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“WHY WOULD THEY BURY HER WHEN SHE CAN STILL WALK AROUND” : EXAMINING AN INDIGENOUS GOTHIC

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“WHY WOULD THEY BURY HER WHEN SHE CAN STILL WALK AROUND” : EXAMINING AN INDIGENOUS GOTHIC

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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Abstract:

In “Why Would They Bury Her When She Can Still Walk Around” : Examining an Indigenous Gothic, Tatiana Rosillo adapts the genre conventions of the literary Gothic to examine Indigenous genre media and analyze what an Indigenous American Gothic typically entails in three central texts: Jeff Barnaby’s *Rhymes For Young Ghouls*, Cherie Dimaline’s *Empire of Wild*, and Stephen Graham Jones’ *Only Good Indians*. Rosillo proposes that these three texts reveal a spectrum of an Indigenous Gothic with specific commonalities. By focusing her analysis on common aspects of the Gothic — atmosphere, protagonists, and cultural anxieties — Rosillo seeks to complicate the traditional Euro-American Gothic and Horror conventions. Rosillo asserts that acknowledging the relationships and culturally-specific ways of knowing which appear in these texts brings much needed diversity to the Gothic tradition.

"Why Would They Bury Her When She Can Still Walk Around" : Examining an Indigenous Gothic

Not Dead, Not Buried: Introducing an Indigenous Gothic

The literary Gothic is a concept conceived in a Western European context; for the majority of its existence, the genre has been dominated by those aesthetics. Great castles or manors in Old World style loom, eccentric, excessive characters haunt their halls, and the very air in the genre is claustrophobically heavy with anxieties, sourced from within and without. This is the traditional Gothic, even when removed from Europe and brought over to North American literature. We see the same Western European Gothic atmosphere, the same eccentric characters, but even when the underlying anxieties here often stemming from the tensions that arise with the process of colonization in a "new" country, the American Gothic has been centered in the Euro-American settler-colonial viewpoint.

It is, however, possible to isolate aspects of the Gothic into a lens with which one can examine commonalities in diverse literature and other media. Here, I intend to use Gothic aesthetic conventions to examine Indigenous genre media and analyze what an Indigenous American Gothic typically entails—Gothic from the perspective of those who were colonized, rather than from the settler-colonial perspective. By laying out these conventions in Native American and First Nations literature and films that skirt, straddle, or land firmly in the horror and thriller genres, there is an opportunity to examine common aesthetics and themes that speak to the culturally-unique anxieties that assail those communities. This thesis will examine three common aspects of media that fall within the typical scope of the Gothic: atmosphere, protagonists-usually female, and cultural anxieties. The fledgling sub-genre of Indigenous Gothic complicates the traditional Euro-American conventions with a focus on the Indigenous

protagonists' relationships to the physical land and on their relationships within their communities. This thesis serves as an intervention into the discussion of Indigenous genre media through the lens of the Gothic to highlight culturally-specific ways of knowing as expressed in said genre media.

Prior to this analysis, I must acknowledge that the concept of Gothic literary convention is a Western import, and were I to attempt to assert that the term "Gothic" can be implied to have a universal meaning, I would be participating in academic erasure of non-Eurocentric story-telling traditions. It is not my intention to undermine Indigenous media by forcing it under a Eurocentric label, but rather to use the lens of the Gothic to examine recurring commonalities in the emerging narratives of genre media contemporarily produced by Indigenous creators. I would also like to caveat my use of language in this thesis. For the purpose of clarity, I will be using the term Indigenous to refer to both Native American and First Nations Canadian peoples henceforth. This is not to imply that media produced by people who identify as Indigenous is monolithic, but rather to examine similarities that emerge from these neighboring communities. The tribes associated with *Rhymes for Young Ghouls, Empire of Wild,* and *The Only Good Indians* are dispersed throughout the North American continent—Mi'gMaq, Métis, and Blackfeet respectively. While the modern tribal groups listed here are spread across the continent and all contain unique cultural identities, the intention of this thesis' investigation is to examine these three particular texts that contain significant similarities.

North American genre media—including action, fantasy, horror, thriller, and science fiction—has been dominated by the seemingly default perspective of the white upper middle-class populace. These genres are dominated by the desires and anxieties of the so-called "average American/Canadian." Many action and/or horror stories are predicated on the fragility of the suburban nuclear family; the fear and anxiety over something beyond the borders of the

settlement encroaching, invading, and/or threatening the embodiment of Americana. Turning to the lens of the Gothic, it is important to establish that here, too, there is anxiety, though this anxiety usually comes from a fear from within. Throughout most Gothic traditions, the source of the driving anxiety is one of fear of excess from within, though it is often triggered by an outside force.

Before fully delving into the theoretical work involved in adapting the Gothic into a lens rather than as a genre on a whole, it is important to examine the origins of the Gothic and touch a bit on its theoretical past. The origin of the Gothic lies within the early novel, particularly of the Romantic vein. Consequently, one of the central tenants of the Gothic during its inception was that of excess and transgression, as the genre lent itself to resisting the purported rationality of the Enlightenment. Fred Botting, one of the foremost voices in contemporary Gothic analysis, asserts that this transgression can be found in the Gothic's "overindulgence" in superstitions and other methods of blurring the limits of "reality" (Botting 6). Even within the more "fanciful" versions of the Gothic – such as romantic dramas taking place between aristocrats within the walls of great castles – the anxieties of navigating and playing on the contemporary cultural boundaries, both behaviorally and philosophically, are at the heart of the Gothic genre. Botting summarizes this by explaining the importance of dichotomies and boundaries within the genre:

> "Relations between real and fantastic, sacred and profane, supernatural and natural, past and present, civilised and barbaric, rational and fanciful, remain crucial to the Gothic dynamic of limit and transgression. The emotions most associated with Gothic fiction are similarly ambivalent: objects of terror and horror not only provoke repugnance, disgust and recoil, but also engage readers' interest, fascinating and attracting them. In the process, fear and its darkly obscure object is externalised and limits are reconstituted between inside and out" (Botting 9-10).

The centrality of these essential dualities within the Gothic form the basis of the "most important shift" in the Gothic (10). The inherit liminality involved in the exploration of these dualities is at the Gothic's core, and this liminality has survived as its, arguably, key defining feature. While Botting's *Gothic* as a whole is invaluable as a resource for analyzing the Gothic, I would like to draw attention to one particular chapter, "Homely Gothic." Building on the Freudian concept "*heimlich*[i]," Botting uses the dichotomy between the "homely" of rational understanding and the "unhomely" or "uncanny" within the Gothic. By tracking the shift from the Gothic's concern away from the excess and transgression of the of the aristocracy characteristic of early Gothic texts, one can note the rising focus towards more "domestic" concerns. The shift towards these comparatively more domestic concerns of the bourgeois rather than that of the aristocracy, allows for the dichotomy between "homely" and "unhomely" to take precedence. While this dynamic does lend itself to the more traditional interior versus exterior anxiety, it also makes space for one of the key aspects of the more modern dimensions of the Gothic. The "ghosts of family transgressions and guilty concealment" begin to permeate the Gothic with fears from within the "home" or the culture concerned (123). With this shift and the subsequent emergence of "strange figures threatening the home and society," the emergence of the American Gothic begins to come to fruition to meet its evolving British counterpart (123).

The American Gothic tradition began to emerge with the shift away from the older, more fantastical versions of the Gothic. The ambivalence which Botting discussed as essential to the Gothic transforms when in the scope of the American cultural landscape; rather than the more fantastical concerns of the European aristocracy, the American Gothic anxieties stem from "the constitution of American society itself" (Botting 117). As I have alluded to previously, and will expand with Bernice Murphy's Rural American Gothic, much of the anxiety found in the American Gothic can be traced back to the settler-colonial apparatus responsible for America's

existence When considering race within the context of the American Gothic, it is important to acknowledge the fraught colonial history that predates the American Gothic. In fact, captivity narratives such as that of Mary Rowlanson at as a kind of "proto-Gothic" form of literature (Weinauer 85). From these accounts to the actual inception of the American Gothic, once again placed firmly in the Romantic period of the region, the anxiety at play here persists in the abjection projected onto the Indigenous people of the American continents. With America's attempt at reconciling its colonial actions, there came the Euro-American settlers' "efforts to manage cultural anxiety through ... the 'othering of indigenous people becomes a staple of the American Gothic" (87). This Othering of Indigenous peoples allowed for a convenient method of rationalization of not only the physical invasion of the continent, but also the atrocities inflicted on the very people they designated as monstrous. The dichotomy between the "virtuous" settlers and the "savage" Indigenous peoples allowed the settlers to project their fears of the wilderness onto a human form.

In her book *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture: Backwoods Horror and Terror in the Wilderness*, Bernice Murphy establishes the Rural American Gothic in terms of this duality. While there is the fear of the wilderness and its outside influence, there is also this fear: "[W]hen you leave 'civilisation', you will inevitably become less civilized, often as a result of a process of adaptation and transformation that turns you into something partially or wholly monstrous" (Murphy 11). This inherently racist fear lies at the heart of much of the American Gothic when operating on the so-called fringe of "civilization" and ultimately posits that not only "adapting" to survive but also integrating into the Indigenous culture of the area is inherently monstrous. This settler-colonial paradigm completely ignores, when not outright condoning, the horrendous violence intrinsic to colonization. Murphy's work set out to further define the Gothic with American mainstream Gothic texts in mind; in doing so she solidified the notion of

specificity of the Gothic outside of its initial Western European definitions. Though she was by no means the first to explore the creation of an American Gothic, Murphy's specificity of the Rural American Gothic made room for the type of cultural nuance this thesis intends, looking at Indigenous American Gothic in that same rural space.

Before I begin outlining what I argue are the contours of an Indigenous Gothic, I would like to address a previous use of the term "Indigenous Gothic." In Ian Conrich's chapter in *Globalgothic,* "Maori Tales of the Unexpected: The New Zealand Television Series *Mataku* as Indigenous Gothic," Conrich utilizes the term "Indigenous Gothic" within the larger context of the collection's titular Globalgothic. The main conceit behind the Globalgothic posits that the "the *processes* of globalization [are] monstrous, spectral, cannibalistic" and globalization itself ultimately "becomes a gothic manifestation" (Byron 5). This centering of the Gothic in terms of globalization allows for a more post-colonial reading of Gothic literature produced by different cultures around the world. There are a few key distinctions between the "Indigenous Gothic" Conrich carved out in 2013 and the Indigenous Gothic I see taking shape now during the 2020s. While there are a few lighter discrepancies between our two interpretations of an Indigenous Gothic – namely the initial cultural differences between the scopes of our respective works to the media discussed to the almost ten year time difference – I believe it is important to focus on what I would qualify as the most important distinction. Conrich's Indigenous Gothic is centered within the larger context of the Globalgothic, and thusly his interpretation is focused on the emergence of a kind of "hybrid" Gothic. The Indigenous Gothic of Conrich's interpretation appears to be most concerned with the incorporation of "Indigenous perspectives and superstitions" into "more advanced horror traditions" (Conrich 36). This version of an Indigenous Gothic explores the "transcultural" influences Indigenous, in this case Maori, perspectives can have on the larger global phenomena of the Gothic (40). The scope of Conrich's exploration is far broader than the

intended focus of this thesis, and the thrust of our analyses seems to differ greatly. Rather than looking at the impacts Indigenous contribute to the larger mainstream Gothic canon, this thesis intends to use the Gothic as a lens.

In moving away from the notion that the Gothic must be limited to a particular canon, and therefore limiting it to a particular subset of story types and storytellers, it becomes possible to more accurately investigate the construction of stories by people of color. In the introduction to the essays collected in *Asian Gothic*, the collection's editor Andrew Hock Soon Ng laid down one of the foundational frameworks used here: "In other words, the Gothic functions as a method of inquiry into our socio-cultural conditions. Gothic monsters such as the vampire and the Frankenstein creature, for example, should not be read merely as nightmarish configurations of twisted fantasies, but important metaphors for understanding historically-specific socio-political crises" (Ng 2). By using Andrew Hock Soon Ng's theoretical approach to the Gothic, it is then possible to apply that theory to media outside of the strict British and American Gothic canons. Using the Gothic as a theoretical lens with which to investigate socio-political anxieties present in other socio-political situations allows for the outlining of new sides to media traditionally considered as straightforwardly horror. While Ng is working with the Asian Gothic, his framework outlines core aspects of the Gothic throughout its different cultural manifestations. This is particularly interesting in terms of Indigenous Gothic texts, as it allows for a spectrum to be drawn with these cultural threats in mind. On one end of the spectrum lies *Rhymes for Young Ghouls.* Jeff Barnaby's feature film debut presents the threat coming from outside the community. In its postcolonial world, the biggest issue affecting the reservation is the oppression delivered at the hands of corrupt and cruel government agents. Cherie Dimaline's *Empire of Wild* incorporates both postcolonial exterior threats from a land development company and a closer and comparatively interior threat from "alongside" the community, the werewolf-like Rogarou,

bridging the gap between the exterior threat from *Rhymes* and "interior" threat within Stephen Graham Jones's *The Only Good Indians*. Furthering the spectrum, Jones's novel's threat comes from alongside the community in a similar way to the Rogarou. While exterior threats based in post-colonial forces do still heavily influence the text, the supernatural Elk Head Woman dominates the novel and orchestrates many of the events of the plot. The spectrum of exteriority to interiority of threats adds dimensionality to the concept of an Indigenous Gothic.

The Too-Young Gunner

"The day I found my mother dead, I aged 5,000 years."

"I wonder how many ghosts wander around this hole. How the devil doesn't let them go. Or how many got out that were ruined all the same." --*Aila,* Rhymes for Young Ghouls (2014), *Jeff Barnaby.*

The 2014 Barnaby film *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* focuses on the story of Aila, a young Mi'gMaq girl living on the Red Crow Reservation who must deal with not only the looming threat of colonial violence, but also the familial ramifications of her mother's death. Aila is haunted by her father's absence and her mother's suicide. Consequently, she is forced to become an "adult" and an active participant in the illegal drug trade previously headed by her parents, now left to her and her uncle, Burner. Through this necessitated maturity, Aila takes on a role as "boss" and protector; she actively chooses to put herself between the people in her community and the colonizing force of both the St. Dymphna's residential school and the "truancy agents" based there. While *Rhymes* has been looked at in terms of the Gothic prior to this essay in Jennifer Henderson's "Residential School Gothic and Red Power: Genre Friction in *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*," the focus of this thesis is not centered as heavily on the "residential school an

anxious, theatrical practice of settler sovereignty" (Henderson, J. 45). By examining *Rhymes* through the lens of the Gothic, the film reveals important nuances that appear in the rural Indigenous Gothic. The film centers around Aila, and by extension her community, and her anxieties about the past, present, and future. Through observing the atmosphere, protagonist, and her relationships to the other characters, the contours of an Indigenous Gothic subgenre begin to take shape.

The atmosphere of *Rhymes* is close and cloudy. The cinematography revolves largely between two types of visuals that convey its version of a Gothic aesthetic: stark, sparse daylight and close, often crowded darkness. The scene in which Joseph drunkenly attempts to visit Aila's mother's grave showcases the first example of this aesthetic. The trees surrounding the abandoned graveyard, peppered mainly with crosses with no names, are bare and surrounded by fallen leaves. The camera lingers on several wide shots of the yard and Joseph's search for the grave. He and the viewer are lost in the surrounding sea of sparse trees and nondescript crosses, unable to find Anna's grave. When Aila leads Joseph to it and explains that the graves of people who commit suicide remain unmarked, the distraught Joseph cries, "Why would they bury her when she can still walk around?" (Barnaby). This hopeless exclamation signifies not only Joseph's difficulty confronting his wife's death, but also one of the core aspects of the film: the hauntings of Aila by the ghosts of Anna and her friend Tyler. These hauntings are highlighted by the other dominant aesthetic for shots throughout the film: the tight camera, the dim to dark lighting, and the glimpses of characters looming on the fringes of the frame. One scene that particularly exemplifies this aesthetic is the scene in which Aila encounters Anna and Tyler's ghosts in a dream. The dream takes place in the same graveyard, but during the night. The starkly bare trees seem to crowd in the darkness, a curious juxtaposition given what it looks like in the light. The crowding from these images emphasizes Aila's enclosure with her grief. The film

vacillates through these two dominant aesthetics over its runtime, creating a tension between the different aesthetics and modes of the film and never quite allowing for a moment of neutrality.

The general environment of the film also contributes to a rural Gothic aesthetic. The reservation is a bit rundown, and the film is set in fall. Every environmental aspect of the film seems to be approaching either obsolescence or decay. Again, the fall leaves and sparse trees dominate the film when shot outside; indoor spaces are somewhat dated and cluttered, even in places which signify safety to Aila, such as the home of Aila's adoptive grandmother, Ceres. Ceres' home is softly lit, but full of crowded walls and counters, obviously lived in and loved but inhabited by someone without the energy to devote to constant control. Aila's home has a measure of this crowding, though it is worth noting that the glimpses within the house are few and even those are shown either in the midst or aftermath of a densely-populated party. The house littered with inebriants and empty bottles further establishes this area as falling into the overcrowded aesthetic. Aila's contribution to her surroundings is the art she creates throughout the film, from spray-painted murals to sketches to brush paintings on the side of a boat. Through artistic creation, which she associates with her mother, Aila is able to attempt some control over her surroundings, however fleeting it may be. The environment full of people and things taking up room in the frame allows the viewer and Aila to better relate to the surroundings. While the crush can be overwhelming, it is a vast improvement and juxtaposition to the environment within the residential school, which is clinical and bare compared to the locations on the reservation proper. This juxtaposition serves to further heighten inherent anxiety in Aila's infiltration of St. Dymphna's; the stark emptiness of the school striking the viewer as alien and dangerous. This hostile atmosphere adds tension to the teenagers' mission to retrieve money stolen by Hopper, but comes at the cost of exposure of their group and potential freedom. Aila's response to this menacing emptiness is to alter it. Once locked in a dark cell at the school, Aila improvises a

loose stone as chalk and draws ghostly figures representing the disappeared Indigenous children kept and killed at the school on its walls. By taking the time to draw these figures in the midst of their heist, Aila is asserting her agency and compassion in this refusal to be ignored.

The various traumas of Aila's life have shaped Aila into a protective, hypercompetent role. During the opening scenes of the film, Aila is dealt three serious psychological traumas that all contribute to the hardened teenager revealed to the audience after the time skip: her friend Tyler, a young boy instituted at the St. Dymphna's residential school, is killed in a drunk driving accident involving her intoxicated mother who has put a quite young Aila behind the wheel; her mother, horrified at this accident and likely overwhelmed by her own traumas, commits suicide on the side of their home; and her father falsely confesses to the accident and is imprisoned. In Aila's voiceover narration, she conveys, "The day I found my mother dead, I aged 5,000 years." This moment of Aila's rounding the porch to discover her mother's hanging body is the catalyst for Aila's hardened exterior throughout the film. Aila takes on a leadership role in her little gang, which consists of her Uncle Burner and young men; she makes decisions about "runs" for their illicit drugs and even does business with their customers. Her willingness to stand strong in response to intimidation from the truancy agents and to demonstrate firmness when executing their robbery show the strength Aila has had to cultivate to survive without much adult protection in her life. While Aila is a tough character who stands firm in her convictions and practicality, she is not restricted to the role of a one-dimensional "strong female character." Aila has a softer side, which she shows to her adoptive grandmother, Ceres, and another young friend named Jujijj. Focussing first on her friendship with Jujijj, Aila finds ways to care for the boy and attempts to protect him. While this might be a result from her guilt over the fate of her childhood friend Tyler, it seems more likely that this care is a natural, nurturing side of her personality. Prior to Tyler's death, Aila provided him a drawing "for protection" of an Indigenous woman

named Gunner on a horse; “She likes to fight, dead people especially” (Barnaby). This moment, even with a very young and comparatively more innocent Aila, shows her willingness to protect people she perceives as belonging to her community. The caring side of Aila becomes even more apparent when examining the relationship between Aila and her adoptive grandmother, Ceres.

Aila has a refuge in which to let her guard down with Ceres. The hardened persona she adopts in her other interactions is dropped in favor of a young woman caring for her elderly grandmother. Even in her softer interactions with others, like Jujijj and even her father, Aila is still in the position of strength and guidance. She is in control of the governing knowledge of those situations. With Ceres, she is allowed to be young; Aila learns from Ceres, and Ceres, despite her age and apparent illness, has the power in their relationship. Ceres herself, who only speaks in Mi'kmawi'simk, is responsible for growing the marijuana on the reservation and is complicit in its distribution, but she does care about the potential harm that could come to Aila in the enterprise. In the one interaction the audience sees between Aila and Ceres, Ceres settles Aila down to give her a warning in the form of a story about an eternally hungry wolf. This wolf, so consumed by hunger, ate Mi’gMaq children and eventually consumed itself. Ceres’ grim tale is an obvious caution to Aila to remain safely away from the clutches of the residential school, of which Ceres herself was once captive. Ceres also seems to be a connection to Aila’s late mother, as the story she passes down seems to have influenced some of the drawings in Anna's sketchbook. The refuge and guidance Ceres offered Aila is yanked away just when Aila believes she will be able to escape the reservation, as Aila finds Ceres’ body after her apparently being murdered by the truancy agents. With her guidance gone, Aila finds herself adrift before the final confrontation with Hopper. This vulnerability is not helped by the unsteady state of Aila’s other relationships with the adults in her life.

Another facet of the Gothic that appears in *Rhymes*–and that we will see momentarily in *Empire*—is the breakdown within relationships, particularly the perceived "failure" of male counterparts in those relationships. For Aila, the lack of support and protection she receives from her parents leads her to take on the role of caretaker and protector; her two remaining parental figures after her mother's death, her father, Joseph, and Burner, fail to protect Aila or support her in most ways. Burner, Aila's uncle, becomes her guardian with the death of her mother and the subsequent jailing of her father. Rather than living up to the expectations of caretaking, it appears that Burner simply enlisted—or at least freely allowed—Aila into the illegal drug operation previously run by only the adults of her family. He does not have any idea of how to really raise Aila, and his brother's frustration with this passivity leads to tension between the pair. Her father, on the other hand, has been largely absent from her life since his wife's suicide and his imprisonment. Though violence is a deeply ingrained habit for Joseph, this does not affect his relationship with Aila; the breakdown of their relationship lies in his failure to understand and accept what Aila's life has become in his absence. He longs to be a good father to her, but does not understand that she has grown into an exceedingly capable teenager rather than a "little girl." During a moment of honest vulnerability between the two, Joseph asserts: "All's you needed to do was ask and I would've done anything you needed me to." To which Aila responds: "I did need you dad, just not the way either of us wanted." Joseph himself is the character who needs rescuing during the climax of the film, and in the end, falls into his old pattern of accepting the blame and punishment for a crime that was not his own—here the death of Hopper.

The relationships between characters in *Rhymes* does not only extend to the living, but also stretches to encompass the dead. While the supernatural elements of this film intertwine with the knowledge base of the protagonist, they do not constitute an outside threat. Aila dreams

of her mother rising from the ground. Aila, while scared by the image of her mother's bloodless, dirt covered hand rising from the ground, does not run in the face of this dream. She additionally sees apparitions of both her mother and Tyler. These shots, as opposed to the dreams and memories that Aila experiences, are composed in the corners of the frame, partially obscuring the ghostly figures while centering Aila. The dreams and memories that Aila experiences are, however, shot with more straightforward composition. The film appears to leave whether or not these experiences actually occurred within the film's reality or were simply Aila's coping mechanisms for the audience to decide, ending with Aila's vision of the bodies of the residential school victims. This dreamy vision takes place in a forest with ethereal lighting leading to the large dark pit. In this dream, Aila is guided by Tyler to confront the horror of the apparently incalculable death toll of St. Dymphna's. The information shared with her by Tyler in this moment merely affirms Aila's need to escape and enact a form of revenge on the system. As such, the supernatural forces in this film, whether only a product of the film's potentially unreliable narration, merely act as support and enlightenment for Aila.

There is no creature to chase Aila through the woods, and the ghosts she encounters are of her loved ones. The real threat of the film lies in the threat and effect of colonialism. Within the first thirty minutes of the film, the embodiment of the ongoing—or at least as contemporary to the 1970s—settler-colonial power is Hopper the Indian agent. The first scene after the initial time skip of the film is of a group beating of the presumably Mi'gMaq male patrons of the local exotic-dancing locale by a group of law enforcement. The camera in the scene cleanly and slowly pans past several men without allowing the viewer to focus too hard on the proceedings. To the tune of the Black Keys' "Sinister Kid," the audience is inundated with police brutality, only for the first faces that come into clear detail belong to Burner and Hopper. This places the truancy agents as the forefront threat in the film. Throughout the first act of the film, Hopper and

his stooges beat, intimidate, and steal from Aila and her people; all of these actions set the plot rolling, but the crux of these scenes is the implicit legal power Hopper holds over the people of the reservation, particularly the teenagers. The threat of the "truancy tax," which functions more as a bribe to Hopper than any legal fee, keeps the teenagers at the constant edge of being pulled to the terrible residential school. The teenagers are not the only characters subject to Hopper's, and by extension the colonizing force of Canada's, authority, as evidenced by Joseph and Hopper's clash over being on the lake. Exercising a technicality in the apparent fishing law, Hopper punishes Joseph for daring to take a little dinghy out during the off season by forcibly remanding him back into custody. The actions of the purported "justice" system in the film exposes the possible, and likely probable, extent of the damage wrought by colonialism on Indigenous communities.

Rhymes for Young Ghouls functionally establishes key points in the construction of an Indigenous Gothic. The dark atmospheric elements of the film, along with the focus on relationships and the inclusion of Indigenous epistemologies, intervenes in mainstream Gothic storytelling to create a more inclusive subgenre. By beginning with *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, the initial contours of the Indigenous Gothic become clearer.

Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolfsegner?

"*For girls, he was the creature who kept you off the road or made you walk in packs. The old women never said, 'Don't go into town, it is not safe for us there. We go missing. We are hurt.' Instead they leaned in and whispered a warning: 'I wouldn't go out on the road tonight. Someone saw the Rogarou just this Wednesday, leaning against the stop sign, sharpening his claws with the jawbone of a child.'*

For boys, he was the worst thing you could ever be. 'You remember to ask first and follow her lead. You don't want to turn into Rogarou. You'll wake up with blood in your teeth, not knowing and no way to know what you've done.' (Dimaline, *Empire of Wild* p. 4)."

Cherie Dimaline's *Empire of Wild* allows for a slightly different manifestation of the Gothic than that of *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*. While the two share commonalities—a female protagonist, rural settings, complicated and antagonistic relationships with a neo-colonial character—each story has its own approach to genre fiction. Where *Rhymes* lies more in the realm of action thriller with a Gothic flair, courtesy of Barnaby's usual horror inclinations seen in his short *The Colony* (2007) and his second feature film *Blood Quantum* (2019), *Empire of Wild* falls solidly within the horror genre. Using the Gothic lens to examine *Empire* reveals the interventions Indigenous perspectives can make within the large genre of Gothic horror itself. The threat in *Empire* is two-fold, though both subvert the urban/rural spatial dichotomy at the heart of horror and Gothic tropes by centering a different relationship to place in the narrative. Arcand is not a vacation spot for tourists itching to try their hands at "roughing it" or in pursuit of solitude, nor is it a suburb that needs to be protected from alien forces. Joan is not the typical Gothic heroine forced to observe the happenings of the novel from the sidelines, but an active participant in her own story. The anxieties and threats in *Empire* are correspondingly complex: the Rogarou is a creature of borders, an enforcer of communal boundaries, whereas the Wolfsegner is an agent of contemporary colonialism. By privileging the perspective of a Métis woman, Dimaline's novel works to decolonize the horror genre, and through these efforts contributes to a new form of the Gothic, traditional knowledge belonging to and enacted by Métis women gains a foothold against the encroachments of colonization and the consequences of those encroachments. The resolution to the novel is an Indigenous one.

After an argument over an offer to sell her inherited land, Joan Beausoliel's husband Victor walked away from their home and vanished. Approximately a year later, Joan encounters Reverend Wolff, a traveling minister with her husband's face, but seemingly no memory of her; after her encounter with this Victor doppelganger and the organizer behind the traveling Christian ministry, the intimidating Mr. Thomas Heiser, Joan's search for her husband becomes nearly desperate. After the violent murder of her grandmother, Joan receives guidance from her grandmother's old friend, another Métis elder named Ajean. Together with the help of Joan's adolescent nephew, Zeus, Joan tracks down the Rogarou who killed her grandmother and frees Victor from Heiser's thrall. The plot of this contemporary novel fits within the genre conventions of horror literature, while still conveying the Indigenous American Gothic developed previously.

Beginning with the atmospheric aspect of the novel, there are some parallels with the environment within which *Rhymes* is set; while they are set in two different areas in Canada, the setting is still rural and somewhat isolated. While *Rhymes* takes place in only one geographical location, the fictional Red Crow Reservation, *Empire of Wild* is given the room to explore a few locations. The majority of the significant moments in the novel take place in liminal areas: the rural Métis community of Arcand and the areas where the traveling Christian ministry tent run by the novel's antagonist, Thomas Heiser. Firstly, the town of Arcand functions in tandem with the main character, Joan Beausoliel, to set *Empire of Wild* apart in the horror formula. Described in the prologue as "a church, a school, a convenience store, a bootlegger and a crowd of stooped houses leaning like old men," Arcand sets the stage for Dimaline's adjustment to the genre (1). This is not a suburb full of nuclear families, nor is it characterized as the white-dominated small town Americana popular media has become inundated with. Arcand is explicitly a town on the fringes, set apart from the neighboring lakeside vacation homes made up of "million-dollar cottages," "boathouses[,] and painted gazebos" (2). The prologue firmly establishes the

difference between these two communities and the relationship between them; rather than the small town and wilderness encroaching on the wealthy lakeside homes, it is the wealthy who are encroaching on the Métis community of Arcand. Over the years since the Métis community's relocation to the area of the Georgian Bay, industrial and real estate development pushed the community farther and farther away from the shoreline. Coupled with the usual economic pressure of a rural town—job scarcity and isolation—there is a concerted effort from land developers to further encroach on the Arcand inhabitants' land; taking advantage of the struggling economy of Arcand, the developers relentlessly push offers on the lands that the traditional community lands. This, in turn, puts further stress on the already stressed people of the community, and, in the novel, one family in particular is subject to this pressure.

Joan is a mature, adult protagonist. The goal she sets out to achieve has a more adult set of stakes than in either Aila or Denorah's stories. While Joan works a stereotypically masculine job, roofing, it is not treated as unusual in any way; the company is, in fact, a family business headed up by her mother. Joan, prior to the events of the novel, had lived an average life with a balance of good and bad choices, but Joan's defining characteristics are her love and tenacity when defending that love. Her relationships, even those that are strained with realistic nuances, are of loving and largely supportive bonds. When her family is initially resistant to her romantic relationship with Victor, the two of them persist in their efforts to win their, particularly Joan's Mere's, approval and acceptance into the Beausoliel family. When Victor goes missing, Joan painstakingly searches for him and refuses to believe that he would abandon her with no warning. The novel picks up this search when "eleven months and six days" have passed since Victor's disappearance, and the members of Joan's family are beginning to urge her to move on (Dimaline 6). While the core of the novel is in "Joan's relation to herself and indigeneity" rather than solely focusing on the plot, as Celiese Lypka's "Métis Survivance: Land, Love, and Futures

in Cherie Dimaline's Dystopian Novels" asserts, this connection to her indigeneity seems to only further cement and empower Joan's conviction (Lypka 33). This determination to find her husband and avenge the death of her grandmother, Angelique, drives the plot of the novel and is at the core of her character. Her tenacity and love for the people in her life are what keep Joan from giving up and writing the fate of her grandmother as just an animal attack and her husband's disappearance as abandonment. Her relationships are what give her this strength and call back to another facet of the Indigenous Gothic.

The centrality of relationships and the reciprocity within relationships is another important aspect of the Indigenous Gothic. While this was touched upon in *Rhymes for Young Ghouls,* in her novel, Dimaline has more room to fully develop this concept. The established community relationships in Archand, particularly Joan's, are strong, but still strained. Through Angelique's death and the subsequent quest to find the Rogarou responsible, Joan strengthens her bonds with the members of her community who are willing to support her. Her relationships with her immediate family are pulled thin, as they believe that Joan is merely reacting poorly to the stress she is under. This is contrasted with her relationships with Ajean and Zeus, which function as reciprocal support. Ajean mentor's Joan and teaches her ways to counteract and contain the Rogarou, while Zeus, her little cousin, attempts to care for Joan as best he can as her "helper." Despite this, Joan's other familial relationships are not the only ones under siege.

This creates tension between the people of Arcand's traditional values and the material economic circumstances. Joan's own brothers, who work alongside Joan for their family construction business, face the economic pressure to work for mines miles away. The unnamed mining company, along with other land development projects in the area, poses a direct threat to the beliefs of the local community; Angelique, the grandmother and family matriarch, reacts so violently to the suggestion that one brother work for the company that "steal[s] from us,

ignore[s] our rights and mess[es] up the land" that she nearly cuts off his traditional braid (18). Another symptom of this economic pressure is the inciting incident of the novel: Joan and Victor's fight. Victor, while also Métis, is not from Arcand and does not feel the same familial tie to the land that his and Joan's home occupies. When he receives an offer on the land from the "JT Development Corp," he strongly urges Joan to consider selling the land (72). This inciting incident sets forth the two threats from the novel: the Rogarou and the Wolfsegner. These two "monsters" work in tandem to threaten the safety of not only the characters of the novel, but also the traditional ways still being kept alive in Arcand. When Joan's husband "betrays" her by attempting to convince her to sell her land, he falls directly into the trap of these two monsters. Rogarou acts as both protector and threat to the people of Arcand. He appears as a huge hybrid of man and wolf to punish, by violence or infection, people who violate the balance of the community in various ways. The Wolfsegner, the corporate consultant Thomas Heiser, works in service to the furthering of modern-day colonialism through land development companies. When Victor falls into the Rogarou's grasp and becomes a Rogarou himself, he becomes a tool of not only the ancient Rogarous, but also, through this connection with the Rogarous, a tool of Heiser. These two threats and their near indistinguishability are the source of the anxiety of this novel. Both their effects and threats contribute to the same events and ends throughout the novel. The murder of Joan's Mere, an outspoken member of the Arcand community, has two effects: leaving Joan vulnerable without the guidance of her grandmother and robbing the community of a protector against Heiser's projects. Her death both slakes the hunger of the Rogarou and makes it easier for Heiser to further encroach on the land of the Arcand community. The entanglement of Heiser and the Rogarou nods to the liminal nature of *Empire of Wild*; the "monster" is not easily discernible, and the actions of the two threats are so muddled that their effects are basically synonymous.

Heiser, the more obvious of the two threats, exudes danger from the moment of Joan's first encounter with him. Joan's initial description lingers on the material parts that make up Heiser's image: a quality suit, a pair of brogues, matching yellow printed tie and pocket square, "gold watch" (Dimaline 33). Following the description of his sophisticated attire, Joan focuses on two main images of his physical attributes: his "gold hue" eyes and "dark hair dense on his too-white skin." These images all culminate into an image of a wealthy, white businessman in a position of power. He is in control of a traveling "Christian revival" tent touring around both Canadian and the United States. As a "consultant," he uses his traveling revival to convert the people in rural areas, almost exclusively Native Americans, to soften them into selling their land and land rights to his clients, with a brainwashed Victor in tow (46). As a Wolfsegner, an old Bavarian term for men with the ability to control wolves, Heiser is able to control multiple Rogarous. He uses this skill to not only control Victor, but an additional Rogarou, Roe, who he uses as a henchman. Through his control of Victor, however, Heiser is able to exert influence over the revival and the Métis people they encounter. His ability to control Rogarou allows him to muddle and conceal Victor's memories of himself, creating a puppet persona known as Reverend Wolff. Through the reverend, he uses Christian ideology to denounce the traditional ways of Indigenous people and urges them to turn themselves and their lands over to God (117-125). He is also willing to allow Victor to hunt in his Rogarou form and murder people who Heiser deems disposable, including Mere and Joan. Heiser, the representation of colonialism, is willing to use any method possible to further encroach on the land of Indigenous communities, including using one of their own against them, just as settler-colonialism has always co-opted Indigenous people to further the colonization of their own people.

The Rogarou has a complex function in this text. He is being controlled for the majority of the novel, but his nature as a traditional creature is also demonstrated in the stories within the

text. The prologue holds a particularly good description of the Rogarou as a supernatural entity: “He was a dog, a man, a wolf. He was clothed, he was naked in his fur, he wore moccasins to jig. He was whatever made you shiver but he was always there, standing by the road, whistling to the stars so that they pulsed bright in the navy sky, as close and as distant as ancestors” (Dimaline 4). This passage firmly establishes the Rogarou as a legend, but also somewhat concretely. As a creature who could appear “in both the occupied places and those left to grow wild,” the Rogarou acts as a liminal figure who inhabits a variety of roles in relationship to the community. When Joan was thirteen, she had an encounter with a Rogarou on her way to her cousin’s home. In this instance, the Rogarou acted as a protective warning. Joan put on her guard by the appearance of what at first appeared to be a “large black short-haired dog” before revealing its more monstrous appearance, and as a result of her preparations, avoided being attacked and possibly kidnapped by a lone driver (77-78). The Rogarou, in addition to his role as the violent enforcer of community balance, acts as a seductive trickster in many ways. Within Victor’s mind-space, represented by the woods surrounding his and Joan’s home, he finds himself almost hypnotized by the Rogarou and its form when caught by it. Juxtaposed to the Wolfsegder’s threat of foreign encroachment, the Rogarou is a threat from within and could emerge from any member of the community. This innate threat of the consequences of upsetting the balance has “no exceptions,” as evidenced by his possession of Joan’s twelve-year-old cousin Zeus (294). The figure in this novel acts as a reminder that not every ill comes from the outside.

Both of these threats are posed against Joan and the town of Arcand. Both pit themselves against Métis traditions and are brought down by them. With the guidance of the “ancient” relative Ajean, Joan uses traditional medicine to break the hold Heiser and the Rogarou hold over her husband. It is no accident that the knowledge handed down by and acted upon by women is what bests the Rogarou and the Wolfsegner. By enacting traditional ways of knowing, Joan

carves out a path from which to resist colonial encroachments and their ramifications within communities. Heiser's plan was to capitalize off of further taking advantage of Indigenous people; Victor's betrayal and subsequent possession by Rogarou occurs because of an attempted encroachment of modern colonialism. Through *Empire of Wild,* Cherie Dimaline allows her heroine to stand against these encroachments, one increment at a time.

A New Final(s) Girl[ii]

"*An elk mother, cornered, will slash with her hooves and tear with her mouth and even offer the hope of her own hamstrings, and if none of that works, she'll rise again years and years later, because it's never over, it's always just beginning again."* (Stephen Graham Jones, *The Only Good Indians.*)

Stephen Graham Jones' *The Only Good Indians* uses the established Indigenous Gothic conventions and adds a new dimension to the protagonist/antagonist relationship with Elk Head Woman as its primary threat. *The Only Good Indians* marks the opposite end on the gradient of the Indigenous Gothic from *Rhymes for Young Ghouls.* Where the threat in *Rhymes* is almost entirely external and post-colonial in nature, the driving threat in *The Only Good Indians* comes from alongside the community. Unlike *Empire of Wild*, which contains both external and comparatively internal threats to the community and characters, the impact of post-coloniality in *The Only Good Indians* is restricted largely to the fringes of the narrative. The threat, Elk Head Woman, has to contend with the post-colonial world the characters live in, and she must learn how to use it to her advantage. By changing the orientation of the threat, one might assume that *The Only Good Indians* functions in a similar way to most mainstream Gothic or horror media. While it does share similarities to these genres—naturally, given Stephen Graham Jones'[iii]

mastery of horror—this novel falls within the Indigenous Gothic with its use of atmosphere, relationships, and threat with a bit of a twist.

The atmosphere and environment in *The Only Good Indians* fall within the established parameters of Indigenous Gothic, while also allowing for a larger range of settings with a myriad of valances. The novel falls into roughly four sections with four sets of settings, conflicts, and characters, while all still being connected by the ultimate thread of Elk Head Woman and the underlying trauma of the elk massacre. As such, there are arguably four overwhelming atmospheres, and each adds an additional layer to the overall effect of the collective whole. Louis Clark and Ricky Boss Ribs both begin their sections outside their reservation, but are still within the realm of "rural" areas. Admittedly, the contexts for each of their settings are different without sacrificing the isolation that rurality implies. Boss Ribs, despite being in a more physically crowded space, is still in a relatively rural setting of the roadside bar. The majority of his section takes place on the edges of a parking lot, with his murder being close enough to the fringe to afford him the visual of the large elk herd witnessing his death. Clark's story begins in a rental home that, while remote, is relatively close to his work and the surrounding small town implied by a post office staff of approximately seven. Clark's further self-isolation, due to his Elk Head Woman induced paranoia, culminates in his trek through the woods in an attempt to reach the Blackfeet reservation.

The second half of the novel is set entirely on the reservation, which is both the home of the main characters and also the origin of the story's inciting transgression. As both home and origin of the threat, the reservation offers a unique twist on the traditional Gothic atmosphere in which the home—house, manor, castle, etc.—becomes unwholesome, the presence of Elk Head Woman does the same to the entire reservation. Jones, and subsequently Elk Head Woman, use the rural settings to create an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. For Clark, Elk Head Woman

literally invades his home in the form of spectral mind-games and ostensibly in physical forms through first Shaney and eventually Clark's unborn child. This invasion functions not unlike a genre-typical fear of external forces invading the home and nuclear family structure. With the other central characters, the isolated countryside is used to create a sense of unease and uncertainty again; Elk Head Woman uses nature in order to both menace and camouflage. For Cassidy Sees Elk and Gabriel and Denorah Cross Guns, she constantly shifts in and out of the periphery. This coupled with the characteristic rural isolation allows *The Only Good Indians*' atmosphere to fit within the parameters of the Gothic.

A major difference between this novel and the previous two pieces of media discussed here are the "protagonists" of the story. Both *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* and *Empire of Wild* were led by a single female protagonist, with various male and female characters alike contributing to the overall story. Here in *The Only Good Indians*, Jones' central characters are largely men, with the exception of Denorah and Elk Head Woman. Setting those two aside for the moment, it is important to examine the shift that this male-centric story structure brings to the Indigenous Gothic dynamic for the majority of the novel. The male characters—Ricky Boss Ribs, Lewis Clark, Cassidy Sees Elk, and Gabriel Cross Guns—are all the unknowing arbiters of their own fates, both in terms of the reason for their "hauntings" by Elk Head Woman and the actual events that lead to their deaths. They propel the inciting action of the novel, the elk massacre at Duck Lake. This is a huge shift in the previously established Indigenous Gothic as the previous protagonists, while complex and capable of wrong-doing, were largely portrayed and perceived as marginalized characters pitted against colonial-systemic threats. The framing of the elk massacre is a stark comparison, despite Sees Elk and Cross Guns' attempts to downplay its importance. In Clark's section of the novel, "The House that Ran Red," Clark's conversation with Cross Guns ironically portrays the event from an elk's perspective: "[The site of the elk

massacre is] haunted, man, didn't you know? Elk don't go there anymore, even. I bet they even tell stories around elk campfires, right?... The four boogeymen–the four *butchers* of Duck Lake" (Jones 27). While said in jest, this exchange perfectly sets out the dynamic between our protagonists and antagonist. Though each man feels varying levels of guilt or unease about the incident, they all participated in the event; as a result, the protagonist to antagonist relationship changes from revenge against wrongdoing to wrongdoers receiving, arguably excessive, comeuppance. The reader, while ultimately siding with the men, can at least understand—and perhaps empathize with—the reasons behind Elk Head Woman's quest for revenge. Keeping this shift in mind, that Elk Head Woman largely manipulates events to orchestrate their deaths rather than outright killing these four men is juxtaposed by the actions she takes towards those incidentally caught in the crossfire. This dichotomy will be later examined in closer conjunction with Elk Head Woman as an antagonist, so let us return our attention to the final protagonist of the novel.

Denorah Cross Guns is the final protagonist, with the last sections of the novel dedicated to the conflict and eventual resolution between her and Elk Head Woman. Denorah's section of the novel follows the pattern of Indigenous Gothic previously established. She is the innocent protagonist under threat, and her characterization allows her to fill a similar niche as Joan and Aila. Denorah, both a "Finals Girl" because of her success at basketball and the Final Girl of the novel in the nomenclature of horror films, the last woman standing, is allowed to be a flawed teenager (Jones 173). While she does necessarily possess the maturity of the female protagonists previously mentioned, she is driven and dedicated in a similar way with admittedly lower stakes towards the beginnings of her introduction into the narrative. She is a normal teenager worried about grades and basketball. Her relationships with her parents are complicated, but strong. Her relationships with her fathers, biological and by-marriage, are central to her position in the novel.

Her strained relationship with her biological father gives more depth to both of their characters, and that she is Gabriel Cross Guns' daughter is the entire reason behind her inclusion in Elk Head Woman's scope of vengeance. Being "his calf" makes Denorah the target for Elk Head Woman's retribution as payment for the calf she lost in the elk massacre (Jones 273). This familial relationship also comes through to save Denorah, in a way. One of the impacts Cross Guns had on his daughter was her commitment to basketball; his encouragement, while not the only support she receives, has a significant impact on her commitment to and even style of playing. While the determination he helped instill in her is one of the central reasons for her survival, he is not her sole mentor in this endeavor. Her relationship with her Coach and her adoptive older sister, Trace, both of which push towards academic excellence in a determined and naturally talented player, give her the stamina and fortitude to not only beat Elk Head Woman when she challenges Denorah to a game, but also to outlast her during her final pursuit of the novel. This stamina and the ultimate resolution Denorah bring to the chase allows her to function as the novel's Final Girl and cements her place in the Indigenous Gothic.

While Elk Head Woman goes directly after Denorah, her antagonism towards the other characters in the novel differs vastly. The incidental killings she undertakes are senseless in comparison to her vendetta against the four hunters. The deaths of Jolene, Cassidy's partner, and Victor Yellow Tail are apparently incurred based on bad timing; had they not been in the area that night, they likely would not have encountered Elk Head Woman at all. This lack of real motive other than convenience and orchestration of her ultimate vengeance makes the contrast between the hands-on approach she takes to their murders and her psychological approach to the other killings more intriguing. She is willing to kill Victor, Jolene, and the Sees Elk dogs with her own power, but goes through elaborate plans to attack the real targets of her revenge. Her approach with the four "butchers" is largely indirect and psychological. For the most part, she

stays out of their direct sight, never quite revealing herself until it is too late to act or not at all. She orchestrates Boss Ribs' death via beating at the hands of drunken—and presumably racist—thugs in a bar parking lot. By influencing the "big meaty spike," she incurs property damage to the cars belonging to the "roughnecks" at the bar, and thus leaves Boss Ribs to reap the subsequent violence as the assumed perpetrator (Jones 6). With Clark, interestingly enough the only one to actively show remorse for their actions, Elk Head Woman engages in elaborate psychological manipulation that drives him to murder and/or mutilate two women, a Crow coworker named Shaney and his own wife Peta, out of paranoia. These deaths subsequently lead to his own at the hands of either white vigilantes or police officers, purposefully, I argue, left open to interpretation as both are all too possible fates for Indigenous men[iv].

During the first two sections of the novel, the narrative has been solely in the hands of the protagonists. This subsequently has kept the reader subject to the same doubts we hold regarding the previous central characters in each section. The "Sweat Lodge Massacre" and "It Came From the Rez" sections of the novel are peppered with Elk Head Woman's own perspective alongside those of the human characters. With Cross Guns and Sees Elk, the final two "butchers," she continues to take her revenge using manipulation. From removing important objects to outright incurring collateral damage kills, Elk Head Woman turns the two best friends against each other by flitting around just out of sight outside the sweat lodge. Out of the four, Cross Guns is the only one to directly interact with her, and the most she does directly to him is to stare him down until he uses Sees Elk's finger on the trigger to shoot himself (246-9). These two tactics, direct, incidental killings and carefully orchestrated psychological warfare, come together in the conflict between Denorah and Elk Head Woman.

Elk Head Woman's drive is sourced in vengeance, not only on behalf of her own death, but that of her herd and her own calf. As previously stated, the threat in this novel comes from

alongside the community rather than completely externally. Similarly to Demaline's Rogarou, Elk Head Woman appears to act as an enforcer of community boundaries; unlike *Empire of Wild, The Only Good Indians* does not contain much detail on the overall lore behind Elk Head Woman's role. Elk Head Woman's significance is implied, but ultimately remains culturally privileged knowledge. While the characters themselves evidently have foreknowledge of her once she says her name, whether it be "Elk Head Woman" or "Ponokaotokaanaakii," the audience is restricted to a more general understanding through Jones' interpretation of the figure. She at first functions as a "memory cycling from brown body to brown body," the potential of her eventual vengeance waiting until the opportune moment to strike (Jones 134). She appears to be a kind of ghost or spirit, the memory of that painful massacre gaining consciousness to enact vengeance on behalf of *her* community. Denorah, once Elk Head Woman reveals her other than human nature, attempts to classify her as "some Indian demon from way back, some monster her dad found buried on some hill out here, a ghost woman he left in a rolled-over car" (275). Despite these guesses, she does not fully figure out her name until Elk Head Woman's transformation from a human woman into a literal elk-headed woman. When she does realize the identity of the threat, she appears to instantly catch on to the implications the uninitiated audience picks up from context clues peppered throughout the novel. Returning to the nature of the threat, Elk Head Woman's presence as the novel's antagonist shifts the emphasis away from the direct effects of colonialism and more into the nature of problems within the community itself. That Denorah stops the cycle of violence speaks to the importance of this distinction. Denorah, the Final Girl of the novel, survives not by outrunning or overpowering the threat but by extending understanding and respect to the Elk Mother that Elk Head Woman originated from.

While the main threat in the novel is intentionally non-colonial, that does not mean that there are no effects of colonialism to be seen in the novel. The direct parallels between the elk massacre and the Marias Massacre[v] against the Blackfeet is a rather blatant indication of the effects of colonialism on the community. This parallel is used to explore generational trauma, which affects both the Blackfeet and the elk throughout the novel. The elk are constantly having to contend with weapons imported into the area, not simply guns, but also trains. Meanwhile, two of the four hunters are killed in instances of systemically condoned, if not enacted, violence. Both the Blackfeet and Elk Head Woman use post-colonial apparatus to inflict damage on each other's communities until a respectful balance is struck by Denorah's act of forgiveness. The Indigenous Gothic in *The Only Good Indians* covers a broader selection of narratives than the previous two texts studied here, as each of Jones' sections function through their unique manifestations of the Gothic. *The Only Good Indians* expands the Indigenous Gothic further under the umbrella of the horror genre without sacrificing its integral atmosphere, relationships, and cultural specificity.

Conclusions on the Indigenous Gothic

Analyzing the differences and similarities in Jeff Barnaby's *Rhymes For Young Ghouls,* Cherie Dimaline's *Empire of Wild,* and Stephen Graham Jones' *Only Good Indians* reveals their interventions in the typical Gothic narrative. In *Rhymes* and *Empire*, the typical American Gothic anxiety is inverted. Rather than being afraid of the corrupting influence of an alien Other, whether in the form of a supernatural monster or a similarly presented nonwhite agent of excess, the anxiety is instituted by colonizing forces. While complex, as most things postcolonial tend to be, the main threat is the encroaching colonial force. These two works also have the connection from sharing locations within Canada, though admittedly in vastly different times and places, to

their complex female protagonists and those protagonists' community relationships. The similarities in these two make for some interesting contrast with Stephen Graham Jones' *The Only Good Indians*. Jones' novel is largely concerned with its male protagonists, and the defining threat comes from alongside the community itself as a result of the bad choices made by these characters. While utilizing aspects of the traditional American Gothic, namely the uncanny threat coming from alongside the community, Jones' still manages to remain firmly within the Indigenous Gothic established.

By privileging the perspectives of a Blackfeet, Métis, and Mi'gMaq people, Jones, Dimaline, and Barnaby, respectively, work to decolonize the genre media. Through these texts, traditional cultural knowledge belonging to and enacted by members of these communities gain a foothold against the encroachments of colonization and the consequences of those encroachments. Creating genre media from and directed towards Indigenous peoples allow push back against the racist stereotypical portrayals pervading genre literature and to center genre narratives, particularly those of horror and adjacent to horror, from a non-white perspective. *Rhymes for Young Ghouls, Empire of Wild,* and *The Only Good Indians* are all essential entries in the reclamation of Native story in genre media, particularly horror. The Indigenous Gothic subgenre is still growing, particularly in New Adult and Young Adult corners, and will no doubt continue to stretch through various genre media.

Notes:

i. The dynamic between ‘heimlich’ and ‘unheimlich’ was explored by Sigmund Freud in “The Uncanny” (1919);‘Heimlich’ being representative of the socially acceptable order of things, while ‘unheimlich’ or the titular uncanny representing the “homely” becoming “unhomely.”

ii. The term “Final Girl” originates from Carol J. Clover’s “Her Body, Himself.” While Clover’s Final Girl was set as a counterpoint to the male killer in slasher films, the intrinsic characteristics of the Final Girl – practicality, “boyishness,” endurance – do appear with Jones’ Final Girl, Denorah Cross Guns.

iii. Stephen Graham Jones manages to balance tongue-in-cheek humor with genuine scares in a number of novels and short stories, including *Mongrels* (2016), *Three Miles Past* (2013), and *Night of the Mannequins* (2020) among others.

iv. According to Barbara Perry’s research in *Silent Victims* (2008), Indigenous people are regularly subjected to “acts of violence and intimidation that are not always technically criminal in nature, and that are usually directed towards already stigmatized and marginalized groups” (Perry11).

v. The Marias Massacre, also known as the Baker Massacre, took place on January 23, 1870 under the command of Major Eugene Baker. During the unprovoked attack, the United States’ cavalrymen “slaughtered 217 noncombatant elders, women, and children” (Henderson, R. 50).

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