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"DREAMS GET CAUGHT IN THE WEBS WOVEN IN YOUR BONES": STORYTELLING AND RESISTANCE IN CHERIE DIMALINE'S *THE MARROW THIEVES*

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Abstract

Set around 2050 in a Canada ravaged by environmental depletion and subsequent climate change, Cherie Dimaline's The Marrow Thieves *features a post-apocalyptic world where Indigenous people are the only population who has managed to preserve the ability to dream. In the guise of speculative fiction, the novel seeks to foreground the Indigenous practices of dreaming and storytelling and thus imagine a future predicated on Indigenous terms. Relying on* survivance *and* rhetorical sovereignty*, I aim to illustrate that the community of storytellers depicted in the novel does not struggle for mere survival against colonial powers, but for the continual refashioning of Indigenous narratives of personal and collective identity. By analyzing instances of both dreaming and storytelling, I will foreground the idea that Indigenous dreaming represents an extension of storytelling, which furthers Indigenous ways of life and seeks to revive ancestral knowledge by enabling the connection between present, individual experience, and past, collective experience. Thus, I will seek to reinforce Dimaline's assertion that contemporary society is a society of children, and address storytelling as a form of education which deconstructs colonial hierarchies and notions of otherness and empowers Indigenous youth to overcome colonial and environmental disaster and reclaim the future of Indigeneity.*

Keywords*:* postapocalyptic; disaster; speculative fiction; Indigenous; YA

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1. Introduction: Survivance, Rhetorical Sovereignty and Indigenous Storytelling

The Marrow Thieves is a young-adult speculative novel penned by Métis Canadian writer Cherie Dimaline with a view to foregrounding the Indigenous practices of dreaming and storytelling in the struggle for Indigenous-termed futures (Dimaline, 2017 *apud* Diaz, 2017). The plot focuses on the ever-resilient struggles of an Indigenous community on the run from the Canadian Government Recruiters, whose task is to incarcerate Indigenous peoples in "new" residential schools. These Recruiters are part of a system which performs institutionalized physical exploitation of Indigenous bodies by siphoning out their bone marrow and implanting it into non-Indigenous populations in order to restore their ability to dream. Even if the action unfolds in a 2050 post-apocalyptic Canada, the events are rooted in the traumatic history of Indigenous peoples across Americas. The book calls out white supremacist policies by directly referencing instances of cultural, physical, environmental and sexual exploitation: the system of Canadian residential schools which closed as late as 1996 and still impacts the psychological well-being of Indigenous peoples; the Canadian-owned oil pipelines which

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encroach on Indigenous territories and devastate the environment, and the sexual violence, rape, and abuse acted out against Indigenous women by the white colonial system through physical violence and media negative representations (Ingwersen, 2020, 72). The novel seeks to reassess the impact that these forms of settler abuse have had on Indigenous bodies and minds, but also to reframe these traumatic events so as to imagine new ways of resisting colonial powers and suggest new possibilities for building Indigenous futures. With regard to Indigenous resistance, Maori scholar Linda Smith asserts that "'The talk' about the colonial past is embedded in [Indigenous] . . . storytelling, and other common sense ways of passing on both a *narrative of history* and an *attitude about history*" (Smith, 1999, 19 *apud* Corntassel, 2009, 137).

In this paper, I will deconstruct a number of instances of storytelling in an attempt to demonstrate that Indigenous storytelling is not only an act of resistance against the colonial system, but also a means of dismantling settler termination policies which are still predicated on the idea of lack of futurity for Indigenous populations. Using Gerald Vizenor's concept of *survivance*, I aim to illustrate that the community of storytellers depicted in the novel does not struggle for mere survival against colonial powers, but for "an active sense of presence and the continuance of Native stories" through the continual refashioning of Native narratives of personal and collective identity, defined by Vizenor as *survivance* (Vizenor, 1999, 7). I will argue that *The Marrow Thieves* is a "meta-speculative" novel, a story about the role of storytelling in not only resisting the hegemonic discourse of extermination, but also in rewriting a traumatic history of abuse and oppression from an Indigenous point of view, toward a story about Indigenous futures predicated on Indigenous terms.

I will also analyze a few instances of dreaming to foreground the idea that Indigenous dreaming represents an extension of storytelling, which furthers Indigenous ways of life and seeks to revive ancestral knowledge by enabling the connection between present, individual experience, and past, collective experience. It is these *autonomous* acts of storytelling and dreaming that underpin the preservation and transformation of Indigenous ways of life on Indigenous terms. I will use Scott Richard Lyons's concept of *rhetorical sovereignty* to demonstrate that performances of storytelling in the novel buttress and advance the community's struggle for political sovereignty. Rhetorical sovereignty is "the inherent right and ability of peoples" to choose how and why they tell their stories and to decide "their own communicative needs and desires" (Lyons, 2000, 450). By using *rhetorical sovereignty*, I will deconstruct the ways in which characters create and manipulate stories to reinforce an Indigenous sense of identity and sovereignty, and to project it into the future of their community. Many of the storytellers in the novel are children or youth, as Cherie Dimaline wanted to show young audiences a future of "[Indigenous] kids . . . not just surviving, but being the absolute answer, being the heroes and leaders" (Dimaline, 2017 *apud* Diaz, 2017). I will discuss the ways in which Indigenous children and youth in *The Marrow Thieves* can impact their Elders' stories and create "new forms of knowledge grounded in [Indigenous] tradition" (Dimaline, 2017 *apud* Diaz, 2017). I will seek to reinforce Dimaline's argument that contemporary readers live in a society of children, by addressing storytelling as a form of education which deconstructs colonial hierarchies and notions of otherness, and thus foregrounds respect towards animals, the environment, and fellow human beings. By discussing Indigenous children as active storytellers and agents of change in their community, I will also address storytelling as a tool of rhetorical sovereignty which empowers Indigenous youth to reclaim and reimagine the futures of Indigeneities.

2. Frenchie's Trauma: Healing through Community and Storytelling

The first chapter of this novel introduces residential school trauma as the main form of colonial oppression impacting the teenage protagonist. The perspective belongs to eleven-year-old Frenchie, a Métis teenager whose family seeks to escape incarceration and exploitation at the hands of the Canadian government. The narrator reframes the main elements of residential school experience so as to reflect the methods involved in perpetuating colonial trauma across generations. The government-assigned Recruiters are dressed in official attire, the hallmark of white hegemony and state-endorsed biological control against Indigenous peoples (Dimaline, 2017, 4). The fact that a science ("oneirology") has been repurposed and assigned to recruit Indigenous peoples into culturally

destructive institutions points to the extent of systemic discrimination and the scientifically validated subjugation of Indigeneity (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, 108). Physical disenfranchisement is reinstated in the Indigenous psyche through psychological trauma, as Frenchie's father regularly resorts to alcohol to cope with the impact of residential school experiences on his well-being (5). Communities survive these wounds not only by constantly moving, but also by finding ways to live with these traumas, as their daily survival is threatened by impending death at the hands of the Recruiters: "Dad had taught us that the best way to hide is to keep moving, but . . . I imagined the school truancy officers – Recruiters, we called them – coming for us" (2).

The goal of the future communities arising out of these traumas will be to recover and reclaim these traumatic histories and to use this knowledge to build safer communities. While coping with a difficult past, Frenchie's father also ensures that his children are tuned to the possibilities of the future. To this end, the father tells his sons that a glance into the past illuminates the present purpose of the "new" schools recruiting Native people: "Miigwans says the Governors' Committee didn't set up the schools brand new; he says they were based on the old residential school system they used to try to break our people to begin with, way back" (Dimaline, 2017, 5). In the novel, as a result of termination policies, Indigenous peoples are forbidden safe expression of their identities as whole communities and families are fragmented and forced into hiding. Confronted with the loss of communal land and identities, the survival of Indigenous peoples and cultures depends on their ability to cope with traumatic experiences. Frenchie's father risks his life but still joins the Council of Indigenous negotiators to reason with the oppressors. Frenchie's mother gives up the hope of a different story and surrenders to the captors but first ensures that her children are motivated to survive. Frenchie's elder brother, Mitch, sacrifices his life so that Frenchie can have a chance at freedom. Frenchie, in turn, makes good on this freedom, and lives to tell the story and actively alter it. As traumatic as his family's stories are, they are also stories of resistance, and their retelling allows Frenchie to understand his goals and organize his struggles.

At the age of eleven, Frenchie realizes that any story of oppression encloses a story of resistance. His journey through the Canadian wasteland mirrors his determination to carry on the legacy of his brother and family; as such, it is a process of finding the resources to recover personal and communal identities against a backdrop of oppression and dissolution. Harsh natural conditions reconnect Frenchie with his ancestors' stories of survival, and he taps into his own repository of Indigenous ways of life, which he terms "blood memory," in order to find the hunting skills he needs for immediate survival (Ingwersen, 2020, 69). Confronted with the challenge of continual adaptation, Frenchie acquires enough experience to tell that physical abuse is subsumed to spiritual subjugation. His steady choice to tap into Indigenous spiritual knowledge signals the scope of Indigenous survivance – not mere physical endurance, but the preservation of the Indigenous ways of being in the world: "Out here stars were perforations revealing the bleached skeleton of the universe through a collection of tiny holes. And surrounded by these silent trees, beside a calming fire, I watched the bones dance. This was our medicine, these bones, and I opened up and took it all in. And dreamed of north (Dimaline, 2017, 9)." Dreaming here is a form of physical and spiritual self-determination, which mediates the relationship between the individual and his experience. A connection to dreaming ensures that people do not die like "[factory machines] shutting off at the end of a shift" but that they make sense of their experience on Earth and live meaningfully (Dimaline, 2017, 14). Frenchie's familiarization with his rescue family comes as a dream that connects his story to the community's stories, signaling the bonding role of dreams within communities. Frenchie starts dreaming and then wakes up to a din of voices speaking in his parents' languages, thus connecting him to his community. Dreaming thus becomes a form of common storytelling that incorporates Indigenous languages and worldviews. The title of the opening chapter ("Frenchie's Coming-to Story") sets up the whole novel as a narrative of becoming an individual through storytelling ("coming to be *someone*") and of becoming part of a community of storytellers ("coming to be *part of something*").

Frenchie's new community allows him to acquire further knowledge and delve into the possibilities of Indigenous dreaming and storytelling as forms of survivance. Upon entering this new community, Frenchie encounters the leading storyteller, Miig, and finds out that the purpose of the new residential

schools is to harvest Indigenous people's marrow and their ability to dream (Dimaline, 2017, 18-19). The fact that Indigenous dreaming (spiritual knowledge) and marrow (physical bodies) are intertwined also speaks to Indigenous religious and spiritual beliefs. Dreaming ensures that the Indigenous individual is well-grounded in his own body but also articulates his relationship with the ancestors and the Universe – just like stories reside in their marrow, so do they reside as stories in the Universe: "We go to the schools and they leach the dreams from where our ancestors hid them, in the honeycombs of slushy marrow buried in our bones. And us? Well, we join our ancestors, hoping we left enough dreams behind for the next generation to stumble across" (Dimaline, 2017, 90). In her book on Indigenous ways of knowing and healing, Kickapoo, Comanche and Macehual scholar Patrisia Gonzales asserts that dreams are both "the outcome and vehicle for cocreative knowledge," and that Indigenous dreamways enable the journey into the "[Indigenous] collective unconscious" and thus assist in healing and rebuilding against genocide (Gonzales, 2012, 174). Dreams and stories are closely linked as part of Indigenous continuance through storytelling, and one needs to dream and access ancestral knowledge before being able to tell their own stories of resistance against settler oppression.

3. The Journey of Miig's Community: Reclaiming Indigeneity through Storytelling

By means of Miig's weekly retelling of the Indigenous people's story in Canada, children become familiar with the workings of racism, anthropocentrism and capitalism, and are empowered to deconstruct these systems and act responsibly and respectfully towards their environment and fellow human beings. In undoing hierarchies that subjugate nature and non-white peoples and cultures, the children in the novel take their first steps towards anti-colonial action (Xausa, 2020, 93). However, as leader of the community, Miig also controls the Story that younger children can have access to; RiRi, the youngest member of the community, for instance, cannot listen to the Story in full. Yet, the children are free to create their own stories of possibility and personal agency before their Elders can gradually introduce them to the cruel, traumatic histories of colonial oppression: "[Parts of the Story were] withheld from her youth so that she could form into a real human before she understood that some saw her as little more than a crop" (Dimaline, 2017, 26). This family is driven by responsibility towards stories, as everyone in the community has a role in fashioning the story and delivering it to empower the other members of the community. In this social organization, Frenchie, who is sixteen in chapter 3 and five years older than RiRi, facilitates her "understanding" of the Story by familiarizing her with some of the missing parts (Dimaline, 2017, 28-29). He thus fulfils the role of a storytelling mediator, who renders the Story accessible for RiRi's age and gender. Education draws on older children's experience, who assist younger children in understanding their own role in the Story. Based on mutual responsibility among children, this is a community where education is constantly performed through storytelling and aims to ensure that children grow into rhetorical sovereignty.

Rhetorical sovereignty also extends to the new members' choice to tell their personal stories. Before her coming-to story becomes part of the community's story, Rose, a very feisty and determined newcomer, influences the Story by urging for immediate fighting and articulating this idea in the manner of her Elders, in the Cree language: "[Rose] became part of Story, the dissenting voice to the way things are, the rebel waiting for the fight to be brought. And we loved the way she rebelled, anyway; having been raised by old people, she spoke like them" (Dimaline, 2017, 32). Rose's interaction with the Story speaks to the role of storytelling in equipping Indigenous people for the fight against colonial powers, but also points to the ways in which Indigenous languages shape the creation of new stories of resistance. Rose uses her intuitive grasp of language to act as a mediator between Frenchie and Minerva, the oldest member in the community, and the repository of Cree linguistic knowledge. Rose promises to impart Minerva's lessons with Frenchie and thus becomes a storyteller in her own right, ensuring that traditionally Indigenous knowledge is adapted to the needs of younger audiences (Zanella, 2020, 192). Her work relies on preserving and passing on the "magic words" of an Indigenous language and integrating them into future stories of Indigeneity, presented here as daily language lessons between Frenchie and Rose. Frenchie and Rose's linguistic exchanges bridge past and present, and foreground knowledge and ways of being encoded in the Cree language: "It made us feel surrounded on both ends – like we had a future and a past all bundled up in her round dark cheeks

and loose curls" (Dimaline, 2017, 32).This recovery of the Cree language generates new ways of seeing the world and projects Cree traditions into a future built on Indigenous terms, where youth can actively impact and challenge the hegemonic Story.

Through his own experience of dreaming and storytelling, Frenchie realizes that these new ways of seeing coexist with traumatic visions of the past. Dreaming confronts Frenchie with dismal renditions of his parents, either as physically disabled or self-harming, and he needs storytelling in order to make sense of these experiences: "It was painful, but I didn't really mind. The more I described my brother, my parents . . . the more I remembered . . . Instead of dreaming their tragic forms, I recreated them as living, laughing people in the cool red confines of RiRi's tent" (Dimaline, 2017, 43). He retells these dreams to RiRi in the form of stories which actively remember his parents but also re-member (reframe) his experience in light of his family's Indigenous past (Dillard, 2012, 17). These acts of (re)membering Indigenous ancestors and integrating pain into new forms of resistance are accompanied by forays into the history of settler ideology, since these forays can deconstruct and resist the dominant ideology. The community confronts yet again settler colonial trauma by trying to deconstruct the settlers' point of view and the motives of their deeds. Discussions are centered on whether circumstances make people or people make circumstances, and one of their conclusions is that either side, settler and Indigenous, has been motivated by survival. Miig reframes the question of survival by pointing out the doctor in Albert Camus' novel *The Plague* as an example of a non-Indigenous person whom dire circumstances motivated to help and rebuild the surrounding community (Dimaline, 2017, 53). For Miig, this is clear evidence that it is not only race or ethnicity that defines one as Indigenous or non-Indigenous, but also personal ideology and the reenactment thereof: "[W]ho is to say what we will be capable of . . . Not every Indian is an Indian" (Dimaline, 2017, 55). Miig's inclusion of Western literature reinforces the idea that storytelling is crucial to negotiating mutually respectful ways of life. This act of story-telling on the nature of survival takes place in the presence of the young so that they can understand the limits of their own powers ("What would I have done to save my parents or Mitch, given the chance?") and then start to reflect on what they stand for and how they plan to carry out their personal beliefs in terms of empathetic and respectful action (Dimaline, 2017, 48).

The experience of reclaiming land and space is in itself conclusive to traumatic incursions in the past. When taking camp in a former resort building, Frenchie feels safe in the confines of a closed space but soon realizes that notions of safety are conditioned by the degrees and forms of oppression inflicted upon different members of the community (Xausa, 2020, 96). Women in the group use storytelling strategically to explore different notions of safety. Minerva, for instance, introduces her story by arguing that her account directly concerns girls. The rogarou is a werewolf-like character in Métis stories which appears to Métis girls on the cusp of womanhood, and Minerva frames the story in such a way as to suggest that this is a universal story of female experience handed down from generation to generation of women: "This is my grand-mère's story, told to me when me and my sisters were turning into women. It's about Rogarou, the dog that haunts the half-breeds but keeps the girls from going on the roads at night where the men travel" (Dimaline, 2017, 66). These first lines introduce the rogarou as an ambivalent figure in relation to women, both a perpetrator of violence and a warning against male-inflicted violence. The rogarou acts as a trickster and entices the girl with the "smell of blood on his tongue" (Dimaline, 2017, 66), forcing her to protect herself through violence. Later on, the rogarou turns into a man who threatens to abuse the girl sexually, but this story of insidious shape-shifting and violent exchanges becomes the account of a marriage, speaking to the cycle of domestic abuse endured by Métis women in mixed-race marriages. Minerva uses a first-person narrative to point to the physical "markings" inflicted on Indigenous women's bodies so that the younger audience understands that this is a story rooted in the reality of settler violence against Indigenous women.

This story allows one of the female members of the community to cope with her own traumatic history of abuse, rape, and physical mutilation (Clark, 2016, 53). As a teenager, Wab was one of the last inhabitants of the now ruined cities, daughter to a woman who neglected her and traded sexual favors in exchange for alcohol; once all other means of communication had been cut off, Wab started earning her living by running messages across the city (Dimaline, 2017, 81). Similar to the Rogarou story,

Wab was tricked one day into delivering an empty envelope to a group of men who locked her up in a freezer, slashed her face, right eye, and chest, and raped her for two days. Wab survived this traumatic experience by walking out by herself out of the city and "into the bush," where she eventually encountered Miig's community. As a result of her trauma, Wab holds a vulnerable and ambivalent position in this new family. Frenchie describes her as "movie star beautiful" and "wearing an eye patch, like a real villain," and confesses that every boy in the community was at some point fascinated by Wab's aura of mystery (Dimaline, 2017, 77-78). However, boys also perceive her as a difficult woman, who makes them uneasy because her experience is not yet set into an accessible narrative that can illuminate her trauma for them. Her contrasting beauty and harshness turn her into a "mysterious" figure, an object of fantasy that the boys keep speculating about to the point of begging Miig to tell them her coming-to story.

Miig does not allow for Wab's story to be part of community knowledge until she feels ready and safe enough to tell it herself (Dimaline, 2017, 79). Minerva's rogarou story assists Wab in making peace with her own trauma by assuring her that she is not alone in sharing this traumatic experience, thus alleviating her feelings of shame and guilt in the trauma aftermath. Upon listening to these intertwined stories of violence against Indigenous women, the soon-to-be men in the community grasp the perils of objectifying women and become aware that oral discourse is also a way of perpetuating objectification and violence against women. Once Frenchie and his friends realize that Indigenous girls and women are more prone to sexual abuse and violence because they are women of color in a white patriarchy (Clark, 2016, 51), they understand that they need to provide additional support and protection for girls and women in their community. As an act of joint storytelling, Minerva's and Wab's stories both instruct men and boys about their responsibility toward vulnerable members of their community and toward their stories, and help Wab onto the process of healing from her traumatic experience.

On his journey toward self-agency, Frenchie also encounters stories of silence or half-formed stories that he needs to internalize and put together in order to better understand the goals of his community and use his newly acquired power in ways constructive to the latter. Although Frenchie's new family reunites him with his Dad, this happens after six years of lack of communication between biological father and son, during which Frenchie's notions of home and family have changed with his new roles and responsibilities. While his father can no longer provide Frenchie with guidance, he can ask him questions and challenge the motivations of his struggle. When Minerva, the oldest member of the community, is taken captive by the Recruiters, Frenchie decides that they should go searching for Minerva; he takes on the leadership of the community (Dimaline, 2017, 183). Frenchie's father asks him why he wants to look for Minerva and Frenchie tells him that looking out for each other should be the ultimate goal of a community such as theirs (Dimaline, 2017, 188). His father tells him that indeed, he set up their community together with Miig in order to allow people to find their missing family, but that they ended up being a new family with new, different roles. He thus helps Frenchie understand that events shape and transform a family or community and the roles of people therein, and that everyone, leaders included, need to adapt: "I didn't set up this camp to be my community, Francis. I brought these people together so that we could find our community. But, eventually, that's what we became" (Dimaline, 2017, 188).

While this story may be incomplete for Frenchie's understanding, his father also gives Frenchie the account of how he met Frenchie's mother. He ran away from home when he was thirteen and first took shelter in a Catholic church in an attempt to escape his family. The quiet of the church soon made him realize that he was in danger of being captured by the Recruiters and so needed to first protect his life. He started praying and heard the bustle on a highway for an answer, thus realizing that he needed to value his temporary state of freedom and take responsibility for his life (Dimaline, 2017, 199). Afterwards, he went to the city and met Frenchie's mother, who made him aware of his power and familiarized him with the future role of father of the family (Dimaline, 2017, 199-200). While this is a story about reclaiming space and transforming a Western church into a space of Indigenous soul-searching, it is also a story about leaving home in order to find one's true home, the ever-changing nature of home, and the efforts involved in building and preserving home (Zanella, 2020, 186). By

taking in his father's story and questions in an attempt to make sense of his own insecurities, Frenchie understands that home is a fluid concept and that additional efforts are necessary to building and rebuilding Indigenous homes, especially when Indigenous communities are under the daily threat of violence and extinction. Frenchie's work from now on will involve piecing together his and his fellows' experiences in order to create a safer community, regularly adapting to the challenges posed to Indigenous peoples and ways of life.

Minerva's story of resistance against settler biological exploitation makes Frenchie think up new ways of improving the goals and communication in his community. Frenchie and his group find out Minerva's "miraculous" story from Father Carole, an Indigenous priest that has infiltrated residential schools in order to pass on information to the Indigenous Council. As she is prepared for the medical procedure of marrow extraction, Minerva refuses to speak English and only hums to herself in Cree, while Recruiters proceed to discipline her body by "cutting her hair, shaving her skin, scrubbing her body" (Dimaline, 2017, 171). When the personnel connect her body to the extraction machine, Minerva fully opens her mouth and starts singing her stories and dreams in Cree, thus short-circuiting the whole apparatus meant to obliterate her mind and body. She performs her stories on Indigenous terms, and thus dismantles centuries-long colonial efforts to commodify and terminate Indigenous bodies by means of institutionalized and science-endorsed racism (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, 233).

Hers is a complete act of resistance and an exhaustive act of story-telling: Minerva relies on the connection with the ancestors and her grasp of Indigenous ancestral knowledge. She performs it as a song which she modulates according to the content of the story. She uses her ancestors' language to deliver the message, and she draws on personal and collective experience enshrined in dreamways (Zanella, 2020, 190). However, Minerva's "miracle" does not remain a mere metaphor for Indigenous survivance, as the community builds on her act of resistance in order to regroup after her and RiRi's death. Confronted with the loss of its oldest and its youngest members, Frenchie's family starts thinking up new strategies of survivance, and they take a number of steps towards their execution. They first perform the ceremony of singing Minerva's way to the afterworld, to ensure that her dreams are preserved into her new life, and that younger generations can access her dreams as form of ancestral knowledge (Dimaline, 2017, 211-212). They proceed to set up a youth council that puts together every member's knowledge of languages and stories, thus aiming to both instruct the young and reassess Indigenous ways of knowing.

This youth council seeks to use these languages and stories to construct an Indigenous collective identity which predicates belonging on a common experience of resistance against colonial exploitation. Lastly, a new distribution of roles occurs, and the Elders decide to work on maps, while the young decide to conduct expeditions and collect information about the surrounding environment (Dimaline, 2017, 221). One of these expeditions allows Frenchie to test all the knowledge he has acquired so far from story-telling and personal and collective experience. Frenchie and his group encounter Miig's lost husband, Isaac, and manage to identify the latter as an ally to their cause because he not only speaks, but also dreams in Cree (Dimaline, 2017, 228). The integration of Indigenous ways of being and knowledge into one's spiritual and everyday life becomes a form of Indigenous rhetorical sovereignty which directly speaks against colonial oppression. The community will build on this form of Indigenous rhetorical sovereignty while heading towards an Indigenous-termed future: "And I understood that as long as there are dreamers left, there will never be want for a dream. And I understood just what we would do for each other . . . the bigger dream that held us all. Anything. Everything" (Dimaline, 2017, 231). The end of the novel brings about the vision of an Indigenous future, authored by tight-knit communities which foreground various forms of (rhetorical) sovereignty: the autonomy of psychological space; the relationship with the ancestors; Indigenous languages and story-telling, and the reclamation of a physical and cultural space.

4. Conclusions

For Frenchie's community, storytelling has meant a journey in itself, navigating a world of settler cultural and environmental self-destruction towards a sense of Indigenous unity and regeneration. This

collective act of storytelling taps into the imagination and creativity of each community member, and they can all exert their individuality as storytellers towards the construction of a new Story, which not only resists discourses of settler exploitation, dispossession, and extinction, but also generates new ways of thinking about the future in Indigenous terms. For the new members of Miig's family, the performance of their coming-to stories helps them make sense of their traumas before joining the community, and enables the construction of a safe space where they can heal from and channel these traumas in ways constructive for themselves and the community. Frenchie's performance of his coming-to story ties in with his recurrent dreaming of his parents, and both instances act towards preserving connections to ancestral knowledge and biological kinship, while also reassessing notions of belonging and roles in the new "family." The regular performance of the story of colonial oppression in front of younger audiences allows children and youth to become aware of the systemic means of subjugation of Indigenous peoples, and empowers them to first resist and then actively challenge colonial powers. Children can also act as storytelling mediators for younger children, and thus teach one another how to preserve their Elders' stories and adapt them for future times. In retelling and passing on knowledge, they become storytellers in their own right, but in adapting the stories, they also become aware of one another's communicative needs. When retelling the story of settler oppression to RiRi, Frenchie realizes that, as an Indigenous woman, RiRi will undergo the colonial oppression of both racism and sexism, and that he needs to adapt the story in such a way as to warn RiRi against the perils of white patriarchy while also allowing her to imagine her own future of freedom and fulfillment. As storytelling evolves and the storytellers' needs change, performances of the stories extend beyond the English language and into the repository of Indigenous languages.

As yet another form of storytelling, dreaming in an Indigenous language allows characters to tell their stories to their ancestors and thus integrate these stories into a wider network of dreamways which furthers Indigenous spirituality and foregrounds Indigenous understanding of experience. By connecting dreaming and Cree, an Indigenous language, Minerva and Isaac succeed in dismantling the technological and psychological exploitation performed by residential schools, demonstrating that the preservation of Indigenous languages enables not only political and rhetorical sovereignty, but also psychological sovereignty. Besides foregrounding and reinforcing Indigenous languages, storytelling also works as a form of education which deconstructs binaries of cultural otherness and anthropocentrism. This Indigenous, holistic vision of the universe, which forgoes hierarchizations of cultures, races or beings, lays the foundations for Indigenous futurities, authored by Indigenous peoples and predicated on Indigenous visions of the world.

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