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Wondrous Hauntings in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*

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In *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (2018), Cherokee author Daniel Heath Justice suggests the term "wonderwork" as a useful alternative to "speculative fiction" or "fantastic literature", to describe Indigenous creative works that convey "meaningful ways of experiencing this and other worlds" beyond dualistic notions of real and unreal. In Justice's formulation, Indigenous wonderworks counter colonial deficit narratives and inspire radical hope by envisioning alternative futures. Hope does not deny struggle, and it can be a driving force even in texts in which trauma is foregrounded, as in *Monkey Beach* (2000), the debut novel of Haisla/Heiltsuk author Eden Robinson. Set in the evocative landscapes of British Columbia, enlivened by talking crows, forest spirits, b'gwus, and other more-than-human beings, the novel incorporates Indigenous epistemologies while engaging with and subverting the conventions of the Euro-Canadian Gothic tradition. If Indigenous ghosts have long been a part of a white settler Canadian narrative of dominance – with Indigenous presence spectralized to justify land theft and to enforce a sense of loss and deficit – the ghostly figures in Robinson's novel oppose colonial tropes and the Gothic's discourses of pity, absence and terror. Robinson conveys the haunting legacy of residential schools through silences, narrative gaps, and intergenerational echoes of colonial violence, but her ghosts are never merely allegories of trauma. Instead, they embody kinship, knowledge, more-than-human agency, and a profound sense of wonder, engaging Lisa in reciprocal relationships that demand responsibility, interpretation, and care. Drawing from Daniel Heath Justice's theorization of wonderworks as an antidote to despair, as well as Haisla critical perspectives on wonder, this paper examines how *Monkey Beach* challenges narratives of Indigenous absence and loss, offering instead a vision of presence, interconnectedness, and radical hope.

In *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (2018), Cherokee author Daniel Heath Justice suggests the term "wonderwork" is a useful alternative to "speculative fiction," "fantasy," or "fantastic literature," through which to define Indigenous creative works that convey "meaningful ways of experiencing this and other worlds" beyond dualistic assumptions and colonially constituted notions of reality (152). Justice issues a challenge to scholarship on "the fantastic," a broad European literary category encompassing the Gothic, fantasy, and sci-fi, because it is rooted in an ideology that neatly separates the "real" from the transcendent, while Indigenous writers often reject such seemingly clear-cut divisions. For Indigenous writers of speculative fiction like Justice, "the fantastic is an extension of the possible, not the impossible" (149). Justice is one in a long line of Indigenous scholars who have built critiques of the hegemony of Western knowledge systems. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Māori, Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou iwi), for example, stresses that "What makes ideas 'real' is the system of knowledge, the formation of culture, and the relations of power in which these concepts are located." When confronted by the worldviews of other societies, European ideologies sediment into a reified conception of Western reality as "representing something 'better', reflecting 'higher orders' of thinking" and masquerading as a "universal truth" (50–1).[1] A deficit model is implicit in narrative categories and theories of literature which narrowly define reality though a lens of colonial assumptions. The colonial myth of "Indigenous deficiency," which Justice identifies as the most "corrosive" of colonial stories, locates the roots of Indigenous peoples' struggles and losses in their "supposed lack of basic human decency," rather than in colonial violence (2, 3). In this formulation, loss and damage constitute the benchmark against which "real" Indigenous experience is measured and it is in this context that Justice is critical of realist fiction that is "framed by social presumptions that naturalize colonialism and its effects" and that "presume[s] the inevitability of Indigenous deficit" (148). This way of representing Indigenous reality is damage centered. Eve Tuck (Unangax^) criticizes damage-centered approaches as pathologizing if they reinscribe "a one-dimensional" picture of Indigenous peoples as "depleted, ruined, and hopeless" (409). Trauma may be a part of the Indigenous experience, but so are healing, joy, love, wonder, and hope. Speculative fiction, "in its most transformative modes," offers a range of reading and interpretive strategies that can "undo the violence of the deficit models of 'the real'" (Justice 142). Indigenous wonderworks have a distinct capacity to inspire radical hope and new visions for the future by creating alternative imaginings and realities.

[1] French philosopher Jacques Derrida described "logocentrism" as an "ethnocentric metaphysics" rooted in "the history of the West," originating from Plato and characterized by binary oppositions (*Of Grammatology* 85). If logocentrism is primarily about language, in Derrida's usage it also implies all forms of thought that rely on a central, authoritative foundation or identity (the Logos).

Hope does not deny struggle, and it can be a driving force, even in texts in which trauma and suffering are foregrounded as in the case of *Monkey Beach* (2000), a debut novel by Haisla/Heiltsuk author Eden Robinson. Set in 1989 in the Haisla village of Kitamaat on the northern coast of British Columbia, the novel follows Lisamarie Michelle Hill (Lisa), a twenty-year-old Haisla woman with a spiritual gift that affords her the ability to perceive layers of existence wherein the tangible world coexists with a deeper, undisturbed reality. Dreams, visions, and spectral figures—at times caring and threatening—guide her or otherwise call her into a relationship with a world that lies just beyond the perceptible. Opening with the news that Lisa's brother Jimmy is lost at sea, the novel traces her physical and spiritual quest to uncover the truth behind his disappearance and delves into her personal and family history. Lisa recalls time spent fishing and camping with her uncle Mick, a former activist in the American Indian Movement (AIM), gathering berries, cooking, and learning Haisla with Ma-ma-oo ("grandmother" in Haisla), and searching for b'gwus (or Sasquatches) with Jimmy in Monkey Beach. Interspersed with these memories are instances of bullying and isolation during her schoolyears, personal trauma, which includes her experience of rape and the harrowing loss of family members, as well as the collective trauma stemming from the enduring legacy of residential schools and ongoing colonial oppression.

Monkey Beach features evocative landscapes enlivened by talking crows, forest spirits, b'gwus and other more-than-human beings.[2] Robinson incorporates Indigenous views and epistemologies while employing a writing style that reflects patterns in Euro-Canadian literary production. This intriguing blend has piqued the interest of many non-Indigenous scholars who seek to categorize *Monkey Beach* within established literary genres, often interpreting it as an intervention into Gothic literature. Robinson's skillful manipulation of gothic conventions is undeniable, as highlighted in Jodey Castricano's assertion that the novel "simultaneously invites, resists, and exceeds a Western European Gothic explanatory model" (806). Robinson herself cites Stephen King and Edgar Allan Poe as significant influences and situates her work within the "Canadian Gothic" tradition in which "our landscape is our haunted castle" ("On Writing"). She has nevertheless also expressed discomfort with the label and stated that she destroyed the second draft of her novel because she considered it "too gothic" (qtd. in Hunter 68). In recent scholarship, Carolina Buffoli emphasizes that "any reading" of *Monkey Beach* needs to contend with the novel's engagement with and subversion of gothic parameters while also paying attention to

[2] I acknowledge that as a European scholar my perspective may differ from other people whose culture and lineage align more closely with the worldviews and values expressed in the novel, and mine is only one of many possible readings.

the "complexities of the dialogue between Indigenous fiction and the Gothic genre" (155, 153). In North American fiction that espouses the Gothic Indigenous peoples are often depicted as monstruous, vanishing, spectral, or conspicuously absent, enforcing a historical narrative of settler dominance, a point also underscored by Métis scholar Warren Cariou ("Haunted Prairie" 727). The spectralization of Indigenous presence has been used to justify land theft and enforced Indigenous dispossession, emerging as it does from the works and politics of figures such as James Fenimore Cooper in the United States and Duncan Campbell Scott in Canada, and it continues to permeate North American cultural and literary discourse.[3] Through a postcolonial critical lens, Indigenous ghosts have been interpreted as expressions of the "postcolonial uncanny," manifestations of settlers' unease and reminders that the land they consider theirs is fruit of inequity and the dispossession of the rightful owners.[4] The discourse around haunting risks reinforcing colonial relations, particularly when Indigenous spectral figures are indiscriminately labelled as postcolonial or decolonizing gestures (Cameron 384). Cariou suggests the term "neo-colonial uncanny" is a more revealing signifier through which to describe the "lurking sense that the places settlers call home are not really theirs" and the "horrified sense of inevitability" that corresponds to a "passive conviction that colonial sins will be punished" (730). This can promote apathy as if it may be pointless to work toward any hope of reconciliation. Spectralization in this context is a configuration of the colonial myth of deficiency perpetuating the notion of Indigenous peoples as inherently lacking in presence, agency, and humanity. The portrayal of Indigenous communities as inconsequential remnants of a bygone era justifies continued dispossession.

Monkey Beach challenges this literary tradition, emphasizing Indigenous sovereignty and agency through more-than-human characters that articulate traditional and contemporary Indigenous knowledge as alive and present. In one instance, Robinson explicitly writes back to the "spectral Native" trope, subverting it by depicting two white specters standing on the shore of Monkey Beach. This image not only confronts the colonial gaze but also reimagines power dynamics within

[3] See for instance James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), John Richardson's *Wacousta* (1832), Duncan Campbell Scott's poem "Indian Place Names" (1905), and more recent works including Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* (1983), Maggie Siggins's *Revenge of the Land* (1991), and Sharon Butala's *The Perfection of the Morning* (1994).

[4] Postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha argues that the uncanny is "a paradigmatic colonial and postcolonial condition" inherent in the experience of dispossession, when the land itself becomes *unhomely* (9). The root of the German word for uncanny (*unheimlich*) is *heim*, meaning home. Gayatri Spivak reinscribes Freud's concept of the primordial home, which he identifies with the female body, to the Earth itself: "colonialism, decolonization and postcoloniality involved special kinds of traffic with people deemed 'other'—the familiarity of a presumed common humanity defamiliarized, as it were" (77). Building on these ideas, settler scholars Gelder and Jacobs further explore this notion in the context of Aboriginal peoples in Australia, highlighting the liminality of an existence of dispossession, where "one remains within the structures of colonialism even as one is somehow located beyond them or 'after' them" (Gelder & Jacobs 24).

Indigenous landscapes. The ghosts, a father and son in "matching neon green and black scuba gear," wave at Lisa from the shore (91). If they serve as a metaphor for colonial exploitation, their ghostly presence in this Indigenous site also emphasizes Indigenous sovereignty. Although Lisa initially feels a chill at the sight of them, her response quickly shifts to acknowledgment and indifference as she waves back in bare acknowledgment. By incorporating these seemingly insignificant white specters into her narrative, Robinson invites readers to reconsider perceptions of Indigenous sovereignty and Indigenous-settler relationships in colonial spaces. But ghosts in *Monkey Beach* are never solely symbolic. To reduce them to mere metaphors would be to miss the sense of wonder that permeates the novel, which is why it has been described as a *wonderwork*. While acknowledging the wide array of reading strategies that *Monkey Beach* offers, Justice warns against interpreting the novel solely as "a realist, magical realist, or Northern Gothic text" (154). To do so would reduce to falsehood the teachings that connect Lisa to her land and family. Such a limited reading would also undermine the ongoing struggles of the Haisla to protect their lands and communities, which encompass more-than-human entities as integral parts of their existence (Justice 155).

Over the course of two decades, gothic scholarship on *Monkey Beach* has evolved from predominantly tragic interpretations to more nuanced analyses that recognize the complexity and resistance embedded in Robinson's portrayal of ghostly figures and Indigenous experiences. Early criticism by Jennifer Andrews reduced the "mysterious creatures" within the narrative to a reflection of the protagonist's psychological turmoil (19). Similarly, Alison Rudd's characterization of the novel as "postcolonial Gothic" frames spirits as narrative tools through which to articulate traumatic colonial histories, with "history" interpreted solely through the lens of violence and the return of the repressed. This approach—in which "terror and pity are the moving forces" (Punter 55)—risks perpetuating narratives of deficit, victimhood, and loss if it does not adequately recognize whose repressed history is returning and why. David Gaertner offers a compelling counterpoint when suggesting that the ghosts in *Monkey Beach* symbolize the resurgence of Haisla worldviews as well as representing colonial trauma. Gaertner suggests that "Indigenous gothic novels" can serve as a testament to the resurgence of Indigenous culture in the face of settler colonialism's repressive forces (3). Certainly, the return of Haisla spirituality serves to familiarize rather than frighten in *Monkey Beach* and Gaertner's interpretation is nuanced, but Sarah Stunden argues against reading ghosts and spiritual figures solely as articulations of "traditional knowledge." In her view, this "flattens the deliberate juxtaposition of positive, life-affirming spiritual figures with the more dangerous, figurative ghosts that represent settler violence against the fictionalized Kitamaat community" (395).

In my reading, Robinson dramatizes haunting multiple ways, but I am wary of drawing clear-cut distinctions between threatening ghosts as symbols of trauma and "familial ghosts" that "nourish, protect, and guide Lisa" (Stunden 393). To do so would risk dismissing the ambivalence that is also exhibited by wondrous creatures in the text and oversimplify their complex portrayal.

In Western conceptualizations of haunting, the fear elicited by ghosts stems from their ambiguity and liminality, a feeling that is encapsulated by the notion of the uncanny. As theorized by Freud in 1919, the uncanny is a "class of the terrifying" which "leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" that has "undergone repression" and "emerged from it" (369). For feminist critic Hélène Cixous, what is "intolerable" about the ghost—the "direct figure of the uncanny"—is that it collapses the dichotomies of presence vs. absence, living vs. dead, present vs. past, thereby erasing boundaries: "Hence, the horror" (545). In *The Testimonial Uncanny* (2014), Julia Emberley introduces the term "Indigenous uncanny" to describe how Indigenous storytelling incorporates uncanny elements that express the presence of ancestral spirits, unresolved histories, and cultural dissonance created by colonial disruption. Whereas the postcolonial uncanny addresses the unsettling remnants of colonial rule, the Indigenous uncanny fosters a "reparative episteme," wherein Indigenous epistemologies engage with colonial violence through the interplay of the familiar and the strange in order to begin a process of healing (289). Emberley recognizes how entities and experiences can be simultaneously protective and threatening, comforting and unsettling, to reflect the complexities of Indigenous experience in a settler-colonial context, but a singular focus on the uncanny might also reduce wondrous beings to mere instruments for addressing colonial history.

Wonder is a more apt signifier to capture the myriad ways in which more-than-human entities in *Monkey Beach* evoke "astonishment, admiration, and even a bit of mindful fear" (Justice 153). Robinson captures wonder through Lisa's perspective of "magical" as meaning "full of endless opportunities for adventure" (102). Clearly, horror and fear are not Western prerogatives but part of a rich tradition of Haisla storytelling from which Robinson draws in her fiction. *Monkey Beach* is rich in intertextual links to *Tales of Kitamaat* (1956), a book by Robinson's uncle, Gordon Robinson, replete with Haisla monsters (114, 120). Robinson explores ambivalence and liminality through the figure of the b'gwus or "wild man of the woods", a tall, hairy creature whose "wide, friendly smile" is also menacing because his mouth seems to hold "too many teeth" and "they were all pointed" (7, 16). The b'gwus typically evokes fear in Haisla stories that have been passed down through the generations of Robinson's family, an autobiographical detail she incorporates into her novel

(*The Sasquatch at Home* 34–5; *Monkey Beach* 7–10). His presence is also profoundly wondrous, as Robinson suggests in a pivotal encounter with Lisa, where she feels "deeply comforted that magical things were still living in the world" (315–6).[5] While the uncanny primarily centers on terror—the familiar turned other and, therefore, monstruous—wonder encompasses a broader spectrum of emotional and cognitive responses that include fear and uneasiness but also joy, awe, excitement, and hope. Justice describes wondrous beings as "other and otherwise [...] outside the bounds of the everyday and mundane, perhaps unpredictable, but not necessarily alien, not necessarily foreign or dangerous—but not necessarily comforting and safe, either" (153). Seemingly both human and nonhuman, the b'gwus embodies liminality and wonder much like the novel's primary setting, Monkey Beach, named after this enigmatic figure (*The Sasquatch at Home* 29). Monkey Beach serves as a physical and symbolic threshold between worlds, as described in Lisa's dream on the night her brother disappears: "He stood at the edge of the sand, where the beach disappeared into the trees. The fog and clouds smeared the lines between land and sea and sky. He faded in an out of view as the fog rolled by" (7). Through this oneiric recounting, layers of imagery convey Monkey Beach as a space where reality is fluid and boundaries indistinct; it harbors a sense of wonder that is rooted in a deep connection to land and stories, and in Lisa's relationship with her brother.

Wonderworks are means through which Indigenous storytellers envision alternative ways of being in the world that reflect Indigenous epistemologies, politics, and relationships while also reinventing them (Justice 152). Countering narratives of erasure, deficit, and victimization, wonderworks provide models for better relationships and inspire hope for a better future. *Monkey Beach* is a wonderwork that celebrates Indigenous presence without denying trauma. At its heart is what Warren Cariou describes as a "reawakening to pain," not as "an end in itself" but as a "path towards spiritual healing" ("Dreamlike" 37). If Robinson subverts gothic tropes through her representation of wondrous beings as articulations of Indigenous knowledge, she also deploys uncanny elements to suggest a haunting that is emblematic of the history of the residential school system.[6] In what follows, I analyze how Robinson

[5] Because the b'gwus is gendered male in the novel, I maintain Robinson's usage of masculine pronouns in my analysis.

[6] Funded by the Canadian government and administered by Christian churches, the Indian Residential School System (IRSS) was active for more than a hundred years, with the last residential school closed in 1997. Its purpose was to sever connections between Indigenous children and their home culture in order to assimilate them into white settler Canadian culture. In 2007, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established to investigate the history and lasting impacts of IRSS on Indigenous families. In 2015, the TRC released an Executive Summary documenting crimes against humanity committed at residential schools across Canada, alongside 94 calls for acts of "reconciliation" to promote peaceful and respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

addresses colonial trauma, before exploring how wonder and storytelling intersect in a narrative that demands a reckoning with colonial horrors while inspiring possibilities for transformation.

Residential School Haunting

Haunting has long served as a metaphor for how the past continues to influence the present in subtle and unseen ways. From Jacques Derrida's hauntology to Avery Gordon's study of the sociological role of haunting, ghosts have been interpreted as manifestations that signal a reinscription of responsibility to lingering historical injustices and social violences, demanding redress (Derrida *Specters* xix; Gordon xvi). If the residential school system "haunts" Indigenous writing, the "Residential School Gothic" has sedimented as a "narrative genre of our present" (Henderson 127).[7] There are no ghosts in *Monkey Beach* that metaphorically embody the history of the residential schools, but this legacy looms over the characters in the story like a pervasive, albeit unspoken, specter. It persists as a subtext that is only brought to the surface in the last ten pages of the novel, when Lisa finds something that belongs to her brother's girlfriend, nicknamed Karaoke. It is an old black-and-white photograph of a priest and a little boy—Karaoke's uncle, Joshua—with a note on the back: "*Dear Joshua* [...] *I remember every day we spent together. How are you? I miss you terribly. Please write. Your friend in Christ, Archibald.*" A cut-out of Joshua's adult face is pasted over the priest's while Karaoke's face overlays that of little Joshua's, conveying the cyclical re-enactment of sexual abuse. When Lisa's brother Jimmy takes a fishing job on Joshua's boat after expressing his wish to propose to Karaoke, Lisa believes it is to earn money for the wedding. She does not understand the meaning of the collage because she lacks knowledge of the abuses perpetrated in this colonial institution. Only later, when she performs a blood offering to the spirit world and is shown a vision, does she understand that Jimmy killed Joshua and sunk his boat to avenge Karaoke's abuse, drowning in the process.

What haunts this novel and its protagonist is left suspended, as in "most hauntings in Gothic fiction" (Punter 57). Yet, unlike conventional Gothic narratives, the uncanny and traumatic return of the repressed in *Monkey Beach* is not embodied in ghostly figures but resides in the material and ongoing effects of colonialism (Castricano 802). Even though residential school history is unintelligible to Lisa, and her family refuses to speak about it, she witnesses intergenerational trauma in the form of alcoholism and erratic behavior exhibited by her Uncle Mick and Aunt Trudy, both of whom

[7] In 2007, Sam McKegney analysed residential school haunting as "subject matter, as setting, as repressed (communal or individual) memory, as source of anger, shame, pain, and violence, and as unspoken backdrop to conditions of authorship" (11).

are survivors of residential schools. The effects of the residential schools seep into the family, from Trudy's resentment of her mother to Mick's anger at the Catholic Church which he redirects towards family members: "You're buying into a religion that thought the best way to make us white was to fucking torture children—" (110). Through abundant use of ellipses, as in this case, Robinson systematically prevents her characters from voicing the psychological, ideological, and physical abuse that occurred in state-led and Catholic-run institutions. Unable to comprehend the broader socio-historical context that shapes her community's experiences as well as those of her family, Lisa is left vulnerable. For example, when a group of white men harasses her cousin Erica and Lisa intervenes, she does not anticipate the dangerous consequences of deeply ingrained racism. Her aunt Trudy tries to explain that as an Indigenous woman, Lisa faces a prejudiced system that often blames the victim rather than the perpetrator: "There were tons of priests in the residential schools [...] that 'helped' themselves to little kids just like you. You look at me and tell me how many of them got away scot-free". Trudy's stark reminder of unchecked abuses underlines their continuity, but Lisa mistakes her family's protection and awareness of systemic injustices for blame: "I didn't understand why I was the one getting blamed for some assholes acting like assholes" (255). This conversation suggests that Lisa's bravery is fraught with risks she has yet to fully understand.

Robinson sets her novel in the 1970s and 1980s, when the horrific truths about residential schools were still largely suppressed, unacknowledged in public discourse and hidden beneath the surface of mainstream awareness. By 2000, when *Monkey Beach* was published, residential schools had begun to emerge much more prominently in societal consciousness. In the 1990s, the "principal source of outrage" driving condemnation of the residential school system pertained less to the violation of the rights of Indigenous peoples and more to the violation of human rights, particularly the sexual victimization of children (Niezen 29). This is reflected in the novel insofar as sexual violence in a residential school triggers the plot and, more broadly, in the Canadian Gothic and its preoccupation with child sexual abuse in dehumanizing institutional settings (Henderson 131). But if gothic portrayals confine settler colonial injustices to the Indian Residential School System and to acts of sexual violence against children, as Henderson argues, in *Monkey Beach* settler power is not presented as monolithic. Through various narrative threads, Robinson interweaves a broader examination of the enduring impact of colonialism on Indigenous communities by delving into interconnected issues including racism, damaging policies of assimilation, epidemics, colonial gendered violence and domestic violence, land theft, resource extraction and environmental contamination, as well as the emotional toll of activism and Indigenous rights advocacy.

Robinson makes clear that the legacy of residential school abuse impacts Lisa despite her not being directly involved—neither she nor her parents attended residential schools—because collective trauma is ubiquitous. Lisa becomes entangled in the cycle of violence as a victim of rape; that the abuser, Cheese, is one of Joshua's nephews emphasizes this. Cheese may be another of Joshua's victims, and his crime against Lisa may be perhaps too readily attributed to the legacy of residential schools.[8] But I am more interested in an ambiguous trail of suggestions that Robinson leaves regarding another of Joshua's nephews, Pooch, who is also Lisa's closest friend and who tragically commits suicide. In an exchange observed by Lisa from a distance, Pooch, Joshua, and Karaoke have a tense interaction involving an envelope that may contain the photograph Lisa discovers at the novel's end. Robinson creates narrative ambiguity at every turn by crafting characters whose motivations and actions are difficult to pin down: Joshua grabs Pooch by the neck and steers him out of view when he rejects the envelope, while Karaoke retrieves it and hands it back to Pooch (288). Later in the novel, Pooch shoots himself, re-enacting his father suicide. Karaoke almost brings truth to the surface when suggesting that "we all know why he did it", but her cousin Frank silences her. Karaoke's frustrated response, "Yes, let's not talk about it. Josh didn't—", conveys her rebellious attempt to push the truth out into the open, but Robinson's use of ellipses again underscores the overwhelming silence surrounding the traumatic events within the community (319). If violence within Indigenous communities is often interpreted though a lens of deficiency, seen as the product of "inherently abnormal and defective" peoples, as Cindy Holmes and Sarah Hunt (Kwagiulth) have observed and criticized (16), Robinson emphasizes self-harm and community violence as colonial phenomena, and the legacy of residential schools and oppression which manifests in complex ways in the novel's present.

Unnarratability in the novel has received considerable critical attention, and Sam McKegney has examined how repression is thematized through water metaphors of submersion to illustrate how trauma affects individuals when it is pushed beneath the surface and hidden from conscious recognition. Gaertner has argued that if the "ocean and what lies beneath it" represent "a topography of repression", then Lisa's descent into the water can be read as a resurgence (8). I would extend McKegney's and Gaertner's readings to suggest that the recurring motif of descending to the bottom of the ocean serves as a metaphor for truth-seeking. In the novel's beginning,

[8] Stunden suggests that a "sense of violation" is "conjured up in Lisa's encounter with the embodied ghost of Alberni's [residential school] history" (402). While acknowledgement of the cycles of abuse that stem from residential schools is essential, interpreting sexual violence as metaphorically embodying the ghost of an institution shifts responsibility away from the abuser.

six crows speak to Lisa in Haisla and, with the imperative "La'es", tell her to "go down to the bottom of the ocean" (1). This is an early indication of Lisa's mission, an anticipation of her brother's fate and also, on a symbolic level, an invitation to come to terms with what has been kept hidden by uncovering trauma and reconnecting with Haisla spirituality. Lisa consistently erects emotional and cognitive barriers, though, resisting whenever she encounters challenging information, as exemplified by her response on learning about domestic violence within her family, specifically her grandfather's physical abuse of Ma-ma-oo and her decision to send Mick and Trudy to residential school to protect them. Lisa cannot understand why Trudy perceives her mother's decision as selfish, or why Ma-ma-oo might have deemed it safer for her children to be away. Neither can she entertain the possibility of Ma-ma-oo's involvement in her husband's death after enduring his abuse for years, as another of Lisa's aunts suggests (254). Robinson returns Lisa to this pivotal moment in her family history by having her witness her grandfather's death in a dream where Ma-ma-oo sits at the kitchen table, bruised and battered, and hears a noise in the bathroom—her husband slipping in the shower—and remains frozen (356). On awakening, a gravitational force pulls Lisa towards the beach where she finds herself wading in the water, drawn to something floating in the half-submerged grass by the shore. Her initial thought that it resembles "a baby in a christening outfit" presages a haunting presence tied to unresolved residential school trauma, but it turns out to be "just a bucket", suggesting that the past can be addressed: "I should catch it before it's lost". When Lisa attempts to catch the bucket, however, "something" yanks her underwater, troubling the promise of resolution (356–7). "Something" highlights a narrative gap that the narrator does not fill retrospectively, leaving room for interpretive engagement by readers. The unseen force pulling Lisa underwater is likely one of the menacing, "worm-like" entities that Lisa encounters throughout the narrative, usually lurking outside of her immediate field of vision. This exchange exemplifies what one critic reads as dangerous "figurative hauntings" and their animation of residential school trauma, as distinct from the familial "humanoid ghosts" that are articulations of traditional knowledge (Stunden 391). However, spirits in *Monkey Beach* defy such easy classification because Robinson emphasizes their multifaceted nature, portraying them as deeply ambivalent.

Haisla Wonder

Whereas gothic conventions presuppose a Christian polarization of good and evil, dichotomizing imperatives collapse in Robinson's portrayal of the spirits in *Monkey Beach*. Robinson's ghosts are closer to the shape-shifting trickster of North American

Indigenous cosmologies, a figure that Anishinaabe cultural theorist Gerald Vizenor describes as "a comic and communal sign" that is "never tragic" and "never the whole truth" (11). In *Monkey Beach*, Robinson revisits Weegit, the raven trickster from traditional Haisla origin stories. In Gordon Robinson's *Tales of Kitamaat*, Weegit's actions showcase a blend of wit, deception, and occasional benevolence. From stealing the moon to manipulating a bullhead fish with his cunning, Weegit's tales reflect themes of greed, violence, and the consequences of one's actions. Robinson draws inspiration from her uncle's book but reimagines the trickster in his old age, living in a "comfortable condo downtown" and sipping low-fat mocha while reading "yet another sanitized version of his earlier exploits" (296). If this portrayal highlights continuity with traditional stories, it also establishes the trickster's relevance in modern times. Weegit's deliciously outrageous endeavors transcend morals, yet he often positively influences human lives: motivated by boredom, he creates the world and humans, and his theft of the sun and moon, though driven by personal convenience and the search for food, brings light to humankind (295). Benevolence is only "incidental," Gordon Robinson clarifies in his text, because Weegit's "main interest" is to play tricks and pranks (viii). The vignette of Weegit acts as a thematic prelude to Part Three of *Monkey Beach* which traces Lisa's tumultuous period of addiction in Vancouver and safe return to Kitamaat following her cousin Tab's intervention. Struggling to recover from the trauma of rape and tragic deaths of Uncle Mick and Ma-ma-oo, Lisa becomes ensnared in a cycle of self-destructive behavior in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, an area known for high rates of homelessness and missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. She is found semi-conscious in a motel bathroom by Tab, who chides her: "Some people aren't wallowing in misery like they're the only ones on earth who've ever had someone die on them" (300). An argument ensues, but when Lisa tosses Tab a pack of cigarettes, it goes "right through [Tab's] body" (301). The ghost shakes Lisa from numbness: "You and your fucking problems. Get your act together and go home" (301). A literary trickster herself, Robinson invokes a familiar trope from horror stories—a tragic twist whereby a ghostly presence signals the loss of a loved one—only to subvert it entirely: as Lisa later learns from Tab's mother, her cousin is not dead (305). Lisa suspects she has hallucinated her presence, and a gothic interpretation of the text would require no alternative explanation.[9] A lens of wonder opens the narrative further to suggest that a shapeshifting spirit has tricked Lisa by masquerading as Tab, thereby saving her from a terrible fate, as Lisa also acknowledges: "I would have stayed that way for years if it wasn't for Tab" (297). Whether Weegit, the red-haired little

[9] Robinson leaves room for various interpretations, including those which rest on the Gothic. For example, she preserves ambiguity about Tab's death by not having Lisa meet her again after the narrated events.

man from Lisa's childhood—she notes that Tab's hair is dyed red—or a different spirit, the shapeshifter deceives Lisa by leading her to believe that Tab has been brutally murdered, "bumped off by a couple of boozehound rednecks" (301). If this is a prank, the scenario of colonial gendered violence it creates is believable and serves to impart a lesson. The lies are also admonishments and lead Lisa to reconsider her situation and return home to Kitaamat.

In *Monkey Beach*, Lisa grapples with an epistemological tension between the spiritual and the psychoanalytical, often dismissing her encounters with the spirit world as signs of mental illness. This response can be partly traced to the history of colonization and indoctrination, predominantly through schooling—an issue Robinson addresses in the novel.[10] Lisa's parents, Gladys and Al, also minimize the significance of her spiritual connections. When Lisa confides that a murder of crows has delivered a message in Haisla, Gladys jokingly remarks that it is "clearly a sign" that she needs Prozac, an antidepressant, and when Lisa's visions intensify, her parents entrust her to a psychiatrist to "normalize" her (3, 274). Cara Fabre interprets Gladys and Al's embrace of a capitalist and utilitarian worldview as a rejection of traditional Haisla teachings (128). In my reading, although a positivist and pathologizing mindset may influence Lisa and her family, colonial conditioning does not fully define their reality. Lisa's uncertainty about the nature of ghostly encounters resonates with a Haisla worldview, where spiritual understanding requires ongoing learning and interpretation. She learns to navigate the spirt world through trial and error by harnessing Haisla principles of experiential learning where teachings are "shown and told over and over" to be absorbed at different stages of life, as emphasized by Haisla scholars Jacqui, Mary, and Ray Green (71). Through ghostly encounters made credible within the narrative, Robinson encourages belief in the veracity of these phenomena so that Lisa's attempts at rationalization often appear forced and unconvincing, marked by denial and self-diagnosis. In this way, Robinson subverts a Western literary-critical model wherein first-person perspectives that involve "supernatural" occurrences are indicators of a narrator's unreliability.

Critical analyses of *Monkey Beach* often focus on Lisa's struggles to integrate Haisla and Euro-Canadian cultures (Fabre, Buffoli, Soper-Jones) and examine how Robinson's writing merges Western and Indigenous storytelling traditions (Lane, Lacombe, Howells), sometimes invoking a postcolonial notion of hybridity. Much of

[10] Robinson has Lisa rebel against the imposition of Western history and thought in school. She refuses to read a passage that claims Indigenous peoples on the northwest coast practiced cannibalism as part of religious rites because it is "all lies" and expresses frustration at the irrelevance of the school curriculum to her life: "Nothing they taught me meant anything. None of the stories I read in English had anything to do with my life" (68–9, 166).

the novel's complexity derives from Robinson's articulation of the tensions between different interpretive models, but a framework of cultural hybridity risks trapping Indigeneity in essentializing definitions of "authenticity." Hybridity presupposes a pure Indigenous identity, with tradition static and confined to the past, when, as Walter Mignolo contends, the distinction between modernity and tradition is "part of the larger strategy of the denial of coevalness, the creation and reproduction of colonial and imperial differences, and, more generally, of building and maintaining the colonial matrix of power" (174). Notions of authenticity construct "real" Indigenous peoples as "always Other," relegating contemporary Indigenous experience to a "reduced shadow" of "former greatness" (Justice 147).[11] Robinson challenges such false dichotomies by depicting Haisla knowledge and tradition as dynamic, innovative, and capable of adapting to changing circumstances.

Adaptation and innovation are at the heart of *nuyem*, a term that can be understood as encompassing Haisla epistemology, ethics, worldviews and ways of being. More than a set of static regulations, *nuyem* is a living, adaptable legal system that remains relevant and vital to contemporary Haisla life (Green et al. 57). In *The Sasquatch at Home* (2011), Robinson illustrates the concept of *nusa*, traditional protocols for teaching, sharing, and preserving *nuyem*, when recounting a visit to Graceland, Elvis Presley's home in Memphis, with her mother: "I was glad we'd come here together. You should not go to Graceland without an Elvis fan. It's like Christmas without kids—you lose that sense of *wonder*. [...] More importantly, as we walked slowly through the house and she touched the walls, everything had a story, a history. In each story was everything she valued and loved and wanted me to remember and carry with me. This is *nusa*" (11; emphasis mine). Wonder is at the heart of *nusa*, a storytelling method in which personal connections, values, and experiences are entwined as knowledge, and traditional protocols are continuously integrated into everyday life. This sense of adaptation permeates *Monkey Beach*.

Lisa's encounters with a little red-haired man exemplify the dynamic reinterpretation of Haisla spiritual traditions in the context of her personal struggles and contemporary realities. A spirit of the "chief trees" traditionally used by medicine men to craft canoes for traveling to the land of the dead, his presence signals Lisa's

[11] For postcolonial scholars, hybridity celebrates the blending of cultures, referring to "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization" (Ashcroft et al. 135). However, for Indigenous scholars like Deanna Reder (Métis), it is inadequate to describe a contemporary Indigenous experience because it encourages "already-existing essentialist pronouncements that perpetuate racist stereotypes" (McCall, Reder, Anderson 50–1). Drawing from Craig Womack (Muscogee Creek-Cherokee), Kristina Fagan signals the attendant risk of a hybridity framework to enforce a "deficit theory" (220).

destined journey to the spirit realm (152–3). That this journey is undertaken by Lisa not by canoe but by a speedboat highlights the enduring significance of a traditional practice in a contemporary setting.[12] When Lisa is a child, the little red-haired man visits her in anticipation of tragic events, to warn and to comfort her. Although she initially rejects him as "a variation of the monster under the bed or the thing in the closet, a nightmare that faded with the morning," his gestures exude an otherworldly tenderness: he blows her "sad kisses that sparkled silver and gold in the dark and fell as soft as confetti" (27, 132). Following Mick's death, Lisa feels guilty for having ignored the sprite's warnings. Her attempt to contact the dead through *Voodoo for beginners*, a book emblematic of the commercialization of spirituality, invites the little man's return in a far more sinister guise: "he was hanging by his neck from a yellow rope, smiling at me as he swung back and forth" (222). This eerie manifestation, paired with a vision of Jimmy and a dead crow, leaves Lisa consumed by dread that "something bad was going to happen to Jimmy" (223). One critic interprets this apparition as a "death sending" foretelling the rape Lisa endures (Rudd 89), but this reading fails to account for his later reappearance to warn Lisa about the assault, and his final departure at her request. The little man's unsettling apparition following Lisa's consultation of *Voodoo for beginners* may instead reflect the playful, unpredictable nature of Haisla spirits. Lisa's realization, after days guarding Jimmy, that "all that fuss and I'd saved my brother from the mumps", underscores the trickster-like qualities of the little red-haired man (229). Projecting a gothic sensibility onto the little man obscures the delightfully mischievous nature of Haisla spirits. Ma-ma-oo's observations that the little red-haired man is "a guide but not a reliable one" is a reminder that his role lies not in providing certainty but in challenging Lisa's understanding of both tradition and the spiritual world (153).

Ma-ma-oo's teachings about traditional Haisla cultural practices provide Lisa with *nuyem*, a set of values and beliefs that help her contextualize what she experiences, giving positive meaning to what is otherwise seen as problematic, unspeakable, or false. Within this framework, Robinson weaves a narrative of gynocentric spirituality because Lisa learns that she has inherited the gift of vision from her mother Gladys, whose mother, in turn, was "a real medicine woman" (154). Ma-ma-oo speculates why Gladys is persistently dismissive: "She doesn't tell you when she sees things. Or she's forgotten how. Or she ignores it" (154). Gladys' denial of her spiritual gift is to be understood as the result of systemic repression of Indigenous practices and knowledge systems, and as a survival mechanism in the face

[12] Julia Emberley also emphasizes this aspect when she interprets *Monkey Beach* as a "modern telling of the Haisla Spirit Canoe Journey" (110).

of the profound trauma during her formative years. Ma-ma-oo tells Lisa about the epidemics brought by colonizers that decimated the village and were still rampant when Gladys was a child, including tuberculosis and influenza, diseases previously unknown in the community. That she could foretell death underlines the traumatic effect, but Gladys does not reject her culture entirely. She teaches Lisa how to make oolichan grease, a typical Haisla delicacy, shares traditional stories rooted in the land, and teaches her the value of reciprocity during a visit to the Kitlope river: "you be polite and introduce yourself to the water," instilling in Lisa a sense of wonder sparked by a willful connection, "so you can see it with fresh eyes" (112). Ma-ma-oo and, in different ways, Gladys, teach Lisa to negotiate, establish connections, and make offerings to plant, animal, and spirit nations.

Lisa's journey in *Monkey Beach* is defined by her struggle to navigate the complexities of the spirit world without the guidance of ancestors with knowledge of traditional protocols, as Ma-ma-oo's laments, "people who knew the old ways" are "gone" or practicing in secret (154). Central to the novel is Lisa's gift of vision, described by Ma-ma-oo as a "powerful medicine" capable of both healing and harm, akin to *oxasuli* (*veratrum viride* or *Indian hellebore*), a potent plant used in medicinal and ceremonial practices. Ma-ma-oo's cautionary advice, that it is "best not to deal with it at all if you don't know what you're doing", becomes painfully clear at the end of the novel when Lisa's attempt at a blood offering nearly costs her life (370). In exchange for knowledge about her brother, Lisa offers herself as a sacrifice, a dangerous encounter with the spirits that leaves her powerless and sinking to the bottom of the ocean. In a semi-conscious state, she is saved by the ghost of Jimmy and reaches the land of the dead, fulfilling her calling. Here, the spirit of Ma-ma-oo reminds her of the responsibility that comes with her gift: "Unless you know how to use it, it will kill you" (371). By the novel's close, then, Lisa still needs to learn how to interact with the spirits. Robinson leaves her at a crucial juncture, emphasizing that learning and cultural resurgence are ongoing processes that cannot be fully completed.

Spirits in *Monkey Beach* are members of nonhuman nations with whom Lisa enters into complex relationships. In Indigenous literatures, spirits are not necessarily "figures of uncanny terror," and although they can be "malevolent", they are also ancestors and "figures of healing, ceremony, or political action" (Cariou "Haunted Prairie" 730). Wendat scholar George Sioui stresses that spirits are part of a web of relationships and they should be considered "quite simply, relatives" (24). A broad spectrum of relationality encompasses more than the ghosts of dead family members to include b'gwus, the little man, and even the ominous worm-like spirits

indiscernible from their environment who promise Lisa vengeance against her abuser and knowledge about Jimmy in exchange for an offering of meat. Lisa's interactions with spirits involve a negotiation process marked by reciprocity and obligations. This aligns with Lee Maracle's (Stó:lō) view that Indigenous peoples engage in social contracts with "all beings" (113). Focusing on pre-colonial treaty negotiations between humans and animals, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Anishinaabe) emphasizes that such contracts involve both rights and mutual responsibilities: a treaty represents an "ongoing reciprocal and dynamic relationship" which, when nurtured in perpetuity, ensures "peaceful coexistence, respect, and mutual benefit" (35). Social relations encompass humans and animals, plants, stones, ecosystems, celestial bodies, spirits, and energies, all understood as sentient, agential, and aware. Kim TallBear (Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate) defines this as "the knowing relatedness of all things" that is encapsulated in "Indigenous metaphysics" (191). A principle of non-interference and respect for differences is at the core of reciprocity, and one that Robinson emphasizes. She has Uncle Mick encapsulate this epistemology during a fishing trip when he inadvertently catches a halibut in a crab pot, which he describes as a "magical thing," cautioning Lisa: "You aren't supposed to touch them if you don't know how to handle them" (99). Ma-ma-oo emphasizes incommensurability with nonhuman realms when she tells Lisa that "everything in the land of the dead is backwards" and that she should not trust the spirit world without reservations because "they think different from the living" (140, 153). At the same time, Robinson makes clear that a lack of total understanding is not an obstacle to relationships: "you don't have to be scared of things you don't understand" (265). Thoughtful reciprocity, rooted in respect, and cautious engagement with the unknown foster a sense of wonder.

In *Monkey Beach*, wonder lies in a profound connection that is at once intimate and enigmatic. In Haisla *nuyem*, this is encapsulated in *nolaxw* which, when repeated three times, acknowledges the spirit of a place and conveys a sense of wonder, admiration, and awe (Green et al 70). Robinson conveys *nolaxw* imaginatively in interactions in which the unexpected and unexplained awaken a sense of a deep connectedness in her characters. Wonder emerges through relationships with the land and nonhuman inhabitants, including the animals that enliven the landscape: sea otters, seals, wolves, bears, frogs, and orcas. When Lisa witnesses Jimmy swim in the open ocean with orcas, she observes that "[t]he water looked so much more magical when they were swimming in it," which captures a sense of wonder that is deeply relational (353). *Nolaxw* is experienced as a moment of ecstatic connection, wherein fear and awe merge, and a sense of deep respect is evoked. A profound engagement with the environment opens the way to ecological visions though which Lisa can perceive the wonderful interconnectedness of all life:

> When I dreamed, I could see things in double exposure—the real world, and beyond it, the same world, but whole, with no clear-cuts, no pollution, no boats, no cars, no planes. Whales rolled in and out of the water [...] Some of them were large, dark grey whales. Some of them were smaller and black. Hundreds of birds I'd never seen before squawked and chirped in the air, on the beaches, in the trees (265).

This window into a world unspoiled by colonial impact suggests a holistic ecosystem before industrialization and environmental degradation. For some critics of the novel, it is a "spatial distortion that occurs for the Haisla protagonist as she simultaneously occupies two worlds: her pre-colonial inheritance and the colonial reality of the everyday." This juxtaposition is expressed through a "colonial doubling" in names, such as Lisamarie Michelle and the town of Kitamaat/Kitimat, that signifies cultural and epistemological tensions arising from Lisa's inhabiting of two worlds and cultures (Gaertner 6, Buffoli 159). Through a lens of wonder, however, the double exposure emerges less as a "spatial distortion" whereby the colonial encounter determines Lisa's experience as fragmented, and more as a glimpse into a world of wholeness and interconnectedness wherein putative boundaries between temporalities dissolve, and a new vision can emerge. Lisa's encounter with a great blue heron by Kitlope lake at night is another moment of temporal transcendence and connection conveying *nolaxw*: "The bird's long thin beak pointed towards me as it rolled one yellow eye then the other, checking me out [...] while I watched it disappear in the distance I thought I was watching a pterodactyl straight from the Dinosaur Age" (118). With each interaction, Robinson evokes a timelessness that transcends colonial disruption, inviting Lisa and, through her, her readers into a space where past and present, human and more-than-human, are fluid and interconnected.

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Any critical engagement with *Monkey Beach* must contend with silence and unspeakability as a result of colonial trauma stemming from the long history of residential schools. For example, one critic reads the novel as a "fictional testimony" with readers as active witnesses, suggesting that Robinson is as concerned with exploring how "a necessary national truth has been hidden" as she is in telling it (Stunden 394). In my reading, residential school suffering is not all that is silenced; through ellipses and narrative gaps, characters are precluded from speaking about any traumatic experience. In the case of Mick, a former activist in the American Indian Movement, it is impossible to articulate the emotional and psychological cost of his activism, including PTSD and his wife's murder, and his utter disillusionment

with the movement: "fighting didn't get me anything but lots of scars" (96).[13] As Fagan suggests, *Monkey Beach* "raises many questions about what constitutes appropriate speech," including whether it is "necessary" for the health of individuals and communities to speak out about trauma (223). Robinson grapples with the responsibility of storytelling within the Haisla community, mindful of traditional protocols: *nusa.* She has said she feels a sense of self-censorship and fears reprisal from living community members and spirits: "I had one poke me in the butt", and another "so pissed at me – yelled and shouted. Gave me nasty dreams all night" (qtd. in Methot). Haisla elders emphasize that in order to preserve *nuyem* "some things cannot be shared" because "there are aspects of our traditional perspective and values that non-Haislas would never be able to understand" (Robinson *The Sasquatch* 13). Writing *Monkey Beach* was, Robinson has confessed, "incredibly tricky" because it required striking a balance between what to explain to people outside of her community and staying true to her story (qtd. in Patrick). Robinson crafts a narrative that simultaneously tells and eludes telling, compelling readers to navigate a landscape where truths are implied, and imagination is a prerequisite for discerning them.

Elusiveness is embodied in the figure of the b'gwus and in what Gaertner describes as the "slippage between ghosts and humans" that sparks a "sense of wonder and fear" (6). Symbolized by the b'gwus' mask—crafted by Lisa's grandfather, worn by her father and finally gifted to Jimmy—this "slippage" is also suggested in tales where the human origin of b'gwus is contemplated (*The Sasquatch* 34–5, *Monkey Beach* 211). But beyond his appearance and habits, it is the b'gwus' voice that encapsulates in-betweenness in *Monkey Beach*: "close, very close, a b'gwus howls—not quite human, not quite wolf, but something in between" (374). The narrative concludes with the haunting sound of the b'gwus and the distant noise of a speedboat. Robinson's finale is less about Lisa's harmonization of modernity and tradition and more about forging meanings and connections from stories, oriented towards the future. If testimony is a sensory dialogical experience encompassing speaking, listening, and understanding as relational practices, it is not confined to the human voice. As Leanne Betasamosake Simpson summarizes, Indigenous peoples have been "in constant dialogue" with the land and waters, and "for many of us, the

[13] In the novel, key moments in the history of the American Indian Movement (AIM) are mentioned, among them, the 1972 Bureau of Indian Affairs building takeover, the 1973 Wounded Knee Occupation, referred to as "the standoff", and the FBI's illegal counterinsurgency campaign against the AIM in the 1970s on the Pine Ridge Reservation. If activist Ward Churchill is right in suggesting that this history—reflecting the targeting of groups like the Black Panther Party—should be "studied closely by all who set upon the task of forging a positive future" (xvii), then Robinson's subtle references to these events serve as a reminder of their ongoing relevance and impact.

sound waves of our voices, vibrations made from the instrument of the body, are an affecting force in their universe" ("Listening"). The b'gwus's howl, then, is non-verbal testimony, the sound reverberating ancestral knowledge, because listening is crucial to approaching the truths of *Monkey Beach*, even when understanding might be elusive. By transcending linguistic confines and embodying interconnectedness between land, ancestors, and community, this form of testimony slips beyond the limitations on speech imposed by colonial trauma, opening spaces for healing and resurgence.

Challenging myopic colonial perspectives that portray Indigenous peoples as clinging to the remnants of a lost past, *Monkey Beach* is a wonderwork that celebrates "creative and visionary" Indigenous individuals and "new practices, relationships, and cultural forms" (Justice 55). Robinson dramatizes ambivalence—"something in between"—not as a marker of hybridity, but as a site of continuity and adaptation, a space of wonder where transformation can occur (374). Through double exposure, ambiguity and uncertainty may scare, comfort, or excite but they are always cherished. When the novel is read through Daniel Heath Justice's lens of wonder, encounters with the spirit world are expressions of radical hope. For Kim TallBear, "radical hope" may be an opportunity to realign "the emotional, intellectual, and (un)ethical baseline and narrative of those who hold power," and weave stories that do not entail "redeeming the state" but "caring for one another as relations" ("Caretaking" 34). When Lisa reaches the land of the dead and witnesses the spirits of her relatives dancing and singing around a bonfire, they compel her to envision alternative imaginings and pathways. Ma-ma-oo tells her, "go home and make me some grandkids," while Mick urges her to "go out there and give 'em hell. Red power!" (373). Jimmy's message to "Tell her" is a haunting echo of his final goodbye, carrying both an affirmation of love for Karaoke—"Tell her I love her"—and an unspoken plea to bring truths to the surface (363, 374). The spirits sing about "leaving and meeting again"; they chant, "*aux'gwalas*" or "take care of her yourself, wherever you're going" (374). Robinson's use of an ambiguous object pronoun opens possibilities for interpretations, suggesting a plurality of interconnected meanings, all of which emphasize relational care. Wonder brings forth Indigenous understandings of relationality and the multidimensionality of worlds, signalling potential for profound transformation and new possibilities for the future rooted in place-based relationships with the land, humans, and more-than-human beings.

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