

Resisting Consumption: Exploring Pathways of Resistance to the Assimilative Nature of the  
Canadian Education System through Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*

Project Paper Submitted to the College of Graduate Studies and Research  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of English  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon

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## Abstract

In this project paper, I explore the domination and subjugation of Indigenous people that the Canadian education system encourages. I use Tomson Highway's text *Kiss of the Fur Queen* to examine instances of isolation felt by the protagonists Jeremiah and Gabriel in both Residential School and high school. Isolation creates feelings of inferiority, leaving them with the desire to fit within the dominant group. I also address instances in which the dominant nature of education can be challenged, primarily through the decentralization of the institution as the sole proprietor and manufacturer of knowledge. Highway addresses this through his use of the "Son of Ayash" and Weetigo and Weesageechak stories as well as the novel's overarching theme of institutional consumption and assimilation. Though the novel is set in Manitoba roughly fifty years ago, I choose to focus on the British Columbia curriculum because of my connection to it as both a student and a future teacher. My argument suggests that not much has changed from the dated curriculum discussed in the novel to the present curriculum that I critique. Assimilation is still a significant portion of what is taught in schools; the practice is simply pursued more discretely. Finally, I address the difficulty in challenging a system that one is a part of. Through the decentralization of the institution as the hub of knowledge, one makes way for others and their methods for understanding the world.

## Resisting Consumption: Exploring Pathways of Resistance to the Assimilative Nature of the Canadian Education System through Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*

The consumption of students through the education system is a topic explored in Tomson Highway's novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, which examines the effects of this assimilation through the stories of two young Cree brothers named Gabriel and Jeremiah Okimasis from Northern Manitoba. The novel explores the brothers' encounters at residential school, but also moves into their experiences in high school, demonstrating that the colonial institutionalization of students was evident outside of residential schools as well. Furthermore, the aftermath of Gabriel and Jeremiah's encounters with the Canadian education system becomes the topic of exploration in the final section of the novel, which utilizes Cree stories as metaphors for resistance. Exploring current methods of resistance, I analyze both my experience at the Indigenous Theatre Program in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan called Circle of Voices, as well as Warren Cariou's Oral Storytelling class as a means to discuss how education can be decolonized through the arts, oral tradition, and community involvement.

Highway's text centres around two stories from Cree oral tradition, the first describing an encounter between the Weetigo and Weesageechak. The Weetigo is a "cannibal spirit who devours human flesh" (Appleford 2), while Weesageechak refers to "the trickster figure who stands at the very centre of Cree mythology" (2). In this story, Weesageechak enters the Weetigo and slays it from the inside. The second story depicts the feats of a character called the "Son of Ayash" who, armed with "magic weapons", fights evil. Similar to the way in which Weesageechak enters the Weetigo, Gabriel and Jeremiah are consumed by the education system. The arts allow the brothers to explore their lost culture further by connecting them to the culture

that the Canadian education system attempted to strip away. This act of resistance exemplifies the "Son of Ayash" story, because the brothers are equipped with "magic weapons" (227) to help them resist the institution while still being a part of it. Using the novel, the British Columbia Education curriculum, and discussions in educational discourse to draw attention to the issue of Eurocentric indoctrination, I explore the ways in which the education system perpetuates colonial ideology. My investment in the BC education system is derived from my interest as a future educator, but also because I am a product of that system. While the novel's events transpired between 1951-1987, the institutional assimilation and consumption of Indigenous people is still an underlying flaw in the system's design.

In order to address the theme of consumption present in Highway's novel, one must understand the discourse surrounding the institution of education. The first problematic element of Canadian education system is that it is entirely under the control of individual Provincial governments. Though education in Canada is controlled provincially, there are some similarities between provincial curricula, as the Western and Northern Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education (WNCP) indicates:

The WNCP was established with the aim of developing curricula and identifying learning resources within a western Canadian perspective. Under the WCP, educators from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, Yukon Territory, North West Territories, and Nunavut collaborate to identify learning outcomes for kindergarten to Grade 12 in mathematics, social studies, and language arts.

(Manitoba Learning Resource Centre)

The collective contributions of the Provinces and Territories to learning outcomes ensure that despite methodological differences, similar lessons are being taught.

In a recent proposal for changes to the British Columbia curriculum, the ministry is attempting to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing. As an overview describing curricular changes notes,

the redesigned curriculum builds on what has been learned and extends Aboriginal perspectives into the entire learning journey, rather than into specific courses or grade levels. This means that from Kindergarten to graduation, students will experience Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge as part of what they are learning.

(British Columbia Ministry of Education, "Introduction")

Though initial readings of this passage may suggest that progressive changes have been made, control of the curriculum is still subject to the approval of the province's Ministry of Education. Although students are able to experience Aboriginal perspectives, these perspectives are filtered through non-Indigenous instructors who are bound by the Ministry. Under the section titled "Collaboration with Community," the document further stipulates that "[t]eachers are encouraged to incorporate [community experiences]...into their students' learning when possible and appropriate. It is particularly helpful to co-operate and engage with experts from the community when learning about culture-specific contexts to avoid offence or misrepresentation or appropriation of culture" (British Columbia Ministry of Education). The word "encouraged" suggests that the use of an Indigenous community member in classrooms is not mandatory and leaves the decision to the discretion of the teacher. Similar conclusions can be drawn from the idea that these invitations are to be extended "when possible and appropriate" (British Columbia

Ministry of Education). Though these passages seem to convey the notion that Indigenous perspectives are being incorporated into classrooms, this material is still subject to control of the Ministry, which consumes students through indoctrination. Indigenous perspectives are not entirely Indigenous perspectives when filtered through the Ministry of Education and the instructor who is trained to teach largely from a colonial perspective.

One may further note that the institution of education's Eurocentric pedagogy enforces the domination of students, similar to the way that colonialism perpetuates the subjugation of Indigenous people. Paulo Freire uses several examples to demonstrate the dominant nature of the education system in his text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In one example, Freire refers to the teacher as a narrator who "leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content" (71-72). Furthermore, Freire suggests that education "turns students into 'containers,' into 'receptacles' to be filled by the teacher. The more completely [he/she] fills the receptacles, the better a teacher [he/she] is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are" (72). Freire's reference to the teacher as a narrator implies that the teacher is the only one in his/her classroom who knows the story. This creates a very distinct division of power where one party keeps the knowledge and the others merely receive it. Furthermore, Freire critiques the encouraged passivity of students, which indicates that good students work within the system instead of resisting it. As passive receptacles students are consumed by the education system through their institutionalization. Through this process, students are stripped of knowledge deemed not worth knowing and made to learn what the institution views as valuable.

Tara J. Yosso's "Whose Culture has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth" uses a critical race theory (CRT) lens to explore knowledge considered valuable enough to teach. Critical race theory challenges the notion that people of color lack knowledge that the white middle class possesses. Yosso states that "CRT shifts the research lens away from a deficit view of Communities of Color as places full of cultural poverty disadvantages, and instead focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged" (69). Yosso points to earlier scholarship, specifically that of Pierre Bourdieu, who argues that "the knowledges of the upper and middle class are considered capital valuable to a hierarchical society" (70). Yosso indicates that "if one is not born into a family whose knowledge is already deemed valuable, one could then access the knowledges of the middle and upper class and the potential for social mobility through formal schooling" (70). The idea that one has to be educated to reach a standard threshold of knowledge builds on Freire's discussion of domination and Highway's notion of consumption, which I discuss later. Education is made to appear as a form of salvation through which people of color, by participating in the system, can attain the knowledge that they inherently lack. Yosso's discussion of the hierarchy of knowledge is a useful tool in exploring the ways that education impacts Indigenous people because it indicates the reason why individuals would allow themselves to be consumed. People, specifically people of color, are made to feel that they can ascend to a level of whiteness that only education can provide. Instead of whiteness, however, the system uses the term "success" to mask its inherently racist agenda. In pursuit of success, individuals allow themselves to be institutionalized and assimilated by Eurocentric pedagogy.

While Yosso and Freire address the cycle of domination present in current models of education, Marie Battiste narrows the focus of domination, examining this issue specifically through an Indigenous context. Battiste's article "Enabling the Autumn Seed: Toward a Decolonized Approach to Aboriginal Knowledge, Language, and Education" establishes a connection between past models of education through Residential Schools and current methods of controlling Indigenous people through provincial education. Battiste notes that "the federal government has entered into agreements with First Nations bands that require them to adopt provincial curricula as a minimum requirement to assume control of their education. In almost all of these provinces, these curricula are developed away from Aboriginal communities, without Aboriginal input, and written in English" (16). She stipulates further that "[i]n effect, the curricula serve as another colonial instrument to deprive Aboriginal communities of their knowledge, languages, and cultures" (16). While this article was published in 1998, the colonial control of Indigenous education is still relevant to the current discussion. As indicated earlier, the Canadian education system is controlled by the provinces, and though the B.C. Ministry of Education states that it has worked with Indigenous people to include Indigenous content in all courses, this content appears to be sprinkled into courses that are still regulated by the government. For instance, British Columbia's Contemporary Indigenous Studies 12 "Learning Standards" notes that students are expected to "Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to ask questions; listen to the oral tradition of Elders and other local knowledge holders; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions" (BC Ministry of Education, "Areas of Learning"). Despite making positive strides toward a more inclusive classroom, the material is still subject to colonial control because Indigenous perspectives are

often filtered through a colonial lens. The lens in this passage is a social studies one, a western colonial construct, which is being used to evaluate Indigenous knowledge systems. This centralizes European knowledge and conventions and "others" conventions outside of the EuroCanadian. While it is evident that the Ministry is attempting to improve education for Indigenous people, its continued control over relevant knowledge and world views remains problematic.

Battiste elaborates on the complexity of the issue of incorporating Indigenous content into classrooms, stating that "Public schooling has not wholly ignored Aboriginal content in the schools, as many, if not most, have taken on the task of seeking to find the means to make their curricula inclusive" (21). She acknowledges that the system is making attempts to address its problems. However, Battiste posits further that "mainstream knowledge has not been questioned or reconsidered; rather, the *other* is acknowledged as *a* knowledge, not *the* knowledge, as in the case of academia's special case studies such as Women Studies, Native Studies, or Black Studies" (21). Through the use of the "Social Studies inquiry process" as its central component, the British Columbia Contemporary Indigenous Studies 12 course further perpetuates the consumption and domination of students. Students are indoctrinated to believe that EuroCanadian concepts are central and can be used as a comparison for peripheral knowledge systems.

In their article "What makes anti-racist pedagogy in teacher education difficult? Three popular ideological assumptions," Carol Schick and Verna St. Denis explore the centrality and normalization of whiteness in Canadian school curricula in further detail by discussing the challenges of addressing privilege in a classroom setting. Schick and St. Denis address common statements such as, "I don't see race. I see people as people..., as well as, I am fascinated by all

the cultures. I love learning about them" (8). Finally, "Why do they always bring up the past? I wasn't there" (8). Schick and Dt. Denis state that "[t]his is perhaps the most challenging of the three ideological assumptions to many white students' sense of self. For those in positions of institutional superiority and advantage, one typically participates by helping others; in turn, helping others is proof of superiority" (8). While these statements acknowledge a power dynamic by placing white people in a position of benevolence, they also allude to the depth to which these ideals are indoctrinated into students through the education system. In their attempts at proving their acceptance of multiculturalist ideology, the students' utilization of words such as "they, them, we and I" suggests a boundary between self and other. For instance, the statement "I don't see race, I see people as people..." reveals the speaker's own privileged ability to make that decision. Additionally, choosing to ignore someone's cultural and physical differences erases those differences in an attempt to normalize the other for the dominant group. This further solidifies the power of the dominant group over the other rather than excusing the speaker from the conversation. The continued indoctrination of "others" through the normalization of whiteness functions as an act of consumption by the education system, which is explored in Highway's novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen*.

Consumption by the institution of education is initially explored through both Gabriel and Jeremiah's experiences at Birch Lake Indian Residential School. The narrator emphasizes the imposition of sameness on the students, drawing attention to the shaving of the heads of the boys entering the school. Jeremiah, who was previously named Champion, is described as being "poised for the slaughter" (52), a statement that reflects the death of his identity, but also refers to Jeremiah as meat that is being prepared for consumption. "*Clip, clip, clip,*" the scene continues.

"Champion could feel his hair falling, like snowflakes, but flakes of human skin. He was being skinned alive..." (53). Champion's hair represents an element of his individual identity, something that is stripped away from him upon his entry into the school. Jeremiah is shaped and molded into an identity that is forged for him by the institution, by which he is consumed like the Weesageechak by the Weetigo.

The alteration of Jeremiah/Champion's name contributes further to the discussion of Jeremiah's consumption by the education system. When asked his name, Champion replies accordingly. However, Champion is told by Brother Stumbo that his name is actually Jeremiah, which Champion disputes: "No. Champion. Champion Okimasis" (54), he states, to which Brother Stumbo replies, "According to Father Bouchard's baptismal registry, you are named Jeremiah Okimasis'.... As with Father Bouchard, Abraham Okimasis [Champion's Father] would have decreed that this man's word bore the weight of biblical authority and therefore was to be listened to" (54). Jeremiah has an identity thrust upon him despite his resistance. The struggle with identity is a result of the institutional indoctrination of the students—in other words, the institution's attempt at turning students into "'containers,' [or] 'receptacles' to be filled by the teacher" (Freire 72). Additionally, the imposition of knowledge that Brother Stumbo inflicts on Jeremiah diminishes the value of the knowledge that Jeremiah already has, deeming it less valuable than what the institution presents. This makes it difficult for Jeremiah to resist becoming institutionalized and consumed because the institution is presented in a manner that asserts its power over his own.

As both Jeremiah and Gabriel enter the institution, they are stained by their experiences there, which imbed within them colonial notions of whiteness and knowledge. The form of

knowledge that the brothers learn can be seen through Jeremiah's writing of the word "Devil" (Highway 62) and his listing of the seven deadly sins, another component of Christian mythology. Jeremiah recounts that he, "Champion-Jeremiah [,] looked down at the word on the right-hand page of his little scribbler and found the D of 'DEVIL' not quite perfect. He reached for his eraser. 'And these seven deadly sins are called...' Champion-Jeremiah applied the eraser to the D, 'Pride, envy, gluttony...'--erasing was such a waste of time--'sloth, covetousness, anger, and...'lust'" (62). This passage reflects the depth to which Jeremiah was educated to a standard of whiteness through religion. The meticulousness that Jeremiah demonstrates trying to ensure that he perfects the spelling of these words illustrates his desire to be successful, according to a European standard. His level of education and his desire to meet the requirements of that education establish Jeremiah's consumption by the institution. However, one also finds that Jeremiah expresses resistance to the knowledge systems that are attempting to indoctrinate him. Statements such as "not quite perfect" allude to the notion that though Jeremiah is attempting to work toward a white standard of knowledge, he has not been fully consumed by the education system yet. His imperfect writing suggests that he has much more to learn both in terms of attaining the knowledge that the system demands, and later about his own lost Indigenous culture. The erasure of the letter "D" in Devil produces the word "evil", signifying the evil that the institution is inflicting on Jeremiah through his assimilation and abuse<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, Jeremiah's thought that "erasing was such a waste of time" (62) invokes similar tones of resistance. For instance, if one were to erase an incorrect letter as Jeremiah is doing, one would be doing so in an attempt to correct the word. Though the word has been changed and corrected,

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank my second reader Dr. Wendy Roy for suggesting this interpretation.

traces of what was originally written remain. Likewise, while the institution is attempting to erase indigeneity from Jeremiah, fragments of what he has lost remain, which suggests that there is an opportunity to reclaim what is being taken from him.

Institutional consumption is further described through Jeremiah and Gabriel's shopping at the local mall in Winnipeg. Jeremiah attempts to help Gabriel dress in accordance with a perceived white standard, preparing Gabriel to attend high school in the city. While shopping for city clothes, Gabriel asks Jeremiah, "What, then...do city boys wear on their feet?" (116). Jeremiah responds by stating that "white boys lived in dark penny loafers with socks so white they looked like snow" (116). This sets the standard for what Gabriel must replicate in his own wardrobe. In order to conform, Gabriel attempts to blend in with white city people, who he was taught through the education system possessed more "cultural wealth" (Yosso 69) than himself. Gabriel's need to conform is illustrated in his request to know what the standard is for his new environment as well as his desire to meet that standard, which is demonstrated in the following: "Gabriel threw a curse at an entire rack of...lugubrious knitwear. He announced, instead, his preference for a six-pack of wool-polyester socks so white they looked like snow" (117). Highway's description of the sock's whiteness being like "snow" further indicates Gabriel's desire to appear as white as possible. After purchasing his socks, which are exactly what Jeremiah indicates is worn by "white boys" (116), Gabriel purchases "brand-new muskrat-coloured patent-leather penny loafers" (117) in place of the shoes he had been wearing when he arrived. The desire to conform to the standards set by the institution reveals the extent that the brothers are consumed by its teachings. They have developed the desire to reach a threshold of whiteness that they have internalized as the standard for how they should both behave and appear. However, the

reference to the loafers as "muskrat coloured" (117) instead of "dark" (117), alludes to the fragments of Indigeneity left within the brothers.

While they are shopping, Jeremiah and Gabriel recount their Aunt Black-Eyed Susan's story of the Weetigo and Weesageechak, an origin story that explains how the weasel got his coat. The story is told as follows: "Weesageechak comes down to Earth disguised as a weasel....And the weasel crawls up the Weetigo's bumhole....In order to kill the horrible monster....And comes out with his white fur covered in shit..." (118). The brothers' recollection of the story takes place over the course of three pages and is interspersed with descriptions of the boys' experiences in the mall, reflecting the extent to which Gabriel and Jeremiah have been consumed by the education system. A story that is part of their identity, something that was passed onto them by a family member, becomes fragmented over the course of several pages. In an attempt to remember the story's details, Gabriel asks his brother, "Why did Weesageechak kill the Weetigo?" (120), to which Jeremiah responds, "All I remember is that the Weetigo had to be killed because he ate people.... Weesageechak chewed the Weetigo's entrails to smithereens from the inside out" (120). After this explanation the story continues, "'My coat!' moaned the weasel. 'My nice white coat is covered with shit!'.... Feeling sorry for the hapless trickster,...God dipped him in the river to clean out his coat. But he held him by the tail, so its tip stayed dirty..." (121). This story is central to the tale of Jeremiah and Gabriel because it echoes the circumstances of their lives. The Weetigo, as Sophie McCall indicates in "Intimate Enemies: Weetigo, Weesageechak, and the Politics of Reconciliation in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*," "is used to imply a paradoxical interdependence of overconsuming (wasting) and of being consumed (wasting away), of devouring and of being

devoured, of starving to death and overindulging" (66). Like Weesageechak, both of the brothers enter the Weetigo, which is a symbol for the mall, and leave the system tainted with the colonial version of knowledge that they received under the guise of education.

The scene at the mall concludes with the brothers' departure, which is described as the end result of digestion. Their egress is described in the following passage: "Grey and soulless, the mall loomed behind them, the rear end of a beast, that having gorged itself, expels its detritus" (121). The mall, which functions as another symbol for the institution connected to both capitalism and education through its comparison to a beast, consumes the brothers and feeds on their individual identities, replacing them with aspirations of whiteness. Having apparently satisfied their desire to blend in with white settler society, Jeremiah and Gabriel leave the mall. In addition to illustrating the depths to which the brothers have been consumed, the scene also presents elements of resistance through the telling of the Weetigo story which should have been erased completely by the institution. Gabriel and Jeremiah's ability to hold onto the story despite assimilationist pressures indicates their unconscious resistance to the institution's attempts at consuming them. The resistance is unconscious because they do not know that they are resisting by the mere telling of a story.

Jeremiah is introduced to the possibility of conscious resistance when he meets Amanda Clear Sky in his high-school history class. When conducting a presentation for his history class, Jeremiah chooses to conduct his presentation on Marie Antoinette and states that her death was "surely the most violent and bloody peer... bloody period in the his...tory. Of the world" (148 ellipses in original). This passage reveals the extent to which colonial culture has been internalized by Jeremiah. His understanding of history is limited to the western colonial

perspective he has been taught. This echoes what critics such as Schick, St. Denis, Freire and Yosso argue regarding the centrality of the colonial perspective in the Canadian school curricula. This problem is something that most provinces are currently attempting to address through the integration of Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum. Amanda Clear Sky objects to Jeremiah's Eurocentric claim:

'I disagree,' a low, rich voice cut through the din. The laughter stopped. Heads swivelled. 'Yes, Amanda? vat is it you disagree vis in Mr. Okimasis's interstink presentation?'.... 'There were many bloody periods in human history,' her tone unflinching, with a sheen of anger, 'many of them occurring right here in North America.'

Once he had summoned the nerve to meet her stare, Jeremiah's eyes stung, 'Such as?'

'Such as the Cherokee Trail of Tears.' Her English was impeccable, not a speck of accent. 'Such as Wounded Knee, smallpox blankets, any number of atrocities done to the Indian people. Was the colonization of North America not every bit as bloody as the French Revolution?' (148)

Clear Sky's objection challenges the institutional indoctrination that both she and Jeremiah have been subjected to and forces Jeremiah to confront his own role within the system. Jeremiah's lack of knowledge surrounding Indigenous history is addressed, and he is reminded of the existence of Indigenous discourse, which like the story of the Weetigo and Weesageechak has been all but erased from his consciousness.

Reminders of the Indigenous culture that Jeremiah and Gabriel have lost challenge the institutionalized education that they received. These reminders facilitate a desire to learn more about the heritage that they continue to lose. This notion is brought to Jeremiah's attention during

his encounter with Poosees at the Pow Wow. Poosees, the grandmother of Amanda Clear Sky, reflects on the loss of culture that Jeremiah was subjected to through his education: " 'You northern people,' she sighed, as with nostalgia, 'it's too bad you lost all them dances, you know? All them beautiful songs? Thousands of years of...But never mind. We have it here.' She too, was looking at the dance now. The drumming, the chanting crescendoed – pentatonic mush, Jeremiah opined" (175). Jeremiah's thinking reveals his own oppression and the depth of his colonial indoctrination, referring to elements of his culture as "pentatonic mush" (175). Poosees' statement illustrates the notion that culture can be reestablished in individuals such as Jeremiah who have had it eradicated through colonial education. Through his exposure to buried elements of his culture, Jeremiah is conflicted by what has been taught through indoctrinated whiteness and what he has the desire to learn. Poosees indicates that Pow Wow dancing was referred to as "Devil Worship" (176): "That's what they called this. The nerve!" (176), she says, to which Jeremiah agrees, "Yes...The nerve" (176). This interaction may not be enough to cause Jeremiah to accept his own Creeness, but it does facilitate the dialogue necessary to explore his identity further, particularly through the arts.

The connection between art, identity, and resistance is explored through the second Cree oral story present in the novel, the "Son of Ayash". Prior to taking his final communion, Abraham, Jeremiah and Gabriel's father, tells his sons this story: "'The world has become too evil. With these magic weapons, make a new world,' said the mother to the hero, the Son of Ayash.'....So the Son of Ayash took the weapons and, on a magic water snake, journeyed down into the realm of the human soul where he met...evil after evil" (227). One of the evils is the Weetigo, who Abraham notes is "the most fearsome among them [,] the man who ate human

flesh" (227). As I established earlier, in the novel, Highway uses this figure from Cree cosmology as a metaphor for the institution of education to which Gabriel and Jeremiah were subjected. The magic weapons with which they are meant to fight their indoctrination refer to the tools that the institution gave the brothers through their schooling, as well as their own affinity to the arts. In "The Trickster Moment, Cultural Appropriation, and the Liberal Imagination in Canada," Margery Fee notes that artistic mediums such as "music, dance, theatre, writing, and the other arts—based on traditional roots—were to be the magic weapons with which Indigenous people would make a new world" (62). Similarly, in his text *Magic Weapons: Aboriginal Writers Remaking Community after Residential School*, Sam McKegney notes that "the 'magic weapons' with which the sibling protagonists conquer the corrosive aftermath of residential school abuse are unlikely skills in classical piano and ballet, learned in Euro-Canadian environments but adapted to Cree spiritual knowledge actively garnered in adulthood" (8). He stipulates further that these magic weapons are used to "provoke positive change in others--to 'make a new world' through art" (8).

Though McKegney focuses on Jeremiah and Gabriel's artistic skills acquired through their schooling, the brothers' connection to the arts predates the education that they received at both residential school and high school. As a child, Jeremiah was fond of playing the accordion, something taken from him upon entering Residential school. Jeremiah's love of the accordion is demonstrated in the following: "The three-year-old stretched and pumped the miniature accordion strapped to his chest with such abandon that its squawk was frightful" (23). Later, his music is played along with a caribou song that he created to help draw caribou to his father to hunt. Jeremiah sings, "*Ateek, ateeek, astum, astum, yoah, ho-ho!*" (23). The instrument is

described as being "strapped to his chest, as if he had emerged from his mother's womb" with it (41). This demonstrates Jeremiah's deep connection to artistic expression at young age. Similarly, Gabriel's dancing manifests itself at a young age. When Gabriel turns three, he is described as dancing "graceful like a birch sapling" (41). The pursuit of the arts later in their education becomes the way through which Gabriel and Jeremiah are able to resist colonial indoctrination because it reconnects them to their culture. This notion is articulated through Amanda Clear Sky's discussion with Jeremiah: "'You are an artist.' She wiggled her tongue in his ear. 'It's a responsibility, a duty; you can't run away from it.' Jeremiah shuddered; a worm was inside him. Or a...No, no, Champion-Jeremiah, we won't ever think about that. Not now. Not ever. That door is closed" (259). Clear Sky illustrates the important role that the artist performs in the community in terms of healing others by reconnecting participants with their displaced cultural identities. Her presence reminds Jeremiah of the cultural identity that he has lost and tries to keep buried. One may also observe the shift between "Champion and Jeremiah" as if he is struggling internally to understand his own identity. Furthermore, by confronting his past and the abuse that he has suffered, Jeremiah is given the opportunity to heal from the trauma experienced. Jeremiah's reluctance at confronting his past illustrates the difficulty in exploring these buried emotions. However, the brothers' pre-existing connection to art, both in an Indigenous context explored in their early childhoods and a western-colonial context through their educations, demonstrates the centrality of art to Indigenous identity, education, and healing.

Jo-Ann Episkenew quotes Louis Riel, who states, "My people will sleep for one hundred years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back" (qtd. in Episkenew 192). This statement frames the nature of her discussion regarding the role that art

and artists play in healing Indigenous communities. Episkenew discusses several artistic mediums. However, she focuses primarily on literature and theatre. She notes the communal nature of theatre, stating that "theatrical productions are not the creation of solitary individuals working in isolation. They are communal both in production and in performance. A community of actors, designers, and technicians work cooperatively to fashion productions that will be worthy of communities that constitute their audiences" (147). The communal nature of theatre becomes evident towards the end of *Kiss of the Fur Queen* when Jeremiah's abilities as a pianist and Gabriel's skill as a dancer are brought together with other members of their communities, such as Amanda Clear Sky, who contribute to the production of a script. This decentralizes the power of the participants attempting to create a product. No one person is in complete control of the performance. Similarly, the play functions as a model for learning, in which the role of the instructor as the sole curator of knowledge is decentralized by providing participants with an equal opportunity to exchange ideas. Although violent and confrontational, the exchange of ideas between Amanda, Gabriel, and Jeremiah begins as mild criticism of Jeremiah's play. Their exchange indicates that each party has an equal platform from which to participate in the conversation: "Jeremiah banged at the piano--dissonance like shards of steel--though he had no idea why. 'What are you doing?' he yelled at his brother. 'Play!' Gabriel screamed back. 'Just play!' 'Stick to that goddamn piano'--Amanda lunged at him with teeth bared, spit flying--'where you belong!'" (280). The source of the conflict is the criticism of Jeremiah's play, a play that both Amanda and Gabriel believe is too artificial to perform.

This exchange also represents a moment of catharsis, allowing the individuals to express the negative emotions that they have been harbouring through their artistic medium of choice.

One finds this evident through Jeremiah's banging of the piano. Episkenew addresses catharsis in theatre, noting that,

[d]uring the process of storytelling traumatic events, we may re-experience those emotions associated with the original trauma. However, by re-experiencing these emotions in a safe environment and by expressing them in language, we are often able to come to terms with emotional injuries and then move our emotional lives forward to a place of health and contentment. (70)

This passage articulates the notion that healing can be facilitated through the safe exposure to traumatic events. Art affects both the artist and the audience by providing a space to re-experience trauma in a safe and controlled venue. By allowing individuals to confront their traumatic memories, art allows participants to make peace with the more negative elements of their pasts.

Art also facilitates the transmission of cultural knowledge, something that the institution of education attempted to strip away from Indigenous people. In "Once upon a Medium: The Evolution of Theatrical Storytelling," Drew Hayden Taylor discusses his experience as a playwright and a writer. He describes the similarities between the mediums of theatre and oral storytelling, stating that oral storytelling is "the ability to take your listeners on a journey using voice, your imagination and your body (gestures, eye contact, facial expressions)" (159-160). In both forms of expression, the individual is taken on the performer's journey, experiencing a scene rather than reading about it from a text. Monique Mojica describes the journey that art facilitates: "the embodiment of stories from my immediate elder generations, from my ancestors and from ancestral lands is what connects me through time and space to that intangible, temporal,

performative medium we call theatre. A medium that is temporary in nature because it exists in the moment..." (16). The notion that the theatrical experience is a fleeting moment ensures that the experience does not indoctrinate the audience with the playwright's point of view. Instead, the viewer witnesses an event and leaves to ponder the experience when the moment has concluded. Additionally, the use of theatre connects Indigenous people to their heritage, allowing them to learn about their culture through a medium that resembles a significant cultural component—oral tradition. In a manner similar to Jeremiah's experience with Amanda Clear Sky, that single experience where one is reminded of a moment long forgotten is enough to change the individual without consuming him/her like an institutional experience does.

The role of art and education in facilitating healing in communities is evident in Gordon Tootoosis Nīkānīwin Theatre in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. I was given the opportunity to visit this community-based organization through Nancy Van Styvendale's graduate class, "Writing Communities: The Praxis of Indigenous North American Literatures." The class itself blended experience in a community-based organization with Indigenous literature, allowing me to see the ways in which art and healing are interconnected. The theatre company has a youth program called Circle of Voices (COV) that mentors students in elements of theatre. Gordon Tootoosis Nīkānīwin Theatre's artistic director Curtis Peeteetuce allowed me to watch and participate in the program, granting me the opportunity to view the impact art programs can have on communities. COV focuses on three interconnected areas, theatre, culture, and career, giving students an opportunity to develop in multiple areas. Students are also given credit for high school drama, which helps meet the requirements of the Canadian education system through a community-based approach. The program's purpose is to "assist aspiring artists in strengthening self-

confidence and cultural awareness while developing professional skills, and provide an experience where youth can work with and among professionals in the theatre industry" (Dawn-Bishop 2). The use of the word "strengthening" suggests that students have pre-existing skills that will be built upon. This is very different from the consuming nature of western educational institutions that strip students of what they already know and teach them what the institution deems worthy of knowing. The theatre also provides training "in all aspects of theatre [where students] attend workshops by local artists and COV alumni designed to teach [students] the skills [they] will need to put on a full-scale production" (Dawn-Bishop 2). This section of the pamphlet implies that students will develop both existing and new skills to fit their own desired outcome. Students participate in workshops where they are taught what interests them. This approach to teaching theatre disrupts traditional pedagogical models that imply that one person (the teacher) is the keeper of knowledge. Instead, the program turns to members of the community to facilitate learning and utilizes theatre as a method of knowledge dissemination.

The program's cultural component includes "elder led activities that...include sweat lodges, feasts, and talking circles" (Dawn-Bishop). Incorporating an elder in the program facilitates the dissemination of cultural knowledge in addition to the teachings regarding theatre. This helps make the program relevant to the students because they learn how theatre interacts with their own cultures. The transmission of cultural knowledge puts into practice Mojica's comment, explored earlier, regarding the ability of stories to connect her to her ancestors. One of the most inspirational moments that I remember from this program was the talking circles, where I was surprised by how much students were willing to share with one another. This cultural practice breaks down the pedagogical barriers between teacher and student that Freire references

in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The circle works as a safe space where individuals are encouraged to speak about anything that is on their mind; both students and staff participated. Both groups were able to open themselves up and create a more personable and understanding group by encouraging individuals to listen to one another. The other element of this practice that I enjoyed was the invitation to pray in one's own way. Despite the claims to multiculturalism that Canada likes to boast about, it is not often that multiple religious practices are honoured in the same space. Students who did not come from a cultural background that participated in smudging were given the opportunity to "opt out" of participating in that portion of the circle. This practice facilitates respect for other students and faculty in terms of cultural backgrounds and practices. Additionally, it also acts as a form of resistance because unlike traditional educational institutions that distance people who do not indulge in the dominant culture's practices, this program celebrates the differences between people. Through the mutual respect that the talking/prayer circles facilitate between students and faculty, COV resists the conventions of pedagogical domination that Freire identifies.

Resistance to traditional models of education can also be found within the institution, something that Warren Cariou's Cree storytelling class challenges through the breakdown of pedagogical barriers. Traditionally, post-secondary classes consist of a textbook(s) chosen by the professor to help the student attain knowledge that the professor believes is worth knowing. The professor is also bound by the practices of the university, making him/her to some extent a subject of the institution as well. However, the professor's control over the student exemplifies the earlier conversations regarding Freire and the teacher as a figure of domination. Cariou notes that despite his name being listed on the course syllabus as the instructor of Cree Stories at the

University of Manitoba in August 2010, it was in fact the Elder and Cree storyteller Louis Bird who taught Cariou as well as the students (Cariou 300). Cariou states that the class had no textbooks (300), and he notes that both he and the students "encounter[ed] those stories only in their oral versions as [Bird] chose to tell them to us" (300). Cariou's resistance to the structure of the institution is grounded in the notion that he does not assert authority over the students. He instead relinquishes the power given to him by the institution and acknowledges that he is not the only individual claiming knowledge of oral storytelling. Cariou further disrupts formal education by not utilizing textbooks to tell stories. This action resists the very Western notion that knowledge can only be obtained through the reading of books and places great authority in the Indigenous practice of oral storytelling. Cariou acknowledges the difficulty in facilitating such a class because of the initial discomfort of his students. He notes that "[t]hey were terrified that they would forget the stories and then be unable to study or write their essays, lacking access to the so-called primary texts" (300). This illustrates the way in which European and North American pedagogical practices have influenced students into thinking that the only way one can obtain knowledge is through the very narrow means that conventional schooling provides such as written textbooks. Cariou also generates a comparison between the physical text and the oral story. When discussing the nature of the stories, Cariou notes that "we retold the stories to one another, at the same time as we talked about what they might mean. It was probably the most engaged and genuinely interactive teaching experience I have ever been involved in" (301). Cariou's use of inclusive words such as "we" and "one another" suggests equality in terms of his relationship with his students. He is not the figure of domination facilitated by the institution;

instead, he challenges standard Canadian pedagogy by changing his role as an instructor to explore new ways of learning and educating.

In addition to resisting dominant pedagogy through his Cree storytelling class, Cariou also discusses the role of the oral story. Like Mojica, Cariou identifies oral stories as a fleeting experience through which one witnesses the story in a moment and is left with only the memory: "maybe forgetting is part of the story," he concludes. "Maybe it is necessary for us to lose some aspects of the story in order to remember it as a coherent thing" (301). By not knowing the "correct" answer, Cariou disrupts the pedagogical presumption that the professor possesses all of the answers. Cariou alludes to the possibility of making the text one's own, which like the Circle of Voices program is a method of resistance. Individuals take something that is inflicted upon them and are given the opportunity to internalize it and make it their own. Highway's text explores this process of internalization through Jeremiah's play "Ulysses Thunderchild" (227). The title of the play suggests an amalgamation of European mythology with a Cree perspective. Jeremiah discusses the concept behind the play, noting that it is based on the "Son of Ayash" story that their father used to tell them, although Jeremiah's version is blended with the Greek myth of Ulysses and some of Jeremiah's own embellishments. Furthermore, Jeremiah claims that the "Son of Ayash" is the "closest thing the Cree have to their own Ulysses" (277). This statement illustrates two notions. Firstly, the passage articulates the ways that Western-European knowledge can be internalized by Indigenous people. This is evident through Jeremiah's use of the Ulysses myth to tell his own story through a Cree lens. However, this passage also presents white colonial culture as a standard that "others" should aspire to. This idea is articulated through Jeremiah's statement that the "Son of Ayash" is the "closest thing the Cree have to...Ulysses,"

which suggests that the "Son of Ayash" is beneath its European counterpart. Highway's text alludes to the difficulty in challenging the education system that one is a part of. One may be able to resist as Jeremiah does by making the system one's own, but the fact remains that one is still a part of the system.

The challenges of resisting the education system are illustrated through the nature of consumption central to the story. As I described earlier, the consumption of Gabriel and Jeremiah is similar to the Weetigo and weasel story, though there are several important distinctions. First, the roles of consumption are reversed: Jeremiah and Gabriel are involuntarily consumed by their schooling. In the Weetigo and weasel story, the weasel enters the Weetigo's anus and consumes the monster from the inside. The weasel in this story is the hero, though he has become a consumer in the process of attempting to save humanity. Jeremiah and Gabriel are forced into Residential school and made to participate in European education through compulsory attendance. The brothers begin their stories as victims, but are transformed into survivors and heroes through their ability to resist consumption. The stories of both the weasel and the Weetigo and Gabriel and Jeremiah work together to describe the difficulties in attempting to resist a system that one is a part of. Highway explores this more viscerally through Jeremiah and one of his young students: "Willie Joe spoke. 'What's...what's a...a Weetigo?' How fresh children smelled. You could take them in your hands, put them in your mouth, and swallow them whole" (Highway 271). This passage reflects Jeremiah's internalized struggle with becoming the Weetigo like the priests and teachers who taught him, and resisting assimilative education as he does later in the passage: "In a panic, he disengaged himself and squatted, his eyes inches from the six-year-old's. He had a raging hard-on" (271). The reference to Jeremiah's erection suggests

that he is aroused by the child, a learned behaviour from residential school. Jeremiah fights his own transformation into a Weetigo. The urgency of this statement reflects both the importance of resistance, but also the difficulty in resisting a system that one is a part of.

The risk of being transformed into a consumer by the institution is addressed further through another of Jeremiah and Gabriel's plays. In this play, the caribou hunter Migisoo wanders through the night praying to the Creator to provide caribou. He states that his people are dying of starvation and begins to sob. Migisoo's crying is met with the arrival of the Weetigo. Migisoo addresses the Weetigo saying, "You've already taken five children from us. Haven't you feasted on enough human flesh while we lie here with nothing but our tongues to chew on? Get away from us, get away *awas!*" (294). Migisoo's character is played by Gabriel, whose conflict with the monster is described as a dance: "[t]he percussionist in the wings attacked his drum kit as Migisoo and the Weetigo leapt into their dance of hate. Gabriel dodged the monster with nimble-footed grace, though as the dying Migisoo he stumbled here, tripped there, even fell" (294). The struggle of Migisoo's people both in starving to death and being consumed by the Weetigo juxtaposes the idea of poverty and surplus. In order to rise above conditions of poverty, one is made to pursue education to avert starvation. This idea echoes Yosso's discussion of cultural wealth, and the illusion that the institution has a surplus of cultural wealth that people of color can aspire toward in their pursuit of success. The Weetigo has a surplus of food because it can feed on the people, whereas Migisoo's food supply is connected to the caribou. However, if the people are dead, the Weetigo dies as well because it no longer has anyone to feed on. The Weetigo's existence is connected to the people. This is similar to the current education system: its existence in its current state is contingent on people not resisting the system. Challenging the

system disrupts the assumption that education is the only way to achieve success. In his attempt at resisting consumption, Migisoo is transformed into a consumer himself, unintentionally being forced to consume the Weetigo. As individuals trained through the current education system, resisting present models is difficult because of our own consumption by the educational institution. As the earlier scene with Jeremiah and his student gestured toward, we see here how one risks becoming assimilated by the institution despite one's attempts at resisting it.

Highway's incorporation of both Cree stories coincides with the plot surrounding Jeremiah and Gabriel's lives both in terms of resistance, and the difficulty that resistance entails. Similar to the story of the Weetigo and the Weasel, the brothers enter the institutional beast of the education system where the knowledge that they already possess is replaced with knowledge that the system insists is more valuable. Highway utilizes the theme of consumption to reflect the way in which individuals lose themselves physically and mentally to the institution. However, through lessons in the arts, the education system inadvertently provides Gabriel and Jeremiah with the means to resist being consumed entirely. The theme of resistance echoes the "Son of Ayash" story told to the brothers by their father Abraham. Highway's novel mirrors similar conditions that Indigenous people face in present day educational institutions that work to colonize individuals sent through the system. These institutions enforce colonial practices through the acts of domination that they inflict on their students. The role that the arts play in terms of healing as well as their role in providing an outlet of resistance represent a significant trope in Indigenous literatures. This trope works to highlight the value of the arts to Indigenous people and highlights the need to resist the continued facilitation of colonialism in education. Though institutions such as the British Columbia Education system are attempting to make

positive changes by incorporating Indigenous perspectives into the classroom, more needs to be done. More work needs to be done to break down the dominant nature of education by decentralizing the institution as the sole provider of knowledge, as well as destabilizing constructs of the "other" that divide groups by normalizing the white European as the standard norm. However, teachers must be conscious of their own role in the institution and how they reinforce or resist the domination of the students that they teach. To truly decolonize the classroom, Indigenous voices and pedagogy need a more prominent place in education, with their place in the classroom mandated rather than simply suggested. Finally, more Indigenous people need to be involved in the curriculum-making process as authorities, instead of merely participating in a consultative manner. By including Indigenous people in the classroom, and decentralizing the role of the institution, we will ensure that Indigeneity is no longer merely an alternative means of education below a European standard, but rather a legitimate way of seeing and understanding the world.

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