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Terminal Futurity and Native *Ressentiment* in the Indigenous Post-Apocalypse

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Indigenous post-apocalyptic fiction projects an Indigenous presence into future spaces, attesting to the endurance and survivance of Indigenous peoples and thereby challenging settler myths of erasure. The Indigenous post-apocalypse foregrounds continuity by focusing on how the violences of the future mirror the violences inflicted by settler colonialism in the past and present. In Cherie Dimaline's Marrow Thieves series and Waubgeshig Rice's Moon novels, communities of Indigenous survivors are depicted amidst the violence and hostility of the post-apocalyptic landscape. Both authors, as well as other post-apocalyptic writers such as Gerald Vizenor and Stephen Graham Jones, depict the threats to Indigenous characters as not simply external, however, but internal as well. Not all Indigenous characters in the post-apocalypse are able to resist a colonized identity, with some going so far as to privilege settler futurities over Indigenous ones. Instead of Indigenous futurity, these characters embrace colonized futurities, visions of the future that render it as a dead-end, as trapped in what Jones refers to as the "End of the Trail mode." The means of refuting this type of futurity consist of resisting the settler imaginary's constructions of Indigeneity, but also in pushing back against Native ressentiment. In this case, ressentiment signifies Indigenous identities formulated as a reaction to settler colonialism, a negative rather than affirmative conception of self. Each of these texts creates future spaces in which Indigenous characters are empowered with agency to refuse terminal futurity's vision of ressentiment, with some characters fighting to build a communal and resurgent future while others are unable to escape settler colonialism's pull. In this way, these texts serve as a cautionary tale for Indigenous readers: to survive in the future means actively combatting terminal ideologies which seek to keep Indigenous futurity tethered to a colonial past.

Author Terese Marie Mailhot (Seabird Island First Nation) has noted that while she has heard Natives in online spaces "extolling joyous indigenous futures," that she far prefers "joy that's earned, because what good is it without the threat it can be taken away?" (Mailhot) In this sense, it is perhaps not surprising that many Indigenous speculative fiction writers have gravitated toward distinctly dystopian sub-genres of sci-fi, particularly post-apocalyptic fiction. Since Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor's influential *Darkness in Saint Louis: Bearheart* was released in 1978, multiple Indigenous authors have worked with the post-apocalypse as a fictional landscape for exploring the past, present, and future of Indigenous communities. The post-apocalyptic setting itself perhaps resonates with so many Indigenous writers because, as Waubgeshig Rice has stated, Native nations have "already endured apocalypse" and "survived the dystopia that's followed" (Johnson). The settler colonial violences experienced by Indigenous communities in North America have, in other words, led to communities needing to survive and adapt in an environment that has been radically remade to be destructive toward Indigenous peoples. With this in mind, it is arguable that the appeal of the sub-genre partly arises from the way in which the post-apocalypse is nothing new: it is not a rupture or radical break for Indigenous peoples since that, in a sense, has already occurred as a result of settler colonialism. The post-apocalypse as a fictional landscape instead represents colonial continuity and the survivance of Indigenous peoples in a future in which we are not supposed to exist. It is often averred that Indigenous writers "subvert" the genres they work in, that genre fiction, for example, produced by American Indians "disrupt[s] and resist[s] the narrative strategies of colonial imaginings by transforming the modes of interpretation and revealing the structures of dominance by turning generic conventions against affiliations" (Byrd 346).

And yet, the tropological ready-mades of non-Indigenous post-apocalyptic fiction carry over to works created by Indigenous writers: precarity, death, destruction, and a post-civilizational landscape made up of settler colonial night terrors such as "tribalism" and "savagery." Indigenous writers of post-apocalyptic fictions do not abandon these conventions, but they do reinscribe them, giving them a signification that speaks to Indigenous futurities, but also to Indigenous presents. From Gerald Vizenor's 1978 novel through to recent works of post-apocalyptic fiction by Waubgeshig Rice (Wasauksing First Nation) and Cherie Dimaline (Métis Nation of Ontario), the precise nature of the post-apocalypse changes, but what remains as a throughline are (1) the juxtaposition of Indigenous survivance with Indigenous death and (2) the element of character agency. In a future of precarity, not all Indigenous people will make the right choices and not all will be able to overcome the negative influence and terminal creeds of settler colonialism. By imagining future spaces where some Indigenous people are

incapable of escaping the colonial world of the pre-apocalypse, Indigenous writers make it clear the degree to which colonized futurities are distinct from Indigenous futurities and that a terminal conception of Indigenous identity represents a dead-end in the worlds they envision, a Native *ressentiment* that does not equip Indigenous characters to survive the dangers of the post-apocalypse.

Before discussing the precise nature of this *ressentiment*, it is worth delving into the Indigenous post-apocalypse and delineating its attributes. In recent years, there has been a veritable Native genre boom, with many Indigenous writers heeding the advice of Blackfeet writer Stephen Graham Jones to "get out there, traffic in the genres typically denied to Indians. That we're not allowed to do fantasy or science fiction and the rest, it's both stereotyping us and primitivizing our writing: it's saying we can't play in the branches that come off literature with a capital L" ("Letter" 124). Indigenous writers have very much branched off from the confines of "ethnic literature," crafting genre fiction that is both creative expression and protest literature. The post-apocalypse has become a popular genre for Indigenous writers, but like much settler sci-fi, it does, however, carry conceptual difficulties for Indigenous readers and viewers. Katherine Sugg has described the post-apocalypse as "a *frontier* setting in which individuals and groups must learn to make their own rules and preserve a fledgling and isolated community located in a hostile setting" (Sugg 800-801). Connor Pitetti states that post-apocalyptic narratives highlight the "various forms of adaptive continuity and survival that link the pre- and post-disaster world" (Pitetti 447). It is, however, worth noting that, with settler works of post-apocalyptic fiction, the issue of Indigenous representation is, contra a television series like *Star Trek*, not one of bad representation, but *no* representation. While the "postapocalyptic stance opens up an endless series of opportunities to participate in those processes and contribute to determining the always-changing shape of the open-ended future" (Pitetti 451), it is difficult to connect this generic possibility with Indigenous futurities given that, in most settler post-apocalyptic fictions, Indigenous peoples are nowhere to be seen. Instead, these works present what April Anson calls the "settler apocalypse," stories that "tell of the end of the whole world but are, in reality, specific to white settlers" (Anson 63). The settler apocalypse as a reflection of the settler present is illustrative in the sense that it highlights the extent to which settlers view Indigenous peoples as connected to "narratives of *finality* and *last-ness* that privilege the concept of change as a concept describing movement or transition from stability to crisis—where crisis signals an impending end" (Whyte 236). We do not feature in many works of settler post-apocalyptic fiction precisely because those narratives are focused on white and/or settler futurities, not Indigenous ones, and part of the reason for that is because the

settler imaginary already envisions us in what Stephen Graham Jones calls the "End of the Trail mode" ("Letter" 124), as an endangered species whose extinction is all but certain. Hence, the survival of Indigenous people, much less our communities, beyond an apocalyptic event becomes unthinkable in the settler post-apocalypse.

In *Why Indigenous Literatures Matters*, Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) asserts that for "Indigenous writers of speculative fiction, the fantastic is an extension of the possible, not impossible" (Justice 149). He goes on to note that the fantastic "opens up and expands the range of options for Indigenous characters (and readers)." The extent to which this description applies to Indigenous post-apocalyptic fiction varies. Broadly, it is accurate, and it is worth noting that Justice's description of the fantastic as an "extension of the possible" applies to post-apocalyptic futurities in the sense that they show a future where the already oppressive and murderous settler colonial structure changes form but retains its fundamentally violent and dispossessive character. The roving bands of savage marauders who play such a prominent role in settler post-apocalyptic fiction are also part of Indigenous post-apocalyptic fictions except their violence is more explicitly racialized and more expressly colonialist. Still, Justice's contention that the fantastic "expands the range of options for Indigenous characters" is worth elaborating on in the context of post-apocalyptic fiction. Opportunities for cultural resurgence, traditionalist revivalism, and for the formation of new kinds of Indigenous community are a prominent feature of the Indigenous post-apocalypse. As Waubgeshig Rice has noted, there are "shreds of promise in what's smouldering. The ends of some things can be opportunities to start over" (Johnson). And yet the post-apocalyptic setting itself, one of violence and death, imposes a certain precarity on its Indigenous characters. The "range of options" may expand for certain characters in these novels, but they, if anything, contract for others. Who lives and who dies can be narratively contingent and effectively "random" in the Indigenous post-apocalypse: in Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*, the elder Minerva is killed during a rescue attempt taken up by the novel's pan-Indigenous cast even though she is depicted as a positive figure, as an elder to the novel's band of survivors.

Additionally, the death of the character J.C. in Waubgeshig Rice's *Moon of the Turning Leaves* occurs due to a broken leg from an accidental fall. J.C.'s example is, however, instructive since he survives the injury, but is unable to continue the journey with the rest of his community members and chooses to remain behind. As the novel notes, in the "new era" of the post-apocalypse, "few had the opportunity to decide their own fate peacefully" (*MTL* 140). While the situation itself forced precarity on J.C., he nonetheless had a degree of constrained agency. In many works of Indigenous post-apocalyptic

fiction, the narrative factor of *choice* plays a prominent role in the ultimate fates of characters. The future is a terminal, deadly space and those who do not embody what Gerald Vizenor refers to as "survivance," a state of survival that is "more than survival, an active presence," are unlikely to endure (*Fugitive Poses* 15). Vizenor juxtaposes survivance with the notion of "terminal creeds," his term for "beliefs that seek to impose static definitions on the world" (*Bearheart* 249). The static nature of terminal creeds specifically relates to the occidental simulations of Indians that have existed since the moment Christopher Columbus first turned his "striven western gaze" on the Taíno people and saw only "naked servants with no religion" (*Heirs of Columbus* 184). Natives who embody these simulations, who embrace modernity's "tedious, haunted mission of civilization" to enforce the "practices of separation" and the "ideologies of dominance" of settler colonialism (*Fugitive Poses* 97), have themselves taken on a terminal identity, an identity with no future. In the Indigenous post-apocalypse, the future becomes an unkind space to all Indigenous characters, but none more so than the Native characters who live and abide by terminal creeds.

Justice describes Indigenous speculative fiction as offering a "complementary and distinctive range of reading and interpretive strategies that can undo the violence of the deficit models of 'the real,' and offer transformative visions of other lives, experiences, and histories" (142). He goes on to propose that Indigenous speculative fictions should be described as "wonderworks," creative gestures toward "other ways of being in the world" (Justice 152). According to Justice, wonder is "rooted in meaningful uncertainty, curiosity, humility" and serves as a reminder that "other worlds exist" and that the wonderwork is intended to help Indigenous peoples imagine "beyond the wounding now into a better tomorrow, working, writing and dreaming a future into being" (156). Similarly, in "Visual Cultures of Indigenous Futurisms," Lindsay Nixon discusses the potential for Indigenous speculative fiction to "respond to the dystopian now, grounding their cultural resurgence in contextual and relational practices," insisting that even when these works have negative or violent dimensions that "love and kinship as resurgence" serve as a counterbalance (Nixon 335). Nixon goes on to define Indigenous futurities as a "contextual ideology of resurgence, one based in love and kinship, imagining a better, prosperous, and kinder future for all life within the galaxies" (337). Both Justice and Nixon's concepts are worth considering in relation to Indigenous post-apocalyptic fiction specifically because, while they do express a common theme shared by many of the narratives, they also emphasize speculative fiction's positive attributes, the resurgent and creative possibilities it suggests, as opposed to the genre-specific attributes that make each work specifically post-apocalyptic.

In Vizenor's *Bearheart*, for example, the focus is on a community of tribal pilgrims, and, in this sense, the novel very much reflects the potential for speculative modes to, as Nixon puts it, "project Indigenous life into the future imaginary" (Nixon 334). At the same time, though, Vizenor's novel emphasizes the precarity and violence of the post-apocalypse in a similar way to settler texts. The victims of this violence are, as noted above, those who fall prey to terminal creeds. It is, therefore, worth placing special emphasis on the degree to which the Indigenous post-apocalypse critiques what Justice describes as the "violence of the deficit models of 'the real'" in two senses: the violence which settler colonialism inflicts on Indigenous peoples and the violence contained in terminal identities produced in response to colonialism. While Indigenous post-apocalyptic fictions do focus on thinking otherwise about the future and on providing Indigenous readers with imaginative alternatives to colonialism, these positive attributes are, a la Mailhot, joy and wonder that is "earned, because what good is it without the threat it can be taken away" (Mailhot). For Indigenous writers, the post-apocalypse provides this threat with its future of violence and death, but also suggests that one's survival depends upon their ability to refute the terminal embrace of a colonized identity. In this sense, Indigenous post-apocalyptic fictions are often expressions of a *terminal futurity* rather than a purely "joyous" one, with the healing and resurgence of communities and cultures contained in these narratives always juxtaposed with threats both external and internal.

Vizenor's novel *Darkness in St. Louis: Bearheart*, which was updated and retitled *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles* in 1990, is an important text in the Indigenous post-apocalyptic tradition for many reasons. Its publication in 1978 predates many of the more prominent literary and cinematic examples of post-apocalyptic settings and its importance as a formative antecedent to Indigenous speculative fiction cannot be overstated. Set in a future United States where the gas has run out and society has collapsed, *Bearheart* chronicles the journey of a pan-Indigenous group of mixed-blood Natives who journey together southward and attempt to survive a world in which communities founded on terminal creeds, bands of cannibals, and the remnants of the settler colonial structure threaten their lives. Described by Vizenor as "tribal pilgrims" and "circus pilgrims," this group loses most of its members over the course of the novel, with many suffering fates brought about by their own bad choices. The cultural figure of the trickster plays a prominent role in *Bearheart*, as it does in Vizenor's other fictional and theoretical works, with certain characters embodying trickster's creative and destructive tendencies. At the same time, these characters also embody the terminal creeds of settler colonialism to varying degrees, and the fate that befalls them often reflects that. The character of Belladonna Darwin Winter-Catcher, for

example, frequently espouses a stereotypical and terminal perspective on Nativeness.[1] When the pilgrims visit a settlement called Orion, made up of "descendants of famous hunters and bucking horse breeders" (BH 189), Belladonna is asked to give a speech on Native identity. Her resulting lecture consists of pan-Indianist generalities and vague spiritualism, insisting that Natives are "children of dreams and visions" and that their bodies "are connected to mother earth and our minds are part of the clouds" (BH 194). Moreover, Belladonna attempts to create a stable sense of Indigenous identity through her speech, which is met with criticism by the audience. One hunter replies that "Indians are an invention" and that it was the world that "invented the Indian," not Natives themselves (BH 195). Belladonna embodies an identity that was the product of the settler imaginary. Her attempts to define Nativeness consist of her describing the Indian as "a member of a recognized tribe and a person who has Indian blood" (BH 195), using federal recognition by the United States government and the concept of blood quantum as the markers of Indigenous identity. It is an identity formulated as a *reaction* to settler colonialism, using colonialism's measures of Indigeneity rather than communal ones. For her performance, she is rewarded by the audience with a poisoned sugar cookie, which kills her. Identities produced according to the "racialist tropes of vanishment" (*Fugitive Poses* 91) only lead to death in the post-apocalyptic landscape of *Bearheart*. According to Vizenor, "identity is a choice, but identity is [also] a responsibility. And it's not who people are by their fractions or their quantum; it's who those people are by their responsibility with peers and families and communities" (*Survivance* 43). In *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles*, characters who make the wrong choices, who cling to identities formed as a response to settler colonialism, are certain to lose their lives.

To further illustrate this, it is worth briefly turning to a distinctly *un*-joyous example of Indigenous speculative fiction, Stephen Graham Jones's 2003 novel *the bird is gone: a manifesto*. Jones's dystopian setting imagines a future where North and South Dakota have become Indian Territory again. The potentially positive nature of this new Indigenous polity is, however, compromised by the inability of the Native cast in *the bird is gone* to "think otherwise," to imagine Indigeneity beyond colonialism. In the new Indian Territory, Indigenous characters define their Nativeness by their maladies. The phrase "pink eye was all the rage" recurs at various points of the novel and refers to a form of pink eye going around that only affects Natives. Consequently, it becomes "the STD of choice" (Jones 63), a marker of who's Native and who isn't. Jones

[1] Bellodonna's name gestures toward this, with "Belladonna" referencing a type of poisonous (and non-Indigenous to North America) nightshade, "Darwin" symbolizing the scientism at the core of how she views Native identity, and "Winter-Catcher" potentially being a play on dreamcatchers (instead of dreams, Belladonna catches winter).

describes how pink eye has replaced earlier ways of identifying Natives such as nipple color and teeth (one character is described as having formerly carried around an incisor on a string as an "ID badge") (Jones 101). The emergence of the free Dakotas has also affected how the characters view themselves, with the character Courtney Peltdowne bemoaning that she has become "ordinary" in the midst of five million other Natives and no longer embodies "everything exotic" (Jones 22). Effectively, settler projections of foreignness and exoticism became an identity unto themselves for Courtney, who struggles with feeling Native otherwise. Jones's future is, in other words, dystopian and negative, emphasizing the degree to which thinking otherwise beyond the settler imagination and the settler colonial present are difficult tasks to accomplish.[2] In many respects, the *bird is gone* reflects Jones's desire to refute attempts to essentialize or confer definitional stability upon Indigenous identities. In "Letter to a Just-Starting-Out Indian Writer," Jones notes how the "cruelest form of essentialism is that which we lay on ourselves" and describes essentialism as a "knee-jerk response" to colonialism ("Letter" 129). Placing strict definitions on Native identity is "playing [the colonizer's] game and becoming an "entry in an encyclopedia" ("Letter" 128). In *the bird is gone*, he deliberately lampoons this effort by incorporating a list of "Terms" at the end of the novel which refuse to clearly define any of the novel's terminology.

Jones's novel is helpful to consider alongside Vizenor's concept of the terminal creed since it focuses very directly on identity formation produced in response to the terminal creeds of settler colonialism. If the character of Courtney Peltdowne, for example, struggles to think of herself as "ordinary," as lacking the exoticism projected onto her by settlers, and if the other Native characters in the book have come to view sickness as a symbol of Indigeneity, it is because they have formulated identities which, as Jones notes, are a "knee-jerk response" to colonialism, which are reactive and, as a result, limited, the sort of identity that represents a dead-end for Indigenous peoples, an abnegation of Indigenous futurity. These terminal identities are, in some respects, similar to the concept of *ressentiment* described by Friedrich Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Nietzsche characterizes *ressentiment* as a reactive process of interpellation that serves to "sanctify revenge with the term justice" and to "legitimize with revenge emotional reactions in general" (52). According to Nietzsche, "every sufferer instinctively looks for a cause of his distress," for a "guilty culprit who is receptive to distress" (99). By releasing one's emotions against the object of guilt, the sufferer finds their "longed-for narcotic against pain of any kind." *Ressentiment*, then, is an attempt to "anaesthesize pain through emotion," a "purely protective

[2] For a more utopian reading of Jones's narrative, see Baudemann 2018.

reaction" or reflex to pain, that seeks to substitute a "tormenting, secret pain" with violent emotions (99). Nietzsche viewed the masses as "poisoned, corrupted by [their] *ressentiment*" and subsequently intent on destroying the "seeming privilege of the elite" when, in fact, they should join the elite by achieving "the highest form of will to power" (Jonas 686). Guy Elgat has argued that *ressentiment* as described by Nietzsche contains within it "degrees of epistemic acuity," or the ability to "identify and focus on its proper aim" or the root cause of the *ressentiment* (Elgat 247).

Similarly, Glen Coulthard in *Red Skin, White Masks* critiques the notion of *ressentiment* as "irredeemably vengeful, reactionary, and backward-looking" (Coulthard 108), arguing that what is often mistaken as "Indigenous peoples' *ressentiment*—understood as an incapacitating inability or unwillingness to get over the past" is, in fact, a justified type of Indigenous resentment, or a " a politicized expression of Indigenous anger and outrage directed at a structural and symbolic violence that still structures our lives, our relations with others, and our relationships with land" (Coulthard 109). While Coulthard demonstrates the potentiality of *ressentiment* to serve as a form of political consciousness, my focus here is not on how r*essentimen*t is channeled outward toward settler colonialism, but rather on how identities interpellated in *reaction* to colonialism foreclose Indigenous futurities. *Ressentiment*, in this sense, (1) privileges individual and settler futurities over tribal and communal ones and (2) does not equip the bearers of said *ressentiment* to survive in the future because it produces a colonized futurity that points to nothing, that represents a future *without* a future. To paraphrase Jones, the cruelest form of *ressentiment* is that which we lay on ourselves, and one of the most striking features of Indigenous post-apocalyptic literatures is how they explore *Native ressentiment* as a Indigenous identity formed in response to settler colonialism's simulations of Nativeness.

Having redefined terminal identities as a form of *ressentiment*, it is worth turning to recent examples of Indigenous post-apocalyptic fiction to examine how this *ressentiment* manifests in the futures they depict. In the speculative fiction novels of Cherie Dimaline, Native *ressentiment* plays an important role in the post-apocalyptic landscape *Dimaline* envisions. In Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* and *Hunting by Stars*, Canada is in a state of slow collapse due to settlers losing the ability to dream. In their desperation, they target Indigenous peoples (who are collectively still able to dream) and seek to extract a dream-making property said to be contained in Indigenous bone marrow. The novels' multitribal group of survivors, primarily made up of Ojibwe, Cree, and Métis individuals, are forced to go on the run from the settler colonial state and its "Recruiters," operatives who seek to send Indigenous people to residential schools, where they will be "processed." The Recruiters are not, however, the only

threat confronting the survivors. In *The Marrow Thieves*, the existence of Indigenous people who betray other Natives is alluded to early on when one of the community of survivors, Miigwans, warns the group that "[n]ot every Indian is an Indian" in the world they live in (55). This is confirmed when the group encounter two Native men, Travis and Lincoln. After briefly staying with the protagonist French's community, the two are revealed to be "traitors," "Indians turning in Indians for reward" (MT 132). Travis describes how "[e]very head is worth a fortune" and the two men attempt to capture the community of survivors before they are killed. The brief glimpse readers receive of Travis and Lincoln reveals them to be debased and lost. Travis's voice is "like an echo of a man he used to be" and he alludes to having done "bad shit in my time in the cities" and of having once had "bad habits" (126–27). After their attempt to capture the community fails, he describes his deceased partner, Lincoln, as having been addicted to "pills" (132). Lincoln himself describes Indigenous people who resist being captured by Recruiters as "frigging woodlands wizards" and declares that the only choices available are to "run or you find other ways to fit in and get by" (126). Those who run, according to Lincoln, are "stupid" since there "[a]in't no use in holding on to ways that are dead. It just brings death closer" (126). Both Travis and Lincoln are portrayed as damaged individuals who made the choice to adapt to the post-apocalypse by betraying other Natives. Their actions, however, only lead to their own demise. When Travis pleads with French not to shoot him and calls him "Brother," he is executed (136). In Dimaline's post-apocalypse, "[n]ot every Indian is an Indian" and those who betray other Natives are not making a choice to survive, but simply doing what the colonizer wants, their identity shaped by Native *ressentiment*. Moreover, the contempt Lincoln expresses for Indigenous people surviving collectively and both men's willingness to condemn other Natives to death demonstrate the degree to which they envision survival in purely individualistic terms. They are strictly concerned with *their* survival.

Hunting by Stars delves even further into this element of Dimaline's post-apocalypse by introducing two Indigenous characters that personify Native *ressentiment.* The first is "the Chief," a Native man with a "collection of dolls," white women who believe their proximity to him will give them back their ability to dream (HBS 89). Patriarchal, avaricious, and abusive, "The Chief" is a man who was, in the pre-apocalypse, "plain old corrupt Chief Henry Williams, a stereotype" who had the "biggest house on the rez" and was "living the good life with the consultation money meant for the Band" (184). Unable to survive in the future without the power and privilege he once had and unwilling to see beyond the terminal creeds of colonialism, "the Chief" collects non-Indigenous wives and plays the role of a "real live Indian" for them to fulfill his desire for sex and power (146). In the world before the settlers stopped dreaming, he

was a stereotype, and in the post-apocalypse, he continues to perform that role. He is described as an "overexplaining, condescending man" (158), but the extent to which "the Chief" embodies the destructive influence of colonialism extends beyond that. He is revealed to be the uncle of Nam, a young non-binary Native who views him with contempt. Nam ultimately kills "the Chief" in order to help the survivors escape him, but also because he sexually abused Nam for many years (194). Billy-Ray Belcourt has argued that "to attach masculinity to the decolonial future might mean to repudiate queer life as such" and that "queerness cannot tether itself to the real in a world in which masculinity operates as an organizing force" (Belcourt). "The Chief" is an Indigenous man whose desire for power and whose willingness to abuse others makes him a symbol for an Indigenous masculinity that is shaped by the settler colonial state, a state that, as Audra Simpson has noted, is "heteropatriarchal" because it "serves the interest of what is understood as 'straightness' or heterosexuality and patriarchy" (Simpson 3). In this sense, "the Chief" is not simply a stereotype, but a man whose whole conception of himself is molded by a destructive and violent masculinity that models itself after colonialist heteropatriarchy.

The second Native character shaped by *ressentiment* in *Hunting by Stars* is Mitch, the protagonist French's lost brother, who has become an underling at a state-run "new residential school" where captured Natives are held until their bone marrow can be extracted (HBS 8). A handful of prisoners, such as Mitch, are allowed to move up through the program and assume positions of authority. As a character, Mitch is the antithesis of what French and his family of Indigenous survivors represent. While French learns that "stillness was death" living with his community (7), Mitch assures him that he can "finally be still" (76). Miigwans tells French that "we are not all one people" and that, despite everyone in the group being "Dreamers," they remained "separate nations" (22). Mitch, on the other hand, has embraced a Christian identity, what French derisively refers to as "pretend-gospel saved" (84), and argues the opposite, that "[w]e are all one people" and that all "separations are false" under God (70). French's final memory of his brother before their reunion was of Mitch heroically drawing the attention of settler hunters away from French, but Mitch now views that as him having been "blind," "more focused on individual freedom than collective survival" (78). Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang have noted that "decolonization is not accountable to settlers, or settler futurity" (Tuck and Yang 35), a notion that is echoed by another member of French's family, Rose, who argues that settlers' loss of their ability to dream is "not our responsibility" (161). By contrast, Mitch has become colonized and has constructed an identity for himself that is wholly beholden to settler futurities and his own advancement in the system. Later in the novel, he tells French that Indigenous

infants can be the primary source of marrow extraction and that, if French joins him, they can "make it so that more Native people have a chance to truly live [as] productive members of a reborn society" (288). To Mitch, the "purpose of Indigenous people" is to "give birth to the answer" of settlers' inability to dream, regardless of whether that costs their life or not (288). Shortly before he is forced to kill his brother, French takes offense at Mitch using the word "Indian," noting that Mitch "hadn't earned it" (279). In the future, as was mentioned by Miigwans in *The Marrow Thieves* and is repeated in *Hunting by Stars* by Rose, "not all Indians were Indians these days" (127). Those who are unable to conceive of identities for themselves beyond settler colonialism and its imperatives, like Mitch or "the Chief," have no place in an Indigenous future.

In Waubgeshig Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow* and *Moon of the Turning Leaves*, an Ojibwe community on a remote reserve in northern Ontario struggles to adapt to the changing circumstances brought about by an apocalyptic event, the nature of which is left mysterious. In *Crusted Snow*, the ability of some Natives to adapt to the post-apocalypse over others is explored through the contrast of protagonist Evan Whitesky and his brother, Cam. At the beginning of the novel, Evan is shown hunting a moose, in part because the food his community receives from "the South" is "never as good, or as satisfying, as the meat he could bring in himself" (*MCS* 3), but also because he learned to hunt "out of tradition, but also necessity" (6). For Evan, "hunting, fishing and living on the land was Anishinaabe custom," a way of "living in harmony with the traditional ways" (6). As the cell phone signal drops and bad stories from what is going on outside his community demonstrate that an apocalyptic event has occurred, many members of the community panic and are ill-prepared, but Evan is much better equipped. In contrast, his brother Cam is described as bemoaning how they "[c]an't do nothin' with no power" and as having spent his life up to that point unemployed and "playing video games" (33). While Evan "had been out on the land learning real survival skills with his father and uncles," Cam chose to "stay behind, learning simulated ones in video games" (34). As a result, in the post-apocalypse, he lives a life of "inactivity and lack of initiative" and is unable to spot the danger brought to the community by the white outsider, Justin Scott (129). Rice has noted how on the "spectrum of contemporary Indigenous experiences," most Canadians see Indigenous peoples as either "victims or tragic figures" or "exceptional triumphs" (Wilmot). He envisioned the character Evan Whitesky as a "rez everyman," one of the "unsung" people who "make communities flourish." In this sense, Evan's role in *Crusted Snow* is exemplary, using the "unsung" community members of Indigenous communities in the present day as a model to emulate and as a contrast to Indigenous characters who are much more deeply tethered to settler colonialism and its ills.

In Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*, the community of survivors are described discussing the "wiindigo people, those who need to eat but can only eat human flesh" (MT 115). In *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, Justin Scott is gradually revealed to be such a person. He arrives in Evan's community and claims to only want a place to lay low as the world collapses outside the reserve. Early in the narrative, though, it is noted that the community has an alcohol ban in place because of a "snarl of tragedies" (MCS 44). Young people "had been committing suicide at horrifying rates" and this was "abetted by alcohol or gas or other solvents" (44). For decades, "despairing men had gotten drunk and beaten their partners and children, feeding a cycle of abuse that continued when those kids grew up" (44). As a result, Evan's reserve became a "dry community." After arriving, Justin Scott quickly becomes the "man to go to if you'd run out of smokes and alcohol" (131). He endears himself to segments of the community, including Evan's brother Cam. Cam is like Vinny, another community member who, even after the tribal council requests moderating electrical use, still has "every fuckin' light" on in his home at night (43). Both are unable to adjust to the lack of modern conveniences and life as they have previously known it. As a result, Cam is drawn to Justin Scott and, during the closing moments of the novel, is revealed to be helping the white man process the bodies of deceased community members for consumption. Evan sees his brother with "bloody hands" and as "emerging from a deep spell" upon realizing that Evan knows what he has done (202). While Cam and others are fooled by Scott, Evan sees him for what he is, having a dream in which the "beast Scott" appears before him with a "feral odor, like a rotting heap of moose innards" and a "disfigured," monstrous appearance (187). In Rice's novel, Evan Whitesky is depicted "trying to live in a good way, despite the pull of negative influences around him" (5). While he makes an effort to live "in harmony with the traditional ways" (6), other community members have become too deeply invested in the luxuries and comforts of the settler colonial past. Once the world of the settlers ends, they struggle to adapt and become susceptible to the influence of a wiindigo in their midst. Rice describes Scott as both an "allegory for settler colonialism" (Wilmot) and a wiindigo, noting that the "Wendigo stories reflect the darker nuances of our lives. They were primarily told to stop us from cannibalising each other. A Wendigo comes upon a community at its weakest" (White). In *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, the wiindigo Justin Scott prays upon the Anishinaabe community, but does so by specifically targeting its most vulnerable members, those who have become too dependent on settler colonialism. In the case of the two brothers, it is Evan, the brother who tries to live traditionally and looks toward the communal past for guidance about how to survive in the future, who apprehends the danger of Justin Scott. Cam, on the other hand, looks toward a colonial past of creature comforts and sees the future

as deficient by comparison. His susceptibility to Scott's malign influence demonstrates the degree to which his identity is too enmeshed with settler colonialism for him to see an adversary that his ancestors warned him of.

In Dimaline's *Hunting by Stars*, French is captured and, to appease his brother and to survive the experience, is forced to agree to be "drafted into the program" that indoctrinated his brother (72). French pretends to convert because of his desire to "get back home" (87), but the decision costs him dearly over the course of the novel and, when he is reunited with his family, he is unable to tell his romantic partner Rose what really happened out of shame (HBS 382–83). In Rice's sequel to *Crusted Snow*, *Moon of the Turning Leaves*, Evan's community sends a group of scouts on a journey southward to determine the livability of their tribe's ancestral homeland. Along the way, violence becomes inescapable the further south they get, with the group eventually being cornered by the Disciples, white supremacist survivors of society's collapse who "worship the gun" (MCS 230) and are organized as a militia. The Ojibwe characters are surrounded and forced to surrender but are saved when one of the Disciples begins executing his cohorts. This character looks white, but reveals himself to be Zhaabdiis, an Indigenous man who, like French, performed a role in order to survive in the post-apocalypse. By his own description, by the time Zhaabdiis encountered the Ojibwe survivors, he had been "lost a long time" (226). He recounts his story to the group and tells them that he ran into the Disciples and that he was asked directly "how white I was" (240). Zhaabdiis "didn't hesitate" after realizing he "was passing for white" since he wanted to "keep living" (240). The Ojibwe characters initially do not trust Zhaabdiis, but they come to accept him more when he tells them that "if you wanna see the future, if you wanna survive, you gotta find others. If you think you care about the future and your life ends alone, what was it worth" (244). Zhaabdis's desire to find community, to find other Ojibwes, is successful even though he embraced an identity settlers projected onto him, but his strategic *ressentiment* does eventually catch up with him. A group of Disciples recognize him and, seeing him with "savages," execute him (273–74). While both Rice and Dimaline's novels envision scenarios in which Indigenous characters are forced to embrace a false identity as a means of survival, they are both equally clear that doing so can come at a high cost. Strategic adoption of terminal creeds and identities can be a measure in survivance in exigent scenarios, but it requires an ethical compromise that can make moving forward difficult or even, in Zhaabdis's case, impossible. The contrast between French and Zhaabdiis and the two traitors in Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* is interesting to consider since the former aid and abet the colonizer out of a desire to survive until they can find community while the latter are entirely self-interested, selling other Natives out to keep themselves alive and in the colonizer's good graces. In

Rice and Dimaline's texts, however, *ressentiment* is dangerous to the self regardless of motivation.

Like Dimaline's *Hunting by Stars*, *Moon of the Turning Leaves* does not view Indigenous post-apocalyptic fictions as being accountable to settler futurities. While the non-Indigenous character Meghan, who executed the sinister outsider Justin Scott in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, becomes part of the community and "one of their own" by the time of its sequel (*MTL* 21), the "dying world" envisioned by Rice is otherwise not kind to settlers (126). The Ojibwe scouts in *Turning Leaves* travel through the nearest city, Gibson, and find that death "has swept through this place," with the violences and the "depravity that followed" the apocalypse still readily apparent (100). Settler survivors like the Disciplines attempt to "recapture the original heroic spirit of the white man and reclaim the land for themselves" by using firearms and violence, but they are, nonetheless, running out of bullets and suffering from sickness produced by failing nuclear reactors in the United States (241–42). While they are a threat, their way of life is dying while that of protagonists Evan and Nangohns Whitesky and their Ojibwe community is just beginning, symbolized during the novel's opening by the birth of an infant, described as a "light that will help lead the way out of this darkness" (6). Part of how Rice envisions an Indigenous future is to ground it in the futurity of a collective people, the Anishinaabek. While Dimaline's community of survivors consists of Metis, Cree, and Ojibwe survivors (among others), Rice focuses on Anishinaabe peoples.[3] In Rice's novels, survival means reclaiming what was lost to Anishinaabek, whether that be language, land, or living off the land. Nangohns' father, Evan, refuses to discuss "Jibwaa," the "time before" (9), with its "airplanes, trucks, and satellites" (12).[4] At a later point, the characters reminisce about pizza, which Evan admits was "pretty good," but that before the apocalypse, "most of the food that tasted good was bad for us" (71). When the group visits Gibson, the remnants of "city amenities" such as salons and convenience stores are described as things the Ojibwe survivors "ultimately never needed" (112). Similarly, when the group encounter another community of Anishinaabek, Linda, the elder leading this community, pretends to be offended they don't say grace prior to eating before laughing and asserting that "[t]hat god died a long time ago" (176). At this community, the survivors see a "diversity of complexions," but all speak "the same language" (185). At the end of the novel, Evan's partner Nicole

[3] An allusion is made to a surviving Lakota community, but otherwise, Rice's *Moon* novels remain very focused on Anishinaabe futurities. (See Waubgeshig Rice, 2023: 238).

[4] It is worth noting that Evan's daughter Nangohns criticizes her father for keeping too much of the past from the young ones, arguing that, while she knows the adults were trying to "protect them," they still "ignored" their children's questions. Nangohns insists that the young members of the tribe "deserve a say in the world we're going to live in" and that being fully informed about the colonial past will help with that. (See Waubgeshig Rice, 2023: 110–111).

tells Waawaaskone, the infant born at the beginning of the narrative, that "[w]e'll always be here" in English, which is described as a "language her granddaughter didn't understand" (301). The journey of the scouts was successful, and the community is able to relocate to and reclaim the ancestral homeland settlers removed them from. In Rice's *Moon* novels, Anishnaabe futurities are expressed through a rejection of the signifiers, luxuries, and the futurity of settler colonialism, and through an imaginative revitalization of the culture, language, and land that colonialism tried to take away, with the new home of the community being described as where "their people had been renewed" (300).

It is worth turning back to the topic of precarity before concluding because, while both Dimaline and Rice's novels illustrate the lethality of Native *ressentiment*, the terminal futures they construct also, as noted above, do not spare the virtuous from death. In Dimaline's *Hunting by Stars*, the deaths of two members of French's family, Tree and Zheegwon, are worth examining, as well as the death of "rez everyman" Evan Whitesky at the end of *Moon of the Turning Leaves*. None of these characters are depicted as embracing a colonized identity and yet all three do not survive their respective narratives. In which case, what separates their fates from the deaths of characters like Belladonna in *Bearheart* or Mitch in *Hunting by Stars*? It is, first of all, important to note that death's omnipresence in these narratives and its intrusion into the lives of their characters signify the degree to which the Indigenous post-apocalypse does not avoid the generic conventions of the form, but instead invests those conventions with new significance. In the case of Tree and Zheegwon, their deaths occur during an escape attempt from a vigilante group of settler mothers known as the Mothers of Meaningful Slumber (MOMS). Tree and Zheegwon fight to escape MOMS after the birth of Ishkode, the child of two other family members, Wab and Chi Boy. Their deaths occur after it is revealed that MOMS plan to "eat" the child (355) and this is critical for giving Tree and Zheegwon's deaths their proper context. When Ishkode is born, French states that "Wab and Chi Boy had a child. We had a child. Even now, our family was growing" (347). Earlier in the novel, Chi Boy describes his philosophy of survival as follows: "Sometimes you risk everything for a life worth living, even if you're not the one who'll be alive to live it" (292). In *Turning Leaves*, the novel opens with the birth of Evan's granddaughter Waawaaskone, who is described as a "light that will help lead the way out of this darkness (*MTL* 6). When Evan's community are debating moving to their ancestral homeland, he tells his wife Nicole that they "gotta do this move for her and the young ones," to which Nicole replies, "Yeah, they deserve that chance. They're our future" (49–50). This is reinforced later when Nangohns, in response to one of the group of travelers expressing misgivings about continuing the journey, asks, "What

about us" (110)? She describes herself and other young members of the community as the "young ones," the "next generation," and "the future," and notes that "I love that place and respect that land," but that it was where "we were supposed to disappear," the site of the community's forced relocation (110). Nangohns insists that "we have to think about the future" and tells the adults that the children will "still be here after you're gone" and that they "deserve a say in the world we're going to live in" (111). Both Dimaline and Rice's novels contextualize the deaths of their positive characters by emphasizing that their deaths occurred while seeking communal survivance and a "life worth living" (HBS 292). In contrast, the Native characters in thrall to *ressentiment* are either self-seeking, focused on their own personal futurities, or willing to sacrifice Indigenous futurities for the continuance of settler colonialism. Life is precarious in the Indigenous post-apocalypse, but how Indigenous death signifies depends a great deal on what kind of future the characters choose to fight for.

As the group of scouts prepare to set off toward the beginning of Rice's *Moon of the Turning Leaves*, the community they are about to leave behind sing them a "welcoming song" (43). By contrast, in Dimaline's *Hunting by Stars*, the survivors are unable to sing or to dance since "[m]aking noise drew attention," so the people "had gone quiet" (HBS 388). At the end of Dimaline's novel, a variety of "choreographies" are described: the choreography of survival, of want, of reclamation, and "of being born everything the ancestors ever dreamed of" (390). A wish is made for resurgence, for the Indigenous characters to be "loud again" (389). While the Indigenous characters of Dimaline's *Marrow Thieves* series spend the novels running from violence, they are also described by Miigwans as always "running toward something. We are running toward community, toward safety, toward a future centered around what we know and understand to be the good life" (HBS 232). In an interview with the *Toronto Star*, Dimaline notes that what she thinks about while writing her characters is the question of "what kind of ancestor do you want to be" (Dundas)? She goes on to elaborate that "we're not always backwards, but also forward." In both Dimaline and Rice's novels, the ability to extricate one's community from precarity arises, in part, by rejecting Native *ressentiment* and surviving the perfidy and malevolence of Indigenous characters who are shaped by it. Both authors' works provide, as Nixon notes, a "contextual ideology of resurgence, one based in love and kinship, imagining a better, prosperous, and kinder future for all life within the galaxies" (337), but they also envision futurities in which certain Indigenous peoples are unable to adapt and change because they are too colonized to envision a future beyond colonialism. Dimaline's comments about looking "backwards" and "forward" are worth considering in this context since they illustrate a useful contrast. For a character like Evan Whitesky in Rice's novels, looking "backwards" is living a

life grounded in "Anishinaabe custom" (MCS 6) and prepares him to confront a hostile future. For the multitribal community of Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* series, looking "backwards" is maintaining an image of the "good life" the survivors hope to recuperate one day (HBS 232). In the case of Indigenous characters like French's brother Mitch or "the Chief" in *Hunting by Stars* or the community members who fall prey to Justin Scott in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, looking "backwards" represents a futile attempt to cling to settler colonialism and the identities it produced. These characters are unable to look "forward" because they have been shaped by a *ressentiment* without a future, by terminal creeds connected to settler futurities that, in Rice and Dimaline's narratives, are drawing to a close.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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