OSKISIHCIKÊWAK / NEW TRADITIONS IN CREE TWO-SPIRIT, GAY AND QUEER NARRATIVES

by

JUNE SCUDELER

B.A (Honours), Simon Fraser University, 2001
M.A. Simon Fraser University, 2002

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ABSTRACT

"oskisihcikêwak/New Traditions in Cree Two-Spirit, Gay and Queer Narratives" works in a field where very little historical or foundational material exists. I provide this groundwork for playwright and novelist Tomson Highway and his younger brother, dancer and choreographer René Highway (Woods Cree), and for the performance artist, filmmaker and painter, Kent Monkman (Swampy Cree). Using Cree methodologies, such as wâhkôhtowin or kinship and miyo-wîcêhtowin or getting along with others, the project illustrates how the Highways and Monkman use their art not only to combat racism and homophobia, but more importantly to show the survivance and vibrancy of Indigenous ways of knowing. By using Cree epistemologies, I show how queer theory and queer-of-colour theory can neglect to address colonisation.

In four chapters, I show how the Highway brothers "stood together" to form community for their early and undocumented performances, such as *New Song . . . New Dance,* and through their involvement with Toronto's Native Earth Performing Arts, Canada's first professional Indigenous theatre company. I then compare a script written for a made-for-television movie with what it turned into the novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. I then examine Kent Monkman and his establishment of what David Garneau calls "Aboriginal sovereign display territory" in his paintings and performances, and devote a chapter to the work of his alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle. My overview of the range of media in which these artists worked (film, dance, theatre, painting, performance art) sees this work as a holistic Cree response to colonisation, including sexual colonisation.

PREFACE

This is an original work of research by the author, June Scudeler

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii

PREFACE iii

TABLE OF CONTENTS iv

LISTS OF FIGURES v

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS vi

INTRODUCTION: Situating Cree Two-Spirit, Gay and Queer Narratives 1
- oskisihcikêwak / New Traditions 1
- Cree Methodologies 4
- Two-Spirit Arts as Decolonisation 11
- Two-Spirit Theories 13
- Chapter Overviews 21
- âcimisowin / Personal Story 23

CHAPTER ONE: nîsokâpawiwak: René and Tomson Highway's Woods Cree Artistic Practices 26
- *The Sage, the Dancer and the Fool* 43
- *The Rez Sisters* 50
- *New Song . . .New Dance* 62

CHAPTER TWO: "This show won't mean anything without the people:" wâhkôhtowin in the *Kiss of the Fur Queen* Movie Treatment 76

CHAPTER THREE: "That's Who the Stories Are About:" Kent Monkman's Artistic Inclusivity 109
- *A Coyote Columbus Story* 123
- *The Prayer Language* 127
- *A Nation is Coming* 129
- *Future Nation* 134
- George Catlin 140
- *Welcome to the Studio: An Allegory for Artistic Reflection and Transformation* 147
- *Urban Res* 150

CHAPTER FOUR: "Indians on Top:" Kent Monkman's Sovereign Erotics 155
- *Heaven and Earth* 164
- *Lot's Wife* 165
- *Miss Chief: Justice of the Piece* and *Mary* 168
- *Séance* 175
- *Shooting Geronimo* 178

CONCLUSION 184

Works Cited 188

LISTS OF FIGURES

Figure 1: René Highway. Choreography Notes. 1976-1990. n.d. MS René Highway Collection. U of Guelph. 59
Figure 2: René Highway. Choreography Notes. 1976-1990. n.d. MS René Highway Collection. U of Guelph 60

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INTRODUCTION

Situating Cree Two-Spirit, Gay and Queer Narratives

oskisihcikêwak1 / New Traditions

Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, clad in a pink headdress and bead-work bedecked high heels, saucily asserts, "I am up against some very large problems, which require a very large personality" (Testickle 109). Miss Chief is the alter ego of Kent Monkman, a Swampy Cree artist and filmmaker. The problems she is up against include racism, homophobia, and the erasure of Two-Spirit[2] peoples from dominant accounts of history. Monkman, along with modern dancer René Highway (Woods Cree) and his brother, playwright Tomson Highway, all use different artistic forms to create new traditions or to reinvigorate old ones, especially in urban environments. In their work and in that of many other Indigenous artists, performers and writers, tradition is not relegated to the past, but lives and changes through time. Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) redefines tradition as "about maintaining responsibilities, relationships, and affinities with distinctive worlds of meaning" ("Notes Towards" 214). Tradition is shared, which means it changes as different people engage with it. The Highways and Monkman insist on what Sophie

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[1] I don't italicise Indigenous words because Indigenous languages are the original languages of North America. English is in reality the foreign language.

[2] Two-Spirit is a specifically Indigenous term that is different from gay, lesbian, trans, bisexual or queer. Qwo-Li Driskill (Cherokee) defines of Two-Spirit as an "umbrella term for Native GLBTQ people as well as a term for people who use words and concepts from their traditions to describe themselves. Like other umbrella terms—including queer—it risks erasing difference. But also like *queer*, it is meant to be inclusive, ambiguous and fluid" ("Doubleweaving" 72). Two-Spirit Swampy Cree scholar Alex Wilson defines Two-Spirit as a "self-descriptor increasingly used by Aboriginal gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered Canadians who live within a traditional Aboriginal worldview. It asserts that all aspects of identity (including sexuality, race, gender and spirituality) are interconnected and that one's experience of sexuality is inseparable from experiences of culture and community" ("N'tacimowin inna nah" iv)

McCall calls "transformation over stasis, on continuities over binary opposition" (70). We are accountable to traditions and to larger communities, whether reserve or urban-based. Monkman and the Highways' art, although individually distinctive and in varying media, is transformative, not only for themselves but for different Indigenous communities.

Plains Cree scholar Neal McLeod created a Plains Cree[3] neologism to describe such new traditions: oskisihcikêwak, or new ways of doing things. Since Cree, like German, is a polysynthetic language that includes words that can consist of several nouns, McLeod is able to create a word to describe new traditions. He explains oskisihcikê as consisting of "osk-new and -isihcikê: a way of doing something (sometimes used for ceremonies, but can be used for any systematic pattern of action)–ak pluralises the word" ("Personal Communication"). A systematic pattern of action doesn't mean unchanging repetition but, as in story making and in ceremony, new patterns emerge as people tell or perform narratives. Craig Womack (Muskogee / Cherokee) points out that tradition can be freeing if positioned "as anything that is useful to Indian people in retaining their values and worldviews, no matter how much it deviates from what people did one or two hundred years ago" (*Red on Red* 42). Similarly, René Highway explains, "our tradition is the spiritual element and the tools we use to express it are the modern elements" (qtd.in Jung 65). Tradition is alive, vital and very contemporary.

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[3] As a Métis scholar with Plains Cree ancestry, I use Plains Cree language in this dissertation. I audited a Plains Cree class at UBC and sat in on another but my knowledge is rudimentary. I use Plains Cree or the y dialect, which is different from the Highways' Woods Cree or th dialect and Monkman's Swampy Cree or n dialect.

Relationship, reciprocity, ceremony. These concepts inspire the art of the Highways and Monkman, and I hope I reflect these teachings in my dissertation. I focus on Monkman and the Highways because of the path-clearing nature of their various art practices, as well as the links among their works. The Highways and Monkman are intimately connected. Also, no sustained analysis of the Highways and Monkman's work using Cree concepts has been written before mine. While the Highways and Monkman work in different media—visual art, performance art, theatre, dance, film, and literature— they assert the continuance of Two-Spirit, gay and queer (2GQ) narratives.

The Highways were born in the early 1950s, and lived a semi-nomadic life with their Roman Catholic parents in northern Manitoba. They spoke only Woods Cree before attending residential school. Although Tomson and René Highway experienced sexual, spiritual and cultural abuses at Manitoba's Guy Hill residential school, they both became accomplished artists in Winnipeg and then in Toronto. Born in 1965 in St. Mary's Ontario to a Swampy Cree preacher and an Anglo-Irish mother, Monkman grew up in Winnipeg before moving to Toronto. Monkman was an intern at Native Earth Performing Arts in 1991 and 1992 while Tomson Highway was the artistic director, which inspired Monkman to embody or make tangible Two-Spirit people as Miss Chief Eagle Testickle in film, painting and performance. Although Tomson Highway and Monkman have received significant critical attention, my use of Cree ways of knowing—encompassing epistemologies, histories, stories, language, spirituality, legal systems, and artistic practices—opens up new ways of understanding their work. Little has been written about René Highway, who was an innovative dancer, choreographer and actor in his own right. He was just beginning to direct plays, both with Tomson Highway and on his own, before

his 1990 death from AIDS-related meningitis at thirty-five. Like Monkman and Tomson Highway, his art sprang out of his Cree heritage. Although Monkman and the Highways are primarily categorised as dancer, writer and artist, the Cree notion of what is call art is unified, in part by a tradition of ceremony that combines all these forms.

Cree Methodologies

Although there is a growing number of Indigenous scholars in the academy, Indigenous literatures and other cultural forms have been studied through theoretical perspectives that derive from and serve colonisation. Indigenous literary nationalism, while a new field, has been around long enough to have a sense of its precepts. But like any intellectual endeavour, Indigenous literary nationalism has differing ways in which it is conceptualised. Difference in opinion means the field is still growing and changing. The idea of sharing stories and idea around the kitchen table is an Indigenous-centred way of thinking about theory. Rather than framing disagreements as conflict, the kitchen table means, that everyone's voice is different but equal. Of course, this is not always achievable, but it is a useful metaphor in which to discuss the intersections between Indigenous literary nationalism and Two-Spirit theory.

Indigenous literary nationalists centre Indigenous ways of knowing in their scholarly work as an act of sovereignty. Womack proposes that developing a Nation /

tribal specific literary criticism is an act of sovereignty[4] because these histories, lands and epistemologies will guide Native literary nationalism.

He states that *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* "arises out of the conviction that Native literature, and the criticism that surrounds it, needs to see more attention devoted to tribally specific concerns" (*Red on Red* 1). Womack's and other Indigenous literary nationalists' formulations are a sovereign act because Indigenous literary nationalism situates Indigenous histories, traditions and ways of knowing as the basis for theory. These theorists have differing conceptions of what constitutes nationalism and sovereignty.

In *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (1999), Womack calls for self-determination on the part of Indigenous writers and demonstrates an approach to studying Indigenous texts, one that engages not only the literature, but also the community from which the work grew. Driskill *et al.* also see a "methodological shift in Indigenous studies, which centres Indigenous knowledges of Indigenous people as a basis for making our claims" ("Revolution" 216), what has become known as Indigenous literary nationalism. Moreover, Indigenous literary nationalism also serves to retain Indigenous ways of knowing and traditions. Along with Indigenous literary nationalists Deanna Reder (Cree Métis), Niiganwewidam Sinclair (Anishinaabe) and Justice, Womack proposes that developing an Indigenous-specific literary criticism is an act of sovereignty because the histories, lands and epistemologies of particular nations will

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[4] I define sovereignty as an assertion of Indigenous cultural, political and artistic lifeways. Imagination is key to reconceptualising sovereignty and the idea of nationhood, especially for urban Indigenous people. While land and territory is a fundamental part of Indigenous sovereignty, I focus more on how artistic forms as acts of sovereignty.

guide theory. He states that *Red on Red* "arises out of the conviction that Native literature, and the criticism that surrounds it, needs to see more attention devoted to tribally specific concerns" (1), inspiring my use of Cree ways of knowing in this dissertation. Using nation-specific ways of knowing to discuss Indigenous literature is a political act: "Native literary aesthetics must be politicized. . .autonomy, self-determination, sovereignty serve as useful literary concepts" (Womack 11). Womack situates Indigenous literatures in the realm of the political, inseparable from sovereignty, nationalism and culture.

Coupling an Indigenous literary approach with Two-Spirit critiques is essential because Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (2LGBTQ) writers dare "to imagine land, self, and family in the wake of attempted genocide" (Tatonetti, *Queerness* ix). Scholars in 2GLBTQ studies stress the significance of stories to decolonisation, which is important to the Highways and Monkman's use of 2GQ narratives as decolonial praxis. Inspired by Jeff Corntassel's (Cherokee) assertion that decolonisation works by "focusing on 'everyday' acts of resurgence, one disrupts the colonial physical, social and political boundaries designed to impede our actions to restore our nationhood" (88), I argue that decolonisation also includes performance, film and visual art. Art is important to urban Indigenous people, especially those who are not tied to a specific reserve or territory or are unable to go home because of their sexual orientation. Two-Spirit critiques "see theory practiced through poetry, memoir, fiction, story, song, dance, theater, visual art, film, and other genres" (Driskill "Doubleweaving" 82). Moreover, Lisa Tatonetti stresses that queer Indigenous studies "offer nuanced readings of Indigeneity in which queerness is not apart from but part of Native literature and lives" (143).

Indigeneity and sexuality are intertwined in similar decolonial rhetorics; Monkman and the Highways use Cree ways of knowing to create new traditions as urban 2GQ artists.

Inspired by Native American sovereignty movements of the late 60s, theorists like Womack and Robert Warrior (Osage) are often situated as initiating the Indigenous literary movement, Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan) and Kimberley Blaeser (Anishinaabe) were early interveners in the burgeoning field. In her "Editor's Note" at the beginning of *Looking at the Words of Our People*, Armstrong recounts her experiences at the 1992 Conference on Post Colonial and Commonwealth Literatures at Queen's University. In the panel "Reading First Nations," Armstrong

> suggested that the questioning which forms the critical pedagogical voice, might belong to the internal questioning that is first a reading and a sense-making of, by the culture from within which it arises. . .I suggest that First Nations literature will be defined by First Nations writers, readers, academics and perhaps only by writers and critics from within those varieties of First Nations contemporary and past practice of culture and the knowledge of it. (7)

The Indigenous scholar / community member is affectively connected to Indigenous cultural productions in both the past and the present. However, it is unclear how urban Indigenous people fit into this land-based paradigm.

In 1993, Kimberly Blaeser (Anishinaabe) also stressed the need for "a way to approach Native literature from an indigenous cultural context, a way to frame and enact a tribal-centred criticism" (53). This approach should "arise out of the literature itself (this is opposed to criticism applied from an already established critical language or

attempts to make the literature fit already established genres and categories of meaning)" (53-54). This method of approaching Indigenous literatures runs counter to accepted critical modes in mainstream literary criticism taught in English departments, which typically use an established theory, such as postcolonialism, to analyse a text, rather than allowing a text to guide the theoretical lens used. At this juncture, Indigenous scholars, including myself, can use theories and methods deriving from our own ways of knowing rather non-Indigenous epistemologies because of the critical mass of Indigenous scholars in literary studies.

The Cree and the Métis are relatives, so using Cree methodologies is a form of wâhkôtowin, "the Cree value of kinship or interrelatedness" (Reder, "Âcimisowin" ii), a concept I will develop more in chapter two. My Métis / status Indian ni-chåpanak was a member of Saskatchewan's Muskeg Lake Cree Nation and had a "R" for rebel beside her name in the band list because of her, as well as her husband's and son's, involvement in the 1885 Resistance. The 1901 census lists my ancestors as being "rouge" and speaking French-Cree or the Métis language, Michif, which my grandmother spoke until she went to school. She told my mother about going to visit relatives who lived in tipis. Unfortunately, she died in 1994, before I even thought of asking her about these stories. Using Cree methodologies is a way of honouring her and my ancestors.

Margaret Kovach (Plains Cree / Saulteaux) posits Indigenous methodologies as having three distinct aspects: "(a) the cultural knowledges that guide one's research choices; (b) the methods used in searching; and (c) a way to interpret knowledge so as to give back in a purposeful, helpful, and relevant manner" (44). Grounding my dissertation in Cree ways of knowing opens up new ways of thinking about 2GQ narratives. Kovach's

use of searching as a metaphor for using Indigenous methodologies is crucial. pêyahtik, "to give something great thought, to walk softly" (Scofield, *Love Medicine* 81), highlights that context is important and knowing all the facts before making a decision is an essential component of successful community relations. While direct criticism is avoided, stories are often intended as indirect critical comments on particular behaviours. Two-Spirit Swampy Cree scholar Alex Wilson notes "there are unwritten rules against giving advice or telling someone what to do" ("Identity Development" 307). No one is an expert, which can be in conflict with a hierarchised and competitive academy.

As in oskisihcikêwak, the process we use to decolonise ourselves is important—are we being good relatives? In the words of Plains Cree artist Archer Pechawis, "I am not speaking of grafting Aboriginal protocols onto existing methodologies. I am looking to a future in which Indigenism is the protocol, an all-encompassing embrace of creation: the realms of earth, sky, water, plant, animal, human, spirit, and, most importantly, a profound humility with regards to our position as humans within that constellation" (38). Moreover, Indigenous intellectual sovereignty privileges emotion and embodiment, an important motivation for three artists who practice theatre, dance and performance. A Cree reading practice will seek to understand how Cree 2GQ narratives move beyond colonisation to focus on concepts that allow Indigenous 2GLBTQ peoples to name themselves.

Accordingly, Cree ways of knowing are integral to my dissertation, influencing not only my use of Indigenous literary nationalism but also how I situate Monkman and the Highway's 2GQ narratives. Cree cultures position non-interference as a way of life, providing a way for gender non-conforming peoples to be seen as an integral part of

community, rather than as an anomaly. Deanna Reder (Cree-Métis) positions respect as a Cree value "fundamental for the health of the person and of society" ("Âcimisowin" 181). In Cree cultures, it is not polite to tell people how to be. This principle makes Cree cultures more open to disparate genders; certainly in the past they did not regulate sexuality in the ways typical of Christian colonisers. For example, some prairie First Nations like the Cree practiced polygamy, but the first wife had the ultimate say as to whether or not her husband could bring other wives into their home (Carter 115).

While colonisation has disrupted principled non-interference, it is still an important part of Cree ways of knowing. Monkman and the Highways work against and with their Christian backgrounds to ground themselves in their Cree traditions. Of course, the idea of respect does not mean that disagreement is impossible, because "core to the value of kinship is the understanding that everyone has his or her own perspective, that everyone tells stories, including their own story, from a different point of view" (Reder, "Âcimisowin" 123). Of course, respect and other notions of good behaviour can be difficult to attain, but that it is held up as an ideal (whereas interference is a "well-meant" way of life in mainstream culture) makes a difference.

Monkman and the Highways are also profoundly urban Indigenous artists. While their art is inflected with their Cree heritages, they are also influenced by their work with other Nations and by western art forms. The majority of Indigenous peoples are urban[5] but are largely under-represented in Indigenous literary studies because living in cities is equated with assimilation into the dominant culture. Chris Andersen (Métis) and Evelyn

[5] According to Statistics Canada, 54% of Indigenous peoples live in urban centres (2006 Census). Because many Indigenous people are not counted in census taking, the percentage is higher.

Peters underscore that "privileging a connection to ancestral homelands as a marker of Indigenous identity reinforces dominant visions of Indigenous peoples as authentic only if they live in remote areas and engage in 'traditional' lifestyles" (8). Reder's retooling of the pow wow term intertribal, a non-competitive dance for all participants, forefronts urban Indigenous cultures. Participants from all nations join together in a social dance, separate but moving in the same direction. Urban Indigenous peoples, especially artists, are creating new traditions inspired by their traditions, but also by their contact with people from other Indigenous nations. Justice also cites the "lack of attention to or substantive engagement with the nationhood and peoplehood specificities of urban, pan-Native, or multi-tribal traditions and writers" ("Relevant" 26). Cities are places of connection for Indigenous peoples, allowing the Highways to create a vibrant community of Indigenous artists in Toronto.

Two-Spirit Arts as Decolonisation

Womack observes that 2GLBTQ people may be less visible than their white counterparts because of the "way that the queer Indian, even more than contemporary Indian culture, defies the stereotypes of the stoic warrior, the nature-loving mystic, the vanishing American" (*Red on Red* 279). Womack adds, "I would speculate that a queer Indian presence *fundamentally* challenges the American mythos about Indians in a manner the public will not accept" (*Red on Red* 280). Clearly, 2LGBTQ people disrupt stereotypes of what constitutes Indigeneity.

Driskill emphasises that "for Native Two-Spirit / GLBTQ people and our allies, part of imagining our futures is through creating theories and activism that weave together Native and GLBTQ critiques that speak to our present colonial realities"

("Doubleweaving" 70). Driskill positions Indigenous 2GLBTQ people as activists because they bring together issues of queerness and of Indigeneity. Thus, 2LGBTQ people create new theories to talk about their experiences. Together, the Highways and Monkman counteract the legacies of colonisation, such as homophobia and racism. Their chosen art forms become "Two-Spirit critiques. . .practiced through poetry, memoir, fiction, story, dance, theatre, visual art, film, and other genres. Theory is not just about interpreting genres; these genres *are* theory" (Driskill, "Doubleweaving 82). Narratives, or stories, are an essential part of the decolonising process, which is an "ongoing, radical resistance against colonialism that includes struggles for land redress, self-determination, healing historical trauma, cultural continuance, and reconciliation" (Driskill, "Doubleweaving" 69). Artists like the Highways and Monkman counteract the invisibility of 2GLBTQ peoples and theorise Cree 2GQ ways of knowing.

Two-Spirit peoples caused confusion and even murderous loathing among the colonisers. In 1513, the explorer Vasco Nunez de Balboa had his men throw joyas[6]—Indigenous men from what is now California deemed to be sexually deviant, —as "a prey to his dogges." The joyas were torn apart by the dogs because of they were engaged in acts of "preposterous Venus" (Miranda 258). Clearly, people of genders different from the heteropatrichal norm were (and still are) seen as a threat to the established order. Sam McKegney argues that Indigenous men are still viewed in highly stereotypical ways, noting particularly the settler propensity to view Indigenous men as hypermasculine stereotypes like the bloodthirsty warrior or newer incarnations like the ecological

[6] Deborah Miranda (Ohlone-Costanoan Esslelen Nation, Chumash) translates joyas as "Spanish for jewels" (257).

medicine man or the drunken absentee ("Into the Full Grace" 1). For Indigenous women and 2GLBTQ peoples, "the colonizer has always known that to counter the power of Indigenous womanhood, you need to make acceptable the practice of hating Indian women [and I would add Two-Spirit people]" (Nason, n. pag.).

2GLBTQ peoples can still face significant challenges fitting onto mainstream GLBTQ communities because of racism. But they also face homophobia within Indigenous communities. Brian Joseph Gilley (Cherokee / Chickasaw / Creek) explains that "Indian community conceptions about masculinity are assumed to be fixed, historically determined characteristics firmly grounded in popular and tribal notions of the 'warrior'. . . .Two-Spirit men assume that they will be judged accordingly to these masculinized community standards" (77). However, using Indigenous methodologies, such as Two-Spirit critiques, reclaims and reconfigures 2GLBTQ ways of being and narratives about them.

Two-Spirit Theories

The individualism of mainstream articulations of queer theory can elide "race," class and ability by focussing on equality and homogeneity, which allows people to move between communities without contributing to the social good or acknowledging social and historical forces (Cohen 35). Two-Spirit theory is grounded in broader Indigenous traditions, whether urban or rural. Queer of colour theory, while alert to racism, does not often critique settler colonialism or seek land redress. Two-Spirit theory can encourage queer and queer of colour theories to question "the usefulness to Native communities of theories not rooted in tribally-specific traditions and not thoroughly conscious of colonialism as an on-going process" (Driskill, "Doubleweaving" 71). It is difficult to

describe Two-Spirit in western terms because of the western intellectual and linguistic emphasis on binaries. Driskill *et al.* emphasise that in Two-Spirit theory, roles are not about sexuality "but about relationships with gender. . . .It should come as no surprise to us in our gatherings and organisations that there are people who identify as Two-Spirit and / or queer who have relationships with people of another gender" ("Revolution" 215).[7] Two-Spirit identity is fluid and not tied to western conceptions of male / female or gay / straight, but can be an affirmation of the integral role Two-Spirit (or tribally-specify named) people have in their communities. But, as I will discuss further, it is important to state that not all nations had a Two-Spirit tradition, or the tradition is hard to recover because of the disruption Christianity has caused in Indigenous communities.

Anthropologist Walter L. Williams' *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture*, published in 1986, was one of the first comprehensive examinations of Two-Spirit people. Williams uses the term berdache to denote "a morphological male who does not fill a society's standard male role, who has a nonmasculine character. . . . Berdaches have special ceremonial roles in many Native American religions, and important economic roles in their families" (2). Berdache has been rejected as a term by 2GLBTQ peoples, because of its anthropological history and because the term refers to a male sexual slave (Monkman, *Miss Chief* 87); it also leaves out women who carry out male roles. Williams is careful to note that Native Americans have many different "languages, economies, religions, and social patterns" (1), so it is

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[7] Driskill *et al* stress that "much of our work ends up conflating *Two-Spirit* with *gay* in ways that often ignore those who should be at the center of our movements: those whose gender identities and expressions fall outside of rigid colonial dichotomies" (215).

impossible to make generalisations about each Nation's traditions. Further, Justice cautions that "while many communities. . . have well-documented examples in both oral and written texts of gender-variant people who might also be considered sexually variant in today's vocabulary, comparative evidence for hundreds of other tribes is scant" ("Notes" 215). Members of Nations that do not have a Two-Spirit tradition or those that have one that has been buried because of Christianity are creating new traditions. For example, Saylesh Wesley (Sto:lo) chronicles the difficulty of connecting with her Christianised grandmother after Wesley transitioned to a woman. While Wesley has trouble finding a Two-Spirit tradition in Sto:lo culture, she connects with her grandmother through cedar weaving.[8]

Although queer and Two-Spirit theories may seem like natural allies because of their fluidity, there are marked differences between the two theories. As Driskill *et al.* state: "Declaring 'We're here and we're queer' does not mean we get our land back" ("Revolution" 212). Two-Spirit critiques are profoundly radical as they "hold Native Nations and peoples accountable for misogyny and homophobia [and] they simultaneously see Two-Spirit people and traditions as necessary—if not central—to national decolonial struggles" (Driskill, "Doubleweaving 81). The erasure of Two-Spirit or gender variant peoples began with contact. In *When Did Indians Become Straight?: Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty*, Mark Rifkin stresses that "US imperialism against native peoples over the past two centuries can be understood as an effort to make them 'straight'--to insert indigenous peoples into Anglo-American

[8] See Wesley, Saylesh. "Twin-Spirited Woman: Sts'iyóye smestíyexw slhá:li." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1.3 (2014) 338-351. Print.

conceptions of family, home, desire and personal identity" (8). Legislation such as the Indian Act and the imposition of residential schools were designed to lessen the power of Indigenous women and of Two-Spirit people.

Queer theorists Karen Lovass, John Elia and Gust A. Yep believe queer theory, like Indigenous literary nationalism, can follow similar aims of specificity, and they emphasise that the "postmodernist take on subjects highlights the necessity of situating or contextualizing, past and present, with as much specificity as possible" (5). Queer theory should be grounded in historical context as well as contemporary realities, which highlights the activist nature of queer theory, an activism that can be rooted in political struggles like the queer of colour movement. Robert G. Corber and Stephen Valocchi posit queer studies as describing "identities and practices that foreground the instability inherent in the supposedly stable relationship between anatomical sex, gender, and sexual desire. Such identities and practices have the potential to expose the widely held belief that sex, gender, and sexuality have a causal or necessary relationship to each other as an ideological fiction that works to stabilize heterosexuality" (1). In other words, sex, gender and sexuality are not tied together. This notion resembles Two-Spirit theory's insistence that sexual acts are not entirely distinct. However, some Two-Spirit people use the term interchangeably with gay, queer or lesbian, whereas others use the term to refer to Nation-specific practices.

Corber and Valocchi describe queer studies as an oppositional force to what Judith Butler refers to as the heterosexual matrix, which in order to have bodies "cohere and make sense," must rely on the stable gender categories of male (masculine) and female (feminine) (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 151). As Butler stresses, the heterosexual

matrix can only function if it is based on "a stable sex expressed through a stable gender" (*Gender Trouble* 151). Queer theories are clearly an oppositional force to compulsory heterosexuality, which places heterosexuality, particularly the heterosexual couple, at the centre of society, leaving little space for 2GLBTQ peoples to express their desires. Michael Warner states, "'queer' politics, no longer content to carve out a buffer zone for a minoritized and protected subculture, has begun to challenge the pervasive and often invisible heteronormativity of modern societies" (3). The current "homonormative focus on romantic couplehood and marriage" (Tatonetti, *Queerness* 101-02) is also part of the straightening of Indigenous peoples. Lovass, Elia and Yep emphasise that the "minoritizing view," in which gays and lesbians are situated as a minority group, has been challenged by "scholars and activists of color who argue that [the minoritizing view] is dominantly studied through the lens of white, middle-class males" (6).

Queer studies often overlooks the concerns of people of colour. Steven Seidman states that "the new sociology and history of same-sex intimacy has been narrowly focused on the social origin and development of lesbian and gay male identities and communities among almost exclusively white, middle-class Europeans or Americans" (105). Nonetheless, queers of colour share many of the same concerns as 2GLBTQ peoples, such as discrimination from mainstream gay and queer societies, both of which can be posited as white and middle class.

Still, the Two-Spirit movement has its antecedents in the assertions by LGBTQ people of colour for their rights and for their visibility in a predominantly white gay and lesbian movement, as well as in the burgeoning queer movement. For example, José Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*

argues that people on the margins traverse mainstream society, not by aligning themselves with or against exclusionary works, but rather by transforming these works for their own cultural purposes. According to Muñoz, "disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practice in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship" (4). Disidentification also posits queers of colour as hybridized subjects who can move between the reception and production of strategies, including art and drag, to both work within and outside of the dominant public sphere (25). Working within the dominant system is a strategy to "survive in a hostile public sphere" (Muñoz 5). Muñoz counteracts the emphasis on queerness as a liberatory strategy without any real-world consequences. For queers of colour, working within the dominant sphere may be the only way to survive. However, disidentification recognises that resistance strategies change to counter the dominant ideology.

Bringing Two-Spirit theories to the table with Indigenous literary nationalism not only counters dominant ideologies of what constitutes Indigeneity, but more importantly opens up different notions of nationhood. Driskill notes, "American Indian literary nationalisms. . . can aid in developing Two-Spirit critiques that are simultaneously tribally specific and speak to intertribal concerns" ("Doubleweaving" 84), especially in urban areas. Rather than an emphasis on fixed points in time and place, the fluidity of Two-Spirit theory encourages Indigenous literary nationalism to move across genres and locations, in the process introducing new idea what it means to be a Nation. For example, in his 2012 performance *Miss Chief: Nation of the Piece*, Miss Chief invites anyone into

her Nation while lecturing the audience about colonial government strictures that define Indigeneity. By allowing anybody--including a German hobbyist and a First Nations man who is disenrolled—to enter her Nation of Mischief, Miss Chief positions the nation and Indigeneity ways that complicate and unsettle Indigenous literary nationalism. The Nation of Mischief calls into question of nationhood, a concept that Justice frames outside of state apparatuses. The applicants having to learn about colonisation before they enter; Miss Chief lets them know what they need to do to be good citizens.

On the other hand, Indigenous literary nationalism can help 2LGBTQ people enact a cultural and territorial rootedness, especially for those living in the city. The Highways are both rooted in Woods Cree language and stories, but also are urban Indigenous artists. Their collaborations with other Indigenous artists, especially at Native Earth Performing Arts, helped to form an ever-growing circle of Indigenous artists and performers. Both Tomson and René Highway were early chroniclers of urban Indigenous experience: Tomson Highway's *The Sage, The Fool and the Dancer* (1982, 1989) is unusual in its depiction of a middle-class Indigenous government worker who finds connection to the city and to Woods Cree culture. The Highways used Woods Cree language and stories in their work, but also showed how urban Indigenous people should not be seen as inauthentic. Rather, they helped to create an urban Indigenous nation of performers inspired by their experiences. Moreover, for 2LGBTQ people, Indigenous land-based communities are not safe spaces; the Highways were not able to be 2GQ men on their Catholic reserve. Fortunately, they were able to form a different kind of nation in the city.

Womack states, "[A] key component of nationhood is a people's idea of themselves, their imaginings of who they are. The ongoing expression of a tribal voice, through imagination, language, and literature, contributes to keeping sovereignty alive in the citizens of a nation and gives sovereignty a meaning that is defined within the tribe rather than by external sources" (*Red on Red* 14). Monkman and the Highways use Cree values of principled non-interference, which enables people to follow their path in life, and wâhkôtowin or kinship / interrelatedness, to creatively reimagine nationhood. Moreover, I argue these reimaginings create new traditions, particularly in urban areas. Monkman and the Highways use western art forms such as studio painting, modern dance and theatre, but from Cree perspectives. As McCall argues about *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, "in no way is healing imagined as a retreat from the multiple institutions that shape the complex, layered spaces of the city" (78). The city is Indigenous territory, an intertribal space in which ideas, art and decolonisation circulate. Renya Ramirez connects urban Indigenous hubs to Indigenous homelands or reserves by positioning Native hubs as a "cultural, social, and political concept [that] ultimately has the potential to strengthen Native identity and provide a sense of belonging, as well as to increase the political power of Native peoples" (3). However, as mentioned previously, Indigenous people like Monkman are not tied to a particular homeland. As Andersen and Peters point out, "innovations that are positioned from interactions with non-Indigenous society are positioned as less central or even as less 'authentic' than transplanted tribal traditions" (8). Indigenous peoples use new traditions to keep cultures, in whatever form they may take, alive and changing.

Chapter Overviews

In my four chapters, I use Cree ways of knowing to explore how art, sovereignty and 2GQ concerns intersect in the work of the Highways and Monkman to create new traditions. In chapter one, I examine René and Tomson Highway's collaborative practices using the Plains Cree term nîsokâpawiwak or standing together. In October 2013, during my first visit to the University of Guelph archives, I watched a video of René Highway's 1988 dance performance *New Song. . . New Dance*. Along with Indigenous dancers Raoul Trujillo and Alejandro Ronceria. René Highway was clearly addressing the effects of residential school abuses, but also the profound power and strength of Woods Cree language and traditions in the city. He also embodied a Woods Cree 2GQ performance aesthetics. I was intrigued by René Highway's performance and delved deeper into his collection of choreography notes, videos and personal papers. Like many who read and study Tomson Highway's work, I was aware that René Highway played Nanabush in *The Rez Sisters* and that Gabriel in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* is based on him. I had no idea of the richness of René Highway's own work or of his work with Tomson Highway. I use René Highway's hand-annotated copy of *The Rez Sisters* to examine his interpretation of Nanabush. René Highway's copy of Tomson Highway's unpublished script for *The Sage, the Dancer and the Fool* (1984) also shows his interpretation of Tomson Highway's script which portrays the mind, body and the spirit of a Woods Cree man adapting to the city. I then concentrate on *New Song. . .New Dance*, which uses Cree language and drums to gesture towards healing after residential school and the shock of moving to the city.

I focus on *Kiss of the Fur Queen* in my second chapter, both the novel and the unpublished 1992 made-for-television movie treatment. Because Tomson Highway was unable to have the film financed, he decided to revise it as a novel. Building upon my

archival discovery, I use wâkhôtowin or kinship as a way to understand the radical differences between Simon in the movie treatment and Gabriel in the novel. Tomson Highway doesn't portray Simon taking sexual risks in the movie treatment but instead shows Simon and Jeremiah as part of larger gay and Indigenous theatre communities. Simon and Jeremiah directly confront the priest who sent them to residential school in a stunning act of defiance, especially for the early 1990s. My analysis accounts for these differences by considering the different audiences he envisioned for the two projects.

Building upon the Cree methodologies and artistic history of the Highways, I turn to the work of Kent Monkman in my third and fourth chapters. In my third chapter, I use a selection of Monkman's works to argue that his emphasis on communication entices all viewers into his work. Monkman builds on what Métis artist David Garneau calls "Aboriginal sovereign display territory" (37), a space that is managed by Indigenous people, but that welcomes respectful visitors; similar protocols are also followed by the Highways. Because Miss Chief is such a vibrant part of Monkman's work, in chapter four, I use Driskill's idea of sovereign erotics to argue that Monkman imagines 2GQ versions of history in some of his art. He also enacts miyo-wîcêhtowin—the principle of getting along well with others, good relations, expanding the circle (Cardinal and Hildebrandt 14)—in performances such as *Miss Chief Justice of the Piece*, in which Miss Chief adopts people into her Nation of Miss Chief. She creates a Nation that rejects Indian Act and blood quantum strictures, an Indigenous sovereign display territory.

âcimisowin / Personal Story[9]

"So why are you writing about gay Indigenous men?" a committee member asked me over coffee. Although I am a cisgendered[10] woman, I have never felt I fit into my perceived gender role. These feelings reflect my ambivalence about discourses of gender. Writing this dissertation made me see patterns in my own life. While I undoubtedly consider myself an Indigenous feminist, I am uncomfortable with the trope of Indigenous women as life-givers that is prevalent in Indigenous society. Not having children is a contentious choice for an Indigenous woman.

I clearly remember being seven or eight and much preferring playing with a girlfriend's younger brother's trucks to playing house. I complained to my mom, "all they want to do is play house. It's so boring!" From a young age, I knew I didn't want to be married and have kids. Rather than children, art and scholarship are my life-long passions, along with a strong sense of social justice, or the equitable distribution of wealth and opportunities especially for marginalised peoples. These passions make me firmly believe that I need to be an ethical and responsible researcher.

I never thought I would attend university, coming out of high school with a C-average and a fail in English 12. At thirty-two, I went to college and then university, completing my Honours BA and MA at Simon Fraser University. In 2002, I was accepted to the University of Calgary, and planned to build upon my Honours essay on Percy Shelley, masculinity, and the Gothic. My M.A. paper on the movie *Fight Club* and *Dr.*

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[9] Reder defines âcimisowin as Cree autobiographical narrative ("Âcimisowin as Theoretical Practice: Autobiography as Indigenous Intellectual Tradition" 10).

[10] Cisgender refers to people who feel comfortable with their assigned biological sex and the gender they feel themselves to be.

Jekyll and Mr. Hyde continued my interest in masculinity, a focus that continues in my current work. But I felt restless, that something was waiting for me. Inspired by a Canadian History course that I took in 1999, I connected to my Métis ancestry. The textbook in that course contained a list of Métis people killed during the 1885 Resistance, which I showed to my mom. She pointed out that Joseph (José) Vermette was our ancestor and I felt proud as the instructor announced that I was his descendant. I joined the Vancouver Métis Community Association in 2002, just before I left for Calgary. I radically changed my dissertation topic from Shelley to gay Métis poet Gregory Scofield, whose writing I first read in Calgary. I connected to Scofield's writing about his struggles to understand his Métis heritage, a process that paralleled my own. But unable to assemble a Ph.D. dissertation committee, I dropped out of Calgary, believing my academic career was over.

I have come to the realisation that I appreciate the Highways and Monkman because their art elides heterosexual gender roles, a continuing theme in my work and in my life. This realisation dovetails with the rise in scholarly work by 2GLBTQ peoples. *Two–Spirits: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality and Spirituality*, published in 1997 and co–edited by Sue–Ellen Jacobs, Wesley Thomas (a Navajo *nadleehe* or gender-variant person) and Sabine Lang, was the first anthology to feature essays on the topic by both Indigenous and non–Indigenous scholars. But the theoretical essays were primarily by non-Indigenous anthropologists (Driskill *et al*, "Introduction" 13). Indigenous scholars, particularly 2GLBTQ peoples, are now publishing their own theories and stories, in collections such as *Sexuality, Nationality, Indigeneity* (2010), a special edition of *GLQ*, *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics and*

Literature (2011), and *Sovereign Erotics: A Collection of Two-Spirit Literature* (2011). My research makes an important intervention in this growing field, building upon the path-clearing work by others in 2GLBTQ studies, who have been generous with their support.

CHAPTER ONE

nîsokâpawiwak: René and Tomson Highway's Woods Cree Artistic Practices

By nîsokâpawiwak or standing together, Tomson and René Highway embodied Woods Cree language and ways of knowing to help to connect an Indigenous-centred theatre movement in Canada. Tomson Highway had the business and administrative expertise to bring their productions to fruition, which helped to foster René Highway's artistic visions. Tomson and René Highway also used performance as a way to reconnect with their culture. Coming from a Roman Catholic reserve and being sent to a Roman Catholic residential school was a profound cultural loss for the brothers. However, they "develop[ed] their potential in music and dance from within the colonial violence that [was] inflicted sexually on their bodies" (Belghiti 1) by reconnecting to their language and stories in urban spaces.

Tomson Highway's fictionalised depiction of his brother, René Highway, as Gabriel in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* has overshadowed René Highway's own artistic practices and their collaborations. Tomson Highway is best known for *The Rez Sisters*, in which René Highway played Nanabush in the original productions.[11] Tomson Highway notes "people always say *The Rez Sisters* was my first play. That's not true. It's not true at all. It may have been my first play to be successful with the general public. But there

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[11] *The Rez Sisters* was first performed at Toronto's Native Canadian Centre in 1986, followed by a national tour and a 1988 appearance at the Edinburgh International Festival. It won the 1986-87 Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding New Play and the Floyd S. Chalmers Canadian Play Award in 1987.

were five plays that came before that, every one of them self-produced, with money from my very own pocket. And some of these plays were awful, some of them were good, at least two of them were very, very good" ("Should Only" 21-22). He continues, "I didn't really have a primary goal when I started. My first impulse was to help my late brother, René Highway, to put on shows. He was stuck in Toronto with a stalled choreography career and so I helped him put shows together" (De Laurentis Johnson n. pag.).

Working together, the Highway brothers played a large role in the booming 1980s Indigenous theatre scene in Canada. With Tomson Highway as the Artistic Director from 1986 to 1992 at Toronto's Native Earth Performing Arts, Tomson and René Highway were able to create and, in some cases, to direct their own productions. Prior to Native Earth, Tomson and René Highway produced their own shows, such as *The Sage, the Dancer and The Fool* (1984) and *New* Song. . .New *Dance* (1982), performances I will discuss in this chapter. Native Earth later remounted both plays during Tomson Highway's tenure. Tomson Highway's *The Rez Sisters* catapulted Indigenous theatre and Native Earth into mainstream awareness. René Highway was important to *The Rez Sisters*' success as he choreographed the play and débuted the role of the Anishinaabe trickster Nanabush.

I focus on Tomson and René Highway's more collaborative work because of their important place in Indigenous performance. Although *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* (1989) also deals with gender, especially masculinity, René Highway choreographed the play but did not appear in it. Tomson Highway's unpublished play script for *The Sage, the Dancer and The Fool* and René Highway's unpublished choreography notes for *New Song. . . New Dance* (1988) and for the role of Nanabush

better reveal how the brothers chronicle the culture shock of being Woods Cree in the city and the effects of residential school from a Woods Cree perspective. *The Sage* presents a stream-of-consciousness style interior monologue of a day in the life of a Woods Cree man and shows Tomson Highway's first use of wîsahkecâhk, the Cree Elder Brother or trickster and wîhtikow, the insatiable Cree cannibal monster. Similarly, René Highway's three-part *New Song. . . New Dance* uses dance, poetry and theatre to counteract the disastrous effects of colonisation through connection to Woods Cree language and culture. In *The Rez Sisters*, Nanabush intervenes in the lives of seven sisters and their journey to Toronto to win the world's biggest bingo.

René Highway receives only a brief mention in dance scholar Jacqueline Shea Murphy's *There Is My People Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories* (2007), and only in relation to Alejandro Ronceria (Suesca / Sogamoso) and Raoul Trujillo's (Chicano / Nde / Tlaxcala) work with him. Yet René Highway was one of the first Indigenous choreographers in Canada to represent a nation-specific, in this case, Woods Cree sensibility in his work. Tomson Highway refers to his younger brother as the "Che Guevera" (Posner C1) of Indigenous arts in Canada because of his path-breaking work. René Highway's collaborations with other dancers, especially as a mentor, ensured that his choreographic work continues; for example, Ronceria went on to found the Aboriginal Dance Programme at the Banff Centre for the Arts and choreographed the First Nations, Métis and Inuit portion of the opening ceremonies for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. Ronceria emphasises, "though René Highway left us, left the physical world, he's still with us and still manifests in the physical world today. . . .It was a movement; as the aboriginal theatre movement was beginning, Rene was a pioneer—and then

disappeared" (n. pag.). Trujillo remembers René Highway was "beginning to develop a movement vocabulary that was contemporary but intrinsically Native in feeling" ("Memory" 22).

René Highway's insistence on the embodiment of both colonial violence and Woods Cree ways of knowing in the 70s and 80s Canadian performing arts scene made him a path clearer for other Indigenous artists. Driskill affirms that "if we can find ways to kinaesthetically know historical trauma, power and oppression, we can more deeply understand the nature of our oppression and the impact of colonization on our lives and our communities" (156). However, Driskill doesn't want to frame Indigenous peoples simply as reacting to trauma and to the history of colonisation as they stress that the "body is also a central site of healing and resistance" (155). Beth Brant (Bay of Quinte Mohawk) similarly writes, "[W]ho we are is written on our bodies, our hearts, our souls. . .Listening to the stories brought to us by other beings. Renewing ourselves in the midst of chaos" (74). Accordingly, I explore how René Highway used his mamâhtâwisiwin or spiritual power, talent, or magic (LeClaire *et al.* 68), particularly his experiences with "intense animal energy when [he] was very young" (René Highway, "Talking With" 14), throughout his artistic and personal lives to create new traditions as a gay[12] Woods Cree man. René Highway's mamâhtâwisiwin is also reflected in *New Song. . .New Dance* (1988), which foregrounds his and many other Indigenous peoples' experiences in residential school and in urban environments. These experiences led him to dance and to choreograph on a deeply spiritual level; he recognised "the great power that lie in my

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[12] René Highway referred to himself as gay. Two-Spirit was coined two months before he died.

roots" (René Highway, Citron 16). While René and Tomson Highway suffered severe cultural shock and abuse at residential school, they channeled these experiences into art when residential school abuses were starting to be addressed in the mainstream, a shift they helped to start.

The Highways, like many other Indigenous choreographers and creative teams, demonstrated how they "can re-claim the stage as a sovereign space—an advantaged territory where Aboriginal performers have the authority to tell their own histories and stories, work through the bodily effects of colonization" (Apsey 66). Moreover, most Indigenous peoples integrate all aspects of performance into ceremony, a process that most western art practices separate out from performance. Cree / Métis actor Christine Sokaymoh Frederick explains that "arts began as participatory processes embedded in ceremonies that included dance, song, and drama, that communicated our humanity. . . . Sacred knowledge, histories, and cultural values were transmitted and were instrumental in engaging community to make the arts conduits of energy, social criticism, and embodies vitality" (xiv-xv). Significantly, dance critic Deirdre Kelly notes that René Highway "brought to all his roles, whether abstract or dramatic, a sense of deep and quiet conviction" (C1). René Highway felt a profound duty to represent Indigenous peoples to themselves. René Highway practiced healing and resistance by performing, teaching and working extensively, but not exclusively, in Indigenous-centred spaces such as the Native Canadian Centre[13] in Toronto, during the centenary of the 1885 Resistance in Batoche,

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[13] René Highway taught modern dance classes at the Native Canadian Centre and Daryl Jung's 1988 article about René Highway, which includes quotations from René Highway, was held "in the midst of last weekend's elder's conference" (65) at the Native Canadian Centre.

Saskatchewan and with Tukak Theatre, an Inuit / Sami theatre company based in Denmark in 1980.

Floyd Favel (Plains Cree) and Monique Mojica (Kuna / Rappahannock)[14] formulate what Favel calls Native Performance Culture or NPC, "the development of techniques, methods and exercises based on Aboriginal ritual and social structures" ("Poetry" 34). NPC involves "studying Aboriginal dances, songs, weaving, myths and ceremony and, from there, identifying theatrical principles and using these principles as starting points for contemporary work" ("Poetry" 34). For Favel, allying tradition with Indigenous theatre is essential to "revitalizing our fractured cultures through the transformative power of tradition" ("Poetry" 33). Like the Highways, Favel believes that when "theatre and ritual connect, it is at a spiritual level" ("Poetry" 33). René Highway explains how he was "encouraging [himself] to participate in, and thereby learn, techniques employed by our Native ancestors, so that, someday, [he] will be able to incorporate [his] heritage into [his] own personal expression" (René Highway, "Modern Dance" 14). Tomson and René Highway created new traditions by using Woods Cree language and stories, as well as their own experiences in residential school and in the city.

Although understanding how René Highway created new traditions in Woods Cree performing arts is necessary to recuperate his work, I must also be attentive to the silences in his work, including those in his interviews and writings. Like the silences and ellipses in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* when Jeremiah is unable to comprehend or to

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[14] Mojica played Marie-Adele Starblanket in the original productions of *The Rez Sisters.*

acknowledge his and Gabriel's sexual abuse, René and Tomson Highway were initially unable or unwilling to openly discuss being gay, especially in the 60s and 70s. Nonetheless, the brothers' artistic practice led them over time to articulate and to negotiate being both gay and Indigenous in Canada. However, Tomson Highway and René Highway were addressing these issues, not only by their mere physical presence, but also through coded words and ideas in their writing and performance. It wasn't until the late 80s, at the height of the AIDS crisis and shortly before he died, that René Highway started publicly testifying about the sexual abuse he and too many other Indigenous children suffered at residential school, and that he also began openly discussing his experiences of being a gay, Woods Cree man. He also employed the embodied language of Cree stories to counteract the assimilative assaults of residential school.

Tomson and René Highway entered Guy Hill, a Roman Catholic residential school at aged six; they both channeled these experiences into their art.[15] René Highway stresses how residential school "tried to control us, erase our heritage, our culture. The school was located in the middle of a huge provincial park. I used to look at the fence and fantasize about life outside the schoolyard" (qtd. in DiManno E10). The brothers were not only creating works of art, but were creating stories about their lives as artists and as survivors. As early as 1976, when René Highway was twenty-two, he stressed the importance of communicating through dance: "I suppose that my ambition is to be able to

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[15] Both Tomson and René Highway felt ambivalent about residential school. René Highway stated "[i]f I hadn't left the reserve, I probably would not have received an education. I probably would never have left and become exposed to dance and become a dancer myself. So I am able to see the good points of what happened. Right now, I guess it's 50-50" (qtd. in Jung 65).

span the communication space between my own people to whom I feel a very strong bond, and whoever is willing to listen" ("Modern Dance" 14). René Highway stresses the importance of sharing stories primarily with Indigenous people, but also with non-Indigenous peoples. As I will discuss in chapter three, Monkman also emphasises communication with Indigenous peoples.

The brothers struggled deeply with the culture shock of moving from speaking only Woods Cree and fishing and hunting with their family in the bush, to being forced to attend residential school. René Highway recalls: "What peace we had! I cry when I think of how lucky we were to be held by earth and sky so close at hand. . . .I had been used to living so openly in Nature and the new environment caused turmoil. These days, I am fighting to remember how to live so openly" ("Indian Legend" 42).[16] For René Highway, the shock of leaving his home was extreme but his life in the bush on his traditional territory sustained him, including intense memories as a young child when a caribou herd appeared out of nowhere. René Highway recalls in an article he wrote when he was twenty-one:

> It happened so fast that all I saw was a moving mass of solid animal energy. It was an overwhelming feeling to watch this mass of thundering hooves and flashing antlers rush past me, so close that I could have reached out to touch it. This energy seemed to stir something within me. It was like watching life rush past, exciting and stimulating. It felt so

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[16] I wish to qualify, however, that I don't want to romanticise the Highways' childhoods. Tomson Highway remembers getting up at 3am to check nets: "I loved it and I hated it. There were moments of perfect happiness, and moments of difficulty and distress" (qtd. in Hannon, "Tomson Highway" 31).

> attractive and compelling that I wished I had some too. . . .The energy I had seen and felt was, and still is, within me. For the energy was life itself, but it would be a few years before I could relate to things often labeled as concepts. ("Modern Dance" 13)[17]

Plains Cree language and education philosopher Willie Ermine describes how "mamatowisowin is the capacity to connect to the life force that makes anything and everything possible" (110):

> The Cree word *mamatowisowin*, for example, describes the capacity of tapping into the "life force as a means of procreation." This Cree concept describes a capacity to be or to do anything, to be creative. . . .For the Cree, the phenomenon of *mamatowan* refers not just to the self but to the being in connection with happenings. It also recognizes that other life forms manifest the creative force in the context of the knower. . . .The experience is knowledge. (104)

While he didn't use the word to explain his connection to the caribou, I believe René Highway experienced mamâhtâwisiwin. In a 1988 interview he revealed "nature is a very magical place where you can experience things that are powerful, such as being visited by spirits and receiving the gift of strength from them to carry on" (qtd. in Jung 65). mamâhtâwisiwin is an inanimate noun, highlighting how this giftedness needs to

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[17] René Highway's experience with the caribou is echoed in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* but with Jeremiah saving Gabriel from the caribou. Highway captures René Highway's profound experience: "Gabriel opened his arms to embrace this immense field of energy. And he began to weep" (46). Tomson Highway would also tell his version of the caribou story in his 2001 children's book *Atihko nikamon / Caribou Song.*

manifest itself within animate beings. All life is alive and interconnected; "all my relations" is shared with the human and other-than-human world.

Plains Cree scholar Neal McLeod describes mamâhtâwisiwin as "involv[ing] spirituality and the belief that reality is more than what we understand on the surface" (92). He continues: "The term 'e-mamâhtâwisit,' the verb form of mamâhtâwisiwin, means he or she is 'spiritually gifted.' It could also be translated perhaps as 'they know something that you will never know'" (92). René Highway's experience with the caribou herd becomes a form of knowledge, not only of the land but also of the life force of the caribou. Ermine's assertion that connecting to the life force makes anything and everything possible not only inspired René Highway's life path as a dancer. For René Highway, mamâhtâwisiwin is not just a gift but also comes with a profound responsibility to share this knowledge and giftedness with other beings, especially performing artists. René Highway's mamâhtâwisiwin also enabled him to carry Woods Cree ways of knowing with him through residential school and in Winnipeg and Toronto, and to build good relations with other performing artists.[18]

René Highway used the word magical numerous times to refer to both the magic of nature and to other gay men, highlighting how the flexibility of mamâhtâwisiwin encompasses both René Highway's artistic practices and his sexuality. This life energy of the caribou impacted René Highway's life profoundly, making him feel different from his high school classmates, especially as he was one of only three Indigenous students at the school: "I could feel there was something lacking, something that prevented me from

[18] Neither Tomson nor René Highway ever moved back to Brochet as their artistic careers and same-sex relationships could only be maintained in urban centres.

communicating. I had to find a way of releasing the energy that was racing through me" ("Modern Dance"13). This release he could only experience through dance and through acceptance of his sexuality.

Furthermore, the Cree idea of kihceyihtâkosowin (respect, esteem or great consideration) or principled non-interference (McLeod, *Cree Narrative*; Reder, "Sacred Stories")—assuming people can discover their own path as long as it doesn't harm the larger community—frees people to self-identify sexually and to pursue the artistic practices that are best suited to exploring their sexuality and their Indigeneity. Two-Spirit Swampy Cree academic Alex Wilson explains how Cree people position an ethic of principled non-interference as a way of life, in which community members should not "interfere in any way with another person" ("Identity Development" 307). Moreover, principled non-interference would require family and friends to "respect and trust the choices [a Two-Spirit / Indigenous GLBTQ] person makes" (Wilson, "Identity Development" 310), providing a way for gender variant peoples to be seen as an integral part of community, rather than as an anomaly. Two-Spirit University of Saskatchewan Student Union president Jack Saddleback also cites non-interference as integral to his experience growing up in a tradition family on Samson Cree Nation in Maskwacis, Alberta: "as long as the child is happy, the community and the family are happy. . . .I was able to go about and be the gender-queer kid that I always was" (Malone n. pag.)

While Tomson and René Highway were very different, their experiences in residential school and as gay men made them become close. Tomson Highway remembers their parents treating them "like princes of the north" (Rogers, "Tomson Highway") because six of twelve Highway children had died in infancy or early

childhood. René and Tomson Highway were clearly artistic from an early age: they would make up plays in the meadows around their family's fish camps (Hannon, "Tomson Highway" 31). In 1991, Tomson Highway's partner, Raymond Lalonde remembered the Highway brothers' working relationship:

> Tom and René talked on the phone all the time, three times a day, always in Cree. . . . I loved going to rehearsals when René and Tom were working. They are very different: René was not an intellectual, he was not agile with language the way Tom is. He wasn't as educated. René played on the street more, Tom is more into business, administration, writing. But together, in the theatre, they clicked. They didn't have to talk, they knew what had to be done to get where they wanted to go. René would choreograph certain movements to accompany the words, telling actors when to turn, raise a hand, look around—it was as if he'd make people dance even though they weren't dancing. (qtd. in Steed D1)

Similarly, René Highway explained, "We don't communicate to each other because we don't have to. . . .And it leaves a bit of a mystery about how we do communicate. It's better that way—it leaves some room for surprises. Something can get created that neither of us thought of" (Hannon 36). Tomson Highway concurred, "We work really beautifully together. He has such a good handle on movement, and sometimes I envy his ability to relate to performers. But my contribution to the partnership is the intellectual part of it" (Hannon 36).

As a director and choreographer, René Highway treated his dancers and actors with respect and patience, making him more collaborative than authoritarian. Lewis

Baumander, for whom René Highway choreographed *The Tempest* set on Haida Gwaii, describes René Highway treating young Indigenous actors and dancers at a casting call "like a fragile young plant. . . . Most of the young people left the room without a job, but all left with more confidence and hope in their hearts when they came in. René Highway gave each of them a gift of themselves" (19). René Highway's treatment of the young Indigenous performers made Baumander vow out loud never to treat auditions as a cattle call, at which René Highway looked at him "as if to say 'is there any other way?'" (19). Baumander's example shows René Highway nurturing a community of Indigenous performing artists. Tomson Highway also mentored upcoming Indigenous playwrights and artists. For example, Monkman interned as a set designer for Native Earth Performing Arts when Tomson Highway was the artistic director.

René Highway locates dance in what dance scholar Jacqueline Shea Murphy describes "as a becoming, rather than a playing at" (*The People* 225), performance as social action. René Highway did not use dance as simply a performative act but as a way of affirming a Woods Cree performance theory, an Indigenous-centred aesthetic shared by many Indigenous performing artists. For example, Jerry Longboat (Mohawk) describes his choreography for *Raven's Shadow* as "a contemporary investigation into the process of expanding oneself to experience the threshold between the living and the ancestral" (qtd. in Murphy *There are* 225), a concept that echoes mamâhtâwisiwin. René Highway was aware that his mamâhtâwisiwin was a great responsibility: "It would be easy to do cute little rain-dances, but I know I can do better than that" (René Highway, Citron 16). Trujillo confirms that for René Highway, "there was no differentiation between the dream world and the waking world" ("Memory" 22). Although René

Highway's choreographic work could sometimes be abstract, he was attempting to share stories of colonisation, but also of the strength of Indigenous peoples.

However, while René Highway sought emotion and spiritual insight through his dance, he also loved technology and used projections along with innovative lighting to create new traditions in Woods Cree performing arts. René Highway was also very much an urban Indigenous artist, noting that "the potential to use technology as an artistic tool has always challenged my imagination" (CV). Furthermore, while René Highway used Woods Cree props like caribou-hide drums and mahkêsîs or fox costumes, Tomson Highway's modern piano score for *New Song. . .New Dance*, shows that René Highway engaged western arts like modern dance and theatre very much on his own terms. René Highway explains, "I always go to Powwows, and for a long time, I've wanted to reflect the city environment along with traditional Native culture, in a dance" (qtd. in Morrison A25). In René Highway's obituary published in the New York-based *Dance Magazine*, Michael Crabb stresses, René Highway "freely used all the theatrical effects offered by technology. There was nothing ethnographic or folkloric about his work" (32).

René Highway found an outlet for his mamâhtâwisiwin when he started dancing at fifteen, which is quite old for a classical-trained dancer, after seeing a performance of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet with his brother. He recalls, "I found out that the Royal Winnipeg Ballet had a school, but I was afraid to approach them. Back in the late 60s—and in Winnipeg, especially—taking ballet classes was an incredible stigma, both as a male and a Native. When I started taking classes, I told my friends I was going to the 'Y,' and hoped that no one would see me going in. I guess I was 15 when I did my first *plie*" (René Highway, "Talking With" 12). Again, the idea of being different appears in René

Highway's recollections. He remembers his instructors being very encouraging, noting "one even said that I was different and stood out without even realizing it" ("Modern Dance" 13). René Highway's attraction to dance also had a decidedly sexual element:

> I remember going to a dance concert in this beautiful building where these beautiful bodies came on. Incredible sets, incredible costumes, beautiful music. I felt this sexual attraction to these bodies, these animals on stage, these creatures. I was 14 or 15 at the time and I don't remember feeling anything like it before. I began wondering where they trained. And the men were rumoured to be of a certain persuasion—and though there was something unspoken in me, there was a real emotional pull to be like these people. (qtd. in Hannon, "Tomson Highway" 31)

He refers to the dancers as "these animals" and "these creatures," which is reminiscent of the raw energy of the caribou. The sexual energy of the dancers makes them alluring and forbidden. René Highway gleefully recalls seeing dance for the first time on television: "I remember a show called *Broadway Goes Latin*. It seemed a very passionate form of dance and I remember thinking, 'That must be sinful!'" (qtd. in Hannon, "Tomson Highway" 31).

It is no coincidence that René Highway decided to tell Tomson Highway he was gay not long after seeing the ballet: "It was difficult. . .Very, very difficult. I guess I was about 15 then, and Tomson 17 or 18. . .we told each other at the same time and that made it so much more painful. The day it happened we just cried and cried and cried, finally revealing that secret. But some bond was made stronger—it just bonded us that much closer together" (qtd. in Hannon, "Tomson Highway" 36). Being gay Woods Cree men in

the 60s was extremely difficult. René Highway separated his Indigenous friends, who hung around downtown Winnipeg, the city where he attended high school, from his white friends "including a white girlfriend"; neither group knew of René Highway's dance lessons (qtd. in Hannon, "Tomson Highway" 36).[19] René Highway had compartmentalised his life even further because "there was my sexual preference life which was a whole new world for me in Winnipeg. I desperately wanted a relationship" (qtd. in Hannon, "Tomson Highway" 36). Tomson Highway explains what he appreciates about his sexuality: "it gives me the status of outsider in a double sense. That gives you a wider vision, a more in-depth vision into the ways of human behaviour, into the way the world works" (Hannon, "Tomson Highway" 36). Both brothers would use this double vision to create art that not only addressed Indigeneity but also that was queer, such as Nanabush in *The Rez Sisters*.

As there were only about 250,000 Indigenous people in Canada in the 1960s,[20] René and Tomson Highway had to be boarded at white homes to attend high school in Winnipeg. The Highway brothers' placement in a white home was also part of the Canadian government's assimilation processRené Highway realised his wish of having a relationship when he moved to Toronto at the age of seventeen with "the man who would become his first lover—'the theatre person [he] came to Toronto with,'" who was around

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[19] It says something about René Highway's "sunny openness" (Hannon, "Tomson Highway" 36) and extraordinary good looks that he could date a white girl in Winnipeg in the late 60s. Tomson Highway claims that René Highway also dated Helen Betty Osborne, who was brutally raped and murdered in 1971: "She's from Norway House in northern Manitoba and I'm from Brochet, Manitoba. We went to the same school and we're about the same age. In fact, she was my younger brother's girlfriend for a short while, like puppy love—fifteen or sixteen, whatever it was" (McKegney, *Masculindians* 27).

[20] The 1961 census lists 220,121 people reporting Aboriginal ancestry, although the total was probably higher.

ten years older than René Highway.[21] Previously, René Highway had been hanging out with a group of men, "a downtown crowd, the most open, welcoming people in my life to that point. They made me feel wanted, different" (Hannon 37).[22] René Highway emphasises the sexual and artistic freedom of living in Toronto after the compartmentalisation of his life in Winnipeg: "There was just the dance world and the gay world, open for me. And in the early 70s! Wow!" (qtd. in Hannon, "Tomson Highway" 37).[23]

Hannon states in his interview with Tomson and René Highway that, while being gay in the '60s was not easy, Tomson Highway "was experimenting 'in a very clandestine fashion from the age of 13'" (36). Neither brother told their Catholic parents that they were gay, although it is hard to understand how their parents could not have known. Both René and Tomson Highway lived with their partners, René Highway with singer and musician Micah Barnes and Tomson Highway with long-time partner Raymond Lalonde. Tomson Highway stresses that he always knew he was gay but he never told his parents (Steed D1). Prior to residential school, the Highway children were

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[21] While Pierre Trudeau's Liberal government exempted "from prosecution private, consensual sexual activities by adults of at least 21 years of age" ("Toronto" n. pag.) in 1969, René Highway was a minor when he began his relationship with the director.

[22] I was puzzled by the changes to René Highway's name; sometimes he was René Highway, sometimes Dennis Highway and still other times Dennis René Highway. His decision to refer to himself by a partial pseudonym (keeping the same last name certainly didn't aid in anonymity) is also indicative of a fear of discovery: "This goes back to high school, when I was getting involved in dance and trying to hide that from my friends. My real name is René Highway. Dennis is the name I made up for the dance world. When my two worlds merged after I came to Toronto, I used both names. But now I've put it back to René Highway" (René Highway Citron 12). Dennis is more conventionally masculine than the androgynous René.

[23] Psychology professor Philip Hammack "described gay men who were born in the 1950s and 1960s as the AIDS 1 generation because they were 'probably the hardest hit by AIDS, given that they were at the peak of their sexually active lives when it was emerging'" (qtd. in Christopher n. pag.).

already familiar with Roman Catholicism as their parents were very devout. René Highway confirms, "they [priests] brainwashed a couple of generations of people into thinking that anything native and spiritual was evil. My mom and dad would say their rosaries every night and read their Bibles [in Woods Cree] every night" (Hannon, "Tomson Highway" 31). Tomson Highway tells of a priest in Brochet who "forbade all the old chants and dances. Whenever he heard that someone was having a clandestine gathering—even if he heard about it in the middle of the night—he'd get out of bed and he'd take a whip and he'd go over to that house and whip the people home" (Hannon, "Tomson Highway" 31). Both brothers would counteract colonisation by bringing Woods Cree stories to Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences, which I will discuss in *The Sage, the Dancer and the Fool* (1984) and *New Song. . .New Dance* (1988).

The Sage, the Dancer and the Fool

The Sage, the Dancer and the Fool was originally workshopped from January 30-February 3, 1984 at Toronto's Native Canadian Centre with Tomson Highway as the Sage / piano player, René Highway as the dancer / wîhtikow and their nephew Billy Merasty as the fool / wîsahkecâhk. I will be referencing the unpublished final draft of the 1984 version of the performance, which Tomson Highway allowed me to copy, to analyse an early depiction of urban Indigenous life.[24] *The Sage* is also an early autobiographical work by Tomson Highway as he chronicles the loneliness of working as

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[24] It was remounted in 1989 with Plains Cree actor Kennetch Charlette as the Sage, Alejandro Ronceria, an Indigenous dancer from Colombia, as the dancer, and Merasty as the Fool. René Highway also had a small part in the 1989 performance as he was focussing more on directing. The 1989 production was nominated for a Dora Mavor Moore award for Best New Play, Small Theatre Company.

a government bureaucrat in downtown Toronto. Tomson Highway stresses, "today, as an adult, I am urban by choice. So in order for these [Cree] myths to be relevant to my life, to my own system of spiritual beliefs I have to apply these myths to the realities of city living" (qtd. in Preston, "Weesageechack" 146-147). The main character experiences racism and hinted at homophobia in the city, but is not disconnected from his culture. Rather, his comic musings point out the absurdity and conformity of dominant Canadian society.

Both *The Sage* and *New Song…New Dance* reflect Native Earth's explicitly activist theatre:

> The social phenomenon of the "urban Indian" is a relatively new one. It was only in the late fifties and early sixties that Indian people began to migrate to Canada's cities in sizeable numbers, in search of better employment and living conditions, only to find all too often that dealing with an urban, 20th century reality presented its very own problems; alcoholism, family breakdown and general social deterioration were the results in all too many cases. The national stereo-type [sic] of "the drunken Indian" does in fact come from certain tragic factual situations. The work of Indian people themselves to rectify this unfortunate circumstance is work of crucial importance. And Native Earth is very much part of the "movement" of social and cultural rehabilitation. (T. Highway, *New Song Final Report* n. pag.)

Tomson Highway's work with the Native People's Resource Centre and with the Ontario Association of Indian Friendship Centres gave him insight into urban Indigenous issues.

Of course, René Highway and Tomson Highway's own experiences moving to Winnipeg and then to Toronto gave them a keen understanding of the difficulties faced by Indigenous peoples, challenges they repeatedly addressed in their work. However, the Highways brought their Wood Cree culture with them to the city, which, combined with their artistic and business acumen, enabled them to become integral to the burgeoning Indigenous performing arts scene in Canada.

The Sage is inspired by James Joyce's stream-of-consciousness novel, *Ulysses* but with an Indigenous twist. In the novel version of *Kiss of the Fur* Queen, Jeremiah asserts, "if James Joyce can do 'one day in in the life of an Irishman in Dublin, 1903,' why can't I do 'one day in the life of a Cree man in Toronto, 1984?" (277). Tomson Highway's experiences as an "arts / culture consultant with the Native Community Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture in Toronto" (*New Song . . . New Dance Programme* 2), are reflected in the script's only character—the sage, the dancer and the fool are the mind, the body and the spirit of a contemporary Woods Cree man living in Toronto. The sage and the fool sometimes complete each other's sentences or speak simultaneously, symbolising the unified nature of mind, body and spirit.

Tomson Highway's script and René Highway's choreography use the wîhtikow and wîsahkecâhk, Cree figures that will play a large role in Tomson Highway's work.[25] McLeod describes the wîhtikow as a monster that "consumes other beings [that] turns on

[25] Tomson Highway uses phonetic spelling for Cree words for easier pronunciation. I use Standard Roman Orthography in my spelling of Cree words.

others in its society, concerned only with its own well-being" (*Songs* 8).[26] While wîsahkecâhk is described as the genderless Cree trickster, McLeod translates wîsahkecâhk as "the elder brother; the transformer" (*Songs* 103), a distinction that I will discuss more in the section on Nanabush in *The Rez Sisters. The Sage* uses these Cree stories to highlight not only the continuance of Cree traditions, but also the emergence of new traditions in urban areas.

Tomson Highway also uses fragmented and overlapping voices to heighten the alienation of the Woods Cree man: "the overwhelming multitude of white faces" in the city stuns him, making him wonder, "am I not the stranger here?" (12). Delaware playwright Daniel David Moses, who saw the 1984 production, praises *The Sage*'s impressionistic staging. He explains, "the wealth, the torrent of urban detail the play presents, even inundates the audience with [and] the simplicity of the land, only deepens the longing, the nostalgia, the energetic confusion *The Sage, The Dancer and the Fool* expresses" (110). But while the Sage experiences racism and alienation in Toronto, he Indigenises the city with his musings.

The Sage finds the city uncanny as he walks to his office job with the sun on the "street—which is not mine—," as he comes from a "place far, far removed from this street. Yet there is a familiarity with this street that I feel creeping up upon my exterior being" (2-3). But he notes this is a "superficial kind of familiarity" (3), because of "this void between my non-being that is this endless stream of artificial rock between my feet and this realness that is my flesh" (7). The Sage is acutely aware of being Woods Cree as

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[26] McLeod notes "stories of the wîhtikow were especially common among the northern Cree" because "there was less food in the bush and people had to share in order to survive" (*Songs* 8).

he surveys a businessman, "a whiteman, I say to myself, as I stand there with the early morning light dripping down upon my Cree Indian brown skin" (12). In Woods Cree, the Sage describes himself: "Nee-ee-thow ooma nee-tha [I am Cree]" (10) on his way to his office desk on the fifth floor of an office building at the corner of Bay and Bloor. Tomson Highway also highlights the disconnection the Woods Cree man feels from himself. The Fool sees his "alter-ego" walking down Bloor Street with "the long black hair, the dark face with their deep set even darker eyes . . . eyes of Cree mystery. . . eyes of the distant North. . . I remember the beautiful beaded moccasins he / I used to wear in the land from which he / I am from . . . cutting a swathe of Cree Indian feeling across the unforgiving surfaces of this overpopulated concrete canyon" (12). Although the Cree man seems to be alienated from himself, he carries his language and culture within him.

Woods Cree culture and language forcibly enter the government office where the Cree man works. The Fool and wîsahkecâhk try to disrupt the workings of Canadian government business. Queer cinema historian Reg Hartt provides one of the few reviews of the 1984 production, describing the scene in which Merasty as the Fool[27] enters his office as an "inspired mime of a typist gone mad" (n. pag.) Confronted by a letter about a planning task force and the time constraints under which it operates, the Fool wonders how a poor Cree Indian from the distant North should respond:

> Dear Sir: we are very pleased to receive your memorandum telling us about the Planning Task Force and its fabulous adventures in the regions

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[27] Hartt, who was René Highway's roommate for a couple of years in the early 80s, describes Merasty's Fool as "a kind of gender shading that blends male and female postures" (n. pag.).

> to the west of us. Planning Task Forces, I swear to god, Sir, are one of my favourite things in life. Oh, I just love Planning Task Forces, I'm mad about Task Forces . . . And tell this Force that it can do anything with the Cree Indian it should ever wish to do. Thanking you for your interest ever so sincerely, the Fool Wee-sag-gee-chak in the City. (18-19).

Both the Sage and the Fool imagine wîsahkecâhk in the office "sitting there with his legs crossed and his leg swinging over the edge of the furniture like so and just sitting there smoking a cigarette and laughing chittering to himself . . . .Wee-sag-gee-chak is inside me" (23). The Fool answers the phone as wîsahkecâhk and he pierces the office air with his "foolish shrieking screeching kind of laughter and his gregarious green grin careens across the downtown office" (26). The Woods Cree man's co-workers, however, are oblivious to wîsahkecâhk's presence, marking the gulf between him and them.

The Sage continues to feel the gulf between himself and the city's non-Indigenous population as his day continues. During his lunch break, the Sage wonders "why they don't have a Cree Indian restaurant in the city" (33). The Woods Cree man remembers going to a chi-chi restaurant with his friends, where they notice they are not welcome because "our august Indian presence did not jive with the crowd that was there. . . .What was wrong with us? That we had blue jeans on? That we had black hair? That our eyes were brown, our cheek bones high, our skin the colour of smoked caribou hide?" (50). Hartt argues that the scene in which the Fool "describes eating in a restaurant which hurries him through his meal achieves a level of sadness but not self-pity (far from it) that is almost painful to bear" (n. pag.). In this scene René Highway plays the wîhtikow as a waiter, waiting to devour the Cree men's Indigeneity. According to Hartt, René

Highway's impersonation of the "Demon Spirit Weetigo that drives men to cannibalism is so powerful that I had found myself compelled to turn away from it" (n. pag.),[28] highlighting the strength and continuance of Woods Cree stories in the city.

Befitting a performance that includes a talented modern dancer, the Woods Cree man is saved by dance, which connects him with home. The archival copy of *The Sage* is René Highway's reading script, which includes his notes, underlinings and a choreographic diagram. According to the script, the dancer is a "dream, the dream" and "the spirit-catcher [who] beckons all—the Cree and the Ojibway and the white women and the white boys, all" (54), who expresses himself under the cloak of night time. Moreover, this inclusiveness is an example of the Highway brothers' use of contrast rather than conflict; they enact miyo-wîcêtowin—good relations or expanding the circle—to include even those from groups that oppress them. But the Woods Cree man is both seen and unseen by those around him. His dancing must still remain hidden—it is something he only feels comfortable doing in private. The Fool decides to start dancing for "all the Indians in Canada;" René Highway notes, "Ecstasy / dance" (59) as the Fool becomes more bold and begins a "dance of re-emergence" (61) that connects him to his territory in the North while he lives in the city.

The Sage doesn't come to an easy resolution. Moses affirms "this emotional reality, existing, so to speak, between the lines, in the contrast between the elements of the play that was Tomson Highway's—and René Highway's—theatrical accomplishment" (110). While the three parts of the Woods Cree man are very different,

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[28] René Highway wore a mask designed by Greenland Inuk performer Makka Kleist.

Tomson and René Highway do not show them in conflict; rather they muse together on their lives in Toronto. *The Sage* was unusual in its depiction of a Woods Cree man working as a Canadian government bureaucrat living a middle-class life in Toronto, but he uses Cree stories of wîsahkecâhk and wîhtikow to make sense of his urban existence.

The Rez Sisters

The Rez Sisters,[29] which premiered at Toronto's Native Canadian Centre on November 26, 1986, has now become a canonical play taught at university and included in anthologies of varying themes.[30] However, little has been written about the play's original runs with René Highway playing Nanabush and his creative decisions in the conception of the character. Using Cree and Anishinaabe conceptions of Nanabush and wîsahkecâhk, I will examine how René Highway created Nanabush, and his interpretation of the play using his unpublished choreographic notes, hand-annotated copy of *The Rez Sisters*, newspaper reviews and video of a 1987 performance.

Anishinaabe Elder Basil Johnston describes Nanabush as having "good intentions" but explains he "often fell short of carrying out his objectives" because "something always interposed itself between his intent and his fulfillment of it and resulted in mishap or indiscretion" (94). These failures are caused by his human shortcomings; "if he succeeded in accomplishing anything, such success was earned quite

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[29] I must note that George Kenny (Anishinaabe) adapted his novel *October Stranger* into a play, which premiered at the Todmorsden Mills Theatre in Toronto on July 29, 1978. (Kenny n. pag.). It was initially performed in 1977 at a theatre festival in Monaco. René Highway would play the lead role in the 1985 half-hour film version. I am unaware if René and Tomson Highway attended the Toronto show.

[30] Some of the anthologies are *Postcolonial Plays* (2001) and *Broadview Anthology of Drama Volume II* (2003).

by accident" (94). Tomson Highway defined Nanabush as "essentially a comic, clownish sort of character" (*Rez Sisters* XII). René Highway also describes Nanabush as "brilliant and godlike yet like the stupidest person on earth and goes on to say that even though he performed Nanabush as a contemporary figure, the Trickster never changes that much: 'He might look a little different but I think generally a Trickster is a Trickster. He's still as silly, and stupid and brilliant as ever, so I really don't think there is that much of a change, a difference'" (Preston, "Tomson Highway" 142). I argue, however, that René Highway's interpretation of Nanabush is more nuanced than simply portraying Nanabush as a buffoon.

Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe) affirms Nanabush's complexity. Nanabush is a "teacher and a healer. . .capable of violence, deception and cruelties. . .[H]e is comic in the sense he does not reclaim idealistic ethics. . .[H]e represents a spiritual balance in a comic drama rather than the romantic elimination of human contradictions and evil" (*People Called* 3-4). While Nanabush has the power to intervene in human affairs, he doesn't help any of the women win the bingo game, save the cancer-ridden Marie-Adele Starblanket from death or developmentally-delayed Zhaboonigan Peterson from her rape with a screwdriver by four white men. Contradiction is key to Nanabush; he behaves "more like a human being than a manitou" (Johnson 51), which explains some of Nanabush's seemingly inconsistent behaviour. Although Lina Perkins believes that *The Rez Sisters*' "emotional centre is not Nanabush himself but the ways in which other characters relate to him" (260), he is the sometimes unacknowledged core of the play.

Tomson Highway's "Notes on Nanabush" cites the Trickster "as pivotal and important a figure in the Native world as Christ in the realm of Christian mythology"

(*Rez Sisters* xii). His placing of Indigenous stories on an equal footing with Christian stories was subversive at the time. He also stresses that although "some say that 'Nanabush' left this continent when the whiteman came, we believe he is still here among us—albeit a little the worse for wear and tear—having assumed other guises" (*Rez Sisters* xii). Similarly, Johnston writes "no new stories have been made up [about Nanabush] for generations," which he blames on the "present generation's indifference to its language, traditions and heritage" (95). But René Highway's performance as Nanabush and his choreographic script notes show Nanabush's continued importance; Nanabush is still here.

Why, then, does Tomson Highway portray Nanabush instead of the Cree wîsahkecâhk? After all, he uses wîsahkecâhk in the original Cree version of the play, which was published in 2009. Tomson Highway notes that *The Rez Sisters* was workshopped at the "De-bah-jeh-me-jig Theatre Company, West Bay, Manitoulin Island, Ontario in February 1986 (*The Rez Sisters* x). Manitoulin Island is Anishinaabe territory, the Three Fires territory of the Odawa, Ojibway and Pottawatomi Nations, so Tomson Highway is respecting protocol by using Nanabush. The members of Tomson Highway's fictional Wasaychigan reserve are both Anishinaabe and Cree, which explains the use of Cree and some Anishinaabe in the play. And there are similarities between Nanabush and wîsahkecâhk. Robert Innes (Plains Cree) stresses that Elder Brother is "more than just a trickster; he really is the Cree / Ojibwe cultural hero" (34). McLeod stresses that wîsahkecâhk is mistakenly seen as trickster but is really a transformer (*Cree Narrative* 14), explaining Nanabush's change from a seagull to a nighthawk to the Bingo Master in the play. Tomson Highway is honouring wîsahkecâhk and Nanabush in *The Rez Sisters*,

but reinterprets these cultural heroes for urban Indigenous people, particularly 2LGBTQ people.[31]

Even though Tomson Highway positions Nanabush as a genderless character because of the lack of gender in nêhiyawêwin (the Cree language) and Anishinaabemowin (the Anishinaabe language), Nanabush and wîsahkecâhk are seen as male by other Indigenous people. The 2010 collection *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations* illustrates how these debates are still in flux, but as Kristina Fagan (NunavutKavut) explains these debates are informed by Indigenous literary nationalists' "call for cultural and historic specificity" ("What the Trouble" 14). For example, Fagan learned from Métis Elder and author Maria Campbell that "despite the lack of gendered pronouns in the Cree language, 'Elder Brother' is not genderless; he is a male who sometimes disguises himself as female." As such, Fagan points out that "Campbell's understanding of the Cree trickster challenges some of Highway's claims and the flurry of critical claims about the trickster's subversion of gender" (10). However, Highway's use of the trickster is strategic because "Highway and other gay Aboriginal artists may also have found the overt sexuality and gender-bending of some tricksters useful and appealing" (Fagan, "What's the Trouble" 13). Tomson Highway makes Nanabush female in *Dry Lips Ought to Move to Kapuskasing* (1989), which shows the trickster's gender variance. Clearly, the debate about the trickster is not settled, which is somehow befitting for the transformative and ever-changing cultural hero.

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[31] While outside of the focus of my dissertation, *The Rez Sisters*' Emily Dictionary is a queer character, who has a female fellow bike gang member as a lover.

For Tomson Highway, Nanabush and wîsahkecâhk provided a safe way to portray queerness, particularly in the 80s, a time of AIDS hysteria and the 1981 raid on Toronto bathhouses, in which 300 men were arrested.[32] Tomson Highway's trickster is campy, which is "surely connected to urban gay culture as well as to Cree culture" (Fagan, "What's the Trouble" 13). René Highway's Nanabush is masculine as he wears a white T-shirt, runners, and tight jeans that leave little doubt that Nanabush is male. Nanabush, while a mostly non-speaking part, embodies the bawdiness of the Cree language. Reviewers noted the "erotic élan" (Pennington n. pag.) of René Highway's performance. Tomson Highway describes The Bingo Master in *The Rez Sisters* as "the most beautiful man in the world. . .dressed to kill: tails, rhinestones, and all" (100). It is also the only time Nanabush, in the guise of the Bingo Master, speaks for an extended period and in English. René Highway plays the Bingo Master as a carny huckster, pirouetting while delivering his patter. The Bingo Master is firmly in charge of the game, helping Marie-Adele to her death.

The Rez Sisters, while fairly accessible to non-Indigenous audiences, was written for Indigenous audiences, following Native Earth's mandate "to encourage the use of theatre as a form of communication within the Native community, including the use of Native languages" (Preston, "Tomson Highway" 140). But while *The Sage* portrays

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[32] "Late on the evening of Thursday, Feb 5, 1981, hundreds of Toronto police conducted simultaneous raids on four of Toronto's most popular bathhouses, arresting more than 300 men. Conceived to send the city's newly visible gay community back to where it had come from, Operation Soap teetered on the edge of success. Fearing the worst but hoping for the best, activists who had shepherded their community's hesitant emergence as a political force called for a public protest the next evening at Yonge and Wellesley streets" (Hannon, "A City" n. pag.). While Tomson Highway was in Toronto at the time, René Highway may have been travelling around Europe.

urban Indigenous peoples, *The Rez Sisters* tells the story of seven sisters on the fictional Wasaychigan Hill reserve who go to the city hoping to fulfill their dreams.[33] Instead of the usual story of an Indigenous person going to the city to end up abused and addicted, the women's trip to Toronto is a big adventure that brings them closer together. René Highway describes the non-Indigenous audience's reaction: "First of all, they'd never seen all those Native people onstage, talking that way, sometimes in Cree, and then just the messages that are sent across to the audience, just blows them away; people just couldn't believe what these women were saying" (Preston, "Tomson Highway" 143). The women in the play are certainly not the stereotypical Indian princesses; their sheer force of will must have been a shock to most non-Indigenous audience members.

It is easy to forget how startling *The Rez Sisters* was when it was first performed. Although *The Rez Sisters* won Best New Play at the 1986 / 87 Dora Mavor Moore Awards, *The Mikado*—far from earthy or new—won the most awards. Drew Hayden Taylor stresses that *The Rez Sisters* "was like a breath of fresh air and something new, something interesting, something invigorating" (66). Non-Indigenous writers and producers had previously scripted roles for Indigenous peoples, such as the Lone Ranger's sidekick, Tonto, played by Jay Silverheels (born Harold J. Smith on the Six Nations of the Grand River reserve) and those played by Dan George (Tsleil Waututh), such as his role in *Little Big Man* (1970). *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* (1967) was one of the few plays in Canada that portrayed Indigenous lives, but was written by the Ukrainian-

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[33] *The Rez Sisters* was partially inspired by Quebecois playwright Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles-soeurs* (1965) about working class sisters. The play caused controversy because of the "language (a particularly raucous — some say vulgar — joual), and then because it dared to portray working class women doing working class things" (Charlebois n. pag.).

Canadian playwright George Ryga. *The Rez Sisters* was an emphatically Indigenous play, written with an Indigenous audience in mind.

Tomson Highway specifically wanted to show *The Rez Sisters* at the Native Canadian Centre to attract an Indigenous audience. He explains that in order for Native Earth Performing Arts to grow, "it's essential that a vision of the company spring spontaneously from the people it's supposed to represent" (qtd. in Mietkiewicz D1). The play's début caused quite a stir in Toronto's urban Indigenous communities. The December 1986 Native Canadian Centre newsletter highlights the audience's reaction: "The play is wonderfully written and has truly funny moments. Those of us who grew up on Indian reserves can relate to all of the characters in the play as being similar to people that we know. Surely every reserve has its version of the gossiping busybody. . . .Meegwetch to Tomson Highway for bringing the theatre to the Native community and making it more meaningful for us and for bringing 'the rez' to the city" (n. pag.). The newsletter goes on to note that attendees for opening night included critics and "Dennis Cromarty, Grand Chief of Nishnabe Aski; Gordon Peters from the Chiefs of Ontario; Roberta Jamieson, Indian Commissioner of Ontario; Gayle Mason and Myra Wabegijig from the Union of Ontario Indians; Tom Hill, Woodlands Indian Cultural Centre" (n. pag.) as well as Indigenous lawyers and bureaucrats. Native Earth was strategic in its invitations, as some of these people would have access to funding, which was imperative to an Indigenous performing arts organization.

René Highway's scrawled notes on the "Nanabush" page of his script show Nanabush's relationships with some of the women. "MA + ZHA equally important" shows that Zhaboonigan and Marie-Adele's stories are not hierarchical. Nanabush's

"slow motions" for Zhaboonigan shows tenderness towards the character. But what are most interesting are René Highway's motivations for Nanabush's characterisations for the women. For Marie-Adele, he writes, "put her out of her misery by killing her or healing her," showing that Nanabush had the capacity to save her but chose not to do so. For Zhaboonigan, René Highway writes, "put her out of her misery by killing her or healing / educating her" (XII). He also notes with an asterisk "Zha I was there for her rape" (xii). Nanabush was also discernible to Pelajia Patchnose because she is an elder. René Highway states that he would make eye contact with Pelajia during the performance and that she could feel his energy (Preston, "Tomson Highway" 72). However, while Pelajia laments Nanabush's disappearance, she doesn't connect Nanabush with the seagulls nor notice him dancing behind her at the end of the play.

Jeniva Berger's review of *The Rez Sister*'s 1987 run notes the change in Nanabush from the original 1986 production:

> In the earlier production, the spirit of the birdlike Nanabush, the Indian mythological poseur, was foreboding and intrusive as he pursued the dying Marie-Adele Starblanket. This time dancer Rene Highway takes a softer approach. Dressed in blue jeans and flitting seductively, there is little wonder that Marie-Adele, played so poignantly by Monique Mojica, succumbs. (n. pag.).

The use of the word poseur highlights the exhibitionist tendencies of the Trickster. But it also shows a lack of understanding of Nanabush; he is not simply affected nor is he a fake. Nanabush looks after himself first: he doesn't prevent Zhaboonigan's rape or Marie-Adele's death. René Highway's writes that Nanabush is "toying with" Marie-

Adele, and his interactions with her involve "life / death" (XII), highlighting Nanabush's manipulative impulses. René Highway's choreography for Veronique St-Pierre's monologues about using her bingo money to buy a new stove has him seated at her feet, while he exaggeratedly mimics her moves to much audience laughter. However, he also creeps up behind her, placing his hands around her throat. Nanabush is funny,[34] but also dangerous.

During Zhaboonigan's account of her rape by white men, René Highway underlines her words addressed to Nanabush, such as "I know who you are" and "I saw you before. There" (47). His notes show the care he took with choreographing his (and the other characters') movements: "Touch, she can't bear to be touched, do I touch her" (47). The stage directions state that during this speech, Nanabush goes through "agonizing contortions" (48). In the video, René Highway movements are indeed anguished as he stands and writhes above the seated Zhaboonigan. Nanabush feels her anguish but is not strong enough to stop it. People on the rez need to believe in him more so he can again actively intervene in this world.

René Highway's interpretation of Marie-Adele's death scene (104) is stunning (see fig. 1). Critic Frank Rasky writes, "Starblanket never does find her cure. Instead, she dies and dreams of being 'carried away on the wings' of Nanabush the trickster raven[35] of the spirit world (played beautifully by dancer-choreographer Rene Highway)" (Rasky

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[34] Liz Pogue writes of René Highway, when "he first prances into the scene, it's as though something out of a 1960's Fellini film had wandered into a sitcom set" (26).
[35] Raven is a West Coast trickster, not an Anishinaabe one.

48). Marie-Adele lies on the bingo platform, with her head hanging off the edge, overcome by Nanabush's seduction as he lifts up her dress with his teeth.

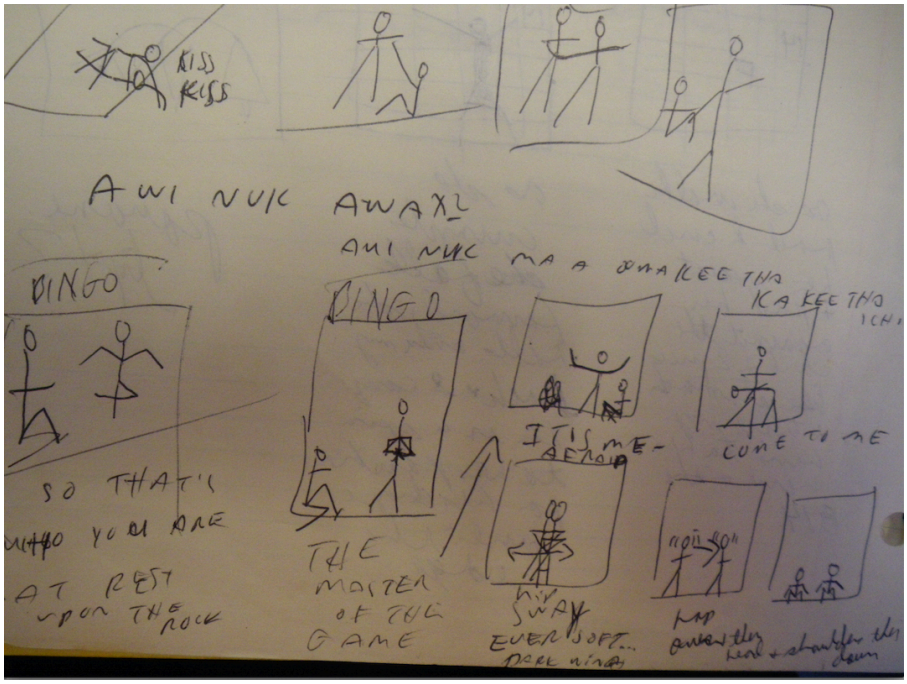

Figure 1: René Highway. Choreography Notes. 1976-1990. n.d. MS René Highway Collection. U of Guelph.

He dances with her as she is dying, lifting her up on his shoulders. René Highway's diagrams for the scene shows him as the Bingo Master (dressed in satin tuxedo and pants) in front of a large bingo card (see fig. 2). His notes read: "as she walks back I circle her waist & push her against the card I press her stomach & trace my hand to her hand & the B14 as she crumples she falls forward, she falls onto my back & I carry her in a spin to her position for her drape over the edge" ("Choreography Notes" n. pag.). While the dance is sensually beautiful, for "Nanabush, death and violence are not frightening concepts to be ignored at all costs—quite the opposite. . . .Death, the final 'game' of which Nanabush is master, arises out of the chaos and banality of the bingo hall" (Perkins 266).

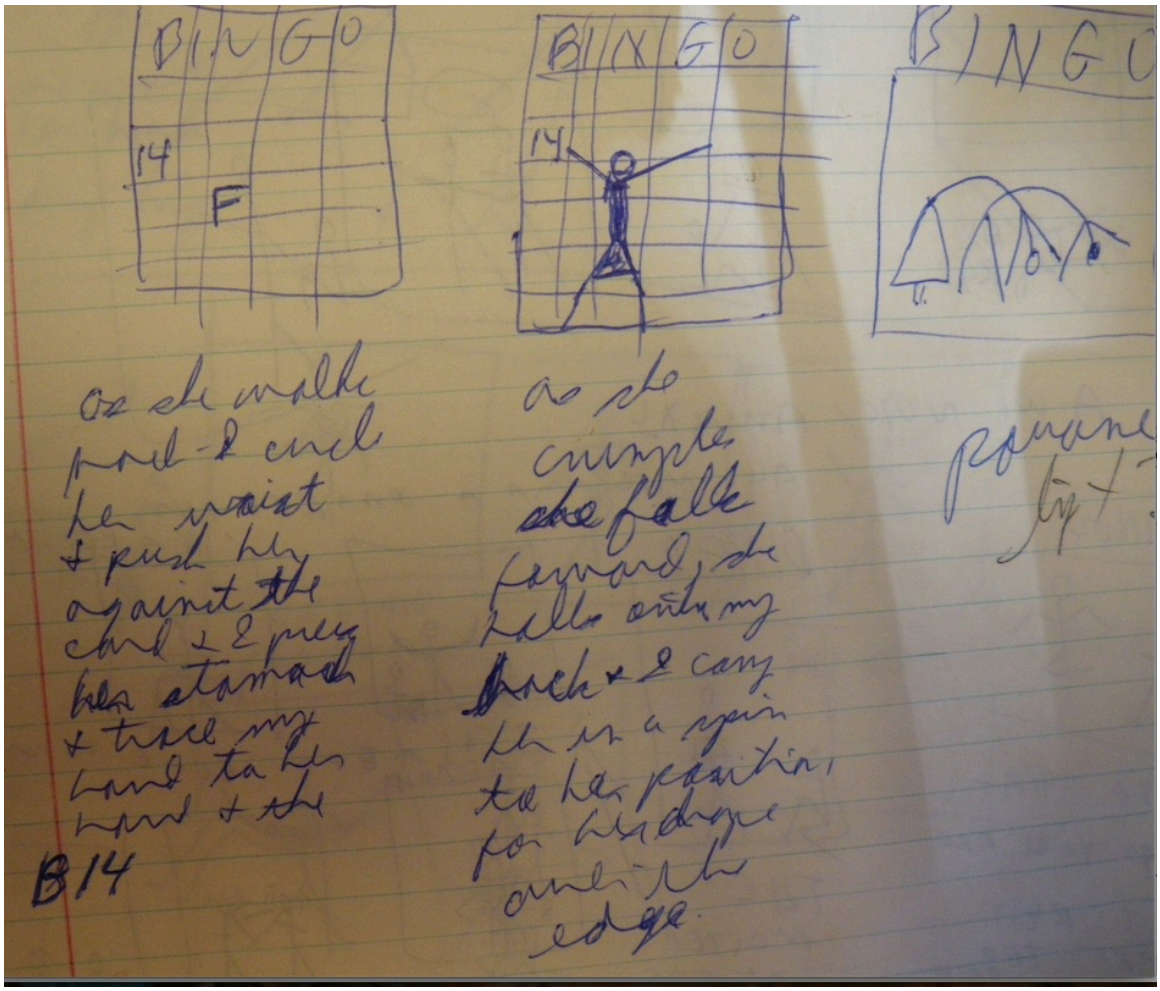

Figure 2: René Highway. Choreography Notes. 1976-1990. n.d. MS René Highway Collection. U of Guelph

René Highway states that Marie-Adele pursues Nanabush in his note: "her pursuit of me" (*Rez Sisters* 104). Speaking in Cree, Marie-Adele accepts that Nanabush is the "master of the game," asking him to "take me. . . come and get me," and acquiesces to his "beautiful soft . . . darkwings" (*Rez Sisters* 104). Marie-Adele has cancer; Nanabush causes her death but offers an act of compassion by taking her away from her pain.

Although most mainstream reviewers appreciated Nanabush, some had decidedly mixed feelings. René Highway's Nanabush is very active, highlighting how Nanabush can intervene in the human world if he chooses to do so. He throws laundry around the

stage during the fundraising scene, rearranges furniture, high fives and tickles and gooses the women with a white feather as they march to the band council office. Nanabush is an attention-seeking buffoon whose behaviour is motivated by a need to remind people on the rez about traditional ways. Some critics liked Nanabush's presence. The *Toronto Star*'s Henry Mietkiewicz wrote, "Even the constant presence of the spirit Nanabush (a graceful, enchanting Rene Highway), who embodies both the breath of life and the stroke of death, fully complements the women's traits and never seems like an intrusion" (D24). A few thought he was overdone. The *Globe and Mail*'s Ray Conlogue believed "he is on stage too much to preserve a sense of mystery. He could have been more effectively used" (C5), a decision he attributed to director Larry Lewis. However, Conlogue praised René Highway's performance: "The cast is rounded out by Rene Highway, a dancer who plays the spirit Nanabush. His movement is clean, alert and lyrical in a nicely understated fashion" (C5).

Cree author Beth Cuthand's 1988 review for the *Saskatchewan Indian* newspapers highlights the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous reactions to Nanabush:

> While Tomson Highway takes a risk with the characterization of Zhaboonigan, he takes a flying leap off a high cliff with his depiction of Nanabush. For those of us who were raised on stories of the trickster, Nanabush is easily accepted as a sea gull, a seducer, a fast talking Bingo cryer and the one who takes you to the other side. But to mainstream theatre goers in this country, the Character of Nanabush is at worst an irritating ambiguity and at best a mystery which they willingly admit they don't understand. (18)

In Cuthand's estimation, *The Rez Sisters* is a deeply Indigenous play, which explains Tomson Highway's decision to have the play début at the Native Canadian Centre.[36] As Tomson Highway explains, Indigenous dance symbolises "the interrelationship between the spirit world and the world of the living. . . .That balance was tipped when the Canadian government and the Catholic Church told Native people that they could no longer dance. . . .Dance is a metaphor for being, so if we cannot dance, we cannot pray" (qtd. in Hodgson 2). Both *The Rez Sisters* and *The Sage* end with dance: Nanabush, again a seagull, landing "on the roof behind the unaware and unseeing Pelajian Patchnose. He dances to the beat of the hammer, merrily and triumphantly" (118), signalling the strength of the women in the play and of Oji-Cree traditions.

New Song . . .New Dance

René and Tomson Highway's 1988 remount of 1982's[37] *New Song. . .New Dance* foregrounds the urban alienation of Indigenous peoples in the city, particularly the experiences of residential school attendees. René Highway states, "on some level it is autobiographical. . .But is more like a general autobiography of not just myself but of other native people who have been through the whole boarding school experience—having grown up in that atmosphere, after being sent away from home at a very young

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[36] And as the play was inspired by Tomson Highway's bingo-loving mother and her sisters, it was only fitting that his parents were able to attend a performance: "When it opens in Winnipeg Wednesday at the Warehouse Theatre the audience will include about 75 residents of Brochet, about 1,200 kilometres northwest of Winnipeg. His parents Joe and Pelagie Highway, who speak little English, will witness their first play" (Prokosh, "Writer" 30).

[37] Produced by Tomson Highway, the 1982 version featured René Highway with four dancers with the perceptive reviewer Michael Crabb noting, "Highway's own intensely concentrated, impassioned dancing is an added bonus" ("Dancing Spirit" C3).

age, where they are boxed in and made to absorb certain things that they have no idea about" (qtd. in Jung 65). Choreographed by René Highway and danced by him, Ronceria and Trujillo[38] with music by Tomson Highway, *New Song* explicitly addresses abuse at residential school, but also the joy of reversing the disastrous effects of colonization through connection to spirit and Woods Cree language. Trujillo confirms "René Highway was dancing his exploration into modern dance using Native ideas and legends, and trying to create a new movement language based on his emotional experience of coming from a remote reserve, from residential school, etc" (24). René Highway's choreography, particularly in *New Song. . .New Dance*, reminds us that "bodies are not merely physical entities" but are "sites of both colonized conflict and passionate decolonization" **(**Justice, "Go Away"161), decolonisation he shares with the audience at the Native Canadian Centre.

Tomson Highway writes in his *Final Report* to the Explorations Programme of the Canada Council, "at a time when many Toronto theatres were playing at about 30% capacity, we were doing business at 70-75% capacity. Our projected box office was $4,000; we cleared $6,405, the first time we've actually gone over in the entire history of Native Earth" (T. Highway, *New Song Final Report* n. pag.). *New Song's* success highlighted the importance of Indigenous theatre as a forum for Indigenous people to confront colonisation, particularly residential school abuses. Tomson Highway goes on to describe the production:

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[38] Monique Mojica (Kuna and Rappahannock) describes René Highway, Ronceria and Trujillo in *New Song* as "the three drums, three moons, three hearts: North, Central and South America" (91).

> NEW SONG. . .NEW DANCE enables us to explore the realm of theatre that utilizes pure movement almost exclusively. We did, however, utilize other elements as well. The dancers spoke: recited poetry in simultaneous and solo voices as well as actual dialogue, all in the Cree language (a translation was provided in the programme for our audience), a context of performance that has never been seen in Toronto ever before. . .The musical score also incorporated elements of traditional Cree drumming and chanting: the dancers played and danced with caribou-hide hand drums, to great effect. (T. Highway, *New Song Final Report* n. pag.)

Tomson Highway highlights the contemporaneity of *New Song* with its mixture of avant-garde music, Woods Cree language, and caribou hand drums. Native Earth Performing Arts, under Tomson Highway's artistic direction, pushed to expand the boundaries of Indigenous theatre in Canada. The so-called traditional and the contemporary are not binaries: "This is why we are exploring new areas of possibility with such experimental pieces as 'NEW SONG. . .NEW DANCE.' In other words, we continue to do 'straight' drama, but also continue to push into new areas of theatrical expression, to expand our horizons to the limit" (T. Highway, *New Song Final Report* n. pag.).

The following discussion analyses based on a performance from its March 23 – April 2, 1988 run and the nineteen boxes of choreography files in the University of Guelph's René Highway collection to consider how René Highway confronts colonisation by using Woods Cree ways of knowing. *New Song* is a three-part dance performance. The first segment "Andante," shows the effects of residential school and the city on Indigenous peoples. The second part, "Largo," René Highway describes as

showing how "after the hurt and abuse of part one the dancer seeks healing. We see him in the form of an animal spirit by the water where he dreams" (R. Highway, *Video Note* n. pag.). The third part "Kachina," is based on the southwestern spirit figures that René Highway encountered while performing at the *Navajoland Festival of the Arts*[39] in Fort Defiance Arizona in 1981 and in 1982, which René Highway describesas a celebration of survival: "The dancers enter the space carrying bowls of fire and smoke, praying. The smoke is caught in shafts of projected light. They wear feathers encased in plastic, symbols of old and new" (R. Highway, *Video Note* n. pag.). "Andante" and "Largo" include Tomson Highway as wîsahkecâhk playing the piano.

René Highway struggled with others' expectations of an Indigenous dancer. While he experienced mamahtâwisiwin with the caribou herd, René Highway also makes it clear that colonisation, especially residential school, made it difficult to reconnect to his Woods Cree culture:

> When people ask me about traditional elements in dance, they automatically think of native dancing with modern dance stuff thrown in. But that's not what I wanted to do, because it is too predictable. When people expect things I get quite upset, because they look at it as a natural process. But I don't think it is, because of our background and what we've been through. Our spirit is the traditional element, and the tools we use today to express it are the modern elements. That is the connection. The

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[39] René Highway's choreographic work at the *Navajoland Festival for the Arts* was intertribal: "They had never really seen the fusing of two cultural forms into one expression—the Native culture with modern dance technique. It was also Cree and Navaho coming together" (R. Highway "Talking with" 16).

> whole point of the show is using tools of the modern-day world to portray the history of our spirit and combine the two. (qtd. in Jung 65)

Clearly, neither brother saw a separation between technology and spiritualty, between the ancient and the contemporary. The Highways were creating oskisihcikêwak, new traditions, in Indigenous performing arts, as Tomson Highway explains, reflected in the importance of his brother as a choreographer and as a director: "In Rene Highway, the choreographer, we are witnessing the emergence of what may be Canada's very first recognized, accredited choreographer. On top of that, it is thought by the theatre community in this city that here we may have a brand new director as well. Indian playwrights are a rare breed indeed; Indian directors are even more of rarity. We need these people desperately" (T. Highway, *New Song Final Report* n. pag.).

New Song's opening prologue is described by René Highway: "There are three dancers, the first is in a fetal position representing a beginning[,] he rises and sees his end the dancer under the cloth. Life and death at a glance. The first dancer mourns then rises to see his future the dancer behind the cloth. The only light is projected starlight. The cloth rises to turn to smoke" (R. Highway, "Video Note" n. pag.). Dance scholar Penelope Doob sees the "Andante" as dream-like as the three dancers are discovered naked and "bathed in light, enveloped in mists: they pass from this primal innocence to don the numbered pajamas of an alien civilization that evokes the prison or the boarding school. Excrement and the excrescence of Western clothes—ties, underwear, shirts, belts—are comically linked" (C9). However, as René Highway's notes indicate, while there is humour in the dancers' inability to navigate alien clothing, there are considerable tension and anger in the portrayal of residential schools and the city. It's also hard not to

think of René Highway's HIV+ / AIDS status as he symbolically goes into the light, as effective antiretroviral drugs were not available until 1996, six years after his death.

Although Rene Highway's choreography notes are fragmentary, they give an indication of his intentions for the "Andante" part of *New Song.* He states, "the first part [Andante] explores the alienation of natives who were sent to boarding school" (qtd. in DiManno E10). René Highway describes the "Andante" in his notes:

-Part I [Andante]-opening

-shamers [?]

-little boys at play and prayer

-dressing up

-longing

-hanging addiction / desire

-little boys grow up

-neck tie abuse

-shit/washroom sex

-shit in face

-bondage

-little boys

-shaming

-fright play

-alone near

-slapped down

-dressing (excerpts)

-fear in fray huddle

-abuse carnly [carnally?] on belt

-paving [?]/addiction/desire

-bondage

-little boys tied up (n. pag.)

In both his notes and in his performance, René Highway captures the extreme alienation of Indigenous people in residential school and in the city. He shows the horrors of residential school in phrases like "shaming," "little boys at play and prayer" and "slapped down." "Bondage," "shit / washroom sex," "shit in face" are more oblique, but gesture toward the intersections between pain and pleasure experienced by Gabriel in *Kiss of the Fur Queen.*

René Highway, Trujillo and Ronceria shuffle on stage, dressed in blue pajamas with white cloth squares with numbers on the back of their pajamas, a reference to residential school that the audience at the Native Canadian Centre would have understood. Although they wear pajamas, they are free to explore the world around them, including their burgeoning sexuality and sexual longing. The dancers stand in a circle, with their hands over their genitalia; with gleeful cries they flash their penises to each other to the loud laughter of the audience. The dancers then crouch with their backs to the audience and loudly shit out blue piece of cloth, which they then put their face in and push towards the audience. They humorously struggle to put on white clothing, such as underwear and socks over their pajamas accompanied by loud, child-like noises; they roll around because of the difficulties of putting on the foreign clothes, again accompanied by audience laughter.

The mood then shifts in "Andante" as the little boys experience shaming and being "slapped down" in the most striking image of *New Song*. One of the dancers[40] strikes a crucifixion pose with René Highway and the other dancer kneeling and praying on either side of the crucified Christ. This image causes a tension in the audience that is palpable, even through video. René Highway's choreography speaks directly to an Indigenous audience, many of whom would have gone to residential school. The "Andante" section goes on to show the struggles of Indigenous peoples in the city, including oblique references to washroom sex as the dancers again squat with their backs to the audience but this time they feel each others' asses. René Highway, Trujillo and Ronceria effectively show the jaggedness and competitiveness of mainstream society as they crash into each other and hit each other, forming a "fear in fray huddle." They become entangled in their clothing, including their newly acquired ties, which René Highway calls "neck-tie abuse." "Andante" uses bondage to describe the pain Indigenous people in the city experience. The segment ends with dancers hobbled by their shirts underwear around their ankles, their arms bound by their shirts.

René Highway states that while "Andante" is "about being hurt physically and psychologically," the "Largo" section that follows "is about healing ourselves on a deep spiritual level" (DiManno E10). He describes Tomson Highway's Cree lullaby: "Then it goes into what I call a healing level. After being hurt and abused and almost destroyed by that experience, it goes back to a level where you know something—where you come from and what feels good to you—and can heal and control your life. It's a base to stand

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[40] Due to the video quality and the age of the small TV monitor in the archives, it wasn't always clear which dancer was where. Luckily, René Highway's Ziggy Stardust haircut made him easy to spot.

on" (qtd. in Jung 65). It is important to note that René Highway uses abuse to describe the "Largo" portion; he didn't shy away from confronting the abuse Indigenous peoples in Canada face, both in residential school and in the city. René Highway goes on to explain that nature is a place to make yourself strong again because it is a magical place "where you can experience things that are powerful, such as being visited by spirits and receiving the gift of strength from them" (Jung 65), a continuance of his mamâhtâwisiwin. The "Largo" portion of *New Song* reflects the magical qualities that René Highway talks about as the dancers wear colourful unitards "suggesting abstractions of natural images, and their gestures and vocalizing hint at the worlds of forest and river" (Doob C9). René Highway begins the Largo dressed as a fox with a tail, cleaning himself by a stream, an example of René Highway's choreographic style which emphasized feeling and spiritual connection (qtd. in Jung 65).

The healing and magic depicted in this segment of *New Song* is steeped in Woods Cree language and culture. René Highway's choreography notes mention "singing / totem" "dreaming / Cree," "drum eagles" and "sing 4 directions." Furthermore, all three dancers recite a Cree poem written by Tomson Highway in one of the most moving parts of the performance. They lie next to each other, parallel to the stage and stretch and contract, paw at the air, awakening from a dream while making animal vocalisations. René Highway arises first, stepping over Trujillo and Ronceria while reciting the poem, which in included in the house programme[41] in syllabics and in English:

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[41] The 1982 house programme notes that the theme of Part II of *New Song* is taken from "an old lullaby Cree mothers in northern Manitoba-Saskatchewan have sung to their children for ages." The poem is also one of Tomson Highway's first published works, written while he worked as "arts / culture consultant with

Time when there was a song,

Song for a time…

Sky and the lake were that song,

Bending grass, the living earth that song;

I remember there was a wind that wakened me,

Light was everywhere…

Time, a pulse that coaxed my blood

Into a movement, there was this dance…

Time come forward now

That touches me, envelops me;

Sky and the lake, yes, but a newness comes,

Windy field, the moistness of the soil,

With a strangeness, the light is brighter now,

There is a song now…

My blood moves still, there is a dance now…

New dance to new song. (n. pag.)

The poem echoes René Highway's experiences with animal energy. Furthermore, while the song is intimately tied to René and Tomson Highway's northern Manitoba childhood of many lakes, time is elastic as the dance of bending grass and living earth carries forward to nurture the brothers' urban life in Toronto and Winnipeg, particularly their

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the Native Community Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture" (*New Song…New Dance 1982 Programme* 2).

artistic works, a newness that is still connected to their land-based childhood. In fact the light is brighter now as "my blood moves still / but to the new time, there is a dance now" (*New Song 1982 Programme*). However, the poem is not completely celebratory as the light is both brighter and stranger, connecting and disconnecting with traditional territory even while a new song and a new dance are received and embraced.

"Largo" reflects the difficulties and rewards of connecting to culture in the city. The three dancers hold caribou hide drums. René Highway holds his drum, whispering in Cree while the drums are lit from behind as they are held aloft. At first, René Highway, Ronceria and Trujillo are unsure how to use their drums; their drumming is atonal and out of sync. But they start drumming together, then stopping together at regular intervals to make tableaux. They follow each other, loping quickly, their drumming becoming quicker. What is striking about this segment is the apparently Dene-style drumming, which is quick, using a stick instead of a padded drumstick; however, the drums are not as large as Dene drums but rather Cree-inspired.[42] Tomson Highway notes that the Barren Lands First Nation, of which the village of Brochet is a part, was really Dene. The Cree were latecomers to the area, with Tomson Highway's parents and older siblings speaking both Dene and Cree (T. Highway, *A Tale* 5-6). René Highway was also inspired by the drumming style used in both Dene and Woods Cree hand games. Trujillo also notes, "René Highway was really fascinated with bringing drumming into the work" (28). The

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[42] René Highway mentions that in his dance piece *Round Dance*, "I used movement I saw people use on my reserve during a game they played called The Hand Game; they would play drums to enhance the intensity of the game. I also love watching people play and work together" ("The Indian Legend" 43). The archive also includes black and white video of René Highway playing a hand drum and choreographing four dancers in a stylised hand game in 1978 at the Toronto Dance Theatre. Some of this choreography would be used in *New Song*.

segment ends with René Highway holding his backlit drum so it looks like the sun or moon as the lighting fades to black.

The third segment, "Kachina," is inspired by René Highway's time in Fort Defiance, Arizona in 1981, where he choreographed Diné dancers,[43] and uses the "simple, linear Hopi style of dancing" with its running steps (qtd. in Jung 65) to, in René Highway's words, "digest the problems of the first section, through the magic of the second section, and coming up with an answer of what we can do with ourselves and our imaginations" (qtd. in Jung 65). René Highway, Trujillo and Ronceria dance in sync before crouching behind the three drums propped up stage front, evoking Thunderbirds or Thunderers, avatars of strong and powerful thunderstorms. Anishinaabe Elder and writer Basil Johnston shared how thunderbirds "were beings of mystery and power and good" who tend to "Mother Earth's health and well-being" and who also "were manitous to be feared" (120-21). René Highway uses this powerful image in the third part of *New Song* to show the strength of Indigenous peoples in spite of the assimilative assault of residential schools. As René Highway stressed before, however, attending residential school enabled him to be a dancer; his experience both endangered and empowered him.

New Song ends with satirically humorous elements. As Penelope Doob remarks, "Its blend of intensity, sincerity and sheer mischief (the all-pervading spirit of the Trickster Weesageechak, a.k.a. Coyote or Raven) is novel and compelling" (C8). Crouched beside their drums, the dancers poke fun at the misconceptions white people

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[43] René Highway pushed the Diné dancers to engage with modern dance: "In Arizona they weren't used to modern dance, and they had trouble with the demands I placed on them. But I did manage to pull performances together, and people liked them. They had never really before seen the fusing of two cultural forms into one expression—the Native culture with modern dance techniques" (René Highway, Citron 16).

have of Indigenous peoples to the laughter of the audience. René Highway circles in a pretend war dance and poses with his ass out, and then shakes it at the audience. Trujillo pretends to do a war dance, ending with an elaborate bored yawn. Ronceria collapses like a marionette without strings. René Highway inquisitively hits him with his drumstick to put him back in shape, then hits his groin and ass faster and faster so it looks like he's having sex, to the raucous laughter of the audience. As Paul Ogresko notes in his review, "There is little of what people have come to assume is Native dancing; stereotypes are assaulted and mocked and new boundaries of Native expression are sought" (10). Similarly, Doob acknowledges that "*New Song. . .New Dance* offers a thoughtful if still imperfect attempt to combine the bedrock of ritual with the luxuriant overgrowth of theatrical dance, wedding spirituality into art and establishing a sympathetic community between performer and audience" (C9). Doob also notices the connection between performer and audience, a relationship that René Highway strove to make in his performances, his mamâhtâwisiwin shared with the audience.

René Highway uses the auditorium of the Native Canadian Centre to create share his Woods Cree language and culture with urban Indigenous peoples. At the age of twenty-one, René Highway wrote, "I am encouraging myself to participate in, and thereby learn, techniques employed by our Native ancestors, so that, someday, I will be able to incorporate my heritage into my own personal expression. In other words, I am looking back, to my past, as well as forward to my future" ("Modern Dance" 14). While René Highway experienced severe cultural shock and sexual abuse at residential school, he lived an exceptional life. Yvette Nolan (Anishinaabe) suggests that Indigenous theatre artists "make medicine by. . . reconnect[ing] who we are as Indigenous peoples with

where we have come from, with our stories, with our ancestors," (3) ideas that René Highway embodied in his work by using his art as a way to assert Woods Cree ways of knowing, as they were in the past and are now.

CHAPTER TWO

"This show won't mean anything without the people:" wâhkôhtowin in the *Kiss of the Fur Queen* Movie Treatment

In a scene from Tomson Highway's unpublished 1992 movie treatment[44] of the *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (1998) novel, Pamela Buckskin (Amanda Clearsky, Jeremiah's love interest in the novel) and Simon[45] Okimasis (Gabriel Okimasis in the novel) try out the script for *The Theft of Children*[46] "at a sleazy dive of a bar. . .on a bunch of Indian street drunks, having them read the various parts, to much hilarity" (52). While it is unclear whether Simon, Pamela or their amused collaborators say the parenthetical words "This show won't mean anything unless it comes from 'the people'" (52), Simon, his brother playwright Jeremiah (Jeremiah is used in both versions) and Pamela see a connection between their play and the larger Indigenous community in Toronto. Like Tomson Highway's insistence that the initial run of *The Rez Sisters* be performed at Toronto's Native Canadian Centre (Mietkiewicz D1) for an Indigenous audience, Simon, Pamela and Jeremiah ground their theatre productions as wâhkôtowin, "the Cree value of kinship or interrelatedness" (Reder, "Âcimisowin" ii). Through wâhkôhtowin, the brothers, both

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[44] A film or movie treatment can be "a lengthy document that is a scene by scene breakdown of a script," as in the sixty-page *Kiss* (Horowitz n. pag.). A movie treatment is the step before a complete screenplay, which contains complete dialogue, and descriptions of locations and camera shots.

[45] Like Simon Starblanket in *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* (1989), Simon Okimasis is the most culturally connected character.

[46] *The Theft of Children*, inspired by *Sweeney Todd*, is a "musical about a priest / barber who steals Indian children, bakes their flesh in pies and, claiming these pies are made with the choicest of northern Manitoba caribou meat, sells the pies to convents and seminaries across the country" (51).

fictional and real, engage with various communities to create art that exposes residential school abuses and foreground Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, trans and queer (2LGBTQ) rights. By comparing the changes between Simon and Gabriel, I argue that wâhkôhtowin is essential for Simon to actively criticise colonisation, homophobia and residential school. Gabriel, who seems to lack such an extended supportive kinship network, which includes his brother, articulates racism and homophobia, but doesn't confront the forces behind them. Winona Wheeler (Plains Cree) explains that because "most Indigenous cultures are collectively-oriented, individual stories reflect concern for community welfare" (266). While working outside of heteropatriarchy is powerful, the movie treatment shows that collective action is even more effective. Although the novel includes Woods Cree stories and ways of knowing, the treatment's portrayal of an outspoken, assertive HIV+ gay Woods Cree dancer was potentially path-clearing.

wâhkôhtowin means kinship beyond the immediate family or the state of being related ("wâhkôhtowin"). For example, Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) defines kinship as "an understanding of a common social independence within the community. . .a tribal web of kinship that link the People, the land, and the cosmos together in an ongoing and dynamic system of mutually affecting relationships" ("Go Away" 151). Emotion is important to Justice's formulation of kinship. Relationships with other people and other-than-human beings are based on reciprocity, an integral part of kinship responsibility. For Simon and Jeremiah, their family encompasses Toronto's Indigenous theatre community, a family that nurtures them, especially Simon as a gay Woods Cree man. While it is obvious that Simon and Jeremiah's (and Gabriel and Jeremiah's) Roman Catholic parents love them very much, the brothers are unable to tell their parents that they are gay. To

support their adult selves in the city, they must form a kinship network based on artistic and emotional bonds, but they also honour wâhkôhtowin by mentoring other Indigenous performing artists.

The novel and the treatment follow the same general trajectory, but use very different narratives to tell Simon and Gabriel's stories. Simon, who is also gay, and Jeremiah, who is also straight, are born in northern Manitoba to semi-nomadic, Cree speaking and Roman Catholic parents, abused physically and sexually at residential school (although only Simon's abuse is depicted), and become artists in the city. Like René and Tomson Highway, Simon / Gabriel and Jeremiah overcome aggressive assimilation to become renowned artists.

I became aware of the treatment while working in the René Highway collection at the University of Guelph archives, and given my interest in René Highway's own choreographic and performance work, was intrigued by the profound differences between his portrayal as the sexually masochistic Gabriel in the novel and as Simon, who has a more conventionally monogamous relationship, in the movie treatment. My research on the Highway brothers prompts me to conclude that the movie treatment is much more autobiographical than the novel. The treatment's use of real names—Joe and Pelagie, René and Tomson Highway's parents' real names, instead of Abraham and Mareisis, and Brochet, their reserve located in northwestern Manitoba, instead of Mistik Lake—inspires a more nonfictional reading. Tomson Highway even portrays the real-life Guy Hill residential school that he and his brother attended.

Tomson Highway first mentions the project that led to the novel in a March 1991 article: "Tomson Highway's beginnings are in him still. Theatrical, marvelous

beginnings. Call them, he says, The Kiss of the Fur Queen" (Hannon, "Tomson Highway" 28). In 1992, two years after René Highway's death, Tomson Highway turned these beginnings into a play script, then into a treatment for two-part television movie (Stoffman E4). Unable to have the movie produced, Tomson Highway then made *Kiss* into a novel. While critics like Sam McKegney have recounted the various iterations that led to the novel, the unpublished movie treatment hasn't been analysed until now.

The major differences between the movie and novel versions of *Kiss* can be partly explained by genre. *Kiss* was originally conceived as a stage play, then a made-for-TV movie, neither of which Tomson Highway was able to produce (Posner C1). The movie treatment reflects *Kiss'* first iteration as a stage play. Movie treatments usually have brief scenes, sometimes only in bullet form, whereas Tomson Highway's treatment is sixty pages long, containing dialogue and scene descriptions. He reveals that he thought "about writing a non-fiction memoir, but it seemed too far-fetched. . . . Then I tried to write it as a stage play,[47] then as a movie. I actually did four drafts of a script but my way was blocked. Finally, I did it the only way possible" (qtd. in Stoffman E4) by making *Kiss* a novel.

It is significant that the *Kiss* movie treatment began as a stage play, which explains its more collective nature. While Tomson Highway may have encountered difficulty finding an Indigenous director at that time, a fictionalised first-hand account of residential school in the early 1990s would have been revelatory. Of course, television

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[47] The scenes in the movie treatment are written more like a play, which is not surprising given Tomson Highway's work as a playwright. Thanks to Tasha Hubbard (Plains Cree) and Ric Knowles for explaining the unusual nature of the *Kiss* treatment at the 2015 Indigenous Literary Studies Association gathering.

would have provided an ideal medium for reaching a large audience. Tomson Highway states "for once or twice I'd like to take a show into every living room in Brochet and to every reserve into the country. You can only do that with television" (Prokosh, "Highway of Hope" C28). Tomson Highway positions his audience as Indigenous communities, especially ones that are not able to see his theatrical productions (Prokosh C28), both in remote communities and in the city.

Tomson Highway describes the proposed "four hour miniseries" as a "a semi-autobiographical drama of epic proportions, opening with grand shots of caribou herds in the North and moving to lavish scenes of professional theatrical productions in Toronto" (Gessell, "Playwright" D4). It is highly unlikely that Gabriel's sexual experiences would have been portrayed on TV in the early 90s or even on network TV today.[48] Moreover, that two gay Woods Cree brothers became highly successful artists is a remarkable story. Of course, making both brothers gay in the early 1990s may have stretched the bounds of belief even more. But, if Tomson Highway was writing the treatment for Indigenous audiences, both rural and urban, then the more autobiographical nature is a sharing of his experiences with people that had to attend residential school. Like *The Theft of Children*, Tomson Highway's movie would have enacted wâhkôhtowin by bringing together an Indigenous audience across Canada. Residential school survivors would see their stories reflected on TV. But what is equally ground-breaking would have been the portrayal of a

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[48] A made-for-TV movie about residential school wasn't without precedent. The 1989 CBC TV movie, *Where the Spirit Lives*, tells the story of a Blackfoot girl in residential school. That *Where the Spirit Lives* had both a white director and screenwriter was controversial for many Indigenous artists, including Tomson Highway, who "didn't like the film. . . .I thought the issue of residential schools was treated insensitively in the film I walked out after the first 20 minutes'" (qtd. in Miller). But the movie was important to other residential school survivors as it brought their stories to a large audience.

HIV+ Woods Cree man surrounded by supportive Indigenous people, including 2LGBTQ people.

The intimate reading experience of a novel means a different audience. Although Tomson Highway states that he wrote the novel for a "Cree readership. . . .I hope to reach the kids in the mall in Saskatoon and Winnipeg" (qtd. in Stoffman n. pag.), a television movie would have been more accessible to remote reserves. McKegney explains that a "great deal had changed in the discursive environment," including apologies from many churches and the "publication of historical works like J.R. Miller's *Shingwauk's Vision* ("From Trickster Poetics" 107) by the time the novel was published. He goes on to argue that, although the failure to produce the movie meant that Tomson Highway was unable to reach a larger audience, the novel allowed the reader time to "deal far more extensively with Aboriginal heritage materials and to illustrate their ongoing utility in the struggle toward Indigenous empowerment" ("From Trickster Poetics" 107). However, while the novel certainly shows the survivance of Woods Cree ways of knowing, the novel also demonstrates the damaging effects when kinship ties breaks down for both brothers. Residential school almost severs the familial and kinship ties Gabriel and Jeremiah have with their reserve community and family with harmful results for both brothers: Gabriel becomes sexually masochistic and Jeremiah clings to Catholicism and denies himself any bodily pleasure. By contrasting the brothers' reactions to residential school abuses, Tomson Highway illustrates the different ways residential school survivors cope with and try to heal their experiences.

Simon and Jeremiah are guided by itahkomitowin or a close kin relationship throughout the treatment. itahkomitowin is vital because "the relationship between

brothers [was] regulated by the laws of kinship, which recognized the close yet separate and independent existence of each" (Cardinal and Hildebrandt 34). In marked contrast to the novel, the brothers in the treatment are much more supportive of each other. Playwright Drew Hayden Taylor (Anishinaabe) notes the lack of conflict in Indigenous theatre because "overt or aggressive conflict was actively and urgently discouraged within the family group and this manifested itself within stories" (64), which is reflected in the use of an ensemble cast in *The Rez Sisters* and *Dry Lips.* While the women in *The Rez Sisters* have conflicts between them, none of the women is the main character; it is truly an ensemble play. Although the women have conflicts with each other, they are equals.

In an interview, Tomson Highway points out how being a gay Cree man affects his writing process:

> being a gay Cree man was a different thing entirely: what I appreciate about my sexuality is that it gives me the status of the outsider. And as a native, I am an outsider in a double sense. That gives you a wider vision, a more in-depth vision into the ways of human behaviour, into the way the world works. But I want to write about it myself. I want it to come out in a way that's natural but at the same time metaphorical. The issue deserves that kind of treatment. It was simultaneously too beautiful and too horrifying to talk about in any other way than the poetic, the metaphoric, the symbolic. (qtd. in Hannon 36-37)

Tomson and René Highway were writing and performing themselves into a society that didn't accept them as gay Woods Cree men. While Jeremiah and Simon have similar

views on sexuality and colonisation, Gabriel and Jeremiah's radically differing views enable Tomson Highway to show Gabriel actively engaged in decolonisation while Jeremiah is stuck in a colonised mindset.

Residential school abuses were just beginning to come to light at the time the movie treatment was written. Phil Fontaine (Anishinaabe), then Head of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, publicly revealed his sexual abuse at residential school in a CBC TV interview on October 30, 1990. He told Barbara Frum, "In my grade three class, if there were twenty boys, every single one of them would have experienced what I experienced. They would have experienced some aspect of sexual abuse." Keavy Martin credits Fontaine's public testimony as a "major factor in increasing national attention to the issue of reparations" ("Truth" 50). Additionally, CBC TV's investigative news programme *The Fifth Estate'*s 1991 episode *A Violation of Trust* focused on abuses at the Williams Lake residential school. Tomson Highway's persistence in sharing his and René Highway's story helped some members of Indigenous communities come to terms with and challenge misconceptions about residential school abuses, homosexuality and AIDS.

René and Tomson Highway's theatrical and written narratives are among the very few that deal with sexual abuse experienced by Two-Spirit, gay and queer (2GQ) men in residential school. Unfortunately, "some Aboriginal people still believe that residential school—and the sexual abuse inflected by many of its priests—caused students to be gay" (Hasselris n. pag), a damaging misconception that René and Tomson Highway rejected through their art. Both versions of *Kiss* are interventions into dominant

discourses about residential school and HIV / AIDS in Indigenous communities.[49] While Gabriel and Simon both die of an AIDS-related illness at the end of the novel / film, Tomson Highway asserts the strength of Woods Cree language and stories in spite of genocidal residential schools.

Moreover, both versions of *Kiss* are firmly situated in their 70s and 80s milieu. Noah Richler wrote about the "buzz" around Indigenous fiction in a 2004 *Toronto Star* article:

> reading Highway's memorable novel now, one is struck by an almost historical aspect to the conflagration of issues that surround the homosexual and aboriginal identity of his central pair of brothers. . . . In both regards his protagonists were up against a wall of horrible national ignorance and prejudice. *The Fur Queen* shares with the gay canon of the early AIDS epoch the impassioned sense that the best response to a misunderstanding and unsympathetic society is to live excessively and well – to burn out with as brilliant a flame as social circumstances will allow. (D12)

Gabriel's sexual life is part of the times of greater sexual freedom for people of all sexualities. The 1969 decriminalisation of contraception made the birth control pill easily available, enabling women's sexual and reproductive freedoms. In the same year, Pierre Trudeau's decriminalisation of some aspects of same-sex activity between consenting

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[49] Some of the other literary texts dealing with 2GQ experiences with AIDS are Craig Womack's (Muskogee) *Drowning in Fire* (1999), Beth Brant's (Bay of Quinte Mohawk) 1991 story "This Place," Evan Adams' (Sliammon) 1992 play *Snapshots*, Richard Van Camp's (Dogrib) *Mermaids* (1996), and some of the stories in Chip Livingston's (Muskogee) *Naming Ceremony* (2014).

adults led to greater sexual freedom, but not necessarily for 2LBTQ people, who still faced considerable discrimination. However, between the advent of the birth control pill and the discovery of AIDS in the early 1980s, it was possible to have sex without fearing either pregnancy or a likely fatal illness. For about twenty years then, a generation grew up that could free itself from many constraints on an active sex life with more than one partner.

In *About Canada: Queer Rights*, Peter Knept[50] includes a section about Two-Spirit people, noting that "one of the most successful efforts [at organizing] came in 1989, when Art Zoccole and Billy Merasty[51] [René and Tomson Highway's nephew] formed. . .the Two-Spirited Peoples of the First Nations in Toronto" (113). Most importantly, 2GLBTQ activists and organizations like Two-Spirited Peoples of the First Nations stressed the need for Indigenous peoples to be in charge of their own knowledges and to assert an identity apart from both mainstream and queer of colour concerns. Two-Spirit Didikai Métis community organiser Cortney Dakin emphasises that "Indigenous peoples often experience marginalization and stigma within settler LGBTQ spaces and other urban communities where respect for Indigenous cultures, languages, and traditions is lacking. Even progressive social movements can be marked by patterns of domination, assimilation, paternalism, charity, or tokenism" (n. pag.). As I will discuss shortly, Tomson Highway's treatment shows Simon confronting a racist bartender in a gay bar, highlighting the racism within mainstream, white gay communities.

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[50] Knept lists *Kiss of the Fur Queen* as one of the "15 Essential Canadian Queer Literary Works" (69).
[51] Merasty's 1992 play *Fireweed* features two Indigenous men kissing. *Fireweed* is an important metaphor of healing in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. See Deanna Reder's "Stories of Destruction and Renewal: Images of Fireweed in Autobiographical Fiction by Shirley Sterling and Tomson Highway").

Tom Warner also stresses in his history of queer activism in Canada that the racism of early gay and lesbian activism, which was mostly middle class and white, "dominated the lives and shaped the identities of the few Native women and men courageous enough to assert a same-sex orientation during this period" (113). Unfortunately, 2GLBTQ people still face racism and homophobia, both on and off reserve. Tomson Highway recalls, "I have been beaten within inches of my life by gay-bashers. They get scared of my femininity" (qtd. in Tompkins and Male 23). Similarly, when Gabriel is confronted by four homophobic young Indigenous men at the Wasiychigan pow pow, he realises his tormentors are "terrified that the emotion of a woman, the spirit of a woman lived inside them" (251). Unlike Gabriel and Simon, the young men are out of balance by rejecting their femaleness. While Gabriel is initially frightened of the men, he becomes filled with sadness because they are scared to express their vulnerability.

The Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network pamphlet *Understanding Epidemiology* states "Two-Spirited survivors of residential school abuses may be unable to explore their same sex orientation in a safe and healthy way. Unresolved abuse issues lead to depression, substance abuse, low self-esteem all of which may in turn lead to the kind of risky sexual and drug-use behavior that puts people at risk for HIV infection" (n. pag). Similarly, in a 2009 report, CAAN stressed, "HIV/AIDS is both a direct and indirect outcome of residential schooling" (Barlow 5**).** Gabriel's sexual behavior resists mainstream, including 2GLBTQ people, society's, moralising about monogamy, an opposition epitomised by seeing gay marriage as a conservative move.

Why did Tomson Highway make such a radical change between Simon and Gabriel? In contrast to Gabriel and Jeremiah's relative isolation, Simon and Jeremiah are part of a vibrant Indigenous arts community, which includes members who are 2GLBTQ. The movie treatment also more explicitly portrays the racism in Toronto's gay scene of the 1970s and 80s and the support Simon receives from his fellow Indigenous actors. Terry Goldie explains that when he asked Tomson Highway why Jeremiah is straight "he replied he wanted to show what he saw as the particular devastation that the sexual abuse visited on heterosexual Natives" (213) and to show that same-sex abuse does not lead to being gay.

Some critics grapple with how to discuss Gabriel's sexuality, but many see Gabriel in charge of his own sexuality. Jennifer Henderson notes that Gabriel as a young man "in moments of exquisite sexual pleasure. . . .will taste warm honey—his body's sensory memory of the abuse, a memory which is condensed a whole complex of physical and emotional responses as well as contextual religious connotations" (191). When the thirteen-year-old Gabriel goes fishing with his dad, he remembers, "from his last encounter, two months ago, he could still feel the old priest's meaty breath, could still taste sweet honey, the hard, naked silver body of the Son of God. Of the four hundred boys who had passed through Birch Lake during his nine years there, who couldn't smell the smell, who couldn't taste that taste?" (109). Gabriel believes his masturbation by the Father is the "right of holy men," but he refuses to feel shame about his sexuality. Jeremiah learns to accept Gabriel's homosexuality. In both the treatment and the novel, Jeremiah insists on Indigenous ceremonies when his brother is dying, and forbids

Catholic rites for his brother. These ceremonies undercut residential school doctrines that denigrated Indigenous spiritualities and ceremonies.

Mark Rifkin not only positions Gabriel as "making room for Cree homosexuality," but argues "Gabriel's insistence on the legitimacy of his pleasure, despite priestly efforts to claim his body and insist that he understand his own sexuality through a non-Native narrative of Indian defilement, expands to a broader critique of the colonial regulation of Indigenous pleasure" ("Queering Indigenous" 142). Both Jeremiah and Gabriel have sexual partners, and although everything isn't lovely, they do have sexual and emotional relationships. And there is a difference between Gabriel's encounter with a businessman, which is a commercial transaction to raise money for his art, and Gabriel's seduction of the priest, which seems to be done out of a wicked sense of fun.

By situating Gabriel's seemingly troubling behaviours in what Fagan terms culturally grounded Indigenous trauma theory, we can begin to understand him. Fagan contends "In the case of sexual abuse, the victims will often create imitations of their own abuse, either through inescapable memories, self-destructive behaviour, or the abuse of others" ("Weesageechak" 210-11). Does Gabriel's unprotected sex with a businessman (294) while HIV+ constitute abuse? Andrew Buzny argues that "it is [not] possible to posit a healthy or unhealthy response to trauma: there is a spectrum of possibilities, and what feels productive and healthy is, perhaps, more helpful than what the medical institution considers a 'healthy recovery'" (8). Gabriel deliberately has sex with an attractive young priest (185) after realising the intersection of desire and repression in the Catholic Church as he attends mass with Jeremiah. When Gabriel receives the host, a ritual he equates with savagery (184), Gabriel seduces the priest, whose vestments hide

his desire for Gabriel while "Gabriel's gaze raked its way up the belly, chest, and neck to the face, where he knew he had induced a flashing spasm in the holy man's gaze" (180-181). Although Gabriel's seduction of the priest can be seen as placing Gabriel in a position of power, his act is individual, whereas Simon and Jeremiah confront colonial oppression on behalf of Indigenous people who may not be able to speak for themselves.

While Gabriel, "through dance, music, sex, and the renewal of Cree traditions. . . crafts for himself a range of personae that appear to blur defiance and submission" (McCall 67), Simon and Jeremiah actively and unequivocally confront racism and homophobia. Simon is also more than able to take care of himself. Simon berates a bartender at a western-themed gay bar where the cast of one of their plays celebrates. Jeremiah's drunken antics become out of control and when the bartender asks Jeremiah to leave, Simon points out the racism in white gay culture: "An argument ensues, etc. until, before we know it, Simon is vamping all the way down the long bar to the pounding beat of k.d. lang, kicking piles and piles of beer glasses, baskets of popcorn and what not all over the place, shouting at the cringing bar-tender as he passes him 'you don't like Indians? Well fuck you, sweetheart!'" (42). Simon uses dance in a decidedly anti-colonial way.

As Gabriel explores Winnipeg's gay scene, he is exoticised as a gay Indigenous man. He is attractive because he is not part of the mainstream gay community. When Gabriel enters the bar, he feels his sexual power: "Chatter stopped, laughter went unfinished; beer bottles went undrunk, whiskey tumblers untouched. . . .Like a surplice of fine linen, a hundred eyes enveloped Gabriel. A thrill shot up his spine until he was confident his hair ends were on fire, crackling, emitting sparks" (166). Gabriel is an

unusual figure who brings the northern Manitoba bush into the very white gay bar. Patrons "drifted up and drifted off—meandered around Gabriel's sultry beauty and desirability" (167). Gabriel is well aware of his power and he uses his sexuality to confront colonisation.

Gabriel also uses dance to protect himself from colonisation and sexual abuse. Inspired by his dance in the residential school Christmas pageant, the six-year-old Gabriel is dreaming of doing a do-si-do with Carmelita Moose, except she keeps "floating up balloon-like, so that, while his feet were negotiating quick little circles, his arms had to keep Carmelita Moose earthbound" (77). Gabriel experiences pleasure, but he is dreaming of a girl while the priest masturbates him. However, Gabriel isn't attracted to Carmelita Moose; rather he's attracted to dancing. Dancing while trying to keep Carmelita Moose earthbound is echoed by Gabriel's pleasure at being masturbated by Father Lafleur, a sinister figure who is nameless until the end of the passage. However, not everything is unknowable:

> The undisputed fact was that Gabriel Okimasis's little body was moving up and down, up and down, producing, in the crux of his being, a sensation so pleasurable that he wanted Carmelita Moose to float up and up forever so he could keep jumping up, reaching for her and pulling her back down, jumping up, reaching her, pulling her back down. (77)

Gabriel works against the straightening of Indigenous people by insisting on enjoying same-sex desires. Importantly, Gabriel's "subjection to the priest's sexual abuse, immediately after his dance performance at school, hardly reduces his passion either for dance or the expression of his sexuality" (Belghiti 3). Jeremiah is unable to protect his

brother from the abusive priest. He looked after his younger brother when they were with their family, illustrating how kinship ties broke down in residential school.

The caribou scene in both versions illustrates how Jeremiah protects his younger brother before they go to residential school. In the novel's caribou scene, Jeremiah plays his composition "'*Ateek*, *Ateek* II,' written in G major, Jeremiah's favourite key because it made him think of oranges" (42). Gabriel, "three years of age and graceful as a birch sapling" (41), imitates a caribou with his hands above his head. Jeremiah, Gabriel and their parents are caught unawares by the arrival of the caribou. Jeremiah "can just make out Gabriel sitting, legs spread on the ground not ten feet in front of him, his tear-stained face bewildered, his mouth open like a little beak, expecting food, his arms spread like small wings" (45). Separated from their horrified parents, Jeremiah rescues Gabriel, holding him on top of the rock, safely above the caribou herd. The caribou, whose "blur without end took on form but what. Dancers? Spirits? Whirlpools of light and air and shadow? The shapes became one pulsing wave of movement, throbbing, summoning him, beckoning him on. 'Come with us, Gabriel, Gabriel, Gabriel Okimasis-masis-masis.... Slowly releasing his hold, Gabriel opened his arms to embrace this immense field of energy. And he began to weep" (46). Isabelle Knockwood (Mi'kmaq) explains "Traditionally…[o]lder brothers and sisters were absolutely required to look after their younger siblings. When they were in the residential school, being unable to protect their younger brothers and sisters became a source of life-long pain" (60). Both versions of the caribou scene emphasise the closeness of the brothers. Jeremiah's ability to save his brother from the caribou foreshadows his later inability to rescue Gabriel from abuse. But the caribou and their energy also save Gabriel by inspiring him to dance.

Tomson Highway titles the equivalent movie scene "Jeremiah Okimasis, at the age of 4, saves the Okimasis family from destruction," dating the event May 30, 1956. Jeremiah, "now 4 years old, plays at miming a dancing caribou using twigs for antlers. . . he now has a responsibility: a little brother named Simon Okimasis, 2 years old, who sits right there beside his mother nibbling on a bannock" (3). Notice how Tomson Highway uses the word responsibility. Pelagie and her children "shriek with horror" when the herd arrives but "above the absolutely heart-stopping writhing mass of a million antlers, Jeremiah hovers like a little angel, holding his little brother in his arms, both boys laughing with glee at the miracle unfolding all around them. . . .How Jeremiah got his little brother up there in the nick of time is the talk of the hour" (3). The movie treatment is couched in decidedly Catholic terms, as Jeremiah is an angel. But Tomson Highway balances the Catholicism by situating the caribou as miraculous. Jeremiah's rescue of Simon is magical, but so too is the caribou energy.

Inspired by the caribou energy, Simon decides to take dance lessons. In marked contrast to the novel, Jeremiah actively supports Simon in his decision to learn dance. On September 14, 1969, "Simon and Jeremiah, now 15 and 17, walk up the grand staircase to the Centennial Concert Hall to see the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. Jeremiah, thrilled to death that Simon is now living in Winnipeg, dances up the steps with joy. The show is spectacular and fills Simon with awe" (18). Simon's reaction to seeing the Royal Winnipeg Ballet echoes both the transformative power of the caribou herd and René Highway's reaction to seeing the ballet. René Highway recalls, "The first theatre I saw was a concert by the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. I was totally sucked in by the spectacle, the costumes, the music. I still believe dance and theatre are strongly magical" (qtd. in Smith

D16). René Highway also describes the dancers as "magical creatures, because I'd never seen anything like it before" (qtd. in DiManno E10).[52] As in the herd of caribou, the fifteen-year-old Gabriel is seduced and embraced by the dancers: "The arms were a sea of moving antlers. And Gabriel Okimasis, three years old, was perched on a moss-covered rock, the warm breath of a thousand beasts rushing, pummelling, the zigzaging of their horns a cloud of spirit matter, nudging him, licking him as with a lover's tongue. And whispering: Come with us, Gabriel Okimasis, come with us. . . .Slumped into his seat, his eyes glazed, Gabriel stared at the curtained stage" (145). Clearly, dance, like the caribou herd, for Gabriel is both profoundly spiritual and sensual.

The brothers realise that they have to hide Simon's ballet lesson because of the homophobic comments and attacks he would endure if his lessons were public knowledge. The scene titled "Simon and Jeremiah hatch a 'ballet plot'" depicts the brothers at the running track, where "a football game is in progress inside the track" (18). Simon wants to take dance lessons "but he doesn't know how without the whole school thinking him a sissy," a point confirmed by the track coach, "a big butch macho man," yelling at the boys "the Churchill High track team is not for a bunch of sissies!'" (18-19). They hatch a plan "that they will tell anyone who asks that Simon is carrying his gym bag to body-building class at the downtown YMCA but that when he gets to the building, Simon will dash down a back alley and enter the Royal Winnipeg by a back door" (18), similar to René Highway's subterfuge. The more secretive Gabriel hides his dance

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[52] René Highway recalls the brothers would receive tickets from the Ministry of Indian Affairs, which "would get symphony tickets and give them to interested students. Occasionally Tom would get tickets to the ballet and take me" (qtd. in Citron 12). René Highway actually first saw dance "when the Winnipeg Contemporary Dancers came with their school tours" (qtd. in Citron 12).

classes from his less sympathetic brother. Gabriel, Simon and René Highway know the stigma of a Woods Cree man taking ballet, but their desire to dance overcomes this disgrace.

Like sneaking off to take dance classes, Simon and Jeremiah create Indigenous spaces for themselves in the most unlikely of places. The brothers talk about "old times" when the fifteen-year-old Simon is on a school trip to Winnipeg. They recreate their northern homeland, "sheltered from the rain under a railway bridge" where they "sit sharing a mickey of rye whiskey" (17). Their campfire and the squirrel they roast, which they pretend is caribou meat, prompt the brothers to tell stories "about the herds and herds of caribou, about silver nets flashing in the summer sunlight, about billowing clouds of arctic terns, about the last shaman 'woo-wooing' it up in the northern sky, about how maybe 'that stupid Weesageechak' is living in the city, getting drunk out of his mind at the Brunswick Hotel" (17). Simon and Jeremiah will turn these stories into art, which they will share with other urban Indigenous peoples, recreating the homeland in a new location.

In the movie treatment, the brothers' itahkomitowin makes them strong enough to confront Brochet's Father Bouchard and by extension, the Catholic Church about their sexual abuse.[53] While the treatment does not mention Jeremiah's abuse nor his recollection of it, we experience Simon's abuse from Simon's point of view. The scene is

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[53] Fifteen-year-old Jeremiah is also beaten for speaking Cree. The principal lifts him off his chair and "slams him viciously against the wall. The wall in front of Jeremiah is smeared with blood and mucous. Jeremiah kneels there almost senseless" ("Treatment" 10).

entitled “Simon Okimasis 'meets' Brother Nadeau.” On December 8, 1964, the ten-year-old Simon, along with the other thirty boys in the dormitory, say their prayers before bed. “Brother Nadeau tells them that, as a special treat he will play music in his room just next door that they can hear through a little speaker he has hooked up in the dormitory, to lull them to ‘sleep like a lullaby:’”

> The lights in the dormitory now out, a tinny distant version of “I Wanna Hold Your Hand” by the Beatles seeps out into the room. Simon's POV [Point of View], the dark figure of Brother Nadeau, dressed in his black robe, glides into the room and goes silently from bed to bed, kneeling and appearing to bless each sleeping boy. Brother Nadeau appears at Simon's side holding a small bible in one hand, puts his other hand under the sheet and whispers into Simon's ear. Simon pretends to sleep but through the slit in his eyes, he can see Brother Nadeau's shadowy face, caught in the grip of a kind of “holy ecstasy." (8-9)

Tomson Highway puts holy ecstasy in quotation marks to signal that Father Nadeau’s abuse of Simon is anything but holy. Unlike the novel, Simon’s abuse is experienced solely from his point of view and not seen by Jeremiah. Brother Nadeau is a vampiric figure as he “glides into the room and goes silently from bed to bed, kneeling and appearing to bless each sleeping boy” (8) in his black robe. Even the jaunty Beatles song, which conveniently will mask any protestations by the boys, takes on an ominous tone. It is a love song with sinister undertones.

But Jeremiah and Simon challenge Father Bouchard, who is the priest at their home reserve of Brochet, at the annual Lac St Anne pilgrimage in Alberta, where “St.

Anne, the mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is reputed to have made an appearance years ago and whose waters are said to have miraculous powers of healing" (50). While Simon pleases his mother by attending mass with her, Jeremiah "sits on the shore close by watching all this, writing it all down in a steno pad" (50). Father Bouchard's appearance triggers the brothers to tell the truth about colonialism and residential school:

> that the priests and brothers at that boarding school Father Bouchard sent the boys to years ago molested them sexually, that the way Father Bouchard and the missionaries converted the Indians to Catholicism is dishonest and immoral, that using the children of a people to conquer the hearts, minds and entire culture of that people and thus subject them to the status of third class citizens—in their own country—is not right, the boys even go so far as to say that if "the Apocalypse" as predicted in the bible is to be averted, that a religion that relates more realistically to the Earth as a living, FEMALE, PRO-CREATIVE, animate being will have to be seriously reconsidered, and soon, etc. (51)

Tomson Highway describes the argument as "fierce . . .bloody" and "unrelenting" (51), but it is one-sided. The brothers—Jeremiah is twenty-five and Simon is twenty-three—have all the power in the scene, as the Father's response is not included; an Indigenous version of history triumphs. Bouchard precipitates the argument by telling the boys "that he's seen some of their interviews and asks, with baleful eyes, how their work is going" (51). Bouchard seems to be angered that Simon and Jeremiah would even consider disclosing residential school abuses and advocate for Indigenous ways of knowing in their art.

Tomson Highway's angry and unrelenting rant against colonialism, patriarchy and sexual abuse is quite astonishing. Along with Phil Fontaine, René and Tomson Highway[54] were also among some of the first residential school attendees to speak frankly in public about their abuse and among the very few 2GLBTQ people to do so.[55] In a June 1990 interview posthumously published in March 1991 for the monthly *Toronto Life*, René Highway told Gerald Hannon of a

> dream he had just had. In it, he is flying above a priest, a handsome man stripped down to his underwear and white socks. And in the dream, they begin to fight and the struggle is charged with eros. He spoke to me of the first time he heard a Beatles song—he was in the car, being masturbated by one of the teaching brothers from school. (33)

René Highway's account is initially framed like Jeremiah's seeing Gabriel's masturbation by Father Lafleur, through the distancing lens of a dream. But then René Highway, whom Hannon describes as willing to answer any question (36), becomes explicit in his description. Charles Brasfield, a medical doctor, outlines some of the common experiences of residential school survivors, "including recurrent distressing dreams of

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[54] In a March 1990 article in the *Toronto Star*, seven months before Fontaine's disclosure, Judy Steed writes, Tomson Highway as a child "was taken away to a Roman Catholic residential school for native children, where he was, along with generations of native children, sexually abused by the priests who were his teachers" (D1).

[55] However, while René and Tomson Highway spoke in major newspapers, lawsuits began in the 1980s, so there was a growing awareness of residential schools, some of which were still open: "In the 1980s, residential school survivors began to take the government and churches to court, suing them for damages resulting from the residential school experience. In 1988, eight former students of St. George's Indian Residential School in Lytton, B.C., sued a priest, the government, and the Anglican Church of Canada in Mowatt v. Clarke. Both the Anglican Church and the government admitted fault and agreed to a settlement. Another successful case followed in 1990, made by eight survivors from St. Joseph's school, in Williams Lake, against the Catholic Church and the federal government" (Hanson n. pag.).

Indian residential schools" (n. pag.). René Highway's dream is mixed with desire but he places himself in a position of power as he flies over the priest. He is not just above, but flying out of the reach of the abusive priest. Clearly, as Tomson Highway suggests, residential school haunted René Highway for the rest of his life. But René Highway's own choreography, such as 1988's *New Song. . .New Dance*, confronted residential school abuses through the use of Woods Cree language and stories, which he shared with Indigenous peoples in the city.

Gabriel and Jeremiah split apart because of Jeremiah's homophobia, which goes against itahkomitowin; Jeremiah can't tell Gabriel how to be without breaking their bond. Rather than respect Gabriel's sexuality, Jeremiah abandons Gabriel when homophobic young men confront Gabriel at the Wasaychigan Hill pow wow. Instead, Jeremiah is "embarrassed to be in cahoots with a pervert, a man who fucked other men. . . On an Indian reserve, a Catholic reserve" (*Kiss* 250). Unlike Gabriel and Jeremiah, Simon and Jeremiah do not separate for several years after Jeremiah spots a teenaged Simon leaving a Winnipeg gay bar with theatre director Gregory Newman:

> Later that same night [February 25,1970] Jeremiah walks homeward down Portage Avenue when he runs into Simon exiting from the city's only known gay bar, in company with an older, non-native man named Greg Newman. Jeremiah, half-cut, berates Simon ("aren't you a little too young to be going into a bar?") but Simon merely fights back ("You should talk. Look at you, you're drunk. Go home. I'll talk to you when you're sober.") Simon, embarrassed, walks away without even introducing his new friend. And Jeremiah pretends he doesn't know that this is a gay bar. (22)

Simon is more embarrassed by Jeremiah's drunkenness than being seen with his lover outside a gay bar. Jeremiah tries to confront Simon about the gay bar and Greg Newman while Simon dances and Jeremiah plays piano for their high school production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers*: "in Cree, Jeremiah asks him who that man was that Simon was with the other night and what kind of bar that was. Simon manages to evade both questions and is saved in the nick of time by the next 'episode' of the gavotte. He glides onto the stage" (22).

Unlike the novel, Jeremiah is more upset that Simon does not spend time with him rather than that Simon is gay, and he is hurt when he phones Simon at Newman's place to tell Simon their older brother was shot. Jeremiah asks Simon if he is moving in with Newman, saying "weakly. . .It's just. . .well. . .you've been spending an awful lot of time over there. You hardly ever sleep here anymore" (23). After his initial shock, Jeremiah supports Simon:

> March 12, 1972, in a practice room at the University of Manitoba School of Music, Jeremiah practices the Chopin "Winter Wind Etude." The door opens and Simon enters: "you wanted to talk to me?" Simon says. Jeremiah asks Simon about his relationship with Greg Newman. They have a violent argument and Jeremiah eventually forces it out of his brother that he, Simon, is a homosexual and that Greg Newman is his lover and that, yes, he will be moving to Toronto with him as soon as Simon graduates from high school. The two boys fall into each other [sic] arms crying. (24)

Jeremiah understands the importance of principled non-interference by protecting Simon, which includes accepting Simon's sexuality. However, principled non-interference does not mean community members can act in ways that will harm the community. But the novel describes Gabriel as being secretive and wily, making it doubtful that Jeremiah is aware of Gabriel's actions.

Like his brother, Simon's community is supportive of his sexuality, enabling him to accept his sexuality. Tomson Highway portrays Simon's relationship with singer / musician Robin Beatty as a loving one with Robin collaborating with Simon and Jeremiah. While Robin only plays a small role in the novel and is not part of the larger Indigenous community, he is an active contributor to the brothers' artistic process by playing the music during *Ulysses Thunderchild*. Robin is very supportive of Simon's work, telling him "not to despair about his choreographic skills, that he has to try. . .right up until the day he dies" (29). While Robin is absent from the narrative when Gabriel is ill, except when Gabriel is dying, Robin looks after Simon, accompanying him to the doctor, and poignantly, helping Simon with his AZT[56] inhaler while Simon cries (46). Tomson Highway places heterosexual and 2LGBTQ relationships on an equal footing by portraying both Jeremiah and Simon having healthy and loving relationships, though with their partners.

Simon doesn't only face discrimination from the non-Indigenous community. The movie treatment confronts homophobia and AIDS discrimination within the Indigenous

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[56] AZT is azidothymidine, an "anti-HIV drug that reduces the amount of virus in the body. Anti-HIV drugs such as AZT slow down or prevent damage to the immune system, and reduce the risk of developing AIDS-related illnesses" ("AZT zidovudine, Retrovir" n. pag).

community. Simon and Jeremiah's friends learn to honour wâhkôhtowin by including 2GLBTQ people as part of their community. The Indigenous drag queen Mama Teresa is an integral part of their community. She wears a sandwich board and flags down potential audience members to attend Simon and Jeremiah's first production. Simon and Jeremiah meet Mama Teresa at one of Robin's shows at Toronto's iconic Horseshoe Tavern: "A young man with an outrageous sense of humour, whom we will get to know as Mama Teresa, sits with them" (30). Mama Teresa also foreshadows Simon's death as "the gang—"Jeremiah, Pamela, Robin, [lawyer] Lena Big Horne, actors, etc"—attend Mama Teresa's lover's AIDS-related funeral. The funeral is centred in Indigenous spirituality as Elder "Ben Ghostrider, waving an eagle feather over a burning braid of sweetgrass, stands beside Mama Teresa and explains the meaning of death, from the Native viewpoint, that death is not necessarily the end, but the beginning of a new form of life etc" (45). Ben Ghostrider's ceremony provides comfort to Simon and his friends, who are aware that Simon has AIDS.

Simon's friends enact wâhkôtowin by supporting when he shares his HIV positive status with them: "After [Robin's] show, Simon, Robin, Pamela and Jeremiah decide to walk home. Through their chatter, Simon inadvertently reveals that he is HIV positive, that he thinks he has AIDS. 'What do you mean, you think?' Jeremiah asks him. Swallowing their terror, they grapple with the huge question. They walk on in silence" (40). In contrast, Gabriel keeps his HIV+ status hidden until he is close to dying because he doesn't feel he has support from Jeremiah and his community. Simon's friends, particularly Pamela Buckskin, honour wâhkôhtowin by defending Simon from homophobia and AIDS discrimination. At a fundraiser for *The Killing of the Last Shaman*

thrown by Mama Teresa, all the attendees cross dress, including Jeremiah who is "in a long black gown and fake pearls" (43) while playing piano. Pamela Buckskin has a drunken argument with the "butch macho actor" in their productions about Simon's gender, "that Simon's disease, now publicly known, affects all people, regardless of gender. The butch actor makes a strong case for the rights of heterosexuals and Pamela shoots all his theories down with aplomb ("if all men were 'faggots' like Simon, we wouldn't have women going around being killed and raped with screwdrivers!"). The butch actor finally admits defeat and Pamela toasts her victory with a glass of champagne" (44).

Pamela is a good relation to Simon and other 2LGBTQ peoples, especially those who are HIV+ or have AIDS. She learns from Simon, Jeremiah and other people in her Indigenous theatrical community to respect Simon and to respect difference. Pamela's defence of Simon also illustrates how connection to culture through performance is an integral part of Jeremiah and Simon / Gabriel's lives. This connection not only empowers the brothers to be part of different performance communities, including pow wow and theatrical, but strengthens their ties to both urban and reserve Indigenous communities and to their Woods Cree roots. Simon / Gabriel and Jeremiah use Woods Cree language and stories in their productions, carrying their remote northern Manitoba community to share with urban Indigenous people.

The novel shows the brothers' initial estrangement from Indigenous culture, rather than a continuing connection to their culture. When Jeremiah and Gabriel go to the Wasaychigan pow wow on May 21 1983, the brothers have very different experiences. While Jeremiah gets drunk and still feels like a "German tourist" (242) although he had

attended many pow wows in Winnipeg, the dancers' bustles remind Gabriel of suns: "A gust of wind ruffled the suns, a shimmering domino effect that fell across the wall of Gabriel's heart, sparking the image of the spiked, roiling spine of the mythic lake serpent, the son of Ayash riding it across the island of the flesh devourers" (243). Even though the pow wow is an intertribal event on Manitoulin Island on Anishinaabe territory, Gabriel still connects to his father's deathbed story, which inspires his first dance performance. Gabriel joins in a round dance, even though admitting to himself "that never had his body moved with such gracelessness; a fish on land would have fared better. . . .How were his feet to move in motorcycle boots that weighed half a ton? How long since they had known smoked hide of young caribou?" (243-44). When the pow wow dancing stops because migisoo soars overhead, Gabriel "saw people talking to the sky, the sky replying. And he knew he had to learn this dance. Someday soon, he may need it" (244-45). Gabriel needs Indigenous-inspired dance not only for artistic reasons but also for deeply spiritual ones. Gabriel will not only inspire his brother to connect to his Woods Cree heritage but inspire a new generation of theatre and dance artists, as René Highway did in real life.

In contrast, Simon and Jeremiah are seasoned pow wow goers who are part of a vibrant urban Indigenous community. They attend their first pow wow together in January 1970 at the Winnipeg Arena, which is turned into an Indigenous space by the pow wow. The dancers' regalia fascinate the brothers. Tomson Highway shows the brothers' disconnection from Woods Cree beliefs when Jeremiah has to make up an answer when Simon asks what the medicine man is doing burning sweetgrass. But Jeremiah is aware where this lack of knowledge comes from, telling Simon "'this is the

kind of dancing that was driven out of Brochet by Father Bouchard's predecessor, that old priest used to come around with a whip and whip the people home, telling them they were dancing for the devil and would go to hell for it'2" (21), which happened on Tomson and René Highway's reserve ("Tomson Highway: Native Voice").

Simon and Jeremiah become part of the Indigenous community as they "dance the round dance among a huge crowd of pow wow dancers" (26) at the Wiky (Wikwemikong) pow wow on Manitoulin Island. Like René Highway's productions, dance is not only social but also political. The pow wow dancers and spectators connect to unceded Wikwemikong territory, which has been holding its cultural festival for fifty years.[57] This pow wow is where Jeremiah first sees his partner Pamela Buckskin, and the brothers meet Ben Ghostrider,[58] who will perform ceremony when Simon is dying. Both brothers become intimately connected with the on-reserve pow wow community, spirituality and, through Pamela, a burgeoning Indigenous theatre movement. Ben Ghostrider also foregrounds the responsibilities Simon and Jeremiah have to other Indigenous peoples. He tells the brothers "that he can't wait forever for the young ones to take over. . . that 'they are predicting the end of the world, you know' and that, if that's the case, then Jeremiah and Simon might as well take over: 'save the Indians from certain destruction, fuck the Indians, save the world!'" (26). In contrast, at the pow wow in

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[57] Tomson and René Highway were connected to Wikwemikong because *The Rez Sisters* was first work shopped with De-ba-heh-mu-jig theatre with René Highway as Nanabush. Tomson Highway was De-ba-heh-mu-jig's artistic director in the winter of 1984 / 85 (Hengen, "Tomson Highway" 14).

[58] Ben Ghostrider's speech takes place during two significant events in Indigenous rights in Canada. The James Bay Agreement gave Inuit and Cree people in Northern Quebec $225 million for land that was to be surrendered to the provincial government to build a hydroelectric dam. The 1974-77 Berger Commission investigated the effects of an oil pipeline from Alaska to Alberta, which was opposed by Indigenous peoples for jeopardising land claims and as an environmental threat ("1951-1981 Aboriginal Rights Movement" n. pag.)

Winnipeg, Jeremiah scathingly thinks the drumming is "pentatonic mush" (175), a sign of how little Jeremiah is connected to his culture. At the same pow wow, Jeremiah thinks to himself "I don't even know if I enjoy being Cree" (174), whereas the treatment's Jeremiah character is eager to learn his culture. But with Gabriel's encouragement, Jeremiah learns to appreciate his culture through their cultural productions.

The brothers and their fellow performers and friends also make the stage an Indigenous space. Simon and Jeremiah's *Ulysses Thunderchild*, identifiably based on René and Tomson Highway's *The Sage, The Dancer and the Fool*, chronicles the difficulties of being Indigenous in the city, particularly in the 70s and 80s:

> The lights come up, the stage is a riot of colour and three Indians stand looking up at towering abstract skyscrapers made of shimmering gold paper. They begin their lines: "the tallness of buildings, the grey cement, the lifeless stone reaching up, up, up and then. . . the sky. . ." And before too long, Simon Okimasis / Ulysses Thunderchild casts his magical silver nets out into the waves of Bloor St West. . . and Weesageechak / Simon chorus-lines with a whole row of lady mannequins in white fur to the beat of a thousand Cree drums, all presented in a series of glittering, swirling images. Much Cree is mixed in with the English. (38)

Jeremiah's script is inspired by his "looking wistfully out the window at the traffic on Bloor Street West. Water sprays out against the sides of skyscrapers, the concrete canyon fills with water and Joe Okimasis appears, riding the crest of waves in his canoe, casting silver nests into the wind" (32), again highlighting the brothers' connection to their culture and territory in spite of colonisation.

Gabriel and Jeremiah are also doing something revolutionary by Indigenising western art forms. When Gabriel forces Jeremiah to play the piano to make amends for Jeremiah abandoning Gabriel when he was harassed by homophobic young men during the Wasaychigan pow wow, Gabriel turns Jeremiah's rusty piano playing into a Woods Cree celebration. Jeremiah surprises himself by playing the piano again and Gabriel is no less astonished: "Gabriel leapt to his feet and started rocking to the pulse—*peeyak, neesto, peeyak*. . .Some spectacular celebration was about to begin, he could feel it in his bones. '*Weeks'chiloowew*!' he yodeled, and catapulted his dancer's form at space" (265-66), setting into motion the brothers' successful artistic collaborations.

Fittingly, the movie treatment ends with a tribute performance for Simon of the triumphant *The Theft of Children*. Jeremiah and the cast stand on stage while he makes a speech:

> "this is Simon Okimasis' last show, that though his body may have left this Earth, he is still here, right here on the stage of the Royal Alexandra Theatre in Toronto, that his work is not done yet, that he has at least 37 more shows to do. And that these 37 shows will get done. Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. Good-night."

While the Fur Queen also escorts Simon to the next world, Jeremiah doesn't need to be saved by Simon's death. Rather, the movie treatment's use of wâhkôhtowin highlights how Simon and Jeremiah (and René and Tomson Highway) helped to create a dynamic community of Indigenous performing artists.

Tomson Highway's portrayal of Gabriel as a promiscuous gay man who has unprotected sex while he is HIV+ is highly controversial. Justice believes "*Kiss* insists on

the inextricable association of pedophilia and assault with either twisted and exploitative homosexual desire or excruciating self-hatred, repression, and denial. . .There is no room in the novel for gay desire that is not deeply condemnatory and compromised by abusive relations" (202). I believe Gabriel turns around the idea that AIDS is god's punishment for being gay to reflect on a culture built on aggression and heteropatriarchy. Gabriel's sex with priests and with businessmen symbolises his rejection of colonisation, but it also provokes unease in the reader. These incidents work against situating the novel as simply a celebration of gay desire. Instead, *Kiss* works intersectionally to show the effects of colonisation and sexual abuse, but also how Jeremiah ignores Cree protocols by not accepting his brother's gayness. The novel does not provide easy answers and I have struggled to reconcile the Gabriel's risky behaviour and his celebration of his body. That irreconcilability does not have to be, or maybe cannot be, solved, which is the point of the novel. The unease the reader feels reflects the unease the brothers feel adjusting to an alien society.

Moreover, writing about gay pulp fiction before Stonewall, Michael Bronski was surprised to discover his preconception of the tragic character was inaccurate. He writes, "This is one of the most deeply inscribed myths of the last three decades—the gay novel or film in which the long-suffering, usually self-hating hero or heroine is doomed to die at his or her own hands, thus enacting the inevitable, implicitly deserved fate of all homosexuals" (7). Gabriel simultaneously fits into the seeming stereotype, but also subverts it. But perhaps the purpose of Gabriel's story is that is both elegy and celebration. Rather than seeing Gabriel as good or bad, he is a complex character that makes us confront our own preconceptions about queer Indigeniety.

Gabriel has the strength of character to critique colonisation, but because he doesn't have the support of a larger community, he is reduced to confronting the emotionally stunted Jeremiah.[59] Gabriel taunts the scandalised and religious Jeremiah: "Do you wonder why the world is so filled with blood and war and hate when it has, as its central symbol, an instrument of torture?" (184), a torture that Gabriel finds alluring. Although Gabriel rails against Catholicism, his sexuality is intimately bound with Catholicism's masochistic tendencies. Gabriel would rather have sex with a priest, than confronting the residential school system. Gabriel pushes Jeremiah to be more assertive in his plays: "You didn't say it loud enough" (285). But as Simon's confrontation with the priest and the racist shows, he is more than willing to confront colonialism, racism and homophobia outside of the theatre because his communities enact wâhkôhtowin.

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[59] Jeremiah becomes "intellect—pure, undiluted, precise" (205) when he sees Gabriel kissing Gregory Newman, an act that reminds him of his sexual abuse at residential school.

CHAPTER THREE

"That's Who the Stories Are About:" Kent Monkman's Artistic Inclusivity

Swampy Cree artist Kent Monkman[60] rewrites Canadian and American histories in a way that is both "kitsch and caustic" (De Blois 56). His work prominently features his Two-Spirit alter ego Miss Chief Eagle Testickle in colourful erotic encounters with nineteenth- and early twentieth-century white men. But Monkman's art also has a serious purpose. Karen Ohnesorge situates Monkman's art as artistic sovereignty because he "decolonize[s] the theory and method of landscape within the broader context of visual art" (43). Monkman stresses that he "play[s] with sexuality and gender to discuss power" (qtd. in Morris) and to counteract the erasure of Two-Spirit peoples. Moving through Monkman's work chronologically to show his artistic and intellectual development, I will demonstrate how he rewrites dominant history using miyo-wicêhtowin by creating his own Nation of Mischief that uses definitions outside of the strictures of the Indian Act and blood quantum.

Monkman's combination of the political with vibrant, sophisticated art works has made his work highly valued in the art market. Dubbed the "rock star" of Indigenous art in Canada by art historian Elizabeth Kalbfleisch (qtd. in Yogaretnam), Monkman has produced, starred in and / or directed eleven films and has had solo and group exhibits at

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[60] Monkman's website contains all the paintings and performances discussed in these chapters: www.kentmonkman.com

the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts in Santa Fe, MASS MoCA, Massachusetts and the Art Gallery of Ontario, among others. Solo shows in New York City, Berlin and London ground his international reputation. His works are in the collections of the Vancouver Art Gallery, the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian. Monkman calls his performance pieces Colonial Art Space Interventions, which he has staged at mainstream art institutions like the Royal Ontario Museum, the McMichael Gallery (home to the iconic modernist Ontario-based Group of Seven) and Warwickshire Gallery in England.

Monkman shifts the trope of the vanishing Indian "from object-status to subject-status, from victimhood to action, from elegiac absence to living presence" (Elston 181) by providing an alternate version of history. Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) affirms "To assert our self-determination, to assert our presence in the face of erasure, is to free ourselves from the ghost-making rhetorics of colonization" ("Go Away"150). Indigenous peoples are spectral absences in the work of the nineteenth-century American Hudson River school of painters, who produced bucolic landscapes void of Indigenous presence. But Indigenous peoples haunt these landscapes, even if colonial versions of history try to erase their presence. Monkman reinserts Indigenous people, particularly 2GLBTQ peoples, as an act of erotic sovereignty. He contends, "I decided at one point that. . .the Indian was going to be the top because this was about power and this was kind of a reversal of power so I was going to use this sexual metaphor to talk about colonial relationships and power relationships" (Maurice 91). Monkman puts Indians on top both sexually and politically; according to Miss Chief, European men loved this role reversal because she "think[s] they're largely submissive by nature" (Testickle 107).

Further, if he sees sexuality in many Indigenous cultures as a fluid concept, Monkman also sees history as a fluid concept. Queer art historian Jonathan D Katz points out, “Monkman is less interested in history than historicity—not what actually happened, but how we tell what happened. And it is in the retelling of the past, as opposed to the past itself, that we can restore, correct, and ultimately rewrite history sensitive to its silences and repressions" (20). Monkman overturns what Tlingit curator Candice Hopkins calls historical amnesia, a process in which Indigenous artists “splice open, reframe, amende, uncover and question” official histories (“Other” 22) and create their own histories. Miss Chief is the embodiment of new historicities. It is not surprising that Monkman subversively mimics nineteenth-century landscapes because the genre makes explicit the "need for land central to territorial expansion" (Hopkins, “Other” 23). The strength of Monkman's oeuvre is that he doesn't merely reproduce these empty landscapes that erase the presence of Indigenous peoples, but he shows how these landscapes are not “neutral territory but riddled with the ideologies, desires and sensibilities of their makers” (Hopkins, “Other” 24). As Cree curator Richard William Hill rightly points out, Monkman juxtaposes “current gay content inserted into a ‘straight backdrop’” (“Constitutional Amendments” 52), making historical landscapes a Two-Spirit space.

For example, Monkman’s 2013 painting *History is Painted by the Victors* overturns dominant portrayals of Indigenous peoples in an art-historical context. Monkman reconceptualises nude white males taken from Thomas Eakins’ 1884-85 painting, *The Swimming Hole.* In addition to the lithesome youth, Miss Chief cheekily paints portraits of Lt. Col. George Custer and the Seventh Cavalry cavorting naked on the

shores of a pristine lake, where one soldier uses fireweed to spank another's ass. Miss Chief, clad only in thigh-high red leather stiletto boots, looks seductively at the viewer, while Custer lies provocatively in front of Miss Chief, anxious to have his portrait painted. But Miss Chief is actually reproducing Red Horse's (Teuton Lakota) ledger account of the Lakota victory of the Battle of Greasy Grass, which the losing side calls Little Big Horn (Lukavic 4). *History is Painted By the Victors* takes on a whole new meaning in Monkman's painting; Miss Chief, and by extension Indigenous and 2LGBTQ peoples, control history and art history.

Monkman shows how art history reinforces official histories, but he always places Indigenous peoples in positions of power. Art historian and curator Hrag Vartanian cites Monkman's combination of the contemporary in Miss Chief with historical landscape paintings as one of his greatest strengths:

> These are modern and contemporary figures in migration, adapting to the present without blinking an eye. If there is a critique in Monkman's work, then it is about the reductive myths of modernity
> that create convenient stories of victors and losers, decline and ascent. In conventional Western history, First Nations people are often portrayed as a dwindling civilization, but Monkman focuses on their agency and resilience, not to mention their ability to adapt. (n. pag.)

When Miss Chief does make an appearance, as in *History is Painted by the Victors*, it is to actively critique modernist art's sexism. Vartanian observes that in Monkman's 2014 solo show at New York City's Sargent's Daughters, the "works are also noticeably queer, and in dialogue with Canadian and modern art history. The compositions bring order to

characters who appear to be acting out roles they seem predetermined to play. It as if they wandered into the frame or were lured in from elsewhere" (n. pag.) Although the figures seem to have wandered from elsewhere—Miss Chief is a decidedly contemporary figure in historical contexts—Monkman decides the (anti-colonial) narrative. Monkman shows that Indigenous peoples have always been adaptive, in decided contrast to the dominant society's view of Indigenous peoples as historical artefacts.

Monkman recently turned to critiquing modernist art's flattening of pictorial space, which, as he explains, "ran concurrently with the flattening or suppression of indigenous cultures, probably the worst of which happened in the last 150 years with the reservation system and the residential schools" (qtd. in Adams L2). Modern art, inspired by "primitive art," erased contemporary Indigenous peoples political concerns. As Monkman further explains, modern art is decidedly hyper-masculine, exemplified by Pablo Picasso (1881-1973): "He was so macho; his work was really an extension of his penis. . . .So I've been pondering that male dominance of Western art, the tension between male and female. It's informed a lot of my work" (qtd. in Adams L2). She exploits that tension to change the viewer's idea about how gender and sexuality are embodied. At the same time that government policies were imprisoning Indigenous people on reserves,[61] modernist art similarly erased Indigeneity by appropriating "primitive art" for its own purposes. Monkman explains, "I like to make the comparison

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[61] Hayter Reed wrote to the Canadian Indian Commissioner Edward Dewdney in August 1885 (three months after the 1885 Resistance): "I am adopting the system of keeping the Indians on their respective Reserves and not allowing any [to] leave them without passes—I know this is hardly supportable by any legal enactment but we must do many things which can only be supported by common sense and what may for the general good" (qtd. in Barron and Garcea 29).

of European Modernism being very liberating for Europeans, while at the same time, being the recipient of it as an indigenous person, it was far from it" (qtd. in Whyte n. pag). In contrast to this confinement of Indigenous peoples in Canada, performances like *Miss Chief: Justice of the Piece* (2012) expand spaces for Indigenous peoples who don't fit into governmental definitions.

Monkman uses aesthetic activism, which Dean Rader describes as "political and social activism that finds representation in the artistic realm. . . [A]esthetic activism implies social action on the plane of artistic discourse, such as poetry, painting, and film" (5). Monkman not only makes aesthetically pleasing paintings, films and performances but also connects to his ancestors, especially his great-grandmother. Monkman expresses a profound kinship with his family and with Two-Spirit people through his art. In other words, the imagination is key to decolonisation. Driskill points out that "*decolonizing, decolonization* and *decolonial*" can become empty words when not tied to "sovereignty, self-determination, land redress and the healing of our landbase" ("Theatre" 165). Decolonisation is also erotic. Driskill explains, "our erotic lives and identities have been colonized along with our homelands" ("Doubleweaving" 52). While imagination provides a homeland for Monkman, his Sovereign Erotics are both art-based and rooted in his family's lands. Monkman's ancestors, especially his great-grandmother, certainly experienced land loss. And if that loss had not happened, Monkman's life would have been very different. Although he is a member of Manitoba's Fisher River Cree Nation,[62]

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[62] Through research on his Swampy Cree ancestry, Monkman discovered that his ancestors were subject to "Treaty 5 between her Majesty the Queen and the Salteaux and Swampy Cree Tribes of Indians at Beren's

Monkman, like the Highways, is very much an urban Indigenous artist. Like the Highways, Monkman reconstitutes a different conception of territory, especially for 2GLBTQ peoples, where urban and reserve-based Indigenous people can create new traditions.

Monkman's family has lived off reserve for several generations and he firmly blames his lack of connection to the Swampy Cree language and to a particular reserve on the assimilationist policies of the Canadian government. Both Monkman's Swampy Cree father and artistically-inclined Anglo-Irish mother were evangelical Christian missionaries.[63] Monkman's family history is not unusual as they experienced colonisation, including land loss, Christianisation, residential schooling and language loss.

The young Monkman visited northern Cree communities where his father delivered sermons in Cree, making Monkman's initial exposure to the Cree language through Christian hymns and prayers. Monkman's family's relationship with Christianity and with his Swampy Cree ancestors is inextricably intertwined: "My father learned some Cree as a child, but had to study Cree with white teachers, in a missionary language school, to prepare him for a Christian ministry for his own people. When I was a young child, my family lived in various remote northern reserves while my father ministered in

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River and Norway House," which they signed in 1875, the year his great-grandmother was born. Like many Indigenous peoples at the time, Monkman's ancestors signed with an X (Hannon "Pink Indian" 59).

[63] Monkman was born in 1965 in the small town of St Mary's Ontario, his English-Irish mother's hometown, and then lived in the northern Manitoba Swampy Cree community of Shamattawa until his family's move to Winnipeg when Monkman was two.

his newly honed Cree tongue" (qtd. in Hannon 59). Monkman notes that his family has been Christian for generations:

> I was interested in the direct impact that Christianity was having in our communities, but also in the complexities and conflict in this relationship. Christianity was introduced to my Cree family several generations ago; and to them it did not seem antithetical to being Cree. Yet there is this dark side to this relationship between Christianity and Aboriginal peoples that has been very oppressive. (Monkman, "Kent Monkman: Miss Chief" 20)

He was closest to his great-grandmother Caroline Everette, who spoke mostly Cree and died at the age of 100 when Monkman was ten (Hannon 59). Monkman's ancestors were forcibly removed three times from St. Peter's reserve in Manitoba, a history that profoundly informs Monkman's work. He is particularly attached to this reserve, his great-grandmother's birthplace: "on the river just north of the city. . . .That's a place I feel a strong connection to. That's where they were located from; they were picked up and moved off that piece of land" (qtd. in Furnish 37). Although his family was dispersed from their lands, they stayed connected to their culture: "I was fortunate enough to have parents and grandparents who were very confident in knowing who they were and who were confident in their own culture. They knew that you can exist in the modern world and still carry your roots and your culture with you" ("Indigenous in the City"), a confidence Monkman reflects in his work.

After studying illustration at Sheridan College in Toronto, Monkman completed a set design residency at the Banff Centre for the Arts in 1992, highlighting his long

interest in the theatre. He then worked in Indigenous theatre in Toronto as a set and costume designer in 1993-1994 for Native Earth Performing Arts when Tomson Highway was the artistic director. Curator David Liss believes that Monkman's theatricality may have been inspired by his father's work as a travelling preacher (Liss, "Kent Monkman" n. pag.). Monkman's experiences at Native Earth influenced the theatricality of his Miss Chief persona. As a young adult, he was drawn to the theatre because he noticed, "they had Native actors onstage, they had Native writers and Native directors, but there wasn't yet anyone from the Native community who was designing for the stage" (Liss, "Kent Monkman" n. pag.). Monkman sees himself "stealing landscapes because nineteenth century landscapes are already a stage" (Monkman, "Laughing 'Irregradless'"). His historical paintings, like the stage for which he made sets, provide a backdrop for 2GQ to take centre stage and to be part of the (Indigenous) circle. And his paintings steal the landscapes back, especially his original reserve of St. Peters, a form of erotic land claim.

miyo-wîcêhtowin—the principle of getting along well with others, good relations, expanding the circle (Cardinal and Hildebrandt 14)—is an underlying tenet of Monkman's over-all artistic philosophy. Harold Cardinal (Cree) and Walter Hildebrandt, who held workshops with Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan in 1999,[64] describe the fundamental importance of miyo-wîcêhtowin:

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[64] Co-authored by Harold Cardinal and Walter Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan* (2000) is the result of Treaty Elder forums commissioned by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, Canada and the Province of Saskatchewan. The Elders spoke in their languages of Plains Cree, Saulteaux, Dene and Assiniboine, which was translated by oskâpêwisak or translators / Elder helpers. While Plains Cree is used to explain the concepts of different Nations, these concepts are also found in the other Nations.

> The term outlines the nature of the relationships that Cree people are required to establish. It asks, directs, admonishes, or requires Cree peoples as individuals and as a nation to conduct themselves in a manner such that they create positive or good relations with other peoples. (14)

Note that Harold and Hildebrandt position miyo-wîcêhtowin as asking, directing or admonishing Cree peoples to build good relationships; the ways of enacting miyowîcêhtowin are as varied as Cree peoples. Some members of a community might need a gentle reminder about the responsibilities of miyowîcêhtowin whereas others need stronger reminders.

Monkman's Indigenous version of modernity uses miyo-wîcêhtowin to counter the vanishing Indian trope of both art history and dominant history. Instead, Monkman interrogates the history of colonialism by stressing how "the artwork of the 19th century was really about freezing Aboriginal people in time and setting us backward. A lot of my work is about deconstructing the authority of these paintings—because they continue to hold authority over how First Nations are perceived" (qtd. in Timm 95). The perception of Indigenous peoples as living in the past continued through modernism as Indigenous peoples were viewed as "insufficiently modern (or constitutionally incapable of modernity) while at the same time as being not authentically traditional by virtue of being alive in the modern world" (Anthes xv). Surrealists such as Marcel Duchamp and André Breton "were desperate for an alternative to their own violently decaying civilization[;] the Surrealists saw in the ceremonial art of the world's indigenous populations the possibility of deliverance" **(**Browne 246**).** Indigenous art was inspiring, but the Surrealists

didn't address colonisation in their works, but viewed Indigenous art as objects full of shamanic inspiration.

Although Monkman doesn't use Cree terms like miyo-wîcêhtowin, he repeatedly uses the word "communicate" in a CBC interview. Expanding the circle involves the sharing of stories, including histories. miyo-wîcêhtowin can also be translated as "living in harmony together" ("miyo-wîcêhtowin"), a concept far more encompassing than to communicate. Monkman clearly wants to share the story of 2GLBTQ people with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. He explains, "I think art functions to communicate ideas. I want my art to speak to people and I have a lot of things I want to communicate. I think in enhancing a vocabulary of painting that can speak to a wide audience was really an accomplishment for me" (Monkman "Reimagining"). This accessibility, particularly in his landscape paintings, is "an entry point for people to absorb a different version of history" (Monkman "Reimagining"). The emphasis on communication is a way of bringing people into the circle where Monkman has decolonising lessons to share. While Monkman considers himself an activist, he humorously states that he "doesn't wake up in the morning and slap on a placard" (Monkman "Reimagining"). Instead he uses visual art, film, and performance as tools of decolonisation.

Because Monkman invites non-Indigenous viewers into his paintings, films and performances, his work is what Métis artist David Garneau calls Aboriginal sovereign display territories (37), which he compares to a cultural centre "located on reserve land (including urban reserves) that is managed by Aboriginal people of that territory" (37). This is a safe space that "would encourage Aboriginal people to make work that not only

spoke to their own people but also to visitors" (37). Garneau is quick to point out that the "non-Aboriginal viewer who seeks conciliation ought to enter Aboriginal sovereign display territories as guests" (37). Similarly, Monkman's repeated use of "communicate" is a way of inviting people into his sovereign display territory: "My primary audience for both paintings and films is Aboriginal, they are my community. That's who the stories are about. An Aboriginal audience member will be the first to understand what I'm doing, but the work is open enough that others can enter it" (Monkman, "Kent Monkman Miss Chief" 53).

Monkman is renowned for his landscapes and performances featuring Miss Chief, so it is a surprise that his earliest work is more conceptual.[65] However, his training in illustration explains his earlier, more abstract work. Monkman believed he had to produce conceptual work in order to be taken seriously as an artist, rather than as an illustrator. His first exhibition, 1993's *Mind, Body, Spirit,* a solo show[66] at Vancouver's renowned Monte Clark Gallery, is a colourful oil triptych inspired by collage and Abstract Expressionism, "but he eventually rejected what he considered a very personal vocabulary in favor of a more widely legible representational lexicon derived from Old Masters" (Vartanian). The three panels show what is recognizably a head that reflects the exhibition title: the mind panel shows the brain and eyes, along with colourful patterned geometric shapes; the body panel is more square with no discernible humanity and the

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[65] Conceptual art started in the late 1960s and the term is used to "describe a wide range of types of art that elevated the concept or the idea behind the artwork over traditional aesthetic and material concerns (what it looks like or how it is made)" ("Conceptual Art").

[66] It is unusual for an artist's first show to be solo; usually artists are part of group shows until they have achieved some critical acclaim.

spirit is the most clearly human with discernible facial features. All three paintings feature a colourful sky blue showing the face in a natural environment. Monkman explains, "for the first twelve years, I just pushed paint around and I just found I was having a really circular conversation. . . I felt I had reached a kind of dead end" ("Discussion Between").[67] Monkman's artistic trajectory also expresses miyo-wîcêhtowin as he strived to make his art more accessible in order to foreground the place Two-Spirit peoples have in some Indigenous societies.

At seventeen, he attended Sheridan College to study illustration, where "he wasn't interested in the then-fashionable conceptual approach to art creation criticism. 'There, the idea was everything. . .but I wanted a skill" (qtd. in Hannon, "The Pink Indian" 60). Monkman credits his early work as a storyboard artist for television commercials with his ability to draw whatever he envisions. This job made him enough money to go travelling around Europe to look at art. But Monkman didn't quite turn his back on his illustration background. He also designed the poster for Native Earth Performing Arts' 1993 *Lady of Silences*, as well as the set and costumes. He also designed the sets and costumes for 1994's *Diva Ojibway*. Both of these productions took place while Tomson Highway was the Artistic Director.[68] Monkman's stint at Native Earth helps to explain his interest in the theatrical. He confesses, "I guess I'm a closet performer" (qtd. in Hannon, "The Pink Indian" 58), which helps to explain his decision to perform as Miss Chief.

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[67] When asked by a McCord Museum audience member about the possibility of going back to Abstract Expressionism, Monkman good humouredly but firmly comments "Probably not. I'm over it!" ("Discussion Between").

[68] Unfortunately, I have been unable to find accounts of Monkman's time at Native Earth.

Monkman argues "in the Romantic period, we were painted out of the narratives, and in Modernism[69] it was further ensured that aboriginal narratives wouldn't enter the canon, by deconstructing painting's ability to tell stories" (qtd. in "Tonto" 75). As Cree curator Richard William Hill observes, Monkman's work doesn't pit past against present but shuttles between temporalities to "see the contemporary view as incomprehensible without the past, to the extent to which we ourselves are still inhabited by these ideas and images. This is simply not a postmodern montage of historical references, but a rich play between past and present, of the past *in* the present and of the present *in* the past" ("Kent Monkman's" 55). It is not surprising that Monkman's move to a more painterly style was to counteract colonialism, especially in the context of art history. The use of a narrative style enables Monkman to tell the story of colonisation. Instead of the "ghost-making rhetorics of colonization," Monkman asserts the Indigenous side of the settler-colonial relationship. In Justice's words, "you can't have a mutual relationship between something and nothingness" ("Go Away" 150).

Monkman's alternative take on landscape paintings subverts dominant tropes of gender and sexuality. As Melissa Elston points out: "By requeering a landscape that had previously been artistically delineated by settler heteronormativity, these paintings also decolonize sexuality where it has been suppressed and remapped by European cultural interlopers" (189). While Monkman ties the present to the past, this doesn't mean consigning Indigenous peoples to the past, which is a colonising tactic. Moreover,

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[69] Beginning the late nineteenth century, "challenging the notion that art must realistically depict the world, some artists experimented with the expressive use of color, non-traditional materials, and new techniques and mediums" ("Modern Art" n. pag).

positioning Monkman as simply antagonistic to American Romantic painting places him as only reacting to colonisation. Queer historian Jonathan Katz emphasises the importance of nineteenth-century painting as a colonial project: "in North America, the Romantic genre itself was all bombastic grandiloquence marshalled to fossilize an image of a virginal land prior to European encounter. . . A sense of history would inevitably temporalize that moment, and spoil the equilibrium it had so desperately sought to figure as an immutable aspect of the landscape itself" (17). History painting is ideological, visually representing North America as an empty land, or terra nullius, ready to be conquered. Monkman repopulates these landscapes with a very different ideological purpose.

A Coyote Columbus Story

Monkman's first gained public attention when he illustrated Cherokee writer Thomas King's children's book *A Coyote Columbus Story* (1992), written as a protest against the 500th anniversary of Columbus' invasion. Credited as William Kent Monkman, his illustrations and King's text caused outrage as the book counteracted the dominant doctrine and celebration of "discovery." According to the *Globe and Mail*, King's publisher Groundswood Books went to Italy to sell foreign rights to several books, including "a funny, angry attack on the 'discovery' of America, *Coyote Columbus*, written by native author Thomas King and illustrated by Métis [sic] artist Kent Monkman. One U.S. publisher called the book 'hateful.' Another said: 'American kids have enough depressing news. We need to lighten up!'" (Ross C14).

Davidson *et al* point out that the *Globe and Mail* may not have been as outraged if it didn't have to defend a "Canadian" book against "those" Americans (77); Americans

should not attack "our" Natives. They continue: "the *Globe and Mail*'s report on the US publishers' dismissal of King's book demonstrates, alternative perspectives continue to be deemed intolerable" (Davidson *et al.* 78). Monkman's illustrations clearly reinforce King's critique of the Columbus myth. Described as "psychedelic woodcuts. Woodcuts on PCP" by Elizabeth Bird, the New York Public Library youth librarian, Monkman "bends over backwards to get it right. . . . Coyote, for her part, is decked out in a hot pink tank top, shorts, and running shoes at all times." Bird further observes: "Columbus is a ridiculous clown with a red nose and bright orange hair. His men resemble an odd assortment of gangster / conquistadors." While all the characters are clad in a riot of colours, the Indigenous people are relatively normal looking, whereas the invaders have enormous noses, bilious green and purple faces with the pope sporting round glasses that make his eyes suspiciously invisible. Monkman's illustrations show how Columbus and Jacques Cartier, the latter of whom appears at the end of the book, are being bad wâhkômâkanak[70] or relatives. The invaders are not practicing miyo-wîcêhtowin.

Notably, however, Monkman's illustrations also reinforce King's assertion that the baseball-obsessed Coyote is also not being a good relative. Coyote loves to play ball, but because she makes up her own rules in order to win every game, she alienates the beavers, the moose and the turtles. She then sings, dances and "thinks so hard her nose falls off, and right away along comes some human beings" (n. pag.). Coyote's punishment for being a bad relative is the arrival of Columbus. Unfortunately, the Indigenous people will be the ones to pay the price for Coyote's bad behaviour.

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[70] wâhktowin and wâhkohmakanak have the same etymology, highlighting the importance of being a good relative to family, community, the other-than-human world and to visitors in Cree cultures.

Monkman's Indigenous humans are a humorous portrayal of Prairie peoples; some of the men have braids and headbands or baseball caps with an eagle feather, and the women wear skirts and have (usually braided) long hair. Monkman did grow up in Winnipeg, so it is not surprising he is influenced by Prairie-style dress. Although Monkman pokes fun at stereotypes of what Indigenous peoples should look like, his Indians are decidedly contemporary. Monkman's Indians also have mouths perfect for lip pointing, an in-joke for Cree readers of all ages.

When the Indians wander off to other activities like shopping, skydiving or watching "big-time wrestling" (n. pag.), the bored and distracted Coyote's dancing and singing bring the invaders to the shores. The Niña, the Pinta and the Santa Maria are broken-down amalgamations of contemporary warships and Columbus-era ships, which bristle with cannons and are covered in large Band-Aids. *A Coyote Columbus Story*'s front cover shows Coyote and a very rotund, orange-haired and purple-faced Columbus on the deck of the Santa Maria, which sports an anachronistic life preserver emblazoned with a skull and crossbones. Monkman's mixture of contemporary and very colourful historical motifs show that the "visitors" continue to be bad guests.

Both Monkman and King show how the invaders are bad relatives who ignore miyo-wîcêhtowin. While Coyote is initially overjoyed at her conjuring up of the invaders, their intense focus on finding things to sell and their refusal to play ball makes Coyote realise "I must have sung that song wrong. Maybe I didn't do the right dance. Maybe I thought too hard. These people I made have no manners. They act as if they've got no relatives" (n. pag.). The garishly coloured invaders, one sporting an orange pompadour, pink heels and carrying multiple guns, look for gold and chocolate cake, staples in what

they believe is India. Instead of playing ball with Coyote, they see humans and other-than-human relatives like turtles, moose and beavers as resources to be extracted. When the animals run away, Columbus and his minions decide that they can sell the Indians, an idea that Coyote find preposterous. After Columbus takes some of the Indians to Spain, the rest of the Indians jump in the pond pretending to be "beaver human beings and moose human beings and turtle human beings" (n. pag.). They point with their lips,[71] holding branches as horns and beaver food, while Columbus and his minions, two of whom are holding guns, look perplexed.

Monkman's illustrations clearly show how religion and commerce are inextricably intertwined in creating bad wâhkôhtamowin or relationship with others, especially as Columbus steals Indians to sell in Spain. In his April 1493 letter to Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand in Spain, Columbus wrote: "As soon as I came to that sea, I forcibly seized some Indians from the first island, so that they might learn from us, and similarly teach us the things of which they had knowledge in those parts. . . .The ones who now go with me persist in the belief that I had leaped down out of the skies, although they have associated with us and are still doing so today" (12-13).

Monkman's invaders look decidedly sick and poor compared to the healthy Indians. Their clothes are patched up as a symbol of their greed and lack of good relations with Indigenous peoples. But the Indians realise that Coyote is being a bad relative, especially as the Indians in the story consider her a good friend. They have to abandon Coyote by fleeing to Penticton, home of renowned Okanagan storyteller Harry

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[71] In Cree cultures, pointing is considered rude, so people point with their lips instead.

Robinson, who profoundly influenced King's storytelling. Theytus Books, one of Canada's Indigenous publishers, is also in Penticton, as is the Enowk'in School of Writing, a reference that highlights the importance of Indigenous-authored stories in counteracting dominant history. Perhaps in Penticton the Indians will be able to regroup and stage a creative comeback.

The Prayer Language

In 2000, Monkman abandoned his illustration background in his first significant series of paintings, *The Prayer Language*, which introduced themes that would be present in his later work. Monkman describes the series:

> In this series of paintings I transcribe Cree syllabic translations of Christian hymns into multiple layers of semi-transparent acrylic paint. Suspended between these layers are organic forms, at times resembling the figure or organs of the body. In a colour range that suggests the various pigmentations of human flesh, the visual forms emerge at the surface of the painting like veins, muscles or bones that rises from within the body to become forms just beneath the skin. In some paintings, the forms are depicting bodies intertwined together. Drawing inspiration from erotic photos of men wrestling, I create ambiguity in the final image. ("Oh For")

The ambiguity in Monkman's work highlights the uneasy intersection between sex and power. As Monkman explains, he uses Michel Foucault to explore "the significance of power in relation to touch and sexuality. Foucault described sexuality as 'an especially dense transfer point for relations of power.' I am interested in how the discourse about, and practice of sexuality and touch relate to hierarchy, domination and subordination"

(qtd. in Francis 148-49). This hiding of erotic figures beneath a layer of Cree syllabics shows Monkman grappling with his attraction to men as well as his insistence that Cree notions of sexuality are healthier than Christian views of same-sex desire as unnatural.

However, because of his Christian upbringing, Monkman, in reference to *The Prayer Language Series,* admits that the meeting of Cree and Christian cultures is "often a space that can be one of conflict and one of consent, sometimes too easily polarized or set up, and so it was about opening this dialogue and saying that there's been many different ways that that Christianity has impacted Aboriginal people" ("Christianity"). Monkman explains that *The Prayer Language* series is also a highly personal work: "My great-grandmother was born in a Christian community, St. Peters just north of Winnipeg, which was this experiment, essentially by the Anglican church to turn Cree and Salteaux people into farmers" ("Christianity"). Monkman realised that the *Prayer Language Series* was an abstract way of addressing colonisation and the impact of Christianity on sexuality: "I had to deal with it more directly and that's when I started to investigate more specifically about who were these bodies and that's where it sort of led into the landscape and then once I situated these bodies in the landscape I realized that one had to be an Indian and one had to be a cowboy" ("Cree Syllabics").

Monkman's next works form a transition between *The Prayer Language* series and the arrival of Miss Chief, who represents Monkman's acceptance of his Two-Spirit self. As Gerald Hannon notes, "in a way, those barely discernible wrestling male bodies in his Cree syllabic paintings had to come out of the closet" ("The Pink Indian" 60). After experimenting with both sexes, Monkman recognised his attraction to men in his thirties and overcame the fear and shame of being gay because of his family's religious beliefs.

As his former partner Gisèle Gordon and now co-collaborator in their film production company Urban Nation jokes, "Yeah, Kent and I go way back—I knew him when he was straight" (qtd. in Hannon 62). Monkman was terrified at the stereotypical depictions of gay men in movies like *Boys in the Band*, which he describes as "an early homo-angst film. Was that what it would mean to be gay—bitchy and camping it up at precious little loft parties?" (qtd. in Hannon, "The Pink Indian" 62). He describes his family as "ultimately supportive" of him (qtd. in Hannon, "The Pink Indian" 62). Instead of referring to Monkman as closeted and then "coming out," it is more accurate to say that he follows a Two-Spirit narrative of changing his sexual preference as he sees fit, rather than fitting into a binary.

A Nation is Coming

Monkman didn't address sexuality in his first film first film, *A Nation Is Coming* (1996), but rather used disease as a metaphor for colonisation. He would depict 2GQ stories as he became more certain about his attraction to men. *A Nation Is Coming* won four awards, and was screened at the 1997 Sundance Film Festival. Based on the Lakota Ghost Dance and the Anishinaabe seventh fire prophesy, *A Nation* uses images of viruses and contamination "to reflect on how technology, 'advancement,' and disease have changed both the land and the lives of those who lived here" ("Synopsis"). Featuring Plains Cree ballet dancer Michael Greyeyes and alternating between a Banff Centre of the Arts studio and the snowy location near the Rockies, *A Nation* is in stark contrast to the rest of Monkman's filmic oeuvre in its abstraction and non-linearity. Monkman uses dance to construct social identities for himself and 2GQ peoples by insisting that cultural practices

are not ossified. Monkman and Greyeyes mix together grass dancing and ballet. A Lakota Ghost Dance Song inspired the title of the video:

> The whole world is coming
>
> A nation is coming, a nation is coming
>
> The Eagle has brought
>
> The message to the tribe
>
> The Father says so, the Father says so (Monkman, "Kent Monkman Miss Chief" 50).

Like René Highway, who brought together modern dance and Woods Cree ways of knowing, Monkman and Greyeyes stress how traditions are adaptive and change through time and space while keeping their importance and meaning.

The Lakota Ghost Dance song shifts from stating that the "whole world is coming" to "a nation is coming." Even though the Ghost Dance has been misinterpreted as a ritual to make European people disappear from North America, Wovoka prophesied peace between Indigenous peoples and settlers (Hopkins 66). Wovoka foresaw a radical hospitality of miyototakêwin, being "happy to welcome guests" or "the act of paying tribute to someone by performing an act of kindness; a tribute" ("miyototakêwin" n. pag.). But, as David Gaertner qualifies, "it was through the desire to do good by visitors that Indigenous communities were also exposed to the violence of settler colonialism" (n. pag.), making hospitality a sometimes dangerous endeavour. Although the Lakota Ghost Dance song cites the Christian god, its image of the Eagles as messengers and its shift in emphasis from the world to a nation, centre the Ghost Dance in Indigenous worldviews.

Carcross / Tagish artist and curator Candice Hopkins describes the Ghost Dance as an act of miyo-wîcêhtowin:

> On January 1, 1889, Jack Wilson (or Wovoka), a young Paiute man, had a vision during an eclipse of the sun. . . .Revealed to Wilson was a place where his ancestors were once again engaged in their favourite pastimes, where wild game and abundant food were restored to the lands. . . .He interpreted the vision as the coming of a new age, one where Native and non-Native people would (finally) live in peace. This was the birth of the Ghost Dance. . . . It was, quite possibly, the first pan-Indian movement in the United States. ("Can Beauty" 65)

In contrast to this bucolic setting, Wovoka's contemporary Drinks Water warns in Monkman's film, "You shall live in square grey houses in a barren land and beside those square grey houses you shall starve" (Monkman, "Kent Monkman Miss Chief" 50). It is unclear, however, whether Drinks Water is referring to Indigenous people, settlers or to both. Monkman describes the prophecy:

> This was at the end of the 19th century, the end of the freedom that Plains Indian people had enjoyed for thousands of years. They were dying from smallpox, being hunted down and killed by the U.S. army. It was probably the most desperate time for Native American people. The prophet Wovoka began the Ghost Dance religion to provide a ray of hope, forecasting that the world would be restored and that they weren't all going to die. (Monkman, "Kent Monkman: Miss Chief" 50).

Monkman clarifies that there was a "pervasive millennial angst, which derives from a Christian viewpoint" when *A Nation* was made in 1996, which is in contrast to "prophecies from Ojibwa and other nations [which] say we are living in the time of the seventh fire, a time of renewal" (Monkman, "Kent Monkman: Miss Chief" 50). Monkman continues, "our film counteracts the bleak fears of the millennium by looking to Aboriginal prophecy to interpret who we are and where we're going" (Monkman "Kent Monkman: Miss Chief" 50-51). Instead of Christian-inspired apocalypse, Monkman uses the seventh fire prophecy to highlight the vibrancy and continuance of Indigenous ways of knowing.

Greyeyes,[72] the first Indigenous person to become a dancer at the National Ballet of Canada, assumes different forms as he travels through memories and visions. He dances as a time traveller, inspired by Ghost Dance but, as Amanda Hopkins remarks, "the 'end' is a means of resurrecting the past in the present day, thereby reinstalling the cyclical nature of time. The ceremony oscillated between the recurrent time of ritual and the linear time of history" ("Can Beauty" 66). The film's references to the Lakota and Arapaho Ghost Dances, while not specifically Cree, situate *A Nation* in Plains ways of knowing, a form of Reder's intertribalism. While the film moves between a contemporary studio in the Banff Centre of the Arts and snow-covered locations in the Rockies, Monkman emphasises the continuity of Plains ways of knowing, even as they change over time. Monkman sees Greyeyes as a time traveller, deciding to paint his body for

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[72] In the mid-nineties, Favel, Monkman and Greyeyes formed Tipiskaki Goroh, a dance company which performed two pieces choreographed by Greyeyes: *Night Traveler* and *Child of Ten Thousand Years* at the Canada Dance Festival in Toronto. Monkman was the production designer for both pieces.

parts of the film like men from archival photos (Monkman, "Kent Monkman: Miss Chief" 51). Curator Gerald McMaster (Cree) also sees Miss Chief as a time traveller, "moving in and out of history as a self-inserting corrective, defying the written and painted narratives espoused by the so-called victors, which have become naturalized with each succeeding generation" ("Geography" 100). Greyeyes embodies both the past and the present, particularly the contorted, frozen bodies of the Lakota children, women and Elders shot by the US army, an image depicted by a famous photograph of Lakota leader Spotted Elk's twisted and lifeless body in the snow.

While *A Nation* begins with images of urban decay, Monkman brings together the rural and the urban by the end of the film. *A Nation* begins with images of fire superimposed on the blue-lit figure of Greyeyes with quick black and white flashes of Greyeyes dressed as an old time Indian lying in snow. Monkman emphasises that this scene is inspired by "the photographs of Big Foot and his band at Wounded Knee [in 1890]. Men, women and children were slaughtered and left frozen in the snow" (Monkman, "Kent Monkman: Miss Chief" 51). Greyeyes is covered by blankets in both the contemporary and historical settings to highlight their interconnectedness. Inspired by Black Elk's prediction of a world without disease, *A Nation* uses greenish images of diseases like smallpox projected onto Greyeyes. Similarly, the old time Indian trudges alone through snow to find a smallpox-ridden blanket hanging in front of a cloth tipi. Images of the smallpox virus are projected onto his blanket. Similarly, one of the most arresting images in the film is Greyeyes in the studio wrapped cocoon-like in a blanket that covers him like a shroud, revealing Ghost Dance-like paint on his face. However, the

film ends on a hopeful note with Greyeyes pow wow dancing on a circle with images of fire inspired by the seventh fire prophecy.

Greyeyes' choreography at the end of the dance also highlights Monkman's insistence that Indigenous peoples have always been adaptable, by bringing together different artistic practices. Greyeyes started his career as a ballet dancer, coming to pow wow dancing later in his life. Monkman states, "Our film provided a good opportunity to draw upon [Greyeyes'] different influences and an interesting way of bringing Native philosophy alive" (Monkman, "Kent Monkman: Miss Chief" 51). The end of the film shows Greyeyes grass dancing in the studio, superimposed with images of water. The mixture of natural images in a modern film studio highlights the fluidity of time as our last view of the old time Indian is of him before a lit fire, emphasising his connection with Greyeyes' grass dancing, with the black-and-white film turning to colour.

Future Nation

Monkman's third film, *Future Nation* (2005), addresses the coming out of an Indigenous youth in a dystopic future Toronto. Although *Future Nation* is a narrative film, it has a decidedly unconventional topic as Indigenous gay teenager Brian finds love with Indigenous dominatrix James / Tonya during a "megapox"[73] epidemic. Monkman worked with Indigenous production company Big Soul Productions (which produced *Moccasin Flats*), and the film was funded by the repREZentin' Aboriginal Media and

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[73] Both films show how diseases like smallpox are instruments of colonization, since smallpox cannot be easily transmitted by blankets (although this idea is widely believed and certainly symbolically useful). Disease was not so much an instrument as a facilitator of colonization—starvation however, was an instrument, to the extent that Indigenous people's access to food could be regulated, at least.

Empowerment and Training Initiative. Monkman mentored Indigenous youth through the filmmaking process (Monkman, "Kent Monkman: Miss Chief" 53). Big Soul Production asked Monkman if he "could do a story about a gay kid, because after working with Aboriginal teenagers, they felt homophobia was an issue that needed to be dealt with" (Monkman "Kent Monkman: Miss Chief" 53). Monkman elaborates: "I was thinking about the story of an Aboriginal kid who comes to the city to find his freedom. . . .You see small-town kids land on Church Street and assume a new identity. It's a way of gaining acceptance. . . .I've never seen a film about an Aboriginal boy from a reserve have a drag-queen boyfriend, and this twist would add a new important layer. The film also shows a cowboy type who is topped by an Aboriginal drag-queen dominatrix. I play with these types, shifting the balance of power" (Monkman, "Kent Monkman: Miss Chief" 53).

Monkman, who wrote the script, positions women and drag queens as the most powerful characters in *Future Nation*. They are the providers, which is sometimes seen as "traditionally" a male responsibility, although women often participated in hunting and certainly contributed as much as men to the family diet. Monkman also depicts women as much more open to differing gender roles and sexualities. 2GQ peoples and women are more willing to enact miyo-wîcêhtowin in *Future Nation* than straight, cisgendered[74] men, which I will discuss shortly.

Future Nation portrays the coming in of an Indigenous youth to his reserve family. Two-Spirit scholar Alex Wilson (Swampy Cree) describes "coming in" as a way

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[74] The opposite of trans, cisgender refers to people having a gender identity that society considers appropriate for the sex one was assigned at birth.

for Two-Spirit people to "take responsibility for and control of their own experiences and identities" ("N'tacimowin inna nah'"197). Two-Spirit people and women repossess the land, both on reserve and in the city, and assert their rightful place in Indigenous societies. *Future Nation* not only posits settlers as bad guests, but it also asserts that cisgendered males operate outside Aboriginal sovereign display territory in Monkman's post apocalyptic world. Monkman offers a place where a Two-Spirit youth can find miyôtotakêwin from his on-reserve family. Brian[75] meets drag dominatrix Tonya by picking up a patron's forgotten phone in a gay bar; he is ordered to "get the fuck over here right now!" and enters Tonya's dominatrix lair, where she is busy dominating (off camera) a white man with a cowboy and Indian fetish. *Future Nation* continues Monkman's preoccupation with placing GQ2 peoples in positions of power; Tonya is reminiscent of Miss Chief in her supreme confidence. While Monkman cites his 2004 painting *Artist and Model* as the first appearance of Miss Chief, Tonya's attire is clearly a prototype for Miss Chief with her black-fringed halter-top, high heels and feathers in her long black-wig. Tonya realises that Brian is not the owner of the phone but, finding him attractive, invites him into her apartment. While the dildos strewn around Tonya's apartment dismay the more bashful Brian, he is attracted to Tonya. He tries to flee after hearing Tonya spank the white cowboy while saying "do you love that, you piece of fucking white trash," behaviour which would make Miss Chief proud.

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[75] Tantoo Cardinal's (Métis) son Cliff, Cardinal who has gone on to write 2GQ –inspired plays, some produced by Native Earth Performing Arts, plays Brian. I couldn't find any information on Joshua Jacobs, who played Tonya / James.

Brian is confused to meet James, who is Tonya out of drag, in the gay bar. James replies to Brian's exclaimed "You look different," with a smiling "Better as a boy or girl?" The next shot is of Brain and James cuddling in bed, a scene in which Monkman shows a very rare cinematic depiction of love and tenderness between Two-Spirit youth. James comes from Blood River, a "rez way up north" and he is a "damn good hunter." But Tonya had to live in the city, a reference to on-reserve homophobia. In contrast, Brian has moved back to the Blood River reserve (Monkman's second film is *Blood River*). Tonya can be herself in the city, while Brian is closeted on his reserve. Tonya's presence on the reserve forces Brian's homophobic brother Charles to include Brian and Tonya in his circle.

However, Monkman doesn't just focus on 2GQ issues in *Future Nation*. He also critiques traditional gender roles, opting to allow people to find their own path. The film shows the interrelated straightening of 2LGBTQ people and the deliberate lessening of Indigenous women's power in some Indigenous societies under colonialism. In the words of Leanne Simpson (Anishinaabe), "when gender becomes so restrictive that our individual light cannot shine through the rigidity of those binaries, and when we replicate the hierarchy and exploitative power needed to reproduce colonialism we become vessels that reproduce violence instead of Indigeneity" (n. pag), a process exemplified by Charles' homophobia and sexism. Brian discovers love and acceptance from Tonya, who has the strength to be herself, and from his aptly-named sister Faith, who refuses to be locked into mainstream gender stereotypes.

When Brian is back in Blood River, we see the contrast between the matter-of-factness of his sister Faith about being a hunter and the posturing of his homophobic

brother Charles, who is extremely heteronormative but can only pretend to be a hunter. Charles invites two female friends, Chantal and Sheila, over to share food and to act as romantic foils for Brian, who hasn't shared his queerness with his siblings. Charles reads James' desperate email to Brian pleading for help to leave Toronto. Of course, Charles calls Brian a fag. However, Sheila, Chantal, Charles and Brian drive to a megapox-infected Toronto to find food and for Brian to find James. There, he finds Tonya, who is dressed in a very short nurse's uniform and has a key to a variety store filled with food. Charles accepts a box of food from Tonya, giving her a grudging nod of thanks. Charles learns to enact miye-wicêhtowin by accepting Tonya into his family. Like Jeremiah's support of Simon, Charles realises the importance of accepting Brian as he is.

By the end of *Future Nation***,** Charles has learned to accept a less heteronormative role. Faith matter of factly tells Brian she doesn't care who he loves, adding, "Don't worry about what Mom and Dad would have thought because they'd be proud of you." When they arrive back at the house at Blood River, Faith asks for help to carve the deer she has shot. Brian excitedly tells Faith that Tonya can help because "she's an expert." Tonya hands her nurse's bag to Charles, who grins sheepishly. The last shot is the same as the opening shot, bringing the film full circle. Tonya smiles at Brian, holding a bloody knife as she goes around the house to help Faith skin the deer. The film fades to black with Brian's voiceover: "We were all happy for awhile, at least we were still alive. I think of you often Tonya and I wish we were still together." Monkman ends the film on a pessimistic note, as befitting a post-apocalyptic storyline; however it is not clear whether Brian and Tonya split up or Tonya succumbed to the pox.

Future Nation has received little critical attention, perhaps because of its unusual place in Monkman's oeuvre as a post-apocalyptic film dealing with queer teenage love. But *Future Nation* is also Monkman's only film to depict reserve life: in this film he directly critiques the colonial takeover of Indigenous lands. The reserve radio station can be heard in the background while Brian and Charles are in the kitchen: "This won't be the first time that people have tried to steal our land." This commentary echoes Monkman's familial loss of land. In fact, Tonya's submissive cowboy and his wife tried to squat at Brian's house while Brian and his siblings, along with Chantal and Sheila,1 were in Toronto to get food. This time, the Indians get to evict white people from Indian land.

As in *Miss Chief: Justice of the Piece*, Monkman advocates a future nation expansive enough to welcome people who do not fit into socially constrained roles, such as the hunter Faith and Tonya / James. Monkman again complicates easy binaries by depicting the fear of urban Indigenous peoples taking over the reserve. While Brian tells James that, although he lives on reserve, he goes to Toronto all the time, *Future Nation* initially creates tension between urban and reserve-based Indigenous peoples. The reserve radio DJs create a fear of "city people" coming on to the reserve. While they may be referring to non-Indigenous people coming on to the reserve, it is unclear if Tonya would be considered an outsider as she is not a Blood River member and because she is in drag. But she is now part of Brian's family, an Indigenous-centred idea of kinship that counteracts official policies of "straightening" Indians. Monkman's next series of paintings shows his exhaustive knowledge of art history particularly nineteenth-century landscape painting. These paintings usually have a lack of Indigenous presence, an oversight Monkman colourfully corrects.

George Catlin

Monkman highlights the place of Two-Spirit people in Native histories by recreating American painter George Catlin's (1796-1872) full-length portraits of important First Nations chiefs and warriors. Monkman places chalk outlines of what philosopher Mark Kingwell calls "spectral dandies" behind these stereotypically noble-looking chiefs and warriors (Kingwell 53). Monkman's 2008 *Tinselled Buck* series enters "recorded history through Catlin's pre-existing inventory to make meaningful expansions and insertions within this particular catalogue of imagery. Through Monkman's observations, we are made privy to the deficiency of source documents" (Lee 37-38). Monkman recognises that he was looking for "evidence of sexual variance even if it was filtered through a European lens. . . even if it was coded in their own biases" (qtd. in Gonick 24). Inspired by Catlin's descriptions, Monkman also refers to the spectral dandies as beaus or Faint Hearts. Monkman reinscribes Catlin's encounters with Indian dandies, which is what Catlin called the gender variant peoples of some Nations, in this case the Mandan of what is now North Dakota. In the series, Monkman repopulates Catlin's scenes of stoic warrior Mandan chiefs with Two-Spirit people because "it is only through the processes of virtual auditing that Monkman was able to rescue the dandy from obscurity" (Kingwell 36). In contrast to Catlin's obsessive cataloguing of vanishing Indians, Monkman performs a critical intervention by inserting missing figures into Catlin's work, expanding the circle of colonial art history to include Two-Spirit people.

Catlin painted chiefs and warriors but was tantalized by the dandy, "these gay and bucks" who led a languorous life that included reclining on their horses watching "young aspirants . . .contending in manly pursuits-; when they are fatigued with this severe effort," they return home to "take a little refreshment, smoke a pipe, fan themselves to

sleep, and doze away the rest of the day" (Catlin 112). He describes the dandies in a Mandan village in 1833:

> Such personages may be seen on every pleasant day, strutting and parading around the villages in the most beautiful and unsoiled dresses. They plume themselves with swan's down and quill of ducks and plaits of sweet-scented grass and other harmless and unmeaning ornaments, which have no other merit than they themselves have, that of looking pretty and ornamental. (Catlin 112)

To Catlin, the dandies are humorous and inconsequential creatures who are fodder for ridicule because of their femininity. Clearly, they are lesser than the heroic chiefs and warrior because they seem to be, in Catlin's view, more like women.

Monkman sees the term dandy as a way to describe "people slightly on the edge of society, or indefinable in some way, but these aboriginal gentlemen that Catlin encountered had a flair for fashion and were observers of society, much like the English dandy" (qtd. in Yarish 94). Of course, Catlin is deliberately misreading the role of the mihdeke (Roscoe 217). They had more of a function than just looking "pretty and ornamental;" they were an integral part of Mandan society. Catlin posits the dandies as less than honourable because they don't seem to hunt "dangerous" animals or engage in combat. Of course, Catlin is an outsider to Mandan culture, no matter how much he portrayed himself as an expert on all things Indian. Kingwell observes, "Though Catlin seems scarcely aware of it, the mere existence of these figures presents a disruption of the aggressively binary scientific vision the painter attempted to bring to his varied

experience of North American aboriginal people" (54). Catlin's obliviousness (deliberate or otherwise) to the homoerotic charge of his description is quite astonishing.

But the dandies are not as languid as depicted. They actively petition Catlin to paint them. He describes them as "figur[ing] about [his]door from day to day in their best dresses and best attitudes, as if in hopes that [he] would select them as models, for [his] canvass [sic]" (113). The dandy that Catlin chooses is overjoyed to be selected: the "poor creature's heart beats with joy and pride at the idea of my selecting him to be immortal, along with the chiefs and worthies whose portraits he saw arranged around the room" (113). Catlin emphasises the abject nature of the dandy by describing them as a poor creature looked down upon by his fellow Mandan, who, according to Catlin, refer to them as "faint hearts" or "old women" (112). But Catlin is quite taken with the dandy: "He was truly a beautiful subject for the brush, and I was filled with enthusiasm—He was a tall and fine figure, with ease and grace in his movements, that were well worthy of a man of better caste. In his left hand he held a beautiful pipe—and in his right hand he plied his fan, and on his wrist was still attached his whip of elk's horn, and his fly-brush, made of the buffalo's tail" (112). Monkman notes, "drawing one beau, who didn't have the status of chief or high-ranking warrior, created such a backlash that the artist had to stop at the chalk drawing, so it just doesn't exist anymore. There's something really beautiful about that, something so completely impermanent and erasable. To me, this speaks about all the other histories and narratives that were never authorized ("Tonto" 75). It is intriguing that Catlin describes the dandies as creatures, echoing René Highway's description his attraction to the Royal Winnipeg Ballet dancers. The dandies intrigue Catlin, but he is unwilling to acknowledge their significance in Mandan society.

Unsurprisingly, Catlin described a Fox and Sauk Nation ceremonial dance to the berdashe as abhorrent and disgusting. Catlin's derogatory 1835 / 1837 paintings *Dance to the Berdache* depicts Sauk and Fox warriors dancing around a berdache, a figure whom Mohawk artist and curator Steven Loft describes as "synonymous with catamite, a derogatory reference to a male homosexual concubine" (qtd. in Ace 10). Catlin's description of the Sauk / Fox ritual shows his distaste:

> Dance to the Berdache is a very funny and amusing scene, when a feast is given to the "Berdache" as he is called in French. . .Who is a man dressed in a woman's clothes, as he is known to be all his life, and for extraordinary privileges which he is known to possess, he is driven to the most servile and degrading duties, which he is not allowed to escape; and he being the only one of the tribe submitting to this disgraceful degradation, is looked upon as medicine and sacred, and a feast is given to him annually. (qtd. in Ace 11)

But, as I will discuss in chapter four, Miss Chief confronts Catlin in Monkman's 2007 performance *Séance* by asserting the continuance of these "disgusting" creatures.

Catlin's 1861/1869 expanded rendering of the painting includes ceremonial hides and feast bowls not included in the original painting (Ace 11), which shows a more moderated understanding of the ritual. The inclusion of these gifts to the Two-Spirit person shows that this person was an honoured part of the community and not always a subject for denigration, although, according to Catlin, the dandies were teased by their

community.[76] Unwittingly, Catlin acknowledged 2GQ people by highlighting the status of the berdache. Catlin describes the "lower caste" dandy whose portrait he begins chalking out as having his hair in a woman's style. Monkman declares "the painting never got made; it was this chalk drawing that never got painted. I always think of missing dandies—he called them dandies—and so that's where I am now, thinking about those missing characters, those characters who never got painted, the missing dandies, the missing berdaches, the flamboyant men or the men-women in the villages" (qtd. in Maurice 91). Monkman gives them the prominence they deserve in his art.

Monkman responds to Catlin's version of the Indian dandies in several different artworks, including his *Tinselled Bucks* series and *Séance,* a performance in which Miss Chief directly confronts Catlin and his *Dance to the Berdashe* painting. Monkman's *Tinselled Buck* series enters, in the words of words of Su-Ying Lee, "recorded history through Catlin's pre-existing inventory to make meaningful expansions and insertions within this particular catalogue of imagery. Through Monkman's observations, we are made privy to the deficiency of source documents" (37-38). Monkman recreates Catlin's obsession with cataloguing Indigenous peoples in the series, with titles like *Kotz-A-To-Ah with Faint Heart 38,757*, which not only mocks Catlin's obsessive cataloguing but highlights the importance of Two-Spirit people in many Indigenous societies, a presence that Catlin denigrated or ignored. Monkman also creates a catalogue but for very different purposes. Two-Spirit people are not catalogued because they are vanishing, but to assert their presence in the past and into the future.

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[76] It is hard to know if the dandies were teased in a way that made them part of the community or made fun of for being unmanly.

Also in 2008, Monkman underlines settlers' erasure of gender-variant people in a series of similarly-themed paintings. In *Clouds in the Canyon*, an earnest nineteenth-century artist has his back to the viewer, busily painting the Grand Canyon, which Monkman skilfully reproduces on the artist's easel, a painting within a painting. Monkman makes explicit what the painter is missing, namely the gaily-painted dandies who lounge around him. These dandies are very hard to miss, as they are clad in vibrant shades of green, blue, purple and pink. One fetching figure, clad in lavender boots, thigh-high blue leggings, pink and purple loincloth, a red beaded vest with purple fur collar and a green parasol, stands squarely in the painter's line of vision. Two more spectacularly dressed dandies lie seductively in front of the painter, looking imploringly at him, begging to be painted. Like Monkman's spectral dandies, they mix male and female signifiers by donning war paint and loincloths with contemporary women's boots and parasols.

The dandies are not simply lounging around but are reoccupying colonised territories. Monkman points out that George Catlin "had a contempt for Aboriginal people who showed any influence—or 'contamination' as he called it—of the European in their dress or in their lifestyle" (qtd. in Timm 94). Monkman's amalgamation of "traditional" markers such as loincloths and war paint with bright colours and high-heeled boots is the epitome of contamination. Similarly, *Forest With Trees* features gaily-attired dandies provocatively posing behind an Edward Curtis-like photographer, who is intent on capturing the waterfall before him. One of the dandies looks at the waterfall, perhaps wondering what could be more fabulous than they are? The other dandies pose

provocatively, ready for the photographer to capture their beauty. The dandies' presence is more than ornamental. They physically inhabit land, if not the landscape painting.

While Monkman's visual and performance art and films counteract the trope of the vanishing Indian, a trope exemplified by the works of Catlin that aimed to document "Indians" before they vanished forever and assimilated into Euro-American culture, they also assert Two-Spirit historicities. Shirley J. Madill notes, "the intelligent mischief of Kent Monkman takes on significant political and social importance in light of today's discourse on the subject of Aboriginal sexuality and the homophobia that originated from Christian European imperialism. Through his artistic interventions, he reminds us that the making of history is a fluid and subjective process that entails constant inquiry and re-evaluation" (28).

Monkman is clearly fascinated by Catlin, especially the artist's ego. Miss Chief's last name (eaglestickle equals egotistical) is a sly reference to Catlin's propensity to paint himself into his own work; both Catlin and Miss Chief are "eagletestickle" or egotistical. Catlin's paintings and illustrations reinforce official policies designed to hasten the demise of Indigenous peoples in the US and in Canada. Monkman observes:

> A lot of my work really is about examining art history of the 19th century, and George Catlin was one of the most fascinating characters that I came across. One, because his body of work was so prodigious – I mean, he produced so many hundreds of portraits of Aboriginal people. But the man was full of contradictions, and it's these contradictions in his work and in his character that make him a really fascinating person to me. On one hand he purported to be this saviour to what he believed was a dying race, the

> native people of North America, and his life's work was really dedicated to creating what he believed was a document of the dying race. So of course as Aboriginal people we're still here. We are not a dying race. We've just been in a process of innovation and influence and we've been adapting to European presence here, but we're still here. ("George Catlin")

Miss Chief confides Catlin tried to seduce her on several occasions even though Catlin felt Miss Chief was inauthentic because she borrowed from Eurowestern culture (Testickle 109). Monkman shows that Catlin is an inauthentic artist who purports to show a dying race rather than resistant and vibrant cultures.

Welcome to the Studio: An Allegory for Artistic Reflection and Transformation

Monkman's works have become more thematically and artistically sophisticated, while still exhibiting humour with Two-Spirit aesthetics. He has shifted his focus to explicitly critique modernism rather than just focussing on repainting terra nullius landscapes. Monkman explains, "modernity espoused a wilful amnesia about the past" (qtd. in Milroy, "Historic Drag" 76), a forgetting Monkman countered in his epic 2014 work *Welcome to the Studio: An Allegory for Artistic Reflection and Transformation* at Montreal's McCord Museum. Based on the William Notman (1826-1891) photography archive at the McCord, Monkman reproduces a few of the vast collection's black and-and-white photos, albeit in ways that Notman never envisioned. The massive twenty-four foot long painting was displayed in a black room with glass vitrines, which reminded Monkman of a non-digital camera's interior (McCord Museum). While Monkman's massive painting depicts the late nineteenth-century rivalry between photography and painting for artistic supremacy, Monkman champions the visual artist. But he also

acknowledges the use of photographs for the visual artist, as he is a studio painter who sometimes uses photographs as the basis for his paintings.

Welcome to the Studio is also inspired by realist Gustave Courbet's 1885 painting *The Artist's Studio: A Real Allegory Summing Up Seven Years of My Artistic and Moral Life*, which features a panoply of Courbet's influences, including writers Georges Sand and Charles Baudelaire, as well as members from different classes of Parisian society. Monkman echoes Courbet by including wrestlers, high society Montrealers, and a portrait of Courbet, who is painting a portrait of the viewer, among the thirty characters in his painting. Lily Sharrick argues, "Monkman portrays himself in the place of Courbet, but in the garb and pose of William Notman's own famous self-portrait. Unavoidably, this compositional representation ties Monkman to the two other men, while raising questions of his identity as an artist and an individual of Cree descent" (n. pag.). By placing himself in the centre of the painting, Monkman is illustrating that he is comfortable being a Swampy Cree man in the dominant art world.

Monkman places Indigeneity at the centre of his painting by his strategic placement of Indigenous people. Some of the Montrealers dressed up as Indians in Notman's photography studio, which was, argues artist Sarah Parsons, "a space for identity performance. . . [T]here was a whole retinue of people there to dress you in whatever persona you chose to take on" (qtd. in Milroy, "Historic Drag" n. pag.). At the 1898 Chateau de Ramzey Ball, a fundraiser for the Women's Antiquarian Society, rich Montrealers enjoyed dressing up as Indians (Milroy, "Historic Drag" n. pag.). Shaddick observes "Like Courbet's, Monkman's piece is split into three sections that present the viewer with his inner circle, those who define his identity on the right side, and those who

willingly participate as spectacles on the left side and peripheries" (n. pag.) The left side contains members of Montreal's high society dressed up as Indians, but the right side includes Notman's portrait photography of Sitting Bull and Buffalo Bill. In this version, Sitting Bull is giving Buffalo the finger. Monkman coyly remarks, "I thought he was maybe just stroking his rabbit skins" (Milroy, "Historic Drag" n pag.).

Monkman "hand[s] back the microphone to voices that colonialism once drowned out" (Milroy, "Historic Drag" 75). Two Tsuu T'ina men in colourful regalia and roaches (a kind of feathered head gear worn by some male pow wow dancers) to the right of Monkman enact the photography / painting debate as one uses his paintbrush to "stab" the other, who is kneeling holding a digital camera. Monkman stresses that the two men are a "way of underscoring Aboriginal identity. . . .Even though these look like 'dead Indians' from the past, our cultures are very much alive. You go to a pow wow and everyone has cell phones and are taking pictures with digital cameras" ("Discussion Between"). Two white women in late nineteenth-century clothing echo the theme of painting versus photography, as one has a painting and the other has a box camera. It is not coincidental that Monkman uses women and Indigenous peoples to demonstrate the debate as both groups are left out of dominant art history.

Monkman's use of the physical space of the McCord Museum, particularly the reflective glass vitrines, enacts miyo-wîcêhtowin by encouraging people to become part of the painting. Monkman's self-portrait, is in front of his Greek god-inspired portrait of the young and handsome Percival Molson. Clad in a fur-trimmed smoking jacket, the languid Monkman seems to beckon the viewer with one hand, while he holds a very large paintbrush in the other. Monkman explains, "It was fun creating this painting with phallic

references, which in a way can be more erotic than just showing a penis. . . It's about having the biggest brush!" (qtd. in Burnett n. pag.). A stool and easel are placed opposite Monkman's self-portrait to encourage the viewer to take photos of themselves, photos that are then reflected reflected on top of Monkman's self-portrait. While miyo-wîcêhtowin is part of *Welcome to the Studio*, viewers' selfies with Monkman's self-portrait will have different meanings. Are non-Indigenous peoples, like the Montrealers in Notman's studio portraits, colonising the painting? But when asked about how viewers should interpret the work, "Monkman simply replied the viewing was up to the individual, that they could think upon the content and mediate it for themselves" (qtd. in Sharrick n. pag.). Everyone has their own story to tell, a tenet that reflects principled non-interference.

Urban Res

Consisting of four large paintings and a life-sized diorama, *Urban Res,* Monkman's 2014 solo show at New York City's Sargent's Daughters gallery, explicitly creates an Aboriginal sovereign space that centres women and 2GLBTQ peoples. While Monkman uses female figures from modern artists such as Picasso, the location of the paintings highlights violence against Two-Spirit peoples and Indigenous women. Instead of his meticulous reproductions of nineteenth-century landscapes populated by a strategically placed and disruptive Miss Chief and usually naked male colonisers, Monkman focusses on Winnipeg's inner-city North End, home to a large population of Indigenous peoples,

particularly Cree people.[77] Monkman remembers seeing dioramas of Indigenous peoples at a Winnipeg museum as a child, which froze "indigenous culture… in this perfect state. This is what we were supposed to be. And then I'd step out onto the streets and see skid row and the fallout of colonization" (Brooks n. pag.) He notes

> Indigenous cultures have been compressed with the advancement of civilization. . . .My earlier work over the past few years focused on the historical narratives between settler culture and Native American people. I wanted to re-stage some of these scenes in urban environments, because a lot of indigenous people live in cities. In Canada, more than half are living in cities. And a lot of urban environments are places where Native people once inhabited. This ties back to some of the themes in my current work—this amnesia in the face of modernity. (Brooks n. pag.)

Monkman stresses that cities are also Indigenous lands. But is Monkman working against miyôtotakêwin by painting (admittedly) staged scenes in Winnipeg's North End? Is he being a bad guest by painting an area of Winnipeg in which he didn't spend his childhood?

I believe his *Urban Res* paintings make an Aboriginal sovereign space by creating decolonised depictions of both mainstream art history and of urban Indigenous peoples. Monkman "stakes new ground and claims a territory for himself as both an artist and a

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[77] However, there is revitalisation from within the community, which "takes the form of a wide range of community-based organizations that have emerged from the ground up, and that use a community development approach to heal and empower those who are poor and have been damaged by poverty, racism, and colonization. Aboriginal people and Aboriginal women in particular are among the leaders in this work" (Silver n. pag.).

descendant of those originally displaced" ("Kent Monkman, The Urban Res" n. pag.). Monkman grew up in Winnipeg's middle class and mostly Anglo area of River Heights, where his parents moved in order to give their children more educational opportunities. Monkman remembers, "There were people who wouldn't talk to my dad when he moved into the neighbourhood. It was hard for him to accept that, but he knew that putting his kids into better schools was going to give us a better shot down the road" (qtd. in Timm 95). Monkman recognises the importance of his experiences as an urban Indigenous person growing up in Winnipeg: "I think I've always been motivated by some of the issues that we faced as an Aboriginal family in Winnipeg, that my family faced in previous generations, being dispossessed of their land, and I think that their point of view, their philosophy toward life, really shaped who I am" ("Early Inspiration" n. pag.). Monkman is asking himself to be a good guest in Winnipeg's North End by positioning the Indigenous youth as welcoming the less fortunate casualties of modernity, figures from paintings by Pablo Picasso and sculptures by Henry Moore.

As Monkman notes, Indigenous peoples are not figures in a museum diorama; rather, the *Urban Res* series asserts the contemporaneity of Indigenous peoples. Moreover, while he respectfully invites people into Winnipeg's North End, I believe he foregrounds missing and murdered Indigenous women. It is no coincidence that the modernist figures being mourned in the paintings are female. Monkman's flattening of pictorial space not only refers to the compression of Indigenous cultures, but also to "how women have been violated in modern art as they are exploited by male artists who butchered their bodies for art" (Vartanian n. pag.). In the words of Two-Spirit scholar Sarah Hunt (Kwakwaka'wakw), "colonialism relies on the widespread dehumanization of

all Indigenous people – our children, two-spirits, men and women – so colonial violence could be understood to impact all of us at the level of our denied humanity. Yet this dehumanization is felt most acutely in the bodies of Indigenous girls, women, two-spirit and transgender people, as physical and sexual violence against us continues to be accepted as normal" (n. pag.). Vartanian's quotation about the violation and butchering of women in modern art is not just metaphorical, but is an integral part of colonialism, which Monkman highlights in *The Urban Res.*

While the women in *The Urban Res* are modeled on figures from Picasso's cubist paintings, their location in Winnipeg's North End and in front of ominous houses and hotels addresses violence against Indigenous women. It is Miss Chief who mourns a cast-off Picassoesque woman in *The Deposition*, a painting set in an inner-city landscape of abandoned halls and boarded-up houses. Miss Chief collapses into the arms of four Indigenous gang members, one of whom blesses Miss Chief with an eagle feather. One man is clearly puzzled by the Picassoesque figure's distorted foot. In Christian terms, the deposition refers to Christ's removal from the cross but Monkman places a woman from modernist art as Christ and Miss Chief as the Virgin Mary. Miss Chief would be outraged at this comparison, though. It is an incongruity that forces us to rethink the worship of a "virgin" mother. Miss Chief is certainly no virgin, symbolised by her scarlet robe beneath which the blue of the Virgin Mary peeks out. Her conquests of European males also attest to her confident sexuality. While she helps the Cubist woman, Miss Chief still asserts her sexuality.

Using miyotôtakêwin, Monkman pays tribute to the stories of Two-Spirit people that the colonisers tried to erase. Yet, while he stresses the need to invite people in to

learn about these stories, Monkman's art is very much for Indigenous people. Monkman does not just make aesthetically pleasing paintings, films and performances but is connecting to his ancestors, especially his Swampy Cree great-grandmother, who was removed from her lands three times. Monkman's cultural productions are more than a reclamation of Two-Spirit traditions; in an act of miyotôtakêwin he Indigenises history by making history and gender more fluid concepts.

CHAPTER FOUR

"Indians on Top:" Kent Monkman's Sovereign Erotics

While Monkman updates nineteenth-century landscape paintings, he more importantly positions Two-Spirit people at the centre of history. As art critic Jordan Timm rightly observes, "his work is a means of metaphorically reclaiming the land, and of exploring themes of racial and sexual oppression through alternative narratives of the art and mythology of the frontier" (94). Monkman explains, "So what I'm doing is taking the most spectacular landscapes that I can find and painstakingly reproducing them in a way that conceptually reclaims those landscapes" (Furnish 36-37) not only artistically but also erotically**.** Monkman reveals the "repressed desire and troubled fascination that have paradoxically contributed" to the shaping of official history (Thériault 6).

I argue that Monkman asserts what Driskill calls the Sovereign Erotic to foreground gender diverse peoples in both pre- and post contact Turtle Island and to centre Indigenous versions of history instead of hegemonic colonial history. In the previous chapter, I focus on Cree principles in Monkman's art, whereas in this chapter I broaden my analysis to analyse Monkman's rewriting of colonial history. Driskill uses "sovereign" and "sovereignty" in "relationship to tribally specific and traditional understandings of our bodies, genders, erotic senses of self, terms employed in the formation of identities" (62). I focus on Monkman's alter-ego Miss Chief Eagle Testickle's erotic escapades with settlers, usually in the guise of explorers, cowboys and nineteenth-century artists such as American George Catlin (1796–1872) and Canadian

Paul Kane (1810–1871), exploits that serve a very particular function: to show the history and importance of Two-Spirit people in the past and in the present.

Tuscarora artist and scholar Jolene Rickard emphasises the importance of tradition to understand Indigenous arts. She uses Stuart Hall's idea that the local and the marginal can counteract colonialism by recovering hidden histories, retelling stories from the bottom up. Rickard observes: "Inevitably Indigenous artists confront the relationship to the philosophies or traditions that frame their cultural mapping with their artwork. . . . Tradition as resistance has served Indigenous people well as a response to contact and as reworking of colonial narratives of the Americas" (472). Tradition is not static. Artists negotiate the tensions between being respectful to traditions and creating path-clearing art.

Driskill cautions against seeing Indigenous peoples solely as traumatised victims, and instead positions the reclaimation of ceremonies, land and languages, as "revolutionary acts against colonial `powers'" ("Theatre" 157). While Monkman is an urban man influenced by mainstream gay culture, he is well aware of his Cree ancestors' history of displacement. Through his films, paintings and performances, Monkman embodies his family's history, including their Christianity, to assert a Cree-centric view of the world and Cree historicities. Mark Rifkin defines erotics as a mix of desire, pleasure, wounding and "interrelations with others, the land, and ancestors" (*Erotics* 39). These sensations open Indigenous peoples to a commitment to "collectivity and placemaking," which initially may not seem to be political (*Erotics* 39). Monkman's cultural productions imagine "alternative kinds of Indigenous being" that exist outside the "bureaucratic apparatus of self-determination" (*Erotics* 39). Status cards and

constitutional acts can provide official identities but Monkman's Sovereign Erotics create a space where Two-Spirit people can explode the idea that a status card or enrolment is all one needs to be Indigenous. Instead, Monkman moves beyond white settler and state recognition by using Indigenous ways of knowing, such as miyo-wîcêhtowin, which seems to invite everyone into his art work, but ensures the viewer learns the history of colonisation.

Monkman is firmly situated in the present as a Two-Spirit Swampy Cree man who lives in Toronto and grew up in Winnipeg. Rather than accept a bureaucratic identity produced by the settler state, Miss Chief creates her own Nation. Monkman plays up the mischievousness of the new Nation. However, nationhood has its serious side: in his February 2012 performance, *Miss Chief: Justice of the Piece*, Monkman shows Miss Chief accepting people into her Nation who don't fit under either Canadian Indian Act or U.S. enrolment criteria. Monkman creates a pointedly political Sovereign Erotics, which better reflects landless and urban Indigenous peoples, including Two-Spirit people. In this performance, Monkman follows traditional kinship practices, such as adopting in people who were not part of the community, as a form of miyo-wîcêhtowin.

Miss Chief is clearly performing in and repopulating the settlers' idea of an empty landscape or terra nullius. Significantly, Rifkin sees embodiment as agency. Situating Indigeneity as an erotics "offers an alternative vision of Native politics, and an attendant account of the effects of settler imperialism, by foregrounding embodiment as the entry point for representing Indigenous political ontologies. . . . indicating an Indigenous philosophy and praxis in which the personal, natural, territorial, metaphysical, and political are not readily contradistinguished" (39). Like René Highway's choreography,

Monkman's incarnation of Miss Chief in performance, films and paintings is not merely a performance but also an embodiment of Monkman's familial loss of territory and an assertion of self as a contemporary, Two-Spirit Swampy Cree man. As I will discuss later in this chapter, the installation *Lot's Wife* foregrounds Monkman's grandmother's loss of land. In this way, Miss Chief not only embodies the history of colonisation, particularly colonisation of Two-Spirit bodies, but uses Miss Chief to show his own struggles with colonisation and the history of Christianity in his family.

Considering the rich history of Indigenous performance, including the 2GQ performances of the Highways, Adrian Stimson (Siksika) and Waawaate Fobister (Anishinaabe), what makes Monkman different? While Monkman claims Sovereign Erotics in the dominant art world, he has also done very well in that art world, especially as a mid-career artist. His artwork has entered "the auction market—a privilege reserved for the safely dead or famous" (Hannon, "The Pink Indian" 56). While there are other Indigenous artists addressing the histories and legacies of colonisation, "he is the first to explicitly recognize, respond to, and manipulate the operations of desire at work" in colonial representation of Indigenous desire (R. Hill, "Spirits of Mischief " 38). Likewise, by "giving way to the narrative, visual, and performative pleasures offered—lurid stories; lush, colourful paintings; dramatic, larger-than-life personalities—[Monkman] [is] able to insert his own fantasies into an existing structure of tremendous power" (R. Hill, "Spirits of Mischief" 39). Monkman's paintings are not only about the larger forces of colonisation but also reflect Monkman's own desires as a Swampy Cree Two-Spirit man. Monkman seduces people into his paintings, films and performance and disrupts colonial history by inserting queer Indigenous sexuality into a narrative that still dominates

Canadian and American discourses of Indigeneity. Yet, Monkman's success places him in the paradoxical position of being a highly successful Two-Spirit artist in an overwhelmingly white art market. But Monkman uses his visibility to help 2LGBTQ communities and Indigenous artists by enacting wâkhôtowin or interrelatedness, especially in his connections to his communities.

Monkman treats "kinship as a verb, rather than a noun" (Justice, "Go Away" 150). He uses his talent to support 2GLBTQ communities and the urban Indigenous communities of which he is a part. He points out, "I think my strongest support has always come out of the aboriginal community" ("Humour"), a kinship reflected in his subject matter, his donation of artworks to AIDS organisations and his mentoring of Indigenous youth. While most of Monkman's work addresses historical injustices, Monkman also embodies wâkhôtowin in more explicitly contemporary and activist ways. Referring to Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*, Reder notes, "[T]he autonomy Maria regains is not individualistic but rather one in community and kinship, in relationships based on reciprocity and respect" ("Âcimosowin" 134). Monkman follows this reciprocity by donating twenty-five prints as a fundraiser for Casey House, the first freestanding HIV / AIDS facility in Canada. Monkman's poster for *AIDS Action Now!* a Toronto AIDS activist organization, features his painting *Kiss the Sky* (2010), a homoerotic depiction of the Icarus story, emblazoned with the caption "The Creator is Watching You Harper!"

Monkman's work for his communities has not gone unnoticed. In 2012, he was a recipient of the EGALE Leadership Award, Canada's national lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans human rights organization and in 2014 he received an Indpire Indigenous achievement award for Arts. While he refers to himself as a "gay man, a queer man" for

non-Aboriginal people, he quickly asserts, "it is important to identify myself as a Two-Spirited person within Aboriginal culture because our cultures were accepting of homosexuality, of bisexuality, of other sexualities the Europeans could not comprehend and could not find a place for in their own culture" ("2012 EGALE Award"). It is important to note that not all Indigenous cultures have a Two-Spirit tradition like the Plains Cree âyahkwêw, a distinction that would make Monkman's statement seem, perhaps, overly hopeful and a bit romantic. However, Monkman's comment comes out of the urban Two-Spirit movement, which is more intertribal as many urban Indigenous peoples may not know or have access to their home communities.

For example, *We are a Part of Tradition,* a flyer for Toronto's 2Spirits of the First Nations, states: "In many of our cultures before the arrival of Europeans to North America, Two-Spirit referred to an ancient teaching. Our Elders tell us of people who were gifted because they carried two spirits: that of male and female. . . and in almost all cultures they were honoured and revered" (*Part of Tradition*). While some of the discussion seems to romanticise the past, these descriptions help 2GLBTQ peoples have a sense of pride in themselves, a pride exemplified by Miss Chief's conspicuous presence. Monkman and other Two-Spirit people create oskisihcikêwak or new traditions, especially for those who do not have access to their traditions because of colonisation. For example, in "Shaking Our Shells: Cherokee Two-Spirits Rebalancing the World," Qwo-Li Driskill uses the wampum belt, and duyuktv—balance, truth, justice—and the Cherokee Stomp Dance to reclaim dormant Cherokee Two-Spirit traditions (121).

Although he rarely foregrounds Swampy Cree topics, I believe Monkman's art is a form of Cree narrative memory by asking the viewer to remember both Monkman's

Swampy Cree family and Two-Spirit people. Queer historian Jonathan Katz describes Monkman as “part Cree, part European, a gay man who was raised straight, a highly political dissident who has made major one-person shows in major museums [which] highlights his contradictory interpellation. But the idea of contradictory interpellation can be reframed into Cree lifeways” (Katz 22). Again, Monkman does not have to be either / or; as mentioned previously, “everyone tells stories, including their own story, from a different point of view” (Reder, “Âcimisowin” 123). Monkman can change his story to reflect his audience and his place in the path of his life, which is inspired by his Swampy Cree family.

Monkman explains the importance of his Cree great-grandmother, who didn't speak a lot of English: "our history is very real to me because of my connection to her" (*8th Fire*). His family sheltered him from their history of forced relocations but his connection to his Cree great-grandmother influences Monkman’s decision to address colonisation in his art. Monkman's cultural productions are inextricably bound with his family's experiences with colonisation, especially his family's generations-long legacy of Christianity, a religion that has actively condemned Two-Spirit and LGBTQ people.

While Monkman parodies and criticises European and North American representations of Native peoples, he clearly enjoys reproducing nineteenth-century painting styles. Monkman likes to show that he can paint as well as or even better than nineteenth-century artists. Mohawk artist and curator Greg A. Hill points out: “[T]oday, the work of Indigenous performance artists draws on that multi-layered and multi-contested history; their art rebuilds and engages it, turns it on its head, is intertwined with it and honours it” (163). In other words, Monkman's art is not “against” Western art but

engages it on his own terms. In the words of José Esteban Muñoz, this is the function of disidentification, which works within the public sphere and contributes "to the function of a counterpublic sphere" (7), a space, in this case Indigenous, outside of the dominant ideology. Monkman's use of Miss Chief, who not only appears in his paintings but who is embodied in Monkman's performance pieces, highlights his Sovereign Erotics of disidentification. His upbringing in a Christian family enables him to understand how Christianity negatively impacted Indigenous peoples, especially Two-Spirit people.

Margot Francis emphasises, "the alternating obliteration and retrieval of the Cree language [and I would add culture] depicted in Monkman's story is itself a metaphor for the broader project of assimilation that the Canadian state has pursued with such vigour" (150). Monkman identified more with his Swampy Cree ancestry than his Anglo-Irish ancestry because of the presence of Swampy Cree relatives in Winnipeg and because "he looked different from his white peers at school" (Timm 95). Being made to feel different formed Monkman's attachment to that difference, inspiring the boldness and originality of his artistic vision. He states, "[W]hile I struggled with identity as a younger person in Winnipeg because of the racist climate there, as an adult I refused to see my aboriginality as a liability. How would things ever change if I did?" (qtd. in Burnett 95).

Monkman uses Miss Chief to create new traditions, especially for urban Indigenous peoples. Miss Chief first appeared in Monkman's 2002 painting *Portrait of the Artist as a Hunter*. At first glance, the painting appears to be a standard Western scene; two Indians and a cowboy ride alongside a stampeding herd of buffalo, with one lucky buffalo running away towards the lower right side of the painting. But closer inspection reveals that the cowboy seems to have forgotten his pants since he is clad in

buttless chaps, a fortunate oversight for Miss Chief, who aims her arrow at the seemingly oblivious cowboy. Miss Chief is wearing a headdress, gauzy pink loincloth and her familar pink high heels. The cowboy is seemingly unaware of Miss Chief's presence, but why is he wearing buttless chaps? Was he secretly hoping for just such an encounter with the fabulous Miss Chief? While Miss Chief is certainly campy, Monkman makes her an Indigenous rebuttal to the anthropological idea of the berdache. Miss Chief explains, "[O]ur nations had names for us in our own languages, Winkte, Illhama, Agokwe, and so on. . . .The French called us the Berdache, which stems from an Arabic word—Bardaj—meaning male concubine. It shows how little they understood of us; we were men who from childhood were blessed by the creator with the role of the opposite gender" (Monkman, *Miss Chief* 87). Monkman then decided to embody Miss Chief; as Liss aptly describes her, "witnessing Monkman in performance, confident in his charismatic presence and good looks, flamboyant in costume, carrying himself with pride, it is obvious he relishes the role-playing and the attention" (n. pag.).

Monkman uses Miss Chief as a way to seduce people into his work. Similarly, by painting "beautiful, lushly painted, fun and humorous images," Monkman uses his landscape paintings as a "gentle way of getting people to look at larger, more brutal parts of history" (Timm 95). However, Monkman can be very upfront about the history of colonial sexual violence, especially as he puts Indians on top in ways that may be discomfiting to non-Indigenous viewers. As Cree curator Richard Eilliam Hill observes, Monkman inserts "his own fantasies and desires into existing structures of tremendous powers. Happily, this subversive infection is invariably fatal to the objectives of the

original ideology" (R. Hill, "Spirits of Mischief" 39), a self-correcting contagion to colonisation.

Heaven and Earth

Duke University Press rejected Monkman's 2001 painting *Heaven and Earth* as a cover for the 2009 issue of the *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly*'s special edition on queer Indigenous sexualities. The painting depicts a puzzled buffalo looking at an Indigenous man wearing a headdress and deer-skin tunic and leather crouching behind a white man wearing a cowboy hat. The cowboy is on his knees and the Indian pulls of the cowboy's shirt. The cowboy has a very prominent erection, which prompted Duke University Press to censor the use of the painting on the cover.

As editors Rifkin, Justice and Bethany Schneider argue, the sight of a white penis was too transgressive as was the position of the two men: "It's a reminder that sexual queer bodies are ambiguously dangerous, especially when they also challenge racial hierarchy, and therefore should be hidden. . . . To quote Mark's quite succinct response: 'All this struggle over a white penis seriously?—just *way* too symbolic'" (2). The editors, along with the *GLQ* series editors, initially wanted a blank cover with the banner "Censored by Duke University Press," but opted to include *Heaven and Earth* within and to use *Forest for the Trees*, a painting depicting Indian dandies near a waterfall, as the cover to make more people familiar with Monkman's work (3). As the editors state, "it casts as pornography the celebrated satirical art of one of North America's finest contemporary Indigenous artists" (2). Monkman's painting technique is masterful but his art is also politically provocative. Duke University Press's censure of the *GLQ* is not the only example of censorship of Monkman's art. As I discuss, Monkman's 2007

performance *Séance* was a response to being censored from the First People's Gallery at the Royal Ontario Museum during the *Shapeshifters* Indigenous art exhibition.[78]

Lot's Wife

In contrast to the public controversies around some of Monkman's work, *Lot's Wife* is one of his most contemplative works as it addresses both his family's history of dispossession and Christianity's negation of Two-Spirit people. As Sarah Milroy describes, "[A] metaphor drawn from a Christian story is used to eulogize a way of life that Christianity unravelled" (Milroy, "Honouring" n. pag.). Monkman inextricably binds together his family's dispossession and the embrace of Christianity with the denigration of Two-Spirit people. The installation is his first piece to explicitly highlight the theft of his family's land. His grandmother's "farm. . .was claimed by white settlers from the fledgling Anglican settlement, supported by the policies of the Canadian government" (Milroy, "Honouring" n. pag.)[79] Monkman sees his family as resisting Canadian government dictates, which led his great-grandmother to live off reserve. Similarly, relocating the family to Winnipeg meant access to the cultural life of a city, which was important to Monkman, as he knew he wanted to be an artist at a very young age. Monkman's family encouraged his artistic endeavours; he remarks, "there was never any

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[78] See http://observer.com/2015/06/a-look-back-at-the-censorship-of-lgbtq-art-in-history/ for Monkman's painterly response to the controversy.

[79] Monkman acknowledges that his grandmother decided not to live on reserve resulting into her family losing their land after she die. He notes "it was illegal at that time for a treaty Indian to own land off the reserve" (*8th Fire* interview).

question that I would do anything else" (Monkman, "Kent Monkman: Miss Chief" 18). Monkman's family supported his career choice and his coming out.

Monkman's installation consists of a white mannequin of Miss Chief dressed in a white tunic holding a white beaded purse. This self-portrait is "placed in a plot of long grasses and wildflowers. Behind it, a baby deer finds sanctuary in the reeds" (Milroy, "Honouring" n. pag.). The mannequin faces a screen upon which is projected a film of the Red River near St Peter's, Monkman's great-grandmother's reserve, "replete with a soundtrack of birdsong and the sound of wind in the grass" (Milroy, "Honouring" n. pag.). The whiteness of Miss Chief also represents the Canadian government's attempts to make Monkman's great-grandmother white by removing her from her ancestral lands. Reflecting his family's history with Christianity, Monkman uses the biblical story of Lot's Wife to depict his family's land and Swampy Cree ancestry.

Lot's wife "who, despite divine threat of reprisal, turned back in her leave-taking for a final glance at Sodom, her former home. For her defiance, God turned her into a pillar of salt" (Milroy, "Honouring" n. pag.), provides an apt metaphor for Monkman's familial history. Monkman points out, "'the story of Lot's wife was always told to us as a story about how God destroyed gay people. But it was Christianity that did not accept homosexuality'" (Milroy, "Honouring" n. pag.). Monkman explains, "'she is punished for remembering. We are not supposed to look back and remember where we are from'" (Milroy, "Honouring" n. pag.). Andrea Smith argues that the Christian colonisers compared Indigenous peoples to Canaanites, since "both were worthy of mass destruction [because] they both personify sexual sin" (*Conquest* 10). Smith goes on to note that in the Bible, "Canaanites commit acts of sexual perversion in Sodom (Gen 19:1-29)" and

are the "descendants of the unsavoury relationships between Lot and his daughters" (Gen. 19:30-38)" (*Conquest* 10).

Monkman further complicates the story of *Lot's Wife* by having Miss Chief sporting a very white, semi-erect penis, which is visible through her diaphanous, biblical style tunic. Like the histories of Two-Spirit people, Miss Chief's erection is both visible and invisible, as the viewer has to make a conscious effort to see it. Moreover, Monkman is exposing the supposed homophobic aspect of the story of Lot's wife as well as its gender politics. Lot's daughters are offered to the mob outside their father's house and later have sex with their father to ensure he has heirs.[80] In some interpretations of the story, the mob of men want "to know" the two strangers who stay in Lot's house in a sexual way. On its website, however, the Anglican Communion argues that the story is "not even vaguely about homosexual love or relationships," but instead "about dominance and rape, by definition an act of violence, not of sex or love" (Mills n. pag.).

What, then, prompts Miss Chief's erection? She is looking at her great-grandmother's land; her longing is physically manifested. But Miss Chief is also Lot's Wife, who is punished for looking back at the "sinful" city of Sodom after god had told Lot's family not to look back at the city's destruction. Lot's wife was supposedly contaminated by Sodom's depravity and punished for disobeying god's edict. Similarly, Miss Chief is supposed to forget her family's land but her arousal signals erotic sovereignty by highlighting the link between sexual sovereignty and land rights. The

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[80] "Now behold, I have two daughters who have not had relations with man; please let me bring them out to you, and do to them whatever you like; only do nothing to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof," (Gen. 19:8 New American Bible).

Two-Spirit Miss Chief cannot forget her place both in history and on the land. She realises she has to establish her own sovereign homeland that will accept those outside of governmental and heteronormative structures. She remakes the connection between a lost land and one present in the city—Indigenous peoples can retain these erotic and affective ties, even if colonialism attempted to sever them through violence.

Miss Chief: Justice of the Piece* and *Mary

Both the performance piece *Miss Chief*: *Justice of the Piece* and the video *Mary* affirm Indigenous sovereignty. Monkman uses Miss Chief to explicitly critique official definitions of Indianness and to underscore broken treaty promises. Monkman's February 4th, 2012 performance piece at Washington DC's National Museum of the American Indian, *Miss Chief: Justice of the Piece* deconstructs notions of blood quantum and race using Swampy Cree ways of knowing. Miss Chief acts as the multi-roled arbiter of the Nation of Miss Chief: "chief magistrate, clan mother, CEO, president, chairman of the board, secretary, publicist, spokesmodel, minister of finance, minister of immigration and citizenship, queen, princess and all around boss lady" (*Miss Chief* 76). Clearly, Miss Chief lives up to her reputation of being "eagletestickle," deciding who should enter her inclusive Nation of Mischief. However, her admission policies are in decided contrast to American blood quantum and Indian Act criteria, which are used to both exclude and to assimilate.

Similarly, Monkman's 2011 short video *Mary*, which is shot like a glossy modern commercial, criticises the Canadian government for its failure to keep treaty promises and for its state apparatuses attempting to control Indigenous peoples. By establishing her own Nation of Mischief, Miss Chief creates a space for those who are negatively

impacted by the state. She exercises autonomy even in the absence of a communal land base. The urbanisation of Indigenous peoples in the U.S. and Canada does not signal a lack of sovereignty but highlights the resilience of Indigenous peoples who, in spite of the devastation of colonisation, "nonetheless maintain their Native identities and struggle to reestablish their survival" (Justice, "Go Away" 160).

Moreover, by opening her Nation to everyone, Miss Chief enacts miyo-wîcêhtowin as an act of radical hospitality. Miss Chief may not have her own army but she has her own citizenship papers and treaty money.[81] The citizenship certificate, emblazoned with a seal with a stylised pink and black eagle with Miss Chief's face in its torso, mimics the language of Canadian Citizenship Certificates: "(Name of Applicant), whose particulars are endorsed hereon, is a Mischief Nation citizen and that he/she is entitled to all rights, powers and privileges and subject to all obligations, duties and liabilities to which a natural-born Mischief Nation citizen is entitled or subject. In testimony whereof I have hereunto subscribed my name and affixed the seal of the Department of the Secretary of State of Miss Chief Nation," legalised by Monkman's signature as Miss Chief. The Nation of Miss Chief also has its own treaty money, but instead of symbolising the contract between the Canadian government and treaty Nations, Monkman's insistence that anyone can join the Nation of Mischief means that Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are in a contract with an Indigenous Nation established by a

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[81] "Treaty annuity payments are paid annually on a national basis to registered Indians who are entitled to treaty annuities through membership to bands that have signed historic treaties with the Crown" ("Treaty Annuity Payments" n. pag.). The annual handing out of treaty money is a symbol of the sacred ties between treaty First Nations and the Crown. Because the money was not tied to inflation, treaty First Nations peoples still receive five dollars.

Swampy Cree Two-Spirit man. Monkman clearly understands the trappings of nationhood. Rather than adhering to a Western notion of nationhood, Monkman insists on an Indigenous nationhood based on inclusiveness, art, play and eroticism, a recognition that "Indigenous nationhood is more than simple political independence or the exercise of a distinctive cultural identity" (Justice, "Go Away" 151).

Miss Chief also highlights the Cree idea of kihci-asotamâtowin or sacred promises to another, the treaty sovereigns' sacred undertakings (Cardinal and Hildebrandt 25), in both *Justice of the Piece* and in *Mary*. Pelican Lake Cree Elder and Senator Hilliard Ermine emphasises, "the old people made the treaties, they're the ones that told us not to fool around with these treaties, they're very important" (qtd. in Cardinal and Hildebrandt 38). Keeping one's promise is one of the fundamental tenets of being Indigenous. Another of the concepts used by the Treaty Elders to describe treaties is tipahamâtowin, which can be translated as "treating each other commensurately. . .this term describes that has been taken where the parties or persons involved fulfil their mutual and reciprocal undertakings or duties to one another" (53-54). By not adhering to treaties, the Canadian government violated its sacred trust with Indigenous peoples, prompting Miss Chief to create her own Nation.

Monkman, while a status Indian and mixed-blood himself, clearly disagrees with blood quantum and the Indian Act, governmental apparatuses that decides who is an Indian. Of course, from a settler colonial perspective, the ideal Indian is dead or assimilated. Miss Chief states, "I have decided, contrary to the colonial policies and laws of discrimination, racism and genocide perpetrated by the governments of the United States and Canada—which are designed to shrink the numbers of First Nation, Native

American, and Aboriginal people—that I will begin to build a great nation, unbounded by geopolitical borders and blood-quantum laws" (*Miss Chief* 76). Instead of Miss Chief's welcoming notion of nationhood, tribal / band governments in the US and Canada were prompted by the need to allocate resources into adopting mainstream notions of what could constitute legitimate membership, including blood quantum. Although this move by Indigenous reserve communities can be an assertion of sovereignty, it violates traditional notions of hospitality and long-standing practices of adopting people into the community. Indigenous conceptions of membership often conflict with Canadian government imposed membership criteria: "the government's legal definition of Indian and the level of assistance that it afforded [to Indians] changed over time" in clear efforts to reduce expenditures (Innes141). As Miss Chief asserts, "why don't WE absorb people into our nations and expand our populations instead—the way we used to do it" (*Miss Chief* 81).

Actors, who are scattered around the audience, petition Miss Chief to join the Mischief Nation. Escorted to her judicial podium by her bailiff, Miss Chief models a black headdress, thigh-high black stiletto boots, her bare torso covered by a train of black gauze and the pièce de résistance, a racoon jockstrap. Even when confronted by a white woman who is a wannabe Indian claiming she knew Miss Chief in a past life, Miss Chief responds, "[H]aving faced discrimination myself, who am I to tell you who you are or who you can be?" (*Miss Chief* 89). Miss Chief stresses that Indigenous peoples absorbed members "from neighbouring and enemy tribes or white settlers; some may have called it kidnapping, let's call it aggressive immigration. These captives could replace members of the tribe who died" (*Miss Chief* 86). Monkman's urban Indigeneity is an important factor;

he rightly notes: "[M]ost of us now live in cities, and we move freely everywhere as citizens of the world—myself included" (*Miss Chief* 81). This statement challenges the idea that urban Indigenous peoples are inauthentic. Rather, Monkman points out the inauthenticity of government-imposed definitions of Indigeneity that he counteracts with miyo-wihcetowin, the philosophy of expanding the circle. He creates his own Nation for people who don't fit into the Indian Act, blood quantum or heteronormative roles.

While Monkman specifically points out the sexism towards Indigenous women in the Indian Act, in which non-status women who married status men gained status whereas Indigenous women who married non-status men lost their status, Miss Chief also targets homophobia within Indigenous communities. While it may be tempting to see the Nation of Mischief as just a performance piece, the title "Justice of the Piece" signals that Monkman has a serious purpose. His performance piece explicitly centres justice for those who don't fit into mainstream Canadian and American cultures and in aspects of contemporary Indigenous societies.

When Ron, who cannot marry his Cherokee partner and adopt Cherokee children because of the Cherokee Nations' same-sex marriage ban, petitions for citizenship, Miss Chief asserts, "I think the most dangerous and insidious part of colonisation is the self-hatred within our own communities" **(***Miss Chief* 87). Monkman highlights how Christianity, promulgated in residential and boarding schools, led to homophobia and sexism in Indigenous communities. In decided contrast to the US and Canada, Miss Chief creates a sovereign Nation where all are welcome, regardless of sex, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation. Miss Chief quotes from the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples'* Article 8.1 "Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not

to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture" (81) to highlight the need for an inclusive Nation. The Indian Act and blood quantum, strictures enacted by colonial governments, both national and tribal, are not based on cultural or kinship ties, an imposition Monkman remedies by creating a new Nation and by stressing the sacredness of treaties. Ignoring the treaties breaks wâhkôtowin or good relationships in a profound manner.

Monkman also shows how the Crown and Canada ignore kihci-asotamâtowin or sacred promises to another when violating treaty rights. As Plains Cree Elder Danny Musqua states, "[W]e made a covenant with Her Majesty's government, and a covenant is not just a relationship between people, it's a relationship between three parties, you [the Crown], and me [First Nations] and the Creator" (Cardinal and Hildebrandt 32). This promise between treaty Indigenous peoples was sacred, signified by the use of the sacred pipe and pipe stem and the use of sweetgrass. In the words of Cree Elder Simon Kytwayhat:

> When our cousins (*kiciwaminawak*) the White man, first came to peacefully live on these lands (*witsakemacik*) with the Indigenous people, the [Elders] used pipe, sweetgrass and the pipe stem…And when they took the traditional adoption with the White man, they used the pipe and they shared the pipe with them from when they adopted a peaceful existence (*witaskewin*). (Cardinal and Hildebrandt 32)

These sacred agreements meant that the treaty signatories became family or *kiciwaminawak* governed by the "positive undertakings of the parties to nurture and root their treaty relationship in the principles of good, healthy, happy relationships (*miyo-*

wicehtowin) as symbolized by the laws governing relationships between cousins" (Cardinal and Hildebrandt 33). *Mary* reminds us both that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are integral to keeping treaty promises; Indigenous people cannot be solely responsible for honouring the treaties.

Clad in a sequinned red dress and red stiletto thigh high boots with her hair streaming behind her, Miss Chief enters a white room with gauzy curtains. Complemented by the melodramatic strains of "Liebestod" from Richard Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde,* she approaches the Prince of Wales, who is wearing both ornamental medals and a contemporary suit, seated in an ornate chair with a foot stool. She kneels before him, tenderly taking off a sock and a shoe. While Miss Chief caresses a clearly aroused Prince's foot, an inter-title states, "We had an agreement, I agreed to share, not surrender." While the music crescendos, Miss Chief, looking beseechingly up at the Prince, starts to weep, her mascara artfully falling on the Prince's foot. The Prince's demeanour now changes as he coldly ignores Miss Chief's distress. She asks, "How could you break your promise?" in an appeal to kihci-asotamâtowin. The intertitles at the end of the film explain:

> Since the signing of the First Treaties in the 18th century, the First Nations and the Crown had differing interpretations on what the Treaties meant. First Nations did not view Treaties as surrender, but as a sharing of resources intended to protect their cultures, languages and the land they had traditionally occupied.

> Despite attempts to extinguish these rights, Treaties remain the building blocks for the future of the relationship between First Nations and the rest of Canada. However, the ability of First Nations to exercise governance over their lands and people remains hampered by the paternalistic confines of the Indian Act.

While it looks as if Miss Chief is in a subordinate position as she kneels in the front of the Prince, the Prince's evident attraction to her puts her in a position of power. Although Miss Chief insists that Indians are on top, Miss Chief is very much the power bottom in *Mary.* Ryan Porter humorously explains that power bottoms are a "receiving sexual partner who should really see someone about their control issues" (21).

Like Mary Magdalene, Miss Chief is the witness to important events but is relegated to the sidelines of official history because of her sex. Monkman also points to the metaphor of Indigenous women as land to be conquered. As Justice notes, "invasion depended on the subjugation of Indigenous women and their frequent positions of authority as much as it depended on the erosion of affirming sexual pleasure and diversity of gender roles and identities" (Justice, "Anomaly 161), a diversity that nineteenth century painters like George Catlin tried to erase.

Séance

In his 2007 performance at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Monkman takes Catlin to task for his 1836/ 3 7 painted depiction of the Sauk / Fox tradition of honouring Two-Spirit people. The performance is Monkman's response to being censored from the First Peoples Gallery during the *Shapeshifters, Time Travellers and Storytellers* exhibition, a perfect excuse to stage a rebuttal to the museum. Monkman wanted to

include his painted critique of Canadian artist Paul Kane (1810-187), who was prominently displayed in the First Peoples Gallery, which was opened in 2006. Monkman and the curators "proposed an intervention in the First Peoples Gallery which would see Monkman hanging a small painting responding to the work of Kane in the central corridor of the gallery, next to Kane's own work" (Swanson 7-8). But the ROM's Director and Head Curator rejected the idea, although they allowed him to copy Kane's paintings and to do a performance piece. The reluctance to include Monkman's work alongside Kane's "highlight[s] the political necessity of Monkman's work" (Swanson 10). Although Monkman's work is shown in major galleries, Two-Spirit sexuality and the insistence that Canada has a racist past (and present) discomfits some viewers and, in this case, major art galleries. The ROM is very much a colonial institution filled with ethnographic displays of Indigenous people. The First Peoples' Gallery contains little in the way of contemporary Indigenous lives and certainly not someone as disruptive as Miss Chief.[82]

In a performance at the ROM's foyer, Miss Chief interviews three dead artists, whose disembodied voices answer her saucy questions, albeit in a less saucy fashion. Using three costume changes,[83] Miss Chief debates Eugene Delacroix (1798-1863), who is one of his favourite painters, Kane and Catlin. Miss Chief invites the artists to "astum pey yum'kah Okemow skew" (*Séance* 58), a phonetic spelling of "come talk to Miss

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[82] I visited the ROM in September 2015. Ironically, the Gardiner Museum, which is across the street, was having a Monkman exhibit.
[83] Miss Chief's costumes become more outrageous as she grows more irate.

Chief" in Plains Cree "to discuss the authority their voices still command in museums well over a century beyond the grave" (*Séance* 58).

Miss Chief asks Kane if he is familiar "with my people, the Swampy Cree, originally from Norway House" (*Séance* 64). Monkman uses Kane's own words to show that artists like Kane and Catlin, while making a record of a "vanishing race," were contemptuous of Indigenous peoples. Kane, who describes the Swampy Cree as being "decidedly the dirtiest Indians I have met with, and the less that is said about their morality the better," claims that they are smaller than their Plains relatives due "to their want of food, and instances of their being compelled by hunger to eat one another are not uncommon" (*Séance* 64). Kane goes on to describe the "unfortunate craving for intoxicating liquor, which characterizes all the tribes of Indians" as a "deadly instrument in the hands of designing men" (*Séance* 64). Of course, Kane is wilfully unaware of the contradictions between the Hudson's Bay Company's "hope of improving the Indians" and the use of alcohol as a means of control (*Séance* 64). Miss Chief sardonically replies to Kane's fabrications with "all right I am sure the audience would be thrilled to hear more of your true stories, but I need a drink" (*Séance* 64), a tongue-in-cheek indication of Miss Chief's unacceptable morality.

In front of a crowd of over 500 people, coyly billing herself as a "simple and humble painter" (57), Miss Chief, clad in a stunning pink headdress, addresses Catlin's disgust at a Sauk / Fox ceremony to a person he called a berdache or, as he notes "I-coo-coo-a in the Fox and Sac language" (*Séance* 68). Both the Mesquakie, the Fox name for themselves and the Sauk are, like the Cree, Algonquian-speaking peoples, and were originally from the Great Lakes areas until they were forcibly removed to Iowa, Kansas,

Nebraska and Oklahoma ("History of the Tribe"). Monkman is enacting wâhkohtowin with an Indigenous-centred performance that retells the ceremony for the i-coo-coo-a from an Algonquian perspective because the Mesquakie and Sauk are relatives to the Cree. Catlin's description of the Sauk / Fox ritual quoted in the previous chapter shows distaste. Catlin wishes that the Dance "be extinguished before it be more fully recorded" (*Séance* 69), to which Miss Chief triumphantly replies, "However, us beaus, dandies and faint hearts are still here. You have now also failed to extinguish the Dance to the Berdashe, as we're about to bring it back, more accountable and disgusting than ever. Mr. Catlin, you may now return from whence you came, or you may stay and join in, because it's time to Dance to Miss Chief' (*Séance* 69). While Catlin answers with a decided silence, three shirtless male Indigenous dancers appear and begin break dancing to "Dance to Miss Chief," a gay disco number that begins with pow wow singing and the exhortation in Cree to talk to Miss Chief. As always, Miss Chief has the last word.

Shooting Geronimo

Monkman's *Shooting Geronimo*, also from 2007, continues his fascination with Catlin. He Indigenises the Hollywood western by showing the real reason two Indigenous men agree to appear in such a stereotypical movie. The two Cree men—played by Antony Collins (Pima / Maricopa) as Blake Tenderfoot and Quetzal Guerrero (Juanaño / Yacqui / Kambiwa) as Johnny Silvercloud—whose real names we never learn, agree to appear in Frederick Curtis' (Yves Harrington) reductive film in order to help their starving community. Miss Chief is the Lonesome Stranger, who uses her beguilingly tricksterish forces, including hilariously out of place break dance sequences, to disrupt the Hollywood stereotypes of the Indian and, possibly deliberately, to have Curtis shot.

Frederick Curtis, the filmmaker in *Shooting Geronimo*, is a nod to Edward Curtis (1868-1952), "a photographer hired by J.P. Morgan in 1906 to document the traditional cultures of the Aboriginal peoples. The resulting archive of more than 2,000 photogravures is one of the most significant and controversial representations ever produced" (Liss, “Wild West” 105). Curtis infamously supplied his subjects with “traditional” costumes to wear because Indigenous peoples were deemed “too modern” to be photographed as historical artefacts, “even paying them to pose and dress in costumes he provided” (Liss, “Wild West” 105). The character of Frederick Curtis directs a silent-era western on a soundstage, seducing two very handsome young Cree men to act in his stereotypical film, *The Red Menace*. The nameless Cree men do not act sufficiently fierce and dress in contemporary nineteenth-century clothing, but do look very alluring in bare chests and loincloths, which is Curtis' idea of how Geronimo and Sitting Bull would appear. Curtis has to teach these modernised Cree to act “more Indian.” Frederick continues his inspirational namesake’s mission to encourage Indians to act like the stereotype. It was important to forbid Indigenous people from moving into modernity except under white conditions. Acting like stereotypical Indians relegates Indigenous people to the past whereas being “modern” people means assimilation into the dominant society.

Monkman posits Miss Chief as a "mischief maker, a supernatural element, representing Aboriginal philosophy" (Monkman, “Kent Monkman: Miss Chief” 49). When Curtis exhorts the two Cree men to perform "The Ghost Dance of the American Indian," the perplexed Cree men, aided by the tricksterish force of Miss Chief, perform a break dance routine, choreographed by Michael Greyeyes (Plains Cree). Amusingly,

Miss Chief's dancing stunt double is Alejandro (Alex) Meraz (Puréhpecha), who is more famous for playing Paul, a member of the wolf pack in the *Twilight* franchise. Miss Chief uses dance as one of the most disruptive elements in the film. Of course, Indigenous dance was viewed as threatening by colonial governments because of its connection to culture. Dance was also seen as anti-capitalist, especially in Cree give-away dances, because participants gave away some of their possessions instead of amassing personal property. Like René Highway, Monkman uses dance as a very physical gesture of resistance in installations such as *Dance to the Berdashe* and films like *A Nation is Coming*. One of the epigraphs for the *Kiss of the Fur Queen* stresses the danger of Indigenous dance in a December 15, 1921 circular sent out by Deputy Superintendent General of the Department of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott: "Use your utmost endeavours to dissuade the Indians from excessive indulgence in the practice of dancing" (n. page). Both the Highways and Monkman position dance as an anti-colonial activity.

Monkman notes that the painted backdrop for *The Red Menace* is based on the actual rock formation in "*The Searchers* [1956]. . .The backdrop is part of the film's reclamations, taking these landscapes to tell the other side of the story" (Monkman, "Kent Monkman: Miss Chief 49). Accordingly, Miss Chief uses her "mysterious force" to intervene in and rewrite history. As Monkman explains, "you can't change history, but you can get people to think again about what happened back then, and hopefully they will se the present in a different light" (Monkman, "Kent Monkman: Miss Chief 50). Monkman very actively changes history in his paintings, installations and performance pieces, showing that history, like a constructed backdrop, is more fluid than imagined.

While past events cannot be changed, Monkman shows that the representation of these events can be rewritten and restaged.

Curtis is overcome by the dance, exclaiming in intertitles, "Good heavens how curious! But oh my! how exciting!" Miss Chief laughs lewdly when Curtis, frustrated by the Cree men's supposed inability to act, dons one of the actor's wigs, acting the part of the fierce Indian with one of the Cree men being the cowboy. However, the prop pistol has accidentally been switched with a loaded gun and Curtis, the "Indian," is shot by a one of the Cree men who are pretending to be an "authentic Indian." After Curtis' untimely (or maybe timely) death, the Cree men take charge of the movie, signalled by humour and some of Monkman's rare uses of specifically Cree markers.

The real reason for the Cree mens' involvement in the film is to help their community: "[We] could buy food and send it home!" The intertitle has Cree syllabics with the English text translated by Keith Goulet underneath, which privileges Cree speakers who can read syllabics. Furthermore, Monkman highlights the deliberate starvation of First Nations people on reserve.[84] Mohawk curator and artist Greg A. Hill notes that the Cree boys put up with Curtis's impositions in order to feed their community: "Their willingness to participate can now only be seen in terms of a power dynamic that Curtis exploits to the extreme: his sexual advances and arrogant assertions about what is authentically 'Indian' are insults that the men must bear as they keep their goal in mind" (159-60).

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[84] In 1883 a Cree Elder stated, "They did a lot to starve the Indians. The first thing they did was to fence the reserve in…The fence was to keep the people in…When the people came here they were starving already. So many people were sick that a doctor from Indian Head [Saskatchewan] was called. The doctor got mad at the agent and told him the people were starving" (qtd. in Lux 40-1).

The Cree men decide to make their own film with the dead Curtis as General Custer. They exclaim: “Looks like General Custer has been shot by another whiteman." One of the Cree men leans over Curtis’ body: “The whiteman says he was definitely shot by another whiteman.” The Cree men take a bow from the soundstage saying “The Whiteman thanks the two innocent Cree Indians for helping him make his picture show.” They change back to western clothes but Johnny cries out "Wait, the money!” (in syllabics and English) but the money has disappeared. When Curtis shows the trunk full of gold to the Cree men, Monkman highlights Curtis’ duplicity, and by extension, that of colonial governments, by having the trunk in a glittering, unfocused shot, making the gold seem like a magician's illusion. The treaties, like Curtis’ “deal,” were made with starving people who realised the buffalo weren’t coming back. The Cree men have little choice but to act in the movie.

Shooting Geronimo shows that while the Cree men are highly aware of their objectification, they're focussed on wâhkôhtowin, working to get the money to feed their kin on the reserve. While Monkman doesn’t explicitly name the Cree men as queer, the jealousy exhibited by one when Curtis grabs the other’s ass is clear as is his partner’s anguish when the other one leaves the set. Of course, this confusion is set into motion by the tricksterish Miss Chief in the guise of the mysterious Lonesome Rider. She is unseen by the actors as she shoots arrows across the set, “even taking control of the camera, laughing uncontrollably at the ill-fated incident, as if she may have had some ‘mysterious’ control over it” (Liss, “Wild West” 100). Miss Chief ends the film by taking Curtis’ spirit with her as she vanishes as mysteriously as she arrived. However, Curtis is

certainly no longer in a position of power as he is pulled ignobly behind Miss Chief on a donkey, a fitting ending for the arrogant filmmaker.

Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe) affirms, "Native imagination, experience, and remembrance are the real landscapes of liberty in the literature of this continent" (7). Monkman's cultural productions are more than a reclamation of Cree Two-Spirit traditions; he Indigenises history by making history and gender more fluid concepts. Monkman explicitly situates his cultural productions as acts of sovereignty, an imaginative land claim for Indigenous communities and for his Cree ancestors. Monkman's amalgamation of the historical and the urban is an insistence that being Cree is not fixed in time, that nêhiyaw-itâpasinowin (Cree woldviews) encourage shifts in history and gender. Monkman uses "sympathetic mimesis—his ability to get so successfully inside his historical sources" (R. Hill 54) to move beyond fixed official histories to affirm Cree Two-Spirit ones. But, as Richard William Hill contends, Monkman "continues to do what has been done since time immemorial: to speak a language through [his] work that is capable of communicating beyond the moment of interaction, creating an experience that posits a memory that forever alters the bearer of that memory and imposes a responsibility to its remembrance and recalling" ("Constitutional Amendments" 54). Monkman is asking all of us to remember Cree Two-Spirit histories and to join his Nation.

CONCLUSION

The summer of 1990 was a pivotal time for both 2GLBTQ and Indigenous rights, and their intersections in Canada. In July and August, Kanienkehaka resistance at Kanehsatake and Kahnawake against colonial expansion into sacred territory brought together Indigenous people from across North America, reigniting Indigenous sovereignty movements. Kanehsatake "showed Indigenous people that they had the power to assert their voices on the national stage. . . .Immediately after Oka, many new works by Canadian Indigenous writers were published, often to national acclaim" (Cariou 578). *Canadian Literature* also published its Native Writers and Canadian Writing issue in 1990. In August 1990, the term Two-Spirit was coined at the Third International Native Gay and Lesbian Gathering in Winnipeg. Although René Highway died in October 1990, René and Tomson Highway's works continue to inspire younger generations, including Monkman.

As I argue in my dissertation, the connections between art, community and sovereignty are integral to the Highways and Monkman's various art practices. And as Cree 2GQ men, they embody 2GQ sensibilities and arts in very different ways. Performance—theatre, dance and performance art, and in Monkman's case, painting and film—is key to their artistic practices. They not only embody Cree 2GQ sensibilities, they also create Cree 2GQ critiques in their work. I situate Monkman and the Highways not only as artists, but as Cree 2GQ men who confront racism and homophobia in colonial society. While being Cree is integral to their art, they are very much urban Indigenous artists, collaborating with and making art for Indigenous peoples of different Nations. As in intertribals, the Highways and Monkman move together, sharing their

work with other Nations. In the words of Miss Chief, "we have the strength of our own voice to balance their perspectives on our cultures" (Testickle 109) to create new traditions.

My dissertation contributes to Two-Spirit studies in four significant ways. Firstly, by aligning myself with Indigenous literary nationalism, I provide a Cree reading practice for reading Cree 2GLBTQ narratives. Using wâhkôtowin or interrelatedness, I explore how Monkman and the Highways' artistic relationships with each other and with larger communities create new narratives about Indigeneity and colonialism. While Cree methodologies have been used to discuss Tomson Highway's work,[85] Monkman's work is usually seen as a reaction to western art history, rather than Indigenisation of art history.

Secondly, I explore 2GQ performance art, which is an under-theorised area of study. While dominant conceptions of performance are seen as separate from life, Indigenous ways of knowing see performance as integral to all aspects of life, what Murphy describes as "dancing as enactment, not portrayal" (*The People* 225). In other words, everything is connected, the embodiment of the Cree prayer "all my relations." Indigenous performance is not always simply mimetic but often functions on a deeply spiritual level. The popularity of works by the Highways and Monkman enables both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to not only better understand the effects of colonisation but also to experience the vitality and endurance of Indigenous cultures and

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[85] For example, see Angela Essen's "nêhiyawaskiy (Cree Land) and Canada: Location, Language, and Borders in Tomson Highway Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*" in the Winter 2012 issue of *Canadian Literature.*

languages. Furthermore, as Julie Nagam and Kerry Swanson (Cree) point out, "there has been only a small amount of academic research in the areas of Indigenous media and performance art in Canada" (31). This dearth makes my research a critical intervention in the field, on which others will hopefully build. Most importantly, key to ethical and responsible research is positioning research as a gift that I share with other scholars, Indigenous artists, Two-Spirit peoples and other community members.

Thirdly, I help to recover René Highway's essential place in Indigenous performance arts, both on his own and with Tomson Highway by focussing on his mamâhtâwisiwin or spiritual giftedness. I explore how the Highways collaboratively reflected a Two-Spirit aesthetic using René Highway's hand-annotated copy of the unpublished script *The Sage, the Dancer and The Fool* and Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* movie treatment as examples. While readers and scholars are usually vaguely aware that Gabriel is based on René Highway, there has been no in-depth analysis of René Highway's own work. And by using René Highway's unpublished choreography notes to show how he created the role of Nanabush, I provide a richer understanding of the character.

Finally, while Monkman has received significant art historical criticism that situates him as rewriting the western art history canon, very little has been written on how he does so with a specifically Swampy Cree sensibility. Using miyo-wîcêhtowin or good relations, Monkman uses his art to expand the circle to communicate 2GQ histories. While Monkman is happy to welcome guests into his territory, there are caveats to Monkman's hospitality. Visitors must be good guests by respecting Indigenous protocol, histories and aesthetics. I also analyse works by Monkman that have received little

critical attention, such as *A Nation is Coming* and *Future Nation*, which both conceptualise alternate, Indigenous versions of nationhood, from the past and into the future. Miss Chief time travels, inserting a very modern sensibility and political agenda into colonial history.

Inspired by Cree methodologies and ways of knowing, my dissertation uses a Cree framework to analyse 2GQ works by Cree men. Cree concepts of kinship, principled non-interference and good relations are the basis for a reimagining of nationhood that is intimately connected to Cree language, territories and ways of knowing. The Highways and Monkman location as urban Indigenous 2GQ artists enables to create new traditions that show the vibrancy of Cree traditions, but they reinvigorate them to ensure that these new traditions survive into the future.

Seating Indigenous literary nationalism and Two-Spirit theory at the same table opens up new possibilities of thinking about tradition and the nation. The Highways and Monkman reinvigorate the idea of tradition to reflect not only their ancestral stories, but to reconfigure and reconceptualise tradition for contemporary Indigenous people. In so doing, René and Tomson Highway show the strength and resurgence of Cree ways of knowing, especially for 2LGBTQ people.

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