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RE-READING THE “CULTURE CLASH”:
ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF READING IN
INDIAN HORSE

By

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of English

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ABSTRACT
RE-READING THE CULTURE CLASH:
ALTERNATE WAYS OF READING IN
INDIAN HORSE

Hailey Whetten

Marquette University, 2021

This study focuses in, particularly, on the study of the “culture clash reading” approach to Indigenous literature and examines the conditioned nature of this approach, its limitations, and its potential for harm to Indigenous agendas.

Student engagement with Richard Wagamese’s *Indian Horse* was observed in two undergraduate courses to study conditioned student literary analysis patterns and engage proposed alternative reading strategies inspired by NAIS methodology. Student interactions with and responses to *Indian Horse* are closely examined in alignment with Indigenous agendas.

The study ultimately finds the “culture clash reading” approach to be problematic in its positional superiority of Western knowledge and inquiry and promotes NAIS-inspired alternative reading strategies as more closely aligning with Indigenous agendas, the primary agenda explored here being intellectual sovereignty. The benefits of the alternative reading have also been found to extend to individual student readers in engaging a more in-depth and deliberate reading of Indigenous literature.

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Hailey Whetten

I would like to thank my husband, who not only got me going down this route of inquiry but who has kept me fueled along the way, and my sons, who daily remind me why I want to try and advocate for good in this life. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Samantha Majhor and Dr. Steven Hartman-Keiser, whose enthusiasm, advice, and encouragement revitalized me throughout the process time and time again. I would like to thank the Marquette English Department administrative staff, who always ensured I was set up for success. Finally, I would like to thank whatever one might call that drawing force that sometimes seems to place us exactly where we need to be when we need to be there.

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Introduction

I entered the new (to me) field of Indigenous literature in the spring of 2020 with a well-intended degree of infatuation. At the time of my entrance into the field, I came fully equipped with the framework of my upbringing and wholly unequipped with any understanding of the need to perceive that framework. I now go forward acknowledging my personal framework, not for the purpose of labeling myself, but for the purpose of better being able to *see* myself, especially in orientation to the Indigenous literature I will henceforth engage with.

I am descended from Canadian loyalists, Mayflower passengers, and Mormon pioneers, to name a few groups. I was raised in a small, largely conservative town in Wyoming, approximately 170 miles south of present-day Yellowstone. I am a white female with a Christian upbringing. I am the product of a Westernized education. I am a being ever searching, who is learning the value of occupying that liminal space.

In the beginning of my foray into Indigenous studies, I read and wrote with the desperation of an explorer in completely new territory. Of course, the territory is not new, and my early adventures in Indigenous studies were riddled with lapses close in metaphor to early colonization expeditions. I brought to the Indigenous literature I read only the literary analysis tools I had grown up with, without seeing right away the limitations of these tools. Approaching this literature as a learner/listener pursuing alternative reading strategies, I have since striven to apply Jo-Ann Archibald Q'um Q'um Xiiem's seven Indigenous research principles, of which I will speak later. These principles have served to add deliberation, awareness, intention, and greater visibility to my exposure.

My initial interests led me to what I tagged as “culture collision” moments in literature, in which I focused on literary depictions of the clashing of two cultures and primarily took interest in the outcomes of such collisions. I have since discovered I was not nearly the first to utilize such a phrase; however, at that time, I thought I had stumbled upon a critical concept with important questions to consider. I remember the confident moment of typing into my MA thesis planning document: “Primary Interest: Culture collision moments as they are depicted in literature (and history texts?)”

I was plowing ahead with my thesis planning parallel to participating in a Global Indigenous Literature course. Having been given the opportunity to teach Wole Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* in that course, I opened the play and read the author’s note for a total of ten seconds before stumbling across a humbling declaration that would throw me completely off of my thesis (and learning) track:

The bane of themes of this genre is that they are no sooner employed creatively than they acquire the facile tag of ‘clash of cultures’, a prejudicial label which, quite apart from its frequent misapplication, presupposes a potential equality *in every given situation* of the alien culture and the indigenous, on the actual soil of the latter. (original emphasis)

I at once felt humbled not just in my misplaced excitement for a tag condemned by an Indigenous playwright, but in my entire venture into Indigenous studies and clear lack of authority on the subject. This was among my first of many wake-up calls to step outside of my framework and look at where I was coming from as a reader, and therefore listener, of Indigenous literature.

Having to meet soon with MA thesis committee member Dr. Samantha Majhor (Dakota) to discuss potential areas of interest for my thesis, I scrambled to put together a new list of ideas. During the course of the meeting, nothing I put forward was really taking off. In passing, I mentioned my original plan to examine culture clashes in literature only to be aptly humbled by Soyinka. At this moment, I finally saw that spark of intrigue appear in the meeting that I had been looking for, and we went on to discuss how I could use this chastening experience to actually explore a re-reading process of Indigenous literature that challenges the “culture clash reading” so condemned by Soyinka (and many others, as I would come to find out) and promotes a reading that actually supports Indigenous agendas. Inspired by where my own educational transformation began, I determined the sight of where to begin exploring this re-reading process: the university classroom.

My first step to proposing an alternative reading to a culture clash reading (CCR), is to determine what a CCR entails as important points of focus in Indigenous literature and what its limitations and flaws are in order to determine what a proposed alternative might do differently. To analyze this, I examine the history of traditional research methods, specifically looking at the acquisition and presentation of knowledge, to discuss the position of a CCR. I acknowledge that a CCR is not a formal literary analysis method and do not attempt to frame it in that light. Rather, I engage it as an often conditioned interaction with Indigenous literature that needs to be challenged and supplanted with a more mindful and deliberate approach.

I will be utilizing Richard Wagamese’s *Indian Horse* as the primary novel to examine both a CCR and a proposed alternative reading in action. Set in 1950’s Canada,

the novel centers around what traditional discourse would call the “coming-of-age” story of Saul Indian Horse, an Ojibwe youth. Like numerous Indigenous youth of this time in Canadian history, Saul is forced into Canada’s Residential school system, where, among extreme measures for assimilation, he is also exposed to the sport of ice hockey. Because this novel vividly depicts Canada’s Residential school era, readers can graphically witness the collision of two cultures as Canadian government policies, largely through the Boarding school system, attempt to assimilate Canada’s Indigenous population. Saul’s journey into professional ice hockey and, ultimately, Canadian society after his time at the Residential school provides an extension of that collision beyond the school system. In tandem with the two cultures colliding in the novel, is the collision of two cultures in any given reader, of which a relative few will align closely with the Indigenous culture of the novel. Accordingly, readers face an opportunity to read Wagamese’s novel through the conditioned employment of Westernized literary practices, or they can take the opportunity to engage awareness of potential reading biases and take advantage of an opportunity to engage Indigenous methodology in reading *Indian Horse*. The remainder of this project aims to explore potential outcomes of each style of engagement.

A primer on the formation of Culture Clash Readings

As a CCR is more a conditioned approach to Indigenous literature than it is a formal literary analysis method, to examine its roots is to examine the perception of history and knowledge acquisition techniques in which a reader is trained. It is misleading to call a CCR a “subconscious” or “natural” approach in that it is more a trained result of Westernized education. Because this paper centers Canadian Indigenous literature and explores Western university literary practices, I will be utilizing the term “Westernized¹” to refer to the normalized discourse of the regions relevant to this paper, namely, Canada and the United States. These will be the regions in reference when I apply the verb “dominant” to any term such as: discourse, society, history, etc.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Maori) critiques Westernized concepts of history through a series of “interconnected ideas” (30) that reinforce history as one, commanding narrative against which alternative narratives are held up for comparison. These ideas assume a universality of “characteristics and values which all human subjects and societies share” (Smith 30), a global body of knowledge, and identifiable stages of development (30) that assumes progress as these inflexible and predetermined societal standards are met. History, Smith argues, then becomes about compiling a series of facts that can be assembled “in an ordered way so that they tell us the truth or give us a very good idea of what really did happen in the past...this idea [of innocence] assumes that the ‘facts’ speak for themselves and that the historian simply researches the facts and puts them together”

¹ The use of this term aims to acknowledge the epistemological, economical, and societal dominance of mainstream culture in Canada and the United States as regions representing the cultural, economical, and political systems of Europe and North America.

(31). Finally, for these ideas to function, there needs to have been an identifiable “time of ‘discovery’” (Smith 30) established to provide a chronological timeline in which to track societal stages of development and assemble “facts” from. These timelines and facts have been assembled and decided upon by dominant society; consequently, theirs is the reigning history presented in the mainstream.

What this means for a CCR is that most readers of Indigenous literature must actively challenge the trained dominant discourse insisting on trackable stages and facts of history. If they do not, they risk reinforcing one dominant discourse of history and historicizing Indigenous peoples. These missteps impede a meaningful reading of Indigenous literature or even negate the liberating action of Indigenous writing and fortify a modernized version of colonialism in which non-dominant perceptions of history remain silenced and unreferenced; the dominant narrative of history and how it should be constructed goes unchallenged. I will examine these missteps in greater depth at a later time when exploring Wagamese’s *Indian Horse*.

I next examine the history of Westernized knowledge acquisition techniques and how they reflect on a CCR. Westernized accumulation of knowledge has been likened in metaphor to various circumstances that center around consumption. This includes bell hook’s metaphor comparing Westernized acquisition of knowledge to the gluttony of a buffet: “The overriding fear is that cultural, ethnic, and racial differences will be continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate--that the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten” (qtd. in Kruk 307). Turning from metaphor to more literal consumption, one need only look at the history of world exhibitions to witness knowledge utilized as a valuable commodity for consumption.

World exhibitions, commonly called world fairs, began under the orchestration of Prince Albert in 1851 in London. The trend was picked up by officials in Paris, where eight world exhibitions were held between 1855-1937². Many other countries held similar expositions, including the United States with the Chicago World Fair in 1893. These expositions were largely driven by competition between nations in areas such as industry, fine arts, and architecture. They were also promoted as an opportunity to “experience” other cultures of the world. Such cultures were often put on physical display like a museum exhibit. These were referred to as ethnological expositions, or, less formally, human zoos. E. Monod, author of one coverage of the 1889 world fair, determined this exposure of diverse cultures to the French people to be a political strong point in establishing French superiority: “From a political point of view, the experiences of our colonials at the exposition are uniformly excellent. Our natives carry away the impression that France is a rich and powerful nation. They recognize our moral superiority, and are less and less tempted to contest our authority” (Monod 139). This trend of knowledge collection and display can still be seen in more modernly recognizable forms such as the Robert Ripley’s Believe it or Not³ franchise, which displays various cultural “oddities” from around the world made to seem unbelievable against the dominant discourse. In this

² World Fairs are still going on today, but they tend to focus less on comparing “achievements” and more on solving problems, such as environmental issues and feeding the hungry. Interestingly, these fairs do not draw near the amount of attention or interest as did their early predecessors, and some suggest that the fairs need to return to their sense of “wonder and aspiration” (Swartout). You can read more about this in: Swartout, Harry. “How the World of Tomorrow Became a Thing of the Past,” *Time Magazine*, April 29, 2014.

³ One Ripley’s museum attempting to shift into an alternative presentation of the “unbelievable” is the Ripley’s Believe It or Not Museum in Wisconsin Dells, WI. With plans to redesign in 2022, this particular museum aims to move away from cultural oddity as inspired by Robert Ripley’s traveling experiences and more into oddity at the level of individuals. It will be interesting to trace if other Ripley’s museums follow suit and how the conversation of “normalcy” and “oddity” will continue to develop as commodities for entertainment.

way, knowledge is still used to maintain control over what counts as legitimate and “normal.”

So what does this mean for a CCR? Knowledge as consumption puts emphasis only on what is gained, not *how* it is gained, what is *done with what is gained*, nor *what is given back*. It also assumes totality in what has been given and ignores what has potentially been withheld. This approach regarding Indigeneity as a cultural add-on to improve our cultured palate locks readers in a stage of cultural tension that is not only unproductive, but non-transformative. When Indigenous knowledge functions as an add-on, it positions the reader naturally in a place to make sense of Indigenous knowledge against the background of what they already know, which, for most university students, has been conceptualized as Westernized discourse. Stuart Hall suggests that conceptualizing the West:

- (1) allow[s] us to characterize and *classify* societies into categories, (2) condense complex images of other societies through a *system of representation*, (3) provide a standard *model of comparison*, and (4) provide *criteria of evaluation* against which other societies can be ranked.
- (qtd. in Smith 42-43, original emphasis)

When readers attempt to fit “new discoveries” (Smith 61) from minority societies into Western frameworks, they not only negate the liberation efforts of the writer, but they fail to experience the writing in the correct frame of reference, and the opportunities missed cannot be quantified. In truth, these discoveries are not new at all, but only considered new when measured against what was previously known by the reader. This literary

misstep is summarized effectively by Chanette Romero, an instructor of Indigenous literature:

Faced with radical differences in worldviews and perspectives when reading Native and other peoples' literature in my general multiethnic survey courses, my students used categories of analysis from the dominant culture to judge these literatures as either deficient or the same as mainstream Euro-American literatures, effectively collapsing differences among various peoples' storytelling traditions, histories, and political aims. Some of my non-Native and assimilated Native students have dismissed Native literature as 'angry,' 'badly written,' or, when praising it, as simply another example of the 'universal truth' that 'we're all the same.' (Romero 434)

This "collapsing of differences" (Romero 434) happens in large part because "[t]hose who lean towards the edge of the abyss to explore what they can see perceive themselves as objective, neutral, and transparent...and select and describe what they see according to what can be made intelligible within their own cultural referents and imaginaries" (Ahenakew 328). While this knowledge may be in and of itself new to the reader, it quickly becomes knowledge misappropriation if the presence of the dominant discourse goes completely unacknowledged and dismissed.

In summary, the formation of a CCR as a conditioned interaction with Indigenous literature is framed by: 1) a view of history as one, comprehensive narrative that promotes tracking all societies against that narrative; 2) a consumptive approach to knowledge acquisition and presentation of such as a cultural add-on to dominant

knowledge discourse; and 3) a neglect to acknowledge the presence of dominant discourse in shaping newly acquired knowledge against what is already known. The potential missteps a reader coming from a Westernized education must contend with in order to better honor Indigenous agendas in their readings are many. This paper is meant to serve as an introduction to some of those missteps and as an opportunity for the increase of awareness in how to read Indigenous literature more mindfully, deliberately, and intentionally.

A Primer on the outcomes of Culture Clash Readings

By its very definition, a CCR ruminates on culture clashes in literature. This reading technique may prioritize questions such as: how are these two (or more) cultures the same? How are they different? What kind of hybridity do we see emerging from these collisions? Who “wins out” in these collisions? What do these cultures take away from one another? What do they give? How are they changed by colliding? What hybrid experiences come out of these collisions? What is the ultimate outcome of this collision? While these questions do not represent an unimportant discussion, they represent one that has largely already been held. In Indigenous literary studies, James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice identify a “shift in critical focus from identity, authenticity, hybridity, and cross-cultural mediation to the Native intellectual, cultural, political, historical, and tribal national contexts from which Indigenous literatures emerge” (1). The questions listed above do not shift into the developing framework of “literary criticism that supports the intellectual and political sovereignty of Indigenous communities and tribal nations” (Cox & Justice 1), but rather remain in the framework that continues to ruminate on the hybrid outcomes of literary culture clash depictions and other diversions from Indigenous agendas. Prioritizing questions such as those listed do not examine how the Indigenous agenda of intellectual and political sovereignty is getting worked out in Indigenous literature, such as Wagamese’s *Indian Horse*.

Because it favors these types of questions, a CCR ultimately comes down to comparing and contrasting two (or more) cultures as they interact. It is a conditioned reaction to encountering text we either do not understand or feel the need to extract measurable meaning from. This is especially at risk of happening when a student believes

they must read Indigenous literature for understanding or comprehension, whether to participate in class discussions or synthesize meaning in writing of some format. In a university classroom tackling Indigenous literature, if the purposes of engaging with Indigenous literature are not made explicit, students will likely resort to what has always been expected of them, using the tools they have always used. This comparative model that simplifies complexities by framing newly acquired knowledge against what we already know (as discussed on pages 5-7), is a habituated reaction to encountering unfamiliar discourse. This continual return to what we already know in order to orient newly acquired knowledge supports a CCR's tendency to unite all differences as one, nationally-conceived difference when held against the discourse of the dominant society. Speaking of Canadian national discourse, Laurie Kruk says, "it is tempting to see Native literature as representing merely another 'difference' we can easily encompass within our own polyphonous, pluralistic national discourse" (303). If we, as readers, cognitively feel we already have a space in our national discourse for Indigenous literature, we instinctively employ analysis methods from that archive of knowledge with which to situate this newly acquired knowledge.

As we prepare to shift into exploring how an alternative reading can act as an effective re-reading option, I must identify its aim is not to completely ignore culture collisions in literature. Rather, one aim of an alternative reading is to engage Indigenous knowledge on its own terms as we encounter these collision moments in Indigenous literature. Margaret Steffler's study of language collision in literature, for example,

identifies one potential way forward that does not need to end with our resolving newly acquired knowledge against what we already know⁴.

Steffler suggests that when readers encounter unfamiliar language in literary text, especially when no dominant language translation is offered, they experience a limited measure of exclusion in being forced to confront these colliding languages with some major knowledge gaps in the case of the unfamiliar language. She identifies these elements as creating a collision in which the student must “re-evaluate the familiar signifiers and signs in the terms of the other language and within the context of the collision...drawing on the cultural and personal responses of individual readers” (363).

Whether speaking specifically of languages, or cultural differences more broadly, students do encounter new ways of knowing born out of the collision of cultures when reading Indigenous literature. Some form of translation must take place, inevitably, for students to make meaning. Acknowledging this, Steffler concludes her discussion with:

Students use the postcolonial refusal to resolve colliding languages to highlight and explain other refusals to move toward resolution. This conscious and unyielding juxtaposition of English and the other language can be a powerful and effective way to position readers to experience other collisions and tensions. Within the classroom, the transition from

⁴ Steffler utilizes various authors to examine the interaction of different languages in literature, focusing on how each author approaches the interaction of different languages in the text. Some authorial techniques for language interaction she identifies include: language submission, diametric opposition, no offered translations, colliding languages in the same sentence, italicizing the othered language, and limited translation methods. Regardless of the technique, Steffler argues that seeking language (or culture) resolution from these moments of collision is not a productive place to stay: “Once students accept the inaccessibility of the words on the page...they appreciate experiencing the position of the ‘other’ language and culture--a position which necessarily begins as one of exclusion” (355). She goes on to examine what moving beyond the need for language resolution might look like in action.

literature to culture and society can be a tricky one, but it is a transition that students are eager to make. (365)

By resisting the reaction to seek culture collision resolution, readers keep open cognitive space for other objectives that better align with Indigenous agendas. Through the following application of a proposed alternative reading to Wagamese's *Indian Horse*, we examine the ways in which confrontations with culture collision moments in Indigenous literature can be productive and prioritize engaging Indigenous knowledge on its own terms.

Applying a proposed alternative reading to *Indian Horse*

The remainder of this paper acts as an introduction to a proposed alternative reading of Indigenous literature grounded in Native American and Indigenous Studies (NAIS) methodologies. The alternative reading draws from Indigenous principles of research and ways of knowing as opposed to Westernized literary analysis techniques and prioritizes engaging Indigenous literature on its own terms. This introduction will focus primarily on talking back to the summarized formation points of a CCR and establishing how a proposed alternative should respond to these limitations. In review, those CCR points are:

- 1) a view of history as one comprehensive narrative that promotes tracking all societies against said narrative
- 2) a consumptive approach to knowledge acquisition and the presentation of such as a cultural add-on to dominant knowledge discourse
- 3) a neglect to acknowledge the presence of dominant discourse in shaping newly acquired knowledge against what is already known

I will be utilizing Richard Wagamese's novel *Indian Horse* to apply reading methods that respect Indigenous agendas, oftentimes juxtaposing CCR methods. As previously stated, the novel is set in 1950s Canada and follows the story of an Ojibwe youth, his experience in Canada's Residential school system, professional ice hockey, and the beginnings of his adult life in Canadian society afterward⁵.

⁵ Review page 3 for a novel summary.

1. Methodology

I will be examining student responses from two undergraduate university courses taught by the same instructor, Dr. Samantha Majhor, both of which I participated in as a graduate student. The first course, a Global Indigenous literature course, took place in the spring of 2020. Student responses from this section come from written, online student collaborations (via discussion boards) as born by the virtual nature the class ended up in due to the Covid19 pandemic. Given that at the time of this first course I was not planning on incorporating student responses to the novel in this thesis, oral student responses from this course were not collected. Written, online student responses, categorized as pre-existing data and accessed retroactively, from this course were anonymized and assigned numerical identifiers prior to my accessing them, and I will identify students numerically with the tag “2020” to denote responses from the first course (i.e Student 1, 2020). In this course, I participated in the *Indian Horse* module only as a fellow peer and reader.

The second course, a Native American literature course, took place in the spring of 2021. Student responses from this course come from both written (via discussion boards) and oral (in-class) student collaborations indicative of the hybrid nature of the course on the tail-end of the Covid19 pandemic. In this course, I was given the opportunity to plan and implement one portion of the *Indian Horse* module, which I organized in alignment with this thesis project. I arranged my lesson plan around a before-and-after reading style that asked students to: 1) engage with particular themes and questions in the novel; 2) read Ojibwe-specific extensions to those themes borrowed from Margaret Noodin’s *Bawaajimo*; and 3) re-engage those same themes and questions

with this extension of Ojibwe-specific knowledge. Because my study of oral conversations were considered observations of private behavior, Dr. Majhor and I underwent the Marquette IRB approval process to collect and utilize oral student responses to the text. Written responses were anonymized and assigned numerical identifiers prior to my accessing them, and I will identify students numerically with the tag “2021” to denote responses from the second course (i.e Student 1, 2021). I will anonymize student responses from oral discussion with a similar method, noting when a response comes from an oral conversation.

Both courses read and interacted with Richard Wagamese’s *Indian Horse*. I will be utilizing student responses, including my own, from those oral and written discussions in order to explore different types of literary lens students tend to approach *Indian Horse* with and identify potential patterns in confronting newly encountered ways of knowing presented in the novel. My analysis will look for evidence of the application of Westernized literary practices (primarily that which I have discussed regarding a CCR) to examine the limitations of this style of reading and how a proposed alternative reading encourages an approach that not only produces an opportunity for more deliberate engagement by students, but aligns more closely with Indigenous agendas. My analysis will also look for the application of alternative literary practices engaged both naturally and through instructor encouragement to assess what is gained through engaging these alternative reading practices.

Finally, my analysis will explore the degree to which this lesson plan fulfills the goals put forward by an alternative reading, namely: 1) to resist a view of history as one, comprehensive narrative that promotes tracking all societies against that narrative; 2) to

engage a multiperspectivism approach to knowledge and acknowledge truth's flexibility; and 3) to attempt to read Indigenous literature through principles of Indigenous methodology, acknowledging, along the way, the presence and effects of dominant discourse.

2. Indigenous Agendas: Intellectual Sovereignty

It is important to note that, just as I do not attempt to frame a CCR as a formal literary analysis method, neither do I attempt to frame a proposed alternative reading as a formal literary analysis method. Whereas the comparative learning instinct that grounds a CCR is an inevitable learning resource, a proposed alternative acts more as a redirected approach to comparative conditioning. An alternative reading attempts to make visible the principles that will make student experiences with Indigenous literature more meaningful, deliberate, and suitable to Indigenous agendas. How Indigenous literature is taught should reflect a shift discussed by Cox and Justice: "Tribal nation specific and American Indian literary nationalist methods opened new areas of inquiry by shifting keywords of scholarly conversation from identity, culture, and mediation to history, politics, citizenship, sovereignty, and diplomacy" (5). When a proposed alternative claims to forward Indigenous agendas, the key words it aims to satisfy are *history*, *politics*, *citizenship*, *diplomacy*, and, especially, *sovereignty*.

The particular Indigenous agenda an alternative reading aims to prioritize is intellectual sovereignty, an "autonomous intellectual framework" (Simpson & Smith 9) developed by Native studies and so named by Robert Warrior (1994-95). Simpson and Smith question whether or not this requires intellectual isolationism, to which they instead suggest "intellectual promiscuity" (9), which is a helpful starting point to

understand the angle from which an alternative reading approaches Indigenous intellectual sovereignty. If the goal were intellectual isolationism, there would be uncertainty of the presence of Native studies in the university setting at all. For example, Simpson and Smith examine Cook-Lynn's caution against Native studies engaging with other fields: "In [Cook-Lynn's] rendering, while Native studies is located in the academy, its primary aim is not the advancement of knowledge within the academy but the defense of Native communities" (10). Although they concede well-founded fears of Native studies engaging with other fields that risk continuation of settler-colonialism, Simpson and Smith contend that "[i]n countering the call for intellectual isolationism, it is therefore important to engage rather than reject conversation with schools of thought that may have compatible intellectual and political goals" (12).

Given that Native studies *is* located within the university, given that concerns of Indigenous methodologies situated within a largely-Westernized institution have been voiced, how Indigenous literature is experienced in the university classroom becomes all the more critical to listening and reacting to these concerns.

3. A proposed alternative reading and concepts of history

Where a CCR may examine Indigenous literature for an assembly of "facts" with which to inform history, a proposed alternative reading prioritizes the "awareness of asymmetrical but mutually constitutive histories, relationships, and responsibilities" (qtd. in Eigenbrod 444). This means a proposed alternative does not ruminate over who comes out on top in culture clash moments of history; nor does an alternative reading deliberate much over the hybridization or bi-cultural experience of Indigenous people. Instead, a

proposed alternative encourages a similar approach to history as that put forth by John Willinsky in working “against the learned forgetfulness and complacency displayed in the face of history” (qtd. in Eigenbrod 441). The underlying purpose of this reading’s approach to history, then, is to attempt to “[see] the world other than as we have inherited it” (qtd. in Eigenbrod 441) when reading Indigenous literature.

In *Indian Horse*, whenever Saul’s grandmother, Naomi, speaks of their ancestral history, she utilizes language such as “In the Long Ago Time...” (18) and speaks of Ojibwe traditions as “the old way[s]” (31). Saul, too, utilizes a similar vocabulary in referencing his origin stories: “The Old Ones say that our long straight hair comes from the waving grasses that thatch the edges of bays” (1). Being immersed in this type of language use, students naturally used similar language in their responses to the novel. Consistent across discussions of history, students, especially in the 2020 course, utilized terms such as: old ways, old generations, and old life, with the addition of “modern ways” to speak of Westernized practices coming into Ojibwe circles. This practice recenters dominant society as the primary writers of history and adheres to that timeline that the alternative reading works against. Although this language is used in the novel by Indigenous characters, the passive transfer of this vocabulary to Westernized discourse risks leaving behind Ojibwe viewpoints of history and time to be absorbed into Westernized viewpoints of history and time, which enacts a historicizing effect. This was evident in a trend of discussion board 2020 student responses that referred to the incoming of Zhaunagush (white man) as the “beginning of the end,” (student 13, 2020) and the “erasure of not native culture, tradition, language, and history, but a literal erasure of people” (student 8, 2020). Additional comments labeled the Ojibwe connection with

Zhaunagush as the “downfall of the culture” (student 15, 2020). While these statements are not inherently incorrect, stopping the discussion at this point has a historicizing effect in that it does not acknowledge Indigeneity as a living, ongoing state and risks reinforcing the misconception of Native traditions as dead-end cultures frozen in a state of perish in the past.

A proposed alternative reading of Ojibwe history should, instead, look at Ojibwe-specific views of time to try and understand what terms such as “old” and “long ago” signify, acknowledging that applying a Westernized viewpoint of history and time to Ojibwe history and time does not align. This can be seen in Margaret Noodin’s comment analyzing a passage from Jim Northrup’s *Rez Road Follies*: “It is important to note that [Northrup] says ‘we feel connected to the old days’ in the present tense. The past is not being relived as a separate time. It is part of the present. There is no illusion of escape to the past or attempt to re-create it” (95). The passive transfer of vocabulary such as “old” does not acknowledge this unique interaction with the past that is specific to Ojibwe tradition. An alternate reading of how Ojibwe history is presented by Student 4 (2021) via discussion board points more toward what an alternative reading attempts to prioritize:

[When presented with Ojibwe history], we are not given a specific date for the historical event we’re told. This is true for the other instance of Ojibwe history, the grandmother simply says, “A long time ago before the Zhaunagush” in order to give a contextualization of the time period. This contrasts greatly with western histories where everything is laid out on a timeline, even from a young age (in 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean

blue). Furthermore, Ojibwe histories are told like oral storytelling designed to impart lessons and instill a sense of being/belonging. While western histories are more told as facts to be studied.

Student 2 (2021) responded to this comment, via discussion board, extending Westernized history practices in saying that “Presenting history [as an assembly of facts] reduces questioning.” These reactions begin to fulfill alternative reading goals of interacting with history in that they acknowledge alternative ways to look at history and realize that attempt to “[see] the world other than as we have inherited it” (qtd. in Eigenbrod 441). Student interactions with Indigenous literature such as these, which extend beyond reading history in a Westernized lens, are the beginnings of working against that view of history as one, comprehensive narrative. Through this supplantive reading, students begin to see alternative ways to read history that acknowledges the limitations of reading Ojibwe history through a Westernized lens.

4. A proposed alternative reading and knowledge acquisition

Where a CCR may reinforce a consumptive approach to knowledge acquisition, a proposed alternative reading prioritizes a multiperspectivism that leaves open cognitive space for other ways of knowing. In fact, this alternative reading might remove the terminology of “acquisition” altogether to engage knowledge as something interactive rather than something acquired and challenge the principles of ownership that come with that perspective. This endeavor is aided by first identifying the qualifiers applied to Westernized perspectives of validated knowledge. This is essentially asking: what

credentials must a knowledge base have to be considered valid, according to the dominant discourse?

Many Native scholars have made visible the institutionalization of validated knowledge, which I will use simultaneously with the term, ‘truth⁶.’ In their introduction to *Theorizing Native Studies*, Simpson and Smith establish that Native studies, from its very beginning, has concerned itself with these questions of what historical and political qualifiers characterize as truth. This claim is backed by the use of Vine Deloria Jr.’s initial texts, which argue that “Native studies poses not just a political challenge to the transcendent and simultaneously universally held barometers of truth, but an epistemological challenge to the institutionalization of that truth--namely, the academy” (qtd. in Simpson & Smith 3). This measurement-based truth seeking produces the limiting paradigm of positivism, which Linda Tuhawai Smith defines as follows: “Positivism takes a position that applies views about how the natural world can be examined and understood to the social world of human beings and human societies. Understanding is viewed as being akin to measuring” (Smith 42). In simpler terms, positivism assumes that examining and understanding human societies transfers over to an understanding of the natural world, too. As the dominant discourse establishes and maintains the tools of measurement to establish understanding, it maintains the power to *classify, condense, represent, and evaluate*⁷ other ways of knowing. It is this power that allows for the trivializing of Indigenous epistemological approaches and positioning of other ways of knowing as mythical, fabled, insufficient, or inferior.

⁶ The decision to simultaneously use “knowledge” and “truth” is guided by my stance that Westernized discourse tends to position knowledge as something that reveals truth or, at the very least, requires a predetermined validation process.

⁷ For a refresher on the emphasized verbs, borrowed from Stuart Hall, see page 6.

Early in the 2021 course, we were reading various accounts of the story of the “Yellow Woman” from Pueblo tradition. During an oral discussion on these accounts, one student utilized the term “magical realism” in describing certain elements. This prompted another student to ask why Native beliefs are called magical whereas Christian beliefs are just called beliefs. Dr. Majhor used this opportunity to discuss the problematic nature of terms such as “magical realism” when discussing Indigenous literature and the trivializing effect of such terms on Indigenous ways of knowing and opened up a discussion about alternate readings of these accounts other than as magical.

Dr. Majhor had posed a similar question in the 2020 course specifically regarding *Indian Horse*: “Is there a way to (re)read this chapter [with Shabogeesick relating lessons of the horse in a visionary style] in a way that resists reading the grandfather’s and the horse’s lessons as magical/prophetic and, instead, understand this chapter (and other moments in these early passages) as depictions of Indigenous knowledge-ways and education?” Students grappled with this question in various ways, some attempting to read the content in a more literal sense⁸, while others read it as the passing down of Indigenous knowledge. Later, in the 2021 course, the same student who first called “Yellow Woman” an example of magical realism noted that, in Ojibwe tradition, knowledge is shared orally, which they at first called folklore then, importantly, corrected to oral tradition. This alteration in speaking of Indigenous ways of knowing demonstrates that shift toward consciously categorizing Indigenous ways of knowing as a part of multiperspectivism, one that does not mysticize Indigenous ways of knowing in order to measure it against elements that do not make sense to be measuring it against. This

⁸ An example of this literal reading in action can be found on page 34.

consciousness of word choice manifests a confronted cognitive process that begins that shift in how students approach Indigenous knowledge-ways.

Simpson and Smith advocate approaching ideas of truth with the acknowledgement of truth's flexibility, thereby freeing our cognitive thought process to also be more adaptable. Their call is to suspend the idea of universal notions of truth:

In our view, poststructuralism contends that all individuals live within a regime of truth that has its own logic, and consequently there is truth *and* the ability to adjudicate between truth claims. If that regime of truth were to become destabilized, it would mean that the individual is simply living under another regime of truth. Because we know that our regime of truth is historically conditioned, we also know it is not stable, that it is flexible and changing; but we are not capable of not believing what we think is true under the regime we live in--and it is true, as long as we are living in it. (3)

In other words, greater cognitive freedom comes as we resist the need for a fixed, stabilized truth, which is, arguably, no more accessible than a fixed stabilized version of history. Truth and history, invariably connected, are both subject to the personal framework with which they are approached. Unlike fiction versus nonfiction binaries typical to Western notion, Margaret Noodin identifies that, according to author Basil Johnston, the subject of true versus untrue may not even be important in Anishinaabe literature: "Instead, all stories are a kind of truth, and it is important for the storytellers and listeners to understand what kind of truth a story contains" (127). Making such a shift in cognitive thinking about knowledge and truth in the academic setting is a crucial initial

strategy that moves toward “ensur[ing] that higher learning is not a mechanism of assimilation but a tool for cultural survival” (Kovach 162) and, beyond survival, intellectual sovereignty.

As previously stated, a proposed alternative reading works to further the agendas put forth by Indigenous communities in contending for intellectual sovereignty⁹. It avoids quick-fix solutions such as simply advancing readers’ cultural repertoire or exposing readers to an abstract awareness of different Indigenous ways of knowing. To make cognitive space for other ways of knowing, readers are first challenged to make visible the archive of knowledge from which they pull and the qualifiers of validity that surround their knowledge assumptions. When reading Indigenous literature, students must suspend the conditioned response to read for comprehension within their knowledge archive and instead read for recognition of other ways of knowing within a space outside their typical realm of contemplation, recognizing alternate forms of truth existing in lateral reality to their own systems.

To assist in combating these challenges, an alternative reading prioritizes the acquisition of knowledge as: 1) an interaction, and 2) a liberation. It is an interaction in that students need to consider not just what they take-away from an encounter with new (to them) ways of knowing, but also what they do with said newly-acquired knowledge. It is a liberation in that, done well, an alternative reading can free readers from a habituated application of Westernized literary methodologies that are simply not the all-encompassing techniques they are often taken for granted to be.

⁹ For a review of intellectual sovereignty, see page 15.

a. Knowledge as an interaction

Georgina Martin (Secwepemc) worked with Secwepemc Elder Jean William in authoring a chapter of her PhD project regarding memory and storytelling as an Indigenous learning methodology. Through their work together, Martin noticed an expression of Elder Jean's called the "give-away," a term Elder Jean used frequently in their interactions to describe what she would do to support the retention of her people's culture and language: "Jean's expression of a 'give-away' relates to *Secwepemc* practices. The *Secwepemc* people pride themselves on being a giving people" (Archibald 60, original emphasis). In this manner, the focus on knowledge is not just on what the learner takes away from an encounter with newly acquired knowledge, but what they "give-away" in return.

The application of what this concept may look like in an academic setting can be examined through the seven, theoretical Indigenous research principles put forth by Jo-Ann Archibald Q'um Q'um Xiiem, which supports the principle of knowledge acquisition as an interaction. Archibald's principles, born from her research on Indigenous storytelling, are: "respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy" (Archibald 1). This study will focus specifically on the principles of respect, interrelatedness, and holism.

While Archibald presents these as *research* principles, I propose that they can be adapted to become *reading* principles for students to emulate when reading Indigenous literature. So, when "[i]n a methodological context, the four principles of respect, responsibility, reverence, and reciprocity act as an ethical guide for the researcher to work

with Indigenous people” (Archibald 1), a reader, arguably conducting personal “research” on a more intimate scale when encountering unfamiliar ways of knowing, may think instead to approach the words of the text, the words of the author, with those first four principles of respect, responsibility, reverence, and reciprocity. One example of a student practicing respect came from the 2020 course via discussion board as this student interacted with the visionary nature of Shabogeesick. In their examination of how some people, regardless of ethnicity, are simply more in touch with the spiritual side of things, Student 9 (2020) ended their thought on the note: “I hope I’m not diminishing the role of the ‘seer’ or this particular indigenous culture by broadening the topic.” This inclusion of well-intended analyzing is a small, yet crucial, first step in establishing respect for the content one is working with. Although it does not excuse a reader from practicing the principles of this alternative reading, it does demonstrate an awareness of the potential for harm in too comparative an analysis, also demonstrating a reverence for the content.

Archibald’s purpose for the latter three Indigenous research principles, “holism, interrelatedness, and synergy enhance the meaning-making process about Indigenous traditional and lived experience stories” (Archibald 2), adapts easily to the personalized task of the reader in that these principles are often exemplified in Indigenous literature. Archibald illustrates this point with a version of the trickster story “Coyote’s Story: Searching for the Bone Needle” told by Eber Hampton (Chickasaw) at a research conference.

I share an abbreviated version of the story here: Old Man Coyote (OMC) spends a long, unsuccessful day hunting and stops for the night, lighting a fire for his meal. He goes to change into his favorite moccasins when he notices a hole in one of them. OMC

begins looking for his special bone needle to mend the tear but cannot feel it in his bag; he begins to crawl on his hands and knees around the fire looking for his bone needle and goes around the fire many times. Owl eventually comes and asks him what he is looking for. OMC tells Owl his problem, and Owl offers to help. After taking one swoop around the area of the fire, Owl tells OMC that he did not see the needle and that if the needle were around the fire, he would have seen it. He asks OMC where he last used the needle, to which OMC reveals he had last used it quite far away in the northern direction. Owl asks OMC why he keeps looking around the fire when the needle is clearly not there. OMC replies, “Well, it’s easier to look for the needle here because the fire gives off such good light, and I can see better here” (qtd. In Archibald 3).

Archibald interjects that at this point in Indigenous storywork, the listener is “implicitly invited to work with the story and begin making meaning from and with the story” (Archibald 3). Applying her own understanding in a research context, Archibald suggests that OMC first “will need to stop going around in circles; a similar action is using research [or reading] methodologies that are not beneficial for Indigenous people, but continue to be used because they are well known (Smith, 2012). He will need to leave the warmth and light of the fire in order to engage with decolonizing research approach” (Archibald 3). Borrowing from Archibald’s perspective, this means that students need to leave the familiarity of literary analysis practices that do not advance Indigenous agendas of intellectual sovereignty, such as a CCR, and move into a literary experience that will at first seem akin to stepping forward cautiously, slowly, arms outstretched, into a wilderness dimly lit and vast in its unmarked boundaries, much as OMC will need to leave the familiar light of his fire to find his lost bone needle. To more authentically

experience and honor Indigenous literature, students will be challenged to engage meaning-making practices not traditionally prioritized in Westernized education. Archibald states that “[e]ngaging in holistic meaning-making involves using the heart (emotions), mind (intellect), body (physical actions), and spirit (spirituality), as well as recognizing the relationships of these realms to oneself, family, community, land/environment, and wider society” (4). To engage these meaning-making practices, students will need to begin exploring how they can involve the heart, mind, body, and spirit in their reading of Indigenous literature.

How to engage these components of holism is not immediately clear. While student connections to themselves and to wider society were present in the readings of *Indian Horse*, that next level of what to do with such connections was less developed. Namely, students recognized connections (operating more in that *comparative* frame); however, the next step into *interaction* with new ways of knowing needs further development. For example, when reflecting on the difference in Ojibwe versus Westernized perceptions of history, Student 4 (2020) commented: “We, as mainstream Americans, like to think that everything that happened in the past is in the past, i.e. it no longer matters or affects us. One can simply look at how the US is ‘dealing’ with the legacy of white supremacy and how many people think racism is a thing of the past.” This student connects what they are learning in an Indigenous literature course with what is happening in society at the time of reading, especially beginning to engage the Indigenous reading principle of interrelatedness, which recognizes connection and relatedness to land, place, people, each other, etc. (Archibald 217). This same student again demonstrates these practices in personalizing the reading and what they were

learning about Ojibwe perceptions of history, saying, “Another thing I realized when reading [about Ojibwe perceptions of history] was how disconnected I feel from the history that should be my own.” In one moment of reflection, Student 4 (2021) does engage these reading principles in recognizing relationships to themselves and to wider society. However, further exploration of how students can specifically involve the body (physical actions) and spirit (spirituality) in meaning-making is needed.

This introduction of alternate meaning-making practices is but one way we can fulfill Evelyn Araluen Corr’s call to “not simply unsettle colonial literary practices and assumptions, but rather to produce constructive and generative sites of inquiry and interrogation, which can accommodate and encourage new stories, and new ways of understanding and engaging with these stories” (Archibald 201). As university classrooms become these “sites of inquiry,” the students operating in these sites have the opportunity to begin making the transition into a realm of thinking that engages Indigenous methodologies for meaning-making. The more often students apply a proposed alternative reading approach to Indigenous literature, the more it will push back against conditioned Westernized methodologies to make cognitive space for other ways of knowing.

b. Knowledge as a liberation

Knowledge as a liberation involves two types of “freeing” outcomes. The first is the liberation of Indigenous literature from constricting Westernized literary methodologies, which makes a crucial, if small, step toward forwarding Indigenous intellectual sovereignty. Indigenous intellectual sovereignty cannot begin to be accessed nor realized in an environment where Westernized methodologies continue to drive

Indigenous literary practices. Speaking particularly of the Maori practice of *purakau*, Joellee Seed-Pihama (Maori) calls on Indigenous storywork as an important part of decolonization: “Integral to the unravelling of colonization is our own ancestral wisdom, which can only be found in our stories (in their many forms). A decolonial research agenda demands not only a revealing of the impact of colonization but a focus on the unravelling it” (Archibald 112). In the university classroom setting, unravelling the impacts of colonization does not equate with the removal of Westernized methodologies for literary analysis; it means that those methods are made visible and their effect factored into readings of Indigenous literature, wherein Indigenous methodologies should govern. In this way, the unravelling of the impact of colonization comes in the form of acknowledging Westernized methodologies and working to prioritize Indigenous methodologies instead.

An important discussion about making visible what is lost occurred in the 2020 course between an undergraduate, myself (a graduate student in the course), and Dr. Majhor, via discussion board. Regarding a video clip the class had been asked to watch to extend conversations happening around the wild rice harvesting in *Indian Horse*, Student 8 (2020) asked:

The video discusses the worry of native culture, tradition, and language being lost and the attempts to keep all these aspects alive and well. The question I kept asking myself during the video was what would happen if native children couldn't keep their native language, but still practiced their traditions and culture, and passed down their history. Is it so much that

they're losing their identity as natives, but instead reimagining it in a new way for themselves and others?

First, this question ruminates on hybridity and how Natives are experiencing bi-cultural lives, which we have identified the discussion in Native Studies to be shifting away from. As a fellow peer, I attempted to make visible what may be lost in my response to the prior student's question:

A significant part of the film addresses why naturally-harvested wild rice is purer than machine-harvested rice, maintaining that certain nutrients are compromised by the more technologically-advanced method of machine harvesting. To carry this across as a metaphor to your question, the process of adapting native culture for a new generation may appear to be progressive, but what is being lost along the way as people compromise little by little what they take with them into the next generation?

At this point, Dr. Majhor interjected to talk more specifically about language preservation and posed the question: "How is normal generational change *different* from enforced assimilation?" Whereas my response questions what might be lost through cultural adaptation, Dr. Majhor's follow-up question invited the discussion to move into that next frame which Archibald proposes: the unravelling of the impact of colonization through the consideration of enforced assimilation. This discussion between students, expanded upon by Dr. Majhor, provided a distinct opportunity to think about what might be lost if the effects of Westernized methodologies are not acknowledged. As part of a separate conversation (via online discussion board), Student 5's (2020) response explicitly emphasizes the need for acknowledgement, saying: "I think there is great difficulty in

communicating the intensity of the connection [between Saul and nature], especially when reading about it in a book in the language of the colonizer.” Although this student is speaking about Saul’s connection to nature, the general principle of the acknowledgement emphasizes the need to make visible the limitations we will be working in by solely applying Westernized methodologies.

A step in the direction toward a proposed alternative reading can be seen in one of my responses as a graduate student in the 2020 course discussing the visionary elements of the novel via discussion board. In an attempt to frame newly-acquired knowledge, Indigenous accounts of visionary experiences, I commented: “because of my own upbringing in a visionary religion, these seership moments have not been foreign to me in the sense of mysticism and connection to spirituality, although the oneness with nature and creatures, specifically, was new to me and special to Ojibwe, which, in turn, tells us a great deal about their ways and knowledge” (2020). This is another attempt to make visible what is lost as a reader utilizes their own knowledge background to orient newly acquired knowledge. This response recognizes a connection between my knowledge base and the Indigenous knowledge base presented in the novel but also acknowledges differences and some elements that are specific to Ojibwe ways of knowing.

The second “freeing” outcome, resulting from liberation of Indigenous literature from Westernized analysis, is a student’s liberation from conditioned ways of knowing. Again, this does not mean prior ways of knowing are left behind or rejected, but that their limitations are made visible and additional methods will expand potential ways of knowing. One such alternative way of knowing is the Indigenous practice of storywork. Although there is great depth to this pedagogy and different Indigenous methodologies

like it, we will here rely on Corr's description of storywork as "the engagement of story, storyteller, and listener creat[ing] a synergy for making meaning through the story and making one *work* to obtain meaning and understanding" (qtd. in Archibald 196, original emphasis). More than just expanding students' potential ways of knowing, storywork pedagogy encourages an entirely different approach to knowledge in that it "defies the Cartesian assumptions inherent to conventional Western scholarship, which privileges the idea of the intellectual over the material and spiritual aspects of human and non-human bodies" (Archibald 197). By giving permissible access to realms of knowledge dealing more with material and spiritual aspects, a cognitive door is opened through which Indigenous literature can suddenly be experienced in such a way that better honors Indigenous approaches to knowledge.

As previously stated, in the 2021 course, I was given an opportunity to design and implement a lesson plan for the undergraduate course regarding a portion of *Indian Horse*. From the lesson structure I describe on page 14, students discussed new ways they discovered to think about certain elements of the novel, essentially, a re-reading strategy. Student 3 (2021) commented (via online discussion board) on their re-reading of nature after engaging with an Ojibwe-specific reading:

My first read, it was not obvious to me the significance of nature throughout the book. I initially thought they made for great metaphors or comparisons. Or that it was an escape for Saul. Yet after reading the extensions especially when it says that nature is 'not something outside of them to be felt or captured but rather something to absorb.' Nature is as much a part of the story as Saul is.

This student suddenly had permission to think past initial thoughts of nature as a descriptive literary device and engage the inclusion of nature as a character in the novel, which opens up an entire new frame for thinking about nature and landscape and how Wagamese weaves it into his novel, not just as a literary device for descriptive language, but, as this particular student engages it, as an Ojibwe-specific character to interact with.

Utilizing storywork as an example, we begin to see Marie Battiste's claim that "knowledge is not a commodity that can be possessed or controlled by educational institutions, but is a living process to be absorbed and understood" (qtd. in Davidson 18). Knowledge, then, is not something gifted in a university setting, but a liberating interaction that privileges individual student accountability in knowledge acquisition. Seeking knowledge becomes an interaction more intentional, aware, and deliberate than absorbing and reproducing institutionalized discourse. The shift in teaching Indigenous literature begins with moving beyond the concept of knowledge as a commodity to acquire and shifting toward making visible the interaction and liberation potential of knowledge.

3. A proposed alternative reading and newly-acquired knowledge

The final summary point of a CCR, a shaping of newly acquired knowledge against what is already known, may perhaps be the most abstract and difficult of the three concepts listed here that a proposed alternative reading sets out to challenge. At its most basic, however, a proposed alternative's response to this point is to prioritize metacognitive thinking, a practice which is already part of university dialogue. Comparative learning, or the shaping of newly acquired knowledge against what is already known, is a rather inevitable response to unfamiliar ways of knowing. Many

readers coming from a Westernized education have learned to rely on prior knowledge as a framework with which to situate new knowledge: this response has become naturalized. An alternative reading does not attempt to reject that comparative learning; rather, it attempts to expose what is lost when one engages comparative learning alone. Not only what is lost, but what is misrepresented, misinterpreted, and misappropriated.

Cash Ahenakew (Cree) refers to this process of hybrid learning as grafting: Grafting is used in biology as the process of transplanting something from one organism into another (e.g., hybrid plants or skin/cell implants.) Grafting, in itself, is neither good nor bad. Indeed, hybridity can be a generative process. However, in the context of grafting Indigenous knowledges into non-Indigenous ways of knowing, we are operating with severely uneven environments shaped by historical circumstances where the grafting/hybridizing does not happen as a mutual exercise, but as assimilation. (Ahenakew 324)

Continuing to try and read Indigenous literature through a grafting process of non-Indigenous and Indigenous hybridity critically limits the methods by which readers can experience Indigenous literature. Ahenakew, too, calls this process inevitable. He maintains that “it is not necessarily a problem as a strategic move, but it becomes a problem when we cannot recognize what is lost in translation” (333). To contend with these holes in Indigenous literary grafting, I utilize suggestions put forth by Ahenakew: “[1] to make grafting visible... [2] resisting the temptation for certainty, totality, and instrumentalization in Western reasoning by keeping our claims contingent, contextual, tentative, and incomplete... [3] make what is absent *present*” (333, original emphasis).

We have already discussed points one and three. Point two can be seen in action in my own student response, via discussion board, from the 2020 course that attempts to engage the visionary aspects of *Indian Horse*. Responding to a question of how Shabogeesick's vision of the horse can be read in a non-magical/prophetic way, I comment:

To read in a literal sense, when our narrator identifies Shabogeesick as a shaman with the 'sending thought,' who can read the land, such language inspires mysticism that overshadows the phrase 'because [Shabogeesick] spent so much time out in the land, it told him things, spoke to him of mysteries and teachings' (Wagamese 5). Our narrator supplies direct reasoning for why Shabogeesick knows so much about the land--because he spends so much time out there, to the result that the knowledge he gains simply by being out there could translate into a relationship between himself and the land which exchanges secrets that would be available to one so devoted to knowing the land. (2020)

I go on to supply more examples of how the visionary account can be read literally. While this does fulfill the original question of alternative ways to read this particular visionary account, I attempt to supply a secular reading for how this visionary account could take place that is logical from a Westernized perspective. While it does avoid reading the chapter in a way that perpetuates Native shaman stereotypes, it does not resist that "temptation for certainty, totality, and instrumentalization in Western reasoning" (Ahenakew 333). This reading of Shabogeesick's visionary experience reinforces a

spiritual/secular binary rather than leaving room for a reading that engages the two apparent binaries as closely integrated.

By making accessible to students this awareness of their comparative learning process, a cognitive door is opened for methods coming directly from the shift Cox and Justice speak of in Indigenous literary discourse. Specifically, this includes questioning the applicability of our comparative learning techniques and promoting a tribally-specific teaching of Native literature.

As we engage in a tribally-specific reading of Indigenous literature, we not only take a crucial step in resisting Indigenous-to-colonizer comparisons, but we also take an important step in carefully approaching Indigenous-to-Indigenous comparisons.

Chadwick Allen, leading discussions of trans-Indigenous methodology, suggests that literary comparison is “a strange objective for anticolonial or Indigenous-centered readings of a body of distinct literatures emanating from distinct cultures, brought together by the historical accident of having been written in the shared language of those who colonized the communities of the authors” (xiii). He suggests a more logical objective to focus “along the lines of ‘together (yet) distinct’” (xiii). Global comparative frameworks for Indigenous literature erroneously assumes that the necessary work of distinct, tribally specific learning has already been done. “The local, having finally won a place at the academic table, becomes engulfed (once again) in the name of the global” (Allen xiii). For this reason, an alternative reading is grounded in tribally-specific readings of Indigenous literature in the classroom.

This does not mean there is no room for reading Indigenous literature through a broader critical lens. Chanette Romero advocates that the work of moving toward

political solidarity “can be furthered by constructing intellectual and pedagogical spaces that theorize and examine the relationship between Native peoples’ national sovereignty and other political groups’ efforts to resist the legacies of colonialism and capitalism” (437). Allen, too, remains an advocate for carefully-executed global Native literary studies. Allen does not condemn all compare and contrast models as harmful; however, of a comparison that does not consider tribal specifics, he says: “[r]ather than producing an enlarged view of evolving cultures or their (post)colonial histories, or a more precise analysis of self-representation, this form of Indigenous-to-Indigenous comparison recenters the (uniformed) dominant settler culture and produces hierarchies of Indigenous oppression” (xiv). In this mode of literary analysis, the dominant discourse retains its centuries-old privilege in driving the analysis of Indigenous knowledge, or, in this case, literature.

As stated previously, in the 2021 course, I implemented Ojibwe-specific reading extensions for a lesson plan utilizing Margaret Noodin’s *Bawaajimo*. Inspiration for this lesson plan drew largely on Noodin’s and others’ (Allen 2012, Cox & Justice 2014, Romero 2014) philosophies regarding tribally-specific readings: “By thinking of the stories in an Anishinaabe context first, we set a differently woven net. This is not the only way to read tribal stories, but it is one that can move careful readers toward less colonial interpretations” (Noodin xvii). Students were given a chance to extend their understanding of the following three themes in *Indian Horse*: visionary experiences, nature, and history. To demonstrate the extension of engagement with *Indian Horse* students had after reading excerpts from *Bawaajimo*, I will share one of the 2-4 excerpts I used for each theme followed by quotes of student responses from the 2021 course.

I utilized the following quote from Noodin as an Ojibwe-specific extension to visionary experiences:

This practice is *nametwaawaa*, which is a verb that can describe a relationship with a place, not random wandering, but enlightened stewardship that allowed people to circle a vast homeland, knowing when to be where. This could also be applied to ideas of places beyond where we are. Many stories speak of places visited in dreams or visions, places like the sky or a cave at the bottom of the lake, or the kitchen table of *nokomisba*, who is no longer living. This ability to visit elsewhere, perhaps stepping out of time, is part of many Anishinaabe stories and can be found in the writing of contemporary authors as frequently as the lakes and forests. (Noodin 37).

After engaging in this Ojibwe-specific reading of visionary experiences, the following exchange took place between two students via discussion board:

Student 1, 2021: “One aspect of ‘*nametwaawaa*’ that stood out to me was ‘learning when to be where.’ This could relate to how Saul has the ability to find the right spot on the ice to be. It might not be where the puck is, but he is always in a spot that will help result in a good play.”

Student 4, 2021: “I agree or even how it is learning to be elsewhere because he was able to understand what the other team and players were going to do before they even did it, which is quite remarkable.”

Because of this Ojibwe-specific extension, these students have been given an alternate way to think about Saul's talent for hockey, one that is, importantly, particular to Ojibwe ways of knowing.

Another quote I utilized from Noodin's *Bawaajimo* for visionary experiences is as follows:

Dreams, visions, and transformations are some of the ways Anishinaabe stories present possibilities. Stories are not always composed carefully for large audiences; they are sometimes given to Anishinaabe people individually in dreams, through visions, or as part of an epiphany. Later, these personal stories become part of other stories, but they often begin when one person listens to the universe. (Noodin 133)

After engaging with this extension, Student 4 (2021) had the following to say:

Using this extension idea...I guess I can see the way that [Saul's] seership is something given to him so that he can create a better stance for indigenous people exploring their freedoms and talents in a way that builds a community making his life worth living on, but it also makes his own life more connected to the natural world...he allows himself to learn from the natural world through vision and applies it to expand his talents.

Before this extension, Student 4 (2021) mainly focused on how Saul uses his gift to "feel this energy" and "describe the divine of how plays are going to unfold." Due to this Ojibwe-specific extension, this student begins to narrow their thoughts down to think more about the individualized nature of Saul's visions and how that might be used to build his community and strengthen his connection to the land.

I utilized the following quote as an Ojibwe-specific extension on nature: Much has been written about the mystical, spiritual union Indians are reported to have with nature. Yet when reading the story of one tribe as written by one author, we find there is no magical, predictable method of ‘becoming one with nature.’ Not only is there no single, pantribal approach, there is not even a single way that nature will affect members of one gender or one generation let alone one tribe...it is also clear the only secret is that there is no secret. Each person must find her (or his) own way to belong to this earth and eventually to move into the dreams of life beyond it. (Noodin 57)

One student extension of nature has already been discussed (see pages 31-32) about utilizing nature as more than just a descriptive literary device, but another student’s reading, Student 2 (2021), was extended from a holistic perspective. This student responded: “Nature provides humans with so many gifts and lessons yet it is very much taken for granted. Human hubris maintains that we must conquer and overcome nature, but this and other native literature has revealed that our relationship with nature should be a mutual one of respect and appreciation.” This Ojibwe-specific extension not only gives the student permission to explore an alternative look at nature, but it encourages Indigenous-specific reading principles of holism, interrelatedness, and synergy.

In fact, a recurring theme among student responses to the Ojibwe-specific readings is the emergence of students especially incorporating Archibald’s research [reading] principles of respect, reverence, and responsibility as they begin to see their

responsibility in responding to the acknowledgement that their own knowledge is contextual and incomplete. See the following excerpts across students responses:

- “I might be able to understand why...”
- “I do think it’s greatly important to know more about Ojibwe cultural practices to understand more about these stories...”
- “After reading the extension to the passage I understand...”
- “Something that I realize I didn’t think about when considering Ojibwe and western history before I read the extension is...”
- “Another thing I realized when I read the extension was...”

By encouraging a tribally-specific reading of Indigenous literature in the classroom, students naturally begin to engage the benefits of an alternative reading of Indigenous literature, and the engagement begins to circle back to practicing those seven Indigenous research [reading] principles. Looking at this small excerpt of student responses to Ojibwe-specific extensions, we see that step into engaging alternative ways of knowing.

Conclusion

This study aims to identify and intervene in the conditioned “culture clash reading” often engaged in university settings as students confront different ways of knowing in Indigenous literature. It exposes not only what is at sovereign risk for Indigenous agendas as Westernized literary analysis techniques go unchallenged in the university setting, but what is at risk at the individual level of the student, as well, in missing an opportunity to attempt a deeper, more authentic engagement with Indigenous literature.

Following up the examination of a CCR’s limitations, this study proposes an alternative reading as a pushback against conditioned, Westernized approaches to culture collisions in Indigenous literature. Such methods for reading have already been, and continue to be, provided through NAIS methodologies. This study, focusing especially on tribally-specific readings, simply aims to bring those methodologies into the university classroom with Indigenous literature. I would contend that tribally-specific readings of Indigenous literature, done well, can naturally begin to engage the other benefits of a proposed alternative reading. Tribally-specific readings of history push back against the one, dominant narrative of history. Tribally-specific readings of Indigenous literature challenge the mystifying of Indigenous ways of knowing as readers attempt to read said literature through a specific lens instead of through one that may be fogged over with Westernized positioning. Tribally-specific readings of Indigenous literature have the potential to make visible, according to what that specific Indigenous community is willing to share, what is lost through *not* engaging a tribally-specific reading. Finally, because tribally-specific readings engage alternative ways of knowing, that permission is

given, in the university setting, to students wherein they can explore those alternative ways and experience the potential, liberating effectiveness of an alternative reading. In turn, this can liberate Indigenous literature from the confines of Westernized literary analysis practices.

As students sincerely practice these elements of a proposed alternative reading, they will be taking responsibility to hold themselves accountable to their reading practices and approach Indigenous literature with greater reverence, beginning to think about what all of that might mean in practice. One extension of this proposal might look more closely at the principle of reciprocity and examine what action(s) students might take as they engage a proposed alternative reading. How might they “give-away” instead of just benefit from take-aways? As students begin to see Archibald’s three latter research principles of holism, interrelatedness, and synergy, what might they do about it? What can the instructor do to encourage reciprocity? As action is a largely agreed upon part of practicing Indigenous research [reading] principles, it would be short-sighted of the Indigenous truths learned here to neglect in any conversation of reciprocity. One might say this alternative reading springboards the process of engaging Indigenous literature more mindfully, but the next question to look at is how reading Indigenous literature more mindfully specifically translates to forwarding Indigenous agendas of intellectual sovereignty.

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