

Sena Crow  
Christina Roberts  
ENGL-4895-05 Honors Thesis Supervision  
25 May 2019

Radical Imagining:  
Indigenous Futurisms and the Decolonizing Possibilities of Contemporary Indigenous Fiction

**Introduction**

In a moment from Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*, the mysterious narrator, I, tells the trickster Coyote that there are "no truths" but "only stories." This may be a small moment in the vast, fantastical world of King's novel, but to me it speaks to the heart of my project. I am not the only person interested in the radical possibilities of fiction, and my thesis is not unique in this capacity. In beginning this endeavor, I drew inspiration and empowerment from Walidah Imarsha and adrienne marie brown's *Octavia's Brood*, which is an anthology of speculative and visionary fiction written by activists and organizers. In their introduction, Imarsha exclaims that they want activists to "be able to claim the vast space of possibility, to be birthing visionary stories" (3). They see the possibilities for speculative fiction to change the world, "build a foundation for the fantastic," and ultimately, serve as a place where that fantastic "liberates the mundane" (4). As I wisely tells Coyote, where truths are nonexistent, muddled, or inaccessible, stories have the power to account for the truths that have been denied to people or used to limit their autonomy. Stories enable us to revise master narratives that have been told as truths, to unearth the buried narratives of colonized and marginalized populations, and offer other paths to navigate the world. They account for histories that ground the fields of the world, and indeed, they are visionary as they imagine our ideas, fears, and desires propelled into the unknown space of the future.

I was led to this intersecting interest towards speculative fiction written by Indigenous authors by studying decolonization and feminist methods alongside Indigenous literature. As a

white-passing, settler-Irish and Athabascan/Yupik woman raised outside my ancestral lands of Alaska, my interest and stakes in this project are admittedly intimate. Additionally, as I have had the privilege to access literary investigation and decolonizing methods within academic spaces, my project seeks the application of a decolonizing methodology outside of academia and within a medium that is more reachable to Indigenous folks and people of color, who have historically been denied access to academic spaces. The use of liberatory-seeking methodologies, which honor the imaginations, losses, and desires of populations are intertwined with the intentions of writing futuristic, speculative, or fantasy fiction. I seek to illustrate the radical and transformative nature of these novels through their work as decolonizing projects as well as their contributions to both a historical lineage of science fiction and the recently emerging sub-genre of Indigenous/decolonizing science fiction. I will investigate the literary themes of dystopian worlds and apocalyptic events in Indigenous fiction novels as purposefully time-meddling through either their imaginings of the future, as with Cherie Dimaline and Louise Erdrich's novels, or the cyclical story of creation that frames Thomas King's work. The non-linear or futuristic temporality of these novels resists Western temporality and, ultimately, narratives of progress that inform linear conceptions of time. I will engage the transtemporal imagination with the connected elements of apocalyptic, world-changing events like floods and biological/special devolution across my novels in Thomas King's fantastical trickster novel *Green Grass, Running Water*, Louise Erdrich's apocalyptic novel *Future Home of the Living God*, and Cherie Dimaline's young adult dystopian novel *The Marrow Thieves*.

Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* first sparked my interest in Indigenized speculative fiction as her Ojibwe characters thrive in the face of a disintegrating colonial world. I interpreted the flood that threatens the fantastical world of *Green Grass, Running Water* as a

regenerative take on the apocalyptic tropes that run through Anglo-American science fiction, as King's novel is a creation story and ends the same way it begins. Finally, Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*, a young adult work and the most recently published novel within my project, empowers the work dreaming and desire that communicates the radical possibilities of making change through honoring intergenerational knowledge and dreaming. The imaginative work of these offers both deconstructive, as well as reconstructive, possibilities within the realm of decolonization. For the purposes of my project, I draw from Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's work in defining the goals of decolonization as "repatriation of Indigenous land and life" (1). Subsequently, settlers and Indigenous people alike must deal with incommensurability, which Fanon defines as the acknowledgement that "decolonization will require a change in the order of the world" (as cited in Tuck and Wayne Yang 31). The notion of apocalypse and destruction to land operates throughout my texts in relation to decolonization and incommensurability: in King's work, Coyote's earthquake unleashes a destructive flood into the world that returns water to its natural course and allows for community gathering; Erdrich's novel illustrates the reclaiming of land and community amidst political, environmental, and biological chaos; and finally, Dimaline's young adult audience and unique youth-rebel character speak to the necessity of hope, intergenerational knowledge, and the act of dreaming within decolonizing efforts. The time-meddling and apocalyptic elements of these works serve as sites to imagine what decolonization could, should, or cannot be. These texts do the vital work of deconstructing colonial histories, writing new stories, and imagining decolonization.

### **Settler Colonialism and Sovereignty**

In this project, I employ Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's definition of settler colonialism, which is discussed in depth in her work *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, as "an

institution or system,” specifically one that requires “violence of the threat of violence to attain its goals” (8). Settler colonialism as a system exploits and monitors Indigenous land and the people who live on it through relocation and reservation systems. Through defining settler colonialism, Dunbar-Ortiz renders a postmodern or multicultural reading of US history as an inadequate account of the violence that was necessary to establish this nation-state. The mass murder, torture, abuse, and ethnic cleansing of Indigenous modes of living all fit as part of the definition of genocide, which Dunbar-Ortiz names as key to understanding “US history, as well as inherited Indigenous trauma”; we cannot talk about US history, or Canadian history, without talking about settler colonialism and thereby genocide (9).

It is integral to recognize that the common cultural stories about Columbus, Thanksgiving, and Pocahontas—all supposedly meant to be historical—work to validate colonial histories, which in turn support the value of progress. The notion that history progresses fails to account for the violence, erasure, and genocide that was required to acquire nationhood in landmasses such as the United States and Canada. It is this narrative of progress that silences and fictionalizes Indigenous peoples. As Dunbar-Ortiz asserts, those who view history with this progressive, linear lens, perhaps seeking “an upbeat ending, a history of redemption and reconciliation,” may have to confront the fact that “such a conclusion is not visible, not even in utopian dreams of a better society” (2). She offers that “to say that the United States is a colonialist settler-state is not to make an accusation but rather to face historical reality,” a historical reality which has been masked in order to 1) continue reproducing these violent behaviors, and 2) avoid the costs of being held accountable to these actions. Without the erasure of Indigenous peoples and the violence of settlers, narratives that confirm the nationhood of settler colonial states could not be progressive or linear in their nature—how could they be, when

the “very existence of the country is a result of the looting of an entire continent and its resources” (Dunbar-Ortiz 5)? It seems impossible that a force which relies on the theft of land, resources, lives can be considered progressive or developed. The need for a specifically Indigenous-driven narrative arises both out of a historical erasure of violence and trauma and the paradoxical cultural role of Indigeneity in North America.

Narrative, then, takes on a heightened role in this discussion of US/Canadian Indigenous literature. Narrative cements and instills settler colonialism and gifts power to settlers; yet, it is through narrative that some Indigenous folks seek sovereignty. Historically, literature has been central to the concept of seeking due to the pivotal and continual significance that treaties have had in limiting and shaping Indigenous communities. Though sovereignty is difficult to define, as I agree with Michelle Raheja that it is “always in motion and is inherently contradictory,” I use the word to refer to the authority of tribes, nations, or communities to govern themselves. An example of a text about sovereignty is the American Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 and the blood quantum identification/citizenship system<sup>1</sup> (Christie 19). These documents ignore the “long-standing...and perfectly function traditional forms of indigenous sovereignty” and instead lay onto these forms settler-colonial concepts of nation and progress (Christie 19). Texts like these, written in the language imposed upon Indigenous people by settlers, work to limit Indigenous sovereignty and construct settler futures in which Indigenous people have assimilated or do not exist.

---

<sup>1</sup> In establishing the Indian Reservation Act, the blood quantum system was later affirmed as to structure the reservation system. The blood quantum system, created with the Dawes Act of 1887, refers to the way people are labeled Indigenous due to the amount in their “blood,” often using the inaccurate recordings of Dawes rolls to establish blood quantum. Blood quantum limits tribal autonomy to institute their own rules for tribal citizenship and falsely equates “blood” with tribal identity (Christie 19).

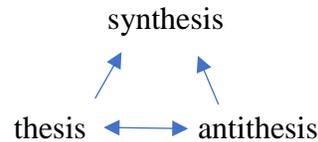
I cannot speak for all Indigenous people when I say that this relationship between literature and sovereignty is vexed, but the historical significance of text as a vehicle for changing communities complicates the action of writing a radical, Indigenous text. Edward Said's assertion that though narratives may be sites of colonization, they can also be the "method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of history" is relevant to my discussion in this sense (as cited in Cox 220). Sovereignty is defined differently among individuals and communities—there are 573 federally recognized tribes just in the US and 634 First Nations communities in Canada, and that does not include communities still fighting for recognition<sup>2</sup>—and I must emphasize that what communities desire to be a part of or be independent from varies widely (Federal Register, Assembly of First Nations). But the act of writing a text, one that envisions communities outside settler imaginations, heightens their subversion through its literary form.

Joseph Bauerkemper explores this relationship between non-linearity in works of Indigenous literature and the establishment of Indigenous nationhood in his paper "Narrating Nationhood: Indian Time and Ideologies of Progress." The Hegelian dialectic is the blueprint for achieving progress and establishing nationhood in Western countries; Hegel's dialectic is a genealogical moment which cemented the concept of progression. In this process, the synthesis that arises from an thesis-antithesis relationship is meant to "carry forth elements that are deemed useful for the progression into a future that will move us one step closer to the end of history and the

---

<sup>2</sup> There are over 200 tribes still unrecognized by the US government. Since the federal acknowledgement process began in 1978, 87 tribes have petitioned for recognition. Only 51 tribes have received a determination, and about two-thirds of those were denied (Furshong par. 1-25). Federal recognition of tribes grants tribal communities more autonomy to act as sovereign nations and holds the government accountable to providing federal or local support for the nation. Research and writing for this paper was done on unrecognized Coast Salish, Duwamish territory.

realization of absolute rationality and freedom” (Bauerkemper 33-4). Past is reduced to their utility to the state, carried on only if they offer something to validate their progress.



The culmination of this process, of course, is the evolved nation state: progress must be achieved to obtain nationhood, a nationhood must achieve history to obtain a state, and it is only “through a state can a man—of course, only a man—come to have worth” (Bauerkemper 34). Thus, the notion of linearity is inseparable from the creation of nation-states, the erasure of historical reality in the name of progress, and the obtaining of disproportionate power. Linearity, as a concept as well as the values it breeds, is inextricable from settler colonialism. Thus I argue that the collapsing of time—time-meddling through the value of transgenerational knowledge, the imagining of future, and the mixing of return to tradition with transformation—resists settler time, and in turn, paves the way for decolonizing work that must look toward futures where settlers return Indigenous land.

### **The Colonial Gaze of Science Fiction**

Science fiction, for most of its life as a genre, has thrived in its fear of Others. The genre upholds and reinforces the fear of beings unlike the middle-upper class, unlike European descendants, unlike able-bodied people, and so on. For instance, where would the thrill of H.G. Wells’ *The Time Machine* (1895) be if not for the impending threat of the ape-like Morlocks that live underground (and happen to resemble a very specific anxiety about class uprising)? Though it seems to be bigger than other genres, moving past race and gender into other worlds, species, and times, science fiction has always been specific. I would disagree with critics such as Csicsery-Ronay who argue that novels like *The Time Machine* are the “universal model for the

future of the human species” (222). They simply are not. Science fiction empowers the use of lens: there are some who get to look, and some who become spectacle.

Historically, it has offered knowledge and power to the one who looks—for the purposes of my paper, the Anglo-American or Canadian—while limiting the power of the subject, or people who have been affected by imperialism/colonialism. As John Rieder explains in his book *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, the colonial gaze and the history and ideology it brings “looms through the mists” of science fiction; Rieder, however, makes it clear that colonialism is not science fiction’s hidden secret, but rather it is embedded as part of the “genre’s texture” (15). Colonialism, if not one of the building blocks of science fiction, is threaded throughout the fabric of science fiction texts.

The audience exposed to the emergence of the science fiction genre contextualizes its rise. The public middle class was most apt to read science fiction texts, and specifically, this was an audience that was in contact with the second phase of the industrial revolution (Rieder 28). This phase was more “intensive rather than extensive,” meaning that imperialism was already cemented as part of industrialization; this contributed to an orientation towards productivity and relatedly, an interest in leisure (Rieder 28). Thus, an ideology of progress is integral to the formation of the science fiction genre. As Thomas Claerson, a science fiction scholar, argued the belief in progress narrative was a “prerequisite” to science fiction (as cited in Rieder 29). The idea of progress is as ubiquitous as a “form of social memory”; that is to say, the idea of progress is vital to the formation of a colonial/imperial nation-state, and thus a genre that emerges from the colonial gaze must take “some of its tone from colonial discourse” (Rieder 29). Ideologies of biological determinism, settler colonialism, and progress narratives manifest in tropes of time-travel, apocalypse, or monstrous beings—all settler fantasies that seep into science fiction texts.

Supplementing my argument is humanities scholar Elana Gomel's assertion that narrative is the "mediator between physical time and cultural time," drawing from Paul Ricoeur's philosophy in that we, as people, "apprehend temporality only through narrative" (7). The fantasies of time-travel offer a way to comprehend and envision a future deeper than can be imagined with conventional, linear time. For instance, to refer to a book often referred to as a classic—Wells' *The Time Machine*—to write a novel about class anxiety for that public middle class, Wells had to invent a time machine that traveled into such a deep and distant future so that readers could comprehend the stakes of the deepening divide between classes.

Temporality is crucial to my study of these texts as it addresses not only progress narrative, but the emergence of futurism as a field of genre and study. If traditional science fiction is whitewashed, colonial, and exclusionary, the autonomy of people of color to write their own science fiction lends itself as a bridge to fill these gaps. An already established and studied form, as well as highly influential for my work and others, is the multi-media movement of Afrofuturism, which is a cultural aesthetic that speculates on Blackness at the intersection of technology and future. Samuel Delany, a notable Afrofuturist and science fiction writer, spoke diligently about the goals and desires of Afrofuturist work; in his introduction to his 1984 book *Starboard Wine* Delany states that "we need images of tomorrow, and our people need them more than most" (14). Though Delany does not name this idea as Afrofuturism in this 1984 text, it is given the name Afrofuturism in a 1994 interview with Mark Dery titled "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Trisha Rose." The power of visuality drives a need to imagine Black folks as having and being in a future; Delany cites the influences of philosopher Susanne K. Langer, who argues that this envisioning is "the impetus for all human progress, scientific, social, or aesthetic" (Delany10). Afrofuturism informs my work with

these texts as it contextualizes the rise of futurisms and contributes to the my specifically Indigenous focus of the term.

Similar to how Delany provides an answer to the question if more “Blacks should write science fiction,” Grace Dillon asks in her introduction to her anthology of Indigenous science fiction: “Does sf [science fiction] have the capacity to envision Native futures, Indigenous hopes, and dreams recovered by rethinking the past in a new framework (Delany 14, Dillon 2)?” Dillon’s answer is simply, “Why not (2)?” Indigenous futurisms, through engaging with the field of science fiction, also “invariably *change* the perimeters of sf” (Dillon 3). Indigenous futurisms are unrestrained by genre expectations and create their own boundaries. Additionally, their efforts are plural and diverse: not every Indigenous future (or envisioning of time, as I show how future is intertwined with other forms of temporality for these authors) will look the same as to reflect unique experiences, traditions, knowledges, and hopes that differ among many Indigenous communities. Indigenous futurism is not necessarily a new field—for example, Dillon’s anthology includes work from 1978 by Gerald Vizenor about Native slipstream, science, and sustainability—but has gained more attention by critics over time. The texts I investigate contribute to a lineage of Indigenous futurisms, including work of writers, creators, and artists such as Gerald Vizenor, Stephen Graham Jones, Elizabeth LaPensée, *A Tribe Called Red*, Jeffrey Gibson, Wendy Red Star, and many, many others.

### **Fantastic Stories and Trickster Floods: Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water***

Thomas King’s (Cherokee) novel *Green Grass, Running Water* is a trickster novel that weaves the fantastic, the traditional, and the contemporary throughout its four sub-plots between both fantastical, mythical people—including a mysterious narrator named I, the trickster figure Coyote, and the childish GOD-dog that manifests from Coyote’s dream—as well as the ordinary

characters trying to live in modern-day Canada. Within this novel there are four Indigenous elders who escape a mental institution and try to fix the world alongside Coyote, with Dr. Joseph Hovaugh and his assistant Babo on their heel; an unrequited love triangle between hotshot lawyer Charlie, the smart and headstrong professor Alberta, and Lionel, a television salesman with bigger dreams for himself; and Eli Stands Alone, an ex-professor living in the spillway of the Balene Dam and who tries incessantly to prevent the use of the dam. The novel reaches its climax at the Blackfoot ceremony of the Sun Dance, where Coyote's dancing causes an earthquake to break the dam and destroy Eli and his house, but also successfully manages to return the water way back to its natural course.

King's novel complicates and revises colonial narratives that are rooted in European colonization and have dominated the cultural fabric of literature, art, film, symbolic gestures; these dominant narratives are also referred to as master narratives. Centering on a First Nations Blackfoot community in Canada, King "intervenes in and revises narratives that affirm colonial dominance and plot Native American absence" (Cox 220). King's novel is multifaceted; he unfolds several plots and worlds at the same time, weaving and building themes and tension upon both the subplots and the overarching plot that questions dominant narratives. At the heart of these tensions is the orality that is always (quite literally) in conversation with written authority and drives the telling of the story. Forces of written authority are embedded throughout the novel: King prods at and remodels Christian biblical tales, the Four Indians (First Woman/Lone Ranger, Changing Woman/Ishmael, Thought Woman/Robinson Crusoe, Old Woman/Hawkeye) take on the names of canon literary characters, and one of the main characters, Eli, has a doctorate degree in literature. Yet a great deal of the plot in general is forwarded through dialogue. The plot with I, Coyote, and GOD orally narrates the escape of the

Four Indians, and each of the Four Indians take a turn narrating a creation story that explains why there's so much water everywhere. Perspective is significant to King's novel, as there are no main characters and no narrative lingering on any one person; the multiplicity of perspective between characters and the weaving of these stories keeps the story from adopting a linear timeline, with each character telling the story from their own voice. Instead of reifying a singular settler colonial narrative that has molded the national identities of the U.S. and Canada, it forms a mosaic that forwards autonomy and multiple truths that account for simultaneously existing realities.

King asserts the power of stories as he emphasizes in both his realistic plot and fantastical plot that although "everyone makes mistakes," it is "best not to make them with stories" (11). Although in this line Norma, the sister of Eli Stands Alone, is making a statement about carpet decisions, her argument that when you "make a mistake with carpet" you "got to live with it for a long time" draws notice to the longevity and impact of storytelling (King 8). King's attention to this observation nuances the relationship between oral and written storytelling beyond binary. It is clear—through his use of humor, modernity, and imagination—that King is undermining potentially harmful written authorities. For example, what better way to test the authority of the Christian GOD than to envision him as just a rogue dream from Coyote, with his childish, egotistical "hands on his hips, so everybody can see he is angry" while whining to Coyote, First Woman and Ahdamn that anybody who "eats my [his] stuff is going to be very sorry" (73)?

Yet King also troubles this binary. Sharon Bailey notes King's criticisms of written works "ultimately destroy the authority of oral work as well" as canonized texts in her piece "The Arbitrary Nature of the Story: Poking Fun at Oral and Written Authority in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* (46)". The storytellers often must start over again, and it is

suggested that the storytellers damaged the world due to some of their mistakes. This is not to say, however, that the damages from colonial narratives are equal to those made by the storytellers, to refer to Dunbar-Ortiz's note of the harm caused by historical perspectives that assert the "colonizer and colonized experienced an 'encounter' and engaged in 'dialogue'" (5). Rather, it highlights the humanity of these Indigenous storytellers, as well as rejects the Hegelian idea that only some pasts ought to be carried because of their usability. The storytellers confront their pasts and carry them into the stories they continue to tell, even if their stories stray from perfection or idealistic expectations. In a way, their mistakes add new meaning to a reservoir of knowledge about the narratives that mold our perceptions of the world.

The connected themes of orality and land are inextricably tied to the subversive nature of King's novel. As Dunbar-Ortiz states, "everything in US history is about the land" (1). The theft and commodification of land, along with the violence inflicted upon it, is integral to understanding the instruments of settler colonialism. In King's novel, the colonial practice of cartography or mapping can be observed through the Western-loving, Native-stereotyping Bill Bursum, who assembles a map of Canada and the U.S. through the arrangement of televisions in his store; such an image, especially in context with the character, who feels "in control" and power when he creates the map, reproduces settler-colonial cartography (King 140). Mapping is a mechanism of colonial restructuring. By creating borders and policies over communities bound to land, mapping land effectively "rip[s] that grounding [of land] from under Native people" (Goeman 170). Goeman, a UCLA scholar of Indigenous studies, Gender studies, and literature, insists it is essential for Indigenous peoples to "scrutinize the impact of spatial policies in our cognitive mapping of Native lands and bodies" (170). Indeed, the mapping of stolen land, a

violent theft of sovereignty for subsistence communities, polices spatial claim to our environments, our bodies, and our communities.

Without reproducing the colonial violences of cartography, then, how does one navigate and reclaim space? In her exploration towards Native feminist spatial practices, Goeman notes the importance of orality to Indigenous artists, as breathing is a “sacred act through which the individual participates in an ongoing relationship with all other living beings” (as cited in Goeman 176). Breathing, as an act, defies categorizations of space: it flows around us incessantly, and it is shapeless and borderless in nature. Additionally, the passing of oral stories as a form of intergenerational knowledge collapses Hegelian, linear concepts of time and memory, causing us to momentarily live in past memories and simultaneously generate new ones. Where the commodification of land limits sovereignty—as symbolized by Bursum’s television store map—the act of orality expands intergenerational knowledge and resists colonial restructurings of space. Thus, like the water that flows throughout King’s novel, orality defies colonial fixedness. Like Sifton—an employee of the corporation who built the dam that threatens Eli’s home—is able to sit with Eli and talk with each other despite their contentious relationship, the act of passing breath between each other and breathing in community with one another allows us to reimagine land outside of a settler-colonial consciousness, an act that aligns with the purposes of decolonization.

The role of creation stories and the impending, doomsday-level flood that shape the world of *Green Grass, Running Water* address a history of apocalypse and speculation among Indigenous stories. While King’s novel plays with cornerstones of science fiction elements of fantasy and apocalypse, the use of the creation story is a testament to a greater world of imagination that extends beyond contemporary science fiction. As King resists master narratives

through canonized literature and biblical fable, the shape of his story refuses to be molded into a single genre.

King's fantastic, grandiose use of water as a symbol throughout the novel is vital to the world he builds and the threads that connect his characters. The role of water and water imagery is central to the novel, as the premise for one of the several plots in the novel is to explain why "there is water everywhere" (King 3). Eli's cabin is located on land near a local dam, which Eli is troubled by as the building of the dam threatens his home and life. As James Cox notes in his investigation of water imagery in *Green Grass, Running Water*, the water imagery throughout the novel "functions as a fluid symbol of destruction, creation, or both simultaneously" (223). Water serves as a symbol of transformation, nuance, and contradiction. For instance, water is both life-giving, but water is also the means through which colonizers traveled to the Western hemisphere and the Americas. The colonial forces in the novel are illustrated as conquering water, as demonstrated through Young Man Walking on Water's failed attempts to calm rough waters by shouting commands and the constant battle between Eli and the architect of the dam. In contrast, the Indigenous folks in the novel view waters as vitally important to a holistic view of environment, as when Old Woman points out to Young Man Walking on Water that he is "acting as though you have no relations" and continues to calm the waters by singing to them (290). Water is significant to King's conception of Indigenous futurism in that it signifies the constant flow of tensions with which it carries: it has been a site of colonial conquering as well as a place for Indigenous folks to acknowledge the importance of good relations.

King's novel uses the contradictions of water to disrupt what destruction means for the future. Though water may have contradictory elements, it follows that these elements are contradictory because water, by nature, is cyclical. The processes of water, such as runoff, rain,

and evaporation, must be cyclical to be sustainable: the ending of one process is the beginning of another cycle. The destruction of one thing inevitably leads to the creation of something else. Coyote's dancing, which causes the breaking of the dam near the end of the novel and destroys Eli's cabin and life, is a symbol of that destruction-creation relationship. As the group of characters circle around Eli's destroyed cabin, they make a pact to rebuild the cabin, transforming the site of destruction into a place of recreation, self-determination and hope of future. King uses the force of water to suggest that destruction does not indicate the end of something, but rather fuels the possibility of regeneration.

Regeneration resonates with the sentiments Eve Tuck expresses at the end of her paper, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities." In "forwarding...survivance" and nurturing regeneration, Tuck argues it is necessary to focus on the desires of communities rather than the harm that has been done to them. In her paper, Tuck calls for scholars and researchers to recognize and acknowledge the "complex personhood" of people, which centers desire and accepts the contradictions that reside within people. King's use of water as a symbol enacts that state of contradiction that is necessary to "deepen...sovereignty" and reimagine a future that accounts for both loss and prosperity. He revises dominant narratives to reveal the complexities that reside in Indigenous people whose lives have been erased or fictionalized in this settler-colonial nation-state; like the dam that bursts at the end of the novel, he liberates his story from the constraints of these colonial forces. King re-imagines places of colonial destruction as transformative sites from which Indigenous folks may find reclamation and futuristic possibilities of rebirth.

This liberation may be messy, contradictory, and even face destruction, but it is the same elements that allow for the possibility of regrowth. At the heart of this liberation is always the

concern for and love of one's land: the title of King's novel references Andrew Jackson's promise to Choctaw and Cherokee people, in being forced to relocate to Mississippi, will have rights to the lands they settle on as long as the grass is green and the water runs (Zinn par. 47). In one sense, this is ironic, of course, because of the destruction that has ensued at the hands of settlers. It also refers to the explosive, outpouring passion that is required for transformation—especially in the process of reclaiming ancestral land. Echoing Tuck and Yang's call for decolonization to grapple with incommensurability, *Green Grass, Running Water* confronts the messiness of justice. In other words, you might have to break a dam to let water run freely.

I see *Green Grass, Running Water* as a heritage novel that speaks to and engages with *Future Home of the Living God* and *The Marrow Thieves*. In my research into Indigenous futurity and its role in Indigenous-authored literature, I found it vital to include both recent and older novels as to represent the presence of Like King's novel, these two both center a desire to return to community at times when the world is collapsing or has already collapsed. While my two more recent novels might fit more neatly in dystopian or science fiction genres, they echo King's emphasis on storytelling and the balance between destruction and creation, and additionally, they expand past the set boundaries of mainstream science fiction.

**The Beginning is Not Backwards: Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God***

Louise Erdrich's (Ojibwe and Chippewa) *Future Home of the Living God* follows the journal of Cedar, an Ojibwe woman who describes herself as “the adopted child of Minneapolis liberals” (Erdrich 3). Cedar writes in her journal as a way to keep a record for the child she learns she is carrying, and thereby records her search for her biological family as well as the unfolding of the world around her—a world that is faced with an unexplainable biological devolution where dragonflies have a “three-foot wingspan” and a government overthrown by conservative

officials who change street names to biblical proverbs and seek control over pregnant women's bodies. Cedar's pregnancy puts her in a precarious position as the world becomes more dystopian, but she continues to be supported by both her adopted family and her biological family. Taking place in a future that is vaguely near to us, the novel complicates what it means exactly to be in a dystopian future.

The biological devolution of living beings—the event that seems to cause the downfall of the society around Cedar—echoes the evolution-play in science fiction classics, such as HG Wells' *The Time Machine*. The unnamed protagonist of Wells' classic novella travels into a deep future where humans have divided into two classes and species: the Eloi, who live above ground and live simple and abundant lives, only worry about encountering the Morlocks, a species that resemble apes and reside in dark caves. Wells' novella, a cornerstone in science fiction literature as the debut of time-travel as a term, encapsulates a common, and perhaps essential, theme among science fiction writers: anxiety about power and the ways that power manifests throughout time.

Indeed, dystopian novels are often written as a meditation on what is to come from a current reality; novels such as George Orwell's politically dystopian *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are often looked to for their insights into the future. It is no coincidence that sales of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, originally written in 1949, surged by over 9,000 percent the month that arguably one of the most controversial presidents was sworn into office (Freitas-Tamura par. 3). Following Orwell's novel at the top of the list was Atwood's dystopian novel *A Handmaid's Tale* ("Margaret Atwood" par. 1). For this reason, though Erdrich's novel is labeled as dystopian, I argue that it also has a role as historical and futurist, reflecting current realities into its fictional future. With the reduction of reproductive rights, religious authoritarian groups surveilling the

masses, and the forces of nature reclaiming and remodeling the environment, the novel reflects current critical issues that are continuously controversial. The novel creates a possible account for the future using current contexts which concern the future.

*Future Home of the Living God* was published a year and a week after the 2016 election that voted Donald Trump into office. Erdrich actually began writing the novel in 2002, citing the influence of the war in Iraq as a reason for her writing the novel (Franklin par. 6). However, she put *Future Home* aside to finish two other novels and did not return to the project until 2016 (Franklin par. 6). The 2016 presidential election—arguably the most controversial election in US history—obviously accounts for some of Erdrich’s desire to return to the novel. Margaret Atwood’s novel speaks directly to *Future Home* where both Atwood and Erdrich’s main characters’ reproductive rights are controlled in some fashion: in the case of Erdrich, her main character is carrying a child after the country has been taken over by a religious cult and biology begins to literally devolve.

Reproductive rights was/is a concern under Donald Trump’s administration. Trump’s campaign website states that Trump “recognizes the precious gift of life and protects the sanctity of life at all stages,” and cites the actions he has taken in office to “protect life,” such as reinstating and expanding the “Mexico City Policy that prevented \$9 billion in foreign aid from being used to fund the abortion industry” (“Social Programs” par. 9). As of May 2019, “heartbeat bills”—which ban abortion after a heartbeat is detected—have passed in Georgia, Ohio, Kentucky, and Mississippi; the most restrictive law was passed in Alabama, which bans abortions in all cases (Chaves par. 4-5). The urgency of Erdrich’s novel comes from the violent politics of nation-state in which she is writing; her decision to return to this novel reflects her intentionality as an author to use dystopia as an exploration of our present, which is historicized

in the process of becoming literature. In this sense, her novel crumples the rapidly changing present into the past *and* the future. Additionally, it seems that her work is not alone in the uptick of interests toward the dystopian—her work represents an aspect of a societal desire to explore the apocalyptic when the future seems unclear.

Erdrich's work joins a tradition of dystopian literature in that she imagines a future in which society has collapsed; however, her work also challenges this genre by uncovering assumptions about what it means to live in a society and universal dystopia. Where in *The Time Machine* a collapse of society is felt both by the anxiety of the Eloi and the poor living conditions of the Morlocks, Erdrich's novel presents dystopia as a relative experience. The differing perspectives among the characters in Erdrich's novel begs the question: exactly *whose* dystopia do we imagine when we read novels like *The Time Machine* or *Nineteen Eighty-Four*?

While Cedar's ongoing letter to her future child seems to indicate that the nation state is in disarray, the transformation of her birth mother's husband, Eddy, shows his experience as contradictory to the rest of the country. Eddy is an Ojibwe council man who is married Sweetie, Cedar's estranged biological mother. In one of Cedar's early interactions with Eddy, they have lunch at the reservation casino and he shows her a section of the manuscript from his book, which is "basically an argument against suicide"; Eddy's book is so depressing that it makes Cedar think she ought to "ask Eddy to report to a psychologist." (Erdrich 31). However, after the nation state increasingly loses control, the tribe decides to "take back the land," with a "wave of sobriety vows" undulating throughout the community (95). With this communal reclamation of land, Eddy's disposition begins to change. At the beginning of part three, Eddy becomes a symbol of power, as he "sits at the head of the tribal council meeting table" and Cedar notes that he is still working on his book, "only there is, he says, a bit more redemption" (213). The

collapse of governmental powers which many would categorize as dystopian allowed Eddy, as well as the other members of the tribe, to flourish.

Erdrich's novel challenges dystopia as solely a futuristic anxiety and offers that it is also a historical event. Early in the novel, Eddy notes to Cedar that "Indians have been adapting since 1492 so I'll guess we'll keep adapting" (28). Eddy is referring to the fact that colonial contact has fundamentally disrupted the knowledges, governments, and lifestyles of Indigenous peoples—in a way that draws similarities to what happens to the U.S. government in *Future Home of the Living God*. One authoritarian group takes over the existing government, the new group re-names and effectively re-maps the physical communities that already exist, and people are exploited for their resources and knowledge. What Erdrich suggests here is that Indigenous peoples have already experienced dystopia at the hands of European settlers—and that they have been resiliently adapting to their invasion since then. It is only until these settler powers collapse that Indigenous communities such as Eddy's are liberated to reclaim land.

The immense measure of dystopia also highlights the significance of incommensurability as part of the decolonization process. As aforementioned, the objective of decolonization is the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; if we are to truly seek repatriation, settlers must accept incommensurability as required for decolonization. As Tuck and Wayne Yang note, the project of decolonization may require an acknowledgement by settlers that some things cannot be reconciled, including their own guilt. Metaphorizing decolonization, and subsequently diluting its violence and complexity, works to support "settler moves to innocence," or the excuses and inability for settlers to give up their privilege and land for the goal of decolonization. Incommensurability—or, as defined by Fanon, the acknowledgement that "decolonization will require a change in the order of the world"—is deeply uncomfortable for the vast majority of

settlers, because the repatriation of land requires that settlers give up their land property and wealth (Fanon as cited in Tuck and Wayne Yang 31). A reckoning, an apocalypse, “a change in the order of the world,” as Fanon says, might be exactly what is necessary to break open the possibility of Indigenous reclamation of land and life.

Briefly, let us recount what is destroyed in Erdrich’s novel: streets, which have settler names for stolen land; the government and its correctional facilities; all media; domesticated animals; flora in general. Though Erdrich’s novel ends in an uncertain state, it is worthy to note the destruction in the novel occurs primarily to systems that are affected by or uphold settler colonialism. But a collapse of these systems is necessary for Eddy to thrive and for Cedar to imagine other alternatives to a linear progression of time. Destruction—and to be clear, it is a destruction specifically of settlers’ stolen property and wealth—may be the fate that settlers must uncomfortably accept if they are to confront the project of decolonization as an actual goal and not just a metaphor for human rights.

Furthermore, time is inextricably linked to settler futures; as Cedar bears witness Eddy’s transformation, she begins to challenge how she ought to perceive time. Towards the end of the second part of the book, tension builds between Cedar and her mother Sera, who is white; Cedar wants Sera to “act like you’re [she is] happy” because of Cedar’s coming baby, but Sera hopes that Cedar loses the baby because, like her friend who miscarried, Cedar would be free (198). Finally, this tension builds until Cedar asks mother what her “version of hell” is, to which Sera responds, “I sort of think it’s right now” (208). Cedar remarks that she had “never thought that,” and that perhaps “turning around to the beginning” is not “the same as going backward” (208).

This is a pivotal moment for Cedar’s development as a character. Sera sees the action of going backwards as the loss of governmental control; according to the Hegelian logics of

progress, the loss of control prevents the government from producing synthesis and therefore progressive history. Where Sera identifies their conditions as going backward, and ties that backwardness to hell, Cedar perceives this as going to the beginning. Sera sees the disruption of nation state power as tragic, as a “pure loss,” yet Cedar continues to assert that “things aren’t really going backward,” and that she experiences a “stupid joy” amidst everything (208). The difference between Cedar and Sera’s positionalities is intentional: Sera’s bleak reaction aligns with a colonialist perception of time and progress, while Cedar’s positivity challenges it.

With Cedar’s resistance to linear time, Erdrich’s novel questions settler futures and linearity as elements of universal dystopia. While Eddy offers that Indigenous people have already faced dystopia, Cedar’s notion that the beginning is not necessarily backward resists the idea that time has been progressing linearly. Going to the beginning could indicate going to an uncolonized time, a time before land, life, and culture was stolen by settlers. This may not be going backwards in the sense of “backwards” as being a reduced quality of life, as we see with the flourishing of Eddy, Cedar, and their Ojibwe community. The fact that the novel is set in the future also allows for the possibility that revisiting the beginning may be a futuristic concept—fundamentally subverting themes of technological progress and democracy that are often tied to conceptualizing futures. Erdrich’s novel imagines the hope for an Indigenous future among the deterioration of settler ones.

### **Web of Dreams: Intergenerational Connection in *The Marrow Thieves***

Cherie Dimaline (Métis) is the author of the 2017 novel *The Marrow Thieves*, which like *Future Home of the Living God* tells the story of a not-so-far dystopian future. In Dimaline’s novel, human-caused climate change and devolution merge together to collapse the societal infrastructure of North America. Amidst destructive and life-threatening climates, non-

Indigenous people find their livelihood threatened as they realize that they have literally lost the ability to dream while they sleep. Indigenous peoples in North America are the only ones who can still dream. As one of the characters, Miigwans, explains, dreams “get caught in the webs woven in your bones” (Dimaline 18). To regain structure and mental stability, white people become marrow thieves (also referred to as Recruiters) and reinstate the residential school system<sup>3</sup> to capture and control Indigenous people for their dreams. The story follows Frenchie, a Métis teenager, who is rescued by a group of young and old Indigenous survivors who are seeking safe lands up north.

Dimaline’s *The Marrow Thieves*, like Erdrich’s novel, challenges the authority of a progress narrative. The novel takes place in a near future; it is suggested it is past the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century, which suffers from a societal and environmental collapse as the group leader Miigwans recounts during group story time: The Melt (melting glaciers up north), The Water Wars, and tectonic shifts had forced the continent “into a new era” (Dimaline 26). Non-Indigenous people “stopped being able to dream” from the sadness of this societal shift (Dimaline 29). On the run from the recruiters, the group that Frenchie travels with follows a lifestyle that would reflect an earlier century; they live completely off the land, with no electricity, a lack of online connection and far away from urban landscapes. Though *The Marrow Thieves* takes place in the future—it is at least past 2019 according to the ID of Frenchie’s mother—things have not progressed at all; the very things built for settler progression have, instead, caused near-complete collapse (Dimaline 177). The group, though they have been through destruction and trauma, find solace in

---

<sup>3</sup> Residential schools were set up by the Canadian government under the guise of providing education to Indigenous children, but their real purpose was to “was to eliminate all aspects of Aboriginal [Indigenous] culture” through alienation and assimilating them into settler society. It was mandatory for Indigenous to attend these schools, which were far from their homeland and frequently inflicted physical and sexual abuse on the children. These schools operated from the 1880s until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hanson par. 1-12).

the company with one another, though their Indigenous identities include Cree, Metis, and unspecified East Coast relations.

Their community, like Cedar bringing together her biological and adoptive families together in *Future Home of the Living God*, is formed out of a need for company and shared knowledge amidst uncertain times. The most valued knowledge in the group comes from their elder Minerva, who though speaks little, gather attention from the whole group when she does. Her ability to speak her language—and occasionally pass this language on to the younger ones—is remarkable to the youth that have been forcibly prevented from learning ancestral knowledge from their own relations. They are right to be in awe of Minerva, as it turns out it is this knowledge of ancestral language to be key to defeating the recruiters; because Minerva dreams in her language, she is able to “bring the whole thing down,” causing the dream-extracting system to malfunction (Dimaline 173). Thus, Dimaline emphasizes the transformative power of ancestral knowledge—a knowledge that according to a Hegelian dialectic, should have been tossed away as things change and “progress.” Yet it is the ability to call back on ancestors that, in *The Marrow Thieves*, is the ultimate weapon against colonizers who lack this knowledge.

Alongside the value of Minerva’s knowledge is the tenderness and care for the youngest in the group, RiRi. Frenchie loves RiRi and treats her like a little sister: he tells her stories of his family, and when she is too young to hear the darker parts of Miigwans’ Story, he sneaks bits and pieces to her. But when the group loses both RiRi and Minerva, there is a palpable change in the mood of the remaining members. As Frenchie says, though they were “faster without our youngest and oldest, we [they] were without deep roots, without the acute need to protect and make better” (155). Echoing the importance of land to the character in the novel, the notion that RiRi and Minerva are the roots to the others in the group suggest their inarguable importance to

the stability of the group. They desire, protect, and value the knowledge of Minerva—a knowledge that must come from the past—but also recognize the life-giving act of nurture and the hope of the future in RiRi.

As Cedar remarks in *Future Home of the Living God*, the beginning is not always backwards. Indigenous futurity honors the knowledge and experiences of past times while simultaneously imagining these traditions in an unknown future. Without the return to and revitalization of colonization, cultures are lost in the grip of colonization. But it is the hope of a future that motivates one to nurture a future where tradition, knowledge, and healing are centered. Where the Hegelian, or linear conceptions of time prioritizes usability, *The Marrow Thieves* uplifts cyclicity and intergenerational knowledge. It collapses linear progression and in doing so, it both reclaims cultural connection denied by colonization and, as Eve Tuck calls it, “forward[s] our survivance” (423).

Likewise, the focus on youth threads futurity into the texture and stakes of the narrative. *The Marrow Thieves*’ reading level and focus on a teenage character makes it appropriate as a young adult novel, joining the genre of young adult-targeted dystopian fiction such as *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*. As Mandy Suhr-Sytsma discusses in her piece “Jeannette Armstrong’s *Slash* and the Indigenous Reinvention of Young Adult Literature,” young adult novels that center Indigenous youth and communities tend to differ in their characters and goals compared to more traditional models of the rebel-youth character. Through her analysis of the young adult novel *Slash*, Suhr-Sytsma finds that the growth of the novel’s young protagonist comes not from their individualization, but their placement in a community: individuals are “part of a web, and they are empowered, not overshadowed, through their connections to others in the web” (32). To contribute to Suhr-Sytsma’s argument, Frenchie’s character aligns with these

values in such a way that provides hope and guidance to a generation that faces climate change and societal transformation.

Frenchie joins his group after he is separated from his family while escaping from Recruiters, or the government officials that kidnap Indigenous people for their bone marrow. Though Frenchie is continuously haunted by his missing family—when he has a “resistance to sleep,” he tells stories of his family to the youngest, RiRi, in order to remember them—he is still eager to help in the group, and feels guilty when he cannot bring himself to shoot a moose (Dimaline 50). He revels at the change to hear an “old-timey story,” a Métis story about a dog called Rogarou, told by the group elder, Minerva; the mention of hearing a traditional story from Minerva takes his breath away from the excitement (68). Yet, like many other male teenage protagonists, he fights a desire to be heroic; after risking his life testing the electric shock of a gate, he is embarrassed by Miigwans’ public reminder that “no one is more important than anyone else here, French” (58). Frenchie survives immense trauma through the novel in witnessing death, destruction, and even ending someone’s life by his own hand. In a moment to hide his emotional vulnerability from the climax of these stresses, he lashes out at his romantic interest Rose and belittles her to a “cheerleader” (195).

They are only reunited when Frenchie asks Rose to cut his hair after Minerva’s death, in which the vulnerability of his short hair and the shared grief diminishes the fight to nothing more than a “seasoning” (Dimaline 213). Finally, it is at the end of the novel, after he witnesses Miigwans’ reunion with his long-lost partner, that Frenchie reaches his most cosmic understanding about life: that it is “just what we would for each other” that holds us all (231). Frenchie does not reach his characters’ peak from isolation, heroic act, or his charismatic

personality; it is through the act of witnessing and understanding shared pain and emotion that Frenchie is endowed with the radical passion of community-building and dream-seeking.

Frenchie is complex. Unlike other youth-rebel characters, his character learns not from a sole sense of his individual self but from community-building and solidarity with others in his group. There are moments where Frenchie exhibits a toxic form of masculinity, like when he calls his love interest Rose a “cheerleader” because he feels jealous. But he is also tender and cares for his fellow group members; for instance, though RiRi is overly attached to Frenchie, he empathizes with her separation from family since infancy and for that reason he cannot “relegate her to the shadows and ignore her requests for information” (Dimaline 28). Frenchie’s complexness, his humanness, encapsulates Eve Tuck’s call for focusing on “complex personhood” rather than damage in her letter to communities and researchers (420). Though *The Marrow Thieves* is not a piece of research on an Indigenous community, it speaks to a genre of literature that does the very similar act of looking, of gazing upon the world, that one might find in research. Only here, the gaze is shifted from a colonial perspective to one that imagines Indigenous futurity.

When Frenchie’s desires are centered—whether it is to be loved back by Rose, to find his family, to get Minerva back, or to be a hero—his invaluable humanness is, too. Though they are subject to change as his motivations are narrowed through the novel, Frenchie’s desires, flaws, and growth are all accepted as part of who he is. As Suhr-Sytsma notes, in writing for a young readership, a power-dynamic between the adult writer and young reader must be balanced for the more impressionable audience. The gaze is shifted from colonialism to Indigeneity; Frenchie’s indelible humanity also reflects Dimaline’s authorial care for her younger audience. Indeed, any author has a gaze, but here Dimaline sees her audience for what they are: perhaps

people who have done harm, perhaps people who have experienced trauma, perhaps younger people, perhaps Indigenous people, but above all else, she reflects the humanness of Frenchie into the hope that we are all multifaceted people with the capacity for dreaming. It is this acceptance of contradiction and complexity that unfastens desire and imagination, which accounts for the things we have lost and the futures we have yet to live for. Dimaline, perhaps like Frenchie speaking to RiRi or Minerva, speaks to the roots of community.

### **Shared Dreams for Decolonization**

These three novels transform and challenge the genre of science fiction and dystopian fiction; their very existence is radical. In writing this paper, there were three key ideas that arose from my research and analysis that connected these novels and made them a significant group, namely, the centering of Indigenous narratives, dystopian themes, and Indigenous futurity.

**Narrative.** Centering Indigeneity and Indigenous people and knowledge is itself transformative for canonized literature, science fiction, and young adult fiction. When the lens of literature is changed, so does the direction of power. Thomas King's work highlights the power of storytelling—both in canonized, settler literature and creationist or trickster Cherokee stories—as both transformative and malleable. Telling a story can create the world, but to remain fixed to these stories is to accept restricted linearity. Just as the creation story is retold until the narrators get it right, remolding, challenging, or interacting with master narratives prevents a complacent acceptance of mythical histories.

Erdrich, too, challenges an unquestioned ubiquity and canonization of classic science fiction stories. Cedar's position as an Ojibwe woman exposes the universalization within science fiction: where some dystopian stories dread the destruction of the civilized world, Erdrich leans into the possibility of anti-universal destruction, in which destruction and liberation are

intertwined with the threat of collapsed settler systems. Indeed, Erdrich's dystopian story contributes to and draws from a lineage of other dystopian classics such as *1984* or *A Handmaid's Tale* due to Erdrich's timely speculation of politics and women's rights in the 21<sup>st</sup> century U.S. However, the centering of Indigeneity and sovereignty, missing from these science fiction classics, drastically changes perspective of dystopia as wholly destructive and challenges the rate of dystopian destruction as relative to power differential.

Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* and its focus on Indigeneity, community, and transgenerational knowledge challenges the archetypes found in other young adult dystopian literature. Where other youth-rebel characters ascend through individualization, the protagonist, Frenchie, is woven more tightly within a community at the end of the novel as compared to the beginning. Dimaline emphasizes his at times contradictory desires for ancestral knowledge, for Rose to like him back, for his family, and to be recognized as a hero. Though Frenchie does not necessarily rise out of the novel as the hero he wants to be—he even recognizes the weight and trauma carried with traditionally heroic tasks—he is written to be wholly human, and thus a character that might more empathically reflect *The Marrow Thieves'* audience. The centering of an Indigenous character within an Indigenous community opens his complexity and desires rather his ascension into herodism and, for this reason, makes Dimaline's novel unique and powerful.

**Dystopia.** Contrary to other dystopian literature, the works I have viewed have both dreaded and hoped for dystopia. As Dillon notes in her introduction, it is not uncommon to posit the idea that the “Native Apocalypse, if contemplated seriously, has already taken place” (8). As my authors have demonstrated, the idea of a universal apocalypse should be questioned. These

authors both recognize the harm caused by dystopia as well as the liberation that comes from the realization that dystopia is not universal.

*Green Grass, Running Water* intertwines joy and regeneration with Coyote's flood and Eli's death. It is under these circumstances that the group of characters, now finally together, plan to build Eli's cabin together. *Future Home of the Living God* expands past this tradition as to acknowledge that, when settler societies collapse, not all people will face apocalypse. The targeted devolution of settlers and their inability to dream in *The Marrow Thieves* highlights the survivance of Indigenous peoples in North America, in both the destruction of settlers and the apocalypse that occurs to the civilizations they built.

To earnestly and intentionally seek decolonization, both settlers and Indigenous folks must grapple with incommensurability. Imagining dystopia begins that process—for settlers, the displacement of their communities, the destruction of their property, and dissolution of settler-imposed nations and governments would resemble an apocalypse. But it is this apocalypse that has, for Indigenous people, already happened. These texts do that work of imagining, perhaps both horrifically and hopefully, the grand scale on which decolonization can happen. They ask the daunting questions: what will it take for colonized peoples to be decolonized? Will settlers be willing to accept the loss of their wealth, property, and systemic privilege for the hope of decolonization?

**Futurity.** The structures of time as known by Western, North American societies centralize anxieties about production and progression. These values construct settler-colonial nation-states to validate the theft of land and erasure/fictionalization of Indigenous traditions and people. To meddle with this conception of time, then, is to challenge settler-colonialism. To

collapse linear time and challenge progression is to assert there are alternative ways to build communities and experience life.

Futurity, and not necessarily future, allows for the honoring of past traditions as well as the changes that come from a transforming world. The transformative possibilities of futurity come from its playfulness of time—a tool of colonization—and its ability to envision a future in which *Indigenous people are centered and alive*. Amidst a history of colonization, where the goal is to eradicate Indigenous peoples, imagining the livelihood of Indigenous lives and knowledges is a radical act. Even more so, futurity crumples time as to avoid a Hegelian hierarchy of past, present, and future; all knowledges are valued, especially that of ancestors and elders.

*Green Grass, Running Water* engages with time and futurism on two major levels. The cyclical structure of the book—it begins and ends with the narration of I, who attempts to tell the story of the beginning—rejects Hegelian ascension. Though much has happened between the first and last pages of the book, the mirroring of the beginning and the end renders knowledge as layered rather than unilateral. The flood at the end of the novel, destructive as it is joyous, also challenges that linear progression in coupling the end of one story with the beginning of another rather than privileging either one.

Given the focus of settler futures in science fiction genre and embedded in notions of progress/linear time, as well as the historical idea that Native people have disappeared or vanished, it is profound to narrate futures in which Indigenous communities are living, surviving, and thriving. The hope for community building notably arises out of destruction in *Future Home of the Living God* and *The Marrow Thieves*. As Cedar wonders in conversation with her adoptive mother, perhaps going back to the beginning is not the same as going backwards. Perhaps the

most powerful tool for regeneration and community building is honoring ancestral knowledge, as the characters in *The Marrow Thieves* come to realize the key to reclaiming sovereignty lies within the ability to dream in ancestral language. The collapse of linear time sabotages colonial projects and empowers ancestral and intergenerational knowledge. The beginning is not backwards. Instead, as these authors have demonstrated, the beginning offers a renewal of cultural truth and knowledge; it is as embedded in the past and future as we let it be.

In writing and researching for this project, these authors have gifted with me the knowledge that stories cannot be universal truths. They ask for grievances, edits, rewrites and alternate endings. Storytelling honors loss, empowers imagination, and envisions the worlds we want, the worlds that seem impossible in the reality we currently know. There is power in subverting master narratives, rewriting generational truths, and contributing untold visions and imaginations.

In forwarding Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's urgent call for researchers and scholars to approach decolonization as an approachable reality and not a metaphor, I offer for readers to join these authors in imagining decolonization. What will it take for Indigenous people to be fully sovereign and reclaim stolen land? What resources, wealth, property, and knowledge are settlers willing to lose in order to actualize this process? Since this paper was researched and written on stolen Coast Salish Duwamish land, I ask settlers with resources to begin the process of repatriation by offering their resources for the sake of sovereignty and repatriation. For instance, the Duwamish tribe's rent program "Real Rent" allows for settlers to pay monthly rent to Duwamish Tribal Services, which supports the "revival of Duwamish culture and the vitality of the Duwamish Tribe" ("Real Rent"). Decolonization requires for settlers to offer their resources—gained from stolen land—to Indigenous people and communities.

Settlers: acknowledge the land you are on and the humanity and desires of the people who have subsisted off stolen land. Read books by Indigenous authors. These authors, and the ancestral knowledges they draw from, teach us to question historical myths and universal dystopias, call us in to empower Indigenous knowledge and stories, and urge us to do the work of imagining the destructive, regenerative, joyous, ludicrous futures where we might live.

## Works Cited

- Bailey, Sharon M. "The Arbitrary Nature of the Story: Poking Fun at Oral and Written Authority in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*." *World Literature Today*, vol. 73, no. 1, 1999, pp. 43–52. JSTOR, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/40154474](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40154474).
- Bauerkemper, Joseph. "Narrating Nationhood: Indian Time and Ideologies of Progress." *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2007, pp. 27–53. JSTOR, JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ail.2008.0009>
- Chavez, Nicole. "The Rising Wave of Abortion Restrictions in America." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 18 May 2019, [www.cnn.com/2019/05/18/us/abortion-laws-states/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2019/05/18/us/abortion-laws-states/index.html).
- Christie, Stuart. *Plural Sovereignties and Contemporary Indigenous Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Cox, James. "All This Water Imagery Must Mean Something: Thomas King's Revisions of Narratives in Domination and Conquest in *Green Grass, Running Water*." *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2000, pp. 219-246. JSTOR, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1185872>
- Csicsery-Ronay, Jr, Istvan. "Dis-imagined Communities: Science Fiction and the Future of Nations." *Edging into the Future: Science Fiction and Contemporary Cultural Transformation*, edited by Hollinger, Veronica and Joan Gordon, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.
- Delany, Samuel R. *Starboard Wine: More Notes on the Language of Science Fiction*, Wesleyan University Press, 2012.

Dery, Mark. "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose." *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, edited by Mark Dery. Duke University Press, 1994, pp. 179-221.

Dillon, Grace L. *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*, University of Arizona Press, 2012.

Dimaline, Cherie. *The Marrow Thieves*, Cormorant Books, 2017.

Dunbar-Ortiz, Roxanne. *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*. Beacon Press, 2014.

Erdrich, Louise. *Future Home of the Living God*. HarperCollins, 2017.

Franklin, Ruth. "A Timely Novel of Anti-Progress by Louise Erdrich." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 21 Nov. 2017, [www.nytimes.com/2017/11/21/books/review/louise-erdrich-future-home-of-the-living-god.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/21/books/review/louise-erdrich-future-home-of-the-living-god.html)

Freytas-Tamura, Kimiko de. "George Orwell's *1984* Is Suddenly a Best-Seller." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 25 Jan. 2017, [www.nytimes.com/2017/01/25/books/1984-george-orwell-donald-trump.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/25/books/1984-george-orwell-donald-trump.html).

Furshong, Gabriel. "Some 'Unrecognized' Tribes Still Waiting After 130 Years." *YES! Magazine*, YES! Magazine, 19 Dec. 2016, [www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/some-unrecognized-tribes-still-waiting-after-130-years-20161219](http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/some-unrecognized-tribes-still-waiting-after-130-years-20161219)

Goeman, Mishuana R. "Notes toward a Native Feminism's Spatial Practice." *Wicazo Sa Review*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2009, pp. 169–187. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/40587786](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40587786).

Gomel, Elana. *Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination*. Continuum, 2010.

Hanson, Erin. "The Residential School System." *Indigenous Foundations*, The University of British Columbia, 2009, [indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca](http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca)

/the\_residential\_school\_system/

Imarsha, Walidah, and adrienne maree brown. *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*. AK Press, 2015.

King, Thomas. *Green Grass, Running Water*. Bantam Books, 1994.

“Margaret Atwood: *The Handmaid's Tale* Sales Boosted by Fear of Trump.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 11 Feb. 2017, [www.theguardian.com/books/2017/feb/11/margaret-atwood-handmaids-tale-sales-trump](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/feb/11/margaret-atwood-handmaids-tale-sales-trump)

“Real Rent Duwamish.” *Real Rent Duwamish*, [www.realrentduwamish.org/](http://www.realrentduwamish.org/)

“Social Programs: President Donald J. Trump's Accomplishments.” *Trump/Pence: Make America Great Again*. Donald Trump for President, Inc., [www.promiseskept.com/achievement/overview/social-programs/](http://www.promiseskept.com/achievement/overview/social-programs/)

Tuck, Eve. “Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities.” *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 79, no. 3, 2009, pp. 409-424.

Tuck, Eve and K. Wayne Yang. “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor.” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1-40.

Wells, H.G. *The Time Machine*. 1895. Dover Publications, 1995.

Zinn, Howard. “As Long as Grass Grows or Water Runs.” *History is a Weapon*, History Is a Weapon, [www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/zinnasl7.html](http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/zinnasl7.html).