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HORROR AND REPRESENTATION: VIOLENCE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF  
POSTINDIAN LITERARY AND CINEMATIC IDENTITIES

A Thesis Presented

by

Caleb Hayes

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts  
Specializing in English

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## ABSTRACT

Across the contemporary literary and cinematic marketplace there is an increasing prevalence of “Indigenous fictions”, particularly those within or adjacent to the horror genre. Historically, the representations of Indigeneity across the forms of fiction in the United States and Canada have been limited to that of colonial constructions meant to uphold European land claims and cultural dominance. These images have been proliferated through commercially successful and culturally significant novels, paintings, and films, from the early captivity narratives of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the romantic Indian epics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s examples of the western and horror genres. The variety of ideologies and opinions informed by the stereotypes and invalidations of the “Indian” representations across the centuries of these works are still prominent in 21<sup>st</sup> century western culture.

Through analysis of the violence depicted in late 20<sup>th</sup> century horror literature and film, especially the influential works of Stephen King, that rely upon an Indigenous presence or “Indian” trope, the use of violence in Indigenous horror can be understood comparatively as a distinct movement against the colonial notions of the Indian into an enactment of scholar Gerald Vizenor’s descriptions of Postindian manifestation and cultural survivance. Through the texts of Eden Robinson and Stephen Graham Jones and the films of Jeff Barnaby, these depictions of Postindian violence are framed as either retributive, for justice, or sadistic, for pleasure, inter-narratively and contribute to the intra-narrative resistance to colonial representations. Using these historically contextualized acts of violence, Indigenous horror imagines a retribution against systems of dominance and a futurity through survivance, countering the persistent associations plaguing Indigenous identity.

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## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Violent Fictions

“I’m gonna scalp him. I could scalp him and be a real Indian. I should be a real Indian, shouldn’t I? Shouldn’t I?” (*Clearcut*)

The process of clearcutting, the removal of all trees from a given tract, has historically been an unrestricted expectation of colonial settlers in recreating the geographies of western Europe, aerating the soil to sow the seeds of cultural dominance. In the 1991 film *Clearcut*, directed by Ryszard Bugajski, a court case concerning the logging of Indigenous lands by a milling company is decided in favor of the mill. After kidnapping the mill owner and contemplating what to do with him, Arthur (Graham Greene) expresses the above, joking, contemplation of scalping him. The contemplation of not only what constitutes a “real Indian”, but also whether or not one should attempt to perform their identity in an “authentic” manner, perfectly embodies the long-seated colonial relating of Indigeneity with violence and ambiguous existence integral to the construction of the Indian.

The invention of the Indian has been a vital component in the formation and legitimation of European-derived identities in North America since the arrival of colonial European powers in the Americas. The imagining of primitive, violent, and pagan cultures provided legitimacy to their maltreatment, systematic erasure, and labor and resource exploitation that would feed the growth of nations like the United States in mind and body. The extent of these abuses would enter into a cyclical relationship with the presentation of Indigeneity across media forms lasting the past five centuries. These

histories of presentation will be afforded their own, albeit limited here, exploration in evolution up until the present century, but central through both reality and media representation is the commonality of depicted violence.

Violence, being surmised here as a force used in the cause of injury or destruction (be it physical, mental, or otherwise), runs throughout the length of Indigenous existence within literary and cinematic mediums. The primary quality in the vast majority of these presentations, however, is their non-Indigenous authorship (that is not to say that non-Indigenous authors are *only* capable of depicting “violent Indians”). Given the prominent rise of interest in novels and films featuring Indigenous casts and created by Indigenous writers and directors at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>, the market environment has been morphing to better capitalize on such narratives. This growing interest is occurring alongside a growing visibility of historical Indigenous suffering in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, protests of the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines in 2011 and 2016, and global Indigenous-led protests for climate justice.

It might be fair to assume that given the traumatic history of colonial violence against Indigenous people and its reduplication through fiction, that fictions created by Indigenous people would stray from such gruesome depictions of violence. Yet in many of these texts those depictions of violence are often prevalent and intense. Tommy Orange’s 2018 novel *There There*, a finalist for the 2019 Pulitzer Prize, concludes with a shooting at a powwow, the reader left in the dark as to whether characters left in critical

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<sup>1</sup> BookNet Canada’s “Canadian Leisure and Reading Study 2021” found an increase of readership reading books about or by BIPOC from 9% in 2020 to 19% in 2021 (BookNet Canada).

condition die or not. When rates of violence against Indigenous people, and especially Indigenous women<sup>2</sup>, continue to remain at such devastatingly high rates<sup>3</sup>, how do representations of violence on and against Indigenous bodies, created by Indigenous people, operate in the toppling of literary and filmic monuments informing harmful perspectives? Can such acts of violence contribute to affecting change on individual and system levels?

## 1.2. Literature Review

Several ancillary questions revolve around the primary questioning of violence's operations within Indigenous horror: how violence is to be understood in the context of colonialism and specific Indigenous cultures; the functionality of violence in horror fiction; how Indigenous fiction is to be understood as a categorization; and, the significance of Indigenous authorship.

At the core of this thesis' examination is understanding the "How?" of reading Indigenous literature. The anxiety of reading and analyzing Indigenous media is not a new presence. Helen Hoy's *How Should I Read These?* (2001) contemplates navigating the reading and teaching of contemporary First Nations<sup>4</sup> women writers from the perspective of a cultural outsider. Hoy's final chapter "How Should I Eat These?"

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<sup>2</sup> Murder is the third leading cause of death for Native Women (Urban Indian Health Initiative).

<sup>3</sup> 84% of American Indian and Alaskan Native women and 82% of AI/AN men experience violence in their lifetime (CDC).

<sup>4</sup> There are a multitude of terms used to refer to Indigenous populations varying across regions and nations, i.e., First Nations in Canada, Native American in the United States, Indian as an historical (problematic) term. For the sake of ease in this region and nation crossing analysis, Indigenous will be the primary term applied, with exception of quotation or emphasis.

specifically approaches the reading of Eden Robinson's 1996 short story collection *Traplines*, arguing that although only one of the stories features explicitly First Nations characters, the stories all present some form of replication of the colonial condition faced by First Nations communities. Hoy ultimately argues that Robinson and other First Nation writers resist and reject the constraints of identity enforced upon them by the literary market and auto-direct readership toward the critical manner in which they need be read.

In dialogue with Helen Hoy's *How Should I Read These?* is Kit Dobson's approach to the cultural reception of Robinson's texts in "Indigeneity and Diversity in Eden Robinson's Works" (2009). Dobson's analysis suggests that Robinson's literary "ambivalence... both stymies audiences and enables a reframing of what native writing in Canada might look like" (59). This resistance to writing representations of Haisla life *and* to writing a universally engageable novel act as a means of negating the categorizations of "Native texts" that Indigenous Canadian writers are subjected to. Dobson suggests that Robinson's *Monkey Beach* (2000) "challenges its categorization in its embrace of pop culture" (60), while also being left to reckon with the difficulties in avoiding absorption into a Canadian diversity celebration devoid of cultural heritage. The ambiguity that *Monkey Beach* utilizes in its conclusion avoids the typical "redemptive" endings filled with cultural and communal returns, yet also toes this line between exemption of the past in present consideration "that might be open to appropriation in the colonial imaginary" (66), at risk of excusing history in presentation of overlapping Haisla culture and the Canadian cultural mainstream.



Further relying on Robinson's, and other First Nations writers', use of subversion in identity relating to text, Nora Bowman-Broz's "Shitless Family Love: Deleuzo-Guattarian Affiliations in Eden Robinson's *Blood Sports*" takes the approach of Deleuze and Guattari's minoritarian literature. Bowman-Broz suggests a figuration of *Blood Sports* within the realm of a First Nations radical text that subverts the colonial and contemporary market categorization of Indigeneity through subverting the expectations of that market categorization in presenting a "compassionate and frightening" domestic narrative of marginalization absent of explicitly Indigenous characters.

Answering the "how?" of reading and analyzing Indigenous fictions, particularly as cultural outsiders, has developed a reliance on the subversion of prior expectations of Indigenous fiction in the marketplace: "narrative[s] of redemption" (Dobson 65) and those depictions of unique cultural traditions. These expectations stem partially from the growth of Indigenous literature in the late 60's, 70's, and 80's, dubbed the Native American Renaissance, and from the enforced limitations of White dominated publishing houses. The result of these expectations was an imposed stagnation in what Indigenous fiction (especially literary fiction) contained and expressed, primed for subversions of genre, form, and content by the late 90's. Despite this growing prevalence, approaching analyses through the subversion of expectations is useful for negotiating the functioning of texts within an Indigenous frame, perhaps *without* explicit Indigenous characters.

Of course, in analyzing Indigenous horror, the specifics of Indigeneity functioning in horror likewise have been subject to multitudes of critical perspectives and hypotheses. The presence of Indigenous figures in horror fiction has primarily been utilized as a

means of evoking fear or providing explanation through association. Aalya Ahmad's "Blood in the Bush Garden: Indigenization, Gender, and Unsettling Horror" (2018) contrasts the uses of Indigenous characters and cultural signs with their associated social constructs of gender and those of settler colonialism in *Clearcut* and the *Ginger Snaps* trilogy. Ahmad situates the use of Indigenous cultural artifacts as a means of upsetting settler claims. This suggestion of "unsettling" extends to a multitude of texts (Ahmad suggests Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* as a potential candidate), both inside and outside of the categorization of Indigenous horror. This Indigenization horror, though against the grain of colonial-enforced expectations, either for Indigenous people to be docile and harmless or violent and savage, still contains the possibility of failing to fully subvert the underlying associations of Indigeneity and the land.

Relying on a wider selection of works utilizing Indigeneity in horror, Darryl V. Catherine's "Heirs through Fear: Indian Curses, Accursed Indian Lands, and White Christian Sovereignty in America" (2014) examines the use of the "Indian" and its related tropes, the "Indian Burial Ground" and "Indian Curses", in 20<sup>th</sup> century works of horror fiction, particularly those of H.P. Lovecraft and Jay Anson's *The Amityville Horror*. Tracing a lineage to both settler puritanical ideologies<sup>5</sup> and the Satanic Panic of the 1970's, Catherine figures the usage of the "Indian" and its related historical geographies and objects within 20<sup>th</sup> century horror as evoking anxieties over cultural authority in the Euro-American public. The claims of European-Americans to land

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<sup>5</sup> Puritans of New England believed in the Indigenous population's worship of the devil, practice of witchcraft, and their own bewitchment (Simmons "Cultural Bias in the New England Puritans' Perception of Indians", 1981).

“cursed” or “tainted” through its Indigenization establishes a means of “exorcising” the land, thereby legitimizing the claimant’s authority.

Exemplifying the analytical discourse on the relating of Indigeneity with horror in terms of land-politics and boundaries, Kevin Corstorphine’s “‘Sour Ground’: Stephen King’s *Pet Sematary* and the Politics of Territory” approach’s *Pet Sematary*’s use of Indigenous folklore in the lurking figure of the Wendigo as means of establishing a “symbolic Other”, an ambiguous monstrous figure that represents “an extreme breakage of physical and moral boundaries” (89). Corstorphine becomes primarily concerned with the settler notions of wilderness and civilization, and how imposed boundaries by the act of colonization are transgressed throughout the novel, but points to the figure of the Wendigo as an (re)implication of Native people with demonic supernatural forces. The supposed implication of European colonization with the souring of the burial ground through the figure of the Wendigo’s malicious reanimation of the dead, a connection suggested by the Micmac’s pre-Wendigo use of the burial ground and later abandonment, that is central to *Pet Sematary*’s narrative remains un-explicit and un-analyzed.

Gesa Mackenthun’s analysis of horror in the 70’s and 80’s in “Haunted Real Estate: The Occlusion of Colonial Dispossession and Signatures of Cultural Survival in US Horror Fiction” (1998) likewise turns to the concerns of horror with claims to property and transgression of boundaries. Mackenthun argues that given the tendency to occlude the history of colonization’s effects on Indigenous peoples, especially in terms of violent land removal, the horror genre is intrinsically capable of negotiating the history of Indigenous removal. Through an analysis of *Poltergeist*, *The Shining*, and *Pet Sematary*,

in comparison with later, more fantastically oriented works like *The Wolfen*, *Nightwing*, and *The Sharpest Sight*, Mackenthun proposes that the earlier texts rely on a subtle translation of “the horrors of colonial guilt into the horrors of native savagery” (102). Through depicting Indigenous people as inherently hostile and not wanting or capable of European enlightenment and sensibilities, the settler ideologies central to colonization are rearticulated, and (re)legitimize European authority. The later fantastical texts, Mackenthun argues, engage in a renegotiation of dispossession through “an Indigenous counter-memory to official discourses about possession” (107). This counter-memory aligns Indigeneity with nature and against the desecration of land and bodies that is integral for colonial-capitalist societies to function. This form of renegotiation calls for reparations and land protections rather than acts of mindless, uncoordinated violence.

These historical representations of Indigeneity within the locale of horror have been purposefully antagonized, as Mackenthun notes, through representations in Indigenous and non-Indigenous horror fictions. While Mackenthun points to the counter-memory, Shannon Claire Toll’s “Disordering Enactments and (Re)mapping the reserve in *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*” (2020) proposes a means of creating space through the use of tropes and attributes of speculative fiction and comics for the purpose of reckoning with colonial violence and dispossession.

Caitlyn P. Doyle utilizes Deleuze’s concept of the dream-image to define Barnaby’s use of speculative and comic imagery as a political act that contests the tropes of colonial fiction and troubles notions of reconciliation. In “Truth Unreconciled: Counter-Dreaming in Jeff Barnaby’s *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*” (2020), Doyle argues

that the film does not offer an imagining of recuperation or reconciliation, but a disparate, further immersion into the dreamscape in which different landscapes, and thereby different opportunities, are created and made pursuable.

Darrell Varga's "Screen Zombies, Alien Settlers, and Colonial Legacies" (2022) asserts that works such as Jeff Barnaby's that impose themselves onto the medium of popular cinema<sup>6</sup> whilst flagrantly forcing confrontation with history enable important opportunities in the process of decolonization. Varga suggests that Barnaby's frequent employment of often viscerally gruesome imagery and crude humor works to agitate audiences through revealing the "nation-state in ways that are not sanitized by existing mythology" (24), emphasizing the unsanitary history of colonization through grosser imagery and dialogue than the prior Indigenous films that carved the commercial success for crude genre films to exist.

### **1.3. Postindian Identities and Violences**

"Everything that's Indian, you just make it up!"

'Shit, somebody's got to'" (*The Only Good Indians*, 236)

The Postindian, a term used in Indigenous Studies and generally attributed to scholar Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe), refers to the identities assumed in direct resistance to the "simulations" of the Indian. While Vizenor's elaborations of the Postindian are

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<sup>6</sup> Neither of Barnaby's feature length films were commercially successful in terms of their limited theatrical box office sales, but both merited critical acclaim and garnered several awards including Best Canadian Film at the 2013 Vancouver International Film Festival for *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (VIFF) and Best Actor, Art Direction, Costume Design, Editing, Makeup, Visual Effects, and Stunt Coordination at the 2021 Candian Screen Awards for *Blood Quantum* (Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television).

heavily descended from Jean Baudrillard's theories of simulation and the simulacrum Indian, partially from which Vizenor's rhetoric also derives a purposefully complicated visage, the Postindian is well-suited (and perhaps better applicable) to the related forms of the Imaginary or Invented Indian. In *The Imaginary Indian*, Daniel Francis describes the "Indian" as a construct that "began as a White man's mistake, and became a White man's fantasy... anything non-Natives want them to be" (5). These imaginary "Indians" are the figures from "school books and from the movies" (Francis 2) that do not accurately represent the reality of Indigeneity. Regardless of which terminology and method of study is in application, the foundation of understanding the constructions of the Indian, the long lingering impacts of these constructions, and the Postindian which is built in response to them, is the exposing of the initial colonial fabrication and its continuous reweaving through (well-meaning or otherwise) popular media<sup>7</sup>. Understanding this responsive nature to colonization's descendants, Vizenor's Postindian is apt for application in analysis of Indigenous fiction, albeit resituated from its postmodernist language.

The figure of the Postindian demonstrates a process of countering the aspects attributed to the Indian through a multitude of culturally and historically specific and collective methodologies. As Vizenor describes in *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance*, "The Indian, and most other tribal names, are simulations in the literature of domination" (10). These simulations/constructions are fought against in the

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<sup>7</sup> These forms of popular media stretch from films like Disney's *Peter Pan* (1953) and 2013's *The Green Inferno*, to sport mascots and souvenir dreamcatchers.

play of the Postindian. This multitude originates from the rejection of cultural homogeneity enforced by the uniform label of the “Indian” across the vast and distinctive Indigenous nations for the sake of European conquest, while the collective is unified only in these processes against the Indian.

The means by which the “Indian” is rejected is dependent upon the “simulations of their time” (4), the stereotypes and methods of domination across the realms of entertainment, history, and geopolitics that are yoked unto Indigeneity. The conceptions of the Indian are taken by the Postindian and reconfigured or recreated in performances that disrupt the historical and contemporary foundations of colonial dominance through humorous and grotesque play. Vizenor deems prominent figures such as Russell Means (Oglala Lakota) and Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) as embodiments of the Postindian warrior for their performances in film and literature respectively. Vizenor takes special consideration in Russell Means as a Postindian warrior for his engagement with politics, specifically the American Indian Movement and their 1973 occupation of Wounded Knee, various election attempts<sup>8</sup>, and films (*Last of the Mohicans*, *Pocahontas*). Across the figures Vizenor presents as Postindian warriors, the same reassertion is repeated, “This portrait is not an Indian”, aligning their actions outside the imaginary realm of the “Indian”.

The actions of Postindian warriors-- occupations and protests, disruptive political acts, creation of subversive arts, and utilization of “trickster” discourses-- create distance

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<sup>8</sup> Means made several bids for various candidacies including President of the Oglala Sioux, Governor of New Mexico, and President of the United States under the Libertarian party to name a few.

from the victimized image of the Indian, acts Vizenor dubs as means of survivance. Survivance, as a portmanteau of survival and resistance or endurance, purposefully chosen for its ambiguity, suggests the active persistence against the expectations and discriminations of colonial domination and relegations toward “victimry” in claiming mere survival against colonization. Though Vizenor initially figures the Postindian warrior as being predisposed to resisting domination through their (re)creation of new narratives, he cautions that the Postindian warrior is equally vulnerable in responding to the “manifest manners” of their time with their own self-dominations, or facilitating “prohibitions, rather than liberation” (21). Here, Vizenor is specifically taking aim at the prevalence of figures (again Means is used) who are pro-prohibition for reservations, reasserting the manifest manner of the “Indian” as being inherently predisposed to alcohol abuse, with only laws able to keep them in line. Survivance acts as a means of simultaneous individual and collective resistance against modes of oppression, the survival of the individual being *and* the survival of their culture.

Reconciling the balance between (re)creating new narratives and avoiding the (re)creation of domination is integral to the acts of survivance of the Postindian. “Manifest manners” and “victimry” are the dominant constructions that must actively be fought against and denied identification through created acts of survivance. The strategies against manifest manners are within the toolkit of the Postindian, the often humorous, sometimes grotesque, methods of “trickster” discourse and political disruption. Often, as with the grotesque, these methods of play utilize heavy depictions of violence and purposefully crude humor.



Though not concerned with the viability of violence in relation to the Postindian, Jeremy Morris' analysis of the torture-horror subgenre of the early aughts provides a useful means of both determining how violence functions within a work and legitimizing the presence of excessive or gratuitous violence. In "The Justification of Torture-Horror: Retribution and Sadism in *Saw*, *Hostel*, and *The Devil's Rejects*", Morris suggests that the torture of torture-horror can be classified two ways: retributive and sadistic. Retributive torture encapsulates the instances in which torture is inflicted as an act of morally justifiable revenge. Sadistic torture categorizes those instances in which pleasure is being derived from the act, typically the pleasure of the antagonist stemming from the pain of tortured.

While here the horror and horror adjacent works of Robinson, Barnaby, and Jones under analysis are not suitably classified within the torture-horror subgenre (some works perhaps not categorized as horror at all), the framework provided through which violence's functions can be understood, with slight adjustments, is helpful. Morris discusses *Saw*, *The Devil's Rejects*, and *Hostel*, films in which Indigenous experience and identity are not at all present; however, the violence of these films is somewhat comparable to the violence in the works of Robinson, Barnaby, and Jones. Morris' distinction between retributive and sadistic horror is helpful in the context of the torture-horror genre, as many of those films depict violence without a moral justification (such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*). In repurposing these distinctions from torture to colonially contextualized violence, the distinctions between retributive and sadistic violence begin to blur.

Because of the contingency on the colonial constructions of the Indian, it is viable and perhaps necessary for the (re)creation of narratives in Postindian fiction to engage with historical colonial violence and its legacies. The depictions of Postindian violence imagine the methodological violence of domination against itself, this a grotesque subversion, challenging the “authenticities” of the “Indian” that colonization constructs for its own benefit. Through the suggestion of retributive and sadistic violence in Morris’ article, Postindian violence can be understood through its transformation of historical instances of violence as a means of imagining justice against, and refutation of, the past. The violence of the Postindian recreates both the real historical and the constructed instances of violence between Indigenous nations and European colonial settlers. Allying these approaches together, the violence of Postindian narratives may be understood as retribution against colonial systems and exposure through sadistic recreation.

Retributive Postindian violence can be defined through its use of colonial contexts to justify contemporary imagined violence. As mentioned, retributive violence is capable of imagining differing landscapes and meanings of resistance and endurance. As the judicial systems of respective countries uphold laws created for the benefit of the dominant culture, imagined retributive violence offers a counter claim, a counter perspective, against that of the law. Retribution acts outside the realm of legality anyhow, clearly demonstrated in the revenge-fantasy genre. The genre of revenge-fantasy, sometimes labeled revenge tragedy, indulges in the excesses of vengeance, focusing on the protagonist’s journey for action against those, actual or imagined, who have wronged

them<sup>9</sup>. Despite this similarity with the revenge fantasy genre, retributive violence is distinct from that of revenge. Here, retributive violence are those acts enacted against wrongs committed or upheld by a system. In acting against systems of violence, retributive violence is capable of being performed by any of those facing oppression, such as on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and so on. Revenge, while it may exist in tandem with retribution, seeks to act against individuals in justice, typically excessive, of a wrong. The caveat here becomes the limitation of the revenge-fantasy genre as a form focused on the singularity of vengeance against specific people. This individual focus acts as a limitation for imagining resistance that fails to perform across collectives. Retributive violence offers a means of imagining revenge against systems, instead of individuals, that directly contribute to the harm of the collective across (in this case Indigenous) nations, identities, and history.

Sadistic Postindian violence is not necessarily entirely separate from retributive violence but differs in approach to contextualizing violence. Where narratives featuring retributive violence recreate settings of historical violence and imagine the oppressed enacting revenge against the oppressive system, narratives of sadistic violence recreate the instances of historical violence with altered oppressed/oppressor positions, reversing or otherwise subverting the dynamics of power. Importantly, the audience finds the violence inflicted to be unjustified, either partially or entirely, but still receives the empathized gratification of inflicted violence. This violence, as with the revenge-fantasy

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<sup>9</sup> The genre tends to convey a moral plea to the audience against actualized revenge through tragic endings or ambiguous endings.

genre, is depicted through an individual or group's act of violence against another individual or group, rather than against a system. Sadistic violence, however, is not performed in retaliation to a prior act of violence as with retribution. The bodies on which Postindian violence is subjected are not always in the dichotomy of the Indigenous-Settler relation. As will be seen with Eden Robinson's short story "Contact Sports" and later novel *Blood Sports*, Postindian violence can be utilized as a means of refuting the expectations of fiction by Indigenous writers, through stories vacant of explicitly indigenous characters. The expectation of Indigenous writers is the production of culturally specific texts capable of being marketed as Indigenous texts with Indigenous characters, not narratives of White-on-White torture. Sadistic Postindian violence is capable of recreating sadistic colonial violence on non-Indigenous bodies, a dissolution of these blockading market expectations.

Compiling these two forms of recreative Postindian violence, the functioning of violence within a text is capable of being analyzed intra-narratively and inter-narratively. Intra-narrative violence, those acts contained within the text, may be deemed as retributive or sadistic in their narrative confines, but contribute to the inter-narrative acts of Postindian survivance. This framework allows for texts that seem to be too disparate to be read congruently, contributing to an operating collectivity.

The following outlines a limited but necessary historical foundation of the pervasive images of Indigenous representation throughout American and Canadian media forms. From there attention is given to the specifics of Indigenous representation in the horror genre in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century that directly influenced Indigenous horror in the 21<sup>st</sup>

century, with focus on the commercially and culturally significant works of Stephen King and the trope of the Indian Burial Ground. Finally, the works of prominent Indigenous writers Eden Robinson (Haisla-Heiltsuk) and Stephen Graham Jones (Blackfeet) and director Jeff Barnaby (Mi'kmaq) will be analyzed in their depictions of Postindian violence and survivance against the horror tropes of the Indian.

## LITERATURE'S INDIANS

### 2.1. A Brief History

“And is it supposed that the wandering savage has a stronger attachment to his home than the settled, civilized Christian? Is it more afflicting to him to leave the graves of his fathers than it is to our brothers and children? Rightly considered, the policy of the General Government toward the red man is not only liberal, but generous. He is unwilling to submit to the laws of the States and mingle with their population. To save him from this alternative, or perhaps utter annihilation, the General Government kindly offers him a new home, and proposes to pay the whole expense of his removal and settlement.” (Andrew Jackson, 1830)

The Jacksonian era of the United States surmises the preceding three centuries of lengthy colonization efforts into the continuing representation of Indigeneity nearly two centuries after. The theft of Indigenous land, exploitative treaty practices, and violent removals became framed under the guise of liberalism and governmentally legitimated acts of “kindness”. The “timid and guileless” Indians of Columbus’ letters, the “merciless Indian savages” of the Declaration of Independence, are transformed into a group that, for their own good, need be subjugated lest they be annihilated. This image of the “Indian” would become, and remains, dominant in the forms of media that reflect and inform national identity throughout the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The history of this media representation of Indigenous cultures of the Americas is too extensive to chronicle here in any excessive detail, but several prominent forms and

genres, particularly literary, are significant in understanding the pivotal role played in the construction of European derived American and Canadian identities.

The captivity narrative, perhaps the most recognizable of which being Mary Rowlandson's *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, was a popular form through the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, especially in the English colonies of New England. The popularity of these narratives is noted by Slotkin, "Of the four narrative works which attained the status of best seller between 1680 and 1720, three were captivity narratives; the fourth was *Pilgrim's Progress*" (96), later going on to define the form's ability to provide a guiding principal for communal rationalization, a mold for the "expression of the Puritan's anxieties about their social and spiritual position" (98). These narratives frequently depicted the Indigenous populations as being prone to violence, neglecting their captives for extensive periods, and being defined by devilry unsuitable to European Christian sentiments or acts of punishment through which God acts.

The American Romantic period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the prevalence of the Indian Epic, best represented by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "Song of Hiawatha" and Lydia Sigourney's "Pocahontas", and the conception of the Vanishing Indian. These epics bolstered the legitimacy of American identity for the presumably unstable nation<sup>10</sup> and illustrated a pre-settler history that allowed for the removal of Indigenous populations through the gifting of the land to white settlers. Longfellow's Hiawatha "in

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<sup>10</sup> The United States in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was grappling with various rapid economic and political changes, from the 1803 Louisiana Purchase and the War of 1812 to the Panic of 1819.

dying, gives the land to the white man's keeping, along with the gift of his knowledge of how to hunt and cultivate the land" (Slotkin, 366), easing the tensions of land claim by the non-Indigenous Americans through the creation of a mythological foundation of identity outside of Europe. The image of the Vanishing Indian is not unique to the culture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century United States. Canada's own conception of the Vanishing Indian was partially influenced by that of the United States, evident in the paintings of Paul Kane and Emily Carr among numerous others. These artists set out to "capture a record of [Indigenous] culture before it died away. This fate was what made Indians so interesting to the public at large" (Francis, 53). The proposed "in-progress" extinction of Indigenous cultures was made prominent to the public through these media representations.

The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and through the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the continuation of several different usages of the Indian in growing literary, and soon filmic, genres. The Western genre in particular is built upon the bodies of the Indian, as physical representations of the "wildness" of the American frontier, identity-less antagonists to serve as cannon fodder against the superiority of the (predominantly and inaccurately White) mythical Cowboy and the United States Cavalry. The Western genre is responsible for many of the attitudes toward Indigenous people through the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. These attitudes are reinforced through the genre's repackaging of Manifest Destiny, the right and responsibility of US westward expansion, and White Christian virtues being imposed on the lawless, pagan "Indian" West. The golden era of



the genre's film expressions commonly featured Indians as antagonists for the John Wayne type to fight in defense of White civility and the purity of White women.

Canada, instead of posing cowboys and cavalry, had the literary and later filmic archetype of the Mountie, Canada's Royal Mounted Police force. The Mountie is defined in similarity and contrast to the American cowboy, particularly in terms of violence. While the Mountie is similar in terms of defending White national values and innocence, there is distance formed in the treatment of the Indigenous population. The Mountie takes a measure of pride in conflict defusal with the Indian, either by show of force or through his authoritative tone. This reflection of Canada's attitude toward their treatment of the Indigenous population being far less brutal than the violence of the United States would migrate to the US through Hollywood with the production of Mountie films in the early 1900's, the first being the short film *The Cattle Thieves* in 1909.

The other "pulp" genre occurring in tandem with the Western during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is that of weird fiction, short stories inclined to the paranormal and pseudo-scientific, epitomized by Howard Phillips Lovecraft, that often featured Indigenous (and more generally racialized Others) antagonists as minor figures worshipping, sometimes supporting, the more cosmically situated antagonists against the rationally oriented White protagonist. This genre relied upon many of the puritanical leanings of the earlier described Captivity Narrative, particularly the associations of devilry and the supernatural, and, most importantly for the following analysis, heavily influenced the horror texts it preceded.

The latter half of the 20th century, an era that will be explored more diligently for its contextual significance in the influence of modern Indigenous Horror later on, saw the production of the Indian in the more familiar horror setting as a supernatural force. The Wendigo, Skinwalker, Sasquatch, and more figures of Indigenous folklore become objects scoured of their cultural significance and dropped into horror settings.<sup>11</sup> The apex of the “Indian” in horror is revealed in the (resurrected) trope of the “Indian Burial Ground”.

Since the 1990’s and the 2000’s, the horror genre across both literature and film has undergone a stark, and mostly welcomed, transformation in Indigenous representation. The commercial success of many Indigenous authors in the realms of literary fiction, Sherman Alexie, Louise Erdrich, Tommy Orange, and genre fiction, A.A. Carr, Eden Robinson, Cherie Dimaline, Stephen Graham Jones, has demonstrated a desire for media outside of and often against the dominance of White literatures. These successes are not without considerable difficulties however, especially in the avoidance of enforced categorization and expectations by the literary marketplace.

Of these authors, directors, and artists of Indigenous horror, the works of Eden Robinson, Jeff Barnaby, and Stephen Graham Jones are most significant here for their utilization of colonial history, violence, and the genre of horror in navigation and rejection of the constructed Indian for the Postindian. Their texts collectively engage in a rejection of the grouping of the “Indian” (the collective referral of all Indigenous

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<sup>11</sup> While some forms of appropriation of Indigenous folklore have fallen out of favor, many forms of media continue to utilize a culturally sanitized presentation of Indigenous culture, especially creatures or spirits, e.g. the Wendigo in *Antlers* (2021) and *Until Dawn* (2015).

people under the same name), depict scenes of, at times visceral, violence that defies the expectations set by the earlier pulp genres, and intentionally complicate the very categorization of “Indigenous fictions and authors”.

The ever-rising financial legitimization of contemporary Indigenous fictions in the global literary and cinematic marketplace brings with it (or rather brings to an ignorant audience) an interrogation of the multitudes of abuses and restraints imposed upon Indigenous cultures. An, at best ignorant, audience is presented with the perseverance of Indigenous cultures and made aware of the historical and current violence against them that is central to the foundation of non-Indigenous Western identity. The focus of this sudden consciousness (one hopes would be) is a questioning of how the systemized cultural annihilation of Indigeneity has been allowed to continue and is still ingrained in the dominant culture.

## **2.2. Resurrecting the Indian Burial Ground**

“Jesus, don’t you ever read anything normal? Ever heard of Stephen King?”

*(Traplines, 100)*

Beginning an analysis of Indigenous horror fiction with the works of an Anglo horror writer seems dubious at best. However, the influence of Stephen King’s bibliography on the genre of horror, both in literature and film, and status as a prominent pop cultural figure prescribes a significant viability in utilizing King as an historic turning point in the genre. The publication of *Carrie* in 1974 ushered King into the realm of regarded horror writers nearly instantaneously. *Carrie* likewise cemented King as a

contributor to the Horror genre's responses (and accused contribution) to the Satanic Panic and resurgent religious imbued paranormal investigation sub-genre, a trend that would become continuous in King's utilization of history in his novels.

King and his contemporaries in the American horror genre chose to engage with, or became a part of through influence, the revitalization of specific tropes that had undergone a relative dormancy since the 1920's and 30's. The revitalization of the mythology of the Indian as a supernaturally aligned figure in horror of the 70's and 80's can be seen as an influence of the prominent media attention received by contemporary Indigenous civil rights movements at the tail end of the 60's and into the 70's (Occupation of Alcatraz in 1969, Occupation of Mt. Rushmore in 1971, the Wounded Knee Occupation in 1973). But this revitalization tended to care little for the contemporary engagements and plights of actual Indigenous communities and instead focused on the familiar image of supernatural affiliation and absence of earlier romantic and pulp fictions.

The most popular recycling of Indian related tropes in the horror of the 70's and 80's was the "Indian Burial Ground",<sup>12</sup> repurposed into congruency with the haunted house. Jay Anson's 1977 *The Amityville Horror* adopted the use of the IBG as a partial explanation as to the supposedly supernatural events of the narrative, relaying that "the Shinnecock Indians used land on the Amityville river as an enclosure for the sick, mad, and dying... [they] did not use this tract as a consecrated burial mound because they believed it to be infested with demons" (81). The supernatural violence of the haunted

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<sup>12</sup> From here the "Indian Burial Ground" is shortened to IBG.

house archetype becoming explained through the repurposing of colonial associations of the Indian with “devilry” taints the American landscape via their historical presence, creating “a horror emanating from the country and its inhabitants” (Mackenthun, 102). The potential implication of suburban middle-class identity with colonization and Indigenous dispossession is subsumed by this horror of Indigeneity itself.

The IBG continued to appear throughout 70’s and 80’s horror, from the 1979 film adaptation of *The Amityville Horror* by Stuart Rosenberg to Tobe Hooper’s 1982 *Poltergeist*, eventually passing from the realm of reliable horror trope to cliché. The IBG is often contemporarily employed as a satirical element, appearing in comedy television like *The Simpsons* or headlining satirical articles for *The Onion*: “Economy Failing Because U.S. Built On Ancient Indian Burial Grounds”. Of all the uses of the IBG during this era of horror fiction, the most subversive demonstration of its deployment in terms of focus on Indigenous dispossession and colonial guilt is found in Stephen King’s 1983 novel *Pet Sematary*.

The primary functioning of references to Indigenous American folklore and iconography in *Pet Sematary* and *The Shining* (1977), alongside much of Stephen King’s extensive bibliography, is in establishing and continuing a historical mythology with which the modern European American identity is familiar: the appropriation of Indigenous cultures in symbols and commodities to bolster European superiority, and may continue to be developed. Both *Pet Sematary* and *The Shining* engage in the usage of Indigenous imagery for the sake of describing and relating to intense acts of violence. In *Pet Sematary*, when Louis awakes to the corpse of Victor Pascow standing in his

bedroom, he describes the bloody specter as “head bashed in behind the left temple. The blood had dried on his face in maroon stripes like Indian warpaint” (83). The ghastly form of Pascow is related to the violent, and importantly figured as also dead, image of Indigenous Americans. Earlier, when Pascow is rushed into the University medical center after being hit by a car, he cryptically warns Louis about the power of the Pet Sematary before stating “Injun bring my fish” (74), seeming to call upon Louis as an “Injun” to bring him sustenance. Pascow introduces the novel’s supernatural elements, specifically that of reanimation, and immediately aligns these elements with Indigeneity. Pascow’s cryptic warning to Louis at first seem an act of compassion, a legitimate caution against what lies in the woods. But what the specter offers “wasn’t really compassion at all; only a dreadful kind of patience” (87). Pascow’s limited presence and “warning” become complicated with the introduction of the Wendigo figure later on. King’s usage of the Wendigo differs from the cannibalistic figure of Algonquin traditions. Instead of offering a warning against isolation and cannibalism, King’s Wendigo manipulates the living and reanimates the dead. The Wendigo’s initial “appearance” occurs when Jud leads Louis through Little God Swamp to bury Church, ominously laughing in the distance. Jud delivers an explanation of the Wendigo through folklore about the burial ground, claiming the Micmac had abandoned it because of the corruptive power of the Wendigo. King’s monster appropriates the namesake of the Wendigo, as had prior White authors like Algernon Blackwood with his 1910 novella *The Wendigo*, that imbues the figure with a fearful Indigenous quality despite his efforts of separation. Relation to Indigenous Americans or imagery are relegated to the position of the supernatural, Pascow becoming

a puppet bloodily painted into a symbol of Indigeneity through which to deliver cryptic warnings to Louis.

Yet it is within *Pet Sematary* that King delves further, granted not by leagues but by paces, into developing the reality of Indigenous Americans both at the arrival of colonial powers and in conflict with the contemporary United States government. There persists a paradoxical navigation of Indigenous identity in *Pet Sematary*. On the one hand, there is the familiar usage of Indigenous imagery in furthering the construction of violent description and enactment that operates similarly to contemporary works like *The Amityville Horror* and *Poltergeist*, the IBG being the commonality amongst the three. The novel's use of the IBG, Jud's descriptions of "Indian woods", and the appropriated Wendigo seem to be only mere recreations of stereotypical associations. Yet there is an acknowledgement of the violent history of colonization: displacement and dispossession, the continuing presence of Indigenous Americans, and the attempted recognition of Indigenous Americans not being a cause of geographic supernatural tampering. As Magistrale and Blouin describe in "The Pasts of *Pet Sematary*", the relegation of the forces operating behind the resurrective behavior of the burial ground as "inherently violent" is because of "the colonial agents of History" (38). The force described as originating in Indigenous mythology is not Indigenous at all, but an appropriated form bent on furthering the actuality of American history through erased acts of violence. This is supported when, in explaining the history of the burial ground to Louis, Jud acknowledges the Micmac's usage of the burial ground as not being the root cause of its resurrective ability: "The Micmac's knew that place, but that doesn't necessarily mean

they made it what it was” (274). The construction of Indigenous identity as being an inherently supernatural formation is broken down, going so far as to recognize the Micmac as being able to separate themselves when the burial ground “goes sour”, something that Jud Crandall and ultimately Louis find themselves unable to do.

The originating source of violence in the novel is an enmeshment between the modern infrastructures of the automobile and petrol industries and that of the Wendigo. The initiating acts of violence, as well as the specter looming from the novel’s beginning, is that of vehicular violence. The speeding oil tanker that would kill Gage, leading Louis to “feed” the Wendigo, is mentioned early in the novel, and the detrimental effect of the road when Jud states “That frigging road. No peace from it” (26). Alongside this permeation is the use of Indigeneity, mentioning “the remains of the Micmac tribe had laid claim to nearly eight thousand acres in Ludlow” (16). While the burial ground is professed to not derive its supernatural antagonism from the Micmac who used it, the Wendigo itself as the cause is still drawn from Indigenous folklore. King’s Wendigo acts akin to a necromantic vampire, reanimating corpses and instilling a malicious violent intent in them while drawing sustenance from them, in contrast to the Indigenous figure of the Wendigo which, although varying between cultures, typically described monstrous gluttony or cannibalism. In the American and Canadian imaginations, the Wendigo presents a fear of not just something monstrous, but something Indigenously monstrous, a pre-colonial horror.



### 2.3. Beyond the Pet Sematary

While *Pet Sematary* begins a confrontation with the usage of Indigenous culture in the formation of an American national identity, it does not make that its objective critique, nor does it confront the reality of present Indigenous Americans much at all. The Micmac, who are for the majority of the novel used as a tool for explaining the historical contexts of the burial ground, are made only presently visible when Jud discusses with Louis the sinister quality of the place: “Now the Micmacs, the state of Maine, and the government of the United States are arguing in court about who owns that land” (258). King’s literary evolution from the one-dimensional usage of Indigenous imagery as a means of furthering the plot or conjuring a greater sense of violence familiar to the American imagination to a paradoxical reckoning of persistent implementation of “Indian as myth” with the reality of European-Indigenous conflict and continuing Indigenous presence does not continue far into his later texts. Instead, the adaptations of his novels<sup>13</sup>, and in particular that of Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining* (1980), may be turned toward as an example of further development.

King’s usage of the Indian is not entirely divorced from Philip Deloria’s idea of “Playing Indian”, in which the cultures and artifacts of various Indigenous nations are replicated into the Euro-American identity. While King is not necessarily playing “dress up”, his usage of Indian icons can be literarily related to the fraternal practice of playing “Indian” in pursuit of literary inspirations. Through King’s works and the various film

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<sup>13</sup> King’s later work on the TV miniseries *Rose Red* would present a far-less subversive use of the Indian Burial Ground trope specifically.

adaptations, Indigeneity is presented either in the form of tropes (lacking criticality in comparison to *Pet Sematary*), decoration, or commodities.

King's *The Shining* delves into a conflation of violence and Indigeneity in a similar manner to *Pet Sematary*. When Danny Torrance is shown a glimpse into the potential future through his shine and proceeds to describe Redrum, Jack supposes "Red drum? Sounds like something an Indian might take on a warpath" (186). The reverse image of Murder that Danny projects is mistakenly absorbed by Jack who can only conflate the potentiality of a musical instrument with a violence in Indigenous usage. While King focuses much of the novel on the perpetuation of violence in American identity, the invisible backdrop in which that violence emerges is rooted in the American ideology of Indigeneity as a mythological and violent figure. This prominent fixture by King is extensive throughout his novels as establishing Indigenous Americans not as people but a cultural fixture in which there exists the allusion of violence or extensive "lost knowledge". This violence is also present in *Rage* (1977), published in the same year as *The Shinning*, written under the pseudonym of Richard Bachman. *Rage* offers an anecdote of Cherokee men mutilating the noses of unfaithful women as a justification to the main character's father's violently misogynistic view towards women, emulating a folk-tale quality in being told around a campfire.

Although Kubrick's adaptation of *The Shining* predates King's *Pet Sematary* by three years, it follows the same trail through the paradoxical representation that *Pet Sematary* would soon after. In the decoration of the Overlook Hotel, there is a noticeable focus on many of the design features being Indigenous imagery, most prominently that of

the Navajo and Apache. But before the instances of Indigenous imagery can be used as background work, the film enables a direct interaction with the increasingly frequent trend of horror at the time that *Pet Sematary* obviously embraces: the Indian Burial Ground. While *Pet Sematary* would use the Indian Burial Ground as a focus point for the primary conflict of the text, Kubrick's *The Shining* merely uses it as an aside, a brief portion of dialogue to implicate the Overlook Hotel into the violent history of colonial American ideology. "The site is supposed to be located on an Indian burial ground and I believe they actually had to repel a few Indian attacks as they were building it" says the Overlook's manager, Stuart Ullman, early in the film. Through this line of dialogue, the Overlook Hotel becomes a physical manifestation of the United States' aptitude for violent assimilation, Indigenous imagery silently situated in the background to embellish the Overlook, depicting a "many-limbed parade of American history [that] leaves bloody handprints on nearly every frame of Kubrick's film" (Magistrale & Blouin, 63). The film's blood isn't always subject to the form of handprints, but also pools and waterfalls. When Jack kills Hallorann, his body is left bleeding onto an Indigenous mosaic. The significance of this scene in understanding the Overlook Hotel as representative of United States history is not difficult to discern: the spilling of Black blood on Indigenous land for the social prosperity of White men. Jack is seen repeatedly pelting a tennis ball against a Navajo sandpainting. This imagery, already relegated to decorative status, is subject to nearly invisible abuses, reinforcing the mythos of Indigenous Americans as being physically absent but ornamentally present.

Unfortunately, the relatively critical potentials of King's *Pet Sematary* and Kubrick's *The Shining* adaptation, with whatever shortcomings they possess, are limited in terms of subverting tropes of Indigeneity in their contemporary horror market. King's later writings and adaptations of his texts would return to utilizing these very tropes, vacated of the socio-political commentary on the issues of colonial legacy and land ownership. In terms of decorum, John Carpenter's 1983 adaptation of *Christine* would feature two white teenagers donning Indigenous regalia and ululating during a football game (though this is a greater reflection of American sports appropriation of Indigeneity). The first *Pet Sematary* adaptation, directed by Mary Lambert in 1989, would portray the Micmac burial ground, explicitly labeling it so, but forgo the presence of the Wendigo. The 2019 adaptation of *Pet Sematary*, directed by Kevin Kölsch and Dennis Widmyer, would label the burial ground's Indigenous connection, but omit the specificity of the Micmac. This adaptation also mentions the Wendigo by name and offers an illustration in lieu of a visualized physical presence. The mini-series *Rose Red*, for which King was a writer, reiterates the IBG as the source of the haunted mansion's supernatural events. Potentially the most egregious entry is 2019's *IT: Chapter 2*, directed by Andy Muschietti. While King's original 1986 novel was not without its own flaws, the adaptation's addition of a non-descript, and not real, Indigenous tribe labeled the "Shokopiwah" recirculates the tropes of mysticism and supernatural authority of Indigenous stereotypes. The group provides nothing more than a vague, hallucinogenic "ceremony" that reveals the IT's origins and a method of defeating the titular antagonist.

(consisting of a ritual artifact that one of the protagonists steals), a reproduction of the long problematized “ethnic magician” trope.

It is through the immensity of influence that King and adaptations of his work have leveled over the horror genre, both literary and pulp, that contributes to his status as a significant figure in the portrayal of Indigenous Americans in fiction. King’s work, despite its often violent and grotesque nature, remains an integral part of the popular literary landscape. Even more important is the influence of King on other writers, and in particular the growing number of Indigenous authors and directors whose works are able to build on the literary styles and conventions of King to primarily focus on the historical and contemporary depiction of Indigenous identity that King fails to combat in his own work.

## INDIGENOUS LITERATURES

### 3.1. Retributive Violence

While in the grand schemata of Postindian violence, the functional difference between retributive, in conversation with systemic injustice and abuse, and sadistic, for the purpose of deriving pleasure, violence is nullified as both contribute to the larger structure of imagining retribution against historical infractions. The distinction based on intra-narrative violence, those depictions contained solely within the context of the text, provides a framework to identify how categorically differing moments of violence contribute to the same inter-narrative formation, multiple texts in discussion or conflict with unmentioned historical and contemporary narratives.

Jeff Barnaby's *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, a drama set in 1976 on the fictional Red Crow Reservation, centers on the experiences within and the impact of Canada's Indian residential school system on First Nations people and communities through the character of Aila, played by Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs (Kanien'kehá:ka). While the real-world inter-narrative connections to systemic government abuses of First Nation children and communities are obvious from the beginning, the narrative's use of violence needs first be understood.

The violence in *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* is not extensive, quantifiably limited to a handful of, albeit quite potent, scenes. The film's opening sequence depicts the death of Aila's younger brother, his head crushed under the wheel of a car his drunk mother is driving. Following this is the scene of Aila's father being beaten and arrested while her mother's body hangs in the background. The film's initial moments of violence are brief

and visceral but become elongated as the film progresses, and the audience becomes increasingly aware of the rampant drug abuse on the reservation persisting as a byproduct of the community's collective trauma of St. Dymphna's: "you have the rez rats who want nothing more than to get fucked up for bottom dollar. This is what brings my people together. The art of forgetfulness". The following instances of violence are less gruesome, building instead the power the Indian Agent Popper holds over Aila and the Reservation in his physical abuses toward her uncle, her father, and her. Most prominently is the beating and capture of Aila's recently released father, and her subjugation to the admission violence of St. Dymphna's, being stripped, forcibly bathed, and having her hair shorn.

Despite these earlier acts of violence being prevalent, their persistence is not within the realm of retribution or even revenge; rather they act to uphold the structures of authority Popper and St. Dymphna's holds over the reservation, Popper's role as an Indian Agent authorizing him to represent the Canadian government on the reservation and see to the implementation and enforcement of government policies, including the Indian Act<sup>14</sup>. Retributive violence finally manifests through the scene depicting Aila and her friends breaking into St. Dymphna's, stealing back the money that has been used to pay off Popper, and rescuing her father. In an act of sabotage, the group backs up the plumbing of the residential school and fills it with excrement courtesy of the reservation, resulting in Popper attempting to shower and being covered in feces. This moment, as

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<sup>14</sup> The Indian Agent played a similar role in the United States, operating as representatives of the US government to Indigenous nations and on reservations.

Shannon Claire Toll notes, prevents his ability to “wash off his ‘shame’ after sexually abusing pupils” (8). The sequence is a collective act of retributive violence in that Aila’s group are the direct cause and that the scat ammunition is provided by the reservation’s populace, equally eager to take part in this method of justice. The reversal of the shower’s cleansing physically marks Popper in the “waste” of the reservation he has so prominently had a hand in creating.

The film’s culminating act of violence occurs when Popper, rage induced by his humiliation, attacks Aila and Joe at home. After incapacitating Joe, Popper attempts to sexually assault Aila. The act is stopped by the intervention of the young boy, who freed Aila at St. Dymphna’s, leveling a shotgun at Popper. Popper’s attempted authorial command for the boy to put down the gun under the guise of a threat is cut short as the boy fires: “Now you put that gun down or I’m gonna- [gunshot]”, killing Popper. The violence inflicted against Popper, both fecal and lead based, disrupts the professed authority of the Residential school system presented through governmental and religious control, reflecting and reversing the film’s opening with the text of the Indian Act by will of the Queen: “Her Majesty’s attendants... will take into custody a child whom they believe to be absent from school using as much force as the circumstance requires.” The film’s closing sees Joe take the blame for Popper’s death, once again being arrested, to protect Aila and the young boy, and the suggested mentoring of Aila by a friend of her grandfather’s, Gisigu, who won’t let her return to selling drugs.

In the greater, inter-narrative framework of Postindian retribution, *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* engages with several re-creations of impactful historical acts, the most



focal being the horrifying conditions and assimilatory practices of the Indian residential school system throughout Canada. While during the film's release in 2014 the sufferings brought on by the residential school system were already abundantly clear, the scope of the trauma has only grown through the following years under the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report in 2015 and the hundreds of Indigenous remains in unmarked graves on residential school grounds continuing to be uncovered. The film's setting of a 1970's reservation in which the residential school system is still presently at play allows for imagined violence directly against a system that no longer, in its portrayed form, exists. *Killing Popper* stands as an imagining of violent retribution against the Indian agents' cruelties that cannot be manifested in reality.

West and across the border into present day Montana, North Dakota, and the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, the settings of Stephen Graham Jones' *The Only Good Indians* change little about the functionalities of violence. The narrative retribution of *The Only Good Indians* attempts a different approach through presenting the Indigenous characters as the inflictors of violence and the victims and eventual justice seekers being a herd of elk. The cevirdae antagonist, Elk-Woman or Po'noka, is reminiscent of the typical pursuant behaviors of villains in the slasher sub-genre, described by Carol J. Clover as "the immensely generative story of a psycho-killer who slashes to death a string of mostly female victims, one by one, until he is himself subdued or killed, usually by the one girl who has survived" (187). The presence of this "final girl" in conflict with the slasher antagonist allows for focus on the mental degradation and building of paranoia rather than outright slaughter, although it is still prevalent. Seeking vengeance

against the four Blackfeet protagonists for their against-reservation law hunting-trip-turned-massacre which resulted in the death of her herd, herself, and her unborn calf, Po'noka pursues the four across state and reservation boundaries.

Po'noka's pursuit of the four protagonists and their eventual deaths take place wherein she acts as an initiator of indirect violence rather than direct. Instead of killing the four men herself, Elk Woman incites violence against them by causing conflicts and sowing paranoia while remaining unseen. Po'noka's lack of direct action and visibility engage in a subversion on the typical slasher, for while their presence may remain undetected during moments of tension, the deaths are directly caused by them and not some third party. This use of indirect violence contributes directly to Elk-Woman's "invisibility", the deaths, instead of suggesting a violent stalker, suggest a string of "bad luck". Ricky is beaten to death by a white mob outside of a bar after Po'noka damages their cars. Lewis is overcome with paranoia and kills his Crow coworker and his wife before being hunted down by white vigilantes and killed. Cass is, after a series of accidents, killed by Gabe. Finally, Gabe, the only one of the quartet to speak with Po'noka, commits suicide believing she will leave his daughter Denorah alone.

Po'noka's indirect violence against the protagonists at first presents as a simple narrative of supernatural revenge. Though the violence performed is in service of her individual desire for revenge, the initiating acts of violence were not solely against Elk-Woman, but her entire herd and her unborn calf. The four protagonists were in violation of their own reservation's law for elder reserved hunting rights and any hunter's or community's sensibilities in protecting herd populations. Retribution is not based in Elk

Woman's material body being used in its entirety, her hide being tanned for shoes and belts or her flesh being eaten, as one of the Blackfeet men, Lewis, believes, but in being reunited with her calf.

Pervading all four protagonist's narratives before their deaths are questionings of Indigenous identity and responsibility. Ricky imagines his interview with a foreman as if it were centuries prior, "the foreman in a cavalry jacket, and Ricky already had designs on that jacket's brass buttons" (2). Ricky locates his Indigenous identity as being formed through -in reality entrapped within- a cyclical repetition of history, be it the United States cavalry or white bar patrons having "stepped forward to put him down in that time-honored fashion" (9). Even in death, for Ricky and for the other three, Indigenous identity is marred by white violence. Lewis is, at times, in conflict with his white wife's perceptions of Indigeneity, or his own assumptions of ditching some semblance of "ethnic duty" in marrying a white woman and leaving the reservation. Gabe is frequently attempting to embody some form of pride for his Indigenous identity, even if he has to result to making up what constitutes a "good Indian" on the spot using fictionalized-historical anecdotes. These anecdotes display a necessity for the contribution of imagining in the creation of identity, when personal and cultural history have been eroded through traumatic events. These identity formations are limited to the perceptions of Indigeneity as filtered through the histories and concepts of colonial domination, recreating stereotypes without escaping or undermining them. The creation of identity at first seems to function in the realm of Vizenor's Postindian identity, but falls short in its recreation of "Indian-ness", enacting the "manifest manners" of the Indian rather than

acts of Postindian survivance. Cass is the only one to see through the delusion of this Indian-identity repetition, criticizing Gabe that “everything that’s Indian, you just make it up!” (236). While Gabe’s retort of “Shit, somebody’s got to” (236) illustrates the necessity of (re)creation in the wake of cultural destruction, Cass’ critique stands against what goes into Gabe’s exemplifications of Indian-ness.

Eden Robinson’s short story “Queen of the North” figures the protagonist Adelaine recounting her adolescence and the sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of her uncle Josh. Uncovering Josh’s own sexual abuse at the residential school by Father Archibald, Adelaine is able to utilize Josh’s own past against him in forcing him to recognize the abuse and suffering he caused. Putting a clot from her own menstruation in a Ziploc bag and adorning it as a gift for uncle Josh, “I put the picture and the bag in a hatbox. I tie it up with a bright red ribbon” (213), Adelaine intends to inflict a psychological form of retributive violence against Josh, weaponizing the clot as evidence of his abuses and situating him in the position of Father Archibald in the photograph. It remains unstated whether or not Adelaine delivers the gift to Josh or not. Instead, Adelaine’s boyfriend Jimmy accidentally discovers the gift and leaves without speaking to her. Later, when trying to find Jimmy, she discovers he’s gotten a job fishing on the titular *Queen of the North* with Josh.

The short story leaves the motivation behind Jimmy’s decision to go aboard the *Queen of the North* with Josh intentionally ambiguous. Robinson’s later novel *Monkey Beach* uses the short story as a foundational point, following Jimmy’s sister Lisamarie after Jimmy has disappeared at sea. The novel cements Jimmy’s motivation for joining

the crew as a sense of retribution, “For what he did to Karaoke, he knew that Josh deserved to die” (369), intending to kill Josh.

*Rhymes for Young Ghouls* and *The Only Good Indians* leave few definitively “well off” by their narrative conclusions. The teenaged characters Aila and Denorah remain in the tremendous wakes of great violence against them and their families, but they have been positioned toward a more hopeful futurity than those before them in remaining both alive and un-incarcerated. Aila is left with the presence of a supportive adult and mentor figure in Gisigu, presenting a potential cultural reconnect outside of the traumatic endeavors of St. Dymphna’s or the rampant drug abuse in that he appears to be a traditional elder figure. Denorah is likewise left with a supportive adult in the form of her step-father who rushes out to save her from Po’noka. Denorah is left able to discern the wrong doings of her father that contributed to Elk-Woman’s violent rage as a component of cyclical violence, preventing it from continuing by stopping her step-father from firing at Po’noka.

There persists an element in the narratives centering around inner retributive violence that guarantees (or at least suggests) the security of future generations through its enactment. The retributive violence, acting in its capacity against systematic oppressions, functions to render the cyclical systems that have impacted prior generations and threaten future generations inoperable through their exposure and narrative destruction. Aila and Denorah are able to recognize the cycles of abuse that threaten their existence and identities and act against them. Alongside this is the parental generation’s sacrifices to protect their children: Aila’s father taking the blame for Popper’s murder and

Denorah's father committing suicide in an attempt to protect her from Elk Woman, preventing their induction into the cycle of abuses.

### 3.2. Sadistic Violence

“Except this elk, once the glow suffuses down onto it, isn't an elk at all, but Cody, because now him and Jade are just two more Indians at the bottom of the pile of massacred Indians. They're circling the drain of history together.”

*(My Heart is a Chainsaw 335)*

In weighing sadistic narrative violence against retributive narrative violence, it might be assumed that those texts that focus on sadistic violence can be discounted for their lackluster concern for justice, the violence being enacted not in attempt to right a prior wrong-doing but to derive pleasure<sup>15</sup>. In most sadist narratives the violence does often pertain little toward any acts of justice, for instance the *Saw* films as Morris points to, with victims placed in elaborate deadly traps to test their “will to live”, focusing on the derivation of pleasure from such violence rather than any moral sense of right. But sadistic violence, specifically violence in which the primary motivation is to receive a measurable, pleasurable response in the inflictor, is able to contribute to the inter-narrative conceptions of retribution when it operates with historical contexts. The grotesque pleasure derived from sadistic violence is transformed through this contextualization into a re-creation of historical injustices in which the roles have been

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<sup>15</sup> The prime example of course is sadism's namesake, the Marquis de Sade, whose narratives focus on extreme acts of sexual cruelty and the derivation of pleasure over moral limitations.

reversed or otherwise altered. The cyclical “drain of history” becomes clogged with viscera.

Jeff Barnaby’s final film, 2019’s *Blood Quantum*, uses the (arguably oversaturated) zombie film subgenre in order to explore both the issue of land rights and ownership, and, as the title aptly suggests, the difficulties surrounding the legitimations of Indigenous identity. The film uses the blood quantum laws<sup>16</sup> employed by the government in determining racially defined populations as a means of defining immunity to a zombifying virus. Correlating Indigeneity with immunity situates the population of the fictionalized Red Crow reservation (the name returning from *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*) as immune to zombification (but still at risk of being eaten by zombies) and the reservation as a safe haven. While some of the Indigenous population, such as main characters Traylor (Michael Greyeyes) and Joseph (Forest Goodluck), seek to uphold the reservation as a safe haven for all, including the vulnerable surviving white population, others Indigenous characters wish to see the reservation free of whites and the overwhelming risk they pose to Indigenous survival.

The sadistic violence of the film occurs in the actions of Lysol (Kiowa Gordon) and James (Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs) toward the white refugees in the compound. What begins as outwardly hostile and aggressive treatment of the white refugees turns

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<sup>16</sup> Blood quantum laws are rooted within the language of English common law and have been used by the United States federal government in determining ancestry from treaties in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the contemporary usage under the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, under which only those who meet a threshold of Indigenous ancestry are considered Indigenous by the government (see Spruhan, Paul. “A Legal History of Blood Quantum in Federal Indian Law to 1935”. *South Dakota Law Review*, vol. 51, no. 1, 2006).

toward complete violence after a refugee, Lilith, enters the compound secretly infected. After Lilith zombifies during intercourse and disfigures Lysol, he seeks revenge against all of the white refugees, unleashing Lilith into the compound, leading to its destruction. The cause of the reservation's destruction being manifested through sadistic violence informed by personal prejudice operates as a cautionary tale against the abuse of vulnerable populations, even if the vulnerable had once been the inflictors of sadistic violence themselves. The significance of depicting nuanced Indigenous antagonists is likewise a necessary representation of Postindian identity. As Jones says in an interview for *Esquire*, "If we are always represented as heroes or victims, then that's another form of violence, another form of essentialism". Barnaby's alignment of Lysol and James as antagonists that are not caricatures of evil "Indians" develops instead forms of Postindian villains, figures through which anxieties and anger can be communicated and warned.

Lysol's namesake, as Darrell Varga notes, is that of a low-alcohol home cleaning product, drawing on associations with both "(ethnic) cleansing" and "as an allegorical reference to the British military use of infected smallpox blankets as weapons during the Seven Years War" (24). Reference to militarized use of smallpox is made explicit when James takes the blanket of a recently admitted refugee away and burns it. The presence of an epidemically vulnerable white population on Indigenous land recreates the initiating instances between colonial powers and Indigenous populations half a millennium prior, recreating a reverse scenario of contact. Although virgin-soil epidemics described by Jared Diamond in *Germs, Guns, and Steel* have undergone complications in recent years, the prevalence of vulnerability to immune-lacking populations in colonially impacted



conditions was destructive to Indigenous nations following contact. This reverse scenario, the Indigenous population having immunity and dictating the conditions for the vulnerable white population, sets the stage for any number of exploitations to be re-created in reverse. The reservation is likewise reversed into a space of power rather than the product of removal policies onto the least resourceful land, being recreated into the only safe space left (at least at the film's beginning).

The nature of analyzing ambiguously racialized texts, such as Robinson's short story collection *Traplines*, prompts a necessary inquiry into the possible fallbacks of claiming assignment of Indigeneity. In the final chapter of *How Should I Read These?*, "How Should I Eat These?", Helen Hoy grapples with the issue of assuming Indigeneity on ambiguous texts and characters in regard to authorial identity.

The violence of the short story collection *Traplines* varies from the re-creation of sadistic colonial violence onto ambiguous and explicit bodies, to acts of grotesque and defiant retribution. The racial ambiguity of the short story "Contact Sports", an ambiguity that becomes explicit in *Blood Sports*, is bookended by "Dogs in Winter" and "Queen of the North", stories explicit in their Indigenous presentation and violent content. The violence of "Contact Sports" emulates the sadistic historical impact of colonial violence on Indigenous populations in North America, specifically that of the assimilationist practices performed in residential schools. The narrative however, does not recreate these instances exactly; instead, it figures the acts of violence being committed by and against racially ambiguous bodies. Tom Bauer, an epileptic high school student already precariously navigating the rocky seas of teenage identity, finds the already difficult

situation of his home and personal life upset by the presence of his drug-dealing, Jaguar-driving cousin Jeremy.

The introduction of Jeremy upsets the, admittedly precarious, dynamic in Tom's home. The sudden injection of financial stability provided by Jeremy ingrains a requirement of servitude onto Tom. The actions Tom must perform at first, attending school, getting good grades, "being good", may all be disguised as benefits towards Tom's wellbeing, an easy compromise for no longer having to worry about growing financial debt. But Jeremy's demands increasingly overstep the boundaries of Tom's physical identity and safety: Tom has his hair forcibly shorn, his old, thrifted clothing discarded for suits, and, eventually, his sexual privacy violated. This erosion of his personal identity culminates when Jeremy begins physically abusing him. The physical abuse ultimately leads to Jeremy ambushing and violently beating Tom, after Tom has had Jeremy's car pinched. Tom is tricked by his crush, who Jeremy has promised drugs, bound and tortured by Jeremy, the entire act being recorded.

In the short story, neither Tom nor Jeremy's ethnicities are noted, and instead remain ambiguous. Hoy notes that Robinson's choice of such ambiguity is influenced by the looming categorization of Indigenous literature and her growing recognition as an author. Jeremy represents a sudden, uninvited, entrant into Tom's life who is able to use monetary and physical means to threaten Tom into performing in a manner different to his personal identity. This usurpation of identity situates Jeremy into the role of the Indian Agent, forcing Tom to assimilate into the mainstream. He uproots Tom's sense of self under the guise of improvement, and when he doesn't get what he wants, or Tom

refuses, he threatens physical and emotional violence as a means of coercion. Robinson's re-creation of assimilationist practices on ambiguous bodies performs a means of Postindian subversion in preventing the, definitive, labeling of the text as either Indigenous or non-Indigenous. To label the text as Indigenous is to rely on Robinson's own Indigeneity as confirmation, while to label it otherwise would require ignoring the clear description of assimilationist practices, thus leaving a boundary transgressing, Postindian text.

The violence of the short story is altered however in the novel *Blood Sports*. A continuation of "Contact Sports", *Blood Sports* deeply ingrains itself in the pulp crime-thriller genre. Tom, now having a relationship and a child with his crush Paulie, is still attempting to deal with the consequences of his experiences with Jeremy and his affiliates. When these affiliates reappear believing Tom to be talking to the police, the violence reemerges incredibly. Tom is kidnapped, drugged, and tortured into revealing what he has told the police and as to the whereabouts of tapes documenting various illegal deeds filmed by the now incarcerated Jeremy. The difference in these acts of violence, besides being more intense, are the bodies it is acted onto. Both Tom and Jeremy are described as Caucasian during the novel's segments depicting the content of Jeremy's extensive videotaping.

The significance of *Blood Sports* as a Postindian text, despite the loss of racial ambiguity from "Contact Sports", featuring no explicitly Indigenous characters lies in the persistence of discrimination in the post- "assimilation" experience. Tom, giving in to the societal expectations of domesticity and work, has acts of violence performed against his

body, by other white bodies, in a mimicry of assimilationist violence performed against Indigenous bodies. Tom's torture, ranging from drugging and kicking to the insertion of burning needles, are enacted in attempt to force Tom into admitting to his own violation of social expectation, in the torturer's belief that Tom went to the police with information about Jeremy's incriminating video tapes. The cultural realm in which Tom is being forcibly assimilated into, both by Jeremy and the torturer Firebug, is not that of the "hip-to-be-square" law-abiding citizen, but of the criminal underground.

*My Heart is a Chainsaw* (2022) is a meta-fictional approach to the horror genre, being cited as a love letter to the horror films of the 1980's (particularly that of the slasher sub-genre), playing on common tropes of the genre and expectations. As with *The Only Good Indians*, Jones reiterates the tropes and formulas of the slasher sub-genre, adapted to contemporary critiques with the history of abuse and cultural unknowing brought through colonial violence. The novel is equally concerned with identity, the protagonist Jade Daniels, a horror obsessed queer Indigenous teenager, providing the primary source of horror history that the novel deconstructs.

The establishing shot of *My Heart is a Chainsaw* situates two Dutch tourists in the fictional Proofrock, Idaho, musing on the setting of America: "'We're gonna fix this place up right', Sven says, meaning all of America" (4). The Dutch presence in the novel, much like the colonial Dutch presence in 17<sup>th</sup> century North America, is rather short. Instead of New Amsterdam refurbished into New York by the English, these Dutch tourists are killed by a specter haunting Indian Lake who will later be revealed to be the vengeful spirit of an Indigenous woman, Stacey Graves. This opening immediately

situates the novel's place in recreating history through establishing a representation of European colonial culture perceiving the landscape of the Americas as needing to be fixed through European sensibilities. This historically framed antagonist is bolstered through the narrative's other antagonist, Theo Mondragon, who begins killing workers to coverup accidents that threaten the new wealthy community of Terra Nova (literally *New Land*). The contrasting violence of these two slashers, Graves being supernatural and indiscriminate, Mondragon against the working class and for the sake of gentrification, embroil the narrative in the history of land ownership and Indigenous dispossession.

History's impact on the present is further realized through Jade's constant identification with the horror genre. In order to pass her history class, Jade turns in papers on the history of horror's tropes and sub-genres, which are provided to the audience between chapters. This wealth of knowledge informs Jade's worldview and allows her to perceive the instances of violence occurring in Proofrock as being connected and signaling the presence of a slasher in the town. This suggestion is of course discarded by the figures of authority around her, being perceived as the result of an overactive and traumatized imagination. This encyclopedic knowledge of horror film history is contrasted sharply against her lack of knowledge of her own Indigenous identity. Jade's concerns with her own Indigenous identity are complicated, sharing in the trend of older generations not being able to discuss their cultural histories, in fear of retaliation or the traumas of past retaliations. She admits to herself that "she'd always thought she was Shoshone, because those were the Indians her social studies class said were in Idaho" (21), never being told that she was Blackfeet by her father.

This unstable foundation of familial history results in Jade lashing out, such as during a discussion with Cowboy Boots, hired on to aid in the construction of high-end lake houses, when Jade asserts that she is Blackfoot. When prompted that “‘Isn’t that Blackfeet?’”, she responds, “‘Blackfeet’ she says back with faked authority. ‘What the fuck did you think I said?’” (21). This lack of personal Indigenous authority does not prevent Jade from feeling the effects of the racialized horror tropes she is familiar with however. When Jade begins to believe herself to be in the setting of a slasher film, she immediately suggests the possibility of a “final girl” figure in an attempt to subdue the killer. But Jade does not figure herself as the final girl, and instead turns toward a new student at her school. Jade is unable to see herself as becoming the final girl for multiple reasons: She is a queer woman, Indigenous, and “impure”. The figure of the final girl is usually presented as the sober, chaste white woman of the group, such as Sally Hardesty in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) or Laurie Strode from *Halloween* (1978), “spared” because of her moral purity. Interestingly, if Clover’s definition of the final girl is followed, Jade demonstrates an even greater cognition, as the final girl “lives with the knowledge [of her danger] for long minutes or hours” (201), whereas Jade’s knowledge is present for days if not weeks.

At the apex of the novel, when the antagonists converge on the town’s Fourth of July celebration and begin slaughtering the townsfolk on Indian Lake, Jade kills her abusive father, who is dressed up like Tonto<sup>17</sup>. The murder (somewhat accidental),

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<sup>17</sup> The character Tonto comes from the Western radio series *The Lone Ranger*. In the series, expanded into television, film, novels, and comics, Tonto plays sidekick to the titular Lone Ranger. The figure of Tonto has been criticized for reinforcing cultural stereotypes about Indigenous Americans.

recreates the final scene of *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*, in having Jade's father lurch from beneath the water and grab at her. Opposed to Alice's dream of being pulled into Crystal Lake by Jason's decaying body, Jade embeds a machete in her father's neck. This act of violence prevents Jade from being pulled down into the historically dirty waters of Indian lake and releases her from the prospect of further abuse. The choice of costuming Jade's father as Tonto in this moment presents a tandem rejection of the stereotypes of Indigeneity embodied in such figures.

In facing off against the wealthy serial killer, the vengeful Indigenous spirit, and her father as the specter of Tonto, Jade stands against the looming threats of history that meld into her own oppression. Their sadistic recreations of historical violence contribute to the inter-narrative negotiation of assimilationist practices, colonial land claims, and the figuring of Indigenous identity in the wake of cultural destruction.

## CONCLUSION

### 4.1. Horror Endings and Survivance

The ever-present difficulty of endings, particularly the crafting of *good* endings, is an issue that is exacerbated within the horror genre. Even the most well renowned and commercially successful horror writers and directors are challenged in the formation of a satisfying, and yet tonally synchronized, conclusion.<sup>18</sup> The possibilities of horror endings are wide and varied, from sole survivors (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Alien*) to twist endings (*A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Drag Me to Hell*) and utter ambiguity (*Halloween*, *It Follows*). The difficulty of these endings originates partially in the balance of tension and release that runs throughout the work, either ending before the audience is satisfyingly released from tension buildup, or too long after the release has occurred. Across the selected works of Robinson, Barnaby, and Jones, the deliberation has not been focused on whether or not the narrative's balance of tension and release reach a satisfactorily entertaining conclusion, but how the narratives' figure into acts of Postindian survivance. The requisites of survivance, *survival* and *resistance*, intertwine a similarity through the endings of these texts: perseverance against the oppressor.

The conclusions of Barnaby's *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* and *Blood Quantum*, while presenting a measure of uncertainty in the wake of systematic change, the death of the Indian agent Popper and zombie infestation of the reservation, also figure a hope in the futurity of Indigeneity. In *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, Aila is left with both an elder

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<sup>18</sup> There persists a trend across Stephen King's readership that in contrast to his engrossing narratives and ability to establish dark tones, he "can't write a good ending to save his life" (Kerridge, Jake. "Stephen King can't write a good ending to save his life – and he knows It". *The Telegraph*, 2019).



mentor figure in Gisigu and friendship with the schoolboy who saved her. *Blood Quantum* suggests the continuation of not only Indigeneity but humanity as a whole with the birth of Joseph's zombie-immune child. The audience is not explicitly told what follows but is left knowing that survival and continuation are possible and with healthy room for speculation.

Robinson's protagonists across *Traplins* and *Blood Sports* persist through their hardships, although, they are left in even greater ambiguity in comparison to Barnaby's films. The result of this lack of definitive answers, as horror films especially have latched onto, is the possibility of narrative sequels, as is the case with "Queen of the North" and *Monkey Beach*, and "Contact Sports" and *Blood Sports*.<sup>19</sup> These narratives and their later continuations offer not merely survival, but also avenues of resistance or succumbing.

Jones' conclusions, relying on his subversions of the slasher sub-genre and the final girl trope, figure the remaining protagonists as either communal saviors, as is the case with Jade in *My Heart is a Chainsaw* (though recognition of her acts is left for the sequel), or as being in the rescue and care of community, as is the case with Denorah being rescued by her step-father in *The Only Good Indians*. The route of survivance crafted in these conclusions is focused particularly around the impacts of the collective, even when community has been absent to the needs of the protagonist.

Darrell Varga states that the Indigenous artist's work is "surviving in spite of the crimes of the nation-state and thriving by shining a light on colonial legacies" (25). The

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<sup>19</sup> Robinson had produced some hundred pages of a follow-up to *Blood Sports* entitled *Death Sports* before having to scrap it. (Stephenmaymckenzie.com)

“thriving” Varga describes can be rearticulated as resistance, translating the description into the realm of the Postindian. Postindian violence presents a spotlight in the forms of genre entertainment familiar to contemporary, oblivious, audiences on the legacies of violence and systemic erasure in a means that cannot be ignored. The violence of the horror genre that concludes in what seems to be isolation becomes, through the Postindian, a dislodging of historically enforced collectivity in the “Indian” and the creation of a new collectivity of survivance. To reiterate, survivance is a Postindian means of persistence for both the individual and their culture.

Be it the archetypal final girl or the remainder of a group at the conclusion of horror narratives, the characters that make it to the end of this genre of stories *survive*. Vizenor’s notion of survivance is fulfilled in Indigenous horror through the character’s active survival of the narrative, and resistance against the recreated colonial violence that fuels it. Retributive and sadistic violence in Indigenous horror culminate as methodical resistances towards colonial implications through the recreation of history. Robinson, Barnaby, and Jones’ works participate in a cross-cultural, international survivance against colonization’s annihilatory agenda.

But Retributive and Sadistic Postindian violence are only able to account for a small portion of the violence depicted across Indigenous fictions and films. Its methodology of comparing functions of justice and pleasure fails to encapsulate other depictions. Returning to Tommy Orange’s *There There*, the powwow shooting at the narrative’s conclusion cannot be articulated as either retributive or sadistic. There persists

an implication of colonization's legacy in driving Indigenous violence, but its appearance leaves behind a nulling void rather than a vacancy, for cultural re-creation.

#### 4.2. Audience and Effect

In his examples of Postindian warriors, Vizenor situates the actions of writers, directors, artists, and actors alongside that of political resistance movements such as AIM. This proximity dictates the literary, filmic, and artistic landscapes to be important landscapes of performance in protesting and resisting the sociocultural and political domination of Indigenous identity. Understanding the realms of literature and cinema as capable of enabling Indigenous activism, how does Indigenous horror work to educate and spur non-Indigenous audiences?<sup>20</sup>

In 2019, during an interview of the upcoming screening of his film *Blood Quantum* at the Toronto International Film Festival, Jeff Barnaby stated,

I hope they go out and research a little and, and hopefully have a broader understanding of the relationship between native and non-native people in Canada and the US... you're trying to get a non-native audience and I think it'll speak, like the film will one-thousand percent speak a native audience... but I think white audiences are going to struggle getting it... I think you kind of need to put these ideas in a vehicle that the majority of the population or the ruling class are gonna understand. (TIFF)

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<sup>20</sup> The realm of activist horror analysis has already been populated with works concerning feminism and animal welfare. See: Walker, Johnny. "Activist Horror Film: The Genre as a Tool for Change". *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, vol. 20, 2022.

The purpose of Barnaby's utilization of the zombie film sub-genre is attached to its extreme pop-cultural relevancy, growing itself from the history of colonialism and Haitian folklore. This reflection situates an understanding and a hopefulness in the ability to convey, what Barnaby refers to as, "minority ideas" to the majority without the potential for sowing alienation in the audience.<sup>21</sup> Barnaby's use of the horror genre consciously avoids the pitfalls of resulting to "overly-preachy" or "poverty-porn" narratives that would result in a limited reach or interest to majority audiences.

Barnaby's understanding of the non-Indigenous majority's hesitation toward the consumption of alienating media makes the familiar landscape of horror, and all speculative or pulp genre fictions, a worthy candidate for the communication of "subtle" histories that Indigenous audiences would recognize and non-Indigenous audiences would seek to understand. The antagonists of the horror genre, and the greater realm of gothic fiction, have achieved space in the international pop-cultural imagination, serving with increasing frequency as "harbingers of social change" (Browning 2). Barnaby's feature length films are communicable and digestible without an extensive knowledge of Indigenous history and are enriched through such further engagements.

Robinson and Jones likewise demonstrate an understanding for the audience assumptions bound to their works. On her short story "Terminal Avenue" Robinson notes its excision from the *Traplins* collection being due to the fact that "back in the mid-90's, bondage porn didn't belong in a serious fiction collection", stating that a decade-and-a-

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<sup>21</sup> Following the structures of European-dominated storytelling is not always a guarantee against alienation of course, and sometimes narratives of explicitly Indigenous style, such as *Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner* (2001), attain rapid critical and commercial success.

half later, “post-50 *Shades*”, the short story would’ve likely been the title piece of the collection. The changing attitudes toward what is constitutive of “serious fiction” has enabled a further exploration of genre fiction’s resistance capabilities and transgressive potentiality, Robinson’s speculative fiction *Trickster* trilogy (2018-2021) is evidence of such recent approaches. Jones’ aptitude for meta-approaches to genre fiction likewise come after a lengthy streak of literary-fiction novels and short stories, which although receiving significant analytical attention, were not the market successes as his recent horror titles have become.

Even within the confines of genre, Barnaby, Robinson, and Jones’ grasp of the inner workings of their forms allow them the ability to subvert limitations in discreet ways. In returning to Vizenor’s terminology, they are able to subvert the “manifest manners” expected of their Indigeneity and status as writers and directors, enabling a form of protest within the landscape of fiction. This wave of Indigenous fiction has seen a significant increase in the writing of genre fiction, “we’ve got a lot of horror and spec fic and mystery and thriller and noir writers coming up – which give you more leeway to be transgressive with your narratives” (Robinson), a growth that has been matched by the measurable increase of audience interest in Indigenous narratives. These approaches to genre fiction utilize the mechanics of *Survivance* Vizenor examines of the earlier works of Indigenous literature, film, and activism, adapting to the form-specific narrative methodologies. The role of Postindian violence explored here expands further into these examples of Indigenous genre fiction, from Robinson’s own *Trickster* trilogy to the

anthropocentric violence of Cherie Dimaline's Dystopian YA novel *The Marrow Thieves* and Waubgeshig Rice's Post-Apocalyptic *Moon of the Crusted Snow*.<sup>22</sup>

The role of violence in the creation of the "Indian" has been demonstrably subverted in the realm of Indigenous horror in enacting the collective survivance of the Postindian. Tropes that have utilized Indigeneity as a signifier of devilry and savagism have been undermined and discarded, the history of Indigenous dispossession and colonial abuses has been recreated to expose their systematized legacies, and the "Vanishing Indian" has been dismantled in the wake of violent visibility. The global influence of the American horror market has impacted audiences and writers alike, presenting avenues for development and subversion from varying liminal social positions. As the contemporary horror genre continues to utilize its problematic prejudicial history, the discussion and exhibition of ongoing sociopolitical struggles only grows in tandem, legitimizing the genre as a site of activism and encouraging an aware audience.

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<sup>22</sup> See: Xausa, Chiara. "Decolonizing the Anthropocene: 'Slow Violence' and Indigenous Resistance in Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*". *Il Tolomeo*, vol. 22, 2020, pp. 87-100. and Martens, Reuben. "Petromelancholia and the Energopolitical Violence of Settler Colonialism in Waubgeshig Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow*". *American Imago*, vo. 77, no. 1, 2020, pp. 193-211.

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