – the sense of smell and dialogue – that informs Daunis's professional and personal decisions, respectively. The third dream also offers new insights that align with Indigenous knowledge systems when Travis mentions the Little People and their being "so mad at him" (*Firekeeper's Daughter* 284), presumably for pressuring Lily into drug addiction. The appearance of the Little People mirrors their role in Anishinaabe stories, in which "Little people known as *apa'iinsag* capture children and teach them lessons under trees" (Noodin 7). *Firekeeper's Daughter* deliberately relates to these stories because Travis, too, talks to Daunis under trees and has been chided by the Little People. Again, Daunis awakes uncertain how to engage with the dream:

> I snap upright. Grateful for the noise beyond my bedroom door, pulling me away from that dream. No, not just a dream – a memory…
>
> Wait. I dreamed the words. Lily's last words were to protect me.
>
> Travis said something about … the Little People.
>
> Am I unlocking memories? Or just inventing them?
>
> One of the Elders had mentioned the Little People. (*Firekeeper's Daughter* 284)

Despite Daunis's uncertainty, the dream inspires her to take action and seek guidance from her Elders (*Firekeeper's Daughter* 294). Here, Daunis's dreamscape begins to encompass experiences beyond her own: It becomes a space that incorporates Ojibwe tales, and that needs to be approached in a community setting. The dream is closely associated with the teachings of her tribe and an Elder explains to her: "You're fluent when you dream in the language" (*Firekeeper's Daughter* 294). Beyond the linguistic quality of the statement, it signifies Ojibwe knowledge in Daunis's dreamscape. Moreover, as in the previous dream, Travis's "dreamed" words form the basis for her decision-making and detective work. She explains later on: "The night he killed Lily, Travis told me the Little People were mad at him" (*Firekeeper's Daughter* 334) – her dreamed conversation has become evidence. While Daunis had wondered upon waking whether she had "invented" the conversation, she now appreciates it as vital as other leads she has followed. The third dream, then, ties Daunis's dreamscape into Ojibwe teachings and storytelling. As already mentioned earlier, the presence of the Little People appears as a decisive difference between Daunis's reading of the events and

the FBI's, which validates the knowledge she has recovered in her dream and which is shaped by her Ojibwe knowledge.

Lastly, Daunis's fourth dream draws attention to Travis's motivation and instills doubt in her brother, Levi. In contrast to the three previous dreams, this one begins after Lily has been shot and shifts emphasis from the traumatic event. Instead, Travis reveals key information about Daunis's brother, explaining that Levi is guilty of the charge that ended Travis's hockey career. In her dream, Daunis closes her eyes and opens them "*in time to see his head snap sideways*" (*Firekeeper's Daughter* 382, emphasis in original). Clearly, the act of opening her eyes in the dream metaphorically mirrors the dawning understanding of her brother's involvement in the distribution of drugs in her community. While Travis might not name his murderer, as Trevor does in *Elatsoe*, his truth is nevertheless revealed to Daunis in the dreamscape. Moreover, this final conversation fills a gap in her initial account of the event, in which she, too, closed her eyes and opened them "to see his head snap sideways" (*Firekeeper's Daughter* 87). The fourth dream, then, appears as the final version of the experienced event and directly recurs to her initial, non-dream version. While previously, Travis's "mouth moves but [she] can't hear him" (*Firekeeper's Daughter* 87), the fourth dream fills in the words and leads Daunis to the main suspect: her own brother. The dream has thus brought Daunis full circle[5] and has yet unearthed what she needed to solve the case: Here, spiralic time and the ongoing presence of the past in Daunis's dreams allow for a renegotiation of lived experience.

As Daunis relives a traumatizing event again and again, her dreamscape suspends linear time and brings her into contact with the knowledge of her tribe. After Daunis listens to Travis's account of the Little People in her dream, she is able to reinterpret the supposedly shared hallucination and to read it within her Indigenous knowledge system. As she takes her dreams seriously and acts in accordance with what they reveal to her, she also inscribes herself into her familial lineage, given that it is Daunis's grandmother who believed in the Little People (*Firekeeper's Daughter* 295). Daunis's dreams thus relate to traditional knowledge that can only be fully appreciated by engaging with her community. This communal relation is further developed in the dreams' relation to death and neglect of linear time. Here, Boulley's novel aligns with Anishinaabe tradition, in which "dreams are a way to understand the waking world and to communicate with other worlds" (Noodin 161). This intersection of the "waking world" and "other worlds" appears central. As the protagonist encounters

[5] Daunis coming full-circle also resonates with the novel's structure of four parts which mirror the Ojibwe medicine wheel, as Paulina Hernandez-Trejo explains (6).

her deceased friend and the young man who killed her, her dream also resonates with Noodin "wonder[ing] if in dreams we sweep reality away, cast time aside, and see the other side for a while" (xvi). This timeless nature of both the dreamscape and death is further underlined when Daunis explains that "[w]hen someone dies, everything about them becomes past tense. Except for the grief. Grief stays in the present" (*Firekeeper's Daughter* 24). While the eternal present of grief reveals Daunis's ongoing hurt, the timelessness of the dreamscape presents hope by offering a chance to learn from the past. Here, spiralic time allows for new insights and new paths into the future. It is thus her reliance on her dreams, her Elders and her community that makes Daunis successful in her endeavor. As author Angeline Boulley explains: "It's only when she claims all the aspects of her identity does [sic] she really come into power of, you know, being the ideal confidential informant, of being her truest self" (Clayson and Beiner). Alongside her memories, part of this identity can be found in her dreamscape, which presents her with knowledge and stories to further the continuance of her community.

In the end of *Firekeeper's Daughter*, Daunis dreams again. In her dream, she gazes into her son's eyes and tousles his curls which are reminiscent of Jamie's. Daunis explains that they had named their son "Waabun" and relates to a "Someday" in a future the child belongs to (*Firekeeper's Daughter* 478). While spiralic time has so far mainly related to past generations, Daunis's dream hints at a glimpse to the future: When readers encounter her again in the sequel, *Warrior Girl Unearthed* (2023), ten years have passed, and a version of that "Someday" seems to have occurred: Daunis has a son named Waabun. While the dream may also be read as visualizing a desire that is fulfilled in the novel's sequel, the connection between dreams and intergenerational contact is further developed when the narrator, Daunis's niece, Perry, explains: "My ancestors had names, and they lived through good times and bad times. They dreamed of me. And I dream of them" (*Warrior Girl Unearthed* 107). The dreamsite is shared by generations, it allows for ever-changing connections between past, present, and future and establishes connections beyond the limitations of linear time.

4. Dreamscapes as Sites of Resistance

In her discussion of race in young adult fiction, Ebony Elizabeth Thomas explains: "When people of color seek passageways into the fantastic, we have often discovered that the doors are barred. Even the very act of dreaming of worlds-that-never-were can be challenging when the known world does not provide many liberating spaces" (11). In my discussion of *Elatsoe* and *Firekeeper's Daughter*, I have attempted to draw attention to the ways that Indigenous authors strive towards creating fictional "liberating spaces." Within the narrative, these spaces occur, as I have suggested, in the dreamscapes of

the protagonists, which establish spiralic time and reinstate contact with the dead and with Lipan Apache or Ojibwe traditions, respectively. This break with linear time presents a critical shift in terms of meaning-making and abandons what Mark Rifkin has called "settler time", namely "notions, narratives, and experiences of temporality that de facto normalize non-native presence, influence, and occupation" (9). Beyond individual narratives, Indigenous speculative fiction for young adults itself might thus prove to be a "liberating space", a space that offers to be, using Rudine Sims Bishop's terminology, both a mirror and a window (3), both a space of reaffirmation and a space to gather new knowledge.

This analysis of two texts thus underlines that Indigenous YA presents a highly heterogeneous group of texts for literary study that deliberately intersects and plays with different genres, such as speculative fiction, detective story, and traditional Indigenous storytelling. My focus on dreams has introduced the unconscious state beyond a mere narrative structuring device. Instead, it reveals their significance as a space beyond colonial reach and as a space that allows for spiralic time. In order to substantiate this reading, it seems beneficial to briefly consider the study of dreams outside Indigenous frameworks. Carol Schreier Rupprecht and Kelly Bulkley explain in their introductory article to *The Dream and the Text: Essays on Literature and Language* (1993) with reference to non-Indigenous literature:

> There are those who have treated such dreams as nothing more than simple, transparent structuring devices. Dreams are read as *framing mechanisms* by which the author chooses to convey something that would lose its desired effectiveness if directly stated, simply represented, or incorporated stream. Once that function is served, however, the dream is essentially discarded. Then there are those who have treated dreams in literary works as *psychological proof-texts*, confirming the validity of a particular psychological theory. Here, too, the dream itself is dismissed once it serves its use. (2, my emphasis)

Elatsoe and *Firekeeper's Daughter* abandon such readings of the dream as either a means to characterize or emphasize specific plot elements. Instead, they use dreams as an independent epistemological form and thereby present their young protagonists' ability to dream as their biggest source of knowledge and, in effect, resistance. Rather than "discard[ing]" the dream, as Rupprecht and Bulkley observe, the dream has long-lasting impacts and shapes the characters' immersion into community values and storytelling practices. While both novels feature plotlines that insist on Indigenous

presence in contemporary or magical versions of America, their employment of dreams also establishes this presence on a structural level.

It has also become apparent that the discussed texts introduce the dream as a form of epistemology into detective work and thereby conceptualize their protagonists' unconscious mind as a resource to solve a case. In other words, it is the protagonists' reliance on their dreams and its relation to their heritage that leads them to succeed. Mary Stoecklein explains in her study on Indigenous mystery fiction that "Native writers use the mystery genre to bring attention to particular crimes that are inextricably related to a much larger and more complex network of historical events that continue to greatly impact the lives of Indigenous peoples today" (2). Stoecklein thus explains that by engaging with specific crimes, Indigenous mystery fiction makes larger structures visible and reveals their ongoing impact. These cases, then, also highlight the limitations of linear time, a notion that holds particular significance in the texts discussed in this article. Here, the dream, in particular, overcomes linear time and presents the crime the young protagonists are solving in a complex relationship with ongoing structures of oppression but also of continuous Indigenous community formation.

Drawing from Suhr-Sytsma's understanding that "Indigenous YA stories show individuals who are empowered through connection to communities" (149), this article has assessed dreams as unconscious spaces of community formation in which the young heroines step into a complex network of tribal relations and responsibilities. By offering a respite from individualistic practices and by opposing colonial endeavors, their dreamscapes form ultimate sites of resistance to the injustices they face. Instead of hoping for an external savior, Ellie and Daunis turn to themselves, drawing on their inner landscapes shaped by their experiences and the traditions passed down to them.

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