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## Indigiqueer Reimaginings of Science Fiction

Liberated from the dictates of realism, speculative fiction, which includes genres such as science fiction (SF), fantasy, and alternative history, creates fantastical worlds that allow for reevaluations of old narratives of history, culture, and identity and open possibilities for new narratives. However, as with any kind of discourse, practices of inclusion and exclusion and the power structures that they produce must be examined to foster this subversive potential. Marginalized peoples have often been excluded from genre fiction, including speculative fiction, and especially SF, which has historically centered cisgender, white, male, and colonizer perspectives. However, there has been an active movement to decolonize these genres. Indigiqueer SF storytellers, for example, are integrating traditional storytelling techniques, playing with existing genre expectations, and working in the footsteps of literary movements such as Afrofuturism to forge their own intervention in SF. This essay examines two such stories, “How to Survive the Apocalypse for Native Girls” by Two-Spirit Métis/Baawiting Nishnaane writer Kai Minosh Pyle (they/them) and “Andwànikàdjigan” by nij-manidowag (Two-Spirit) Mi’kmaq/Algonquin writer Gabriel Castilloux Calderon (they/them), to show how Indigiqueer storytellers both utilize and challenge the SF genre to reflect the past and present experiences of Indigiqueer people and, maybe more importantly, to imagine futures in which Indigiqueer people can thrive.

Keywords: Indigiqueer; Two-Spirit; science fiction; decolonization; Indigenous studies

Indigenous, Two-Spirit, and Indigiqueer people<sup>1</sup> have been telling stories long before academic institutions and book publishers became interested in studying or publishing them, and these stories include a rich variety of traditions, themes, and forms that reflect cultural specificity as well as shared concerns. According to Cherokee scholar Christopher B. Teuton, “Indigenous textualities continue a sophisticated practice that is focused primarily on communal goals: survival, balance, harmony, and peace, among other tribally specific values” (172). Further, Jace Weaver argues that this “literary output is both a reflection *and* a shaper of community values” (qtd. in McKegney 419, emphasis added), whether they are tribal specific or shared between communities that have gone through similar experiences.

Indigenous literature, then, plays an active role in the construction of Indigenous identity. Reflecting on the increased interest in Indigenous storytelling, speculative fiction writer Cherie Dimaline (Georgian Bay Métis Nation) has said, “[t]he only way I know who I am and who my community is, and the ways in which we survive and adapt, is through stories” (qtd. in Alter). Patricia A. Monture (Haudenosaunee) similarly reflects that “[t]hese stories teach us about identity and responsibility [...] about how to live life, how to be a good ‘Indian’” and adds that “[c]oming from this storytelling tradition, it is odd to know that our stories are sometimes excluded from the material scholars call ‘literature’” (154). The exclusion of Indigenous literature from a larger literary canon has been contested, however. Craig Womack (Cree-Cherokee) has even claimed that “without Native American literature, there is no American canon” (qtd. in Monture 157). By telling, writing, and proliferating their own stories, Indigenous people claim space and counter the narratives of erasure that settler colonialism has tried to impose.

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<sup>1</sup> Indigenous people use a variety of terms to refer to themselves and their communities, including Indigenous, Native American, American Indian, and other tribal specific terms. When discussing a specific person, I will use the term they use for themselves; otherwise, I will use the word Indigenous. Similarly, Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer people also make use of various terminologies with their own histories and implications. When the preference of a person is known, I will use their preferred identifier. Otherwise, I will use the term Indigiqueer, which was coined by T. J. Cuthand in 2004 “because some LGBTQ Indigenous people don’t feel as comfortable with the two-spirit title” and because “Queer is kind of a confrontational label, it’s one of those old reclamations that makes people uncomfortable” (Cuthand). This term has been picked up by scholars and storytellers such as Joshua Whitehead, who is Oji-Cree and identifies as Two-Spirit.

The attempt at erasure of identity and culture by settler colonists affects all aspects of Indigenous life, but one aspect that is far reaching and visible in history and literature is that of sexual and gender identity. Even though it cannot be said of every single North American Indigenous community, historically, many “recognized third and fourth genders and acknowledged roles for tribal members whose gender expression existed outside a naturalized male/female binary” (Tatonetti, *Queerness* x). In fact, “[a]lternative gender roles were among the most widely shared feature of North American societies” and have “been documented in over 155 tribes” (Roscoe, qtd. in Tatonetti, *Queerness* x). Because these gender identities were saliently different from those recognized by European settlers, those settlers often responded with disgust and violence (Tatonetti, *Queerness* x). European colonizing nations (mis)functioned under a system of heteropatriarchy, which instills hierarchies that privilege straight, cisgendered, white men and marginalizes women and other genders and sexualities. Chris Finely, a queer native feminist and member of the Colville Confederated Tribes, argues that colonial powers use heteropatriarchy as a necessary tool that “justifies genocide and conquest as effects of biopower” (37). Therefore, “the policing of gender and the regulation of monogamous heterosexuality have been part and parcel of the colonial settler project” (Jobin & Pyle 5). This policing has continued over centuries by different means, including genocide and murder, boarding school discipline, and legislation.

Unfortunately, in many Indigenous communities, heteropatriarchal values have replaced the earlier expansive understanding of gender and sexuality. Some Indigenous people and communities, due to the influence of settler colonialism and the naturalization of heteropatriarchy, have come to see Indigiqueer individuals at a threat to their “imagined Indigenous heteronorm,” equating heteronormativity with Indigeneity (Tatonetti, *Queerness* xxiv). In discussing the impact of heteropatriarchy on Cree communities, Two-Spirit Cree scholar Alex Wilson says that “in most of our Indigenous cultures where gender and sexual diversity were once accepted and valued, our traditional teachings, ways of being, spirituality, and languages were disrupted and displaced through the process of colonization, Christianization and assimilation,” meaning that Indigiqueer individuals often face rejection from both within their community in the form of homophobia, transphobia, and misogyny and from without in the additional form of racism and classism (“Coming In Stories” 3).

However, these efforts at erasure, exclusion, and marginalization initiated and perpetuated by settler colonialism have not succeeded in silen-



cing Indigiqueer voices. These individuals and communities have built frameworks of understanding and inclusion through new definitions and storytelling, which as discussed previously, both reflects and creates individual and communal values and identities. For instance, the term Two-Spirit, which was coined in 1990 by a group of Indigiqueer/Two-Spirit people, was meant to counter the term “berdache,” which positioned the flexible gender and sexual identities found in Indigenous communities as deviant (Driskill et al., “Introduction” 11). The Two-Spirit identifier is not universally accepted by everyone in Indigenous LGBTQ2+ communities or is sometimes used in tandem with other terms or in specific situations (see Driskill, “D4Y”; Driskill et al., “Writing in the Present”). However, the term Two-Spirit can be empowering in that it “centralizes a decolonial agenda around issues of gender and sexuality” (Driskill et al., “Writing in the Present” 5). For Wilson, “Two-spirit identity is about circling back to where we belong, reclaiming, reinventing, and redefining our beginnings, our roots, our communities, our support system, and our collective and individual selves” (“N’tacimowin” 198). That process of circling back, reclaiming, reinventing, and redefining is enacted in Indigiqueer fiction.

There has been no shortage of representations of Indigenous and Indigiqueer people in literature, but when focalized through a settler colonial lens, the result still situates Indigenous and Indigiqueer people as objects of colonization rather than as sovereign subjects. Scott Morgensen argues that, despite good intentions, “colonial subjects narrate anticolonialism through colonial narratives, which is to say that their supposed anticolonialism constitutes an oscillation that exists within, not beyond the power of colonial knowledge” (611). In contrast to this, Indigiqueer storytellers reframe narratives outside of heteropatriarchal settler colonial frameworks. The “queer desire” that they reflect can then “serve as a prism through which to conceptualize non-normative possibilities for being in the world targeted for destruction in the settler-imposed regime of proper home and family” (Rifkin 147). In various ways, Indigiqueer SF writers “write themselves in”<sup>2</sup> and in doing so ensure survivance<sup>3</sup> and display creative and cultural fecundity.

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<sup>2</sup> Octavia Butler coined the term “writing yourself in” during her 2000 appearance on *Charlie Rose* when she discussed how she became an SF writer: “You gotta make your own worlds. You got to write yourself in.”

<sup>3</sup> “Survivance, a combination of survival and resistance, is a theoretical challenge to a stable, easily discernible, and victimized American Indian identity” (Gilley 130)

By recognizing, reading, studying, and valuing Indigiqueer stories as literature, readers and scholars reaffirm the existence of the stories they tell and open space for more stories to be included. This dynamic indicates the importance of authorship in matters of inclusion (in the literary canon for instance). In his 1969 essay “What is an Author?”, Michel Foucault argues that recognizing authors is important because “[the name of the author] points to the existence of certain groups of discourse and refers to the status of this discourse within a society and culture” (123). He claims that the “aspects of an individual, which we designate as an author [...], are projections [...] of our way of handling texts: in the comparisons we make, the traits we extract as pertinent, the continuities we assign, or the exclusions we practice” (127) and that “[t]he distinctive contribution of these authors is that they produce not only their own work, but the possibility and the rules of formation of other texts” (132). In the case of Indigiqueer authorship, that recognition of an individual author (such as Joshua Whitehead) means an inclusion of Indigiqueer perspectives in wider discourse as well as a cultural imagination of what Indigiqueer fiction is.

However, scholars of Indigenous storytelling have emphasized the communal nature of storytelling in a way that does not tend to valorize the storyteller. Candice Hopkins (Carcross/Tagish First Nation) discusses how Indigenous stories “are already individualized and communal, original and replicated, authored and authorless” (341), and Heather Bruce reinforces this inclination away from a focus on the author by claiming that “American Indian literatures and rhetorical traditions are embedded in the cyclical and rely extensively on collaboration rather than individual showcasing” (55). This contrast between Foucault’s ruminations on the significance of authorship and these scholars’ emphasis on the process of storytelling over the individual author brings up the question of how we should approach authorship in Indigiqueer SF.

If the canon is to be expanded to include more Indigiqueer writers and stories, it seems clear that authorship plays a role. However, communal traditions of indigenous storytelling should not be neglected. Therefore, to negotiate this anxiety over authorship, Indigiqueer storytelling must be understood as a community of Indigiqueer storytellers writing from their own socio-cultural reality and unique context, lifting each other up to establish a canon that makes intelligible an Indigiqueer discourse in society and subsequently allows space for future Indigiqueer storytellers and texts to continue to reshape the narratives spun around indigeneity and queerness.

The rest of this paper will explore two examples of such Indigiqueer storytelling: “How to Survive the Apocalypse for Native Girls” (hereinafter referred to as “Native Girls”) by Two-Spirit Métis/Baawiting Nishnaane writer Kai Minosh Pyle (they/them) and “Andwànikàdjigan” by nijmanidowag (Two-Spirit) Mi’kmaq/Algonquin writer Gabriel Castelloux Calderon (they/them). Both works can be classified as science fiction (SF) short stories, though they often challenge ideas of what SF is and can be. Both manipulate SF genre conventions as well as work within Indigenous storytelling traditions to contemplate the past and present experiences of Indigiqueer people and, maybe more importantly, to imagine futures in which Indigiqueer people can love and thrive.

### **Indigiqueer Epistemological and Literary Interventions**

At first sight, SF may seem like a strange genre through which Indigiqueer writers can voice these decolonizing narratives. While Jodi Byrd (Chikasaw) acknowledges SF critic Paul Kincaid’s claim that SF is a “web of resemblance” that complicates identifying the exact qualities of SF, they claim that “what is science fiction is also imbricated in colonialism, empire, and racialization” (353); “it enacts colonist discourse at the site of imagination” (346). SF has long been preoccupied with alien beings and strange lands, and, as Jessica Langer points out, “[t]hese two signifiers are, in fact, the very same twin myths of colonialism” (3). However, through their own creative interpretation of the SF genre, Indigenous SF writers can subvert these myths and replace them. According to Byrd, genre, with its strict categorical imperatives, “colonizes texts” (345), but Indigenous literatures can “disrupt and resist the narrative strategies of colonial imaginings by transforming the modes of interpretation and revealing the structures of dominance by turning generic conventions against affiliations” (346). They do this by employing “transgenres” “that experiment, refuse categorization, and that genre-bend narrative fiction into poetry, traditional stories into science fiction, fantasy into the historical, and horror into the epistolary” (Byrd 346–347). By doing this, Indigenous texts can narrate decolonized stories while also manifesting “in a love affair with the possibilities popular genre offers when fully embraced” (Byrd 355–356).

Despite these possibilities, it can be tempting to disregard SF as a vehicle to carry Indigiqueer stories. Dean Rader does this by fashioning an alternative genre he calls “Indian Invention,” which completely dis-

tances itself from Western notions of “science” and “fiction” (qtd. in Byrd 355). However, doing so neglects the potential that working with the SF genre can have to call into question the Western notions of “science” and “fiction” that have historically positioned Indigenous knowledges and literacies as primitive. Much SF gatekeeping comes from the power to define what “science” is. Robert A. Heinlein claims, for example, that SF should be “based solidly on adequate knowledge of the real world, past and present, and on a thorough understanding of the nature and significance of the scientific method” (9). However, the use of the scientific method need not be equivalent to what we understand as scientific. Wendy Makoons Geniusz (Cree/Métis) describes the ways colonizers have benefited from framing Indigenous knowledge practices as primitive, in opposition to Western “science” and argues that “an important step in decolonization is taking control of research,” which involves, among other things, naming the processes and theories used to conduct research, for instance, using the Anishinaabe word *gikendaasowin*, which means “knowledge, information, and the synthesis of our personal teachings” (10). Grace Dillon (Anishinaabe) participates in this naming by describing “indigenous scientific literacies” as “practices used by indigenous native peoples to manipulate the natural environment in order to improve existence in areas including medicine, agriculture, and sustainability” and uses the term “in contrast to more invasive (and potentially destructive) western scientific method” (25). Judy M. Iseke (Métis) and Leisa Desmoulins (Biigtigong Nishnaabed member) also describe Indigenous knowledge systems as “integrated epistemological systems taught through Indigenous pedagogies that support an understanding of an interconnected world and our places within it,” integrating “ideas that are commonly referred to as scientific knowledge” (31). Of course, it would be possible to write “Indigenous knowledge fiction” or “*gikendaasowin* fiction” or some other tribally specific equivalent, but by working within and altering the genre of SF to accommodate and embrace multiple forms of scientific literacies, Indigenous SF authors can also explicitly call into question the assumed superiority of Western science.

The assumed superiority of Western literature is also, of course, called into question as Indigenous writers work innovatively within the SF genre. In discussing issues of colonization, genocide, and assimilation, the conversation often focuses on what is lost of Indigenous cultures. However, Craig Womack points out that “it is just as likely that things European are Indianized rather than the anthropological assumption that things Indian are always swallowed up by European culture” (qtd. in

Monture 156). This two-way assimilation can be seen in the ways Indigenous writers transform the SF genre. Further, the more stories told from different worldviews presented as SF, the more room that makes in SF for the telling of different worldviews. Indigenous and Indigiqueer SF, for instance, follows in the footsteps of the innovations of Afrofuturism (which Pyle explicitly references in their own SF story). This history allows for intersectional and collaborative readings and tellings.

When the notions of “science” and “fiction” are expanded, SF becomes a useful tool for Indigiqueer storytellers looking to imagine new worlds into existence. In Pyle’s “Native Girls,” this new world at first seems to adhere to the standard dictates of the SF apocalypse story, reflecting on the tensions that arise when a small community attempts to survive with limited resources in an apocalypse presumably set in place by settler colonialism, but then the story pivots further into a reflection on the meaning of kinship and family, belonging and love. Calderon’s “Andwànikàdjigan” likewise creates an apocalyptic world where carriers of stories (who are physically marked by the stories they pass on) become targets for the militaristic settler colonial presence that attempts to strip people of their histories and stories as a means of control. It too pivots to a story of love and resistance when stories are shared between people and new communities are built out of the ashes. Both stories bend and blur the dystopic and utopic visions of SF to reflect the nuanced experiences of Indigiqueer folk. Both mourn the traumas enacted by settler colonialism, but perhaps more significantly, both turn toward the future, and like the rest of the stories in the anthology *Love After the End*, imagine an “after” that is made possible by and makes possible “love.”

### Stories about Storytelling

Both “Native Girls” and “Andwànikàdjigan” are stories about storytelling, indicating the importance of storytelling in both content and form and emphasizing the need of storytelling for survival. “Native Girls” is written in the form of a hybrid instruction book and diary. From the first entry, the very act of writing a story down is emphasized: “I’m writing this down so I don’t forget. I want to be one of those seventy-year-old women with their photo albums and old diaries, the ones who can recite stories from when they were children or even further back” (Pyle 79). The writer of the instruction book, a young, Two-Spirit (ekwewaadizid) indigenous girl named Nigig, is writing for herself but also for other girls like

her. This is indicated by the personal diary-like nature of the writing alongside the self-awareness of the instruction book as an artifact, as indicated when she writes sentences like “If someone (such as a Native girl living after the apocalypse) finds this, how can I guarantee they know about what happened?” (Pyle 81). This dual audience reflects the intertwining of the personal with the concerns of the broader community and the role storytelling plays in maintaining those bonds. The way a “how to” guide melds into personal narrative also reflects “the aboriginal method of conveying scientific literacy through storytelling rather than a rote set of instructional procedures, a manual handbook, or a sharply demarcated taxonomic system,” which Dillon also points out as evident in the metanarratives of Nalo Hokinson’s novels (38).

Like “Native Girls,” “Andwànikàdjigan” addresses the significance of storytelling from the very beginning:

The elders had told her stories about the world that was. Stories about a mother who was earth. Stories about how the ones in power killed her. Others said the stories were lies. The world was always grey and concrete, steel and sorrow. They were born into it, so were their children. The only reason elders told stories was in order for the memory markings to appear. No one in the village knew why. However, when someone shared a story and you truly listened, listened with all your heart, by the end, strange red markings would appear on your skin, like tiny scratches that fell into a pattern no one could discern. When you touched one, words would appear in your head, and you would repeat the story back, verbatim, as if you were the one who shared it in the first place. (Calderon 97)

The SF novum of the markings centralizes the importance of storytelling and evokes storytelling traditions of various Indigenous peoples whose “lifeways and cultural practices across the world are grounded in epistemologies that have communication and relationality as a condition of existence” (Teuton 167). The verbal aspect of storytelling in the story ties back to some Indigenous traditions of oral storytelling; however, it does not reduce this type of storytelling to something primitive, stuck in the past, or contrary to “progress” as many colonial perspectives do (Teuton 168), nor does it reduce Indigenous storytelling simply to orality, evoking the bodily marks of the stories on the teller’s skins. Additionally, the title of the story “Andwànikàdjigan,” which is an Alogonquin/Anishinaabemowin word for “record; to set down in writing or the like, as for the purpose of preserving evidence” (Calderon 112), mirrors how “many scholars have begun to use culturally specific Indigenous terms and concepts to discuss textual forms” (Teuton 172). The conflict in the story

revolves around how those in power want to destroy the potential for passing down stories, emphasizing the importance of storytelling for preserving memory and identity, but the resolution of the story with the creation of a new community through sharing stories also points to specific cultural practices of Indigenous storytelling that emphasize communication and community.

### Language

Closely linked to storytelling is the stories' concerns over language, which has historically been significant for both Indigiqueer people regarding how they are named and Indigenous communities in regard to the use and erasure of their native languages. Pennycook argues that "language plays a central role in how we understand ourselves and the world and thus all questions of language control and standardization have major implications for social relations and the distribution of power" (qtd. in Iseke-Barnes 57). To gain power over native populations, colonizers of North America, forbade the use of native languages, taking children away from their families and putting them in boarding schools where they could only use English. This erasure of language has serious ramifications because, according to Kirkness, "[i]f you take language away from the culture [...] [y]ou are losing those things that essentially are the way of life, the way of thought, the way of valuing, and a particular human reality" (qtd. in Iseke-Barnes 58). Therefore, the use of the lexicon from various native languages in "Native Girls" and in "Andwànikàdjigan" works to push back against erasure and to reclaim the means of defining oneself outside the power structures imposed by settler colonialism.

In "Native Girls," Nigig references the history of language erasure when she refers to her kookum (grandmother in Cree) as not having "an Anishinaabe name, because when she was born they were only starting to get them back" (Pyle 80). Throughout the rest of the story, however, Nigig uses specific tribal languages intertwined with her English. For example, in addition to using the more general English term "2spirit," she also uses the Indigenous words "ekwewaadizid" and "eniniwaadizid" to differentiate herself and her friend Migizi with more specificity (Pyle 81). Specific Indigenous words like these are scattered throughout the narrative without translation, with the effect of privileging this language.

Calderon also uses a variety of different Indigenous words in their story with the difference of noting them in a postscript at the end of the

story as a deliberate choice they made to research the Indigenous languages of their own people, which works to push back against erasure and to reclaim the means by which to define oneself outside settler colonial power structures. Like with Pyle's use of "ekwewaadizid" and "enini-waadizid" as culturally specific words for a Two-Spirit person, Calderon uses the Plains Cree word "ihkwew." This variety of language also reflects the diversity of identities and cultures reflected in Indigiqueer fiction.

In the context of the SF genre, in which new words are constantly formulated to describe new things or ideas, it is interesting that these two works of Indigenous SF use existing words to describe very real identities, but because so many Indigenous people have been alienated from their own languages, the casual use of them in these stories may also feel futuristic. In this way, these stories utilize SF conventions of naming but do so in a way that is decolonizing rather than Othering, playing with notions of the past, present, and future to assemble a whole identity.

### Temporalities, Memory, and Tradition

An important aspect of SF is the question of time, as is often seen by the novum of time travel. Although neither Pyle's or Calderon's texts explicitly use time travel, they are deeply interested in notions of temporality. In "Andwànikàdjigan," the text shifts back and forth through time, with italicized sections indicating that the story is taking place in the protagonist A'tugwewinu's childhood. This juxtaposition connects Winu's present circumstances to memories of her past and to the even more distant memories and stories told by her elders. The connection between the past and present resembles the Cree tradition of collective narrative:

[c]ollective memory is the echo of old stories that links grandparents with their grandchildren. In the Cree tradition, collective narrative memory is what puts our singular lives into a larger context. Old voices echo; the ancient poetic memory of our ancestors finds home in our individual lives and allows us to reshape our experience so that we can interpret the world we find ourselves in. (McLeod, qtd. in McKegney 417–418)

Winu is connected to her past through these memories and stories, but the story does not stay in the past; at the end of the story, as "she marched on into the unknown world," a "new awakening of the people" also promises a connection to the future (Calderon 111).



“Native Girls” is also concerned with time, and the connection between the past, present, and future. Unlike in “Andwànikàdjigan,” “Native Girls” does not move so explicitly back and forth through time, though, of course, the past is still implicated in the story, as Nigig occasionally mentions something about the history of the apocalyptic society that she is living in. What does seem clear, however, from the first entry where she refers to her friend saying, “we are future ancestors” (Pyle 79) to the last one in which she writes, “I hope you’ll read what I have written here and remember the stories of the people that I love” (94), is that the past, present, and future are inextricably linked. The very last line of the story, “Let’s get started” (94), also plays with the notion of time in a very SF manner by considering a crucial question: If an apocalypse is an end, then what comes after?

### **Complexities of Community and Kinship**

Though community is important in Indigenous cultures, imposed settler colonial values have had the effect of making some Indigenous community and kinship relationships fraught, and “Native Girls” and “Andwànikàdjigan” show how, in this context, community can entail both inclusion and exclusion. In “Native Girls,” Nigig both instructs that “Love is good” (Pyle 82) in her sixth entry and “Sometimes love is not so good” (Pyle 85) in her ninth entry. The story of her best friend Migizi, another Two-Spirit person (eniniwaadizid), illustrates this point. Nigig writes, “Migizi was the one who helped me realize that 2spirit is a thing I could be. That I could be a Native girl—that I could even be a Native girl who loves other girls! What a wonderful discovery” (Pyle 82). This passage encapsulates the power of love and community. However, Migizi is also the person who later informs the narrator that “for some people, inawemaagan [kinship] doesn’t include people like me and you” (Pyle 87), showing that a community can also contain an internal border through which someone can be rejected based on their sexual or gender identity. This rejection can also come from notions of racial authenticity, as when Shanay’s grandmother was almost denied entry into the Nation despite the apocalyptic situation because she was Black and did not have papers (Pyle 80). In both cases, questions of what it means to be a “real Indian” arise, and definitions are manufactured based on the naturalization of settler colonial notions of gender into Indigenous “tradition” (Rifkin 138) and the colonizing practice of defining for Indigenous people

who a “status Indian” is through legislation based on “dilution theory” (Bidwell 120).

A similar allusion to the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in community is made in “Andwànikàdjigan” in an interaction between Winu and her mother:

“The boys made fun of Kokomis’ shirt. They said I’m a girl and girls shouldn’t wear men’s clothes. They said I’m wrong.”

Her mother crooned. She gently grasped her face. “When you were born, your Kokomis held you in his arms and he looked at me with tears running down his face because he had been waiting his whole life for another ìhkwewak like him, and there you were, I gave birth to you, and I was never more grateful for anything else in my life. You are a gift, Winu. And people are often jealous of gifts that are not for them.” (Calderon 99)

Queerness in this instance is portrayed as a positive thing by Winu’s mother, but, as with “Native Girls,” the story does not shy away from the fact that it is not always something that is accepted or understood within a community. Both stories highlight the importance of community and kinship, and in the end, both protagonists find or make their own community, but not without having to face the antagonisms and exclusions that have resulted from the interference of settler colonial ideals in Indigenous community values.

### Home and Space

According to Monture, “[o]ur understanding of the place Indigenous place holds in the history of the world can be recovered through understanding the ways in which Indigenous writers locate themselves. And this location is always more specific than a claim to ‘Indian’ identity” (158). With histories of forced removal and relocation, paired with many Indigenous traditional ties to the land, place becomes an important issue for Indigenous writers, and the struggle to find a “home” that is tied to place becomes salient. In postapocalyptic fiction, in which returning home is impossible due to environmental or some other catastrophe, this struggle is brought to the fore.

However, “Native Girls” and “Andwànikàdjigan” respond to and play with this postapocalyptic trope by not giving in to despair and instead finding a new way to understand home. Home becomes less of a place and more the people you momentarily share that place with and, in the end of both stories, the idea of creating your own community comes to

the fore. At the end of “Andwànikàdjigan,” even though Winu’s nation of “marked ones” has vanished, she witnesses how the prisoners of the prison she is held in “dedicated themselves to memorizing the stories she told,” and how a “new nation not of her village, not of marked ones, but of memorizers arose” (Calderon 108). At the very end of the story, Winu whispers, “I am no longer the last of the Andwànikàdjigan” and, holding hands with her partner, marches “into the unknown world, ready for a new awakening of the people” (Calderon 111). Unlike the typical notion of home, the world Winu moves into is “unknown”; however, this highlights that home in this case is not located in physical space but in the people who occupy it.

In “Native Girls,” Nigig eventually leaves the community she had been brought up in. However, she does not go alone as an exile. She leaves with her girlfriend Shanay and Shanay’s grandmother, both outsiders within the community themselves, in order to find their friend Migizi and create their own community. In her last entry, Nigig writes, “I know now that the only way to survive the apocalypse is to make your own world” (Pyle 94). In the storyworld, this refers to the world she is setting out to make with her friends. On a metatextual level, this “own world” can also be read as the imaginary world of fiction, and particularly of SF, that Pyle creates to make space for Indigiqueer stories.

### The Body and Erotics

Qwo-Li Driskill has another way of understanding home as rooted in the body:

I find myself obsessed over the notion of ‘home’ on many levels. I have not only been removed from my homelands, I have also been removed from my erotic self and continue to journey back to my first homeland: the body (“Stolen” 53).

According to Shari M. Huhndorf (Yup’ik), like land, “[b]odies, too, are surfaces that are mapped and inscribed in the interests of power, and in Native America, the imposition of patriarchal gender roles aligns closely with European appropriations of territory” (362–363). In the specific case of Indigiqueer people, the constant imposition of colonizing ideologies of bodies, love, and desire cause them “to dissociate from [their] erotic selves or assimilate dominant culture’s concepts into [their] lives” (Driskill, “Stolen” 54–55).

In the stories by Pyle and Calderon, however, bodies are sources of power, pleasure, and joy. Where these stories find it impossible to return their protagonists to their literal homelands, they do offer the characters the possibility of a Sovereign Erotic, which Driskill defines as “an erotic wholeness healed and/or healing from the historical trauma that First Nations people continue to survive, rooted within the histories, traditions, and resistance struggles of our nations” (“Stolen” 51). In “Native Girls,” this Sovereign Erotic is seen in Nigig’s description of her relationship with her girlfriend Shanay. The story does not shy away from depictions of desire:

When I saw Shanay today, she said, “Wow, Nigig, I almost forgot how gorgeous you are.” I blushed a lot, could feel the warmth in my face. Then she pulled me into her arms and kissed my nose and my cheeks and finally my mouth and I melted.

That’s Love. (Pyle 82)

“Native Girls” is not naïve to the struggles of Two-Spirit people, as can be seen in the experience of Migizi and their rejection from their family. However, in this world, representations of queer love and physical desire are also embraced and allowed to flourish.

“Andwànikàdjigan” also depicts a Sovereign Erotic through the description of Winu and her partner Bèl’s reunion after Winu had thought Bèl had been killed:

A’tugwewinu pressed her face to the bars as her chapped lips met soft ones. Bèl kissed her like it was the first time and the last time they kissed, like soothing water caressing a parched throat. They kissed without care of the Enforcers, or pending doom, they kissed like the world was ending, but really, wasn’t it already over, and perhaps within this kiss lay the new beginning? (Calderon 109)

Like Driskill’s definition, this kiss is depicted as literally healing, not just for Winu, but also potentially for the world. These two examples from “Native Girls” and “Andwànikàdjigan” show how Indigiqueer SF writers can create a Sovereign Erotic in the midst of a fictional apocalypse, which reflects the power it also holds within the real apocalypse of settler colonialism.

### **Conclusion: Hope, Joy, and Love After the End**

Indigiqueer SF provides an opportunity to meld traditional storytelling and knowledge with speculation to reflect on and represent personal and political histories while creating multi-temporal and multi-dimensional potentialities. Just as “[Indigenous] [s]tories are not static” (Vizenor, qtd. in Ballenger 792),

[s]cience fiction is a genre which is continually evolving, and as it encompasses a wider range of writers and readers it will reach a point where writing from or about a racial [or sexual] minority is neither subversive or [*sic*] unusual but rather one of the traits which makes it a powerful literature of change. (Leonard 262)

This change need not be limited to the literary realm either. As Astrid Erll argues, literary works have the potential to “change perceptions of reality and in the end—through the readers’ actions, which can be influenced by literary models—also cultural practice and thereby reality itself” (155). This is a big ask for a single author or text; however, as mentioned in the discussion on authorship, what is important here is not so much the individual author or single text, but the way in which these authors and stories come together to create a community strong enough to change the canon and, in the spirit of SF, the future as well.

### **Positionality Statement**

I acknowledge that my position as a white queer woman raised in the United States on colonized Indigenous lands influences my preconceived notions and approach to this topic. I seek to learn from Indigenous scholars and writers and where possible elevate their voices.

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