

DAMS, ROADS, AND BRIDGES: (RE)DEFINING WORK AND MASCULINITY IN
AMERICAN INDIAN LITERATURE OF THE GREAT PLAINS, 1968–PRESENT

by

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ABSTRACT

Dams, Roads, and Bridges: (Re)defining Work and Masculinity in American Indian
Literature of the Great Plains, 1968–Present

by

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This master's thesis explores the intersections of labor, socioeconomic class, and constructed American Indian masculinities in the literature of indigenous writers of the Great Plains published after the Native American Renaissance of the late 1960s. By engaging scholars and theorists from multiple disciplines—including Native labor historians such as Colleen O'Neill and Alexandra Harmon, (trans)indigenous studies scholars such as Chadwick Allen and Philip Deloria, and Native literary and cultural critics such as Gerald Vizenor and Louis Owens—this thesis offers an American Studies approach to definitions and expressions of work, wealth, and masculinity in American Indian literature of the Great Plains. With chapters on D'Arcy McNickle's posthumous *Wind From an Enemy Sky* (1978), Carter Revard's poetry and mixed-genre memoirs, and Thomas King's *Truth and Bright Water* (1999), this thesis emphasizes the roles of cross-cultural apprenticeships for young Native protagonists whose socioeconomic opportunities are often obstructed, threatened, or complicated by dams, roads, and

bridges, both literal and metaphorical, as they seek ways to engage (or circumvent) the capitalist marketplace on their own terms. In highlighting each protagonist's relationship to blood (family and community), land, and memory, the chapters reveal how the respective Native authors challenge and reimagine stereotypes regarding Native workers and offer more complicated and nuanced discussions of Native "traditions" in modernity.

(173 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Dams, Roads, Bridges: (Re)defining Work and Masculinity in American Indian Literature of the Great Plains, 1968–Present

In the study of contemporary American Indian literature, the definition of work and the characterization of Native and non-native laborers—farmers, ranchers, lawmen, smugglers, Indian Affairs agents, academics, activists, “traditionalists,” tour guides, artists, among others—are rarely the lenses that scholars use to interpret the texts. Instead, issues of class and labor often take a backseat to those of cultural survivance and traditional and/or “mix-blood” identity, resistance to historical and ongoing acts of colonialism, reassertion of treaty rights and cultural practices, and reclamation of land and cultural artifacts. However, although the canon of contemporary Native literatures warrants close attention to these issues, the time has come to reexamine American Indian novels, short stories, and poetry published since the Native American Renaissance of the 1960s and ’70s in order to begin a more nuanced discussion of how work and masculinity are defined and expressed in Indian Country, especially in sites where the types of work available challenge and/or complicate “traditional” definitions and expressions of wealth and masculinity.

By re-reading American Indian literature of the Great Plains and emphasizing the roles of work, class, and masculinity in texts by influential, yet understudied authors such as D’Arcy McNickle, Carter Revard, and Thomas King, this project offers opportunities for reframing and reimagining contemporary, real-life obstacles faced by Native workers and Native communities: such as the Lakota bid to take over operation of Badlands National Park in South Dakota, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai bid to take over operation rights of Kerr Dam near the Flathead Reservation in Montana, and the struggles for sovereignty faced by Native nations such as the Three Affiliated Tribes in western North Dakota, who are embroiled in heated debates regarding the economic promise and ecological degradation of the oil boom on the Bakken Range. In this way, this project does not place literature in a vacuum, but rather, engages the social, cultural, and economic questions that remain as prevalent for understanding the present and, perhaps, for predicting the future, as they are for understanding the past. Moreover, the discussion of dams, roads, and bridges—both as literal structures that present opportunities and obstacles for Native workers *and* as metaphors for the distance between Native and Euroamerican conceptions of work and wealth—is timely and politically significant given the renewed national emphasis on rebuilding structures such as roads and bridges with programs such as “Fix It First” and “Highways For LIFE” that seek to boost a struggling economy by reinforcing the infrastructure.

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Finally, I give special thanks to all of my working-class relatives who taught me to operate bulldozers and excavators, to shape and sculpt roads and bridges, and to cherish and value personal stories and family histories of working and living on the Great Plains.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: DAMS, ROADS, BRIDGES

But you know Crows measure wealth a little differently than non-Indians. . . . Wealth is measured by one's relatedness, one's family, and one's clan. To be alone, that would be abject poverty to a Crow.

—Janine Windy Boy-Pease, from the film *Contrary Warriors: A Story of the Crow Tribe*,
Rattle Snake Productions (1985)

I've heard it said that Indians shouldn't become involved in high-stake gambling because it tarnishes our noble heritage. Personally, I've never believed in the nobility of poverty. Personally, I believe in the nobility of breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Indians need money.

—Sherman Alexie, qtd. in Harmon, *Rich Indians* (264)

Under the old names, new beings gather; within the new beings, old ways survive.

—Carter Revard, *An Eagle Nation* (xi)

For many North Americans, the Great Plains is flyover country, a vast expanse of wheat fields and windswept prairies where nothing much happens, a place where, as Gertrude Stein remarked of Oakland, “there is no *there*, there” (*Gertrude Stein* 289). However for those of us that have grown up there, lived there, *worked* there, the Great Plains is home. As Carter Revard writes of his homeland in Oklahoma: “[A] THERE depends on how, in the beginning, the wind breathes upon its surface. . . . [Y]ou have to be there before it's there” (*An Eagle Nation* 3). Stretching from Texas to the Canadian prairies, and east to west from Fort Worth to Roswell, Kansas City to Denver, Omaha to Cheyenne, Fargo to Missoula, Winnipeg to Calgary, the Great Plains is a truly massive region, where plenty *has* happened and *continues* to happen. It is home to the ghost dancers and AIM activists of Wounded Knee, iconic figures such as Crazy Horse who led the Lakota in the defeat of Custer and the US Calvary at Little Bighorn, and the Indian

Territory of Oklahoma where many Native people were forcibly relocated. However, it is also where Native people continue to resist ongoing acts of colonialism, such as oil pipelines, dams, and blood quantum, and to defy expectations, such as poverty, alcoholism, and technological “backwardness.”

For many Native writers, then, the Great Plains is not just a site of work, but a place that offers pathways to “*blood, land, and memory*,” which, Chadwick Allen explains, is “arguably, the most recognizable trope deployed in American Indian literary texts published after 1968” (*Blood Narrative* 178). After the destructive termination and relocation eras of the 1950s, the so-called “Indian Self-Determination Era” of the 1960s and ’70s brought about a renewed emphasis on *blood memory* and once again made Native issues visible on a national scale.¹ Aided by N. Scott Momaday’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *House Made of Dawn* (1968), the social activism of the American Indian Movement (AIM), and parallel struggles for civil rights, this era of US federal Indian policy saw the passage of the Indian Civil Rights Act (1968), the Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act (1975), the Indian Child Welfare Act (1978), and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (1978). Furthermore, during the Native literary and cultural “Renaissance” or Red Power movement that coincided with this era, the Plains became the place where Momaday traveled in search of *blood memory* on his way to Rainy Mountain, where James Welch’s unnamed narrator attempted to thaw the “winter in the blood” in the foothills of Montana, and where Louise Erdrich practiced “love medicine” on the mixed-blood families of North Dakota.

However, while much has been written about the controversial trope of *blood memory* in contemporary Native texts, especially as it relates to what critic William Bevis calls “homing in”—a central trope in American Indian literature, focusing on the return of Native characters to cultural and ancestral homelands in pursuit of their spiritual and emotional center—very little attention has been given to the roles that class and work play in defining and complicating relationships among *blood, land, and memory*.² And, although I remain cautious in using *blood memory* or *memory in the blood*, due to the nativistic overtones inherent in the terms, here I re-purpose the tropes, shifting the focus away from blood as a marker of essentialist values and racial “authenticity,” and, instead, using blood as a way to signify the home and community relationships that inform a character’s outward engagement with the capitalist marketplace. Therefore, unlike blood quantum, which seeks to define Native authenticity through sterile percentages and legislation, I adopt Allen’s use of the term, which seeks to “redefine Indian authenticity in terms of imaginative re-collecting and re-membering” of the past, present, and future, as characters find multiple, complex ways to re-establish relationships to family, land, and history (Allen, *Blood Narrative* 178).

In this way, this work returns to the Plains, centering on the understudied novels and poetry of D’Arcy McNickle, Carter Revard, and Thomas King, applying a renewed focus to *blood, land, and memory* in relation to Native epistemologies of work, wealth, and masculinity. On one level, my emphasis on writers of the Great Plains presents an opportunity for me to travel back through familiar lands and to challenge my own hard-won definitions of work and wealth. Although I, like countless others, have sought

automotive and socioeconomic routes off the Plains, it remains the place I call home. It is where my Norwegian-American grandfather took up roadbuilding and my Scots-Irish grandmother and her fellow Okies survived the Dust Bowl before fleeing to California. It is where I learned to operate bulldozers and backhoes, building roads alongside my uncles and cousins in northeastern North Dakota, a place so flat that a grid is easy to impose, too easy if you're not careful; as my Uncle Bruce explains, "square grids don't fit a round world. ... [E]ventually, you have to account for the curvature of the earth."³ Through hot and sticky summers I swatted mosquitoes, listening to my uncles tell stories about their uncles, about how Ronnie and Jimmie used to light their cigarettes, touching them to the blue-hot steel blade of the motorgrader after hours of hard-sledding over sun-baked gravel. I listened too for lessons about work—learning the "proper" way to grease a backhoe from my Uncle Bear, how to torch and weld a rock-screener out of scrap iron from Bruce, and how to "stretch a penny into copper wire" from all my working-class relatives, especially my Okie grandmother. In short, it's the place where my conceptions of work, wealth, masculinity, and class were forged. And, while it's been a few years since I've shifted a rock truck without the clutch or worked the toe-and-heel of a ditchline with a dozer, I still carry with me the memories of working alongside my relatives on the Plains, where I learned that work doesn't build character, it reveals it.

In a similar way, the "work" performed in McNickle, Revard, and King does not "build" character (although work certainly takes on an important role in their texts), but it does help to "reveal" the characters' relationships to *blood*, *land*, and *memory*, "traditions" and "modernity," as well as the spectrum, rather than the binary, between

individual and communal expressions of wealth. Rather than applying a square grid to a round world, I attempt to reveal how young Native men—Antoine in McNickle’s *Wind from an Enemy Sky* (1978), Revard in his poetry, and Tecumseh in King’s *Truth and Bright Water* (1999)—seek cross-cultural and intergenerational apprenticeships into multiple worlds of work and, in so doing, offer cautious optimism for the future of Native masculinity despite the threats posed by dams (that flood sacred valleys), roads (that lead to predetermined destinations), and unfinished bridges (that fail to connect traditions with modernity).

In emphasizing the roles that dams, bridges, and roads play in the lives of Native workers, this work provides a discussion of how motion and mobility counteract the assumed narratives of stasis and stagnation, as Native characters use cars and horses, cross borders and the “maps of the mind,” and seek routes off the reservations and Canadian reserves, while “homing-in” on cultural roots that connect them to home and land. The Great Plains is a perfect setting for such an emphasis on roads and bridges—in the states of Iowa, Wyoming, Montana, and North and South Dakota there are more registered vehicles than licensed drivers (Nebraska has an almost exact 1:1 ratio, while only Alaskans can make this claim outside of the Plains)—a fact that marks this as a region in which the car’s status, in literal and symbolic terms, cannot be questioned.⁴ For Native drivers, though, the car offers a mode of leaving *and* returning, allowing Revard to navigate “between home and away” on the backroads of Oklahoma and Tecumseh to cross and re-cross the 49th parallel, turning reservations into what Philip Deloria describes as “distinctly tribal spaces” (Revard, *Cowboys and Indians* 37; Deloria, *Indians in*

Unexpected Places 153). Furthermore, for Revard and Tecumseh, who live in the age of automobility, the car offers counternarratives to the expectation of stasis and economic and technological “backwardness,” making room for what Gerald Vizenor calls the “sovereignty of Native transmotion,” in which indigenous people assert agency and enact survivance through motion and memory, avoiding the expectations of vanishing and cultural death—beliefs which Vizenor calls terminal creeds. Meanwhile, McNickle’s Antoine exists in a time in which horses are still more ubiquitous than cars, and the technology he encounters—the dam—presents the threat of stasis *and* the threat of forced assimilation or taking “the white man’s road”—a metaphor repeated throughout the novel.

In each of the chapters, then, my focus is on the real and metaphorical roads the characters must travel, the apprenticeships they encounter, and the work they perform in their pursuits of Native masculinity and economic opportunity. Journeys of this sort are at least as important and often far more interesting than destinations; however, for Antoine, Revard, and Tecumseh, they are also filled with potholes and roadblocks, dams and unfinished bridges. As King explains:

We know that we dam(n) rivers not to improve water quality but to create electricity and protect private property. We make race and gender discriminatory markers for no other reason than that we can. And we maintain and tolerate poverty not because we believe adversity makes you strong, but because we’re unwilling to share. (*The Truth about Stories* 27)

For McNickle, the dam that is “killing the water” and threatening a sacred valley provides an opportunity for cross-cultural dialogue to negotiate meaning across these “discriminatory markers” and to see the tragedy, not of the “wronged Indian” but of “two cultures trying to accommodate each other” (McNickle qtd. in Owens, *Other Destinies*

79). Furthermore, the dam, as a federally imposed colonial structure, also allows room for McNickle to comment on the promise and eventual failure of legislation aimed at cultural pluralism, such as the Indian Reorganization Act (1934), which he was directly involved in during his time in the department of Indian Affairs. Meanwhile, Revard's poetry asserts a place for mixed-blood and mixed-class workers in Oklahoma—a place where, Joy Harjo explains, “the red earth gives meaning to the name. Oklahoma is derived from the Choctaw word which means ‘red people’” (“Oklahoma” 43). Revard bridges the “discriminatory markers” of race and class into his own family before reversing and reimagining them, writing from both sides of his Osage/Ponca and Scots-Irish heritage and blending his technological savvy with tradition-minded storytelling. In essence, Revard's poetry reclaims Indian Territory for the Osage who came before him, such as John Joseph Matthews, and for his Scots-Irish and adopted Ponca relatives, but not before complicating the expectations for Native people in modernity. And, whereas Revard's poetry swings beneath the bridge to “get across” the lines which separate, King's novel fuses humor and trickster-like imagination to offer a commentary on how unfinished bridges leave room for a “third space” between the Alberta/Montana border, where Blackfeet protagonist Tecumseh is provided multiple apprenticeships and multiple ways to assert Native presence in modernity.

To explore how these Native authors define work and wealth in modernity, I engage contemporary scholars of literature and the working-class, such as Janet Zandy, who explains that “working-class history and culture complicates and deepens class analysis and provides a space for reciprocal visibility across divisions of race, ethnicity,

citizenship, and geography. At its best, working-class studies bridges communities and nonacademic workers to institutions of knowledge” (*Hands* 3). However, constructing the bridges between Native “communities and non-academic workers to institutions of knowledge” is complicated by the fact that the cross-section of American Indian literature and working-class studies remains largely unexplored. The easy answer for this disconnect is that few scholars of American Indian literature see issues of class and labor infiltrating or informing Native texts—at least not in ways that are readily identifiable. For me, though, this explanation fails to recognize the relatively pervasive theme of “restless young [Indian] men with nothing to do”—a theme which links Native masculinity with issues of class and labor (R. Parker, *Invention* 3). As Robert Dale Parker explains, many Native men “ha[ve] not managed to construct an Indian, unassimilating way to adapt masculine roles to the dominant, business-saturated culture’s expectations of 9-5 breadwinning,” leaving them few options for defying expectations and engaging the capitalist marketplace *on their own terms* (3).⁵

Therefore, I see my work here as something of an extension of Deloria’s *Indians in Unexpected Places* (2004), a work in which he unearths several “secret histories” of American Indians in film, athletics, technology, and music, exploring how such histories lead us to new understandings regarding Native people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By focusing on “expectations” and the “unexpected” rather than on “stereotypes” and “anomalies,” Deloria asks us to consider the negotiation between Native and non-native people in the construction and maintenance of these expectations and the ways in which they have been challenged and resisted in the post-frontier United

States. Combining Parker's and Deloria's examples, I consider how McNickle, Revard, and King at times reinforce, but more often resist and reimagine the cultural mythology of "restless young [Indian] men with nothing to do" as they strive to locate Native workers in "unexpected places." Specifically, by focusing on the relationship among class, labor, and masculinity and *blood*, *land*, and *memory* in their novels, poetry, and mixed-genre memoirs, I hope to reveal how each category speaks to and informs the definition of the other and how such negotiations ensure that none of the categories become static, as they all remain in a constant state of flux.

Due to the limited work done on Native labor and class in contemporary indigenous literatures, I also consult historians such as Alexandra Harmon, who in *Rich Indians* (2010) uses class to address how definitions of wealth remain culturally and historically constructed, blurring the lines between tradition and modernity, Native and white, capitalism and tribal economics. Through telling the stories of wealthy Indians, Harmon works to unsettle "the popular American conception of Indians as change-resistant, primitive communists" and to unearth histories of Native workers who were "dynamic and sophisticated enough to thrive in the modern economic world without sacrificing ideals such as generosity, reciprocity, and stewardship of the natural world" (158, 244). Similarly, Native labor historian Colleen O'Neill offers a way to read Native people as active agents in shaping their relationships to the capitalist marketplace through a "home sphere" approach, in which a worker's home (*blood*) relationships influence their definitions of wealth and their expressions of work. Through this approach, O'Neill demonstrates that a Native worker's engagement with economic markets is not

predetermined by essentialist cultural values, nor is it solely imposed on them by a powerful capitalist system; as she explains “[t]he motor of change may be the encroaching capitalist system, but the road that it travels may indeed be shaped by the cultural, social, and economic systems that lay in its path” (*Working the Navajo Way* 5). In this way, O’Neill unsettles the hierarchal relationship between “modernity” and “traditions,” and instead asks how Native workers have made room for “traditions” to survive while “craft[ing] ways to live and work within a system that offers alternatives to the individualized and consumerist values of American capitalism[,] ... [finding] multiple pathways of economic development” (7–8). As Harmon and O’Neill make clear, money is not always synonymous with *power*, and *wealth* is not always measured in dollars and cents. Moreover, *work* is not all done on the shop floor, nor is it always an expression of essential cultural values—as many Native people engage in capitalist economics and wage work, while others make the distinction between the *work* they do in their community, as members of a family, within the domestic and community spheres, and that which they do “elsewhere,” or the work done to earn an income. Recognizing this distinction allows room to explore the various forms and expressions of work and class in McNickle, Revard, and King, and it may provide in-roads for understanding each respective author’s statement on masculinity and tribal economics.

With the help of these scholars and theorists, then, my work aims to reveal not just close readings of the texts, but the broader meanings—the social, cultural, and political significance—that such readings imply. For instance, the connections I explore between bridges, roads, and economic practices may be particularly timely and politically

significant if read in relation to President Barack Obama's 2013 State of the Union Address, in which he declared that there are nearly 70,000 bridges in the United States that are "structurally deficient." Citing the importance of strengthening (roads and bridges) and modernizing the infrastructure (high-speed railways), President Obama proposed a "Fix It First Program" aimed at creating jobs to boost a struggling economy and to ensure future job growth, explaining that a stronger infrastructure would attract new industries to the United States and accelerate the return of outsourced jobs. On a literal level, the President's emphasis on roads and bridges sounds a call that harkens back to The Interstate Highway Act of 1956, which resulted in the US interstate system as we currently know it and was arguably "the most ambitious public-works program undertaken in American history" (Flink 175–76).⁶ However, with the recent adoption of the US Department of Transportation's Highway for LIFE initiative, the new age of bridge- and road-building appears to be upon us, as it seeks to "advance *Longer-lasting* highway infrastructure using *Innovations* to accomplish the *Fast* construction of *Efficient* and safe highways and bridges" (Department of Transportation, "Highways for LIFE"). And, while more sustainable roads and bridges aim to make our routes safer, less congested, and more efficient, it remains to be seen whether these programs will provide ways out of our current economic predicaments or what impact the reinforcement and construction of roads and bridges will have on Native workers and Native lands (Flink 371).

Taken metaphorically, however, the renewed national emphasis on roads and bridges might offer insights into the "structurally deficient" bridges within and between

families, cultures, and worldviews, reminding us of the work that still remains as we strive to make these important routes more sustainable. As Linda Hasselstrom explains: “The pathways devised by humans who change the land, whether trails or highways, are the arteries through which the blood of history flows” (*Roadside History of South Dakota* x). In this way, the real and metaphorical roads, bridges, and dams provide insights into the lines of *blood*, *land*, and *memory*—as even the Department of Transportation refers to roads as “arteries” and “veins”—bringing us in and out of contact and conflict, carrying us between home and away. Such a link brings me back to my work as a roadbuilder on the Great Plains. However, instead of waxing nostalgic, I pause here to recognize that my work on the Plains and my work in indigenous literatures are fraught with problems stemming from my position of “whiteness” and my family’s legacy of settler colonialism, both of which inform my relationship to home. As bell hooks writes: “scholars who write about an ethnic group to which they do not belong rarely discuss in the introductions to their works the ethical issues of their race privilege” (*Talking Back* 44). Therefore, with this introduction, although I re-claim my working-class heritage, my aim is not to claim connection to the Native workers and writers who command my attention. Instead, I position myself as a non-Native reader who has overlapping experiences and interests to the authors whose work I discuss throughout the chapters.

For instance, after returning from the Pacific Campaign during WWII, my grandfather helped to build the Garrison Dam, which displaced the Mandan, Arikara, and Hidatsa—a project which inspired McNickle’s plot. Moreover, as a reader of Revard—who, like me, balances a love of engineering, roads, and bridges with a commitment to

community relationships and environmental stewardship—I bring with me my own stories of roadwork and farm labor, as I cut and hauled wheat in Kansas and Oklahoma to pay for my first year of college, just as he did in the summer of 1949, a memory he tributes in “Bringing in the Sheaves.”⁷ And as a builder of bridges and roads, who has found out the hard way that there is more buried beneath the ground than what is listed on the historical registry, I read King’s novel and remember the effort it takes to complete unfinished bridges, and the hope and healing that repatriation can offer across cultural lines. However, while these personal overlaps keep me coming back to the literature, I hope to avoid what Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo) describes as “the assumption that the white man, through some innate cultural or racial superiority, has the ability to perceive and master the essential beliefs, values and emotions of persons from Native American communities” (“An Old-Time Indian Attack” 211). Instead of making dangerous assumptions, I strive to recognize my limitations in reading across and outside my own “cultural eye,” even while advocating for others to practice reading beyond and outside the scope of theirs. I hope that by doing so we can begin to find routes across unfinished bridges and to “re-collect and re-member” the lines of *blood*, *land*, and *memory*, which may help us to get across the obstacles that remain between and within us.

As Thomas King writes: “The magic of Native literature—as with other literatures—is not in the themes of the stories—identity, isolation, loss, ceremony, community, maturation, home—it is in the way meaning is refracted by cosmology, the way understanding is shaped by cultural paradigms” (*Truth about Stories* 112). So while I

leave behind my personal stories in pursuit of more “academic” questions, I keep King’s words in mind, recognizing that the “magic” of reading good literature, even where blind spots remain, is in striving toward understanding. I hope too, that in the chapters that follow, readers, Native and non-Native alike, will develop their own personal connections and see the aesthetic qualities in the works of McNickle, Revard, and King, finding that “good language, in both talk and writing, builds a small community in which people can live a little more completely than solitude allows” (Revard, *Winning the Dust Bowl* xvi). And, although Revard reminds us that literature may “not [be] so helpful as good carpentry or plumbing, or farming or parenting,” I hope that my fellow working-class readers will find moments of joy, connection, and inspiration from these Native authors, who are rarely, if ever, read as part of the growing canon of working-class writers, and whose work “is of some use when well and truly done” (Revard, *Winning the Dust Bowl* xvi).

¹ For instance, on July 8, 1970, President Richard Nixon addressed the issues surrounding young American Indians and outlined his plan for future Federal/Indian relations, saying “the goal of any new national policy toward the Indian people [must be] to strengthen the Indian’s sense of autonomy without threatening his sense of community. We must assure the Indian that he can assume control of his own life without being separated involuntarily from the tribal group. And we must make it clear that the Indians can become independent of federal control without being cut off from federal concern and federal support” (qtd. in Dorothy Parker 121).

² “Homing in,” is, by now, perhaps the most recognizable trope in Native literature. Bevis coined the phrase in its current usage in “Native American Novels: Homing In.” In *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature*, ed. by Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat, 580–620. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

³ According to Bruce, the flat, featureless Plains often require roadbuilders and civil engineers to insert corrections in the roads once every six miles to account for the curvature of the earth.

⁴ According to the Department of Transportation’s 2011 report *Our Nations Highways 2011*, Wyoming has the highest rate of vehicle ownership per-capita with 1.21 registered

vehicles per licensed driver. South Dakota (1.19), Iowa (1.17), North Dakota (1.14), Montana (1.05), and Alaska (1.02) round out the list of states with more registered vehicles than licensed drivers (Department of Transportation).

⁵ Using Parker, my discussion of “constructed Native masculinities” builds upon similar work by Gail Bederman (*Manliness and Civilization* 1995) and Anthony Rotundo (*American Manhood* 1993).

⁶ The Interstate Highway Act was signed by President Eisenhower to provide funding for an unprecedented highway project that would last until the late 1970s. It commissioned the federal government to pay ninety percent of the construction costs for 41,000 miles of toll-free express highways from a Highway Trust Fund, a fund made possible by an increased gasoline tax.

⁷ Unlike Revard, who never enrolled as an engineering major, I actually declared a mechanical engineering major during my first year at North Dakota State University, influenced by years of building roads and bridges, trenching and sculpting ditches, and hearing stories passed down from my grandpa and uncles about their hand in building the Garrison Dam, clearing the way for highways and county roads, and reinforcing the bridges that I crossed and re-crossed in my youth.

CHAPTER 2

ANTOINE'S JOURNEY INTO THE WORLD: CROSS CULTURAL
 APPRENTICESHIPS AND CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM IN D'ARCY McNICKLE'S
WIND FROM AN ENEMY SKY

Above all else a man learned to be strong in support of his kinsmen. A man himself was nothing, a shout in the wind. But men together, each acting for each other and as one—even a strong wind from an enemy sky had to respect their power.

—D'Arcy McNickle, *Wind from an Enemy Sky* (197)

In a paper presented at a conference on Indian affairs in Canada, confederated Salish/Kootenai writer D'Arcy McNickle explained to his audience that “[r]eality is not an absolute state of things as they are ... The observer sees what his culture has taught him to see [and] language itself compels the particular abstract [he makes] of reality ... [T]he worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached” (qtd. in D. Parker 66). Echoing the fictional Indian agent, Toby Rafferty, in his novel *Wind from an Enemy Sky* (1978)—a character who insists that “the problem” of federal Indian policy “is communication, and language is only part of it ... perhaps it is intention, purpose, the map of the mind we follow”—McNickle expressed to his audience that he too had discovered the difficulties of cross-cultural communication in his struggle to develop meaningful and lasting federal Indian reform (125). Perhaps an unlikely spokesperson for Native autonomy—after all,

McNickle sold his allotment share on the Flathead reservation in western Montana in his youth to finance his studies at Oxford and performed much of his work on behalf of Native communities passing as white in the far remove of his New York office—he, nonetheless, was one of the most influential Native men of his generation.¹ Aside from publishing three novels and four nonfiction works (of history, anthropology, and biography), McNickle also spent his early days working for Indian Affairs under the tutelage of John Collier where he was directly involved in implementing the Indian Reorganization Act (1934) which aimed to return self-governance to Native communities and to reinstate a tribal voice in Native economics. As a result, he also became a regular contributor to *Indians at Work*, a magazine published by Indian Affairs during Collier's administration, in which he often called for reshaping federal/Native relations through a greater focus on cross-cultural communication and an increased effort to learn and understand Native languages and worldviews as they related to economics, wealth, and work.

The difficulties McNickle encountered working in the Collier administration and advocating for Native workers and Native self-governance are reflected in his third and final published novel *Wind from an Enemy Sky*, a posthumous work in which competing definitions of wealth and power shape competing visions of Native masculinity and federal Indian economic policies. As Alexandra Harmon reminds us, “wealth is a human invention and thus subject to continual reinvention. Although wealth is also a universal concept, its meanings are culturally and historically specific” (12). Furthermore, she explains that

[T]here is considerable variation in the degree to which people distinguish economics from other aspects of life, but there is never strict separation. In small ‘tribal’ societies, economic strategy has typically been embedded in relations with kin and friendly associates. In the present world of nation-states, by contrast, it has become normal to conceive of economic relations as a distinct realm of life with its own laws of operation. (13)

The problem, however, is that too often the present “world of nation-states” fails to recognize alternative and competing definitions of wealth and economics, or, even worse, “traditional” or “indigenous” definitions are viewed as “primitive” and “savage” and set in opposition to “modernity” with no recognition of how the former are embedded in the latter. In this way, the traditional/modern binary is often used to justify not just the erasure of tribal economic practices, but the *inevitability* of such erasures—beliefs ruled by positivist assumptions that connect colonization to “progress.” As applied to Native North Americans, the traditional/modern binary has functioned this way, as Colleen O’Neill explains:

[The tradition/modern] is a false dichotomy for American Indians. They exist in a world where the two cultural categories fold into each other. ... Yet it would be wrong to discard these terms altogether since the categories themselves have become important cultural markers for American Indians and have retained significant currency among native communities throughout the twentieth century. (152)

Rather than simply discarding the traditional/modern binary, then, I use McNickle’s *Wind* to unsettle it, arguing that by acknowledging multiple, “distinct worlds” and multiple ways of defining and expressing wealth and economics, McNickle moves beyond simple binaries and provides a much more nuanced exploration into the various ways of seeing and being in the world, while recognizing the violence and conflict that often result when negotiations of meaning fail to cross cultural and generational lines.

As if interrogating Richard Pratt's now infamous line, "kill the Indian, save the man," a line which helped shape state and federal Indian policy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, McNickle unsettles the expectations for Native masculinity and the threats posed by assimilation policies. Couched in Pratt's terse phrase is the most prevalent expectation for Native people at the turn of the twentieth century—if Native people were to survive, it would be through assimilation and integration into the capitalist marketplace as farmers, ranchers, and individual landowners. However, McNickle's emphasis on the clash of worldviews between white characters and the fictional Little Elk tribe (and often within the Little Elk tribe itself) challenges such expectations and articulates the tensions between competing definitions of wealth and power—the dam, museum artifacts, and real estate for cattle ranching, farming, and settlement on the one hand, and the sacred valley, Feather Boy medicine bundle, and reciprocity with nature on the other.² Furthermore, the culturally constructed definitions cannot be cleanly divided between Native and white, traditional and assimilationist, but instead, are complicated by varying degrees of assimilation, acculturation, and cultural hybridity, as characters work within and between binary constructions, often shifting their own positions as they come to greater understanding of the world on the opposite side of the dam or reify long-held, often fatalistic beliefs. Those who reify their positions—such as Natives like Bull and Pock Face, or white men such as Sid Grant, Reverend Stephen Welles, and "The Long-Armed-Man"—uphold what Gerald Vizenor calls "terminal creeds" or beliefs which are problematic because they offer only fatalistic, essentialist visions for Native people, visions which are often woven in tragic, linear plotlines, leaving little hope for Native

survival or “survivance” in the world of modern technology. However, even though many characters become entrenched in such beliefs, resulting in a conclusion which is undeniably tragic, I argue that *Wind* does not celebrate or reinforce the inevitability of tragedy, but instead it complicates the static tradition versus modern binary, leaving room for cautious optimism for the future of Native masculinity through cultural hybridity while providing insights into the role that work and class play in unsettling this binary and avoiding the adherence to terminal creeds.

The primary symbol of and hope for the future of Native masculinity in the capitalist marketplace is Bull’s grandson, Antoine. In the opening line of the novel, Bull and Antoine “walk into the mountains to look at a dam built in a cleft of rock, and what began as walk became a journey into the world” (McNickle 1). In Antoine’s guided journey “into the world,” he finds that anger and violence threaten his development, and, throughout the novel, he must navigate between and across cultural barriers—symbolized by the dam, the Feather Boy medicine bundle, the boarding school, among others—in order to become a Native man who maintains “traditions” but acquires the skills to survive in “modernity.” As if anticipating Chadwick Allen’s *blood, land, memory* complex, McNickle, through Antoine, asserts the need for “an unmediated relationship to indigenous land bases (whether or not those lands remain under indigenous control), the continuation of oral traditions (whether or not those traditions continue in Native languages), and the power ... to establish communion with ancestors” (Allen, *Blood Narrative* 178). Central to Antoine’s cultural apprenticeship on both sides of dam, or across *blood, land, and memory*, are cultural journeymen who offer competing visions of

the future of Native masculinity and tribal economics—the tribal traditionalists Bull and Two Sleeps, Pock Face and other “restless young men with nothing to do,” the assimilationist Henry Jim, the white boarding school disciplinarian known as The Long-Armed-Man, and Son Child/The Boy, who, like Antoine, presents the problems and promise of cultural hybridity, living and working in the borders between white and Native worlds (R. Parker 3). As Antoine journeys into the world, he must learn from each of these men and from his experiences, as Bull insists that, in order to become a man, a boy must ask himself “what did I see? What did I learn? What will I remember?”—questions Antoine continues to ask himself throughout the novel. Therefore, by focusing on Antoine’s journey into the world, the lessons he learns, and the competing visions of Native masculinity he encounters, this chapter explores McNickle’s text as it relates to the past, present, and future of Native masculinity and federal Indian economic policies.

By shifting the questions from those concerning dams and ecology, cultures and communication, to Antoine’s hybridity, the future of Native masculinity, tribal economics, and federal Indian economic policies, a new vein into McNickle’s text begins to open. For instance, what does Antoine *learn* from Pock Face’s and Bull’s acts of aggression toward the dam and the dam engineers, and how do these acts complicate Parker’s discussion of “restless young [Indian] men with nothing to do,” or, in Bull’s case, “restless [old men] with [nowhere to go]” (*Invention* 3); more broadly, how might such acts of violence be seen as resistance to the policies of economic assimilation—as “white” farmers, ranchers, and individual landowners—and offer insights into competing definitions of Native masculinity and the adherence or resistance to terminal creeds? How

do Antoine's and Toby Rafferty's respective "cultural apprenticeships," which offer multiple pathways for the "map of the mind" to follow, complicate our definitions of Native hybridity and our expectations for federal Indian economic policies? What will Antoine *remember* after the violent and tragic conclusion of the novel; and can reading the novel's ending not as an inevitable tragedy resulting from the triumph of modernity over traditions, but as an ironic, or "trickster" tragedy, which compels readers, Native and non-Native alike, to interrogate their complicity in maintaining fallacies such as the linearity of progress, technological determinism, and the inevitability of ethnocide or cultural death, allow room for reading agency in Antoine? Out of this tragedy, will Antoine *learn* new modes of resistance and survivance and grow into a leader who can help shape and define federal economic policies for Native people in the future, or will images of anger and violence shape and define him? And, finally, how might the survival of characters such as Antoine and Son Child provide cautious optimism for the survival of Native worldviews in the capitalist marketplace?

Such questions are timely, given the current debates being waged about the economic health of the United States, and when connected to the Great Plains, the questions posed above may be particularly revealing. Although the novel takes place in a region that resembles the mountains and valleys of western Montana, its tension derives, at least in part, from the policies on the Great Plains which divided the land into neat, geometric units—a practice of cartography which mirrored The General Allotment or Dawes Act (1887) in its obsession with imposing individual rather than communal land

ownership on Native people. For instance, in *Wind from an Enemy Sky* Adam Pell, the novel's white dam engineer, explains:

“The idea of the grid survey is peculiarly American and it comes late in our history. Earlier methods of measuring land surface in metes and bounds had a kind of affinity for the earth, going by surface features, stream meanders, and the like. Settlement of the Great Plains was responsible for the monstrous custom of applying straight lines and right angles to the earth—but I guess it was the only thing to do when you set up your transit and aimed it at an infinity of grass. It simply doesn't lend itself to a pleasant mountain valley like this one.” (McNickle 230)

Here, Pell suggests that the practice of imposing the grid survey on the novel's mountainous valley is an error in transposition, and, like the “straight lines and right angles” used to map the land, federal Indian policies often tried to separate the “good” Indian (assimilated, passive, farmer/rancher) from the “bad” Indian (traditionalist, aggressive and resistant, practicing “tribal” economics—gift giving, emphasizing communal and kinship relationships, and sharing, or in the Lockean sense, “wasting” resources). As Robert Berkhofer explains, “Images of the good Indian suggested the ease of exploitation as well as the ability of natives to be exploited,” while “the image of the bad Indian proved the absolute necessity, if difficulty, of forcing the Native Americans from ‘savage’ to European ways.” Furthermore, Berkhofer argues that both images proved useful to policymakers who “wished to exploit Native American minds, bodies, and resources” (118–19). The connections between the images of “good” and “bad” Indians, land exploitation, and federal Indian policies are prevalent throughout the novel, most notably in the characterizations of Henry Jim—a “good Indian” (assimilated, adopting the “white man's road”) who turns bad by “turn[ing] his back” on the English language and other markers of assimilation—and his younger brother Bull, whose strict

adherence to traditions, acts of violence, and openly defiant posture mark him as the most dangerous threat to policies of assimilation (McNickle, *Wind* 125, 128). However, as I will demonstrate more fully throughout the chapter, McNickle complicates the simple depictions of the “good” and “bad” Indian and challenges us to re-read the linear progression of Native history—the nostalgic, “traditional” past, bleak present, and unreachable future—leaving room between and outside these constructs; as Allen argues, “McNickle ... reimagin[es] the distant indigenous past as both vibrant in itself and sustaining of the present and future” (*Blood Narrative* 94). In this way, by unsettling the “straight lines and right angles” imposed on Native masculinity and Native traditions, McNickle reimagines the fixed, static definitions imposed on Native people and Native workers in modernity, leaving room for what Deloria calls “Indians in unexpected places.”

KILL THE DAM, SAVE THE INDIANS: BULL AND POCK FACE AS “CULTURAL JOURNEYMEN”

The dam in McNickle’s novel, which is the source of the novel’s tension and the site where Antoine must first *see*, *learn*, and *remember* the path to Native masculinity, was actually a late addition. Originally titled “The Flight of Feather Boy,” early drafts of the novel depicted the conflicts between a white BIA agent, federal policymakers, and cattle ranchers with disputed leases to Little Elk land, as well as the Little Elk peoples’ attempts to retrieve a sacred medicine bundle.³ However, the novel’s focus shifted in later drafts to the construction of a dam that is “killing the water” and flooding a sacred valley. With the ability to harness the energy of rivers and redistribute that energy to cities, dams

became one of the symbols of “progress” in the post-frontier West. The technological and economic “progress” of dams (especially in the post-WWII era) was also fraught with cultural and environmental conflict, displacing Native people and threatening Native sovereignty. In fact, in *Dammed Indians* (1994), historian Michael Lawson explains that dam projects “caused more damage to Indian land than any other works project in America” (xxix).⁴ This theme is present in *Wind*, as the dam is described with imagery suggesting a bruise: “driven into the canyon” with such force, that “what had been forest and grass where big-eared deer stared in wonder was now a body of purple black water” (6). With this imagery, McNickle suggests that flooding the sacred valley does not just threaten Native sovereignty, but it also leaves a deep “purple black” wound on the land and, perhaps through objective correlation, on the people who inhabit it.

However, rather than marking the dam as simply an issue of environmental injustice, McNickle offers a commentary on how such a structure threatens “traditional” expressions of Native masculinity and tribal economics *and* what Allen calls the “unmediated relationship to indigenous land bases” (*Blood Narrative* 178). Antoine’s apprenticeships in Native masculinity and Native land begins in the novel’s opening scene, when he and his grandfather, the tribal leader Bull, walk into the woods, discover the dam, and Bull fires his rifle at the concrete barrier that is “killing the water.” Before firing the shot, Bull questions the efficacy of such an act of resistance, asking, “What could a gun do? What could a man do, against that thing down there?” (7). Realizing that “what was down there was not going to run away,” Bull takes his time before firing, suggesting that he recognizes the act’s futility, and he is not surprised when the “bark of

the gun” is lost in “the sound of whining machinery and the thunder of water” (7). In this way, Bull’s act of resistance, however impotent, upholds “the popular American conception of Indians as change-resistant, primitive communists,” which Harmon explains is “older than the United States” (158). And it also threatens the future of Native masculinity, as Antoine is there to witness his grandfather’s inability to halt, or to even momentarily interrupt, the construction of the colonial structure, suggesting that even a powerful Native man such as Bull is powerless to change the course of “progress”; as the narrator explains,

The boy Antoine saw this happen in bright sunshine [and though he] couldn’t understand all of it [he] knew how terrible it was. A man alone, with bare hands and a gun. And the man was his grandfather. ... What would happen? In this place, where one had been told not to have angry thoughts? Would he throw his gun at the white man’s dam? Would he leap down there and tear it with his fists? Yes, it was a terrible thing to witness. If he had seen a hole, he would have crawled into it, just so his grandfather would not have to show himself before anyone. (7)

Witnessing the emasculation of his grandfather and the futility of violence make it clear for Antoine that “killing the dam” will not “save the Indians,” at least not with rifles, as new forms of resistance are required to assert Native agency.

After firing two shots at the dam, Bull asks Antoine if he was frightened by this act of violence in a place where “anger” threatens traditional lifeways, to which Antoine replies, “no-o. I was thinking, if you found that white man, he wouldn’t be so big. You’d shoot him and cut off his head” (9). In this response, Antoine justifies his grandfather’s act of violence, even while recognizing its futility, and identifies the real problem—they have not yet put a face or a name to the dam, a structure which they view as a weapon of colonialism and a symbol of the widening water between traditions and modernity. At

this point, neither Bull nor Antoine recognize Bull's use of an older colonial weapon—a rifle—as an ironic form of resistance against the modern technology—the dam. While the dam symbolizes a different sort of threat to Native sovereignty than the rifle, and certainly contradicts the “traditions” of reciprocity with nature, adhering instead to a capitalist commodification of land and resources, its tension derives less from it *being* a modern technology and more from its misguided use—to irrigate farms in a place which is not suited for large-scale farming. As Doc Edwards explains:

“The land had its own way of striking back. ... Farming out here has been a trap, a sure way to break your back and then find you were working for the bank all the time. ... The real loser was the country itself, the land. It had already changed when I arrived here twenty years or so ago, but before that ... when it was all open, the Indians ran cattle.” (230)

Instead of seeing this distinction, however, Bull links the “killing of the water” to past forms of colonial aggression symbolized by guns and, in making this connection, sees the cultural death of the Little Elk as inevitable, saying, “how can a stream out of the mountains be killed? Will they open the earth and drop us in it? ... It was bad for us when they came with guns. Now they will kill us in other ways” (14). Often clouded by anger and clutching to static traditions, Bull fails to see through the modern/traditional binary and to articulate this distinction between technologies which have been adopted and used to reimagine tribal traditions and those which threaten them, making it clear that he will be limited in his capacity to “apprentice” Antoine into the ways that traditions can be maintained and reimaged in modernity. And although he later expresses a wish to teach Antoine about the Little Elk *past*—“not to raise [Antoine] up in anger, not to feed him thoughts that would eat out the guts, but to give him understanding of what it was like in those first days” (131)—he often leaves Antoine to interpret the events of the

present on his own, reminding him that ““when a man goes anyplace”” he should ask himself, ““What did I learn from this? What should I remember? . . . What did you see today?”” (8). However, despite Bull’s limitations as a journeyman into the present and future, Antoine learns from this opening experience that “visions never come to an angry man,” so if he is to become a man and a leader of his people, he must find ways to resist the threats to Native masculinity and tribal economics—which values the powers of the sacred valley over those of the dam—without succumbing to anger and violence (21).

As the Little Elk people become invested in trying to find the white man responsible for the dam, new models of Native masculinity emerge, offering both problems and promise for Antoine’s development. Pock Face—Bull’s nephew—is one such example, a man who McNickle describes as a gambler and a troublemaker, always being scolded for failing to show respect to his elders. Unlike Bull, who refuses to wear the white man’s “hard shoes” for fear of losing touch with the earth and, by extension, his Indian identity, Pock Face readily wears cowboy boots and a “blue cowboy jacket.” However, in his adoption of white cultural markers *and* his resistance to full assimilation, Pock Face represents a form of cultural hybridity which is corrupted by bad behavior, as he drinks whiskey, disrespects his elders, and takes women into the bushes, after which he “come[s] home singing a war song with everybody laughing with him” (44). Rather than reconciling or blurring the lines between tradition and modernity or across *blood*, *land*, and *memory*, he stands as an example of the worst kind of hybrid—he doesn’t make the maps of the mind intersect, but instead, he aligns with other “restless young men with nothing to do,” contributing little and fitting-in nowhere. In this way, Pock Face, whose

name and, presumably, whose face reflect the troubled history of contact and conflict fraught with small-pox infested blankets, offers an even more dangerous model for Antoine to follow than Bull because, whereas Bull sees little hope for the future of the Little Elk, Pock Face, in his restlessness, is willing to accelerate the arrival of that tragic end.

After news circulates throughout the tribal village of Bull's confrontation with the dam, Pock Face goes to the canyon to get a look for himself. Before leaving, Pock Face declares "I'll take somebody's gun, and when I find the man who built the dam I'll shoot him in the belly. The old man [Bull] will thank me" (42). Left in charge of the camp while Bull and the elders are away, Antoine tries to stop Pock Face from taking Bull's gun, but "he lost the gun just the same," demonstrating that Antoine is still powerless to enforce order or to lead his people into the future (43). With violent intentions, Pock Face sets out for the dam, quickly finds a man to put in his sights, and fires a single shot, killing the man instantly and unceremoniously as the man "simply dropped and never moved. His notebook fell from his hand and the pages fluttered in the wind" (45). Although the shot hits its mark, the description here, of the muted rifle blast, mirrors that of Bull's futile pot-shot at the dam, as "the bark of the rifle was muffled in the roar of wind and water. Even the smoke from the barrel's end blew away without a trace" (45). However, unlike Bull, who shoots the dam in a desperate, albeit futile, act to preserve the sacredness of the *land*, Pock Face's shot is motivated more by a resistant, oppositional form of frontier masculinity than by a desire to save the valley or to reconcile the lines of *blood, land, and memory*. And, in both cases, the inability to *hear* each other while on

opposite sides of the dam is compounded by an inability to *see* each other, as both white and Native characters enact violence against one another without empathizing with their victims—Bull’s pot-shot is fired at a structure of rock and concrete he doesn’t understand, Pock Face’s act of violence is committed against a man he’s never met, and, we learn, Pell’s construction of the dam threatens a sacred valley he doesn’t belong to.

The futility of rifle blasts which fall on deaf ears is also echoed in Bull’s description of the futility of cross-cultural dialogue between Native and white men; as Bull explains to US Marshal Sid Grant, who has come to investigate the killing, ““when I talk to a white man, what does it matter what I say? He will turn it around the way he wants to hear it”” (167). Bull’s response to the marshal’s line of questioning demonstrates his belief that white men will always refuse to recognize his words as anything more than sounds muted in the screech of progress, and hints at their inability to see his people as anything but nameless and faceless obstructions temporarily in the way of their manifest destiny. And by reifying the lines separating the “maps of the mind,” Bull, like the cartographers on the Great Plains, reinforces rather than reimagines the straight lines and right angles that define Native masculinity. His attempt to kill the dam to save his people becomes a terminal creed, not because it is wrong to question, challenge, or resist the dam and other technologies, but because his methods and his imagination leave no room for Native survival or survivance in the modern world.

Helping to place acts of violence committed by Native men—such as Bull and Pock Face—in historical context, Deloria explains in *Indians in Unexpected Places*, that expectations for Native violence changed after the Civil War to the fear not of a full or

true military uprising, but of isolated Indian outbreaks, which “suggested a particular kind of armed resistance, a kind of rebellion that would never produce renewed autonomy, a pocket of stubbornness in the sweep of the American empire” (21). At the turn of the twentieth century, the fears of Native resistance through outbreaks and “last stands” gave way to Euroamerican nostalgia, as the Turnerian view of the conquered western frontier came with a similar view of the Native inhabitants—both had shaped the American character, but now their threats had been suppressed, and what had once been the wild and rugged West, was now a site of colonial domestication. However, as growing numbers of legal victories, social and political actions, and acts of civil disobedience can attest, Native resistance to ongoing acts of colonialism is alive and well, and although the struggle for sovereignty, treaty recognition, and self-definition is far from over, such examples offer alternatives to violence that may result in lasting, more meaningful reform than fatalistic violence and terminal creeds.

HENRY JIM: A CAUTIONARY TALE FOR CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM

As Antoine continues to navigate between and across the maps of the mind, or the lines of *blood*, *land*, and *memory*, McNickle frames another important lesson he must learn, as the narrator explains, that “to translate from one man’s life to another’s—that is difficult. It is more difficult than translating a man’s name into another man’s language” (26). The difficulty of translating or codeswitching from one culture to another is more difficult than language alone, a lesson Antoine sees firsthand in his interactions with Henry Jim, who, before abandoning the tribe and assimilating to “the white man’s road,” bestows the tribe’s sacred medicine bundle to Reverend Welles, who then promptly gifts

the bundle to the Americana Institute in New York. Whereas Antoine offers hope for the future of Native masculinity, learning that “to be one among his people, to grow up in their respect, to be his grandfather’s kinsmen—this was a power in itself, the power that flows between people and makes them one. ... [filling him with] a healing warmth that flowed into his center from many-reaching body parts”—Henry Jim’s cultural betrayal serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of social and economic assimilation (106). Using Berkhofer’s term, Henry Jim begins as a “good” Indian, completely assimilating, adopting farming, owning his own land and his own home, while abandoning tribal affiliations. He is a “model” Indian of assimilation policies such as the Dawes Act, not just in his acceptance of allotment, but in his integration into the capitalist marketplace. In this way, he represents an alternative form of Native masculinity which to traditionalists is a threat to Native ways of life because his success in farming threatens to divide the tribe; as Two Sleeps explains, “‘The people are changing in their hearts. They are saying: ‘Henry Jim was not wrong after all. He plowed the ground and planted wheat, and still he lived to be an old man and had lots of cattle and horses.’ Now everybody will plant wheat’” (186).

What separates Henry Jim from traditionalists such as Bull and Two Sleeps is not just his acceptance of assimilation, but his commodification of land *and* cultural artifacts, using the former to improve his crop yields and profit margins and the latter to gain better standing with the white men he hopes to impress. In this way, it is not a simple capitalist drive for money that distinguishes him from his kinsmen, but his willingness to adopt white definitions of wealth and white methodologies for acquiring and expressing wealth.

Such a distinction fits with the historical class divides on Native reservations and within Native communities, as Harmon explains; “it was not a taste for wealth that Indians had to develop in order to be more like enterprising Whites; it was the habit of amassing property, and either retaining it or putting it to use in the generation of additional wealth that would stay within a limited family circle” (103). By limiting the “family circle” to himself, and abandoning, in fact, selling out the Little Elk, there seems to be little room for Henry Jim to defy or reimagine expectations.

However, hoping for forgiveness from and reconciliation with the Little Elk, Henry Jim returns to the tribe after a thirty-year absence and explains his own assimilation and cultural betrayal to Bull, saying,

“I went to the white man, I spoke for him. I opened the gate and let him come in. . . . The fences are here, now, and our country is smaller—we have only what they left us. But that is not what I came to say . . . Let’s bring back our medicine, our power. Let’s bring Feather Boy back to this country, to protect it for our children.” (18)

In his hope to repair burnt bridges and return the Feather Boy medicine bundle, Henry Jim challenges assumptions regarding Native identity at the turn of the twentieth century, as the “Indian” in him has not been “killed” nor has assimilation to modernity and white cultural and economic practices “saved” him. Moreover, his conversion back to tribal lifeways suggests the ephemeral quality of the lines dividing traditions and assimilation, Native and white, even after thirty years, offering what at first appears to be a cautious optimism for cultural hybridity and a potential model for Antoine’s development. However, what sets Henry Jim’s story of “homing in” apart is that he never achieves “hybridity,” but instead spends thirty years in full assimilation to “white” farming practices and following the “white man’s road” before making a complete conversion

back to the Little Elk, a conversion which sees him slip in and out of his Native language until he is unable to speak English anymore “like a man following a vanishing trail” (124). In terms of *blood* and *land*, Henry Jim’s reconciliation with the Little Elk before his death suggests that he has survived the “time of confusion” in which “the new men, coming from across the mountains, set family against family telling them to build legal fences, tear up the sod, build little houses” (31). However, rejoining the tribe does not come before the Feather Boy medicine bundle has been lost and destroyed, leaving the *memory* of his betrayal unresolved, making his redemption questionable and his role in shaping Antoine’s development suspect. Therefore, if he plays a role at all it will be in cautioning Antoine against seeing the worlds of traditions and those of technology as separate and fixed, and reminding him that, although time can heal many wounds, it can also deepen and widen the problems facing Native men who assimilate.

With Henry Jim’s example in place, Antoine remembers his own struggle to resist assimilation while at the boarding school in Oregon. In particular, he remembers “The Long-Armed-Man” who enforced assimilation with a military-like discipline and a paternalistic tone, reminiscent of the language of treaties and federal policies with the same goal—to “kill the Indian, and save the man.” As Antoine recalls one of his first days at the boarding school, he remembers the words of The Long-Armed-Man as he explained the virtues of assimilation:

“You students, now, you listen to me. I want you to appreciate what we’re doing for you. We’re taking you out of that filth and ignorance ... and we’re going to fix you up clean and polite so no man will be ashamed to have you in his home. Forget where you came from, what you were before; let all of that go out of your minds and listen only to what your teachers tell you.” (106)

The Long-Armed-Man's insistence to "forget where you came from, what you were before," mirrors Henry Jim's loss of *memory*—first of his Little Elk affiliations and later his use of English—and it also contradicts the lesson Bull has instilled, which is to constantly question what he *sees*, *learns*, and *remembers* in his pursuit of becoming a man. For Antoine, then, leaving the government school is akin to a return to "traditions" or a return to "*blood memory*," albeit with horses and guns—both "modern technologies" brought to Native people through colonization. As the narrator explains:

[T]he excitement had been growing inside ever since he [Antoine] returned from the government's boarding school and could throw away the government's uniform and not awaken to a bugle call and not march around in a parade ground. . . . He could ride a horse, as before. It was almost as if the government school had never been. (3)

In this way, Antoine's *blood memory* returns while that of the boarding school begins to vanish, as he *remembers* and re-establishes relationships to home and land, and almost "forgets" the assimilationist propaganda of The Long-Armed-Man. However, what prompts Antoine's early return is not his "graduation" or completion of the cultural assimilation, but the death of his mother, suggesting that he has not been "fixed"—in The Long-Armed-Man's paternalistic sense—nor has he been "fixed" in his role as "traditional" or "assimilated," but instead, has gained a certain hybridity with the skills and experience to operate in both worlds. Furthermore, although the death of his mother also makes him an orphan—and adds to the list of tragedies in the novel—it does allow him to be raised by Bull and other, primarily male, leaders of the Little Elk. The lack of a strong female role model certainly limits the potential for balance Antoine might have achieved had his mother, or another strong female figure, remained in his life, but,

perhaps, out of this lack, he is also offered greater access to observe and learn from Bull and Two Sleeps.

THE WHITE MAN'S INDIAN

While Antoine certainly *sees* and *learns* much from Bull, Pock Face, and Henry Jim, much of his fate rests in the hands of white characters who hold the power to legislate and enforce restrictions on Native masculinity and tribal economics *and* those, such as Toby Rafferty, who symbolize the promise and eventual failure of the Indian Reorganization Act and other federal Indian economic policies. As the white Indian agent on the Little Elk reservation, Rafferty is described as a reform-minded government man, similar to John Collier, offering a hopeful, new vision for Native and white relations and representing what McNickle calls “the new settlement-house humanism” (33). Engaged in his own personal struggle to define and justify his *work* among the Little Elk, Rafferty does not appropriate Native identity or “play Indian,” to use Deloria’s term, nor does he align with the paternalistic Westerners that Richard Slotkin describes as “m[e]n who *know* Indians” (emphasis mine, *Gunfighter* 125). In this way, Rafferty differs from most of his fellow white characters—Adam Pell, US Marshal Sid Grant, Reverend Stephen Welles, and The Long-Armed-Man—in his sincere attempt to recognize the biases of his own “cultural eye” and to learn and understand the Native people who live in the valley threatened by the dam. Crucially, although the “world,” as Parker suggests, has still “not managed to construct an Indian, unassimilating way to adapt masculine roles to the dominant, business-saturated culture’s expectations of 9-5 breadwinning,” Rafferty’s reform-minded approach represents a white man’s attempt to bridge the gap between

Native men and capitalist success, as he searches for “unassimilating ways” and advocates for the same brand of cultural parallelism and self-determination that McNickle himself emphasized during his work with Indian Affairs (*Invention* 3).

Soon after he is introduced, Rafferty describes his frustration for the formulaic training and rigid approach to federal Indian reform, saying, “[n]obody in Washington tells you about medicine bundles or culture heroes or folk ways. The emphasis in the instructions we get is on the mechanics of the job we are expected to do—as if these other things don’t exist and won’t get in the way of doing the job” (35). In his efforts among the Little Elk, Rafferty attempts to move beyond the “mechanics of the job” and simple binaries such as savage/civilized, tradition/modernity, Native/white, in order to arrive at more meaningful and lasting reform which recognizes the *power* of medicine bundles, powwow dancing, and sacred valleys as being at least on par with the technological and economic *power* of the dam. Although frustrated that “after three years” the Native men he has helped to take up farming “had not improved their crop yields—or paid off government loans,” he, nonetheless, recognizes that, perhaps the Little Elk have a different conception and expression of *work*, as he finds that “the midsummer dances, which required a period of preparation and a period of recuperation ... made a big hole in the summer months, just when white ranchers sweated in the sun and were calling for extra hands as they ran from task to task” (34). Furthermore, Rafferty recalls that he himself had “pitched hay in the hot sun in upper New York State without discovering particular virtue in the occupation” but notes that “Powwow dancing was no less strenuous ... but the people looked contented” (34). In his admiration of

Native dancing and his recognition that it too is a form of *work*, Rafferty demonstrates cultural sensitivity and a sincere attempt to *see* the parallel visions of work and masculinity expressed by the Little Elk, *learn* from his mistakes and improve his ability to communicate and listen to their concerns, and *remember* the long history of government corruption and state-sanctioned violence perpetrated against Native people, all in pursuit of making the maps of the mind intersect.

With this lofty goal, Rafferty becomes frustrated more by his role in the camp than by the apprehension of the Little Elk to adopt the “white man’s road” and voices this frustration while simultaneously expressing his admiration for traditional dancing as a viable form of *work*, saying,

“Naturally, I don’t tell them my job is to do away with their ‘nonproductive’ dances—an expression used in the field circulars. . . . Nonproductive of what? For I suppose the dancers produce something, if it’s only sweat. They wouldn’t go on repeating if something didn’t come from it—that’s a guess on my part.” (36)

With this statement, Rafferty further distinguishes himself from the likes of Grant, Welles, The Long-Armed-Man, and, to a somewhat lesser degree, Pell, as he does not believe that he must “kill the Indian, to save the man” and instead, he interrogates the very notion that “progress” and “modernity” are linear paths away for “savagery” and “traditions.” He then unsettles the position of white, normative masculinity and economics as he questions the motives of reform and the Little Elks’ resistance to it: “I’m trying to keep a sense of direction. Are we going forward or backward? Who’s getting reformed? Why is it, after three years, nobody has accepted my offers of help? Why doesn’t someone take me up on my offer to get him started in cattle?” (37) In his constant questioning of his own role (and by extension, the role of government in Indian

affairs), and his sincere attempts to *see* and *learn* from alternative “map[s] of the mind,” Rafferty’s promise of reform for Native men and Native workers may outweigh his eventual failure to implement it (125). However, his tragic death at the hands of Bull—which I explore in the next section—forces readers to consider the failure of reform policies, even those which are administered with sincerity and thoughtfulness—forcing us to place what this failure and death mean in relation to the future of Native masculinity, tribal economics, and federal Indian economic policies.

Whereas Rafferty offers a hopeful, if not entirely sustainable, vision of federal Indian reform, Adam Pell—white museum owner and dam engineer/financier—represents the “colonial blindness” that obfuscates or erases the ongoing acts of colonialism from white consciousness, replacing them with well-meaning, yet, nonetheless, destructive and paternalistic beliefs for Native people in modernity. Although he, like Rafferty, at times struggles to define and justify his *work* among the Little Elk, his ability for self-interrogation is more often clouded by his self-delusion—specifically, his inability to recognize his complicity in the acts of colonialism and cultural erasure that result in the novel’s intercultural violence—as he is responsible for the dam that is “killing the water” and his museum has possession of the Feather Boy medicine bundle which the Little Elk hope to recover. McNickle discusses this failure of people to recognize themselves as contemporary agents of colonialism, saying, “most critics of government policy in Indian affairs seem unaware of their own involvement in support of the very morality which informs that policy” (qtd. in D. Parker 233).⁵ Despite his initial failure to recognize his involvement in the conflict, it may seem appropriate to

characterize Pell as the novel's villain; however, this does not seem to be McNickle's intention. In a letter to his editor, Douglas Latimer, McNickle explains, "my strategy here was to make Adam attractive, if somewhat eccentric, as a human being; a man of accomplishment and compassion" (qtd. in D. Parker 230). Pell's "good" and "compassionate" qualities can be traced throughout the final half of the novel, as we learn that he has traveled to remote villages in Peru, bringing them his expertise for building dams and taking cultural artifacts as souvenirs to be displayed in his museum. However, although Pell comes to understand his role in the conflict and begins to realize that the Little Elk "worked with different data and a different ordering of reality" viewing the dam as "an unnatural disruption of a functioning universe, a kind of crime against life," he remains unable to comprehend this other way of knowing, which ultimately results in tragedy (McNickle, *Wind* 210).

Unlike Rafferty, who begins to empathize with the Little Elk in their resistance to the dam, Pell, at first, sees the dam not as a threat to Native sovereignty and cultural survivance, but as a symbol of economic progress, going so far as to suggest its aesthetic beauty, as Rafferty notes, "Only an engineer would put all those things together ... cement, turbines, diversion canals, contour lines—and call the assemblage beautiful. ... An artist could inventory the environment in such a manner; he had not expected to find the gift in an engineer" (154). And Pell, like the other Euroamericans he represents, justifies this commodification of land and resources—even believing that the "dam as progress" makes it mutually beneficial to white and Little Elk people alike. It is only after the dam is nearly finished that Pell realizes "what I had seen as economic development,

Bull and his people saw as disaster” (228). With these words, it is clear that the negotiation of the dam’s meaning between the white and Native characters remains culturally contested—however, Pell and most of the other white characters fail to recognize any meaningful solution to the conflict. Even after making the distinction, rather than offering real restitution or offering to negotiate or listen to the Little Elk’s concerns, Pell upholds the rhetoric of erasure, reifies the binary separating “modernity” and “traditions,” absolves his complicity in that erasure as part and parcel of inevitable progress, and, although sympathetic, assumes that the Little Elk, like all colonized people, must conform to or be crushed by the sweep of progress that is symbolized by the dam and other technologies of colonialism. Pell’s failure to see the interwoven lines of *blood, land, and memory* that make the valley and the medicine bundle “sacred” and irreplaceable, or “priceless” in the capitalist sense, leaves him to see the Little Elk through the prism of nostalgia rather than as *real*, viable agents in the present; and, as Allen explains: “Nostalgia of this sort can serve no purpose in the present except to lock contemporary Indians into stereotypical self-images rooted in the past and prevent them from reimagining viable identities for the present and future” (*Blood Narrative* 191).

The distinction between the novel’s two most dynamic white characters complicates depictions of the Anglo “map of the mind” much in the same way that the distinctions between tribal traditionalists such as Bull and Two Sleeps, “assimilated” Natives such as Henry Jim, and cross-cultural “hybrids” such as Antoine and Son Child complicate portrayals of the Native “map of the mind.” By providing nuance to the racial and cultural landscape, McNickle demonstrates that cross-cultural and intergenerational

conceptions of work and masculinity cannot be cleanly divided into a simple binary between white and Native characters, as the maps of the mind are inflected with individual values, motivations, and beliefs. Crucially, while both Rafferty and Pell struggle to define their working relationships across cultural lines, they each fail by degrees to open and sustain lines of communication and understanding that might have prevented the building of the dam or the tragic violence that concludes the novel (and cuts short their lives). However, prior to their untimely, violent deaths, Rafferty and Pell provide more lessons for Antoine to *see*, *learn*, and *remember*, as their promises of reform and their ultimate failures to communicate and negotiate meaning suggest that the future of Native masculinity and productive cultural hybridity will require work on the “white” side of the dam, which will force Antoine to extend his role as “cross-cultural translator” and to engage with the larger problem of “translating one man’s life into another.”

KILL THE *MAN*, SAVE THE INDIANS: INEVITABLE VIOLENCE, TRAGEDY, AND TERMINAL CREEDS

In a December 1941 article in *Indians at Work* titled “What Do the Old Men Say?,” McNickle frames the cross-cultural and inter-generational problems that arise when Native elders, such as Bull and Two Sleeps, are kept from participating in policy negotiations with government officials, leaving the younger, less influential translators, such as Antoine and Son Child, to assume positions of power. As he explains:

Something like this seems to have happened to many full-blood Indians who, because they cannot use English, feel that they are ridiculed, or will be ridiculed if they attempt to speak for themselves. They have to rely on the young people, while they sit in the background. They are unhappy

sitting in the background, because it is against all custom for them to be without voice. As a matter of fact, the more sensitive of the young people do not like to be in the front doing all the talking. They too, realize that they are in false position and that the privilege of talking and making decisions belongs to the elders. (25)

Here, as if framing the conflict that results in the novel's violent conclusion, McNickle insists that Native elders must be heard and that Native worldviews need to be considered in order to ensure true and lasting Indian reform. By emphasizing the breakdown in cross-cultural and intergenerational communication in the novel (and his nonfiction, activist writing), McNickle suggests that tragedies and violence are not inevitable, but, instead, are a consequence of failed negotiations of meaning—of *blood, land, and memory*; work, wealth, and power; the dam and the medicine bundle—and failures to understand the limitations of “translating one man's life into another” through cross-cultural translators. Taken more broadly, the intergenerational and cross-cultural tension between speakers and translators is built on an even deeper tension between traditions and modernity, imbuing the final scene with elements of the classic Western which places “traditional” forms of masculinity and economic practices in competition with “new” ones—rugged individualism versus eastern gentility and domesticity, farming/ranching versus neoliberal capitalism, “savagery” versus “civilization.” However, the conclusion to McNickle's novel envisions a revisionist, *post-frontier, post-colonial* Western in which violence and tragedy are the result of “failures to communicate” democratically with words, leading to a shootout that not only provides a commentary on Native masculinity and tribal economics (in resistance to federal and state imposed definitions), but also on the future of the *Indian* world.⁶

In the build-up to the final scene, Rafferty and Pell promise to return the Feather Boy medicine bundle to the Little Elk people and convince Bull to meet one last time at the tribal police station. However, before Bull arrives, Pell informs Rafferty that the medicine bundle has been destroyed in the custody of his museum as, “mice had eaten their way through the buckskin covering [of Feather Boy] ... [W]hat was left of the hide and binding thongs were tattered and profaned, devoid of holy mystery” (210). To make restitution, Pell intends to replace Feather Boy with his museum’s most prized possession—a golden figurine which he acquired from a Peruvian museum. Pell’s belief that he can restore peace by simply replacing the sacred bundle with another culture’s priceless artifact signals his failure to recognize the humanity and the cultural specificity of the Little Elk, and it is this lack of understanding, this inability to comprehend the culture on the other side of the dam that leads to the novel’s violent end.

In the final pages, Bull arrives at the station, learns that the medicine bundle has not only been lost, but destroyed, and soon communication breaks down completely. Pell appeals to Son Child, who has served as translator throughout the negotiations, to explain to Bull and the other tribal elders that he has brought a gift to replace the medicine bundle; as Pell explains: “I don’t know what they are saying, but they sound unhappy. Tell them I brought a gift to take the place of the medicine bundle” (255). However, much like a classic Western, when words fail, rifles take their place; as Louis—another of Bull’s brothers—exclaims, “I told all of you my gun would speak for me and I think the time has come. It is no good talking to these men. This is all they understand” (255). But before Louis can fire the rifle, Bull snatches it from him, shouting, “Brother! I have

waited for this—don't take it away” (255). With the weapon in hand, Bull turns to Antoine, who along with Son Child has served as translator during the negotiations, and exclaims, ““Just see, Grandson! [Pell] is no monster! He is a man like the rest of us! He can die like the rest of us! Now let them walk over our heads! We won't have to care anymore!” (255). These words are never translated, as Bull fires a bullet through Pell's chest and another through Rafferty's head before he too is gunned down, by Son Child/The Boy, the tribal policeman. Bull does not even lift the rifle in self-defense, as he “kn[ew] it was to come, and received The Boy's bullet point-blank to the heart” (256). The novel ends, with Two Sleeps, the tribal elder, singing the death song, playing on the hopeful words Henry Jim had begun singing after his first meeting with Rafferty, when it appeared that the Indian agent was going to help the Little Elk recover the medicine bundle. However, the song of the meadowlark in Henry Jim's hopeful version which is “weaving the world together,” is replaced, as “*no meadowlarks sang, and the world fell apart*” (256).⁷

At first glance, Bull's act of violence at the end of the novel may be read as a reversal of Richard Pratt's infamous declaration, as Bull “kills the *man* [Rafferty and Pell], to save the Indians.” However, rather than espousing and embracing such a simple reversal and advocating for resistance through gun violence, McNickle showcases the violence as tragedy, forcing Native and non-Native readers to consider the tragic irony in Bull's inability to see Native presence and Native agency in the world of modern technology—even as he uses a modern weapon, a rifle, and rides horses, not *traditional* or pre-contact technologies, but those resulting from contact. In his essentialist vision of

technologies, Bull upholds what communications theorists call the “fallacy of technological determinism,” or “the fallacy that a given technology (the printing press, railroads, radio) necessarily produces a given cultural consequence. By contrast—the argument goes—the cultural consequence varies with how the technology gets used, despite our tendency to read a consequence back onto the technology itself” (R. Parker, *Invention* 9). In this way, Bull’s final act of violence not only results from him being “ridiculed,” pushed to the “background” of the negotiations to make room for translators, and left “without [a] voice,” but from his inflexible epistemology and his inability or unwillingness to see that structures such as dams, guns, and roads need not be imposed on Native people, nor must they serve as instruments of colonization, but the use, development, and impact of these technologies, as all technologies, varies widely by culture.

Taken together, the novel’s tragic end may be read as Bull’s adherence to “terminal creeds,” or “beliefs which seek to fix, to impose static definitions upon the world. Such attempts are destructive, suicidal, even when the definitions appear to arise out of revered traditions” (Owens, *I Hear the Train* 144). This view is supported by Bull’s final act of violence, which draws strong similarities to his pot-shot at the dam in the opening scene, as in both cases he fires into that which he doesn’t understand—the barriers made of concrete and those of cross-cultural and intergenerational communication. Nothing has been gained by putting a face and a name to the dam, because the maps of the mind still do not intersect, and violence appears as the only alternative. This final act of violence, then, represents the ultimate failure of the white

and Native characters' to negotiate new meaning about dams and land use, Native artifacts and cultural power, and Native men in the capitalist marketplace—as farmers and ranchers or “nonproductive” traditionalists—as both sides fail what linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson consider to be the crucial element in cross-cultural communication, which is to “bend your world view and adjust the way you categorize your experience” (231). Instead of redrawing the maps of the mind—either to make them intersect or to reify a “respectful” brand of cultural parallelism—the Native and non-Native men come together for a violent collision, enacting what might be read as a *post-frontier* shootout in a *post-colonial* Western, in which both sides fail to see beyond the Turnerian version of history or to recognize the long history of mutual exchange and influence. In this way, both camps reify rather than reimagine the lines which separate and internalize rather than interrogate the *post* in postcolonial and post-frontier, seeing instead a world that is destined to be *post-Indian*.⁸

However, although these are compelling and viable readings of the novel's first and final scenes, Bull's acts may also be viewed as resistance to colonialism and cultural (museum) capitalism, beginning with resistance to the colonial structure—the dam—and ending with resistance to the colonial agents, Rafferty and Pell. Such acts of resistance, although based on Bull's failure to understand the world on the other side of the dam, are less a tragedy of the wronged Indian and more the tragedies of miscommunication and misunderstanding. For this reason, these acts may leave room for an ironic view of Native survivance in the unlikely form of tragedy—a Western literary form with linear plotlines not present in Native oral traditions. With no clear victims and no clear villains,

McNickle places an ironic twist on the tragic Western, constructing something of a “trickster tragedy” that focuses on the breakdown of communication between Western men and the inability to negotiate new meaning across cultural borders, implicating all involved, including the readers, challenging each to interrogate his/her complicity in these failures. Such a reading reimagines the *post* in *postindian*, not as a term signifying “vanishing” or cultural death, but as a construct that simultaneously recognizes the colonialism couched in the *invented* term “Indian” and creates a space to challenge and resist that colonialism and to liberate the *real* Native people who, in being signified by the term, have been locked in an invented, imagined past. This marks McNickle as what Vizenor calls a “postindian warrior” who “encounter[s] enemies with the same courage in literature as their ancestors once evinced on horses, and they create their stories with a new sense of survivance” (“Postindian Warriors” 4). In this way, the ending to this novel draws comparisons to other traditional warriors and Native figures, such as the *heyoka* (sacred clowns) in Lakota/Dakota culture, who approach the world in an oppositional way so that endings are beginnings, death brings forth life, and the world is constantly reimagined.⁹ Therefore, while the ending to *Wind* leaves us with a bad taste in the mouth—the cultural death that follows commodification and museumization of Native people—if we focus on the hybrid survivors, a glimmer of hope remains for Native men and Native workers to find new forms of resistance that reject terminal creeds and maintain cultural survivance.

CULTURAL HYBRIDITY AND CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM

For the Little Elk to survive and not become the tragic victims or the nostalgic, “vanishing Americans” fading off into the sunset, characters such as Antoine must find new, more effective methods of resistance than violence. Unlike Silko’s *Ceremony* (1977) or Momaday’s Pulitzer Prize–winning *House Made of Dawn* (1968)—hugely influential works in Native literature which both prominently feature imagery of sunrise at the beginning and conclusion, reversing the Western trope of the sun setting on Native people—McNickle’s work features a much darker, pessimistic vision of the future for Native people, and Native masculinity in particular. The challenge of seeing endings as beginnings is not lost on McNickle, however, as he writes that for Antoine, and all Native (and non-Native) boys,

The days pass slowly in a boy’s mind, since so little is anticipated; ends are never seen as beginnings. But his mind still burned with the flaming image of his grandfather’s face when he fired his gun at the wall of rock holding back the water. *What did you see today? What did you learn?* Like the images, those words were still there, reminding him of how a man should conduct himself. (238)

Perhaps never achieving the status of *heyoka* or the ability to see endings as beginnings, Antoine, nonetheless, remembers to interrogate his experiences and learn from all he sees. He has taken his grandfather’s lesson to heart, as he remembers to “[l]earn something from everything that happens and soon you will be a man” (116).

Furthermore, couched in Antoine may just be the image of sunrise (and perhaps the homonym in Son Child’s name suggests this imagery too), the image of hope that seems lacking from McNickle’s conclusion, as the narrator explains: “A people needed young

ones who would put the sun back in the sky”—however, the question remains whether Antoine is ready to take on this task (204).

Before reading the ending as an ironic/trickster tragedy or Antoine as a character with the power to put the “sun” back in the Little Elk sky, it seems more likely that readers will first see the misunderstandings and violence and consider them inevitable. Rather than asserting agency or self-determination, Antoine and Son Child become mere “collaborators,” in the colonial sense of the verb “collaborate,” which, according to *The American Heritage Dictionary*, means “to cooperate treasonably, as with an enemy occupying one’s country.” Such a reading troubles any hopeful interpretations of their cultural hybridity, as the translators become trapped, as if between the two sides of the dam, either remaining static and fixed in place like the wall of concrete, or trickling through into modernity like the water that is controlled and regulated by the colonial structure.

This pessimistic reading gains currency in the novel’s final scene as Antoine envisions the violent and tragic end before it happens, but can do nothing to stop it; as the narrator explains “[Antoine] knew that the thing he imagined would finally happen. Black blood would spill on the ground” (255). For this reason, Antoine is often read less as a dynamic agent of hybridity and more as a passive spectator, as Dorothy Parker explains:

The character of Antoine was inserted into the novel late in [the novel’s] development, and by introducing him McNickle may only have been returning to a literary device that had served him well in *The Surrounded* and *Runner in the Sun*. Although Antoine is not entirely passive, he is essentially an observer. McNickle uses him to convey information about the traditional life of the little Elk people and to help define the context of

the story, but the character does little to carry the action forward. (*Singing and Indian Song* 228)

In this reading, Antoine is merely a “literary device,” who cannot stop or escape the cultural death that awaits him and his people. In a similar way, after Bull has killed Pell and Rafferty, Son Child/The Boy is unable to relinquish his role as tribal police officer, as he explains to Bull ““Brother! I have to do this!”” before turning his gun on the Little Elk leader and firing a bullet through his heart (256). If read as inevitable, Son Child’s killing of Bull marks him as an “apple” which “is ... a derogatory term for an Indian who is red on the outside and white on the inside. An Uncle Tomahawk, if you will” (King, *The Truth about Stories* 68). Even though he is a large man—six-foot four—and a middle-aged man—fifty-four years old—the corruption of his Little Elk name from Son Child to The Boy strips him of his manhood and imbues him in the long history of paternalistic federal policies, as he is “the boy” to the “Great White Father,” and he is a character who “learned long ago that an Indian who worked for the government never found it easy to be alone with his people” (87). If read this way, Son Child’s killing of Bull signals his ultimate conversion or assimilation to colonization and his ultimate betrayal of tribal traditions similar to Henry Jim’s betrayal which instigated the conflict. In both cases then, the role of translator is problematic as neither character is able to assert agency or to navigate between the maps of the mind, a problem which leads Parker to argue that “Antoine, like The Boy, does nothing to determine the flow of events” (*Singing an Indian Song* 228).

However, while the evidence for the inevitability of violence is certainly here, in one of McNickle’s earliest drafts of the novel, there is a different ending entirely, as

instead of murdering Rafferty and Pell, Bull gives a hopeful speech in which he says, “Let the Indian keep what is his and the white man keep his own. Only let us be friends. I think this is how it is best for men to live together” (qtd. in Owens, *Other Destinies* 81). McNickle’s decision to revise this original ending to make room for the violent and tragic confrontation suggests that, although unsettling, cross-cultural understanding cannot be achieved by a simple declaration to stay on opposite sides of the dam, as a certain hybridity is required of the Native and Anglo characters. Furthermore, while the published ending is undeniably tragic, it is not inevitable, and it is not the end, as Native characters such as Antoine and Son Child survive, each equipped with the linguistic and cultural tools to navigate between both worlds and to act as interveners between traditions/assimilation, Native resistance (Bull and Pock Face) and “white” law enforcement (Sid Grant). Though their paths to viable and uncorrupted forms of cultural hybridity are fraught with challenges, their attempts to learn from their experiences and to negotiate meaning on both sides of the dam align them with other “enterprising Indians” who “had to show that their cultures were dynamic and sophisticated enough to thrive in the modern economic world without sacrificing ideals such as generosity, reciprocity, and stewardship of the natural world” (Harmon 244). Furthermore, their reluctance to violence and their commitment to cross-cultural understanding suggest that, despite the novel’s tragic ending, they might learn new forms of resistance that avoid adherence to terminal creeds and cultural death. This seems to have been McNickle’s hope, as much for the novel as for Native communities, as he writes during the heated political climate of the 1970s, after the American Indian Movement (AIM) had occupied the BIA in

Washington, Alcatraz in San Francisco Bay, and Wounded Knee, South Dakota, that “[i]t now seems likely after Washington and Wounded Knee, that anger will hang in the air, like a combustible vapor, for some time to come. Indian Americans need assurance that riots are not essential preliminaries for purposeful talk” (xiii; qtd. in Ruppert 193).¹⁰ In this way, in telling the tragedy of “two cultures trying to accommodate each other,” McNickle urges us to engage in purposeful talk regarding the past, present, and, crucially, the future of federal Indian policies (qtd. in Owens, *Other Destinies* 79).

¹ McNickle's sustained efforts on behalf of Native workers, students, and activists have led many scholars, such as Chadwick Allen, to assert that "no other individual had a greater impact on American Indian literature and activism in the mid-twentieth century" (*Blood Narrative* 94).

² This focus on the clash of worldviews and the struggle for cultural survivance puts this chapter in conversation with other works which challenge expectations of Native people in modernity such as Robert Berkhofer's *The White Man's Indian* (1978), Philip Deloria's *Indians in Unexpected Places* (2004), Shepard Krech III's *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (1999), Alexandra Harmon's *Rich Indians: Native People and the Problem of Wealth in American History* (2010), and Paige Rabimon's *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (2005). For discussions of Native representation in film see Cree filmmaker Neil Diamond's documentary *Reel Injun* (2009).

³ For more discussion of the early drafts of McNickle's *Wind* see Dorothy Parker's *Singing an Indian Song: A Biography of D'Arcy McNickle* (223–34).

⁴ In their efforts to unpack the impact that dams have had on Native people, historians and literary scholars have offered compelling arguments about how dams on tribal lands have become a common source of tension in Native American communities and a common trope in contemporary Native literatures. For instance, John K. Donaldson uses the obstructed water metaphor to demonstrate how Native writers such as Louis Owens, Linda Hogan, Thomas King, and D'Arcy McNickle use dams to critique white culture's use of land and resources in "As Long as the Waters Shall Run" (2002).

⁵ As Allen explains: "In a climate of willful ignorance and selective amnesia—in a climate of imperialist nostalgia in which the dominant culture seemed to enjoy mourning that which it had itself destroyed—Indian activists and writers worked to reinstate the indigenous into America's performance of a triumphantly settler present" (Allen, *Blood Narrative* 192).

⁶ Renowned Native American scholar/writer, Louis Owens, echoes this challenge to post-colonial theory as applied to Native American literature, insisting that "America never became postcolonial. The indigenous inhabitants of North America can stand anywhere on the continent and look in every direction at a home usurped and colonized by strangers who, from the very beginning, laid claim not merely to the land and resources but to the very definition of the natives" (*I Hear the Train* 214).

⁷ Dorothy Parker connects McNickle's use of the meadowlark to the Great Plains, saying, "McNickle's use of the meadowlark as a symbol first of the tribe's prosperity and then of its disintegration is quite purposeful. The meadowlark has been so closely tied to the folklore of the northern plains tribes that it is sometimes called 'the bird that spoke Lakota,' or even 'the Sioux bird.' Always it is a benefactor, bringing new hope or healing, warning of danger, reporting the latest news, ensuring the people's survival" (Parker, *Singing an Indian Song* 232).

⁸ Frederick Jackson Turner's "Frontier Thesis" influenced McNickle's conception of the West, as he explains in a letter to John Collier about his work: "I am interested in writing

about the West, not in the romantic vein in which it has been dealt with in the past but with the object of revealing, in fiction, as it has been revealed by historical writers [such as Turner] of the past generation, the character which was formed by the impact of the Frontier upon the lives of the people who settled it” (qtd. in Parker, *Singing an Indian Song* 35).

⁹ This information on traditional heyoka stories in Dakota/Lakota culture is drawn from my anecdotal experience in Dakota communities, and from stories told by my Dakota language teacher, Dr. Clifford Canku (a.k.a. Mato Watakbe or “Charging Bear”). Dr. Canku explained that stories of the heyoka, or “sacred clowns” are used in Dakota culture not only to entertain listeners, but also as stories of resistance and as stories which counter traditional beliefs and traditional behaviors. For this reason, the sacred clowns are revered for their oppositional stance in the world and for their ability to reimagine and reinterpret reality.

¹⁰ Speaking of the generational conflicts in Native communities, McNickle discusses alternatives to violence in his revision to *The Indian Tribes of the United States* (1973).

CHAPTER 3

“GETTING ACROSS” BLOOD, LAND, AND MEMORY: BRIDGING WORLDS OF
WORK IN THE POETRY OF CARTER REVARO

Well, so that isn't very Indian, is it?

—Carter Revaro *Family Matters, Tribal Affairs* (11)

I don't have to say things, then—do I?—about extended families, and hard times shared, and a peculiar sense that being Indian meant being very rich and very poor, quietly dignified and raucously funny.

—Carter Revaro *Family Matters, Tribal Affairs* (15)

In his poem, “Getting Across,” Carter Revaro recalls the exhilaration and terror he experienced as a boy, swinging *beneath* the bridge over Buck Creek, “Hanging / out under the bridge / by fingertips and a toe / between ledge and girder, high / over deep water and thinking, / *I can't swim*” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 34). For Revaro, the Buck Creek bridge, connecting the Osage Reservation in Oklahoma to the outside world, was full of danger and mystery; it was the site of his modern-day rite of passage and a place where he saw the “steelblue flashing of wings / and chestnut bellies of barnswallows” which nested in “feather-lined mud” along the concrete girders, while he dangled “like a pendulum” between boyhood and manhood, nature and technology, “pass[ing] his death,” and crossing to the other side (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 34–35). In preparing a speech for young engineers inducted into the chapter of Phi Beta Kappa at the University of Tulsa in 1990, Revaro reminisced about the spring of 1972, during which he wrote “Getting Across,” remembering how, “fifty years before [his] lecture-moment,” he had “stood

watching as the WPA rebuilt that Buck Creek bridge,” hearing “the dynamite blast out rock for its concrete foundations” and seeing “the chunks of old concrete with their rusting steel rods sticking up in the deep water below” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 33).

While his recollection hints at the significance of the WPA and bridge-building to Native people and Native workers in the first half of the twentieth century, Revard’s memory at first remains more personal, as he recalls “dangling below the bridge,” and “how far it was from the east bank to the west, how far [he] would fall if [he] didn’t make it over, which rod might impale [him] if [he] dropped just right, what depth might drown or rock might shatter [him] if [he] fell elsewhere” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 33–34). However, as Revard continued working on the speech, the mortal danger of *getting across* the bridge, which for “human beings” is “safe on top, dangerous beneath, but for swallows it’s the other way round,” became less a concern than the social, cultural, and spiritual dangers of *not getting across* the real and metaphorical bridges that connect and separate people from their identities, histories, communities, and environments (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 36). As he explained:

I thought: how far from each other, how often out of touch, are parents and children—... how small the number of stories that remain about great-great-grandparents in our culture, where nothing is remembered unless it is written or taped. How hard it is, to *get across* the distances of family history—let alone national or international history!

For that matter, it’s a long way from one person to another—a red phone or hotline isn’t enough to get us over that distance. *Some* things do cross by regular routes—the InterState bridges of solid prose where carloads of good sense roar through. ... I like thinking back to that time when I was trying to swing across, hand over hand, *beneath* the bridge—where possibility seesawed with reality, where life was fragile, dumb, unauthorized. (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 33)

Whereas McNickle emphasizes the “dam” separating traditions from modernity, Natives from whites, tribal economics from capitalism—separations which lead to miscommunication, violence, and (cultural) death in *Wind from an Enemy Sky*—Revard often resituates the focus on “bridges”—both real and metaphorical—between and within cultures, offering more room for Native masculinity and Native worldviews to inform and challenge the directions and applications of technologies in modernity. Specifically, in trying to “get across” such distances, Revard bridges worlds often seen as distinct and incompatible—Native traditions and modern technologies, for instance—and, in so doing, defies stereotypes and easy categorization. In this chapter, I use Revard’s emphasis on literal and metaphorical bridges to demonstrate how Native masculinity and Native economics “get across” the distances of traditions and modernity, family histories, place, and Native and Euroamerican conceptions of work and wealth, before ending with a discussion of how Revard uses traditions and technology to reimagine stereotypes and reinstate Native agency.

While the chapter as a whole focuses on the conflation of traditions and technology (or more broadly, traditions and modernity) as it relates to Native workers and economics, I have broken the chapter into three sections: 1. “Getting Across *Blood*: Family Matters and Tribal Affairs” in “My Right Hand Don’t Leave Me No More” and “Pure Country”; 2. “Getting Across *Land*: The Technology/Nature Divide” in “Driving in Oklahoma,” “Making Money,” and “Bringing in the Sheaves” (formerly “In Kansas”); and 3. “Getting Across *Memory*: From Stereotypes to the ‘Unexpected’” in “Criminals as Creators of Capital” and “Paint and Feathers.” In this way, the organization of the chapter

draws inspiration from Chadwick Allen’s “*blood/land/memory*” trope, which he describes as “an expansion of Momaday’s controversial trope blood memory that makes explicit the central role that land plays both in the specific project of defining indigenous minority personal, familial, and communal identities (blood) and in the larger project of reclaiming and reimagining indigenous minority histories (memory)” (*Blood Narrative* 16).

Crucially, the *blood, land, and memory* complex:

articulates acts of indigenous minority recuperation that attempt to seize control of the symbolic and metaphorical meanings of indigenous ‘blood,’ ‘land,’ and ‘memory,’ and that seek to liberate indigenous minority identities from definitions of authenticity imposed by dominant settler cultures. (Allen, *Blood Narrative* 16)

In this chapter, then, I resituate Allen’s trope to consider the intersecting roles played by *blood* (Osage/Ponca and Scots-Irish), *land* (Oklahoma and Kansas), and *memory* (or imagination and stereotypes) in Revard’s poetry of work and class, traditions and technology, as he constructs a complex epistemology of mixed-blood and mixed-class masculinity in the Great Plains. In separating the argument into sections, I hope to reveal Revard’s complex interweaving of *blood, land, and memory* and how these juxtapositions construct “bridges” of meaning between and across cultural and generational lines.

GETTING ACROSS *BLOOD*: FAMILY MATTERS AND TRIBAL AFFAIRS

Much like Antoine in McNickle’s *Wind*, Revard underwent what might be described as a “cross-cultural apprenticeship” into the worlds of work and economics. With an Osage stepfather, Addison Jump, Ponca cousins and uncles—gained through the marriage of his Irish, bootlegger Uncle Woody to his Ponca Aunt Jewell Camp—and his Scots-Irish grandfather Aleck Camp, among others, Revard had several “cultural

journeymen” who apprenticed him into Native and white conceptions of work, wealth, and masculinity. Born in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, in 1931, Revard remembers the tail-end of Osage prosperity which lingered after the oil boom of the 1920s, a time in which his “mixed-blood” identity was complicated by his “mixed-class” identity, as Addison—who, along with Revard’s Scots-Irish mother, raised Revard in the absence of his Osage father—still drew lucrative oil royalties. In fact, oil revenues were so profitable for Osage landowners that, as Revard notes, “during the years 1910–29, it is said that the Osage Indians became, per capita, the wealthiest nation in the world” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 112).

However, despite their prosperity, the Osage still struggled to secure and maintain work in the capitalist marketplace and to control the money they earned through oil royalties, as BIA officials assigned to Osage country were often in control of Osage finances. As Harmon explains, “the history of government controls on Osage money belies or complicates the adage that wealth is power” because “at their richest hour, hundreds of Osages could not retain full control of their own money. Instead of buying them freedom from overbearing outsiders, copious oil revenue produced an excuse to institutionalize U.S. domination” (172, 173).¹ The distinction between wealth and power in Osage country was felt most profoundly in the effect the oil boom had on their claims to sovereignty, in terms of land and resources, as Harmon explains: “ironically, the sequence of events that made Osages rich began with a perilous loss of resources” (173). Grounding the distinction between wealth and power in his family history, Revard describes the prosperous early years of oil royalties, saying,

We had had a Pontiac the first year out there, new Buicks the two succeeding years; we had had a cook, a house full of new furniture and heavy window drapes that seemed regal to me ... and always room for one or two or three uncles for whom there were still no jobs with wages.
(*Family Matters* 13)

The lack of wage work impacted both sides of Revard's Osage/Ponca and Scots-Irish family, forcing many of his uncles to pursue jobs "outside" of the capitalist marketplace, where they often found "employment" as outlaws and bootleggers during the prohibition era.

The lack of opportunity to earn *legal* wages was compounded by the Great Depression and Dust Bowl, as Revard recalls: "the money was gone," and "the Depression's dust was in our bowls, the long rainless baking summers dried up the pond, we sold off the cattle, the last Buick went sour" (*Family Matters* 13). Even during the rare times when farm or ranch labor was available, Revard learned quickly that industriousness alone was not enough to make ends meet. In one such instance during a particularly miserable summer working alongside Addison, Revard remembers hoeing what seemed like endless rows of corn, saying, "at times like that, even when the alternatives are work or starve, the options are considered. Then as now, hard work was not enough to feed a big family, not even fourteen hours a day of it" (*Family Matters* 58).² Moreover, the Great Depression had a profound impact on the struggle to reimagine masculinity in modernity, for both white and Native men, as a result of men's changing relationships with the capitalist marketplace. As Robert Dale Parker explains,

The depression proves provocative for such rethinking, because the great difficulty in finding paid work put pressure on the dominant culture's conflation of masculinity with business-oriented labor just when Indian writers were trying to reconcile their own relation to intersecting

ideologies of labor, masculinity, business, and changing traditional cultures. (*Invention 5*)

In this way, the difficulty of finding and securing wage labor redefined the role and expression of masculinity in Indian country, and for young men like Revard, whose families oscillated between times of poverty and prosperity, a complex matrix of mixed-class and mixed-blood identity began to emerge, further complicating what it meant to *be* Indian.

Perhaps the most influential man on Revard's development during his early years was not Indian at all, but instead, was his Irish grandfather Aleck Camp, a man Revard eulogizes in his poem "My Right Hand Don't Leave Me No More."³ Although Aleck died of a heart attack in March of 1942—when Revard was just eleven years old—his impact on Revard's development cannot be overstated. In *Winning the Dust Bowl* (2001), Revard explains that he did not write about his grandfather's death until 1968, noting that

the loss [of his grandfather] was heavy, not just hard emotionally but also practically, because he was a handy man—the place was falling apart, everything would need fixing, and he was the one who always put things back together, found the baling wire or piece of leather or metal that made things work again. (98)

Echoing Toby Rafferty's assessment of Bull as "a man who could hold a world together" in McNickle's *Wind*, Revard acknowledges his grandfather's practical skills in carpentry and ranching, his technological know-how, and his ability to "put things back together"—useful skills in a place where everything was "falling apart" (McNickle, *Wind* 247).

Furthermore, much like the relationship between Bull and Antoine, in which Bull offers a fatalistic vision for the future of his people, and the future of Native masculinity in particular, Aleck consistently told Revard that he didn't know "what's to become of us,"

suggesting, rather explicitly, that he did not see a future for Revard or the rest of his mixed-blood grandchildren on the farms and ranches of Oklahoma (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 58).

The balance between the emotional and practical significance of Aleck's death is achieved throughout "My Right Hand Don't Leave Me No More," as Revard at first recalls Aleck's drunken boastings, which, in an essay preceding the poem he explains would occur "maybe once in two or three months" when "he would have an extra few drinks" and, despite "being a man who stood maybe five feet six and weighed a hundred and fifty or so," would boast "to the world [that] he could whip [heavyweight boxers of the Depression era, such as] Joe Louis, Jack Dempsey, and John L. Sullivan, maybe all at once" (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 102). As the opening lines of the poem read:

When you were drunk, you could always whip Joe Louis—
Lucky he never stopped by Bartlesville
On a Saturday night in the Green Lantern Saloon
Or he'd've been forced to let you knock him out. (*Winning the Dust Bowl*
104)⁴

This lighthearted opening takes a darker turn when Revard recalls how his grandfather first "outfaced the big fat deputy" who "came to take our bootlegging uncle [Woody] away," able to outwit the lawmen, despite the fact that Woody was at Aleck's house "holding his breath up in the attic," because "the laws all knew that you [Aleck] never told a lie" (104). Darker still, Revard recounts how his grandfather maintained his cool, facing off against a "drunk with his butcher knife" who challenged Aleck to a fight, saying, "Old man, your time has come. You hear me old man?" (104). However, the speaker (Revard), reminds Aleck how he got out of that pinch, saying, "you [Aleck] did not meet his eyes," which "kept his knife from slashing," allowing Aleck to resolve the

conflict without violence, leaving him to suffer, instead, through the man's "drunken apologies" before he "brought him in the house" where the two men shared another drink (105).

While the first two-thirds of the poem establish Aleck's propensity for colorful boasting, cleverness, and coolheadedness in the face of conflict, in the final third of the poem, Revard emphasizes Aleck's skill as a carpenter and a craftsman, paying particular attention to his skillful hands:

You fixed the broken farm. It was your hands drove
The shining nail, squeaking under the hammer, into
Its massive gatepost's new-peeled oaken bulk.
I marveled how those huge things yielded to you
Under scrapegong blows of the hammer's bluesteel arc
In the grip of your hands— (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 105)

In this emphasis on Aleck's hands, Revard pays homage to the work of fixing and repairing the "broken farm" and keeping the family and, by extension, the community, from slipping into decrepitude. As Janet Zandy explains in *Hands: Physical Labor, Class, and Cultural Work* (2004): "We are all sustained because of the labor of hands; what is undervalued, overlooked, and often discarded is how much they have to teach" (xiii). And for Revard, what Aleck's hands have to teach is more than a working-class work ethic; as, on one level, they allow Revard to "recogniz[e] labor's stamp on the body" and "to claim the complex epistemology embedded in the body," while also serving as "reductive identifiers and lucid maps to the geography of human complexity" (Zandy 5, 1). Furthermore, Aleck's skillful hands remind Revard that "if you use your body in a physical way year after year, the body speaks back not only in terms of sore muscles or swollen legs, but also out of know-how" (Zandy 4).

However, as the final four lines of the poem demonstrate, Aleck's hands also carry loads much heavier than gateposts and hammers, carrying instead, the weight of family (*blood*) and the burden of *memory*, a revelation which marks his death as both emotional and practical for Revard:

I thought your hands that held off shame and poverty
 From all of us could keep off death himself,
 My grandfather, but I was gone when he came
 And did not help. You died bringing wood for the fire. (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 105)

Here, Revard turns from recognizing the “physical labor” performed by his grandfather’s hands to the “cultural work” they achieved, as they “held off shame and poverty / from all of us” even if they couldn’t “keep off death himself.” In these poignant closing lines, Revard laments not being there “when he [death] came,” explaining that he “was gone” and “did not help.” If read literally and chronologically in Revard’s biography, these closing lines have less significance—after all, Revard was just a boy when his grandfather died, and whether he was there to *literally* help “bring wood for the fire” seems of relatively little importance. However, if we remember that Revard is writing the poem in 1968, after he had left the Osage hills, first for the University of Tulsa, and later for Oxford and Yale on his way to an esteemed teaching and writing career at Washington University in St. Louis, we can read the metaphorical weight implied in these closing lines.

First, the image of the unbuilt fire not only signals the death of Aleck—a man who provided the light and warmth of the “home hearth” before he was snuffed out by too many years of physical toil—but also, the image relates to the modern/traditional binary, as fire is the most basic, and perhaps the most fundamental and most intimate

human “technology,” and it can be added to the short list of tools (wheels) and abilities (language) that separate us from our distant relatives *and* that symbolize *home*. Speaking of fire as a fundamental human technology, cultural anthropologist Richard Wrangham observes:

In modern society, fire might be hidden from our view, tidied away in the basement boiler, trapped in the engine block of a car, or confined in the power station that drives the electrical grid, but we still completely depend on it. A similar tie is found in every culture. (*Catching Fire* 9)

And, for Revard, the fire carries both literal and metaphorical weight, as it is a crucial, and now missing, element from the “broken farm,” and a symbolic reminder of Aleck’s death. Furthermore, the fire that is “hidden from our [the readers’] view” becomes what Stephen Tatum calls a “spectral beauty” or a “felt absence,” as its ghostly trace haunts Revard’s *memory*, becoming synonymous with the light and warmth of home (*land*) and, symbolically, of his grandfather (*blood*), both of which must be rekindled and re-assembled to give the “dead or missing ... a voice” (“Spectral Beauty” 127, 128).

Additionally, because Revard is not writing *from* the “broken farm,” but instead, is writing long after he abandoned his grandfather’s apprenticeship into physical labor for one in academia, we can infer an added tension from the closing lines, as his choice to leave his *home/land* for college has left him to carry the weight of the firewood and the “broken farm” in *memory*. Complicating this reading, though, is the fact that it was Aleck who first told Revard he “ought to go to college” (*Family Matters* 59). As Revard remembers it, Aleck “did not say why [he] should” go to college, “nor would he have had any idea how, or where, or with what sort of aims or goals,” but, Revard explains, Aleck had insisted that “he didn’t know what would become of [them]” if they remained static

and continued to work as farm laborers and ranchers (*Family Matters* 61, 59). In this way, by writing the poem as a direct address from his own point-of-view to his grandfather, who is not named but addressed as “you” throughout, Revard constructs a poem which reads more like a letter aimed at “getting across” the distance between life and death, serving as Revard’s attempt to reconcile his decision to take Aleck’s advice and leave the farm, while still paying tribute to the skills and lessons he learned, some of which, no doubt, transferred and carried him through his life in academia. Furthermore, in writing to his grandfather’s ghost, Revard seems to move beyond simply seeking validation in his choice to leave, and, instead, he seeks communion and reconciliation with the man whose memory he (temporarily) left behind, perhaps hoping to continue a conversation cut short by hard times and hard living. As Zandy explains, many working-class writers trace the ghosts of their ancestors, because

benign or malevolent, ghosts are signs of unfinished business—lives abruptly ended, stolen, or shortened. Felt, but rarely seen, ghosts hover between presence and absence, invisibility and visibility, trailing the residue of life, of relationships, of labor performed, a history buried but not completely lost. (94)

In this way, while the poem may not be enough to bring Aleck back, through the simple, if painful, act of remembrance, Revard makes it clear that his grandfather’s contribution to his development, as a man and as a storyteller, will never be “completely lost.”

A few years after writing “My Right Hand Don’t Leave Me No More,” Revard wrote a second tribute to the work of his grandfather—along with that of his Osage stepfather and his older brother—in a poem titled “Pure Country.” In an essay preceding the poem, Revard discusses the memory which prompted the second tribute, saying, “there came back to me the comic moment when we were moving the outhouse off the

old pit so we could put it over the new one, and I saw this was a time when what happened to him [Aleck], and how he managed it, showed the kind of man he was pretty well” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 118). The poem about this “comic moment” when Revard and his relatives “mov[ed] the outhouse off the old pit” is broken into four numbered sections, providing the poem with a “traditional” Native structure, as Revard uses the number four—which for many Native people signals the four cardinal directions and the cycle of the four seasons—to tell the comical history of the privy. It begins with a description of work—“pick and shovel dug the privy-hole square”—followed by descriptions of the original placement of the outhouse and the work necessary to bring it into being through the layers of “black soil, / two feet of pebbly grayness, / then clay and the pale harsh rocks” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 118). Throughout the first section, there is a tacit sense of pride in the still unnamed workers as they toil and sweat, digging the hole to its eight foot depth, before “levering the white clapboard privy / on rollers until it was perched above / the eight-foot pit,” and culminating with the success of seeing that after “stamping, rocking, and leveling ... / the door would swing / open, and close, and the hook to latch it / worked just fine” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 118–19).

After recalling the construction of the water-well in the second section—and its ingenious handmade technology of bucket, rope, and pulley, which with a “pull” would “bring [water] dreaming upward” through “the darklit surface with a Floosh! / ... like a soul in flesh” before the water and bucket went “back down the dark echoes to where / it shivered alive with breathing” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 119)—Revard returns to the privy in the third section, remembering how it looked after five years of daily use. Here, the

once new and dignified structure has become home to “bluegreen bottle-flies,” “loose newspaper / brown-stained and musty with the news,” and “black widows waiting” for “the naked bottoms there on the hole above them” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 119, 120, 120). The filth and decay of the third section establishes the need to move the outhouse from its original location to the new site, and again signals the importance of having men like Aleck—“short and masterful”—and Addison—“big and powerful”—to operate a farm constantly falling into disarray (*Family Matters* 8, 8).

In the final section, Revard tells the humorous story of moving the privy “from its old pit filled and stinking / to the new and fresh-dug one,” an effort which he claims, “did not let us off / untouched [as] the oldest of us [Aleck] missed / his footing when a pipe gave way and he slowly sank / up to his chest in the liquid stuff” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 120). As Revard, Addison, and the other men “pulled [their] grandfather up / with a heave [they] looked at each other’s faces and / broke out laughing like hell” as Aleck, without a “word even to swear” looked “down at his dripping self for a minute and then / turned and walked silent along the path to the well” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 120). After “stripping his clothes,” and scrubbing himself clean, Aleck “got clean clothes and came out / and we moved the privy on out / above its new-dug hole” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 120, 121). In telling us how Aleck handled himself—wordless and dignified—after such an embarrassing and potentially life threatening fall into raw sewage, only to calmly clean himself off and return to work in time to help finish the job, Revard certainly helps us to imagine what “kind of man he [Aleck] was” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 118).

Crucially, beneath the layers of filth in “Pure Country” lie lessons about *work*, not just Revard’s mixed-blood work ethic and cross-cultural apprenticeship working alongside Native and white relatives but lessons on the importance of remembering *how things work*—even simple technologies such as the outhouse and the water-well—because doing so can help us to appreciate and make *better use* of the technologies of the present. Far from suggesting that we should return to using outhouses which, Revard notes, were “not the warmest of places on a winter’s day, nor the most fragrant on a hot summer day,” he instead implies that people should see the connections among labor, technology (both new and old, simple and complex) and land-use, as we constantly strive to live more harmoniously with our surroundings (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 118). Most important, Revard urges readers to value the comical moments shared when working together with family and community—even if it takes a few years for some to see the humor, because, as he insists, “comedy is worth more than tragedy any time where survival is at stake” (*Family Matters* 90). And even though the connections between humor, especially ironic humor, and Native *survivance*, or cultural survival through continuance, endurance, and acts of resistance, is well documented, the poem provides a welcome reminder that having the gumption and stick-to-itiveness to endure tough times and the flexibility of mind to see humor in tragedy and misfortune are virtues worth striving for, even if they are rarely reached. And whether we are stoic and gritty when misfortune befalls us—like Aleck—or find humor in our own, or someone else’s, foibles—such as Revard—the poem asks us to consider how we handle ourselves when

we attempt to crawl out of the muck, be it literal or metaphorical, and whether we are able to wash ourselves clean and get back to work.

Taken together, “My Right Hand Don’t Leave Me No More” and “Pure Country” provide insights from Revard’s youthful immersions into a working-class work ethic, while also providing clues into his appreciation for *how things work*—seeing the water-well as an engineering marvel, for instance—and the men with the skills to *keep things working*—such as Aleck, and to a lesser degree, Addison. Furthermore, both poems “get across” the distance of *memory in the blood* and the *work* of family history, and both acts of remembrance reveal and complicate Revard’s “mixed-blood” masculinity and mixed-class identity. However, as the next section will make clear, when Revard places an emphasis on the relationship among place, technologies of *work*, and economics—particularly the disconnect between capitalism and Native “traditions” of reciprocity and communal practices—new sets of questions emerge regarding the future of Native masculinity and the capitalist marketplace.

GETTING ACROSS *LAND*: THE TECHNOLOGY/NATURE DIVIDE

While Revard’s poems and essays honoring the *work* of his grandfather and stepfather offer insights into the role that *blood* plays in defining work across cultural lines, his poems on *land* shed light on the way people have divorced themselves and their understandings of work and wealth from their relationships with place, a symptom of modernity and colonization that he argues has too often gone unchecked. As Revard explains, “Americans have untied their names and individual histories from place and nation to an astonishing extent in the last five hundred years—precisely since the terms

individualism, self, identity and *civilize* came into the English language in their current meanings” (*Family Matters* 128).⁵ In this way, Revard’s poems on place and work interrogate the economic, as well as cultural, social, and spiritual significance of this false separation, and reveal alternative visions for the future of Native masculinity in the capitalist marketplace—visions which challenge technological determinism, rugged individualism, and dominion over nature, while offering a chance to reconsider the virtues of reciprocity with nature and communal, rather than individualistic pursuits of wealth.

Complicating these poems, however, is Revard’s love of science, technology, and engineering—a love which began at an early age, as he explains that when a teacher asked him “what sort of work [he] thought [he] would like to do” he said “civil engineering,” because, as he tells it, “I liked trigonometry and I could see that roads and dams and bridges were useful and there was always likely to be the need of building or replacing them” (*Family Matters* 66). Although Revard took the path of storytelling and literary scholarship rather than road-building and engineering, his poetry continues to draw influences from the world of engineering, not just in the precision, accuracy, and economy of language that engineers embrace, but in the way they have learned to “map” the Thunder’s power into numbers—trigonometry and calculus—and harness that energy, building dams, roads, cars, wind turbines, nuclear reactors, electrical circuits, and other modern marvels, which “bring our kitchens hot turquoise flowers of fossil sunlight to perk our breakfast coffee, bubbling there on the everyday miracle of a gas stove” (Revard, *Winning the Dust Bowl* 126).⁶ In this way, rather than seeing engineering and

Native storytelling as at odds with each other, Revard fuses his interests in engineering and technology with his apprenticeships in the oral tradition and worlds of *work*, conflating the “modern” with the “traditional,” as he explains that “an engineer must completely ghost-dance the world before transforming it, since the numbers which represent its beings, ‘re-presence’ them, must pretend not to know the limits of apple pollen, or cobra genes, or light-years” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 126).

As a writer, Revard uses words rather than numbers to “re-presence” Native spirituality and traditional worldviews into the “cold, hard” sciences of engineering and economics, “ghost-dancing” around and between these worlds, bridging his way across the cultural and generational divides, and providing new ways of reading Native masculinity and tribal economics in the world of modern technology. Even Revard’s Osage name, Nom-peh-wah-the, “Makes Afraid,” which refers to the Thunder’s power and was given to him in 1952 by his Osage grandmother of the Thunder clan, gives clues to his emphasis on the bridges connecting Native traditions to science and technology. In connecting him to the Osage creation story and the power of the Thunder Beings—which figure prominently in the stories of many Plains tribes—his Osage name also signals his affinity for engineering, as he explains:

To the Osages, and to the Engineers, Thunder has said: *If you make your bodies of me, you will live to see old age, and live into the happy days.* That was what was said to Osages when they decided to come down from the stars and become a nation on this earth. (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 127)

By conflating the “traditional” Osage and Ponca stories with “modern” technologies and engineering, Revard reimagines “traditional” Native worldviews as they relate to work, class, and economics, and he simultaneously liberates the magic and wonder of science—

reading the “creation myths” of the likes of Einstein alongside those told to him by his Ponca Aunt Jewell Camp and his Osage Stepfather Addison Jump. As Revard explains, “I think that just as Thunder offered himself to the Osages, so also to the Europeans—to Michael Faraday, James Clerk Maxwell, Albert Einstein, Claude Shannon” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 127).

Drawing from Ellen Arnold, who argues that “for Carter Revard, science and myth are complementary ways of knowing the world,” I shift gears in this section, complicating discussions of family and *blood* with those of technology and *place* as I continue to define Revard’s vision for Native masculinity in the capitalist economy (“Present Myth” 179). As Arnold explains,

By weaving indigenous spiritual traditions together with metaphors and insights from contemporary science, Revard creates a mythology of interconnection and process that offers new ways of knowing and being in the world that participate with what he calls the ‘continuous procreating of the universe. (“Present Myth” 160)

Here, however, I aim to put a finer point on Arnold’s argument, exploring how Revard’s poems and essays “create a mythology of interconnection” not just between science and “spiritual traditions,” but between traditions and technologies of *work*, and, thus, “offer new ways of knowing and being in the world” which challenge the stereotypes of Native poverty and “backwardness” and *get across*—literally as bridges or figuratively as stories—the distances separating Native and Anglo worldviews regarding masculinity and (tribal) capitalism.

In the introduction to his poem “Driving in Oklahoma,” Revard emphasizes the disconnection between technology and nature while hinting at the implications that roads and cars hold for Native masculinity in the capitalist marketplace. As he explains:

Well, the road is mostly safe and entertaining for us, but it does dictate where we can go, and cars tell us how we must get there—but not all they say is gospel. When I try to get BACK across, a different kind of country music is needed to cross that bridge. (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 36).

The borders between technology and nature that Revard hopes to cross are tied to relationships with place. Specifically, he aims to reimagine his connection to and reciprocity with nature in an attempt to break free of the prescribed directions for Native masculinity dictated by roads and cars and other technologies that offer “mobility, speed, power, [and] progress” that “Americans of every race, class, gender, and origin have found ways to express ... in automotive terms” (Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* 138). Significantly, the motion required to get “BACK across” the distance in Revard’s poem is both literal and metaphorical, real and imagined, as he constructs bridges and alternative routes across the technology/nature divide that resist commodification and exploitation of land and resources.

In the opening scene in “Driving in Oklahoma” the speaker (Revard) rumbles down an old highway at 70 miles per hour, grooving to country music as it blares out from the radio. The language in this scene creates a sense of motion as the tires are “humming,” the truck is “thundering,” and the speaker is “grooving down this highway” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 36). The technology which provides the blaring music and the breakneck speed disconnects Revard from the natural world and provides a brisk and isolated movement through the landscape, which leads him to feel that “technology is freedom’s other name” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 36). Playing on Janis Joplin’s line “freedom is just another word, for nothing left to lose,” Revard emphasizes the sense of disconnection and disorientation of driving between “source and destination like a man /

halfway to the moon” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 36). However, the freedom of isolated travel is interrupted when a meadowlark “comes sailing across [his] windshield” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 36). Although the meadowlark avoids a physical collision with the windshield, Revard feels its impact and he begins to notice the world outside his “bubble of tuneless whistling” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 36). But, even though the bird’s shrill notes “pierce / the windroar like a flash,” its song is still overshadowed by technology, as “the country music swells up and / drops me wheeling down” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 36).

Here, the metaphoric collision between technology and nature resonates loudly for Revard, as the singing meadowlark and the crackling radio compete for his attention, becoming a “contact zone,” similar to those James Clifford defines, where “cultural action, the making and remaking of identities, takes place ... along the policed and transgressive intercultural frontiers of nations, peoples, locales” (*Routes* 7). In presenting the road in Oklahoma as a “contact zone” between nature, humans, and technology, Revard implies that roads and cars, which offer the American cultural virtues of speed, power, and mobility, also present the threat of erasing and/or corrupting our ecological memories, threatening the delicate balance among *blood*, *land*, and *memory*, because, “except for the roadkill, all these trucks and swallows leave no trace—roads and bridges keep no tracks” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 36). Furthermore, in a world where “stasis and purity are asserted—creatively and violently—*against* historical forces of movement and contamination,” Revard suggests that motion alone is not enough to “get across” the gap between technology and nature, as such collisions—between the meadowlark and the

speaker—are necessary, reminding us that motion and memory must be coupled as we attempt to find more sustainable, reciprocal, and ethical routes across the divide (Clifford 7).

In this way, this moment of interspecies communication between Revard and the meadowlark demonstrates what Gerald Vizenor calls the sovereignty of Native transmotion, which he defines as “an original natural union in the stories of emergence and migration that relate humans to an environment and to the spiritual and political significance of animals and other creations” (*Fugitive Poses* 183). By offering a piercing call back to this “original natural union,” the song of the meadowlark invites Revard to break free of his bubble of isolation and cross through the technological borders that stand between him and the natural environment.⁷ Crucially, through the power of imagination, Revard is able to *remember* the Oklahoma landscape, before it was carved up with roads and defined by artificial borders, as a place in which sovereignty was not defined by maps or treaties, but by a reciprocal relationship between humans and animals in the natural world. However, even with the meadowlark’s invitation to return to this “original natural union,” the twanging country music remains just loud enough to keep the speaker caught somewhere between the borders, “somewhere between home and away” (37). And although he has rekindled his relationship with the natural world, “wanting / to move again through a country that a bird / has defined wholly with song,” it remains unclear if he will be able to construct *real* and *sustainable* routes across this divide, or if the bridges are purely imaginative, leaving him somewhere between imagining and enacting change, somewhere “between home and away” (37).

Whereas “Driving in Oklahoma” situates the speaker at the crossroads between technology and nature, and, in so doing, offers a commentary on *land ethics*, “Making Money” and “Bringing in the Sheaves” complicate the picture with an explicit emphasis on *land economics* which reveals further implications for Native masculinity in the capitalist marketplace. Similar to McNickle’s *Wind*, in which the central tension rests on a dam built in a sacred valley, Revard’s “Making Money” and “Bringing in the Sheaves” interrogate the way wealth is generated and technologies are put to use in the commodification of land and resources. However, unlike the “traditional” characters in McNickle’s novel, Revard’s speakers envision ways to reconcile their use of technology while reimagining Native traditions, which allows room for Native masculinities to survive (and thrive) in modernity.

In “Making Money,” Revard takes the process of land commodification to task, questioning the practices of turning land into real estate and resources into energy, both of which have assumed leading roles in the next generation of “making money” in the post-frontier West, as farming and ranching—the two previous stages in Turner’s false, yet still prevalent, linear conception of westward expansion, have become corporatized.

As Revard writes:

A field you couldn’t walk around in less
than half an hour
won’t pay its way
by fruit or cattle, honeybees or deer,
but cut it into single-acre lots
and you’ll be rich. (*Cowboys and Indians* 32)

Here, the Lockean concept of putting land to a “higher order” of use is redefined—as its use in farming (“fruit” and “honeybees”) and ranching (“cattle”) gives way to real estate

ventures, which maximize profits by cutting land into smaller and smaller portions.

Writing, in this context, remains a crucial *technology* in the process of land commodification, because the only way to make such transactions “true” (or legal) is “if you can make a piece of paper / with certain lines drawn on it, curving / in shapes we call names” (*Cowboys and Indians* 32). Here, Revard also suggests that cartography has become (or remains?) a commercial practice, not for finding our way and navigating across geographic distances, but in “making our way” and climbing the socioeconomic ladder. Revard writes that the combination of writing (as legal documents and treaties) and drawing (in mapmaking) “turn[s] paradise and Death Valley into / real estate / transform[s] a tree / to money order / savages into / good citizens” (*Cowboys and Indians* 32). The satirical bite of that last turn “savages into / good citizens” suggests that mapmaking is also a practice of cultural cartography, as those in power are able to draw the lines and cleave out a place—literally in terms of land and figuratively in the capitalist marketplace—for themselves, excluding all others, especially Native people, whose claims to land and resources continue to threaten their “economic development.”

In such a world, in which land is worth most when sold in small squares, “cities become the best machines / for generating capital,” as at night “their twinkling tentacles” appear to “grasp / the wounded earth—but in the daylight [you can] see the smudge / from which their twinkling comes” (*Cowboys and Indians* 32). Simultaneously appreciating and interrogating the role of engineers as “creators” of modern marvels, Revard urges readers to “notice how the great lakes / and power stations in the desert lands / and in the mountains / have become / their slaves” and to see how:

... the clean air [is] turned
 to power and the sparkling lakes and rivers sending
 pure heat and light into the heart
 of the great squared-off deserts of rock
 and asphalt where the money's made. (*Cowboys and Indians* 33)⁸

Because resources are valued only for their benefit to the bottom line, Revard asks, “What happens when the lines have all been drawn?” And, perhaps because the matter is too urgent to wait for a response, Revard provides one of his own, saying, “the cities die and rot from inside out, / the weeds come up through asphalt cracks, / blue chicory flowers grow across the sidewalks,” and with a somewhat surprising turn, he ends the poem saying, “with luck, it will happen soon” (*Cowboys and Indians* 33).

In this conclusion, what is surprising is not Revard's belief in the resilience of nature against all human efforts to pollute, commodify, and destroy the planet—as this is, by now, a relatively common vision of the future among the more optimistic environmentalists and a common, albeit nuanced and complex, narrative in Native “traditions” from early creation and trickster stories through the ghost dancers and AIM activists. However, what is surprising is its ambiguity, as Revard does not seem to imagine humans in this post-city, post-capitalism, post-cartography world, which leaves us to question whether he envisions the world after borders, real-estate, and overconsumption of resources as too late for humanity. Is the earth's renewal here post-human, or is there hope for us to re-inhabit the planet with a greater emphasis on reciprocity and a renewed commitment to living sustainably? It seems that, rather than providing answers, Revard intends for us to ask ourselves these questions as we continue to imagine a world after “all the lines have been drawn.” Crucially, the poem asks us to consider how we can “get across” the lines we've already drawn—which place humans

and human inventions, such as capitalism and technologies, in a hierarchal relationship to nature—in order to navigate into a world where land is no longer *just* a commodity for human consumption and exploitation, and where we redefine terms such as *value* and *wealth* to include *communal* and *reciprocal* concerns between and among humans, animals, and the land itself.

Dealing in similar themes, but on a more personal, visceral level which speaks more directly to Native masculinity as it is situated in the capitalist marketplace, Revard's "Bringing in the Sheaves" tells the story of the summer of 1949, in which Revard cut and hauled wheat in Kansas. Working as a farm laborer and wage worker hoping to finance his first year at the University of Tulsa, Revard explains that "the summer we were eighteen," he and his friend Walter "went up to the Kansas wheat harvest and stayed on through August, working at plowing and house moving and construction that summer of 1949, earning money toward schooling that fall" (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 46). The poem generates energy, motion, and conflict through the use of creative structure and imagery, as it begins with twelve lines, all left-justified, and packed full of Revard's description of his "monotonous" job as a combine operator during the summer wheat harvest (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 47). In comparison to the rest of the poem, these lines are as straight and long as the rows of harvested wheat, as the poem reads:

The '49 dawn set me high on a roaring yellow tractor,
slipping the clutch or gunning a twenty-foot combine
to spurt that red-gold wheat into Cere's mechanical womb.
I'd set her on course and roll for a straight two miles
before turning left, and it got monotonous as hell— (*Winning the Dust
Bowl* 47)

Despite the imagery of motion, here, “slipping the clutch” and “gunning a twenty-foot combine” the magic and energy of the harvest are lost on the speaker (Revard), buried somewhere in the monotony of left-hand turns and drowned out in “the roar and dust and the jiggling stems collapsing” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 47). At first, the only thing Revard finds to break up the boredom is to imagine “rats and rabbits scrambling / to hide again in their shrinking island of tawny grain / as the hawks hung waiting their harvest of torn fur and blood” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 47). In this imagery, the combine that Revard operates becomes a cold, indifferent machine turning the gears of capitalism, mutilating and discarding all those that get in its path. And though there are reciprocal, if temporary, benefits for some animals—such as hawks, and other unmentioned scavengers and predators—Revard is clearly conflicted by his participation in the carnage. Yet, in the first ten lines, he appears to be trapped in his role, lacking the agency to break out of the straight lines and right angles that capitalism prefers, as such a system privileges the speed, efficiency, and abundance of the mechanized harvest, making no room for other options.

However, the pacing of the poem shifts as Revard turns his attention away from the monotony of left turns and the endless rows of straight-cut wheat, and begins to move in directions not dictated by capitalism and commodification, but by reciprocity with nature. As the poem reads:

So I'd play little god with sunflowers drooping their yellow heads—
 would see a clump coming, and spin the wheel right,
 left, right, straight, (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 47)

After being forced to break from the left-justified line structure, the combine, as a machine for capitalism, at first appears resistant to its new set of commands as it

“shudder[s]” before “swivel[ing] on its balljoint hitch” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 47). However, as Revard *breaks* the technology, much like breaking or training a horse, he signals a *break* from the fallacy of technological determinism, as the combine must obey its operator.⁹ In this way, unlike the technologies and engineering found in prisons (which I take up in the next section), the combine and other farm equipment hold the potential to reverse their course, abandoning the monotheistic and monocultural assumptions of capitalism, and reinstating Native worldviews. The heightened ecological awareness that follows his renewed commitment to reciprocity reflects what Vizenor calls the sovereignty of Native transmotion, which he explains, “was connatural with the environment; natives altered the land, but their ecological practices as hunters, and as agriculturalists, were not based on economies of abundance, and the environment was not a commodity” (*Fugitive Poses* 183–84). Instead of following the straight, two-mile lines, then, Revard “play[s] little god”—whose lower-cased “g” and diminutive stature aligns more with tricksters, Thunder Beings, and other deities in tribal spirituality on the Plains rather than with the Christian God who gives humans dominion over nature—as he sets the combine on a course for pruning, rather than shearing, the field, making sure to leave room for biodiversity:

first right, then left, that great chatter of blades would go swinging
 so the tip barely brushed those flowers and left their
 clump standing
 like a small green nipple out from the golden breastline,
 and the next time past
 reversing wheel-spins cut free a sinuous lozenge left
 for the bumblebees,
 its butter-and-black-velvet tops limp-nodding over wilted leaves.
 But sunflowers weren’t enough, I left on the slick stubble islets
 of blue-flowered chicory, scarlet poppies, and just for

the hell of it, cockleburs (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 47).

By pointing the combine's oscillating sickles in directions that lead to a renewed emphasis on biodiversity—leaving flower “clumps standing,” reversing “wheel-spins” for the benefit of bumblebees, even making room for pesky cockleburs—Revard provides a vision for the future of farming which anticipates the heated resistance to corporatization and GMOs that has prompted “slow food” and “local food” movements around the globe. Furthermore, he reinstates Native agency, through the powers of Native transmotion and “traditional” tribal economics in which land is less a commodity than it is a source of great spiritual and cultural energy, demanding that humans must act as stewards rather than profiteers of land and resources. In this way, he breaks further from the left-justified lines in poetic structure and the straight paths of capitalism and commodification, offering alternative visions for the future of farming and Native masculinity.

However, Revard doesn't lose sight of the fact that he is a wage worker with limited agency in the capitalist marketplace, as his deviation instigates a heated conflict with the white, capitalist farmer who warns Revard, saying, “From now on, kid, you run that sumbitch straight!” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 47). This conflict is central to the poem, and, while it may be easy to vilify the farmer, perhaps it is better to have empathy for him, recognizing the crushing debt and razor thin profit margins that, no doubt, inform his relationship with the land. He, too, is caught in the cogs of capitalism, perhaps with even less agency than the wage workers he employs because his livelihood is completely tied to the profits of the harvest, while the wage workers will get paid, at least theoretically, even if the farm *loses* money. And when so much of that razor thin margin

As Revard untangles the web of modern technology and environmental stewardship, he challenges the assumption that technologies—such as roads, cars, dams, and combines—“dictate where we can go,” and “tell us how we must get there,” and, instead, reminds us that “not all they say is gospel” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 36). In helping readers “to get BACK across,” the space between technology and traditions, he provides viable and sustainable alternatives to the static and fixed assumptions. In the following section, however, I conclude this discussion on Revard, focusing on his poems which struggle to “cross the bridge” between stereotypes for Native workers in modernity and the “unexpected places” that imagination, traditions, and technology can take them.

GETTING ACROSS *MEMORY*: FROM STEREOTYPES TO THE UNEXPECTED

The *memory*, signified in this section, refers to the conflict between *imagined* Indians (created and maintained through collective, cultural mediums, such as film, literature, art, and, crucially, the *law*) and *real* Indians who often struggle to find routes across these limiting expectations. As Allen argues, the dominant, white culture prefers “fabricated tales” of the Vanishing Indian, and, thus, overlooks “realistic accounts of contemporary reservation life, urban poverty, or events of indigenous activism” (*Blood Narrative* 192). Therefore, finding pathways through memory that make *real* Indians visible and routes across the stereotypes that assume technological “backwardness” and exclude Native men from the capitalist marketplace, making them fringe (welfare “dregs”) or criminal members of society, lies at the heart of the struggle for the future of Native masculinity. Crucially, such expectations leave no room for the ways that Native people can challenge or change the course of technological or economic practices.

However, in “Criminals as Creators of Capital” and “Paint and Feathers,” Revard takes these stereotypes head on, reversing and reimagining such negative cultural expectations, allowing him to reconcile and honor the family (*blood*) and community members on both sides of his Scots-Irish and Osage heritage who earned their livings as outlaws, bank-robbers, and bootleggers. As he explains:

Over a span of years in Buck Creek I’ve watched the deputies come for my uncles, have put up bail money for relatives, with Ponca AIM cousins in White Eagle hit the floor while car-lights of what may have been a drive-by shooting moved slowly past—and ours was one of the less tough situations in that Depression-then-War-then AIM time and Oklahoma place. (*Winning the Dust Bowl* xiv)

In his memory of “tough situations,” Revard makes it clear that the threat of incarceration was a reality during his youth—one borne of both race, and, crucially, *class*, as the lack of wage work available during the “Depression-then-War-then AIM time and Oklahoma place” forced many men, Native and non-Native alike, to consider alternative, often criminal options. However, in the following poems, Revard moves beyond these personal memories and, instead, engages the collective cultural imaginary that has made prison an expectation for Native men who struggle to find wage work in modernity. In so doing, he interrogates the role that *memory* plays in reifying and/or reimagining such expectations, using poetry to reverse the assumed, essentialist narratives that blame individuals, whether implicitly or explicitly, for their lack of “bootstrapping” initiative and their social or racial “inferiority,” and instead, he critiques the social and economic structures that create systems of inequality and that profit from crime and crime-fighting.

For instance, in “Criminals as Creators of Capital” from *Cowboys and Indians Christmas Shopping* (1992), Revard interrogates the “economy” of crime fighting in the capitalist marketplace, saying that “I don’t know how we’d ever get along / without our criminals” (34). Unlike Thomas King, who directly identifies Native men as cross-border smugglers and clever criminals in his novel *Truth and Bright Water* (1999) (which I explore in the next chapter), Revard does not refer to Indians directly in the poem. Instead, he points to those who make a living enforcing the law, asking readers to “think how many / jobs it takes to support one criminal”—the architects who design the jails, the bricklayers and working-class laborers who build them, the lawyers who “prove them guilty” and those who “show / they’re innocent,” the inventors who “make the locks,” and the manufacturers of “gas pellets” and “gallows ropes,” not to mention the alphabet soup of “FBI,” “CIA,” “SEC,” and other agencies who enforce *justice* (*Cowboys and Indians* 34). By including inventors and architects on this list, Revard suggests that the *technologies* and ingenious *engineering* marvels of the justice system—such as state-of-the-art, super-max prisons and detection and surveillance equipment—are mere symptoms of a larger, more corrupt economic system. There seems to be little room to reimagine Native masculinity or to get away from technological determinism when considering technologies such as the electric chair or gas chambers; therefore, by interrogating the conflation of *justice* with *economics*, Revard suggests that the revolution needs to occur not in the use and application of technologies but in the justice and economic systems themselves.

After compiling the list of expenses—insurance, salaries, pensions—Revard concludes that “it isn’t what they [criminals] steal, / it’s what we do to catch them, stop them, / keep them from it” (*Cowboys and Indians* 34). He explains that in such a system, in which laws are created to protect private property, often at the expense of personal and community liberty, it is the criminals and not the citizens, or “admen” or “entrepreneurs” who “generate the law, create police, construct / our locks and jails, determine / where we can walk at night” as “criminals set the price of life” (*Cowboys and Indians* 34–35). Given the disproportionate number of men of color incarcerated in North America alone, the poem, though not explicitly, addresses the racial and cultural bias of not just the law and those who uphold it, but the capitalist marketplace itself. As Revard suggests, the “justice” system is founded on and motivated by an economic system of injustice and class warfare, a collective and accepted cultural *imaginary* that disenfranchises the many for the benefit of the few. Furthermore, because the justice system is embedded in capitalism, where profit margins must be considered, Revard’s poem implies that the *industry* of incarcerating “criminals” will continue to seek ways to fill its coffers, which means finding more people to fill defendant chairs and jail cells. In short, the poem suggests that exclusion from the capitalist marketplace—an expectation already imposed on Native men—poses an ever increasing threat of arrest and incarceration for all—but particularly those of color—in the double-edged bind where poverty *creates* crime and criminals *create* capital.

Meanwhile, in “Paint and Feathers,” another poem of social and economic justice, Revard engages *memory* to seek rituals and ceremonies of *remembrance* which are

informed by traditions of the past but can enact cultural and political change in the present and the future. Whereas “Criminals as Creators of Capital” reverses its course and points its aim not at the “criminals” but at those who profit from crime-fighting, “Paint and Feathers” puts the two most prevalent expectations for Native people in modernity side by side. Using a two-column structure, Revard speaks from the oral tradition—specifically an Osage naming ceremony—in the left-hand column, while telling the story of the “modern” rituals of a young Native man, who is disconnected from his community and from the capitalist marketplace in the right. As Robin Riley Fast explains, “the structure emphasizes the tragic gap between the traditionally grounded ceremonial language of the left-hand column, which echoes the Ki-non, the preliminary ritual of the Osage naming ceremony, and the mostly more mundane language of the right-hand column, which evokes the direction-less, self-destructive lives of youths who have lost the grounding of home” (Fast, “Going Home” 70–71). However, while the space between the two columns certainly signifies the gap between traditions and modernity, here, given the right column’s gritty content and the poem’s vivid, visual imagery—which achieves a certain brand of ekphrasis in its ability to conjure visual images in the mind—I borrow Scott McCloud’s term for the gap between panels in a graphic novel and refer to the space as a “gutter” between parallel *memories*.¹⁰ Getting across the “gutter” in perceiving visual objects or reassembling memories, McCloud explains, requires “closure,” or the human capacity to “observe the parts but perceive the whole,” which is a crucial, learned skill “in an incomplete world” where “we must depend on closure for our very survival” (*Understanding Comics* 63).

In attempting to “get across” this gutter, or to bridge the gaps between traditions and modernity, memory and reality, Revard sets up the single greatest challenge for Native men in the modern world. As the opening of the poem reads:

Into a star
 You have cast yourself,
 Have made your body of
 the male star who touches
 the sky with crimson
 that I touch now upon
 your face so you
 may move upon the path
 of life as does the young
 sun at dawn surging

Now put your face into
 this brown paper bag filled
 with aluminum spray-paint,
 breathe in, reel back,
 shudder, stagger now.
 Walk now along this asphalt,
 stumble, your eyes wide
 and blank, white paint across
 your face, move towards
 the old dance grounds,
 (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 16–17)

On a first read, the two columns couldn't appear more dissimilar, suggesting a disturbing disconnect between traditions and modernity. The spiritual journey on the left, in which the Ki-non begins and a young Osage receives his name—touched by the “male star” (the sun) and instructed to “move upon the path / of life as does the young / sun at dawn surging”—is contrasted by the “reel[ing], “shudder[ing],” “stagger[ing],” and “stumbl[ing]” movements of the young paint-huffer, who is instructed to “walk now along this asphalt” with eyes “wide / and blank” as he struggles to *remember* the way to “the old dance grounds” (*Winning the Dustbowl* 17). As Fast observes, “both columns use direct address and a step-by-step present-tense organization that at once instructs and describes, creating the effect of ritual language in the left-hand column, and making the opposite column a discordant and disturbing echo” (“Going Home” 71). However, upon closer examination, the “disturbing echo” in the right column is, in its own corrupted way, a form of “ritual” language—just not the kind of ritual we hope for, even if it is the one the US imaginary of modern-day “Indians” has come to expect. In this reading, the

young man enacts a corrupted ritual which is far removed from the smudge ceremonies and tobacco religions of many Plains tribes and the peyote religion in the Plains and the Southwest, in that it isolates him from his community, distorts his vision and numbs his physical as well as emotional senses, and, crucially, the effects of the paint fumes disorient his *memory* and his sense of direction, making the task of “homing in,” or finding an emotional and spiritual center as a member of his community, a futile, frustrating, and tragic enterprise.

The corrupted ritual conflating Native traditions with modern expectations continues as the young man in the right-hand column, before getting in his car, comes across a dead scissortail with “eyes eaten out” by ants, and “pull[s] / tail-feathers loose and jam[s] / them in [his] hair” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 17). Meanwhile, in the left-hand column, the young man receiving his Osage name is presented with “white / eagle plumes” which the elder “fasten[s] now / into [his] hair,” imbuing him with the “sun’s power” so that he might “travel with him [the sun]” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 17). As Fast explains, “Revard’s left-hand column refers to the four symbolic ‘decorations’ [in the Osage naming ceremony]—red paint, eagle plumes, buffalo fat, and a mussel-shelled gorget ... the right hand column, in stark contrast, recounts the broken life of a child, high on paint fumes” (Fast, “Going Home” 71). However, the overlap here, between the “traditional” ceremony with white eagle plumes on the left and the improvised, if impoverished, ritual with scissortail feathers on the right is telling—again forcing readers to consider whether it’s possible for the power of the sun and the promise of dawn in the left-hand column to “get across” the gutter and offer hope and healing to Native youths,

such as the man in the right-hand column, who suffer through addiction, isolation, and cultural *amnesia* in the modern world.

Immediately after the young man in the right-hand column “climb[s] / into the car” he “drive[s] northward / without headlights, straight / into the other car,” as “Flashing / red patrol-cars” arrive to find “bodies mingled with metal / and plastic, white paint / spattered inside [his] car” but “they do not notice feathers / from scissortails blowing in / the midnight wind” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 17). The disorienting effect of “flashing red patrol-cars” is contrasted by the ceremony in the left-hand column, as the elder places a disc of ceremonial “mussel shell[s]” around the young man’s neck “so [he] may stand and see / all life within [his] vision” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 17). And after being touched with the “bit of [buffalo] fat” the young man receiving his name is promised that “what fills / [his] deepest hungers for / the life of this world now / will meet [him] on [his] way,” a stark contrast from the young man on the right, who lies mangled in a car wreck waiting to die (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 17).

Because he is so far removed from the oral tradition, it is not an elder, but the “far vision” (television) which will first inform the world of the young man’s death, as Revard notes that when “the first / white plumes of sunlight shoot / up from the east, it [the TV] will speak / of driving in the wrong / direction” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 17). Unlike the young man in the left column, who has the “sun and ... the stars” to guide him, a “name” and a community to center him, and the “words” of his people to ensure that he “meet[s] old age / and reach[es] the happy days,” the life of the young man on the right is reduced to a news clip, a cautionary tale of “those who will not live / to see old age, those blinded

/ by metal paint and headlights / whiting out the stars” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 17). Here, Revard implies that in the glossy, fast-paced, cynical world of twenty-four hour news, the tragic death of another directionless, “restless young [Native] man” will go unnoticed, or worse, it will reinforce the cultural *memories* or expectations of Native “backwardness” and exclusion from the modern world (R. Parker 3). If left up to the mainstream media, then, the *memory* of the young Native man will be folded into what Allen calls “a climate of willful ignorance and selective amnesia—... a climate of imperialist nostalgia in which the dominant culture seem[s] to enjoy mourning that which it had itself destroyed” (*Blood Narrative* 192).

However, Revard does not end the poem on the young man’s death, as he continues: “At the Sun Dance, Little Brother, / we will dance for you, the feather / will fly ... up past the knot, / to where we hear you laughing” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 17). With this conclusion, Revard works against the “imperialist nostalgia” and “cultural amnesia” that seeks to reinforce the image of the vanishing, anachronistic *Indian*, and, instead, reclaims the memory of the directionless young man in an effort to “reinstat[e] the indigenous into America’s performance of a triumphantly settler present” (Allen, *Blood Narrative* 192). Furthermore, Revard suggests one of the routes for “getting across” the gutter is through mourning and ceremonies of *remembrance*, not the corrupted ceremony of the paint-huffer, nor the Western ceremonies which often emphasize “grief” and “tragedy,” but the “Sun Dance,” which offers opportunities for celebrating life and laughter and honoring the “sacrifice” of the young man in hopes that others won’t repeat it. In this sense, the directionless wanderings, terminal creeds, and drug-addled

disorientation of the young man may *save* lives, not just because collectively they serve as a cautionary tale, but perhaps, in the tradition of the *heyoka* or sacred clowns—which figure prominently in the traditions of Plains tribes—because they offer a story of a man who moved “backwards” through the world, in an oppositional stance to both modernity and traditions. In such a reading, the unnamed man becomes a “tragic trickster” figure, whose death is undeniably tragic and whose path was unquestionably troubled, but whose *memory* will be honored in ceremony.

As it relates to the future of Native masculinity in the capitalist marketplace, the poem’s message is clear: ceremonies and other acts of survivance must find routes across the gutters and gaps between traditions and modernity. By highlighting the gap, and signaling the disconnection between and within cultures, Revard’s message is as urgent today as it ever has been. Recognizing that such a gap exists is one thing, but getting across is another matter entirely, and learning *sustainable* ways to get across may help others to avoid the dangers of what Louis Owens calls “the only burden of expectation [for Native people]” which is to “put on the constructed mask provided by the colonizer, ... a static death mask ... [where] he or she who steps behind the mask becomes the Vanishing American, a savage/noble, mystical, pitiable, romantic fabrication of the Euramerican psyche” (*I Hear the Train* 218). The poem’s celebration of ceremonies of *remembrance* such as the Sun Dance—which provide routes across the chasm between “traditional” and “modern” expectations for Native masculinity in the capitalist marketplace—is troubled by the questions that remain, as it urges us to consider ways that Native worldviews can enact change and assert Native agency in other directions,

such as in capitalist marketplace, the justice system, the use and application of technologies, and across family and cultural histories. In keeping with Terry Eagleton's argument, then, the gap offers the poem's most impactful message, as "it is in the significant silences of a text, in its gaps and absences, that the presence of ideology can be most positively felt" (Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* 34–35). And by emphasizing the silence and forcing us to listen for the echoes, Revard sounds a call to action, asking readers to be the bridgers of these worlds and the crossers of these gulfs.

CONCLUSION

As this chapter has attempted to make clear, the expectations for Native workers and Native masculinity are far too limiting. Thankfully, there are writers like Revard, whose unique blend of mixed-blood and mixed-class identity and whose emphasis on collapsing traditions and modernity, and the lines of *blood*, *land*, and *memory*, help to trouble these expectations. Yet even he—after explaining the complicated matrix of class and blood that make up his "identity"—remains cautious about asserting his "authenticity"—as he asks "Well, so that isn't very Indian, is it?"¹¹ (*Family Matters* 11). Though rhetorical, and largely tongue-in-cheek, the question he poses is a good one. Are we to read him as a blend of "the stereotypical rich Indian and poor Indian" which "validated an idea as old as Europe's discovery of the Americas"? Or, worse yet, are we to assume, as many Native and non-Native people have for centuries, that "Indian practices would [always] contrast with the ambition and ever-increasing wealth production" of capitalism, and adopt the "common explanations for Indians' poverty—a traditional Indian mindset and government failure to bring Indians into the American

mainstream”? (Harmon, *Rich Indians* 246). Revard’s poetry cautions us not to fall victim to these and other terminal creeds, and, instead, he offers alternative pathways to “get across” the real and imaginary gaps that serve as obstacles for Native masculinity in modernity.

Crucially, Revard’s poems remind us that the conflicts and troubles that remain between and within us are not external and abstract; instead he bridges the troubles of culture, class, and race *into* his relationships to *blood*, *land*, and *memory*, implicitly encouraging his readers to do the same. As Arnold explains, “If we are to tame the monsters that lay waste to our current world—poverty, inequality, injustice, environmental degradation, toxic pollution—offspring of the imperialistic, mechanistic worldview Columbus brought with him from Europe, we must first recognize how ‘*we are related to the evils we must destroy*’ so that ‘*they can be turned to good things*” (Arnold, “Present Myth” 180). In his effort to “turn evils” to “good things” Revard also wants us to remember the difficulty of “bridging” worldviews, and helping “aliens” to “get across” from worlds of poverty to those of prosperity, the working-class to the academic classroom, and in the reverse direction too.¹² As he explained at the end of his speech to the new inductees of Phi Beta Kappas which opened this chapter:

I try ... to remember that where now deep water winks as we zoom over a bridge, once others crossed only with difficulty; where there now are guides, mentors, Phi Beta Kappa chapters to make straight the way, a long time ago someone planned, arranged for, paid for, put in place these bridges. It is worth remembering how much it takes to build bridges, if we ever can, over the dangerous and impassable distances within and between us. And maybe it is worth saying, to anyone who may be crossers of these gulfs, bridgers of these distances, that I hope in time you will be kind to an alien, and show that you are not only Phi Beta Kappas, but good human

beings. ONE day an alien may have the chance to thank you for it.
(*Winning the Dust Bowl* 138)

And even as I close this chapter on Revard, his advice to Phi Beta Kappas, in a way, continues on. Because, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, the difficulty in constructing and crossing bridges “over the dangerous and impassable distances within and between us” has many far-reaching, still unexplored implications for the future of Native masculinity in the capitalist marketplace.

¹ Revard describes the lack of control that his Osage stepfather, Addison Jump, had over his own oil royalties, saying, “It was for the Agency and the Superintendent of it to say, later, when our stepfather was drawing some oil royalties, what must be done with oil money, and of course at first all of it was needed to buy the eighty acres, to put in the barbed-wire fence—driving the posts in with the big sixteen pound maul, stretching the wire with rope and pulley so tight it twanged like a banjo and the post-staples screamed with the strain as we nailed the wire to the oaken posts. To dig the pond then, my stepfather Addison big and powerful, my grandfather Aleck short and masterful, the uncles swarming and laughing and swearing the metal slip scraping and sleekly digging into the earth, grating into rocks that jerked and twisted the handles in my grandfather’s hands as he held the slip on course and hyaahed the mules, and us barefooting in the slate-smooth track behind as the earth began being moist then muddy” (*Family Matters* 8).

² Throughout his teens, Revard took on several odd jobs to help pay the bills, as he recalls working at a greyhound racetrack, where he was “paid a dollar a day to cut up cows bloated and beginning to stink, dead for two or three days—skinning, gutting, disjoints and slicing them up for greyhounds to eat” (xiv). He also remembers the impact that poverty had on his self-esteem and self-worth, as he remembers going “to school raggedy and ashamed of myself and the lard-can of navy beans my folks fixed us for lunch, and I’ve watched a fair amount of rough stuff with whisky and beer, and stood around in grocery stores while my mother was asking the owner to hold off until the end of the month before cashing the check she handed him, and watched his face as he decided to take the check that he knew was not going to clear even then” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* xiv).

³ On the title, “My Right Hand Don’t Leave Me No More,” Revard explains, “A day or two before the fight [Joe Louis vs. Rocky Marciano], Jimmy Cannon had written of speaking with Louis as he finished training. Cannon said something like ‘How’s it going, Joe?’ and Louis answered simply, ‘My right hand don’t leave me no more.’ That seemed to me a revelation. For the first time I thought I could see how it felt to have that kind of quickness, that kind of power: you don’t have to ‘throw’ the punch, it just ‘leaves’ you” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 101).

⁴ Revard explains how he came to understand his grandfather’s drunken boasting as part of a long tradition of working-class storytelling, saying “What was hard to believe was that a man who never lied, more sensible and well-behaved and kindly than anybody I knew, could in a saloon or a living room speak total nonsense and solemnly hold it to be self-evident truth. A few years later when I first read that chapter which Mark Twain cut from *Huckleberry Finn*—the one in which the Mississippi raft-men do their drunken boasting—I recognized that this sort of behavior was a way of life in the backwoods, and that my grandfather was doing exactly what his grandfathers, and all those before him back to the beer-halls of Beowulf, had been doing” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 102).

⁵ Conversely, Revard notes that in the age of modern technology, we have become increasingly more versatile in our descriptions and naming of machines, saying “But English is still relatively ‘transparent’ wherever things ARE still being named by and for the general community of speakers—an activity now less likely to involve birds than machines. Think for instance of *cars*, *automobiles* (those terms are from Latin and Greek, though *car* seems to have been borrowed into Latin from Celtic): how many terms we have, few of them Latin or Greek, for new kinds of car—*hatchbacks*, *hotrods*, *limos*, *vans*, *coupes*, *four-doors*, *trucks*, *pickups*, *tankers*, *Smokeys*, *beetles*, *junkers*, *semis*, *buses*, to name a very few of very many. And think of the flying creatures we have made: *jets*, *fighters*, *space shuttles*, *smart rocks*, *red-eye specials*, all sorts of winged words for winged machines newly made for our namers to break a champagne syllable over” (*Family Matters* 114).

⁶ As Revard explains, engineers have learned to use the power of the Thunder Beings to create electricity, and he uses the metaphor of the *bridge* to make this connection: “Surely THAT magic [of electricity] is as interesting as language, and surely the miles of copper wire or quartz tubules or bodiless laser-beams, the waves of messages pulsing through space ... from Tulsa to Timbuctoo, are bridges as dangerous and safe as the one over Buck Creek in Osage country. ... The bridges [of electricity] work, of course, only when they have been mapped into numbers, translated into ohms and watts and amperes ... Now is it enough for the engineers to turn natural rainbows into civilized neon. Think how they have caged us all within the wired walls of our homes, surrounded like canaries by all that copper wiring. Think of us in these electric cages, tingling with thunderbolts from all those great fat lakes, those blazing coal furnaces, those freeze-framed nuclear explosions: think how at every wall-socket the thunder’s power awaits our touch, thanks to the Engineers and the Mathematics majors” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 126–27).

⁷ Patrice Hollrah explains the importance of birdsong to restore severed connections between humans and the natural world in Revard’s poetry, saying, “Birds, for Revard, are the connections between the cosmos and people, between the unknown and known, and they carry the songs that connect everything” (“Voices” 95).

⁸ Describing the community celebration that followed his acceptance of a Rhodes Scholarship, Revard offers an alternative method of “making money” that aligns with the Native “potlatch” or gift-giving ceremony, saying, “the blanket was put on me and we danced with many others around the drum, we stood in place while everyone came past to shake hands and to put money into my hands. Something about the placing of those crumpled bills into my hand made me feel deeply what it means to have a community, a people, tell a person: you are one of us and we want to show you we support you, we wish you well, we want your life to go well. ... Money never stays long in my pockets, but that money stays in my heart” (24).

⁹ For an excellent discussion on the way Native people have used technologies to reimagine the binary between traditions and modernity, see Philip Deloria’s chapter titled “Technology” in *Indians in Unexpected Places* (136–82). In particular, Deloria discusses the way Indians on the Great Plains used automobiles to “open up the new while continuing to serve older cultural ideals” (154). For instance, “on the plains, cars easily

served as mobile housing, reprising the older functions of both horse and tipi”; furthermore, “where plains people had once decorated and rubbed their horses with sage, they began to place the plant across the front dashboard” (154, 155). Also, for a specific example of the way Native people reimagined technological determinism, see Deloria’s description of Wah-pah-sha-sah, an Osage oil lessor, who, in 1917, deposited “a million dollars in a Kansas bank” and “went shopping for an automobile,” preferring a “hearse” (Deloria 178). As Deloria explains, the *New York Times* article which first featured Wah-pah-sha-sah’s story “places [him] in a different world, one where Indians squat rather than drive and lack the ability to perceive or reason across the lines of culture and race. The scant hint that [he] might, for his own reasons, prefer a hearse can never be taken seriously.

¹⁰ McCloud’s term—“gutter”—for the space between panels in a comic/graphic novel—stems from his chapter titled “Blood in the Gutter” in *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1993). He explains that “in the limbo of the gutter, human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea. Nothing is seen between the two panels, but experience tells you something must be there. [The gutter] fracture[s] both time and space, offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments. But closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality” (66–67).

¹¹ As Revard says, “We know that children born into poverty, whose parents and folks all ‘lack education and social skills,’ particularly any child with one uncle killed hijacking bootleg whisky shipments while out on parole from robbing a bank, another uncle beaten to death by police in the local jail, all such children in raggedy clothes apt to hide in shame when strangers come to the door, must be doomed to a life of misery, failure, crime, underachievement” (*Winning the Dust Bowl* 132–33).

¹² As if reversing the “illegal alien” trope so ubiquitous in the United States today, and resituating it from an issue of race to one of class, Revard says, “if you really do know any people like us, my folks and me, you’ve probably noticed that they’re just as smart as rich people, probably less selfish on the average, just as funny and decent—or, I suspect, more so—and you know they are on the average a good kind of people to grow up with. If you yourself grew up among well-to-do folks with rugs on the floor, writing checks that didn’t bounce . . . then you may not ever attain a status, among my kind of people, other than alien” (133).

CHAPTER 4

BRIDGE-BUILDING: WORKING ON AND OFF THE RESERVE IN THOMAS
KING'S *TRUTH AND BRIGHT WATER*

Blessed is he who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness.

—Thomas King *Truth and Bright Water* (46)

INTRODUCTION

In 1971, the Keep America Beautiful organization enlisted Iron Eyes Cody, an Italian-American actor who lived much of his life “playing Indian” on and off the screen, to appear in a commercial to promote land ethics and pollution prevention, with the theme, “People Start Pollution: People Can Stop It.” Now infamously known as the “Crying Indian,” the commercial envisions a Native man, played by Cody, as he appears out of the forest in full nineteenth-century regalia, paddling a birch-bark canoe down a river filled with trash and surrounded by industrial stacks that fill the air with dark plumes of toxic smoke. After arriving on the shore, littered with refuse, and walking up the bank to find a human-made “river”—a highway filled with cars emitting exhaust and drivers who toss sacks of garbage out their windows—Cody faces the camera, hardening his features in a stoic, pained stare, as a single “glycerin tear” trickles down his right cheek. With the image of the “crying Indian,” the Keep America Beautiful campaign presents one of the most prevalent expectations for Native people in the age of modernity—that of Native people as anachronistic, ecological stewards—a nostalgic, static image that countless Native writers, artists, and activists have worked to complicate, unsettle, and challenge.¹

In *Truth and Bright Water*, Thomas King (Cherokee, Greek-, German-American) provides an implicit critique to the stereotypical “crying Indian,” while asserting several counternarratives to this and other expectations for Native people in modernity. Working against such nostalgic images, which Chadwick Allen argues, “serve no purpose in the present except to lock contemporary Indians into stereotypical self-images rooted in the past,” King instead tells the contemporary coming-of-age story of fifteen-year-old Blackfeet protagonist Tecumseh Sherman—a story which is both gritty and poignant, combining *real*, visceral concerns with *ephemeral*, trickster-like imagination (*Blood Narrative* 191). In his bildungsroman, Tecumseh straddles the line between Truth—the Montana railroad town—and Bright Water—the Alberta reserve, and, through his work and his apprenticeships to family and community members he muddies the waters of expectations for Native men and Native workers. Whereas Antoine was a late addition with limited agency in McNickle’s *Wind from an Enemy Sky*, leading critics such as Dorothy Parker to claim that he does “nothing to determine the flow of events,” Tecumseh, as first-person narrator, takes center stage, becoming the primary voice through which the action unfolds (228). Throughout the novel, Tecumseh encounters reservation Indians who struggle to find work as wage laborers for the railroad, artists who earn profits by exploiting tribal traditions, and smugglers who evade the law to exploit Native land and resources, as well as Monroe Swimmer—a modern-day trickster and a famous Indian artist—who returns to the reserve and apprentices Tecumseh into the arts of reclamation, restoration, and repatriation of Native lands, artifacts, traditions, and worldviews. With the novel’s commentary on work, class, and Native identities, King

complicates the assumed narratives of “poor Indians” and “Indians as stewards of the land” with characters who take an active role in “exploiting stereotypes for their own purposes” (Harmon 11).²

As if updating the themes and conflicts surrounding the dam in McNickle’s *Wind*, and resituating them on the Alberta/Montana border, King’s novel centers much of the tension on another “colonial structure”—the unfinished bridge that would have connected the fictional towns of Truth and Bright Water. In the opening pages, Tecumseh describes the deceiving, mirage-like quality of the bridge, hinting at the unstable and unreliable routes it provides for Native people in modernity:

At a distance, the bridge between Truth and Bright Water looks whole and complete, a pale thin line, delicate and precise, bending over the Shield and slipping back into the land like a knife. But if you walk down into the coulees and stand in the shadows of the deserted columns and the concrete arches, you can look up through the open planking and the rusting webs of iron mesh and see the sky. (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 1)

Here, the bridge, as a “pale thin line,” critiques the assumed linearity of technological and historical *progress* (westward expansion in the Turnerian sense), and hints at the severed “webs” between Tecumseh and his family and the tangled lines of *land* and *memory*. Furthermore, the passage suggests that the incomplete bridge, like McNickle’s dam, has dire implications for Native workers and the future of Native masculinity. However, rather than “killing the water,” the bridge fails to “cross the river,” and rather than confronting the “white” men responsible (as Bull does when he kills Rafferty and Pell), the Native characters in King’s novel are forced to interrogate the social, cultural, and economic implications of the bridge within themselves. Crucially, as King’s Blackfoot characters internalize the struggle, working *toward* “self-determined” Native masculinity

and tribal economics, they must fight *against* external forces, such as the border, US and Canadian laws aimed at assimilation and termination, white imaginaries that limit Native presence in modernity, and “spectral” images of the recent and historical past—skulls, buffalo, churches, and, most important, the bridge—which haunt the narrative and must be confronted as Native workers attempt to assert their presence and engage the capitalist marketplace *on their own terms*.

In the absence of a stable bridge, Tecumseh finds multiple, often troubled paths to earn wages on both sides of the US/Canadian border, a geopolitical line that takes on economic and sociocultural significance.³ Published in 1999, prior to the attacks on the World Trade Center, the novel envisions the 49th parallel when it was still the longest unmilitarized border in the world, highlighting the ways in which many Blackfeet characters exploit the lax border enforcement for economic gain as they smuggle goods and toxic waste across the Medicine Line, circumventing rather than engaging the capitalist marketplace.⁴ In describing the disregard Native people have for the 49th parallel, King writes “the border doesn’t mean that much to the majority of Native people in either country. It is, after all, a figment of someone else’s imagination” (*Truth about Stories* 102). However, while the geopolitical line is *imaginary*, its enforcement and its implications for Native workers and Native masculinity are very real. And, as in the previous chapter on Revard’s poetry, the symbolic weight of the bridge and the border can be unpacked through Allen’s “*blood/land/memory* complex,” as Tecumseh’s attempts to earn wages are informed and complicated by his apprenticeships to *blood* relatives, the economic promise and ecological concerns couched in his relationships to *home/land*

(roots) and automobility (routes), and the work he must perform to piece together and reconcile scattered images and *memories* of the past.

Because Tecumseh's routes to recovering his relationship to home and engaging the capitalist marketplace are often outward, centrifugal, and multivalent, this chapter complicates Bevis's "homing in" trope—which focuses on the "return" of Native characters to their community and their centripetal, inward pursuit of an emotional and spiritual "center"—and, instead, draws inspiration from Native labor historian Colleen O'Neill's "home sphere" approach, which offers a way of interpreting the complexity of Tecumseh's *blood* relationships and *outward* pursuits of work and identity. Unlike the "shop floor" approach, which "privileges the industrial, wage workplace," or the cultural paradigm, which sets Native traditions in opposition to "white" capitalism and therefore, "tends to reproduce the modern/traditional dichotomy that freezes American Indian culture in the pre-industrial past," O'Neill argues in *Working the Navajo Way* (2005) that the "home sphere" approach that "defin[es] the parameters of class in household terms" offers a "more comprehensive framework that neither obscures gender conflict nor characterizes culture as existing outside economic relationships" (8, 8, 10). On one level, then, the economic or work-related "contact zones" that Tecumseh encounters can be read through his *blood* and *home* relationships—tourists and the toured upon at his Uncle Franklin's Happy Trails campground and "landfill economics" at Turtle Coulee; the border in his father Elvin's "authentic" Native artwork and transborder smuggling; the convergence of gender roles and the traditional/modern binary in his mother Helen's "hybrid" quilting; museums and missionaries in Monroe's repatriation of museum

artifacts and “restoration” of the church; and white expectations in his experiences at the “job gate,” where Wally Preston, a white man who employs workers at the railroad, “always hires the white guys before he hires Indians” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 41).⁵

However, these contact zones also force Tecumseh to confront his relationships to *land* and *memory*, as he, like other Native workers, is in danger of being valued more as a “ghost” in the West, or becoming what critical regionalist Stephen Tatum calls a “spectral beauty”—aesthetically pleasing traces that haunt white imaginaries rather than inhabiting the physical, modern world (“Spectral Beauty” 123).⁶ Much like Allen, who argues that stereotypes and expectations must be “re-collected” and “re-membered,” Tatum explains that the traces of the past—bones, toxic waste sites, landfills, or, in this case, unfinished bridges—must be reconfigured and re-assembled to restore relationships to *home*. Using a “forensic aesthetic,” Tatum argues that characters in the West (such as Tecumseh) live in “*the aftermath of loss*,” navigate through a “*topography of ruin or contamination*,” encounter “*material evidence or traces of some past event*,” in order to achieve the “utopian dream” in which the “desiring human subject” reassembles the fragmentary, incomplete stories and evidence of the past so that “the dead or missing . . . can have a voice” and the world can be made “‘right’ again” (“Spectral Beauty” 127, 128).⁷ While such an aesthetic cannot save Tecumseh’s Cousin Lum, who “sometimes . . . remembers that his mother is dead, and sometimes he forgets” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 14)—a psychic and emotional wound that leads to his deterioration and tragic death on the bridge—it may offer cautious optimism for reading “beyond the ending” and seeing hope

for Tecumseh to piece together the traces of *blood*, *land*, and *memory* and to give Lum and other “dead or missing” characters a “voice.”⁸ In this way, through “forensic aesthetics,” Tecumseh must learn to see connections through the “deserted columns and concrete arches” and the “rusting webs of iron mesh” left in the wake of the bridge, and to re-collect and re-member the “spectral beauties” that threaten his development as a man and severely limit his potential in the capitalist marketplace.

At first, though, such routes and bridges remain incomplete, making it unclear whether Tecumseh or Lum will “get across” the lines which separate them from self-determination and true autonomy or if they will fall victim to anger, violence, and terminal creeds.

LUM AND TECUMSEH: RESTLESS YOUNG MEN WITH NOWHERE TO GO

Before finding passable routes across the obstacles that stand in their way, Tecumseh and Lum first appear to be “trapped” *beneath* the bridge, anchored in a static, fixed position like “the pale supports that rise out of the earth like dead trees” and caught in “the tangle of rebar and wire that hangs from the girders like a web” (King, *Truth and Bright Water 2*). The “web” here, not only suggests the way that Tecumseh, Lum, and other young Native men are “trapped” on the reserve and caught on the lowest rung of the socioeconomic ladder, but it also signifies the severed connections between Native workers and wage labor, and just as important, the bridge symbolizes the fragile connections between Tecumseh and his family and community. Furthermore, the imagery connecting unstable bridges to fragile webs suggests that mobility—both automotive and socioeconomic—will be strained for Tecumseh and Lum, marking them as “restless

young men with nothing to do,” and without clear routes or viable modes of resistance, they appear to have nowhere to go (R. Parker 3).

Early in the novel, the cousins signal their restless and directionless states, as they shoot at the bridge, enacting what might be read as a token (and tacitly desperate) act of resistance to the colonial structure: “The sound of the first round is no more than a sharp snap like something cold breaking. The sound of the second round is caught in the wind and blown away” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 4). Much like Bull’s angry pot-shot at the dam in McNickle’s *Wind*, in which the “bark of the gun” is lost “in the sound of whining machinery and thundering water,” the report of Tecumseh’s gun is “caught in the wind and blown away,” offering another reminder of the futility of guns against structures such as bridges and dams (McNickle, *Wind* 7). The muted sounds of rifle blasts again fall on deaf ears, failing to bridge the gap between Native workers and wage labor, offering instead something of a literary bridge that echoes across the span of time and connects the cautious optimism of Antoine’s future to what appears to be the bleak and aimless wanderings of Tecumseh’s and Lum’s present.

However, unlike Bull and Pock Face, men who harbor anger against the dam and its colonial implications in *Wind*, Tecumseh and Lum make a game of shooting the bridge: “skipping bullets off the concrete and steel. . . . Work[ing] on the angles, and after a little practice, [getting] each shot to bounce at least once and sometimes twice. Three times was hard, and four was impossible, because by then the only thing left of the bullet was the sound of the ricochet” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 5). At first, such game playing suggests that the boys have turned the bridge—a site of economic and social

depression—into a reimagined home space, similar to the way communities turn abandoned lots into urban gardens; however, rather than becoming a site where something is produced, it remains an unfinished structure, a tangled and messy “web,” which catches and traps those who try to cross it, where “the only thing that moves in the shadows is the wind” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 2).

Making sense of the bridge and other “spectral” images of the recent and historic past is integral to Tecumseh’s two interwoven plots: his attempts to find summer work in order to purchase a car; and solving the mystery surrounding a skull left behind by a “woman” who plunges from the cliffs near the bridge into the river. Although Tecumseh’s motivations for buying a car are practical—to find and secure better wage opportunities for himself and his mother, Helen—and personal—the freedom that car travel affords—his attempts also have historical significance regarding expectations for Native people in the age of modern technology. As Philip Deloria explains, “automotive unexpectedness is part of a long tradition that has tended to separate Indian people from the contemporary world and from a recognition of the possibility of Indian autonomy in that world”; however, “automobile purchase [by Native people] often fit smoothly into a different logic—long-lived Indian traditions built around the utilization of the most useful technologies that non-Indians had to offer” (*Indians in Unexpected Places* 143, 152). Therefore, Tecumseh’s pursuit of the car and the mobility it affords is in keeping with Native traditions, as he seeks both roots and routes on and off the reserve. However, Tecumseh’s dream of automobility is interrupted when he and Lum witness what appears to be a “woman” who “plummets down the long spine of the Horns and vanishes into the

night” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 10). The teens look from the base abutments of the bridge into the swirling black water, attempting to see any trace of the female jumper, but, as Tecumseh narrates, “The water is nothing but a dark blur. And as it slides off the rock plates and is forced around the thick footings of the bridge, you can hear it hiss” (10). As the cousins continue their initial search for the mysterious woman, Soldier, Tecumseh’s dog, makes another unnerving discovery—a human skull—apparently left behind by the woman, and, when “Lum coaxes the skull away from Soldier and cleans the slobber off on the grass,” the boys find that “someone has looped a long red ribbon through the eye sockets” (13).

For Tecumseh and Lum, the skull, like the bridge, becomes a “spectral beauty,” initiating their “extended human encounter with the felt absence,” and serving as a reminder that they live in “*the aftermath of loss*” and navigate through a “*topography of ruin or contamination*” (Tatum, “Spectral Beauty” 127). On one level, the skull suggests the colonial expectation for Native people in modernity—they are more likely to be found as bones and corpses in burial sites and museum exhibits, while their traces haunt the landscape; as Tecumseh narrates:

[M]aybe the bluff was once a burial ground. Maybe at one time we buried our dead there and then forgot about it. Maybe if you dug down a little in the grass and the clay, you’d find entire tribes scattered across the prairies. Such things probably happen all the time. A little rain, a little wind, and a skull just pops out of the ground. (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 71)

However, the “felt absence” is complicated as Tecumseh realizes that the skull seems to have been “staged” in the landscape: “As if someone had taken the time to wash and polish it before setting it in the grass for us to find” (74).

Embarking on a forensic, investigative journey, Tecumseh must collect the skull and other *material evidence and traces* that provide insights into the mysterious “woman,” developing theories about her motivations for jumping, such as suicide, or a gesture of sorrow or anger stemming from unrequited or scorned love. However, as Tecumseh explains,

Any one of these theories works fine until I get to the skull. The easiest way to manage it is to forget it altogether. It probably has nothing to do with the woman. There are bones all over the coulees. Lum and I have found plenty. Cows, rabbits, skunks, coyotes, deer. Rib bones, leg bones, jaw bones with teeth, back bones. Skulls. (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 69)

In piecing together the clues, Tecumseh signals an opportunity to recover and reassemble his relationships to home, land, and history, as he hopes to construct economic and cultural bridges and to cultivate meaningful home relationships to Franklin, Elvin, Helen, and Monroe.

Lum, on the other hand, veers off the “investigative journey,” and instead misinterprets the evidentiary traces of the skull, using them to confirm his belief that the jumping woman is his dead mother; as Tecumseh narrates: “Sometimes Lum remembers that his mother is dead, and sometimes he forgets. My mother says it’s probably best to leave it alone, that in the end, Lum will work it out for himself” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 14). Resenting, and at times blaming his father (Franklin) for his mother’s absence, Lum reifies, rather than reimagines, his fate as a restless (potentially violent) young Indian man with “nothing to do.” For instance, after finding the skull and shooting at the bridge, Lum “holds the gun high over his head,” and says ““better get back to the rez. . . . Go a few rounds with the old man before I shoot him”” (15). And, although Tecumseh

later confirms that Lum and Franklin engage in physical violence with each other— noticing bruises on Lum’s legs that run the gamut from “little more than abrasions. . . . yellow, the result of glancing blows” to the one that “runs down his right hip [which] is the colour of blood, dark purple and black”—the actual scenes of violence, like Lum’s mother, remain absent, with only Lum’s scars and bruises to serve as spectral reminders, mirroring the spectral traces that haunt the landscape (152).

Crucially, rather than seeking viable routes to recover felt absences, Lum, instead, envisions a world with ““No tourists . . . No railroads. No fences”” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 152). In his version of the “utopian dream,” Lum does not work toward reconciling relationships with his father or grieving and accepting the loss of his mother, nor does he submit to remaining under the shadow of the bridge’s “concrete arches” or stuck in its web of “iron mesh.” Instead, he dreams of earning his living on ““the powwow circuit . . . spend[ing] the winter learning to sing and dance . . . pack[ing] up everything into a pickup or a van,”” telling Tecumseh that they could make ““gas money, food, if you’re just average. Prize money if you’re good”” (71). In romanticizing life on the road and striving toward life off the rez, Lum articulates what is often a painful and difficult choice for Native men: abandoning community and cultural values in pursuit of individual wealth. However, the unfinished bridge stands in his way, suggesting a strict binary between stasis and mobility, as Lum can *leave* the reserve *or* remain static on it, but, in his estimation, there are no established routes to leave *and* return.

Lum’s escapist, essentialist vision for the future of Native masculinity is apparent in an early passage that foreshadows his tragic, suicidal leap from the bridge (which I

explore in more detail in the last section). In the scene, Tecumseh looks on as Lum takes the skull, steps onto the weathered plywood decking that “bubble[s] up like pieces of thin meat in a hot pan,” and “feel[s] for a rhythm in the wood” (15). Picking up speed over the un-sturdy structure, Lum defies expectations, as he does not “tilt and fall,” but instead, he “moves gracefully, effortlessly along the girders like a dancer, until the curve of the bridge begins its descent into Bright Water, and he vanishes over the edge” (15).

Although Lum’s first “plummet” turns out to be a false alarm, it sets up the real and metaphorical dangers presented by the bridge, as neither Tecumseh nor Lum have reliable routes across the lines which separate them from wage work and family relationships. And, without stable bridges, even nimble, graceful movements—across *blood, land, and memory*, and within families, communities, and economic markets—become insufficient for avoiding the trap doors that stand in the way of Native men in modernity.

In this way, the opening scenes at the bridge suggest that Tecumseh’s and Lum’s seemingly parallel paths will offer, instead, significantly different routes to wage labor and home relationships. Specifically, whereas the absence of his mother and his estranged, abusive relationship with his father lead to Lum’s deterioration and tragic death on the bridge, Tecumseh’s close connections with his mother and Monroe Swimmer, and his more murky apprenticeships to Franklin and Elvin, offer a cautious optimism that rivals that of McNickle’s Antoine, who, like Lum, must navigate without a mother to act as his guiding compass. However, before Tecumseh can engage the capitalist marketplace *on his own terms*, he must reconcile relationships to “indigenous

land bases (whether or not those lands remain under indigenous control),” “oral traditions (whether or not those traditions continue in Native languages),” and to “ancestors,” blood relatives, and community members (Allen, *Blood Narrative* 178). And, as Tecumseh envisions routes across and confronts the obstacles between the literal and metaphorical borders that separate workers from their families, environments, and economic markets, he must simultaneously cross and re-cross the lines of *blood*, *land*, and *memory*, using “forensic aesthetics” to “re-assemble” and “re-collect” the scattered images of the past.

In the following section, then, I explore the economic implications of the unfinished bridge as it relates to the promise and eventual failure of one possible route—the tourist economy—focusing on Tecumseh’s apprenticeship to his Uncle Franklin, a man who plays on his Indian identity in the tourist market and who engages in “landfill economics” when the bridge project falls through, earning (relatively) high wages and adopting a romantic, outlaw persona, but risking imprisonment and alienation from community and cultural values.

FRANKLIN: HAPPY TRAILS, LANDFILL ECONOMICS, AND “GARBAGE ... THE NEW BUFFALO”

Tecumseh’s relationship to Franklin provides one of the most meaningful commentaries on the unfinished bridge and its role in the failed tourist economy, which results in limited options for Native men in modernity. Although Franklin is often distant and *absent* in his home relationships—to his son Lum, his nephew Tecumseh, and his brother Elvin—he, nonetheless, offers pathways to Native masculinity and economic promise. Specifically, the lessons Tecumseh learns from Franklin force him to consider

the relationships among *blood, land, and memory*, as he comes of age after the fallout of the bridge and the tourist economy, finding himself in a world where Franklin is engaged in “landfill economics”—in which he exploit tribal traditions and tribal land bases—and where “garbage” is “the new buffalo” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 152, 153).

Under Franklin’s management, the Bright Water reserve was set to become a tourist site where buffalo would roam the prairie, Indians would sell “authentic” and “traditional” artwork from the roadside, and motorized tourists—who, ironically, drive Jeep *Cherokees* and other nominally *Native* vehicles—could casually zoom through an “authentically” restored frontier.⁹ In its promise of self-determination, the bridge at first offered hope to Franklin’s plans for economic and ecological development, becoming an important symbol of economic progress on the reserve, and, at one time, holding the potential to bolster the tourist economy, bringing markets *to* the reserve and providing *legal* wages to Native workers. As Tecumseh explains:

Three years ago, the new highway from Pipestone was going to pass through Truth and cross into Canada at Bright Water. The foundations for the bridge that would connect the town with the reserve were poured, and everyone started talking about the steady stream of tourists who would stop at the border to catch their breath before pushing up to Waterton or Banff, or dropping down into Glacier or Yellowstone. (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 38)

However, when “construction came to a halt,” and the bridge-building crew “stretched a chain-link fence across both ends of the bridge ... packed up all their equipment and disappeared,” the bridge became a symbol of failure, offering a commentary on how access to capitalist markets, such as tourism, is never a sure thing for Native workers (38). Instead, they are left with no clear economic routes and no way across the

traditional and modern binary, as many working men grumble that “‘If those assholes hadn’t screwed up the bridge, there’d be lots of work for everyone’” (36).

Becoming something of a corrupted and incomplete totem, the bridge symbolizes what for many Native workers is a cruel, yet all-too-familiar irony, as it is a site that on the surface promises motion and mobility, but in reality enforces stasis and stagnation. The cultural and economic stagnation left in the wake of the unfinished bridge manifests at Franklin’s Happy Trails campground, where the plumbing continually gives out, leaving the smell of raw sewage to hover over the landscape. As Tecumseh narrates:

The band tried to get it [the plumbing] fixed, but nothing worked. Some of the elders said that there were animals and other creatures in the earth who were tired of having shit dumped on them and that they had finally done something about it. Marvin Simon, who had taken a couple of Native culture courses at the University of Lethbridge ... reminded everyone that, in the past, Indians were known to dump their refuse in holes in the ground, and that putting shit into the earth was more or less traditional. Carelton Coombs agreed with Marvin, but pointed out that there was a difference between shit and sewage. (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 100)

As this passage suggests, the Happy Trails campground at first represented an attempt to bridge Native traditions with the capitalist marketplace, marking the tourist economy as a potential route to economic prosperity and cultural rejuvenation for the Blackfeet.

Franklin’s hope to not just cash in on the tourist economy by commodifying (and degrading) land and resources, but to *perform* his Native identity for tourists and to assemble and recreate an “authentic” Native frontier, challenges the conventional “toured upon” trope, reminding us that “‘tourism, like ‘work,’ is a part of everyday life in much of the modern West, and we need to move beyond the ‘visited as victims,’ model ... just as we need to move beyond the authenticity-artificiality paradigm in studying tourists” (Wrobel, “Introduction” 21). In such a reading, the *work* Franklin performs, in re-

assembling and recreating a nostalgic past for capitalist gain, is itself a form of agency, as he, like “many westerners,” participates in “transforming [his] landscape and [his] customs, in a form of ‘playing for the camera,’ to meet the expectations of tourists” (Wrobel, “Introduction” 20).

However, much like the bridge, Franklin’s campground does not reconcile traditions and modernity or individuals with *home* and *land*, but instead, it stands as a corrupted contact zone, disguising ecological degradation as environmental stewardship, transforming Native people into actors who capitalize on their Native identities, promising communal and cultural rejuvenation but reinforcing individual pursuits of wealth. In this way, Franklin’s failed attempt in the tourist economy reminds readers of the fraught relationship between Native people and tourists in the West; as Hal Rothman argues, “tourism is the most colonial of colonial economies, not because of the sheer physical difficulty or the pain or humiliation intrinsic in its labor, but as a result of the psychic and social impact on people and their places” (“Shedding Skin” 102). Therefore, though “the view” at the campground remains deceptively “spectacular,” it is also a place where the psychic and social impacts on Native workers can be felt; as Tecumseh narrates: “you could watch the land swell and stretch, as if there were something large and heavy buried deep in the earth, and if you turned your back to Truth and Bright Water, you could imagine that you were the only person in the entire world” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 101). The deceiving view and lingering smell over Happy Trails offer constant reminders of Blackfeet isolation, as the bridge between Native communities and the market remains incomplete.

In the wakes of the unfinished bridge and Franklin's unfulfilled plans for the Happy Trails campground, the Blackfeet economy gives way to a seedy world of transborder smuggling in which Franklin and Elvin work, often at odds with each other, to bring garbage and toxic waste across the Medicine Line. In their new plan for economic development, "garbage" has become the "new buffalo," creating a world in which, instead of finding herds of ungulates roaming the prairie, Tecumseh and Lum discover "car tires, glass bottles, oil drums, [and] shopping carts" in the river—pollution and degradation which at first seems to be performed by individuals who "figure that rolling an old washing machine down the side of the coulee or tossing plastic bags and roofing materials off the bank isn't going to hurt anything" (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 153, 8). However, as the boys come to realize, it is their fathers who are most to blame, as Franklin and Elvin transport, bulldoze, and bury truckloads of refuse on Blackfeet land, profiting from the dangerous game of corruption, pollution, and exploitation.

In a pivotal scene, Tecumseh and Lum watch from a distance as the men working at Franklin's landfill in Turtle Coulee scatter "boxes and plastic sacks and the drifts of loose debris" with a bulldozer that "shoves everything over the edge of the slide. . . . thrust[ing] its blunt nose into the earth . . . spread[ing] a blanket of dirt over everything, and bur[y]ing it whole" (153). At first glance, this scene appears to be a horrific example of the way Franklin—and, by extension, all Native men—is coerced into abandoning Native cultural values and the links between *blood*, *land*, and *memory* in order to assimilate to the capitalist economy. As R. Parker explains the "world has not managed to

construct an Indian, unassimilating way to adapt masculine roles to the dominant, business-saturated culture's expectations of 9-5 breadwinning" (*Invention* 3–4). Instead of adopting "unassimilating ways" to engage the capitalist marketplace, Franklin earns income on the "back" and the "fat" of the land. King signals this breach in tribal traditions in the name of the landfill site—Turtle Coulee—as the "turtle" here suggests the Haudenosaunee creation story in which the "earth ... floats in space on the back of a turtle. ... in all the tellings of all the tellers, the world never leaves the turtle's back. And the turtle never swims away" (King, *Truth about Stories* 1). The story of the turtle is so important to King that he repeats it at the beginning of each chapter in *The Truth about Stories*—a nonfiction work combining autobiography and cultural and literary criticism—telling it in the voices of different storytellers who speak to different audiences. In each telling, the storyteller is asked "if the earth was on the back of a turtle, what was below the turtle?"; to which the storyteller replies, "no one knows for sure ... but it's turtles all the way down" (1–2). However, in the novel, it appears that Franklin's efforts have replaced "turtles" with "garbage," as Turtle Coulee becomes the center of landfill economics where "it's [garbage] all the way down." Becoming another symbol of stasis and stagnation in the absence of the bridge, Turtle Coulee is a place that, when coupled with the Happy Trails campground, leaves the stink of capitalism and greed in the air; as Elvin asks: "'You smell that? ... That's the smell of money rotting in the ground'" (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 103).

Historically speaking, Franklin's commodification and exploitation of land and resources could easily be viewed as "conspicuous gains in wealth," in which "Indians

have not only triggered normative comparisons of Indian and Euro-American economic practices; they have also raised questions about the morality of making, inducing, or forcing culture change that could threaten a people's very existence as a distinct society" (Harmon 275). However, by putting questions of morality aside, and instead viewing Franklin's acts through a working-class lens—understanding that a working-class develops when “economic and political forces transform people into workers” creating “a population that has nothing but its labor to sell”—we can begin to ask “how and when workers understand their fate and what they do with that knowledge”? (O'Neill 8). In the case of Franklin (and later, Elvin), the economic and political forces that inform his present engagement with the capitalist marketplace are directly tied to the border and the unfinished bridge, and how he understands his fate and what he does with that knowledge become increasingly important questions as his son (Lum) and his nephew (Tecumseh) prepare to enter the workforce.

As if mirroring his relationship to land, Franklin's relationships to his family and community are respectable and dignified *on the surface*, as he becomes the *face* of the Happy Trails campground and the *voice* of tribal government and tribal traditions, organizing the Indian Days festival, returning “one hundred and fifty head” of buffalo to the prairie, and “bet[ting] on the bridge” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 165). However, underneath, Franklin buries his emotions (especially in his home relationships) in the same way that he buries garbage and toxic waste, leaving Tecumseh to always guess whether “he's angry or in a good mood” (6). Furthermore, he often “disappears” from Lum's life in the same way his buffalo disappear from the prairie. And, perhaps most

important, the bridges between him and his brother, his nephew, and his son remain incomplete, like the one that held so much promise but now serves as a constant reminder of his failure to connect the worlds of work, community, and family, as well as traditions and modernity.

For Tecumseh, although Franklin fails to bring the markets to the reserve or to reconcile his home and community relationships with Native traditions, his examples provide possible routes to follow, as his perseverance in the face of obstacles and creative, if corrupted, plans for economic development, cut a path to the capitalist marketplace while leaving considerable room for improvement. Furthermore, through his work, Franklin offers Tecumseh an initiation into the first two stages of the “forensic aesthetic,” as he lives in the *aftermath of loss* (of his wife, the tourist economy, and the bridge) and is entrenched in a *topography of ruin and contamination* (in his work at Turtle Coulee). In this way, if Tecumseh is to improve on and learn from Franklin’s example, he must move on to the next step, piecing together the *material evidence and traces of the past* (such as the bridge), as he seeks additional apprenticeships that offer competing visions for the future of Native masculinity and alternative routes across *blood, land, and memory*.

ELVIN: TRANSBORDER DRIVING LESSONS AND THE LINE TO PRISON

Without a stable bridge, Tecumseh and Lum are seemingly left with two options for crossing the border, both of which draw comparisons to the definitions of work and Native masculinity envisioned by Elvin and Franklin. First, Tecumseh explains, “If you have a car and the time, the most convenient way is to drive down to Prairie View, cross

the river and the border there, and drive back up to Truth” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 41). This option, preferred by Tecumseh, requires access to a car, a technology which at first offers hope for reasserting a place for Native workers in the era of reservations (or Canadian reserves); as Philip Deloria explains:

The *auto* and the *mobility* that made up the word *automobile* pointed exactly to the ways in which mobility helped Indian people preserve and reimagine their own *autonomy* in the face of the reservation system. Reservations, we know, functioned as administrative spaces, meant to contain Indian people, fixing them in place through multiple forms of supervision. . . . Automotive mobility helped Indian people evade supervision and take possession of the landscape, helping make reservations into distinctly tribal spaces. (*Indians in Unexpected Places* 153)¹⁰

In this way, if the bridge had ever been finished, it, along with the car, held the potential to reverse or reconcile the relationship between tourists and the toured upon. One can even imagine that, perhaps, by making “reservations into distinctly tribal spaces,” these technologies could have even made room for Patricia Limerick’s hope that finding “better ways to *do* tourism” might allow for “greater respect to the dignity of the toured upon—or probably more important . . . give greater *wages* to the toured upon” (“Seeing and Being Seen” 55).

However, with limited access to cars, Tecumseh notes that the only other route across the river “is to pull yourself across on Charlie Ron’s ferry, an old iron bucket suspended on a cable over the Shield” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 42). And although “a few of the elders still use it,” Tecumseh explains that it is a cumbersome method of transportation—“tourists are always snagging the cable and getting stuck in the middle of the river” and “most of the kids from the reserve would rather swim than be seen sitting in it”—leading Lum and other Native teens to refer to it as “the Toilet” (42). When

compared to Elvin's transborder smuggling and Franklin's "landfill economics," the car and the "Toilet" help to frame what seem to be the only two options left for Native men who live in the absence of bridges: you can use your car (if you own one) to engage and circumvent the capitalist marketplace, or you can take the "slow road," concealing your dirty dealings, exploiting the land and resources in your own *home*, burying and flushing sewage and toxic waste underground.

Whereas Franklin's brand of landfill economics and closed-off, home relationships connect him to the "Toilet" and the *topography of ruin and contamination*, Elvin's freewheeling humor and rolling-stone approach to family and community align him with the car. As a transborder smuggler of garbage and toxic waste *and* a skilled woodworker who plays on his Indian identity for profit, Elvin offers alternative routes to earn a living, combining the tensions of border crossings with the exploitation of Native lands, the reappropriation of Native stereotypes, and a pointed, at times humorous, trickster-like commentary on Native history. As Lynn Stephen explains in *Transborder Lives* (2007), the term "transborder," as opposed to "transnational," emphasizes more than just the crossing of geopolitical lines, as it includes the negotiation of cultural, social, and ethnic contact zones, a process that often rejects binaries and creates what other border scholars refer to as "third spaces" (19).¹¹ Therefore, in his "transborder" negotiation of these contact zones, Elvin provides further nuance to the discussion of blood, land, and memory, as he crosses and recrosses the real and metaphorical borders—negotiating the Medicine Line as well as the tangled lines of family, land, and history—engaging in illicit economics and operating outside the capitalist marketplace while

What begin as driving lessons, a familiar rite of passage between fathers and sons, quickly become a much more holistic and all-encompassing education, in which Elvin apprentices Tecumseh into the dangerous and exciting world of smuggling, where having a sense of humor and an ability to play on Native stereotypes can be the difference between success and failure, profits and prison. As if preparing the reader for Elvin's brand of quick-witted comedy, which is often brought on by alcohol and can just as quickly turn to violence, Tecumseh explains: "When my father has had too much to drink, he likes to joke around and do silly things. Just before he gets angry, he can be really funny" (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 8).¹² Although Elvin's drinking signifies a dangerous cultural stereotype, his humor often resists or challenges such expectations, as he is an "equal opportunity" joke-teller, skewering both white and Native people and using humor to shape and pass on his worldview in which both sides share blame and responsibility.

For instance, in a recurring joke that Elvin tells to Tecumseh, he asks "'You know what's wrong with the world?,'" and although the *correct* answer oscillates between "Whites" and "Indians," the reason remains the same: "'because they [Whites and Indians] got no sense of humour'" (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 86, 105). By implicating white *and* Native people, Elvin's joke demonstrates the ambiguous nature of humor, as the punchline remains the same but the *object*, or group, being singled-out, stereotyped, and *laughed at*, is a matter of filling in the blank. Furthermore, when Tecumseh says that Skee, one of Elvin's white friends, "tells some pretty good jokes," Elvin responds: "Telling a joke and having a sense of humour ... are two different

things” (87). Here, Elvin distinguishes between having a “sense of humor,” which is a crucial element of survivance that resists terminal creeds through ironic turns and satirical twists, and “telling jokes,” which often *become* terminal creeds, reinforcing stereotypes and locking people in the historical past.

Placing the ambiguous nature of humor in context, King writes: “Humour can be aggressive and oppressive, as in keep-’em-in-their-place sexist and racist jokes. But it can also be a subversive weapon, as it has often been for people who find themselves in a fairly tight spot without other, more physical, weapons” (*One Good Story, That One* 244). Throughout the “driving lessons,” Elvin dishes out humor on both sides of this ledger, at times using it to creatively revise historical and cultural oppression, finding routes out of “tight spots,” and at others using it to justify his exploitative acts—of the land, consumers, and the law—as well as the oppression that forces him to engage in illicit economics, explaining to Tecumseh that ““They [US and Canadian corporations and governments] don’t mind making the mess, but they don’t want the job of cleaning it up”” and ““they just pay me to make it disappear”” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 82, 141).

However, the ability to “clean up” messes and to “make [garbage] disappear” takes a turn during Tecumseh’s first attempts to take the wheel, as Elvin performs acts of forensic aesthetics in which the driving lessons with his son provide the forum for his running commentary on the ghosted history of Native land and tribal economics. Paying particular attention to the disappearance of the buffalo, Elvin explains,

“Those history books you get in school say that railroad sharpshooters killed off the buffalo, but that’s not true. . . . soon as the smart ones got a

good look at Whites, they took off. ... That's the mistake we made. ... We [Indians] should have gone with them." (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 90–91)

Commingling the plight of the buffalo with that of Native people in modernity, Elvin suggests that “vanishing”—usually considered a terminal creed—would have been preferable to allotment, assimilation, and state and federal sanctioned “termination,” because, in his view, disappearing *on purpose* implies agency and autonomy, becoming an act of survivance rather than one of cultural death. Continuing with his revisionist history of the buffalo, Elvin explains that “returning” buffalo to the prairie—as Franklin attempted to do before the bridge went sour—will never restore Native agency or rejuvenate tribal economies, nor will it help Native workers to “home in” on cultural identity, because the buffalo to choose from in the twentieth century are ““bone-hard stupid,”” and those few that are intelligent will continue to “disappear,” implying that “smart” Indians should follow their lead (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 106). Moreover, Elvin tells his son that white tourists do not travel to places like Bright Water to see “Indians,” “buffalo,” or “mountains,” and, instead, they come for the ““space ... they’ve never seen space like this,”” implying that colonial blindness still obscures the tourists’ vision, making flesh-and-blood Indians as *invisible* as the buffalo (107).

Speaking of this paradox, King asks, “how can something that has never existed—the Indian—have form and power while something that is alive and kicking—Indians—are invisible?” (*Truth about Stories* 53). And, he continues,

In the end, there is no reason for the Indian to be real. The Indian simply has to exist in our imaginations. But for those of us who are Indians, this disjunction between reality and imagination is akin to life and death. For to be seen as ‘real,’ for people to ‘imagine’ us as Indians, we must be “authentic.” (*Truth about Stories* 54)

The conflict between the “Indian” of white, historical imaginaries and *real* Indians in modernity becomes a central tension in the novel, as Tecumseh must find ways to reverse and reimagine beliefs that make Native men and Native workers invisible, learning new ways of *seeing and being seen*. And, in order to help his son avoid the fate of *invisibility* and the threat of incarceration—which has become the most pervading threat for young Native men—Elvin provides Tecumseh instructions in the *work* of playing on his Indian identity, using humor and deception to exploit Native stereotypes (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 90).¹³ In one such scene, Tecumseh learns that the work of smuggling toxic waste across the border requires acting skills; as Elvin explains that the border patrol “love[s] that dumb Indian routine,” and after playing the part of the “Indians you see in the westerns on television” they cross the border unscathed, prompting Elvin to ask his son if he noticed ““how friendly those assholes were”” (86). In apprenticing Tecumseh into the ways that Native stereotypes can be “repatriated” to Native workers and exploited for economic gain, Elvin hints at the *real* threat posed by failing to play the part of the *imagined* Indian that the border patrollers and other law enforcement agents expect.¹⁴ In this way, “playing Indian” becomes a crucial survival skill, because, as Franklin’s and Elvin’s examples make clear, young Native men with “nothing to do” and nowhere to go are in constant danger of being incarcerated; as Lum explains, ““Indians make up the largest percentage of Canada’s prison population. . . . Maybe we shouldn’t be wasting our time looking for jobs”” (65). And, despite Tecumseh’s reminder that ““My father’s not in jail . . . and neither is your father,” Lum insists: ““There’s a line. . . . You have to wait your turn”” (65–66). In “realizing their [*expected*] fate,” the question remains what Tecumseh

and Lum will “do with that knowledge,” as they are immersed in a world in which the “line” to prison is as dangerous and imposing as the border between the United States and Canada, which makes no room for the “in-between” space that indigenous people occupy, making the bridges across *memory* and expectations just as important as the one that fails to cross the river.

Ultimately, Tecumseh’s driving lessons with Elvin serve as a “journey into the world,” much like Antoine’s, making the daily lives of “flesh-and-blood” reserve Indians and Native workers *visible* as they struggle to make their economic routes *viable*. However, despite Elvin’s humor and creative (albeit criminal) routes across the border, Tecumseh learns that his father’s use of the car offers limited options for “getting across” the literal and metaphorical borders and a limited potential for making the reserve into a “distinctly tribal space.” Instead, as a vehicle for smuggling, it *increases* the threat of incarceration, bringing him into contact with the *real* border—and other geopolitical and sociocultural contact zones—where he cannot *evade* supervision, but instead, is made subject to it. Therefore, although Tecumseh finds that “each time” he takes the wheel “it gets a little easier. . . . all I have to worry about is the steering,” he remains in a *topography of ruin and contamination*, filled with incomplete bridges and policed borders, where many of his directions and destinations are still dangerous and uncharted, and the automobile may not be the *only* way to “get across” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 91). For this reason, he must remember his observation that, “[i]f you’re in a car, you can only get from one side of town to the other . . . but if you’re on foot, you can cross anywhere you can scale the fence or find a hole in the wire” (70). And, as he

continues to pursue wage labor *and* to piece together the evidentiary traces of the past, Tecumseh must learn to “cross anywhere,” “scale fences,” and “find holes in the wire,” reimagining rather than reinforcing the static beliefs and terminal creeds that, if followed, reserve him a place in the line to prison.

HELEN AND MONROE: NATIVE ARTWORK

Whereas Tecumseh’s work alongside Franklin and Elvin signify the limitations for Native workers in modernity, his relationships to Helen and Monroe Swimmer provide counternarratives to the unfinished bridge and the dangerous worlds of landfill economics and transborder smuggling, offering alternative routes and cautious optimism for the future of Native masculinity. Through their examples, Tecumseh finds ways to reconcile the lines of *blood*, *land*, and *memory* as he seeks the “utopian dream,” which Tatum explains is “the fourth feature of the forensic aesthetic paradigm,” in which a character, such as Tecumseh, “set[s] forth . . . wandering and investigating so as to transform lost or found bodies and material fragments into found stories, which is to say into complete narratives that can place past events in their proper order and, in the process, adjudicate among them for both cause and explanatory meaning” (“Spectral Beauty” 128).

In writing about Tecumseh’s pursuit of *recovering* and *re-membering* “evidentiary traces” of the past, the land, and his Blackfeet identity, King articulates his own mixed, multivalent conception of *blood*, *land*, and *memory* (Tatum, “Spectral Beauty” 129). Born in Oklahoma among the Cherokee but spending much of his adult life in Canada among the Blackfeet, King has said that “I’m Cherokee from Oklahoma,

but I don't think of Oklahoma as home. If I think of any place as home it's the Alberta prairies, where I spent ten years with the Blackfoot people. I'm not Blackfoot, but that feels like the place I want to get back to" ("Coyote Lives" 95).¹⁵ Much like Tecumseh, who struggles to restore his relationship with Elvin and who seeks routes off the reserve and beyond his home community, King grew up without his Cherokee father, and claims that, as a teenager, he became "partial to stories about other worlds and interplanetary travel"; not because he was fascinated by stars or outer space, but, as he tells it: "I just wanted to get out of town. Wanted to get as far away from where I was as I could" (King, *Truth about Stories* 2). For King, the desire to leave home involved a complex matrix of "teenage angst," "being poor in a rich country," and "knowing that white was more than just a colour"; and, perhaps most important, "part of it was seeing the world through my mother's eyes" (*Truth about Stories* 2).

Similar to the role King's mother played in his development, Helen provides Tecumseh a vision for the future of Native people and Native workers that competes with those outlined by absent and estranged fathers (Elvin) and uncles (Franklin). In the novel, Helen works at a beauty shop on the reserve, moving with the grace of an actress, "as if she knows where to place each foot ... and how to hold her head so that her hair catches the light that comes through the plate glass window" (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 17). Through her graceful movements, though, Tecumseh explains that a quiet desperation shines through, as "you could see that moving out of Bright Water, away from the reserve, and becoming a real actress was one of her dreams" (138). Although options for pursuing an acting career are limited in *Bright Water*, Helen does earn the "lead role" as

the Queen in the local production of *Snow White*, in which, Carol—a local playwright and play director—rewrites the play, replacing dwarves with Indians (204). Helen has no illusions about the role being her “big break” into the cutthroat entertainment industry; however, the play does have broader social, cultural, and economic implications, especially for Native women in the workforce. As Tecumseh notes, “there are only two parts for women in *Snow White*,” marking them as either pure and virginal, or evil and corrupt; or, in a Native context, such a play suggests that Native women must conform to the “Indian Princess” (Pocahontas) paradigm or risk becoming the violent and oppositional “squaw” or the corrupt and assimilated “apple” (162).¹⁶ In this way, Helen’s endeavors suggest that the work that remains is *on the bridge* and *in-between* the border, finding hybridity between and within cultures and genders, families and individuals, traditions and modernity.

For instance, Helen’s poised and elegant actions at the beauty salon are coupled with “quick, hard gestures” that “remind [Tecumseh] of [his] grandmother wringing the heads off chickens” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 17). Here, Helen’s working hands blend the physicality of “modern” cosmetology with the “traditional” work of plucking and butchering chickens, the latter of which is a job that Tecumseh explains “is not my favourite ... I’m not very fast. For every bird that I clean, my grandmother can clean four” (157). Through watching his mother’s (and grandmother’s) skilled working hands, Tecumseh is offered alternative examples of Native labor that veer away from the roadblocks and obstacles envisioned by Franklin and Elvin. However, unlike other women in the community, who romanticize and/or vilify Franklin’s and Elvin’s work,

Helen offers a more grounded and pragmatic take, saying it's "too bad the landfill project fell through" because "[we] could have used the jobs" (22). In fact, although Helen's graceful movements suggest socioeconomic dreams beyond the reserve, her advice to Tecumseh is built on a foundation of economic pragmatism, in which *work* of any kind is better than none at all. As Tecumseh narrates: "Whenever my mother sees that I have some free time, she finds jobs for me to do"; constantly telling him to "check with Wally Preston over at the job gate" because "the railroad might be hiring for the summer" (41, 17). And, even though she laments the wasted economic opportunities symbolized by the unfinished bridge, Helen remembers that there are older, more productive routes across the river than the car and the Toilet, and better, more sustainable ways to engage the capitalist marketplace than landfill economics and transborder smuggling; as she appeals to Tecumseh's *blood memory*, saying that "the river" has "been here since the beginning of time" (52). Coupling pragmatism with knowledge of the past—"the beginning of time"—Helen demonstrates ways that the past can be reimagined and home relationships and economic pursuits can be rerouted, which become crucial alternatives for Tecumseh's social and economic development.¹⁷

Specifically, Helen's quilt, which has taken many years to stitch, becomes a "living document" rather than a "spectral beauty," containing and revealing the stories of family and place and offering an important counternarrative to the unfinished bridge.¹⁸ Although the quilt, like the bridge, remains unfinished, it is *intentionally* incomplete, by design and by its nature, with patches and patterns added and subtracted, sentimental

pieces woven in and painfully removed. Describing the quilt's *unexpected* qualities,

Tecumseh narrates:

My mother's quilt is not the easy kind of quilt you can get at the Mennonite colony ... or one of the fancy stitched quilts you could get in Prairie View ... Along with the squares and triangles and circles of cloth that have been sewn together, patterns with names like Harvest Star, and Sunshine and Shadow, and Sunburst, my mother has also fastened unexpected things to the quilt, such as the heavy metal washers that run along the outside edges and the clusters of needles that she has worked into the stitching just below the fish hooks and the chickens' feathers. (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 61)

The quilt, like the characters, the community, history, and the land, remains *in process*, and, like the bridge, it represents danger *and* promise, the past *and* the future. As Elvin says ““In the beginning ... everything was pretty much squares and triangles””; but as the years went on, and her sewing skills improved and her relationships became more nuanced, Helen began to include more elaborate patterns and eccentric items such as porcupine quills, chicken feet, human hair, washers, and fish hooks (61). In this way, Helen's quilt takes on the shape and texture of her *home* relationships; as Tecumseh explains:

The geometric forms slowly softened and turned into freehand patterns that looked a lot like trees and mountains and people and animals, and before long, my father said you could see Truth in one corner of the quilt and Bright Water in the other with the Shield flowing through the fabrics in tiny diamonds and fancy stitching. (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 61)

Here, the stitching acts as a web, reflecting the webbed relationships between and within people (and place), metaphorically weaving together the lines which separate—borders, genders, workers and markets—and mapping relationships and genealogies within the fabric of geography and history.¹⁹

For some Native men, though, the quilt, like the bridge, threatens emasculation; as Tecumseh says: “My father told me that my mother started the quilt just after I was born and that it had started off simple enough, but that even before he left us and went to Truth, the quilt had begun to be a problem” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 61). For men like Elvin, Helen’s quilting is just a hobby borne of “frustration and disappointment,” as he says that ““finding all that weird stuff and wasting time sewing it on probably helps calm her down”” (61). Furthermore, Elvin suggests that the quilt threatens castration, as he warns Tecumseh about the ““razor blades”” sewn into the fabric, asking his son if he ““know[s] the difference between a bull and a steer”” (61). However, despite his father’s warning to ““stay away from that quilt,”” Tecumseh recognizes its aesthetic, if eccentric, beauty as well as its symbolic significance, saying “all the dangerous stuff is on top,” and “it looked as if you’d be safe enough as long as you were under the quilt and weren’t moving around on the outside, trying to get in” (61–62). As if mirroring Revard’s discussion of bridges—which for humans are safe on top, dangerous below, but for animals it’s the other way around—Tecumseh’s insights regarding the exterior “danger” of the quilt, suggests that remaining *under the blankets* of family and community is a crucial element of survival. Unlike the unfinished bridge, which is dangerous on top *and* below, the quilt blurs danger and safety and becomes a way of rethinking social and economic contact zones as *internal*, within families and communities, instead of always being *external*, or involving outward pursuits. And, unlike Elvin, whose influence and talent for woodworking is often relegated to *memory*—as Tecumseh struggles to *remember* “him standing in sawdust and wood chips, slowly cutting things into pieces”

(111)—Helen’s power is in the work of “piecing things together,” using quilting and artwork to imaginatively *re-member* the past, while remaining an integral and constant part of Tecumseh’s present. In this way, Helen’s quilt becomes an active and visceral *presence* in the lives of the characters it reflects, whereas the bridge offers only a mirage, becoming a significant *absence*, symbolizing other absences and ghosts that haunt the novel—such as the church and the skull.

As he works to piece together the skull, the incomplete bridge, and other “felt absences,” Tecumseh also begins his apprenticeship to Monroe Swimmer, a Toronto-based Native artist recently returned to the reserve. Monroe, like Helen, provides a counternarrative to the bridge and presents a hope for the future of Native masculinity and tribal economics. Although not a *blood* relative, Monroe offers Tecumseh a commentary on Native *land* and *memory*, and provides an example of how Native men can globetrot on various socioeconomic routes *and* “home-in” on tribally specific lands and cultural roots. Crucially, through his apprenticeship to Monroe—filled with unconventional examples of *work* and *art*—Tecumseh seeks the “utopian dream” and discovers ways to reconcile the lines of *blood*, *land*, and *memory*.

As a modern-day trickster, Monroe breaks expectations for Native class and masculinity, as the men in Bright Water describe him as “a big chief” with “a wad of money and a fine eye for real estate” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 24). Although he rejects and reimagines capitalism—organizing a “traditional giveaway” or Potlach ceremony, in which he displays his wealth by generously giving it all away (244)—at first, his mysterious nature, wealth, and fame lead some men to jealousy, grumbling that

he “got lucky that he landed in Toronto just as being an Indian was becoming chic,” and “[I]f he hadn’t been Indian, he would have been sucking up soup at the Salvation Army ... [A] person should have to work for the money they get” (27). However, while the rumors and stories about Monroe provide lively debate among the men and women in *Truth and Bright Water*, Tecumseh explains that “everyone who knew Monroe agreed on one thing. He could draw” (25).

After he left the reserve, though, Monroe became famous, not for his drawings, but for his “restoration” work, as he began re-asserting Native presence in paintings and erasing colonial images from landscapes. As he tells Tecumseh:

“What I was really good at was restoration. ... Nineteenth-century landscapes were my specialty. ... Have you ever seen a nineteenth-century landscape? ... They all look alike. Craggy mountains, foreboding trees, sublime valleys with wild rivers running through them. ... A primeval paradise. Peaceful. Quiet. Snow on the mountains. Luminous clouds in the sky. The rivers tumbling over dark rocks. Blah, blah, blah.” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 129)

In dismissing what he considers the banal, nineteenth-century notion of “the sublime,” Monroe calls for a reinterpretation of *beauty* which requires a skeptical, revisionist approach to history and capitalism. As Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe argues, “the sublime, in contrast to beauty, seems to have become a function of that general economy of signs out of which capitalism is made and which are made out of it ... beauty has an ultimately adversarial relationship to it” (*Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime* 13). Therefore, in restoring Native people into the “sublime,” pastoral scenes, Monroe calls for an aesthetic in which *beauty* is not an intrinsic quality of the landscape, but instead, it is revealed over time, as humans strive for more inclusive *truths* in their art, history, and stories about the places they inhabit.

Having mastered the art of reclaiming painted landscapes, Monroe returns to the reserve to try his hand at recovering and re-assembling *real* ones; as he tells Tecumseh, “My trade and my art is living” and “I’m going to save the world” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 132, 131). Using the *real* landscape as his canvas, Monroe works to erase the church, which was “built by the Methodists as a mission to the Indians” before being passed through several denominations such as the Baptists, Nazarenes, First Assembly of God, and the Sacred Word Gospel, who “left the church standing empty and moved down the river to Prairie View just after construction on the bridge stopped” (1). Becoming another spectral beauty, the church haunts the landscape with the colonial implications of Christian missionaries who attempted to “kill the Indian” and “save the man,” as well as the deep, troubled past of first contact, providing a symbolic reminder of Columbus’s voyage to the Americas; as Tecumseh narrates:

[O]n days when the sky surges out of the mountains, gun-metal and wild, and the wind turns the grass into a tide, if you stand on the river bottom looking up at the bluff, you might imagine that what you see is not a church gone to hell but a ship leaned at the keel, sparkling in the light, pitching over the horizon in search of a new world. (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 2)

At a distance, the church looks romantic, “sparkling in the light,” and calls to mind the Euroamerican nostalgia of “discovery” and “manifest destiny.” However, up close, the dilapidated church, like a shipwreck, contains ghosted memories in its eerie, skeletal-like remains, as the north side has been “stripped by the cold and the wind, leaving an open wound of wood that had scabbed over grey and brittle,” while “blistered” flecks of paint cling to the west and south sides (2).

Vowing to make the church look “just like the old days” and assuring Tecumseh that ““before we’re done, the buffalo will return,”” Monroe sets out to piece together the *material traces of the past* in his own version of the forensic aesthetic, in which he reasserts Native agency and erases and revises colonial memories (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 134, 135). However, with such lofty, seemingly unrealistic goals, Monroe at first appears to be something of a new-age trickster, who, like a false prophet, makes far-fetched promises and half-baked prophesies. As if embracing his prophet/trickster-like persona, Monroe plays on biblical language during his first encounter with Tecumseh, telling his young apprentice: ““Blessed is he who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness”” (46). However, while Tecumseh initially remains skeptical about whether Monroe’s art reflects the *truth* or an elaborate *trick*, he cannot help but be impressed by Monroe’s ability to paint the church so that it “blends in with the prairies and the sky,” as if it is slowly “disappearing” from the landscape (43). Furthermore, although Tecumseh struggles to find the “blessedness” in restoration work, he quickly learns that it is far from merely “ephemeral” or “cerebral,” requiring *real* sweat; as he explains: “I’m hot now, and I’m sweating, and I’m thinking that cleaning boxcars for the railroad wouldn’t be a bad job at all” (131).

The physicality of restoration work is coupled with real and implicit dangers, as Monroe’s work, much like Franklin’s and Elvin’s, often involves committing “crimes,” forcing him to tightrope along the “line to prison.” However, whereas Franklin’s and Elvin’s criminal acts involve exploitation of Native lands and Native traditions for profit, forcing them to *evade* the law, Monroe steals bones and cultural artifacts from US and

Canadian museums to *interrogate* laws of oppression and termination, authenticity and assimilation, and to *re-assert* Native presence and Native worldviews in modernity. In this way, Monroe's *artwork* reverses the practices of collection and commodification of Native artifacts and unsettles the synonymous relationship between "modernity" and "capitalism," as he steals from museums to *give back* to the land and the people, and he celebrates his exploits, not by accumulating wealth or artifacts, but by sharing them with his community, telling Tecumseh that "'When you write the song about my exploits ... don't forget the giveaway. You don't have to say who got what ... That's not important. But it should be a ballad'" (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 247–48).

In order to liberate Native people, who are preserved "in formaldehyde, as museum relics disconnected from the present," Monroe uses his fame to gain access to museums (in Paris, Toronto, London, Berlin, and New York), smuggling Native bones out in his lunch pail (R. Parker 52). As he tells Tecumseh:

"I stole [bones] from lots of museums. ... I found them in drawers and boxes and stuck away on dusty shelves. Indian children. ... Happens all the time ... Anthropologists and archaeologists dig the kids up, clean them off, and stick them in drawers. Every ten years or so, some bright graduate student opens the drawer, takes a look, writes a paper, and shuts the drawer. ... So I rescued them." (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 250–51)

In finding and "rescuing" Native bones stuffed away in drawers, Monroe resolves a tension that the Little Elk in McNickle's *Wind* could not, as they fail to retrieve their sacred Feather Boy medicine bundle. Furthermore, through his work, Monroe marks museums as crucial contact zones that, as a result of "'flexible accumulation' of traditions, identities, arts" and "contemporary capitalist expansion," have become "what might cynically be called a global department store of cultures" (Clifford 215). However,

Monroe reverses this practice, turning the museum into a place where Native agency and Native survivance can be enacted, demonstrating how “tribal capitalism” and creative, artful acts of restoration “had the potential to reverse the relationship between economic activities and tradition” (Harmon 266). Furthermore, through this revelation, Tecumseh learns that it was Monroe, cross-dressing as a “woman,” who “rescued” the mysterious skull and staged it for him and Lum to find; as Monroe explains: ““I must have looked like a sack of garbage when I hit the water”” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 250). In blurring gender norms, Monroe provides an example of how Native men can operate between the static borders of “race, culture, language, blood,” which, King explains, “still form a kind of authenticity test, a racial-reality game that contemporary Native people are forced to play” (*Truth about Stories* 55). Furthermore, in reasserting Native presence in paintings and reimagining repatriation ceremonies, Monroe challenges the traditional/modern binary, as he explains to Tecumseh that, though his methods for reburying skulls are not strictly “traditional,” they do have power, because he says: ““This is the centre of the universe. Where else would I bring them [the bones]? Where else would they want to be?”” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 251).

On one level, then, Monroe’s restorative *artwork* offers a commentary on the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act (1990), which provides protection for Native cultural artifacts and Native bones and, to date, has resulted in the repatriation of many culturally significant items from museums to Native people.²⁰ Whereas McNickle’s *Wind* predates NAGPRA—thus, leaving no legal remedy for the Little Elk after they discover that Pell’s Americana Institute has allowed their sacred

medicine bundle to be destroyed—*Truth and Bright Water* was published *after* the law’s inception, as Monroe *restores* paintings and *repatriates* bones to Blackfoot lands.²¹ Furthermore, his reimagined repatriation ceremonies for bones, paintings, and churches critiques the Indian Arts and Crafts Act (1990)—which was passed to ensure the “authenticity” of Native artwork in the United States. Unlike Elvin, who benefits (at least implicitly) from the IACA—making and selling coyote figurines with his “treaty number on the card so there’s no question” about his authenticity (32)—Monroe’s artwork calls attention to one of the IACA’s major flaws, as, according to the law, “authenticity” requires federal recognition of Native nations and the individual artist’s tribal affiliation, which discredits the works of many otherwise “authentically” Native artists. This and other legal slips and loopholes aimed at “solving the Indian problem” on both sides of the US/Canadian border become what King calls “legislative magic” because of their power to make “Indians disappear” (*Truth about Stories* 132).²² And, taken together, the policies legislating “authenticity” and termination in the United States and Canada, from the 1950s to the present, leave Native people little room to navigate in the modern world—as they are *imagined* not seen, *remembered* not present, *vanishing* rather than continuing.²³

However, Monroe works against such essentialist visions of Native people, apprenticing Tecumseh in a trickster-like world where history is shaped and undone by a combination of imagination and gumption, and where *work* and *wealth* are defined, not by what is produced or what is accumulated, but by what is experienced and shared. In his “utopian dream,” thought systems such as capitalism and Christianity, and institutions such as churches, museums, boarding schools, and prisons, must be challenged and

reimagined, while “restorative” *art* and “blessed” *work* hold the potential to reconcile *blood, land, and memory*. And, despite his initial skepticism, Tecumseh comes to believe in Monroe’s powers of restoration, as he explains:

Seeing that it [the church] is gone is one thing. Finding it now that it has disappeared is something else. I try looking past the bridge, measuring out the church’s approximate location, but the bluff above the river stretches out in both directions and the church could be anywhere along the way. (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 236)

In this way, Monroe’s ability to re-presence Native people in the modern world and to erase the colonial structures and reimagine the colonial *invention* of the *Indian*, mark him as a “postindian warrior,” which Vizenor explains, “outs the inventions with humor, new stories, and the simulations of survivance” (“Postindian Warriors” 5). And although it remains unclear if the *real* buffalo will return, for Tecumseh, the disappearance of the church, like Helen’s quilt, signals a reason for hope, even in a land filled with a long history of empty promises and unfinished bridges, as his work with Monroe—“restoring” and “erasing” the church, organizing a “traditional” give-away ceremony, and repatriating Native bones to Blackfoot lands—has given him new ways to interrogate the past, engage the present, and reclaim the future.

However, despite Monroe’s help, the unfinished bridge remains a critical obstacle standing in his path, as Tecumseh begins to see it not just as a failed route to economic markets, but as a “spectral beauty” that, like the skull and the church, leaves a ghostly trace over the landscape. As Tecumseh narrates:

From here, as far as you can see, the bridge is nothing more than a skeleton, the carcass of an enormous animal, picked to the bone. . . . From the end of the decking, you can lean out and stare through the dead openings between the ribs and see the fog boil up off the river a thousand

miles below. There's nothing to hold on to out here and the wind knows it.
(King, *Truth and Bright Water* 256)

Through the “dead openings between the ribs,” the bare skeleton of the bridge provides a stark reminder of the result of termination policies and symbolizes the dead ends for Native men and Native workers in modernity, which Lum falls victim to in the novel’s tragic conclusion. However, in the final section, I acknowledge *and* “read beyond” Lum’s tragic death, focusing on the routes *and* roadblocks for Tecumseh’s future, bridging the gaps between cautious optimism and tragedy, survivance and terminal creeds.

READING BEYOND TRAGEDY

In the opening chapter of *The Truth about Stories* (2003)—a work that blends autobiography and literary and cultural criticism—King compares the Judeo Christian creation story to a Native creation story, common among Plains tribes, called the Woman Who Fell from the Sky:

In Genesis, we begin with a perfect world, but after the Fall, while we gain knowledge, we lose the harmony and safety of the garden and are forced into a chaotic world of harsh landscapes and dangerous shadows.

In our Native story, we begin with water and mud, and, through the good offices of Charm, her twins, and the animals, move by degrees and adjustments from a formless, featureless world to a world that is rich in its diversity, a world that is complex and complete. (24)

Not only does the Genesis version bring about notions of original sin, casting humans into a *topography of ruin and contamination* filled with “harsh landscapes and dangerous shadows,” but, by eating from the tree of knowledge, Eve also dooms all subsequent generations to the harsh realities of physical labor, tragedy, and death. Thus, King continues, we are left with the choice of which world we hope to inhabit and which story

we want to tell: “a world in which creation is a solitary, individual act or a world in which creation is a shared activity; a world that begins in harmony and slides toward chaos or a world that begins in chaos and moves toward harmony; a world marked by competition or a world determined by co-operation” (24–25).

Using King’s insightful pairing of Judeo Christian and Native worldviews, this final section offers a way to read “beyond the tragedy” that concludes *Truth and Bright Water*, as it is through cross-pollination, rather than simple hybridity, with multiple, competing routes to engage the capitalist marketplace and to recover “harmonious” home relationships, that Tecumseh *creates* considerable hope for the future of Native workers in modernity. Rather than beginning in “harmony” and sliding toward “chaos,” Tecumseh begins in a *topography of ruin and contamination* and, through “forensic aesthetics,” he pieces together the scattered images of the past in his pursuit of the “utopian dream.” In this way, though the novel’s conclusion is undeniably tragic, if read in relation to *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*, Lum’s and Soldier’s tragic plunge from the bridge leave room for cautious optimism, challenging Tecumseh, like Antoine, to see “endings as beginnings,” and to *remember* that “creation,” like tribal economics, “is a shared activity” rather than an “individual act.” However, if he is to become a “postindian warrior,” like Monroe, and achieve his “utopian dreams” of automobility, economic prosperity, *and* communal and cultural identity, he must first find a way to reconcile the tragic deaths of his cousin and his dog, so that even suicidal leaps can be recovered and reassembled through acts of humor and survivance, community and “co-operation.”

In the closing pages, Tecumseh and Lum reconvene at the bridge to return the skull to the river, crossing the fence that “lies on its side coiled up in twists and bows, more a hazard than a barrier” and “the wire” that “sways under [their] feet, alive and dangerous” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 255). Though Tecumseh explains that he would prefer to throw the skull in from a distance, Lum continues moving forward as they step on the plywood decking that “feels thin, flimsy, hollow, as if we are walking on a drum” (255). This eerie collapsing of the traditional/modern binary—the unfinished bridge as a “hollow drum”—mirrors Lum’s physical and emotional deterioration, which is now painfully evident, as he’s spent weeks camping out underneath the bridge, appearing malnourished, with “blood all over his shirt” and “his hair is matted and greasy,” obviously still haunted by the invisible, psychic wounds left in the wake of his mother’s death (257). Despite the evidence of Lum’s deterioration, Tecumseh at first remains optimistic, remembering that, in their previous encounters, Lum seemed hopeful about his training for the Indian Days race, and when Lum smiles, Tecumseh tells himself that “everything is going to be all right” (257). However, as they search for stable footing on the bridge, Lum takes the skull and drops it between the girders, watching it fall before handing Tecumseh his stopwatch and telling him that when he “hit[s] the finish line” he’s “going to keep going until [he] feels like stopping!” (257, 258). Running with pained, awkward strides, “his feet hitting the planks out of rhythm,” Lum’s body slowly begins to “uncoil and stretch out,” and Tecumseh can only watch as Lum “glides along the naked girders gracefully” with “Soldier hard on his heels and closing, until the curve of the bridge begins its descent into Bright Water and Lum and Soldier disappear

over the edge” (258). Echoing the opening scene, in which Lum “vanishes over the edge” only to return, Tecumseh hopes that this is another one of his cousin’s “lousy jokes”; but, when he moves in for a closer inspection, he explains, “the bridge is empty, and all I see in the distance is the lights of Bright Water and all I see below me is the fog. And all I hear is the wind and the faint strains of the piano rising out of the land with the sun” (258).

Losing his dog and his cousin in one tragic leap, Tecumseh again finds himself in the aftermath of loss, navigating through a *topography of ruin*, with more material traces to piece together, and, perhaps, not enough will and not enough hope to begin the cycle of recovery again. For instance, if he adopts the path of guilt and self-loathing, like Franklin, who arrives at Lum’s funeral “by himself” and “never sa[ys] a word,” Tecumseh runs the risk of playing into the “crying Indian” (self pity) and/or the stoic Indian stereotypes, both of which signal the death cry for Native masculinity, leaving tragedy and terminal creeds to take their place (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 259). Furthermore, if he lets his pursuit of the utopian dream end with the recovery of Lum’s body, which “took the police a couple of days to find” as they dredged the river filled with “tires, car parts, a lawn mower, a mattress” and “a bunch of yellow barrels washed up on a sandbar,” he may never cultivate home roots that extend beyond the *topography of ruin and contamination* or economic routes that don’t end with unfinished bridges, landfill economics, and transborder smuggling (259). Crucially, if he fails to heed Elvin’s and Monroe’s insistence that ““what’s wrong with the world”” is that “[Indians and Whites] don’t have a sense of humour,”” he runs the risk of adopting Lum’s violent

terminal creed: “[W]hat’s wrong with the world ... Bullets ... There aren’t enough bullets” (86, 105, 199, 226).

As Carter Revard explains, “comedy is worth more than tragedy any time where survival is at stake,” and for Tecumseh, humor offers an opportunity for hope and healing, re-mem-bering and recovering (*Family Matters* 90). Although he too stands at the edge of the cliff “for a long time and look[s] down ... wonder[ing] how it would feel to plunge such a great distance and have nothing to break your fall,” he ultimately steps back from the ledge and attends the local play, explaining that “There are more people at the theatre than were at the funeral, but that doesn’t surprise me. Dying on stage can be funny, and most people would rather laugh than cry” (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 262, 265). Finding ways to laugh rather than cry is no easy task in the aftermath of loss and grief, tragedy and death; however, for Tecumseh it begins with a simple hope that Soldier might be alive, as no one has found his body, and, though he knows it’s unlikely, he hopes that his dog “survived the fall but was injured and lost his memory, and that one day he’ll remember and come home,” explaining that he “saw a movie where that exact thing happened, only it was a man and not a dog” (262). With this hope, Tecumseh signals a connection to Lum, whose inability to *remember* that his mother is dead not only prevents him from “coming home” or “homing in,” but it also undermines his pursuit of emotional and socioeconomic stability as he is unable to untangle the lines of *blood, land, and memory*.

If Tecumseh is to avoid a similar fate, he must continue his forensic, investigative journey and piece together the evidentiary traces that remain unresolved *after* Lum’s

death. Crucially, rather than interpreting Lum's running leap from the bridge as an *expected outcome* for Native men, or a "Fall" from grace and a reassertion of original sin, he must *remember* that creation is a collective, co-operative act moving out of chaos toward harmony, away from *topographies of ruin* toward utopian dreams, and thus, a tragic death does not signal *THE END*, but instead offers another opportunity to piece together the traces that remain. Furthermore, like Helen and Monroe, he must find ways to *re-member* the past, whether through quilting, *artwork*, or other creative acts, and resist the temptations of terminal creeds and other beliefs which lock him in the past, where *forgetting* is easier, less painful, yet ultimately more destructive than *memory*. Perhaps, too, he will remember the creation story told by the young Cherokee tourist Rebecca Neugin, and, instead of taking the tragic and *expected* plunge from the bridge, he will find ways to "dive down to the bottom of the ocean" filled with grief, tragedy, and broken promises, and, like the "duck," return with "mud for the dry land" (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 102).²⁴ He may even learn to see connections between Lum's death and the eagles in his grandmother's story, as she explains that "'eagles die in the air,'" and "'unless they're shot or poisoned, they always die as they're flying, and that if one falls near where you're standing, it's a blessing'" (43).

Remembering *and* re-membering the stories may seem like a small task, offering little hope and only token recovery from such deeply felt absences; however, as King explains "the truth about stories is that that's all we are" (*Truth about Stories* 2). And for Tecumseh, the "truth about stories" may also provide cautious optimism for the future of Native masculinity, as Lum's death concludes only part of the investigative journey,

while also renewing the cycle. In this way, the novel doesn't end on tragedy or chaos, nor in a harmonious, utopian dream, but with a focus on the delicate balance between life and death; as Tecumseh narrates the final lines:

The next day, the freesias begin to open up and their fragrance fills the shop. It's a nice smell, like perfume, and I can see why women like flowers. They stay in the front window for a long time, and each day, my mother picks off the blossoms that have died, and carefully trims and cuts the flowers back until there is nothing left but the stems (King, *Truth and Bright Water* 266).

By leaving us with an image of hope and heartache, death and rebirth, King emphasizes survivance, as Helen and Tecumseh live “beyond tragedy,” resisting the dominant culture's preference for “fabricated tales” of the Vanishing Indian—tales which overlook “realistic accounts of contemporary reservation life, urban poverty, or events of indigenous activism” (Allen, *Blood Narrative* 192)—and, instead, they re-assert a place for “flesh-and-blood” reserve Indians and Native workers, providing cautious optimism for Native people in the late twentieth century.

¹ One of the most important works for reimagining Native relationships with the environment is Shepard Krech III's, *The Ecological Indian*. In this work, Krech examines the image of Native people as noble stewards of the land, focusing on how this image has been constructed and maintained through time. Beginning in the Pleistocene period (nearly 11,000 years ago), Krech traces the historical relationships among Native peoples, place, and the nonhuman inhabitants, arguing that while Native people certainly have a long and complex history of inscribing cultural and religious significance to the natural world, the true picture is far from the Edenic past to which so many have ascribed. By focusing on issues of Native impacts on the environment such as the Hohokam water diversions and droughts, the (over)use of fire for clearing land (as well as for communication, improving travel routes, and as a weapon), and the overhunting/trapping of buffalo, deer, and beaver, Krech paints a convincing picture of Native people not as noble environmental stewards, but as “like all people, dynamic forces whose impact, subtle or not, cannot be assumed” (23). In this way, Krech argues that as a construction, this image of the “ecological Indian” fails to paint an accurate picture of Native people both before and after contact with Euro-Americans; and thus, the power of the image is not based on historical facts, but on a powerful historical narrative which defines Native

people as inseparable from the environments in which they live. In this regard, Krech explains, “the potency of this imagery as a source of ennobling sentiment over two and one-half centuries simply cannot be overstated” (17).

² As Teresa Gilbert explains: “Partly because King rejects the characterization of Natives as vanishing communities, he avoids the images that place them in the past. Instead, he often grounds his stories on contemporary popular culture, and focuses on the social realities of today’s Canadian urban centers and reserves” (“Thomas King’s Theory” 265).

³ Although this chapter recognizes the distinctions between US and Canadian policies regarding Native people, I avoid attempts to assess one side as “better” than the other in terms of its dealings with indigenous people, as both nations are fraught with a long history of allotment, assimilation, and termination. As Theodore Binnema explains “Comparative historians should avoid the temptation to find out which country (U.S. or Canada) had the better Indian policy, or the most positive relationship with its aboriginal population, but should instead seek to understand the reasons for the similarities and differences in aboriginal history, and aboriginal-nonaboriginal relations, and Indian policies in the two countries” (“The Case for Cross-National and Comparative History” 5).

⁴ The term “Medicine Line” was used by Native nations of the Northern Great Plains—such as the Lakota, Blackfeet, Anishinaabe, and Metis—referring to its power to prevent US troops from crossing into Canada. For an in-depth discussion on the mapping of the 49th parallel, see Tony Rees’s *Arc of the Medicine Line: Mapping the World’s Longest Undefended Border across the Western Plains*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007. See also Sterling Evans, ed., *The Borderlands of the American and Canadian Wests* (2006) for multiple, historical approaches to the interpretation of the 49th parallel. For further discussions of how other groups exploited or reimagined the Medicine Line see Renee G. Kasinsky’s “Fugitives from Injustice,” which provides historical context for how the Medicine Line was re-appropriated by Vietnam War draft dodgers and Stephen T. Moore’s “Refugees from Volstead,” which focuses on the way US tourists found escape (and legal alcohol) in Canada during the prohibition era (both in Evans). For more on the role of cross-border labor along the 49th parallel see essays by Evans, Evelyne Stitt Pickett, and Jason Patrick Bennett (all in Evans).

⁵ “Contact zones,” James Clifford argues, “can be extended to include cultural relations within the same state, region, or city—in the centers rather than the frontiers of nations and empires. The distances at issue here are more social than geographic. . . . Contact perspectives recognize that ‘natural’ social distances and segregations are historical/political products” (*Routes* 204).

⁶ Tatum uses the metaphor of a bridge to discuss the relationship between the spectral, Comanche past and the present in Cormac McCarthy’s *All the Pretty Horses* (1992): “In McCarthy’s extended simile about the Comanche ‘nation and ghost of nation,’ the swelling sight and sound of this emergent ‘dream of the past’ basically reconfigures the linear ‘faint trace’ of the old war trail as a kind of metaphorical *bridge*” (“Spectral Beauty” 125).

⁷ Making the etymological link between *forensic* and *forum* (Latin for the enclosed space around a home), Tatum explains that the recovery and reassemblage of “spectral” traces offers a way to “not only recover a just, beautiful world” but also to “handle material objects in such a way that a topography of homelessness created by contagious violence can be rewritten/restored ... as a ‘home’ (to translate ‘topography’ literally as writing on the land)” (“Spectral Beauty” 130).

⁸ The trope of reading “beyond the ending” is taken from Rachel Blau DuPlessis’s *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth Century Women’s Writers*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1985.

⁹ Speaking about the motivations of white, middle-class people to find spiritual rejuvenation in Native “tourism,” King writes, that such people were in search of “something middle-class America didn’t have” and “That something turned out to be poverty. Or at least poverty was what they saw. And as quickly as they arrived, most left. After all, living simply was one thing, being poor was quite another” (*Truth about Stories* 113).

¹⁰ Discussing the gendered implications of car travel for Native men, Deloria explains “Seeing technology in masculine terms suggested that Indian men—often feminized historically (and, more recently, in the terms of pacification)—were doubly or trebly unsuited to the automobile” (Deloria 146).

¹¹ I opt for the term *transborder*, as opposed to Chadwick Allen’s term *transindigenous*, because Allen’s term refers to comparative readings of indigenous art and literature that transcend borders—comparing, for instance, Maori literature from New Zealand to the literature of Native people in the United States. See Allen’s *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies* (2012).

¹² As Teresa Gilbert argues, “All through his fiction, Thomas King places his serious concerns within a comic framework, turning to humor not merely for amusement, but to correct widespread misconceptions about Native peoples and their cultures. ... He resorts to jesting in order to more effectively deliver his earnest political messages about racism, stereotyping, appropriation, sovereignty, environmental degradation, land claims, cross-cultural adoption, and many other issues that have a bearing on the present lives of Natives” (“Thomas King’s Theory” 264).

¹³ The threat of jail prompts Elvin to tell a *serious* joke, saying, “Canadian jails are worse than Mexican ones. ... Mexican jails are full of Mexicans ... but Canadian jails are full of Indians” (85).

¹⁴ For an in-depth discussion on the role that humor plays in King’s border-crossing novels, short stories, photography, and radio program (*Dead Dog Café*) see Arnold E. Davidson et al. *Border Crossings: Thomas King’s Cultural Inversions* (2003).

¹⁵ King’s adoption of Blackfeet lands as *home* relates to the “*blood/land/memory* complex,” which “like Momaday’s trope blood memory, names both the process and the product of the indigenous minority writer [such as King] situating him- or herself within a particular indigenous family’s or nation’s ‘racial memory’ of its relationship with specific lands” (Allen, *Blood* 16).

¹⁶ Much like the binary characters in Chicana lore—the pure, virginal La Virgen de Guadalupe and the corrupted “bad girl” La Malinche—the two female characters in *Snow White* are insufficient for exploring the wide spectrum between and within Native women.

¹⁷ In this way, King’s depiction of Helen as a hardworking, pragmatic laborer *and* a dreamer with social and economic aspirations that extend beyond the reserve, again draws inspiration from his own mother, who he “watched . . . make her way from doing hair in a converted garage to designing tools for the aerospace industry. It was a long, slow journey” (*Truth about Stories* 3). Living in a “man’s world,” in which “women were not welcome in the workforce,” King’s mother endured the sexism of the wage scale as “quietly as possible, each movement camouflaged against complaint” (*Truth about Stories* 3, 2, 3). Similarly, Helen quietly resists economic stagnation as well as federally and culturally imposed barriers that restrict socioeconomic mobility for her and Tecumseh.

¹⁸ Deborah Weigel describes the narrative qualities of Helen’s quilt, saying: “A quilt can be both a photo album and a diary that tells of a person’s life and experiences. It often comprises bits and pieces of clothes and other items that once belonged to family members and friends. When certain people see the *mélange* of fabrics from the past, memory is triggered and stories from bygone days are recalled” (118).

¹⁹ As Weigel explains: “The quilt reveals these tensions and the separation of the family, with the river dividing Elvin in *Truth* from his wife and son in *Bright Water*. As Helen struggles to move forward after her husband leaves her, the quilt develops not only into a bold expression of her frustrations and difficulties, but also of her aspirations and dreams. Helen’s quilt, which becomes interlaced with the story, takes on a narrative of its own” (Weigel 116).

²⁰ In a broad sense, federal Indian policies in Canada offer a similar pattern of allotment, assimilation, reorganization, relocation, termination, and “self-determination” to the more familiar laws (for US readers) passed in the United States, though two contemporary pieces of legislation provide insights into the problems faced by the transborder characters in the novel. First, during the same year that Momaday received the Pulitzer Prize for *House Made of Dawn*, Canada put forth its White Paper policies (1969), which never became “official,” but had essentially the same effect and intent as the termination laws in the United States. The White Papers were followed by Canadian Bill C-31 (1985), which amended the Indian Act (1876), and, on the surface, appeared to be a more racially and culturally sensitive approach to Canada’s federal Indian affairs. Specifically, CBC-31 gave unenrolled, unrecognized Native people, women in particular, the opportunity to become enrolled and recognized as Native. However, in practice, CBC-31 served as a cleverly disguised Termination Act, similar to the blood-quantum rules legislated in the United States, which, in Canada, are known as the “two-generation cut-off clause” (King, *Truth about Stories* 144). Just as it sounds, the “cut-off clause” strips Native people of their Native identity, if, in two successive generations, the parents intermarry and bear children with non-status Indians. According to John Borrows and Leroy Little Bear, two of Canada’s leading scholars, the current rates of inter-marriage between

status and non-status Native people will result in no status Indians in Canada within fifty to seventy-five years (in King, *Truth about Stories* 144).

²¹ A *real-life* controversy over museums and Native artwork in Canada reached a breaking point with “The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada’s First People’s” exhibit at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, which coincided with the 1988 Winter Olympics—held in Calgary. The Lubicon Lake Cree boycotted the exhibit on the grounds that the museum’s chief sponsor, Shell Oil, had begun drilling on land claimed by the Cree. For more on this issue, see Clifford, *Routes* (204–205).

²² The Indian Act (1876), which predates similar legislation in the United States, was passed as Canada’s first attempt to legislate First Nations people out of existence. As King explains, “the Indian Act . . . is a magical piece of legislation that twists and slides through time, transforming itself and the lives of native people at every turn. And sprinkled throughout the act, which . . . paternalistically defines who is an Indian and who is not, are amendments that can make Indians disappear in a twinkling” (*Truth about Stories* 132). In 1880, the Canadian government added an amendment to the Indian Act—the first of many “twists and slides”—that stripped federal recognition from any Indian who received a college degree; or as King explains “Get a degree and, poof, you’re no longer an Indian. Serve in the military and, abracadabra, you’re no longer an Indian. Become a clergyman or a lawyer and, presto, no more Indian” (*Truth about Stories* 132). For generations then, according to the Canadian government, there was no such thing as an “educated Indian,” allowing little room for Native people to assert their identity *and* to engage the capitalist marketplace on their own terms.

²³ In describing the impact that this history of laws and legal categorization have had on Native autonomy and Native communities, King writes:

So is the right of identity simply a privilege of power? Unlike most other ethnic groups, we [Native people] have two identities, a cultural identity and a legal identity, and the argument that I want to make is that we should be able to take both of them with us wherever we go, whatever we do, and with whomever we do it. For the reality of identity legislation has not simply been to erase Indians from the political map of North America, it has also had the unforgivable consequence of setting Native against Native, destroying our ability and desire to associate with each other. This has been the true tragedy, the creation of legal categories that have made us our own enemy. (*Truth about Stories* 149)

The privilege of power and the issue of cultural and legal identity are complicated further by the border, which, by its very nature, creates binaries, leaving little room for Blackfoot identity (or, for that matter, Lakota, Crow, Métis, Mandan, Hidatsa), to assert a viable place between or outside US and/or Canadian citizenship. For a humorous and politically significant commentary on the issues involved in asserting Native identity rather than national citizenship in the US/Canadian borderlands, see King’s short story “Borders.”

²⁴ Rebecca Neugin was a real-life participant in the Cherokee Trail of Tears during the 1830s. According to Arnold E. Davidson et al., “her most vivid memory of the trip involved her pet duck, an animal that the young girl apparently squeezed so tightly during the journey that the duck died” (*Border Crossings* 146).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: SEEING ENDINGS AS BEGINNINGS

As Thomas King notes, “One of the surprising things about Indians is that we’re still here. After some five hundred years of vigorous encouragement to assimilate and disappear, we’re still here” (*Truth about Stories* 128). Such is the case for Tecumseh, who survives “beyond the tragedy” of Lum’s death and, we hope, beyond the ending. We hope this too for characters in McNickle’s *Wind*, such as Antoine and Son Child, who survive as cross-cultural translators and are left to negotiate the relocation and termination periods that loom on their horizons, and for those in Revard’s poetry in which *blood memory*—a complex matrix of mixed-blood and mixed-class identity—survives in the red earth of Oklahoma and the Plains of Kansas. Such survivals in and of themselves may not offer much hope for the future of Native masculinity. However, to view them in King’s tongue-in-cheek terms, which can be folded into Deloria’s “Indians in unexpected places” trope, is to recognize that their continuance, endurance, and resistance are acts of Native survivance. They are not the vanishing Native men of James Fenimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales*, but instead they are survivors who have outlasted, resisted, and endured the threats of assimilation and terminal creeds, and perhaps have gained the agency to assert their voices in the present, reclaim the voices of the past, and change the course of the future.

In keeping with McNickle’s emphasis on “seeing endings as beginnings” in *Wind*, then, I point the questions I ask in the chapters to a broader, albeit brief, discussion of new directions and alternative paths that issues of class, work, and gender can bring to

the study of indigenous literature, and indigenous studies more broadly. For instance, can extending my readings of the novels and poetry *beyond* literature to *real-life* concerns provide a framework for understanding current economic and environmental issues on the Great Plains, such as those stemming from the oil boom in western North Dakota? Specifically, will the aftermath of the Bakken-boom, filled with fracking and slurry, bonanza strikes and seismic cultural and ecological shifts, leave more for the Native people it affects than did the oil-booms that made the Osage rich in the 1920s, but left many powerless and with less land and opportunity in the Dust Bowl and Great Depression of the 1930s?¹ Perhaps, by reading Revard's poems on the Osage oil boom and the resulting bust of the Dust Bowl and Great Depression we can gain insights into this and other questions faced by the Mandan, Arikara, and Hidatsa, whose land and livelihood is again under siege as a result of this recent oil strike.

Taken in another direction, will the boom on the Bakken Range, which has attracted many working-class laborers from across the country, ignite cross-cultural conflict as it did in the post-WWII era in which over one-third of the enrolled members of the Mandan, Arikara, and Hidatsa were displaced by the construction of the Garrison Dam on the Missouri River? McNickle was well aware of the issues surrounding the Garrison Dam and the plight of the Three Affiliated Tribes, and this knowledge inspired the plot-shift in *Wind* from tensions over land leases for cattle ranching to the threats posed by the dam that is "killing the water." Like the oil-boom, dams continue to be contentious markers of environmental degradation and economic opportunity on the Great Plains. For instance, a lesser known, yet even more relevant issue for readings of

Wind is that of Kerr Dam in western Montana, a dam project McNickle was perhaps even more invested in, given its location on the Flathead reservation of his youth. Today, the lease and operation rights on Kerr Dam, held by the Rocky Mountain Power Company (RMPC) since its construction in the mid-1930s, is set to expire and transfer to the Flathead reservation in 2015. When the RMPC's lease expires, enrolled members of the Flathead reservation will have the option to take over ownership and operation of the dam, further conflating the environmental and economic concerns in this and, by extension, other Native communities facing similar questions.² This contemporary struggle makes the environmental and economic implications of the dam in McNickle's novel as relevant for discussions of the present and future of Native masculinity and tribal economics as they are for understanding the promise and the problems of the past. However, the question remains whether Native ownership and operation of Kerr Dam will change the course of tribal economics and environmental justice on the Flathead reservation and serve as a model for other Native people facing similar questions.

Take, for instance, the recently proposed Lakota takeover of nearly 133,000 acres of National Park Service land near Pine Ridge, South Dakota, which, if successful, will make the impoverished Ogalala the managers of the country's first tribal national park. In a February 2013 article in *High Country News*, Brendan Borrell explains that the expected tourism dollars "represent one of the best economic development opportunities the tribe has seen in years" ("Can a Tribe Make Good" 10). The move would make the Lakota stewards of the "South Unit" in Badlands National Park, an area which the US Air Force "had used ... for bombing exercises," and which is "linked by an umbilical cord of

land” with the more popular and much more lucrative North Unit (10, 11). Currently surviving on an influx of funds from the North Unit—which boasts more fauna, bison in particular—the South Unit, nonetheless, holds the potential for economic recovery for a Native nation in desperate need of financial repair. The economic situation on the nearby Pine Ridge reservation is particularly dire, as it is a place with a startling unemployment rate that “usually hovers around 80 percent,” where “the best jobs” for those who can find them “are with the tribe or the Bureau of Indian Affairs, followed by Prairie Winds Casino, Taco John’s and Subway” and the average per capital annual income is less than 8,000 dollars (Borrell 11).

While the South Unit is home to geological wonders that “rival anything in the north,” the legacy of military testing remains, as the “land harbors unexploded ordinances [left behind by the US Airforce],” serving as implicit reminders of past forms of colonial aggression and the breaking of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, which was supposed to give the Lakota nation sovereignty over the Black Hills (Borrell 11). The key difference between the North and South Units, however, is the lack of infrastructure in the South—roads, bridges, trails—which had been promised to the Lakota when, in 1976, Dick Wilson—the corrupt tribal chairman—signed an agreement with the Park Service, which essentially “gave the land away” (Borrell 12). Like the unfinished bridge in *Truth and Bright Water*, the lack of infrastructure in the South Unit means that the *road* to economic recovery and ecological stewardship will not be without its potholes, roadblocks, and obstacles. And, with so many “spectral” images of the past—bombs and resulting craters, human bones and cultural artifacts, even the bones of the dinosaur

Titanotheres—the site is filled with haunting memories of colonial violence and pre-contact, Native sovereignty, offering a ghosted history of contact and conflict that mirrors many of the tensions in King’s novel.

Therefore, making the link between tourism and the economic promise of the bridge in King’s novel may provide a frame for reading the *real-life* obstacles faced by the Lakota. Specifically, while the proposed Lakota takeover of Badlands National Park forces us to consider the relationship between tourists and the toured upon, Franklin’s Happy Trails campground provides a lens for understanding how tourism—and other related acts of land and economic development—is more complicated than the simple visitors/victims binary, and instead, demonstrates how Native workers play on Native identity and the nostalgic past for their *own* purposes, perhaps providing a cautionary tale and an incomplete roadmap for the future of the Lakota bid for the South Unit.

By reading beyond the ending of the novels and poetry and into the contemporary struggles faced by Native communities and Native workers, we may also cycle back to the literature, finding new directions yet to be explored. For instance, while my work here focuses primarily on Native men and the Native working-class on the Great Plains, such an approach could easily be extended to the shifting roles of Native women in the capitalist marketplace, or to other regions, such as the Great Lakes or the Northwest Coast, or to the type of comparative, “transindigenous” work done by Chadwick Allen, who studies *blood, land, and memory* and other indigenous responses to settler colonialism in treaties, art, and literature in New Zealand and North America.

Moreover, the arguments in the chapters could be updated and applied to readings that focus on “relocated,” rather than “reservation” or “reserve” Indians, who engage the workforce as laborers or as professionals, such as James Welch’s *Indian Lawyer* or the college professor in Louis Owens’s *Bone Game*. Or, perhaps, the issue of class could be explored in relation to academia, as more Native and non-Native writers and scholars balance the tension between their working-class roots and scholarly routes. As Thomas King explains:

Middle-class Indians, such as myself, can, after all, afford the burden of looking Indian. There’s little danger that *we’ll* be stuffed into the trunk of a police cruiser and dropped off on the outskirts of Saskatoon. Not much chance that *we’ll* come before the courts and be incarcerated for a longer period of time than our non-Indian brethren. Hardly any risk that *our* children will be taken from us because we are unable to cope with the potentials of poverty. (*Truth about Stories* 59–60)

Here, King’s words put a new spin on age-old questions of Indian “authenticity,” which can be read through issues of class and “cultural capital,” or in terms of the mediums of Native self-representation, which now include graphic novels (see Arigon Starr’s *Super Indian*), experimental, genre-bending novels (see Stephen Graham Jones’s *Ledfeather* and *Growing Up Dead in Texas*), postmodern art (see Eric Gansworth’s mixed poetry/art collection *A Half-Life of Cardio-Pulmonary Function*), and films, such as the highly anticipated adaptation of Welch’s *Winter in the Blood*, starring familiar Native actors (Gary Farmer) and emerging Native stars (Chaske Spencer and Julia Jones). Exploding the term “authenticity” and rendering it (almost) obsolete, these artists and storytellers present exciting new directions for inquiry in Native literary and cultural studies, offering more than cautious optimism, but a bright and vibrant future in which more expectations can be challenged and more opportunities for re-reading canonical and understudied

literature can emerge. Taken together, such possible routes may prove crucial for constructing metaphorical bridges across *blood, land, and memory*, and for turning back to the literature or exploding it outward, as Native workers and writers continue to engage the present and re-member the past.

¹ As Harmon explains, “At their richest hour, hundreds of Osages could not retain full control of their own money. Instead of buying them freedom from overbearing outsiders, copious oil revenue produced an excuse to institutionalize U.S. domination. . . . Ironically, the sequence of events that made Osages rich began with a perilous loss of resources” (*Rich Indians* 173).

² For more discussion on the economic and environmental history of Kerr Dam see Clayton Matt’s “Tribal Management of Hydropower Facilities.” *Tribal Water Rights: Essays in Contemporary Law, Policy, and Economics*. Eds. John E. Thorson, Sarah Britton, and Bonnie G. Colby. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006. 213–30.

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