

INDIGENOUS STORYTELLING

A GLOSSARY

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A

ABSTRACT

This is a compilation of analyses, creative work, and quotes brought together in a woven essay. Inspired by Eve Tuck and C. Ree's "A Glossary of Haunting" and drawing from Jeff Barnaby's Rhymes for Young Ghouls, we explore the many facets of Indigenous storytelling. As creative writers, we both recognize the importance of narrative and we draw what we glean from the creative works and quotations to better understand the resistances, powers, and pedagogy of these

Indigenous narratives. Our goal is to bring these Indigenous voices and creations to the fore, celebrating these acts of creation and visualizing what these works represent. From our readings, we hope to gain a profound understanding of these methods of storytelling, restorying, and visual sovereignty to deepen our understanding of what defines narrative construction.

AS TWO WHITE PEOPLE...

As two white people, we'd like to start off by recognizing that many of the stories we present throughout this glossary aren't ours to tell. Take this piece of writing as a fragmentation, a mere moment of writing that attempts to present our appreciation of the power of Indigenous storytelling and honor it. These are not our methods of storytelling, and these are not our histories—that much is obvious. We recognize the uncomfortable, gray area some of the works in this piece represent. It is not lost on us the irony of two white people taking these pieces of writing and "curating" them into a glossary. This work covers merely a fragment of the many modes and methods of Indigenous storytelling, and we could not hope to cover it all—nor should we. We hope to be respectful, ethical, and cognizant of any implicit biases—walking carefully within this space as it is not ours. We have taken great care to understand the historical and social contexts within each piece of literature and each film mentioned. We will do our best to be aware of our role in colonization institutions and epistemologies, and actively focus on decolonization. We recognize that we may get some things wrong, be it in our language or insights, and we intend to continue our education on Indigenous literature in film to ensure that any missteps within this glossary are learned from.

ANIMATION

Animation in Rhymes for Young Ghouls by Jeff Barnaby (Mi'kmaq) separates the content of the story from the film, and breaks Western genre barriers. In most Western films, a movie is either animated or it is not. There is rarely, if ever, a combination of the two. Adding the animation pushes the focus to the story being told, as it has a significant place in the main story.





Mi'gmaq children are hanging from the tree.



and then has finished eating himself.

Within around 3 minutes, William Daniel Buller's animation depicts a haunting story. At 20:50, Aila's "grandmother," Ceres, tells her the story of the wolf and the mushroom.

An animated barren city appears on screen. The grays, blacks, and whites of this animation tell the audience that the location is desolate and has undergone a lot of horrible things. Ceres doesn't need to tell the audience this because the animation does the background work, and she can focus on the moral aspect of her story. She begins, "Once upon a time, the weather was rough. The sky was full of smoke and stunk like the smell of sulfur. And all of the animals had starved and fled" (20:59-21:08). Smoky grays swish through the city as she narrates. The animation of the city dissolves and we are introduced to the wolf: "The wolf was all alone. Sick and alone" (21:13-21:17). The animation splits into three boxes. The first is of the wolf skull, with a white orb as the eye. It's visceral and haunting, both creepy and enchanting. The second box moves from top to bottom to show the back of the wolf, with metal sticking out of its skeletal frame. The third box contains the legs, also with items shoved where a tail once would be. At 21:23, the wolf walks into a forest, faltering and almost limping: "He leaves and goes to the forest. As he's walking around, he sees a tree. He begins to hallucinate" (21:23-21:37). The frame zooms into the wolf's eyes, enhancing the storytelling by showing the depth of the hallucination. The wolf's eyes turn into giant orbs, and the air around him vibrates. His figure dissolves and the tree comes back to the foreground to show the children hanging from it: "Mi'gmaq children are hanging from the tree. The wolf, so hungry, blacks-out and shakes the tree really hard. Until the children begin to fall" (21:41-21:58). It's a horrifying animation sequence, a wolf so starved that he is just bones, shaking a tree until children fall off. The oral tradition of storytelling combined with the evocative animation is moving. Ceres continues, "He sees them as though their heads have become mushroom caps and their bones as stalks (22:03-22:06). The spores expand like trees reaching for the gloomy sky, growing in rows. The wolf eats them all in a morbid sequence, blurry and fast. The hallucination ends, and he realizes what he has done: "When he comes back to reality, he looks around at the world. He feels so sorry for what he has done. Not knowing what to do, he continues to eat. As he sits there, he begins to eat his tail, he gets to his stomach, and begins to eat his stomach. He finishes his stomach, then gets to his heart and eats his heart" (22:28-22:54). Throughout this sequence, the wolf contorts and folds on himself as the narration continues. The background is so gray it's almost green, and the guilt is vivid in the wolf's eyes. The visual component adds to the narration because the audience is given a clear image to latch onto. After the wolf eats his heart, the animation ends.



Once upon a time, the weather was rough.

Combining Indigenous animation with oral storytelling is a form of visual sovereignty because it challenges the Western limitations of linear narratives in film. This animation only appears once in Rhymes for Young Ghouls, and it shows the persistence of oral storytelling and the different media formats it can be present in. It can also be a metaphor for the Canadian residential schooling system, as Ceres' mother told her the same story before she was sent to a residential school, as the function of the schools was to "kill the Indian and save the man." Animation, though growing in popularity, is still an under researched and infantilized genre. Scholarly books and articles on animation are significantly harder to find than those on the live-action medium (Mitkus). Indigenous animation studies are even more difficult to uncover. Animation is a valuable form of art and storytelling and should be taken more seriously by film and art scholars.



B

BEADWORK

"His recognition as an artisan storyteller grows and is 2nd only to his desire to pass along cultural traditions of beading, regalia, artwork as a form of therapy to those who are in crisis."

—Tokeya Richardson, Three Sisters Consulting, Inc.



I went to a beadwork workshop a couple of weeks back, hosted by the Native American Study Body and American Indian Science and Engineering Society. The artist, Tokeya Richardson (Oglala-Lakota and Haliwa-Saponi), described art as a cathartic therapy in which he could portray his experiences and his ancestors' stories through pictures ("Tokeya Richardson"). I remember him talking about beadwork techniques and knowledge being passed down through the women, and how his art has been displayed in museums for art celebrating women and strength.

Beadworking is a form of storytelling, passed down through families: "Fluidity exists between the practices of beading and storytelling because patterns cannot be distinguished from stories...some beadworkers explicitly house their stories within their patterns" (Ray). Tokeya's work, he explained, was a story of resilience and personal recovery. Each bead was a form of healing, a way to release stories that are hard to tell outloud.

I was pretty confident in my mediocrity when it comes to any art that uses a needle, so when I followed along with Tokeya, I was amazed by the sureness of his hands. He told us stories as he beaded, pausing his own work to let the newbies catch up. He talked about land grant university history, specifically K-State's, and how the Kanza's territory was forcibly reduced.

Before colonization, the Kanza occupied Kansas. With European invasion came smallpox, which killed one of every two Kanza males ("History of Kaw"). American squatters began to settle in Kanza territories, stealing land and crops. With the U.S. government's help, colonizers drastically reduced Kanza territory from around 20,000,000 acres to 100,000 ("History of Kaw"). In 1863, Kansas State Agricultural College was the first land-grant college, which is now called Kansas State University.

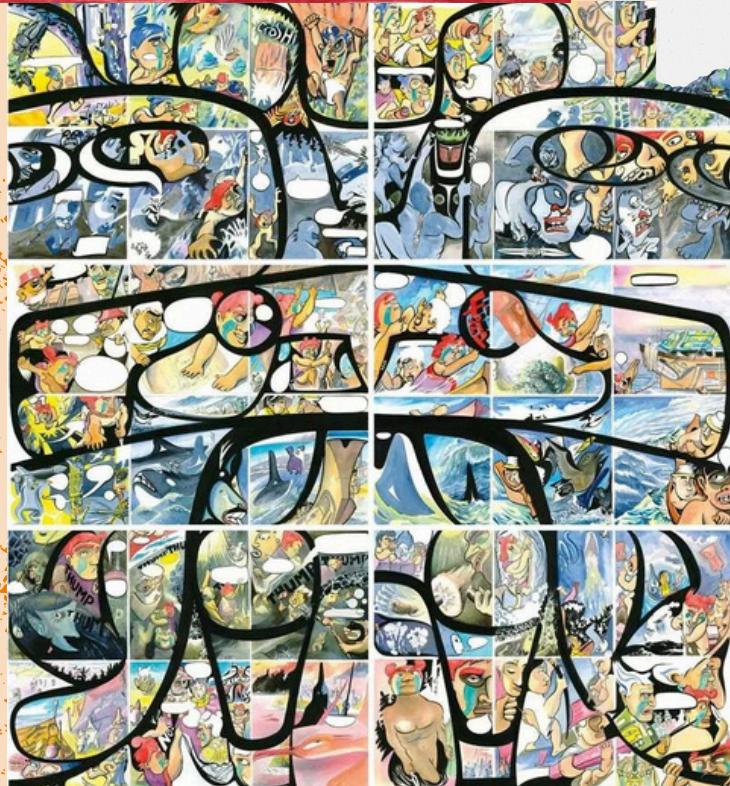
Tokeya discussed this history, and how the university we attend is itself a story of colonization—he said it was important to acknowledge the lost stories of people that were forced from their homes and stripped of their resources for this land grant. He also joked about how it was entertaining to him that a group of mostly white people had gathered at a land grant university to learn Indigenous beadworking techniques, but that it was a positive progression of Kansas State University's story.

C

COMIC

"Historically, comic books have been a site of colonial fantasy and have often portrayed Indigenous people as antimodern stereotypes...Indigenous comics address complex and painful topics that communities face, such as language loss, suicide, and settler violence, with stunning visual portrayals of resistance and cultural continuance."

-Shannon Claire Toll, "Disordering Enactments and (Re)mapping the Reserve in *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*."



"while comics continue to expand and complicate understandings of literature, Indigenous storytelling traditions likewise complicate and challenge literary categories"

"Comics' multimodal format and frequently collaborative nature underscore relationships between artists, writers, and readers. Their often-unpretentious categorization as popular art expands their readership, but their study can also upset assumptions that they are simplistic or unsophisticated (assumptions that have been similarly applied to oral traditions). And just as oral traditions do not exist exclusively prior to written ones, neither is the art of comics exclusively "postliterary," as shown in those definitions of comics that include earlier forms of graphic representation."

-Kyle Bladov, "Framing Storytelling: Indigenous Graphic Narratives"







IMPERIALIST NOSTALGIA

“Curiously enough, agents of colonialism – officials, constabulary officers, missionaries, and other figures from whom anthropologist ritually dissociate themselves – often display nostalgia for the colonized culture as it was ‘traditionally’ (that is, when they first encountered it). The peculiarity of their yearning, of course, is that agents of colonialism long for the very forms of life they intentionally altered or destroyed... a particular kind of nostalgia, often found under imperialism, where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed... In any of its versions, imperialist nostalgia uses a pose of ‘innocent yearning’ both to capture people’s imaginations and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination.”

-Renato Rosaldo, “Imperialist Nostalgia”

Stereotypes and racism coated my childhood in ways I, an AFAB (assigned female at birth) white child, never realized. Ignorance, either willful or otherwise, marked my beginning. In Kindergarten, I “dressed up” as a “Native American” for a Thanksgiving celebration. A celebration that perpetrated countless stereotypes, racist depictions, and continued the false narrative of “Thanksgiving.” When I learned about Indigenous peoples, it was solely situated in the past – “here are a great people who were here before us.” I started school in 2007.

This was not uncommon. The false antiquity that my schooling, television programs, and culture prescribed to Indigenous peoples persisted throughout my early childhood. My ignorance frustrates me. What frustrates me more, to the point of anger and disgust, is the ways in which our school systems blatantly warp and erase narratives of Indigenous peoples. When I was in middle school, we had a classroom debate on if Andrew Jackson was a “good president” or not. In high school I had to write a paper on “my stance on Mount Rushmore.” I could go on, but it’s clear – our history classes are false, colonialism-supporting centers built to celebrate the United States, while ignoring the complexities that comes with this nation’s existence. My anger, disgust, frustration, they are all lame emotions for the profoundly despicable nature of these teaching practices.

This was extended, for the most part, within the home as well. Despite my mother’s liberal leaning, I don’t think we ever really sat down to talk about Indigenous peoples until I had grown “old enough” to learn the “darker” (read: abhorrent) parts of the U.S. Government’s lifespan. Even then, our talks were coated with the stereotypical remorse and white guilt.

A striking memory that seems to encapsulate my early understanding of Indigenous peoples was one hot afternoon in Louisiana. My parents had scrounged together the money to purchase my sibling and I a little inflatable pool, and I was obsessed. I had waited eagerly for our hose to fill it up with the refreshing, metallic-y, slightly warm water. Once it did, I splashed around, pretending to be various water type Pokémons. Just a kid having fun. After a while, I started to get sunburnt – not a difficult feat, mind you.

My dad looked over at me, laughed, and said that my "Indian was coming out." I was very confused. My mom admonished him with a "Brian!" but otherwise nothing really happened. I asked him what he had meant, and that's when I learned that my great, great (great?) grandmother on his side was an Indigenous woman. I still don't think I understood what he meant, or the racism in his remark, and simply went about my day.

The older I got, the more I learned about the Indigenous peoples of America, the more curious I grew about my relationality to one. My mental relationship to this woman was one caked in Imperialist Nostalgia and white guilt. I would grow to feel frustrated with never knowing who this woman I was related to was. I don't even know her name. How could someone get erased so quickly, who's existence only seems to be around for my racist grandfather and great grandfather to reference when someone calls them out?

My displacement with my family on that side is powerful. Aside from my last name I don't feel like I'm related to them. My grandfather never speaks to me, only my father, because he doesn't know what to do with a "granddaughter." I began fixating on my great great (great?) grandmother as a means to heal - quite literally turning her into a figure of imagination rather than recognizing her humanity. I saw in her lack of existence in family history a story of someone trapped within this family, someone who didn't have any options... I took away her agency to feel a connection with my family through a "perceived" mutual-hatred of the patriarchal, racist powers within.

The truth of the matter is I do not know her. I found out my freshman year of college that she was a part of the Ute peoples. I found this out because my dad was trying to find any way he could to get me funds for college - considering, for a moment, attempting to find out if I met the qualifications for blood quantum percentages. I shot it down real quick. Those aren't my funds to have.

Within this rambled mess of a story is the ways in which my schooling and needs for familial connection resulted in muddled, racist depictions of this women who I am only tangentially related to. Someone who I will never know, and therefore someone who I should not prescribe my own issues onto.

I am white. I grew up with all of the privileges that come from that. It's sad the amount of work it took to break past these ideologies and mindsets. I want to believe that I am better now, more cognizant of my follies and more willing to listen and learn. This doesn't mean that I am infallible, nor am I innocent.

I wrote this mini-essay to recognize the influence that Imperialist Nostalgia has on me, and to deconstruct the way that I once viewed my great great (great?) grandmother to better inform my view of her going forward.

"The memories that evoke moods of imperialist nostalgia both reproduce and disrupt ideologies... it is in their inconsistent plenitude that memories eventually unravel the ideologies they so vividly animate... this mode of analysis attempts not so much to overpower an ideology, by grabbing hold and demystifying it, as to evoke it and thereby make it more and more fully present until it gradually crumbles under the weight of its own inconsistencies."

-Renato Rosaldo, "Imperialist Nostalgia"

OLATHE, KANSAS

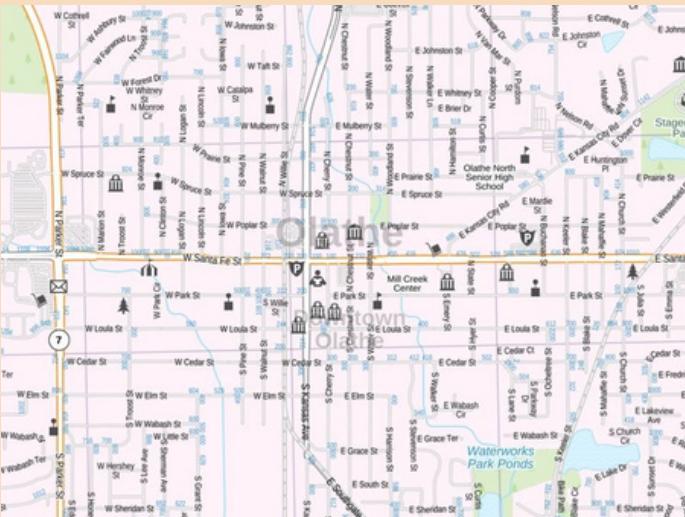
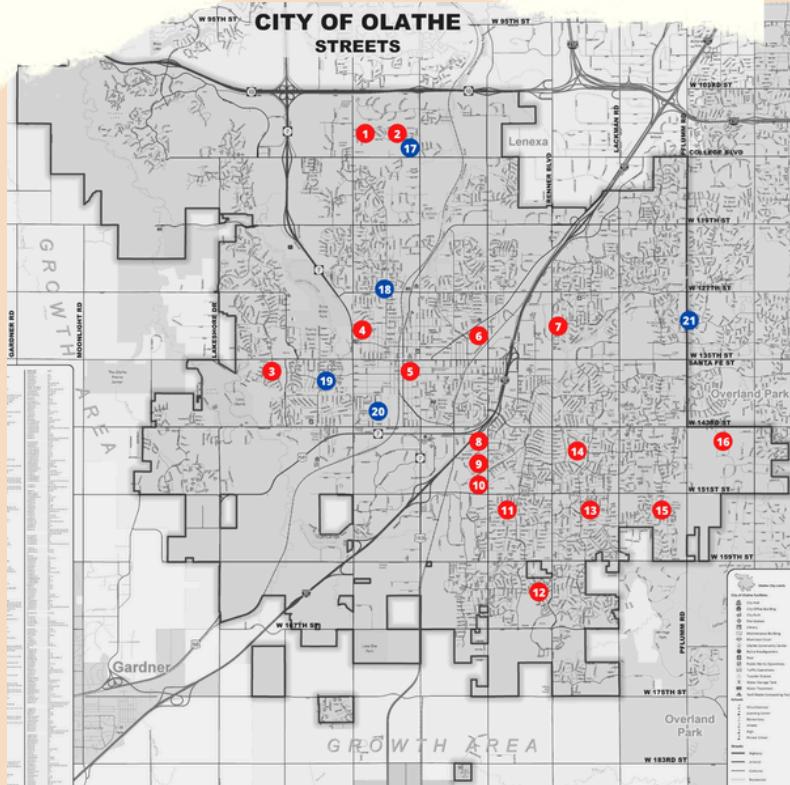
"Indigenous people pioneered this genre of mapping that tells people's stories and describes people's relationships to places and other beings, but those ancestral modes of spatial expressions were deeply affected by the arrival of the Europeans."

-Thomas J. McGurk and Sébastien Caquard, "To What Extent Can Online Mapping be Decolonial? A Journey Throughout Indigenous Cartography in Canada"

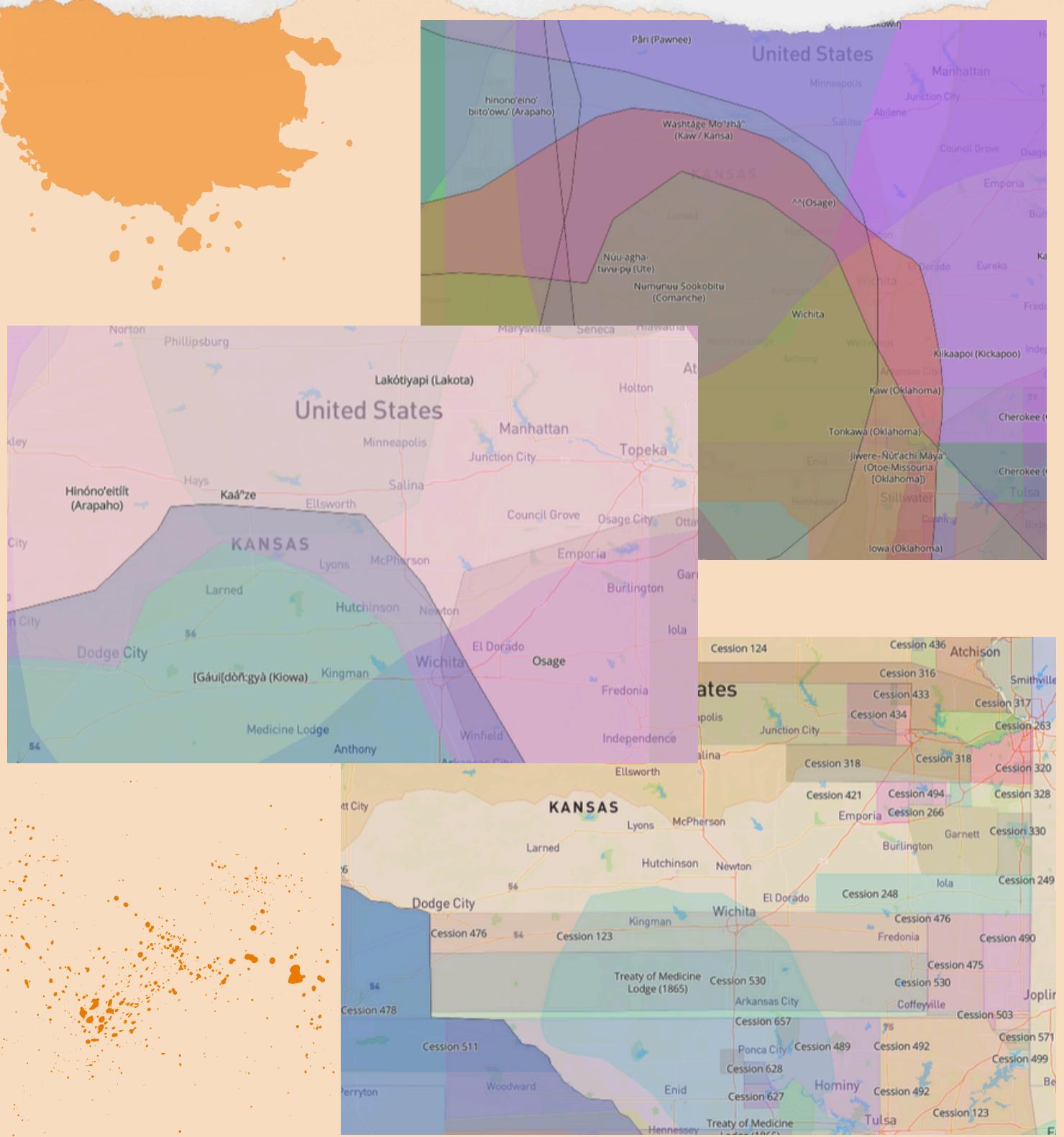
In *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, Aila lives on the Red Crow Reserve, sometimes referred to as the Kingdom the Crow, which "reflects on the colonial imposition of borders, and the Kingdom of the Crow...is at once ironic and resistant" (Toll). It is important to point out why European forms of mapmaking are colonizing agents.

Indigenous mapping operates as a form of storytelling because it tells people's relationships to places and beings in a far different way than European mapmaking does. If you go to a web browser, for example, and search up Olathe, Kansas, you will find a very distinct area. Eurocentric maps don't tell stories; here are roads, locations, and economic holdings. Claimed land. Stolen land.

Claimed land. Stolen land.



Indigenous mapping is not as simple as black lines marking “owned” land. Native Land Digital, a website dedicated to fostering a space for Indigenous communities to represent themselves and their histories, believes that mapping is more than one dimensional grid: “What we are mapping is more than just a flat picture. The land itself is sacred, and it is not easy to draw lines that divide it up into chunks that delineate who ‘owns’ different parts of land. In reality, we know that land is not something to be exploited and ‘owned’” (“About”). On their website, the viewer can learn about Indigenous peoples through interaction with maps, including histories, languages, and stories of relationships to places and people.



P

POETRY

"The literature is approached with an already established theory, and the implication is that the worth of literature is essentially validated by its demonstrated adherence to a respected literary mode, dynamic, or style."

-Kimberly Blaeser (Minnesota Chippewa Tribe), "Native Literature: Seeking a Critical Centre"

Which poets are taught in literature courses?

Can you name a few?

I can: William Shakespeare, Geoffrey Chaucer, Sir Thomas Wyatt. I can even name a few more: John Donne, George Herbert, John Milton, Philip Sidney.

All of these poets have a few things in common. They are all white. They are all men. They are all closed form writers, meaning their poetry follows a pattern of lines, meter, rhymes, and stanzas. They are also considered the best of the best.

Reading Indigenous poetry from the Western lens of literary theory, that being that poetry is more sophisticated and worthwhile if it adheres to closed form, is an act of colonization. Kimberly Blaeser, a Minnesota Chippewa Tribe poet and scholar, argues that Native American literature is in a complicated situation: "The literary works themselves are always at least bi-cultural: though they may come from an oral-based culture, they are written. Though their writer may speak a tribal language, they are usually most wholly in the language of English. And though they proceed at least partly from an Indian culture, they are most often presented in the established literary and aesthetic forms of the dominant culture (or in those forms acceptable to the publishing industry)" (Blaeser 234). Though it may be hard to navigate the dominant culture. Indigenous writers have found a way "proceed from and reinforce an understanding of the dominant position of the Euro-American literary aesthetic, constructing their own identity as they do by its relationship to that master template" (235). Some Indigenous poets choose to write within some poetic formats adopted by the Western world, while others choose to write in free verse. Blaeser does both. In "Haiku Journey," she follows the format of the haiku, with the 5-7-5 syllable structure. In other poems, like "About Standing (in Kinship)" and "Goodbye to All That", she breaks away from formats and experiments with prose and free verse. Her poetry combines oral tradition with poetic convention, resulting in innovative creative work that resists colonial constraints.

RESTORYING

"The stated desire to "put events of the past behind us" and unite a deeply divided society expresses the underlying logic of most truth commissions, which view reconciliation processes in terms of a "preparedness of people to anticipate a shared future" through forgiveness but also shared strategies for moving forward collectively to repair existing relationships (Rigby 12). However, as anthropologist Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox points out, "The result is that, by conflating specific unjust events, policies, and laws with 'history,' what is unjust becomes temporally separate from the present, unchangeable. This narrows options for restitution: we cannot change the past" (33).

Such a convenient framing of the issue allows political leaders and settler populations to deal with residual guilt on their own terms, which often follows all too familiar scripts of "forgiving and forgetting," "moving on from the past," and "unifying as a country," all the while brushing aside any deeper discussions of restitution or justice. Reconciliation becomes a way for the dominant culture to reinscribe the status quo rather than to make amends for previous injustices."

-Jeff Corntassel, Chaw-win-is, and T'lakwadzi, "Indigenous Storytelling, Truth-Telling, and Community Approaches to Reconciliation"

Restorying is often combined with the concept of rewriting stories, inserting identities into narratives, as a means of finding oneself in the text. A prominent example of restorying is "fanfiction," in which authors involved in fandom will write stories based on media, specifically rewriting said stories, in order to insert themes of race, gender, sexuality, etc.

Restorying in this way is powerful. But restorying isn't just rewriting, especially not in Indigenous contexts.

Restorying is also the re-insertion of narratives previously destroyed, brushed aside, ignored, etc. It isn't necessarily "rewriting" history - but rather, changing the lens, removing the written power of the colonialist, imperialist bodies. Fourth Cinema, as defined by Barry Barclay (Māori) through this visualization:

"What happens when the camera is shifted from the deck onto the shore? Will it matter whether it's in the hands of the officers from the ship, or in the hands of the Indigenous people there? The white man ashore (on the rare occasions he comes ashore and mingles with the natives) will say that it makes no difference. "We make films just the same as the natives would, were they given the chance." Please, give me a single example - just one - when the white man ashore has ever done that. He will always film from within the national orthodoxy from whence he came. There is no logical reason why he should act otherwise. The ship camera will always show the white man coming to find the native princess. Or something similar."

is restorying.

In the act of making Indigenous content as an Indigenous creator, the known narrative of Indigeneity shifts to its origin, rather than its “recorded image.” What I mean is that, through Fourth Cinema, Indigenous narratives are able to shift from the imperialists’ desired narrative to the Indigenous.

Rhymes for Young Ghouls is an act of restorying. A story of revenge that refuses colonialist narratives in which the Indigenous woman is helpless, in which the horrors are of the “other,” where anxieties of the oppressed attacking the oppressors manifest, in which individual is applauded. Rhymes for Young Ghouls sets the horrors firmly in reality – removing the aspects of supernaturality from the horror and placing it instead in the realm of grief and revenge. Aila’s mother’s ghost is not haunting Aila in the traditional colonial sense, but rather as a reminder of what she has lost and is fighting for. It throws the hidden narratives of residential schools into the fore, does not shy away from the brutality, the truth, of these cultural genocides.

The act of restorying is “just a first step toward remembering and revitalizing [their] collective and individual consciousness.” (Corntassel, Chaw-win-is, and T’lakwadzi).





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