"THAT'S ALL WE ARE": STORYTELLING AS POSTCOLONIAL PRAXIS IN FIVE NORTH AMERICAN URBAN FANTASY NOVELS

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Abstract

Helen Young characterizes urban fantasy as a genre wherein the suppressed past invades the modern world. Scholars have studied this aspect of the genre with regards to many issues, such as racial dynamics and the conflict between the natural world and the city. In a settler colonial context, however, the contact between past and present brings up questions about the nature of the settler state. How do we construct our communal and individual identities? What are the ongoing effects of colonialism? What does a just future look like?

This thesis situates urban fantasy in its colonial context and examines its colonial roots. It discusses five North American urban fantasy novels from settler, immigrant, and Indigenous authors—specifically, urban fantasy novels in which figures and creatures from diverse traditional cultural stories are living beings who interact with humans in modern society. This thesis draws on postcolonial and settler colonial theory by Mary Louise Pratt, Patrick Wolfe, and others in order to examine how these novels answer the above questions. By examining the relationships between different cultural figures and between humans and figures of story, this thesis argues that urban fantasy portrays characters' strong connections to their cultural stories as the power and means by which they challenge colonial injustices and build a better future.

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Dedication

For Sara Hilgendorf, who handed me my first fantasy book, and who showed me what it means to do work you believe in. I'm forever grateful.

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1. Introduction: Stories with Power

At Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump World Heritage Site there are, or at least, there were, pictures of thousands of bison skulls piled together. That is what I remember seeing the first time I visited the site while on a fourth-grade field trip. I remember other things, too, like the walk out along the top of the cliffs, but mostly I remember those pictures: black and white photos of white buffalo hunters with their piles of bones. Eight years later, I read *Widdershins* by renowned urban fantasy author Charles de Lint. In that novel, the character Grey describes an amassing army of buffalo people as "an indistinct ocean of brown . . . the boom of a multitude of drums combined with hooves stamping on the ground, dancing in place, pounding like thunder when it's rumbling directly overhead . . . thousands upon thousands of the horned cousins assembling there on an open plain" (de Lint 275)—but this is an army of spirits, and only fifty of them are still living (395). I thought of those piles of bones again. The plot of *Widdershins* is a frantic scramble to make peace between the fairy courts and the buffalo people, but it is complicated by the fact that every character who is so desperately trying to defuse the situation also thinks that the buffalo, who want war, have a *right* to it. I have been thinking about that problem ever since.

Urban fantasy novels like *Widdershins* are particularly suited to discussing the ongoing effects of settler colonialism. By making the people and creatures of traditional narratives just as real as the human characters, urban fantasy demonstrates the power that traditional stories still hold, drawing an explicit connection between the strength of the narrative and the well-being of the people to whom the stories belong. As stories-about-stories, urban fantasy novels explore how narrative can be a tool for perpetuating, justifying, or resisting colonialism. At the same time, the novels themselves become tools that either uphold or resist the institutions and hierarchies of the settler state. Using genre conventions such as the encounter between past and present and the protagonist as storyteller, urban fantasy novels are able to interrogate the colonial history of their settings and build narratives of communal and individual identity in response to that history. Novels from settler perspectives tend to construct narratives and imagine futures that fit within existing settler frameworks, while novels from immigrant and Indigenous perspectives challenge settler expectations and seek, to varying degrees, to build communities and individual identities outside of the metaphorical (and literal) infrastructure of the settler state.

This introductory chapter will provide the theoretical foundations for the thesis, as well as a brief review of the scholarship on or adjacent to my topic. The chapter will begin by examining

the various definitions of urban fantasy, as well as its relationship to other genres, in order to more clearly outline the scope of this thesis. I will then discuss the theoretical perspectives that undergird this thesis, particularly in regards to the idea of stories as tools of colonization and decolonization. Following that, I will examine previous scholarship regarding how urban fantasy and related genre fiction deals with race and colonialism. I will conclude this chapter with an outline of the chapters to follow.

1.1 Defining Urban Fantasy

Alexander Irvine identifies two general strains, or spectrum ends, of urban fantasy: "those in which *urban* is a descriptor applied to *fantasy* and those in which *fantasy* modifies *urban*" (200, emphasis in original). The second strain, though interesting, tends to focus on the character of the fantastic city and the nature of urban existence. The first strain is that which brings traditional narratives into contact with the modern world, and therefore, in the settler state, brings diverse traditional narratives into contact with each other. It is this strain which I will examine more closely in defining the scope of this thesis. Helen Young follows suit in her definition, distinguishing the first strain by calling it *Suburban fantasy*, extending the boundaries beyond the city to focus on the meeting of the modern mainstream with the marginal past—"the suppressed history of modernity resurfacing" (142).[1] Taking a broad view of the question, Stefan Ekman investigates multiple definitions of urban fantasy, including Irvine's and Young's, and finds that regardless of whether they are real, Primary-world cities or invented, Secondary-world cities, "the metropolitan setting is largely assumed" (458). Ekman notes Clute's argument that "stories merely about irruptions of supernatural forces within a city ... do not qualify" (qtd. in Ekman 459), but chooses not to exclude from his considerations of urban fantasy stories wherein the setting is the modern world broadly construed—the suburb or the small town. This thesis will build on Ekman and Young's definitions, de-emphasizing the importance of the city's character in favour of focusing on the setting as a meeting place between cultures as well as between past and present.

This choice is premised not only on Young and Ekman's decisions, but also on the aesthetic juxtaposition which is often at the root of the urban fantasy classification as it is

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[1] This suppressed history is often linked to colonialism, as will be discussed in depth later in this chapter.

presented to the public. As Irvine notes, there are many urban fantasy stories which are focused on the character of the city, but those are not the stories this thesis is discussing. Rather, this thesis examines those stories in which 'urban' modifies 'fantasy' (Irvine 200). In such stories, 'urban' does not connote the city so much as it connotes modernity more broadly. What is expected is not a close examination of the urban setting but the close juxtaposition of the human-made trappings of modern life with the supernatural: fairies who live in shopping malls, trolls on the transit, and university paranormal studies programs. In these narratives, the metaphorical importance of the city is as a signifier of modernity.

Beyond setting, there is also a broad spectrum of opinions about the roots of urban fantasy and of its supernatural characters. Ekman notes connections with traditional fantasy, as does Irvine, "from the fairy tale through the Victorian fantasists to the Inklings" (Irvine 201). Irvine and Ringel also emphasize connections with hero-quest narratives and medieval tropes (Ekman 461). Beyond the trappings of conventional fantasy, however, Ekman includes characteristics of Gothic fiction, mystery and crime fiction, and even sci-fi (452). These influences are particularly prominent in the monster-hunting variety of urban fantasy stories: Jim Butcher's *Dresden Files* or Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are well-known examples. Urban fantasy, like most speculative fiction, is not simply one thing—it overlaps in places with every other form of speculative fiction, and realist fiction as well. Harry Dresden is a wizard, but he is also a private investigator. Where monster-hunting stories abut mysteries and the gothic, and where modern-day King Arthur stories like Cochran and Murphy's *The Forever King* abut medieval fantasy, there is another border which is less well-explored: the extremely grey area where urban fantasy meets magical realism.

Magical realism, at its simplest, is also a genre where the magical or supernatural meets the modern world. Luis Leal defines the genre as one in which "the principal thing is not the creation of imaginary beings or worlds but the discovery of the mysterious relationship between man and his circumstances" (122), and ties it back to Alejo Carpentier's concept of the 'marvelous real,' wherein "the strange is commonplace, and always was commonplace" (Carpentier 104). This is similar to Angel Flores' description of the genre as one wherein "time exists in a kind of timeless fluidity and the unreal happens as part of reality" (115). The meeting of the mysterious, strange, or unreal with the ordinary or real is very similar to the concept of urban fantasy as the meeting place of the 'mythological' with the modern world. There are,

however, two distinct differences between magical realism and urban fantasy: the origin and cultural grounding of the genres, and how each genre approaches the concept of reality. As Ekman points out, urban fantasy's non-human characters, when they are not the vampires and ghosts of Gothic horror, tend to come from European cultural stories (460). This is in line with the origins of modern urban fantasy in American settler writing such as Terri Windling's *Borderlands* series, which focuses on an imaginary town that connects the modern world with the Elflands.[2] Magical realism, by contrast, has its roots in Latin American literature—despite its growth worldwide, it is a literature of the so-called 'New World.' [3] In their introduction to *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, Wendy Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora suggest that writers of magical realism "self-consciously recuperate non-Western cultural modes and nonliterary forms in their Western form" (4). This recuperation of non-Western (and particularly non-European) forms and ideas is particularly evident in the second generic difference: how the characters and the readers approach the supernatural.

Sharon Sieber draws on multiple critics to contest that fantasy requires uncertainty, a question about whether or not the characters or the readers believe in magic (168). Magical realism, however, takes magic at face value—the magical element cannot be contested but also cannot be explained (Sieber 172). Urban fantasy begins to overlap with magical realism as it expands to include non-European traditional figures and creatures not only as monsters but as real characters, and as it begins to include non-European viewpoints on the nature of magic and reality. This overlap between urban fantasy and magical realism is also rich for postcolonial analysis, which I will discuss momentarily.

Ekman, following in the footsteps of those before him, identifies one other important point in the definition of urban fantasy: the non-magical characters. The supernatural or magical

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[2] Ekman's survey of literature on urban fantasy places the origin of the modern genre in the 1980s, and names Windling, de Lint, and Emma Bull as originators (453).

[3] Leal argues that "The existence of the marvelous real is what started magical realist literature, which some critics claim is *the* truly American literature" (122). The "marvelous real" itself is a term coined by Cuban author Alejo Carpentier in the prologue of *El reino de este mundo*. Faris and Zamora are less assertive about the absolute origin of the genre, but assert that "Latin Americanists have been prime movers in developing the critical concept of magical realism and are still primary voices in its discussion" (2). For more perspectives on the origins of the genre, consider the essays in section one of Faris and Zamora's *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*.

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characters have already been identified as figures from traditional stories, world pantheons, and so on. The non-magical characters, Ekman asserts, are also very specific. Many definitions specify "strong female protagonists" as a staple of the genre (Ekman 459). There are also specific professions that tend to be prominent. Irvine identifies artists, musicians, or scholars as main characters (200), and Young adds detectives or investigators to the list (142). Young suggests that all of these characters "create meaning from chaos and disorder . . . , are all agents of a different kind of order" (142), and that these characters manage and counter the chaotic intrusion of the supernatural into the mundane world. There is an additional explanation for these characters, however, especially as they exist beyond the monster-hunting variety of urban fantasy. Artists, scholars, and detectives alike are preoccupied with stories. These are not the only professions with an emphasis on storytelling, of course, but they are those that tend towards the two kinds of storytelling which are important to urban fantasy. Detectives seek to answer the question 'what happened here?' and to create a unified narrative. Investigation, particularly of crimes, brings to light what is hidden—again, in urban fantasy, generally the marginal past. Artists and musicians are often also storytellers, especially in the folk scene, and there's a close connection between folk music and folk stories. The scholars of urban fantasy study history, anthropology, or literature far more frequently than they study biology or physics—they study human stories. The main point of urban fantasy is that traditional stories are not left behind, they are not gone; rather, they are part of the modern world, and as such it stands to reason that the protagonists must understand or come to understand the importance of these traditional narratives. In urban fantasy, traditional stories and the suppressed past are also often linked: the knowledge of the past is often held by characters from traditional narratives, or the human characters' discovery of the supernatural cultural figures living among them goes hand-in-hand with their development of a clearer view of history.

Examining the common settings, influences, and characters of urban fantasy helps to specify the focus of this thesis. Though urban fantasy is a broad genre, this thesis will focus on novels wherein the figures and creatures from settler, Indigenous, and immigrant traditional narratives are real, and live among and interact with humans in the modern world. This thesis will also limit its focus to urban fantasy written in and about North America, so as to examine how the genre plays out specifically in the context of the settler state. The generic overlap with magical realism is particularly relevant to the North American context because the cultural

encounter between settler and Indigenous characters, both human and supernatural, creates a contrast and even potentially a conflict between different ways of understanding the magical and the real. Additionally, by choosing which traditions are represented in the meeting place of tradition and modernity, North American urban fantasy is inherently making a statement about the nature of the settler state—about who has power in the current system, who has a future, and what constitutes a just path forward. Finally, by making particular note of those prominent characters and storylines which are preoccupied with historical and traditional narratives, this thesis will add to the definition that urban fantasy is a genre of stories *about* stories, and about the political and social power stories can have.

1.2 Stories as Agents of Cultural Change

Edward Said identifies stories as powerful cultural tools in *Culture and Imperialism*, arguing that "the novel . . . and imperialism are unthinkable without each other. . . . [I]mperialism and the novel fortified each other to such a degree that it is impossible, I would argue, to read one without in some way dealing with the other" (70-71). In great detail, Said examines how the English novel helped to create and maintain the ideological framework for the imperial project. He argues that "British power was durable and continually reinforced . . . , elaborated and articulated in the novel" (73). The novel helped create the English view of the rest of the world: "For the British writer, 'abroad' was felt vaguely and ineptly to be out there, or exotic and strange, or in some way or other 'ours' to control, trade in 'freely,' or suppress when the natives were energized into overt military or political resistance" (74). Writing the English novel, telling stories which built up British power and exoticized and marginalized the Indigenous Other, was colonial praxis. Said also emphasizes in his readings of both Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Kipling's *Kim* a sense of inevitability about empire. About Conrad, he writes, "[He] does not give us the sense that he could imagine a fully realized alternative to imperialism: the natives he wrote about in Africa, Asia, or America were incapable of independence, and because he seemed to imagine that European tutelage was a given, he could not foresee what would take place when it came to an end" (25). Similarly, he writes that "The conflict between Kim's colonial service and loyalty to his Indian companions is unresolved not because Kipling could not face it, but because for Kipling *there was no conflict* . . . . [F]or [Kipling] it was India's best destiny to be ruled by England" (146, emphasis in original).

Though Said's analysis is not focused on settler states and his analysis asserts that "by and large the entire world was decolonized after World War Two" (198), his approach can be useful in discussions of novels about the settler state.[4] As Said argues that the English novel is inextricable from imperialism, I argue that a novel about the settler state is inextricable from the politics of settler colonialism. Regardless of whether one makes that claim broadly enough to cover every novel set in North America, it certainly ought to cover North American urban fantasy. As noted above, simply the choice of which stories are represented, which creatures are good and which are monsters—historically, a settler/Indigenous divide, as will be discussed below—is a statement about who comprises the city or the nation and to whom it 'rightfully' belongs, in the same way that the English imperial novel created a representation of 'abroad' that justified the imperial project. Also like the British novel, urban fantasy frequently supports the structures of power and social organization imposed by settler colonialism.

Fortunately, however, Said's analysis goes beyond the novel as a simple agent of colonialism. "Just as culture may predispose and actively prepare one society for the overseas domination of another," he argues, "it may also prepare that society to relinquish or modify the idea of overseas domination" (200). One such vehicle for cultural change is Said's strategy of contrapuntal reading, which essentially consists of two aspects. First, in the reading of any individual work, we must read "with an effort to draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present . . . . [C]ontrapuntal reading must take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it" (66). The other aspect is "to read texts from the metropolitan center and from the peripheries contrapuntally, according neither the privilege of 'objectivity' to 'our side' nor the encumbrance of 'subjectivity' to 'theirs'" (259). To read imperial justification and resistance to imperialism side by side "is largely to align oneself with the process [of decolonization]" (259). This thesis seeks to analyze urban fantasy texts from settler, Indigenous, and immigrant backgrounds in order to read contrapuntally in the settler colonial context and examine the genre as both a tool of decolonization and one by which colonialism attempts to legitimize itself.

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[4] Said's definition of a decolonized state is based not on the settler state, but on states from which the imperial power has definitively withdrawn, such as India, and many Caribbean and African nations. The definition of decolonization within the settler state will be discussed at length in later parts of this thesis.

As noted above, urban fantasy is a genre of contact—between cultures, between tradition and modernity, and even between other generic conventions. As such, North American urban fantasy carries the potential of what Mary Louise Pratt calls the "arts of the contact zone" (37).[5] Said assigns a great deal of decolonial potential to

> the work of intellectuals from the colonial or peripheral regions who wrote in an "imperial" language, who felt themselves organically related to the mass resistance to empire, and who set themselves the revisionist, critical task of dealing frontally with the metropolitan culture, using the techniques, discourses, and weapons of scholarship and criticism once reserved exclusively for the European. (243)

Pratt's article "Arts of the Contact Zone" is concerned with very similar work. Pratt examines a specific historical document, Quechua writer Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala's *First New Chronicle and Good Government*, written in 1613 in Peru in a mix of Spanish and Quechua. Pratt explains that *The First New Chronicle and Good Government* uses colonial tools to push back against Spanish rule: for instance, the chronicle "was the main writing apparatus through which the Spanish represented their American conquests to themselves" (Pratt 34); however, Guaman Poma wrote a chronicle which integrated Andean people into Christian history and parodied the Spanish history of conquest in Peru (35). This text is an example of *transculturation*—the "processes whereby members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture" (36). The term transculturation is meant to emphasize the autonomy of colonized peoples in deciding which parts of colonial culture they will absorb and for what purposes, as with Said's colonized intellectuals who choose to engage the metropolis on its own terms. For Pratt, however, transcultural works do not simply adopt colonial tools wholesale. Rather, they choose those elements of colonial art which can then be merged with Indigenous forms and ideas in order to provide a new representation of the colonized subject and the colonial system (35). Pratt argues that *The First New Chronicle* "mirrors back to the Spanish . . . an image of themselves that they often suppress and will therefore surely recognize" (35). She also considers Guaman Poma's text to merge colonial tools and Indigenous ideas to create an Indigenous self-representation that

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[5] Pratt defines contact zones as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (34).

counters the colonial representation. Both the self-representation of minority or suppressed cultures and the exposure and parody of the colonial system are tools for decolonization.

1.3 Urban Fantasy and Colonial Expectations

Though it is less direct than the mixed-mode format of *The First New Chronicle and Good Government*,[6] North American urban fantasy often mixes the conventions of colonial writing, particularly the focus on realism and modernity, with the traditional narratives and ideologies of Indigenous and immigrant peoples, particularly in writing by those who are not white settler authors. In that sense, North American urban fantasy frequently practices transculturation, and with that comes another angle by which to expose colonial injustices. Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice also sees in the fantastical a particular potential for Indigenous self-representation, arguing that "we can change the genres to reflect *our* imaginations, *our* fantasies, and not just those of an oppressive worldview that sees us as walking anachronisms" (151). Justice also sees self-representation and the challenge to colonial ideology as going hand-in-hand in fantasy, writing in *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*,

> For Indigenous writers of speculative fiction, the fantastic is an extension of the possible, not the impossible; it opens up and expands the range of options for Indigenous characters . . . ; it challenges our assumptions and expectations of "the real," thus complicating and undermining the dominant and often domineering functions of the deficit model. (149)

The settler expectation of realism is taken, challenged, and reshaped to include Indigenous perspectives and cultural narratives, similarly to how realism is challenged in the overlap of magical realism and urban fantasy.

What of urban fantasy by white settler authors, however? "Arts of the Contact Zone" and *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* focus on the decolonial possibilities of writing by Indigenous and other oppressed authors. Laurence Steven tentatively extends decolonial potential to settler urban fantasy. Steven investigates the work of Welwyn Wilton Katz and Charles de Lint as "new fantasy" (59), whose definition is functionally the same as that of urban fantasy: "the intrusion of the supernatural into the everyday" (Egoff and Saltman qtd. in Steven 60). From the beginning,

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[6] Pratt notes, for example, how Guaman Poma uses Andean symbolic patterns along with Christian biblical narratives to create images of legitimate and illegitimate power (36).

Steven is aware of the potential for cultural appropriation faced by settler authors writing about Indigenous traditions. Steven suggests that Canadian authors have long faced a problem of identity: "having no indigenous non-Native culture to draw on, they attempt to graft themselves onto Native material—and the graft does not take" (57). This assessment of Canadian literature is similar to Patrick Wolfe's description of settler society as a whole. Wolfe argues that once settler society has eliminated enough of Indigenous society to lay confident claim to the land, it seeks to "recuperate indigeneity in order to express its difference—and accordingly, its independence—from the mother country" (389). The settler state builds a national identity by appropriating symbolism and imagery from the Indigenous people it forcibly displaced and murdered. This appropriation is evident in settler Canadian literature about Indigenous peoples and traditions, and Steven points out multiple examples in the writing of, for example, Susanna Moodie and Duncan Campbell Scott.

Steven asserts that Katz and de Lint have managed to avoid this appropriation (though not, necessarily, the accusation of it). Unlike earlier authors, who simply imposed colonial values onto the Indigenous Other, Steven contends that in these works of new fantasy there is "a tangible relationship between the two worlds, and an accommodation of the one to the other" (59). This accommodation is not always harmonious, however, and sometimes the encounter involves shock and even violence. Steven argues that urban fantasy offers the opportunity for a third way that resists reinscribing the assimilative dynamics of colonizer and colonized (63), instead allowing settlers to engage with Indigenous traditions and cultural narratives without appropriating them (70). Steven ascribes this generic potential to postcolonial Canada, leaving open the question of what this literature is doing if one contends that the settler state in Canada is not *post*colonial. Although urban fantasy texts by settler authors walk a very precarious line of appropriation, especially in a settler state which is very much still colonial, this thesis will suggest that they also have some potential to expose the colonial injustices of the settler state, particularly in the genre's characteristic meeting of the past and the present and in how the texts frame questions of good and evil.

Steven is not the only critic investigating the dynamics of race and colonialism in urban fantasy. In his investigation of the many definitions of urban fantasy, Stefan Ekman identifies a common thread throughout the genre: urban fantasy is "a literature of the unseen" (463). Though he does not focus strongly on race, he points out that urban fantasy is populated with

"protagonists who belong to or can move among marginalized social groups" (463). Ekman also notes that, alongside the magical or fantastic elements hiding in plain sight, urban fantasy often addresses societal ills which do the same: homelessness, addiction, and abuse being some examples (466). Though Ekman does not make the connection, this tendency of urban fantasy to make the unseen or ignored visible can and often does extend to a discussion of settler colonialism, its uneasy truces, and, particularly, its abuses.

Going beyond the ability to reveal the dynamics of settler colonialism, Jodi Byrd argues in her essay "Red Dead Conventions" that much speculative fiction relies on the conventions of settler colonialism in order to tell a story. In particular, she argues that "Indians serve as the conventions and constraints that produce meaning within the speculative and popular genres of settler colonialism" (346). Byrd identifies Indigenous people encoded as the zombies in zombie narratives (347) and as the "monstrous savages" (355) like orcs and trolls in high fantasy. The dynamic of settler colonialism, with its own endless conflict between 'civilization' and 'primitivism,' is therefore mirrored in speculative fiction which codes monstrosity and the invasive other as Indigenous. Byrd does not discuss urban fantasy specifically, but the same monstrous coding is common in urban fantasy, as Young makes clear.

Young's urban fantasy chapter in *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness*, as the title suggests, deals heavily with issues of race in urban fantasy, though Young is particularly focused on the monster-hunting variety. (Young addresses television shows, among them *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Grimm,* and *Sleepy Hollow*.) Young categorizes urban fantasy as intrusion fantasy, wherein the magical creatures and figures are invaders, a threat to the modern world (142). This understanding offers the possibility of also considering other intrusions: the intrusion of modernity into a previously-existing magical world, for example, as well as the invasions of settler colonial people, stories, and magics into a land already populated by many Indigenous peoples with stories of their own. Young also examines the ways in which monsters are often racialized (147-48), or any creatures from non-European cultural narratives are portrayed as monsters (145-46). Some creatures are able to live in harmony with modernity, but they are almost always from European stories (145). Young explores urban fantasy as a narrative about identity, both individual and communal, and argues that (particularly American, televised) urban fantasy tends to build a national identity around European heritage and whiteness (149, 153). Despite these critiques, however, Young also suggests that urban fantasy,

particularly urban fantasy which centers around characters of colour and gives them agency (Young examines *Sleepy Hollow, Rivers of London,* and *Sister Mine*), can also challenge the aforementioned racial stereotypes and collective identities of whiteness, arguing that "in the network of genre-culture the works themselves are thus agents of change" (158).

Similarly, Stephen Slemon argues that magical realism "tends to be closely linked with a perception of 'living on the margins,' encoding within it, perhaps, a concept of resistance to the massive imperial centre and its totalizing systems" (408). The particular traits of magical realism that Slemon identifies as part of that resistance are also common in urban fantasy. Magical realist (and urban fantastic) texts are "locked in a continuous dialectic" (409) because the genre rules and narrative styles of realism and fantasy are always in contest. Slemon identifies this dialectic as a reflection of the "double vision" of postcolonial cultures, wherein the language and ideology of colonizers are in contest with those of Indigenous peoples (411). More concretely, the narrative itself frequently reflects real postcolonial social dynamics in three ways. First, the setting of the narrative reflects a "transcendent or transformational regionalism" (411), wherein the city is metonymic of postcolonial society as a whole. Second, there is a "foreshortening of history so that the time scheme of the novel metaphorically contains the long process of colonization and its aftermath" (411). Last, there is a focus on the "gaps, absences, and silences produced by the colonial encounter" (411). These representations of the process of colonialism and of postcolonial society help reiterate the aforementioned double vision, as the dominant, colonizer's narrative of history clashes with "the silenced, marginalized, or dispossessed voices within the colonial encounter [that] form the record of 'true' history" (414). Though Slemon also asserts that magical realism is a "postcolonial" literature even in a country where settler colonialism is ongoing, his analysis focuses on the continuing effects of colonialism. Slemon's analysis, therefore, offers a useful lens for examining how urban fantasy represents settler colonial society. Slemon's lens also provides a hopeful glimpse of the possibilities of the genre: these texts can be an "imaginative reconstruction" (415) of reality which finds and brings together the voices and elements of Indigenous culture which were damaged or suppressed by colonialism and imagines a stronger future.

Of course, there are many other potential avenues of discussion about the genre and its relationship with colonialism. This thesis only begins to scratch the surface of how urban fantasy conflates the settler colonial city with modernity, and what effect that conflation has on the

portrayal of Indigenous characters and traditional figures.[7] It barely touches on how fairies and other creatures and figures from settler narratives are considered to be intrinsically tied to the natural world, and how that intrinsic nature manifests in settler colonial contexts. I do not discuss how urban fantasy interacts with Canadian or American ideals of multiculturalism or, by contrast, assimilation. These topics are beyond the scope of this thesis. I have focused my attention on how urban fantasy portrays traditional narratives as living and powerful anti-colonial tools, however incomplete or imperfect the dedication to anti-colonialism can sometimes be, and how the genre of urban fantasy itself can become a tool for building an anti-colonial future.

This thesis consists of four chapters and a conclusion. In the first chapter, I discuss urban fantasy from a settler perspective, examining *The Book of Dreams* (2003) by O. R. Melling and *Widdershins* (2006) by Charles de Lint. Both Melling and de Lint are immigrant authors from Ireland and the Netherlands respectively, who moved to Canada as young children, but their protagonists are settlers or have settler backgrounds, and therefore take settler approaches to the problems of colonial violence and the questions of cultural identity inherent to the novels. This chapter examines how urban fantasy from settler perspectives does not resist confronting the violence of historical colonialism, but nevertheless prioritizes reconciliation over decolonization in order to preserve settler futures.

The second chapter discusses Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998), examining what happens to traditional narratives and practices when the colonial presence retreats. It discusses those traditions as symbolic of cultural survival and as sources of power which are necessary for building a better future and a stronger community.

In the third chapter, I discuss K-Ming Chang's *Bestiary* (2020), which focuses on the importance of culture to immigrant individuals and families. This chapter examines cultural narratives and transculturation as tools of individual anti-colonial action, but also as tools for recovering from the personal and intergenerational traumas of colonialism.

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[7] In this thesis, 'tradition' encompasses a range of things, and is not limited to things that predate colonialism. 'Traditional narratives' refers to cultural stories, which might less charitably be called 'folk tales' or 'mythologies.' 'Traditional practices' include both broad cultural practices, ranging from religious ceremonies to domestic practices, and family traditions rooted in cultural beliefs and traditional knowledge. In short, 'tradition' refers to things that have history and distinct cultural significance.

In the fourth and final chapter, I discuss *Elatsoe* (2020), by Lipan Apache author Darcie Little Badger, a novel which repeatedly plays with and subverts traditional urban fantasy conventions in order to create a narrative of resistance to colonialism. This chapter considers how connection to traditional narratives, knowledge, and practices gives characters the power to participate in the work of true decolonization.

Thomas King writes that "the truth about stories is that that's all we are" (32). Urban fantasy takes this maxim literally, reflecting and refracting settler colonial society through the stories told by and within it and offering a way into a decolonial future.

2. "Gifts of the Grace": The Ethic of Reconciliation in de Lint's *Widdershins* and Melling's *The Book of Dreams*

Charles de Lint's *Widdershins* (2006) and O. R. Melling's *The Book of Dreams* (2003) are both novels about young women who discover an entire supernatural world just beneath the surface of their own. In *Widdershins*, folk fiddler Lizzie Mahone gets caught up in tensions between the local fairy folk and the Indigenous animal people when she runs into some bogans who have killed a young deer woman.[1] In *The Book of Dreams*, thirteen-year-old Dana moves from Ireland to Canada, believing that, compared to Ireland, Canada has no magic of its own. Dana soon finds herself on a quest to save the land of Faerie, and must seek help from the many figures of traditional stories who have made Canada their home. In both novels, learning about the supernatural goes hand-in-hand with learning about the colonial history of North America, and the supernatural conflict cannot be resolved without the characters confronting the violence of colonialism. However, the novels stop shy of confronting historical and present-day violence, seeking conflict resolution through ideals of reconciliation and multiculturalism while falling short of imagining a just and decolonial future. Ultimately, both *Widdershins* and *The Book of Dreams* suggest that traditional cultural narratives can be tools for greater cultural understanding and for reconciliation, but use those same stories to prop up and reinforce settler institutions.

This chapter will begin with brief summaries of both novels, as well as an outline of the distinction between reconciliation and decolonization. It will then go on to discuss how each novel employs urban fantasy conventions both to confront the violent colonial history of North America by juxtaposing the narratives of the colonizer and the colonized, and to create and uphold the colonial balance of power. The chapter will finish with an examination of how the narratives of good versus evil, war, and peacemaking in these novels serve both to create and assuage settler guilt by acknowledging the evils of the past while calling for peace over justice.

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[1] Bogan: according to Katharine Briggs, "a hobgoblin spirit, often tricksy, sometimes dangerous, and sometimes helpful" (19).

2.1 Widdershins, The Book of Dreams, and Reconciliation

  Widdershins and *The Book of Dreams* establish a standard of urban fantasy. As noted in the introduction, Charles de Lint is a foundational writer of urban fantasy. Many of the defining conventions of the genre, like the city with a hidden supernatural population, the encounter between the marginal past and the mainstream present, and the artistic protagonist, were established by de Lint's novels. His work provides a starting point from which I will explore where the genre is going and how it has changed. It also demonstrates the ideological foundations of urban fantasy as a genre which does not shy away from confronting social injustices. *The Book of Dreams* is less foundational, but it is also a useful starting point. Because *The Book of Dreams* is so heavily focused on the question of Canadian identity, it provides a strong settler perspective on the power dynamics of the settler state and what constitutes a just path forward.

  The setting of *Widdershins* is Newford, an imaginary city set ambiguously in Canada or the United States, surrounded primarily by forest, and near to an Indigenous reserve which is home to the fictional Kickaha people. In Newford, the fairy courts, who originally travelled to North America with European settlers, are bound by treaty to stay in the city, making their homes in shopping malls and hotels. With a few exceptions, the Indigenous animal people, who call themselves cousins, live outside the city in "the green and the wild" (40). The story begins when a group of bogans, who belong to the fairy courts, trespass in the green and wild and hunt and kill a deer woman named Anwatan—an incident which is deeply reminiscent of the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in the real world.[2] A musician named Lizzie interrupts the bogans as they are bringing their hunt home, and is saved from being their next victim by a blackbird man named Grey. The bogans return to get their revenge on Lizzie, dragging her into the otherworld along with her friend Jilly, where they both become trapped in a nightmare world derived from Jilly's childhood trauma.[3] Meanwhile, it is revealed that the bogans have allied with a salmon man named Odawa, who wants revenge on Grey for an ancient injury, and Anwatan's death becomes a tipping point for the buffalo people, who prepare to go to

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  [2] Though Anwatan's is the only death the reader specifically knows about, the cousins accuse the fairies of "hunting cousins" (de Lint 212) and "[killing] a few cousins" (276), implying that they do not consider Anwatan's death to be an isolated incident.
  [3] The Otherworld: the spirit world, connected to ours by an ambiguous space called the between (de Lint 154).

war against the fairy courts.[4] Grey and his friends must seek out the oldest and most powerful cousins to beg their help in preventing war from destroying the city.

In *The Book of Dreams*, by contrast, war comes to the protagonist, Dana, without any warning. Dana, the daughter of a fairy queen and a human man, thinks that she will never encounter the magical world in Canada, and often flees her mortal life to visit her mother in Faerie,[5] but then the gateways to Faerie are attacked by the Grey Man, who seeks to separate the human world from Faerie forever, cutting off humanity's access to its dreams and creativity.[6] To reopen the gateways, Dana allies with Jean, a loup-garou; Gwen and Laurel, older friends of Faerie; and the spirits from many cultures who have made Canada their home.[7] Dana travels all across Canada to learn its stories and history, seeking the Book of Dreams, which will tell her how to re-open the gateways. She eventually finds the book—her ancestor's journal, which tells of a gateway to Faerie right outside Toronto, sealed with her ancestor's blood to protect it from the Grey Man's destruction. Dana and her friends and allies must fight their way through a horde of evil creatures so that Dana can use her blood connection to reopen the portal and save Faerie.

In both novels, the conflict resolution focuses on reconciliation, but not on decolonization. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue that "decolonization in the settler colonial context must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted, that is *all* of the land, and not just symbolically" (7, emphasis in original). In short, the process of decolonization requires returning the land to Indigenous people and recognizing that Indigenous people have a distinct relationship to the land, different from any others living on it. It requires setting aside settler concerns and claims. By contrast, "reconciliation is about rescuing settler normalcy, about

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[4] The Odawa are also a group of Anishinaabeg people, but the similarity appears to be a coincidence. De Lint does not associate Odawa the salmon cousin with any real-life people group.

[5] Faerie: also Fairyland, or the Summer Land, the home of the fairy courts of Irish traditional folk stories (Melling 23).

[6] The Grey Man, or An Fear Liath: from Irish tradition, an elemental who controls the weather (Melling 186).

[7] loup-garou: from the French-Canadian tradition, a Roman Catholic man who has not attended Mass for seven years, and therefore gains the ability to become a wolf at night. Unless he goes to Confession and is cured, he will pass the curse to his descendants (Melling 125). There are other versions of the loup-garou in French and Métis culture, but none of the variants appear in *The Book of Dreams*.

rescuing a settler future" (35). Even as reconciliation may acknowledge the horrors of the past, it moves to smooth those horrors over and move forward within settler frameworks. Using Tuck and Yang's definitions, I argue that *Widdershins* and *The Book of Dreams* promote reconciliation over decolonization and prioritize settler futurity and maintaining the status quo. In addition to my discussion of reconciliation and decolonization, I will also use Patrick Wolfe's discussion of how settlers recuperate Indigeneity in order to legitimize the settler state as a lens for examining national identity and the relationship to the land in *Widdershins* and *The Book of Dreams*.

2.2 Witnessing and Confronting History

As discussed in the introductory chapter, Stefan Ekman suggests that "urban fantasy is a genre of the Unseen" and that "this Unseen is largely related to a social Other, to the less savory aspects of modern/urban life" (466). In settler colonial contexts, those less-savory aspects of modernity include not only those elements that Ekman notes— "criminality, homelessness, addiction, prostitution, and physical and sexual abuse" (466)—but also the specific racial, assimilative violence of settler colonialism. Helen Young similarly suggests that urban fantasy is "the suppressed history of modernity resurfacing" (142), and that the supernatural threat of an urban fantasy novel often stems from that hidden history, "be it migration, colonization, indigenous history, war, famine, the past of the protagonist, or some combination of those" (142). For both theorists, urban fantasy is about uncovering what was hidden or suppressed, and this uncovering allows urban fantasy texts to create what Stephen Slemon calls a "double vision" between "inherited notions of imperial history" and "the silenced, marginalized, or dispossessed voices within the colonial encounter" (414). Both *The Book of Dreams* and *Widdershins* use some of the tactics Slemon outlines in order to create that double vision and confront the colonial history of North America.

In *The Book of Dreams*, Dana's quest through Canada teaches her the history of the country, from the arrival of St. Brendan to the modern day.[8] Dana travels through time in three

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[8] St. Brendan the Navigator: an Irish monk who sailed to the west seeking the Isle of the Blessed. Dana claims that "he sailed to Canada in a leather boat, long before the Vikings or the French and English" (Melling 249), but though the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis* recounts that Brendan did find islands in the Atlantic, there is no physical evidence that he and his crew ever landed in North America. In *The Book of Dreams*, Dana and Jean travel back in time and land on Baffin Island with Brendan and his crew.

different ways, and two of those times she has to bear witness to the violence of colonialism. With Jean, Dana travels to Northern Québec and to Atlantic Canada by running la chasse-galérie,[9] and in his French-Canadian accent, Jean tells Dana, "the boat he sail through time and space" (Melling 140). Looking down from the boat, Dana sees the cities and towns along the St. Lawrence, the modern edifices overlaid with the historic settlements, and witnesses the colonization of Québec, from the Haudenosaunee longhouses to the first French settlement on Cap Diamant to the Battle of the Plains of Abraham (222-24). Dana watches as, "without pity or remorse, the Europeans burned villages and crops, enslaved men, women, and children, and slaughtered all that opposed them" (224). When Dana travels to the West, the Old Ones send her windwalking through the past,[10] and Dana sees the bodies of Indigenous people who died of disease brought by Europeans, and Indigenous children in residential schools (357). Dana does get to see happy or 'good' moments of history as well, running with the buffalo while windwalking, and paddling with the coureurs des bois, but she is frequently reminded of the violence of Canada's history. Dana's travels through time demonstrate what Slemon calls "the foreshortening of history, so that the time scheme of the novel metaphorically contains the long process of colonization and its aftermath" (411). This foreshortening of history is one of the ways in which magical realist (and urban fantastic) stories portray the social relations of colonialism and create the double vision discussed above. In *The Book of Dreams*, the conflicting voices of history are most obvious when Dana finds the Book of Dreams and reads her great-great-grandfather's story.

In *The Book of Dreams*, the settler account of Canada's history comes from Dana's ancestor Thomas Gowan, who wrote down his experiences as an immigrant in the 1800s.[11] Thomas' account is sympathetic to the Indigenous people that he meets, and even gently condemns his fellows for their cruelty (409), but Thomas also fulfills the conventional image of the early Canadian settler: a Protestant Irishman who arrives by boat and settles in the

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[9] la chasse-galérie: from French Canadian tradition. To run la chasse-galérie is to paddle a flying canoe that belongs to a demon. The paddlers wager their souls with the demon, who keeps the boat in the air. If the paddlers speak the name of God while they are in the boat, the demon will let them fall (Melling 138-139).

[10] The Old Ones: "the spirits known to the First Peoples of [Canada]" (Melling 437).

[11] Dana's family first immigrated to Canada in the 1800s, and it was her father who moved back to Ireland, where Dana grew up. Dana is therefore both a new immigrant and part of a long settler history in Canada.

backwoods of Ontario. He records the hard work of clearing the trees and building his house, presents Canada as mostly untouched wilderness (409), and spends years travelling the country working for the Hudson's Bay Company (411). He is the image of the sympathetic pioneer, to the point that only his own recorded insistence keeps his journal from ending up in a museum (399). Thomas' wondrous accounts of his new country and his peaceful interactions with the Indigenous people are at odds with the violence that Dana witnesses, and in the same way, Thomas' (mostly) realist account of his life is at odds with Dana's magical adventures and insights. Slemon's double vision is encoded in the structure of the historical dialogue even as it is foundational to the genre of urban fantasy itself.

In *Widdershins*, double vision is accomplished in two ways: through characters and through setting. *Widdershins* achieves a foreshortening of time similar to *The Book of Dreams* not by having characters who time travel but by having both spirits of the dead and extremely long-lived characters. When the buffalo people prepare to go to war against the fairy courts, the war chief, Minisino, calls on the living buffalo people and the spirits of all their dead: "thousands upon thousands of the horned cousins assembling there on an open plain, drumming and dancing as more, and then still more, join their already swollen ranks" (de Lint 275). In the otherworld, the spirits of the dead have just as much power as the living, and Jack explicitly talks about the buffalo army as a force which brings the early days of colonization to bear on the present, asking Tatiana, "Do you have any idea how many buffalo got displaced or killed when the humans you followed over here made a grab for their lands?" (275).[12] However, it is not only the spirits of the dead who connect the past to the present. Both the cousins and the fairies are long-lived, and many of them remember when the fairies first arrived. In Newford, Raven, who made the world, lives on Stanton Street in a house called the Rookery (333). Grey himself is so old that his feud with Odawa goes back to before the first settlers arrived (175). On the fairy side, Mother Crone, a fairy seer, is described as looking like a skateboarder in her twenties, despite being likely a thousand years old (35, 43). It is unclear how old Tatiana is, but her position as Queen suggests that she is likely one of the oldest fairies in the city. Even Hazel, a fairy who attends Mother

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[12] Jack, or Whiskey Jack: one of Grey's friends, a coyote man (de Lint 128). "Whiskey Jack" is the name of a bird and is a not-uncommon English corruption of Wisakedjak, a trickster and cultural hero in Cree stories, but there is no indication in *Widdershins* that Jack is the same figure. Tatiana: Queen of the Newford Fairy Courts (de Lint 194).

Crone's revels but does not have an important position in court, speaks as though she personally remembers crossing the Atlantic (39-40).

The physical presence of the dead and the long lives of the fairies and the cousins allow the novel to contain and discuss the long history of colonialism in a direct and tangible way. The differences between the fairies' narrative and the cousins' lived experiences create Slemon's 'double vision' between the voices of the colonizers and the colonized. The army of buffalo spirits that assembles to fight the fairies, especially the ratio of the dead to the living, paints a clear picture of the historical violence the fairies participated in and benefitted from. The death of Anwatan clearly signals to the reader that the violence of colonialism is not only in the past— the buffalo and the deer cousins are closely related, and the reckless, pointless slaughter of the buffalo echoes in Anwatan's murder. The fairy courts, however, push a narrative of peaceful fairies and treaty-building. Tatiana responds to Jack's accusations about the deaths of the buffalo by saying, "we had nothing to do with that" (275) and, when challenged on that claim, falls back on the treaty built between the fairies and cousins, saying, "we settled that with Raven" (275). In response to the accusations that the courts allowed the bogans free rein to hunt cousins, Tatiana says, "You know [killing cousins is] something we don't condone" (276), and turns the accusations of cruel negligence back on the cousins, accusing them of potentially allowing the buffalo to trample the fairies over the death of one woman. Tatiana is the most powerful fairy in the city, and she creates and perpetuates colonial narratives wherein the fairies are innocents who made treaties and kept them, and the cousins are irrational and violent. Tatiana's narrative is in direct contrast to what the cousins remember and what the reader perceives, creating a double vision.

The space of Newford also contributes to the double-vision effect. Slemon suggests that magical realism often uses a "transformational regionalism" wherein the setting of the story "is metonymic of the postcolonial culture as a whole" (411). Newford is built on "a nexus of time and spirit zones" (de Lint 77), which is why it has a higher population of both fairies and cousins than other places: the veil between the otherworld and the human world is thinner in Newford. Newford, with its university, wealthy downtown, and rundown artists' neighbourhoods, is familiar to the North American reader. It could be any city with a reserve nearby. It is already a place of cultural contact. However, its magical nature brings the fairies and the cousins into contact as well, bringing them into conflict over the particular land that Newford is on, where

magic is stronger, and therefore the social dynamics of the city are able to embody the social dynamics of the larger colonial society. Between the fairies and the cousins, tensions over land and resources, the murder of Indigenous women, and the ethics of violent resistance and protest are all embodied in a single space—or rather, in two coexisting spaces.

The city of Newford itself is an edifice built by settlers and controlled by the fairies. It is a physical representation of the narrative of colonial victory. When the bogans hold a funeral for one of their dead, a funeral which turns into a mob preparing for war, they are in the city and can believe in their own power. Big Dan, their leader, thinks, "maybe this was a better way . . . , to just take what they wanted from the green and the wild" (257). In the hotel where Tatiana holds her court, Grey, Jack, and Tatiana think their biggest concern is the mob of bogans. However, the otherworld, separated from them only by a thin veil, holds the truth: an army of buffalo spirits gathering for vengeance. The victory and safety of the city, the colonial space, is undermined by the history of the land which lives on in the otherworld. The space of the human world and the space of the otherworld are in dialogue with each other about which is more true: the narrative of the colonizer, or the reality of the colonized. Tatiana literally draws back a veil between worlds to reveal the true legacy of colonialism, to reveal what was previously unseen.

2.3 Modernity, Tradition, and Recuperating Indigeneity

Despite the ways that *Widdershins* and *The Book of Dreams* use the urban fantasy convention of revealing the hidden to confront the violent colonial history of North America, both texts also use urban fantasy conventions to uphold colonial narratives around settler-Indigenous relationships and Indigenous culture. One convention of urban fantasy that exemplifies the colonial framework is the understanding of the city as representative of modernity and as the social centre. Young suggests that, in urban fantasy, "the metropolis—the urban—always signifies modernity" (142), which can lead to the conclusion that those people who have adapted to city life are those who have survived, who can belong in the changing world, whereas those who do not seem to belong in the city will eventually disappear altogether. In short, urban fantasy conflates urban space with modern time.

In *Widdershins*, the treaty that allocates the city of Newford to the fairy courts and the green and the wild to the cousins also creates a narrative of fairy—and therefore settler—growth and progress which contrasts with a narrative of dwindling, disappearing cousins. Not only do

the fairy courts live in shopping malls and hotels, adapting comfortably to the modern space, they also incorporate modern technology, not just into their lives but into their very selves. For example, the treekin repair their bodies not just with natural materials but also with wires and computer parts (111).[13] Meanwhile, though a few cousins do live in the city, most do not, and therefore they are excluded from a world in which magic and modernity coexist. The ongoing activity of human settlers also means that the land belonging to the fairies continues to grow, while the cousins' territory is always shrinking: "In a half year, if not sooner, the bulldozers would come to clear this land, too, and some new enormous store would spring up in its place. Concrete and glass and steel. And with the man-made structure in place, it would be safe for fairies to venture out into it" (113). Since the cousins are not shown to fit into settler modernity the way the fairies do, the loss of territory is correlated with the disappearance of the cousins. Not only is the survival of the cousins correlated with the survival of spaces without any setter infrastructure, spaces which are rapidly diminishing, but also the cousins are shown to be naturally declining due to their age. They are losing their sense of identity. Grey visits Raven to ask for his help, and when he meets Raven he reflects,

> Once, there was a Raven who made the world. Once, it might have been the man sitting in the chair beside me. But that was in the long ago. There might be a piece of that Raven still hidden somewhere deep inside him, somewhere in his blood, in the deep of his bones, but it wasn't something the man he'd become now could readily access.
>
> Because we diminish, we spirits. . . .
>
> Mountains are ground down, continents change their shape, glaciers withdraw. Time moves and everything changes.
>
> We diminish because it's simply the way of the world. (361)

The cousins know each other, know the stories they are a part of, but they are losing touch with themselves out of sheer age and because the world is crowding them out. Raven explains that "there isn't room in the world for beings of such mythic proportions" (361). Despite Grey and Raven's impression that this diminishment is natural for any powerful supernatural beings, it does not appear to be happening to the fairies, even the most powerful like Tatiana or Mother

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[13] treekin: small fairies made of twigs and leaves (de Lint 111).

Crone. There is no indication that the fairies could call on their oldest, most powerful beings and find that they had forgotten about their power or history. The fairies' power is perpetually the same, but the cousins will naturally diminish.

At the same time that the fairies are shown to be more adaptable to modernity and capable of surviving the changing world, they are also inextricably tied to nature. The connection to nature is a common element of stories about fairies, and in urban fantasy this often manifests in a portrayal of fairies as forces of nature in opposition to or oppressed by the urban setting. In *Widdershins*, the fairies are bound to the cities, but are also shown to have a deep desire, bordering on need, for the green and the wild. Hazel recounts that "[the cousins] keep us in the cities—right from the start they have, back when the cities were no more than a few shacks at the edge of the water. We rode those high seas for long, long weeks and looked to replenish ourselves from the green and the wild, but they kept it all for themselves and they still do" (39-40). The idea that the cousins withhold something that the fairies need to live well paints the cousins as selfish for defending their land, but the idea that the fairies are natural and need to connect with the green and the wild of Turtle Island participates in what Patrick Wolfe identifies as the structure of settler colonialism. Wolfe argues that, once a settler society has established a certain claim on the land, it "[seeks] to recuperate indigeneity in order to express its difference— and, accordingly, its independence—from the mother country" (389). *Widdershins* implies that the settler fairies ought to be allowed a connection to the land they have settled, a connection which mirrors the Indigenous peoples' connections to the land, giving the fairies an identity that separates them from the place they left behind and lending their settlement legitimacy.

The Book of Dreams participates in a similar process of recuperation, framing Indigenous tradition and identity as Canadian identity and suggesting that anyone can adopt that identity if they want to. The adoption of 'Canadian' identity is central to Dana's quest for the Book of Dreams. When she and Jean travel north, they meet Jean's friend Roy Blackbird and his Grandfather, who are Inyu, and Grandfather tells Dana, "You're an outsider here, Skywoman's daughter . . . . The land won't yield its secrets to a stranger" (Melling 185). Dana responds, "I want to change that . . . . I'll travel the land till I get to know it, till I'm no longer a stranger" (185). By the time Dana realizes that the Book of Dreams is her ancestor's journal, she has come to root her identity in Canada. She tells Jean, "Reading *The Book of Dreams*, I can really feel the connection to Canada. This country is part of my family history and my family is part of

Canadian history" (412). As noted above, however, this is not just an identification with Canadian settler history, but an identification with indigeneity. Dana's quest is explicitly described as a vision quest (185, 349), and when she travels in the West, Sasquatches dress her in beaded deerskin clothing and moccasins and paint her face with ochre (349-50)—Laurel explicitly describes her clothing as "Native clothing" (362). Dana's identification with indigeneity, her becoming Canadian by taking on Indigenous traditions and attire, is what Tuck and Yang call a "settler adoption fantasy" (13). Tuck and Yang identify settler adoption fantasies as ways to "alleviate the anxiety of settler un-belonging" (15) and, as in Wolfe's own understanding of recuperation, these fantasies paint the adoptee as a "cultural hybrid" (16) who is more than either settler or Indigenous, who is the true Canadian.

Dana is not the only one who experiences this identity shift, adopting indigeneity in order to fulfill her quest. Dana's experience is part of the urban fantasy narrative in which the protagonist, newly discovering the supernatural world around her, must learn about that world and accept her place in it in order to save it. For Dana, that includes 'becoming Canadian,' but she also discovers those who have 'become Canadian' before her. In the Ontario village of Creemore, Dana meets fairies who emigrated to Canada with the Irish centuries ago. During their time in Canada, their appearance has changed to reflect their new landscape: they are tree people who look like red pine, eastern hemlock, aspens, maples, and birches, and "they [have] a stern beauty that [speaks] of deep forests, cold lakes and high mountains, vast plains" (Melling 433). In short, they appear to be Indigenous to Turtle Island, despite being settlers. They have been adopted into the very landscape.

The adoption of Dana and the fairies into Indigenous Canadian identity contrasts with the general absence of actual Indigenous traditional figures for large stretches of the novel. Dana does meet the Old Ones, spiritually, but they do not actually appear until nearly the end of the novel, when they come to help win the battle to re-open the gateways to Faerie. As in *Widdershins*, they are excluded from the urban setting and therefore, metaphorically, excluded from modernity, with the exception of Nanabozho, who briefly poses as a beadwork seller in Toronto to help Laurel (Melling 354).[14] Unlike in *Widdershins*, there is no explicit narrative of diminishing around Indigenous humans or spirits—in fact, Jean says "the First Nations, they are

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[14] Nanabush or Nanabozho: from Anishinaabe tradition, a trickster figure who brought fire to the humans (Melling 300).

strong again" (150). However, the fairies and other figures from settler traditions, like trolls, are at home in the cities and have adapted to the technology. Similarly, figures from later immigrant traditions, specifically the Chinese dragons who live in Toronto's Chinatown, are explicitly engaged with present-day concerns and willing to intervene. The fairies can just go speak to them and ask for their help (444). By contrast, the fairies tell Dana, Laurel, and Gwen that the Old Ones "seldom intervene in human affairs" (445), even though the novel contains multiple stories about the Old Ones' interactions with humans, such as We'sa-ka-cha'k[15] creating the Sun Dance, White Buffalo Calf Woman giving humans the Sacred Pipe, and Nanabozho bringing fire to humans (499-500). The juxtaposition of the ancient stories about the Old Ones and their apparent distance from humanity in the present day creates a narrative of replacement. The Old Ones are not gone; they still have power, a power which can occasionally be used for settler purposes, but in the everyday they are being replaced by the settler figures who have supposedly become indigenous to the land.

Both *The Book of Dreams* and *Widdershins* use urban fantasy conventions of the city and the natural world to create a narrative of slowly-disappearing Indigenous people and to recuperate indigeneity for settlers. However, the novels also lean heavily on general fantasy themes of good, evil, war, and peacemaking in order to continue to alleviate settler guilt and suggest strategies of reconciliation.

2.4 Morality, Peace, and Settler Guilt

As discussed in an earlier section of this chapter, both *The Book of Dreams* and *Widdershins* deliberately confront the violent colonial history of North America. This confrontation is often shown to inspire guilt in the characters, and can inspire readers to consider their own histories, but in the context of the novels the confrontation of colonialism is, in fact, part of a reconciliatory process meant to alleviate settler guilt. When faced with reminders of historical violence, characters react in ways which suggest that they are the 'good' kind of settler, the kind that feels badly about historical violence and respects Indigenous peoples. The novels also connect the ideas of Story and Goodness, suggesting that a true understanding of

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[15] We'sa-ka-cha'k: "Hero of the Cree" (Melling 497). His name is more frequently spelled Wisakedjak or *Wīsahkēcāhk*.

cultural stories leads people to do good. Through this understanding of historical evil and contemporary 'progressive' ideals, the novels build a narrative of reconciliation.

In *The Book of Dreams*, reconciliation is built on an ethic of universalism and unity, a sense that all stories have the same root. Early in Dana's quest, Grandfather explains to her that the Grey Man, who has been stalking her, is kin with every other evil or malicious spirit, in all traditions. He names spirits from Ireland, from Indigenous traditions, and from French Canadian stories, but he also notes, "when the white man came, he brought his devils too, and he himself was *le Diable* to us" (186). Dana has already begun to witness the violent past, but here Grandfather connects the spirits of evil directly with colonialism—not that the latter causes or creates the former, but that they are all evil of the same kind. The understanding that all cultures are part of the same grand story is crucial to Dana's victory. Locked in battle with the Grey Man as she strives to reach the portal, Dana finally sees how all the evils she has confronted come together: "she saw the true nature of the war being waged, ancient and never-ending, in humanity's history. . . . The monstrous forces pitted against the Land of Dreams were shadows and projections . . . . Fairy tale versions of the real evil in the world that came from humanity" (493). Dana names greed, racism, and war as elements of that evil (492). Acknowledging the horrible things that humanity has done weakens Dana as she is overwhelmed by "the mental anguish that came with the true knowledge of evil" (494). To overcome the universality of evil, however, all Dana needs to do is recognize the counterpoint: the universality of goodness.

Grandfather tells Dana, "When darkness calls to darkness, light will go to light. For even as they are kin, so too *we* are family" (186, emphasis in original). He is proven right as all the good creatures Dana has encountered on her journey gather to fight for her. Dana defeats the Grey Man by sacrificing herself to restore the gateways to Faerie, clinging to the knowledge that "*Evil is but a small and passing thing. The true nature of all is Good*" (495, emphasis in original). As the Grey Man dies, Dana senses many figures around her, discussing her quest and her sacrifice, and understands that she is part of "something much bigger. A Great Tale. A Grand Design" (495). Those figures are the Old Ones, and they accept Dana's place in the story and arrive to join the battle at the last minute, singing "*we are all family*" and "*watch the walls come tumbling down*" (496, 502 emphasis in original).[16] All Dana has to do to bring the Indigenous

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[16] In fact, the Old Ones sing Susan Aglukark's 1995 chart-topper "O Siem."

spirits into her alliance is to acknowledge the evils of colonialism, and all is resolved—or perhaps, all is reconciled: "*all had been cleansed and healed and whatever was foul had been banished*" (502, emphasis in original). This sacrifice and reconciliation are also specifically in service of the Irish land of Faerie. Though Faerie is home to spirits from Irish tradition, it is cast as the source of hope and dreams for all cultures (32), and Dana does all of her questing and sacrifices herself in order to convince the Old Ones, the Indigenous spirits, to accept that totalizing narrative. The Great Tale that the Old Ones discuss and evaluate Dana's place in derives from Faerie, from a foreign land. The true understanding of story is that all people are the same. Reconciliation is possible through the simple acknowledgement of evil, but reconciliation happens within settler frameworks and for settler purposes.

In *Widdershins*, there is an understanding of universal good, but reconciliation is less a process of becoming one people and more a process of making peace between two separate, coexisting peoples. Unlike in *The Book of Dreams*, there is no sense of a universal force of evil. Rather, the overarching threat in the novel is the looming invasion of the buffalo spirits. As Young points out, it is common in urban fantasy for the invading supernatural threat to be a product of history (142), and that is the case in *Widdershins.* The violent history of colonialism created the conditions for the army of angry buffalo spirits. The response to this threat, to the evidence of colonial violence being brought to the surface, is a basic acknowledgement. Tatiana falls back on the idea that the fairies did not actually participate in the deaths of the buffalo and do not condone the bogans' hunting (de Lint 275). Human characters like Lizzie also simply acknowledge that the cousins might have reasons to be angry. Colonialism is acknowledged as bad, but it is painted as equally bad to get revenge for colonialism. Jack says, "though I don't entirely disagree with [Minisino's] reasons, I don't believe that everybody should pay for the sins of the few" (278), and this perspective is repeated by multiple cousins. Though Jack and Grey discuss the historic killing of the bison and how the fairies moved into the land as human settlers killed those bison (275-76), there is never any real acknowledgement that living human settlers are complicit in the occupation of the land, and the complicity of the fairy courts in the deaths of cousins is glossed over.

Widdershins frames doing harm as an evil, no matter the circumstances. The universal good in Newford is the Grace, an ambiguous power which inhabits the otherworld and is at the root of the cousins' traditions and understanding of the world. Anwatan's spirit tells one of the

bogans, "The Grace holds all life sacred" (477). Similarly, Joe tells Minisino, "If you had half the heart you think you do, you'd understand that everything that happens is everybody's business. You see something wrong, you do something about it" (443).[17] Joe and Anwatan are framed as having a truer understanding of their own traditions—particularly in comparison to Minisino. Grey, too, comes to this realization at Odawa's trial, saying, "We speak of the gifts of the Grace. Isn't compassion one of them?" (531). The portrayal of seeking peace and commonality as the true spirit of the Grace or of Indigenous tradition is reinforced by Grey and Jack's choice to seek out their oldest and most powerful figures to help them stop the buffalo. Jack seeks out Ayabe, the Moose Lord, and Grey goes to Raven, who made the world. Both of them have reservations about protecting the fairies, but agree that not everybody should be punished for the bogans' actions. Raven says, "Nobody's innocent . . . . But some . . . are more innocent than others" (360). Raven not only has connection to tradition to cement his position but literally is the tradition. He is the character at the center of the world's origin story, a distinction which carries weight. If he says that peace is the way, then it is.

Just as in *The Book of Dreams*, doing right in *Widdershins* relies on recognizing a common personhood and a common cause of peace, and understanding that commonality is framed as true cultural understanding. Unlike in *The Book of Dreams*, the ideal outcome is not unity, but a reiteration of the treaty that outlines the relationship between the fairy courts. The fairy courts will take responsibility for the bogans (365), and a council of cousins takes responsibility for Odawa, whose crime is that he undermined the treaty and endangered the lives of innocents in his pursuit of revenge (528). The treaty leaves the cousins a degree of land and sovereignty, but it also allows the fairy courts and their members to go on with their lives without reckoning with their participation in the historical occupation of Turtle Island. It is a treaty that ensures that fairy territory will continue to expand as the cousins' territory disappears. It is a treaty that invests in settler futurity.

Though *Widdershins* and *The Book of Dreams* both make use of the central premise of urban fantasy as the literature of the hidden in order to uncover and confront colonial violence, they also use the conventions of urban fantasy to uphold settler institutions and alleviate settler guilt. This is not to say that the uncovering of history that these novels participate in is useless—

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[17] Joe: Joe Crazy Dog, a cousin with powerful peacemaking skills who helps Grey and Jack stop the buffalo people.

it is a crucial first step that can help redress one's lack of historical understanding and awareness. *The Book of Dreams,* as a young adult novel, may be a teenager's first challenge to the colonial history and ideology that they learn in school or read about in 'pioneer' classics. *Widdershins*'s uneasy truces, and the way that the protagonists struggle with peace, can give readers a new lens on history and political narratives around peace and reconciliation—as it did for me. Urban fantasy's revelation of the hidden is often explicitly related to building awareness around social issues: *Widdershins*'s other plot—Jilly's story—is about child abuse and follows up on *The Onion Girl* (2001), which centers stories of abuse, homelessness, and addiction. In the same way, novels that acknowledge settler colonialism's violent history and violent present help begin the process of ending the violence. Every story openly told makes it harder to hide or ignore the truth. Unfortunately, *The Book of Dreams* and *Widdershins* invest in ideals of recognition and reconciliation while labelling the requirements for decolonization as extreme or violent. In subsequent chapters, this thesis will examine texts that make space for imagining truly decolonial futures.

3. Invite the Spirits In: Cultural Survival in Decolonized Toronto in Hopkinson's

Brown Girl in the Ring

Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*, published in 1998, is a novel about a community left behind in inner-city Toronto after an economic collapse causes most people to flee the city. *Brown Girl in the Ring* opens with disconnection, with a description likening Toronto to a rusted-through hub of a cartwheel, separated from its spoke-like suburbs by guarded roadblocks (4). The physical disconnect between Toronto and the rest of the world is mirrored by a political disconnect: Metropolitan Toronto has no police force, no government services, and no international companies. It does not abide by any laws. It is not so much part of Canada as what is left when Canada retreats. The urban desertion that precedes the events of the book and the cobbled-together lives of those left in Toronto, who farm and hunt in the remains of the city, suggest that *Brown Girl in the Ring* is a post-apocalyptic novel. The ethical quandary over pig-human organ transplants and the technology of the Strip—the high-tech shopping and entertainment area that used to be Yonge Street and where rich people from the suburbs come for a taste of danger—suggest science-fiction influences, and indeed some scholarly work on *Brown Girl in the Ring* treats it as a work of science fiction.[1] While elements of both post-apocalyptic and sci-fi narratives are present, the focus of *Brown Girl in the Ring* is on its distinctly magical elements—the duppy and the orishas, among others.[2] The conflict in the protagonist Ti-Jeanne's family has little to do with ethics and technology or even with the details of survival. Rather, the conflict centres on each member's relationship with their cultural narratives, knowledge, and practices, and Ti-Jeanne's coming-of-age is a coming-into-culture, into her grandmother's Afro-

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[1] For instance, Grace L. Dillon analyzes Gros-Jeanne's use of traditional herbal medicines and argues that Hopkinson expands the genre of science fiction by including Indigenous ecological knowledge as scientific innovation. Similarly, Jessica McDonald argues that *Brown Girl in the Ring* ought to be studied as science fiction, not as a generic hybrid, because a Caribbean worldview does not see spirituality and science as mutually exclusive (5). McDonald focuses on the Porcine Organ Harvest Program and on the electric weapons carried by Rudy's henchmen as some examples of the technological focus that situates the novel as science fiction. For more on the scholarly treatment of genre in Hopkinson's work, see McDonald's "Beyond Generic Hybridity: Nalo Hopkinson and the Politics of Science Fiction." *Brown Girl in the Ring* is also frequently treated as science fiction in non-scholarly circles, such as when it was shortlisted for the Philip K. Dick Award, which is for science fiction.

[2] Duppy: a ghost, a spirit of the dead (Hopkinson 25).
Orishas: African spirits or powers (Hopkinson 126).

Caribbean religious practices and her own relationship with the spirits. In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, the physical presence of the orishas and the concrete truth of Afro-Caribbean traditions in Toronto are symbolic of cultural survival. The novel also explores traditional stories, knowledge, and practices as tools for building a stronger community and making large-scale change.

This chapter will begin with a synopsis of the novel's plot and the real-world and in-text background to the novel's present-day. It will then move on to examine Toronto as a decolonized space that allows for cultural resurgence and as a space in which colonial perceptions of reality are overturned. The chapter will also analyze Ti-Jeanne's personal reconnection to her culture and how her spirituality, particularly her connection to the Orisha of death, her patron, places her in direct opposition to colonial power over life and death in colonized spaces. The chapter will then discuss how even this imagined society is still bound to the colonial system due to the physical and financial needs of the community, mirroring real-life examples of decolonization and how colonial powers kept—and keep—decolonizing nations in their power. I will conclude by examining the lack of Indigenous characters and traditional practices in the novel and the real-world context of Indigenous title in Toronto, which show how the novel falls short of asking what true urban decolonization would require of all settlers, including immigrants, on Turtle Island.

3.1 *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Indigenous Land Title, and the Abandonment of Toronto

Brown Girl in the Ring follows Ti-Jeanne, a young Canadian-Caribbean woman who discovers that her family and their traditional practices are connected to the gang which runs inner-city Toronto. Rudy, the leader of the posse, is her grandfather, and he has learned how to bind the spirits of the dead in a duppy bowl to protect him and keep him young. Meanwhile, Ti-Jeanne's grandmother Gros-Jeanne leads a congregation of community members in Afro-Caribbean spiritual practices and provides medical services, both Western and traditional, to the community. When a politician comes to Rudy to acquire a human heart for transplant, Rudy recruits Ti-Jeanne's boyfriend, Tony, who has training as a nurse, to procure a heart by committing murder. Tony turns to Ti-Jeanne and Gros-Jeanne for help getting out of the city, and, when that fails, he kills Gros-Jeanne for her heart. Ti-Jeanne discovers that Rudy has trapped the spirit of her mother, Mi-Jeanne, as his duppy and has sent the duppy after them to make sure Tony gets a heart. Ti-Jeanne must overcome her fear of her grandmother's stories and

spirituality and embrace her connection with the orishas, particularly Papa Legbara, the orisha of the crossroads between living and dead, in order to kill Rudy and free Mi-Jeanne's spirit.[3] Gros-Jeanne's heart, meanwhile, is transplanted into Ontario Premier Uttley, who has a sudden change of policy and makes plans to revitalize Toronto.

The government's abandonment of Toronto is, from the start, a result of decolonial action, but that action is not centred on Toronto or the Canadian-Caribbean community. Instead, it is the result of a land title action taken by a First Nation in Ontario. Mr. Reed, the librarian, accumulates newspaper headlines that outline the "making of a doughnut hole" (10), beginning with "TEMAGAMI INDIANS TAKE ONTARIO TO COURT: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL FUNDS TEME-AUGAMI ANISHNABAI LAND CLAIM" (11). This headline builds on real-life events in Canada that began in the 1970s, when the Teme-Augama Anishnabai First Nation filed a land caution on ten thousand square kilometres of land around Lake Temagami in Ontario, an action which escalated to blockades of the Red Squirrel logging road in 1988, when the road was set to be extended further into the territory covered by the land caution (Morrison A13). In 1991, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the Teme-Augama Anishnabai had relinquished their Indigenous Title to that land (Santin 3), but the conflict continued throughout the decade, culminating in the Ontario Court of Appeal ruling in 1999 that they would also not allow the Teme-Augama Anishnabai to issue land cautions on that territory (Tyler 1). *Brown Girl in the Ring* projects an alternative history in which the Teme-Augama Anishnabai's court case garnered enough international attention that Amnesty International took interest and international economic sanctions were imposed on Canada's exports from Teme-Augama territory. In the novel, these sanctions placed sufficient pressure on the federal government, which in turn placed sufficient pressure on the provincial government, that both governments eventually acceded to the Teme-Augama Anishnabai's demands, acknowledging Teme-Augama Anishnabai title and granting their land rights.

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[3] In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Papa Legbara is also called the Prince of Cemetery and Eshu. It is also revealed that Legbara sometimes appears in Ti-Jeanne's visions as the Jab-Jab (Hopkinson 225). Monica Coleman asserts that this is a common portrayal of the traditional figure: "Eşu has multiple manifestations. Throughout the Caribbean, Yoruba's Eşu is known as Vodun's Legba, Santeria's Eleggua, Eshu-Elegba, and Brazil's Exu or Legbara. Within each specific tradition, Eşu has even more names and manifestations" (7).

Before the government gives up its claims to Teme-Augama Anishnabai land, however, it abandons inner-city Toronto. Decreased federal income leads to decreased provincial funding, which leads to decreased municipal funding. Infrastructure breaks down, and it becomes too dangerous for police unions, businesses, and eventually the municipal government to continue to operate in the city (11). The Canadian Army occupies Toronto briefly, and then even they retreat from the city (12), setting up blockades separating it from the orderly suburbs (4). After that, Toronto functionally governs itself. Nobody arrives to enforce the law or provide social assistance or essential services. On one level, this abandonment creates physical need and opens up avenues for gang rule, as seen with Rudy and his posse, who rule Metropolitan Toronto through a combination of drug trade and magic. On another level, however, the people of Toronto are not only cut loose from the colonial government politically, they are culturally freed from colonial expectations.

3.2 Cultural Resurgence in Decolonized Spaces

Ti-Jeanne makes specific note of the cultural shift in the Burn and in her family's life in the eleven years since Canada abandoned Toronto: "she'd had to get used to people talking out loud about her grandmother's homemade medicines. Among Caribbean people, bush medicine used to be something private" (Hopkinson 14).[4] Afro-Caribbean religious ceremonies and practices, too, used to be more private, and fewer people believed in them. Ti-Jeanne remembers her childhood, when Gros-Jeanne used to leave the apartment for religious ceremonies that Mi-Jeanne called "Stupidness" (87) and refused to explain, but now those ceremonies happen right outside Ti-Jeanne's own home. Community members know Gros-Jeanne and visit her there, and the evening ceremonies and Gros-Jeanne's magical practices are no secret. Gros-Jeanne protects her home from duppies with blue glass bottles (25). Before the Riots, the people did not lack religious freedom, but they did lack cultural permissiveness. The physical restructuring required in the newly-abandoned inner city (such as Gros-Jeanne living and operating a medical practice out of a museum-replica facade of a historic farmhouse, or Paula and Pavel hunting and farming in Allan Gardens [13]) was accompanied by a cultural restructuring which deprioritized colonial knowledge systems and reduced (but did not eliminate) social stigma around non-Christian

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[4] The Burn: the poor inner-city area of abandoned Toronto, characterized as dangerous (Hopkinson 9).

religious practice. The cultural openness and renewed practice of what might be called 'old ways' in *Brown Girl in the Ring* is both decolonial and postcolonial.

In discussing Toronto as a decolonized space, I am primarily applying the standard dictionary definition of decolonization—the withdrawal of a colonial government from colonized land—but I am also drawing on Franz Fanon's discussion of the rejection of Western values as part of the process of decolonization. Fanon writes, "In the colonial context the settler only ends his work of breaking in the native when the latter admits loudly and intelligibly the supremacy of the white man's values. In the period of decolonization, the colonized masses mock at these very values, insult them, and vomit them up" (43).[5] The abovementioned cultural openness, therefore, is decolonial in the sense that the colonial government's physical withdrawal from Toronto is accompanied by a move away from colonial norms and knowledge systems, but it is postcolonial in the sense that the people and their traditions have been impacted and changed by their experience of colonialism, and the impact of colonization remains even when the colonizer has retreated. This impact is clearest in *Brown Girl in the Ring*'s approach to religious syncretism.

Afro-Caribbean religions such as those Gros-Jeanne mentions—"Shango or Santeria or Voudun" (Hopkinson 126)—are often thought of as syncretic religions which mix elements of Christianity (mostly Catholicism) with elements of West African religions (primarily those of the Yoruba people). These new belief systems are widely practised in the Caribbean and in Brazil, but the 'mixing' and cultural shift possibly began and certainly occurred in West Africa (Montgomery 4). Syncretism, in many anthropological conversations around the Caribbean, is a direct outcome of colonialism, a sort of incomplete conversion. Eric Montgomery, however, points out the flaws in labelling West African and Afro-Caribbean religions as 'syncretic': "it mistakes receptivity for naiveté and obfuscates the fact that African gods throw a heavier shadow

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[5] As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang discuss, with reference to Fanon, "decolonizing the mind is the first step, not the only step, toward overthrowing colonial regimes" (19), and "decolonization in the settler colonial context must involve the repatriation of land" (7). The status of inner-city Toronto in *Brown Girl in the Ring* more closely resembles that of overseas colonies (similar to Caribbean nations' relationships with European ones) in terms of its relationship with the Canadian colonial government. This relationship is complicated by the settler colonial context, and I will discuss the absence of Indigenous characters and of land repatriation later in the chapter.

than do their orthodox brethren" (3).[6] Montgomery explains that syncretism prioritizes the influence of orthodox religions, essentially framing syncretic religions as impure or inauthentic versions of the colonial religion (4, 5). This representation of these religions is incorrect, Montgomery argues, because prioritizing the colonial religion reverses the dynamic of power the 'syncretic' practitioner sees as inherent to their religious practice: "Some refer to Muhammad and Jesus Christ as themselves 'Vodu spirits' with supernatural abilities. They are not acknowledging Christ or Muhammad so much as they are respecting their essence, and seeing traits and symbols in them that begin and end with their own home-grown spirits" (9). Instead of an assimilation that presents African spirits and practices as imperfect reflections of a Christian or Muslim truth, practitioners incorporate Christian and Muslim practices and symbols insofar as they are compatible with and reflective of a Vodu truth. The incorporation of symbols like icons of Catholic saints simply creates an appearance of assimilation which Montgomery frames as protective: "it makes sense to be 'Christian' or 'Muslim' in a world where Vodu and Orisha are deemed diabolical and sorcery" (8). However, this practice also allows for an ongoing connection to culture, safe beneath the 'syncretic' practices.

In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, both Gros-Jeanne's religious practice and the spiritual reality of Toronto also defy these traditional understandings of syncretism. Free from colonial oversight, Gros-Jeanne and her flock openly focus on the spirits of West African and Afro-Caribbean religions. Gros-Jeanne herself, in her new colonial context in Canada, continues to encounter new religious practices that she can assimilate into her own set of beliefs, as she did with the tarot cards taught to her by Jenny. Gros-Jeanne learns the practice, and then modifies it to reflect the things she knows and needs, as she tells Ti-Jeanne, "This deck is my own. Jenny paint the cards for me after I tell she what pictures I want" (Hopkinson 50). Monica Coleman notes that *Brown Girl in the Ring* exhibits a Pan-Caribbean approach to African-derived religions in order to build a community identity (5). Gros-Jeanne does equate different religions with each other, saying "no matter what we call it, whether Shango or Santeria or Voudun or what, we all doing the same thing. Serving the spirits" (Hopkinson 126). However, this assertion of similarity is accompanied by a recollection of their beliefs' common root: "the African powers, child. The spirits. The loas. The orishas. The oldest ancestors" (126). Far from being an indication of

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[6] Montgomery's study was primarily of the Ewe people in Togo, but he extends his critiques and analysis to similar religious shifts and appropriations in the Caribbean (15).

syncretism with colonial religions, Gros-Jeanne's Pan-Caribbean approach is an assertion of survival. The language changes and diverges due to regional differences, but the core truths survive. Gros-Jeanne and her flock follow religious traditions that have grown within colonial systems and adapted colonial disguises, and Gros-Jeanne acknowledges this, telling Ti-Jeanne "I used to hide it from you . . . . From since slavery days, we people get in the habit of hiding we business from we own children even . . . . Secrecy was survival, oui?" (50). Despite the trauma of having to hide and the many divergences that arose from the slave trade, the stories and traditions of West Africa have persisted, and so have the spirits themselves.

The physical presence of the orishas in Toronto is both proof of cultural survival and clearly linked to the withdrawal of colonial presence from Toronto. Despite the distance from their roots in West Africa, they have followed their people through the Middle Passage and then into the diasporic community in Canada. They have followed them through centuries of hiding beneath the veneer of Christianity, but here, in abandoned Toronto, they act openly. It is clear that the orishas have a different relationship with Toronto than they do with the world outside it; they treat Toronto as their own territory. When Gros-Jeanne calls on the orishas to help Tony escape the Posse, Osain shows up specifically to exile Tony, telling Ti-Jeanne to "lead Tony out of the city," and tells Tony, "We want you gone, oui" (100).[7] The assistance of Osain and Prince of Cemetery in getting Tony out of Toronto and into the suburbs is treated as both escape and exile: outside of the city, Tony is out of reach of Rudy's duppy, but he is also out of Osain's domain of responsibility. Beyond the borders of Toronto, the orishas seem to take little interest in Canada. Within Toronto, however, their influence is active enough to transform the entire city into their sacred space. In the CN Tower, facing off against Rudy, Ti-Jeanne pictures the palais where Gros-Jeanne and her flock hold their ceremonies, with its centre pole, "the bridge between the worlds" (221). She makes the connection between the centre pole of the palais and the Tower: "like the spirit tree that the centre pole symbolized, the CN Tower dug its roots deep into the ground where the dead lived and pushed high into the heavens where the oldest ancestors lived" (221). As Ti-Jeanne calls the orisha down from the heavens and the dead up from the

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[7] Osain: the orisha of healing (Hopkinson 223). He is Gros-Jeanne's spirit-father (126). Tony, as a nurse, would also have been Osain's child, but Osain disowns him for dealing drugs (99).

earth, she reconfigures the space of the entire inner city, turning it into a massive palais around the Tower's centre pole.

In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, every interaction with the orishas both uses and challenges urban fantasy conventions. Helen Young argues that all urban fantasy is "intrusion fantasy" (142), wherein traditional narrative figures like the orishas and the duppy are characterized as invasive forces against the modern world. At first, the orishas do come across as invaders, particularly to Ti-Jeanne and Tony, who do not understand what is happening. Prince of Cemetery takes over Ti-Jeanne's body, even though Gros-Jeanne says, "she head ain't ready to hold no spirits yet" (94). Despite witnessing the possession, Tony does not believe it, accusing Gros-Jeanne and Ti-Jeanne of tricking him (102). The orishas disrupt both the characters' lives and their sense of reality. However, Montgomery points out that "Spirit possession is the primary goal of African religions" (10), and many African-derived religions are similar in that regard. Far from being invaders, the orishas need to be invited in—bodily possession is how people want to interact with them. Prince of Cemetery comes to Ti-Jeanne because Gros-Jeanne invokes him (91). When Ti-Jeanne confronts Rudy at the end, she calls on the orishas for help, and they come. The ease with which they defeat Rudy and his henchmen implies that they could have done it anytime. Ti-Jeanne even tells Legbara, "Is allyou do all this, Papa, not me" (229), but Legbara answers, "is you call all my duppy to come do your bidding. And child, you do a thing I never see nobody do before. For a few minutes there, you hold eight of the Oldest Ones in your head one time" (229). The presence of the orishas is often disturbing and disruptive, to Rudy, to people who do not want to believe in them, but the truth is that they are invited in—into individual bodies, as Ti-Jeanne does when she calls them, and into the city as a whole, which becomes a conduit for their power. Far from the orishas not belonging in the modern world, the modern world, when the colonial power leaves, accommodates itself to the orishas.

The borders of Toronto are borders between where the colonial government acts, and where it does not, between where the orishas act and where they do not, and between two types of reality. Daniel Heath Justice confronts the idea of reality and realism, pointing out that

> privileging this narrow definition of literary realism [one which excludes the spiritual and symbolic] . . . presumes, first, that there's a single reality against which all others must be compared, and second, that any cultural expressions or understandings inconsistent with that interpretation are deficient at best, pathological at worst. (142)

Justice sees the potential in Indigenous literatures to throw off colonial definitions of reality, to counter "dualistic presumptions of real and unreal that don't take seriously or leave legitimate space for other meaningful ways of experiencing this and other worlds—through lived encounter and engagement, through ceremony and ritual, through dream" (152). Though *Brown Girl in the Ring* is not an Indigenous text, it engages with reality in a similar way. Tony says as much when he is trying to convince Ti-Jeanne to join him in running to East York: "Bingo, I'm out of Toronto and into the real world" (Hopkinson 111). In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, reality depends on how you think of it and who dictates the thinking. In Toronto, where colonial cultural and religious expectations have retreated along with the Army, orishas and duppies can become part of characters' lived realities.

3.3 Ti-Jeanne, Legbara, and Resisting Colonial Necropolitics

Toronto as a decolonized place and a (somewhat) decolonial community makes space for this new reality, but Ti-Jeanne and Tony, despite being in that community, are not entirely decolonized themselves. Both of them exist in a colonial mindset at the beginning of the novel, and that mindset leaves them vulnerable. Tony, for example, believes that Gros-Jeanne can do obeah, but he consistently refuses to believe in the orishas, even when he sees them possess Ti-Jeanne and Gros-Jeanne.[8] This disbelief makes him uncertain and hesitant when he tries to escape Toronto, and he is caught as a result (113-14). Ti-Jeanne, for her part, fears Gros-Jeanne's religious practices: "There was the drumming that went on in the crematorium chapel, late into the night. The wails and screams that came from the worshippers. The clotted blood on the crematorium floor in the mornings, mixed with cornmeal" (36). Ti-Jeanne is unable to shake the sense that there is something wrong with Gros-Jeanne's religious practice, a sense that comes from centuries of colonial influence which portrayed obeah and religious ceremonies as exclusively evil. When Ti-Jeanne finally agrees to learn from Gros-Jeanne, it is still out of fear and a desire to "make all of it go away" (125). Eventually, however, Ti-Jeanne embraces her connection to Legbara and calls on him for help in order to confront Rudy: "She knew that by calling the spirit 'Papa,' she was acknowledging a bond between them. Strangely, that felt good and right, not the imposition on her that she had thought it would be" (195). In acknowledging

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[8] Obeah: a practice of spellcasting and healing, also associated with evil because of how it was framed by Christian missionaries (Coleman 2-3).

that bond and performing the same ceremony she watched her grandmother perform, Ti-Jeanne for the first time sees and understands her culture without the veil of colonial fear, and this allows her to face and ultimately defeat Rudy with the knowledge Gros-Jeanne passed on to her.

Ti-Jeanne's acceptance of Legbara as her father-spirit and her subsequent coming-into-power is an act of resistance not only against Rudy but also against the colonial power that lurks just outside of Toronto. Although no one is present in Toronto to enforce colonial law, an absence that has facilitated significant change in Toronto, the colonial government has not truly forgotten the city. Ti-Jeanne as the conduit for the Prince of Cemetery, who guards the crossroads between life and death, stands in opposition to the "necropolitics" of both Rudy and Premier Uttley. Necropolitics, a concept coined by Achille Mbembe, is the use of power "to dictate who may live and who must die" (Mbembe 11). Mbembe argues that the ability to use this power over life and death constitutes sovereignty, and it is by this definition of sovereignty that Rudy and his posse rule Toronto. It was Rudy who first called on Legbara for the power to kill: "me tell him me want him to kill everybody that do me bad. And imagine this: blasted Eshu tell me no!" (Hopkinson 132). Legbara refuses to kill on Rudy's behalf, but does eventually teach him how to make a duppy and control it. Rudy uses his duppy to decide who will live and who will die; the duppy kills for him, but it also keeps him young (122). Rudy has considerable power over Toronto, power that he occasionally uses as an extension of outside colonial power.

From the perspective of the colonial outsiders, inner-city Toronto exists in a twelve-year "state of exception"—a situation in which "the controls and guarantees of judicial order can be suspended . . . in the service of 'civilization'" (Mbembe 24). Mbembe describes modern-day occupation and necropolitics as the "creation of *death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*" (40, emphasis in original). For Mbembe, the condition which confers the status of living death is active, violent occupation and surveillance, for which he gives the example of modern-day Palestine (29-30). In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, this stage is already past: the Riots were initially met with military force (Hopkinson 11), but eventually the Army was withdrawn and the actual occupation of Toronto ended (12). Instead of a death-world created by the constant threat of military violence, Toronto is a death-world by virtue of its extreme poverty and community violence. The residents of a death-world live in constant precarity, to the point that they are, particularly to the outside observer or occupier, as good as dead. Canada creates a

state of exception in Toronto, withdrawing all government and law enforcement and setting up roadblocks around the city to contain the chaos of the Riots (4), creating a death-world in the process. Despite withdrawing both overt control and social services, however, Canada maintains a sense of ownership over Toronto and certainly views its people as already functionally dead. This is why Baines comes to Rudy to source a human heart: "You people see a lot of terminal injuries?" (5), he asks Rudy, certain that they do. The people of Toronto are not, from the colonial perspective, really people. They are living dead, and therefore resources, just as Mbembe explains that their ancestors were, on plantations in the not-so-distant past (21).

Where Rudy uses obeah to mimic colonial sovereignty and even, when it suits him, to extend the colonial reach back into Toronto, Gros-Jeanne and Ti-Jeanne use their spirit connections for resistance. Gros-Jeanne's father spirit is Osain, the healer (91), and her healing ability is a direct counterpoint to Rudy's dealing in death, a more benevolent sovereignty over who lives and who dies. She uses her healing as part of her community-building, as well, and the members of Gros-Jeanne's flock not only meet regularly but also provide food for each other and support each other in times of need, as they do for Gros-Jeanne's nine-night (242-43).[9] This community care reduces each member's physical need and reduces the precarity of the death-world. Ti-Jeanne, however, has a much more active resistance. Her father spirit is Legbara, Prince of Cemetery, and her actions take a more direct form of control, wresting Rudy's control over life and death from him. She shatters the duppy bowl which he has fed by killing people and which keeps him young, freeing the souls trapped inside it (204). She calls down Legbara, who refuses to accept the deaths Rudy has offered in place of his own and gives them all back to Rudy instead, which kills him (226). Ti-Jeanne even invites the spirits of those Rudy killed to return from Guinea Land.[10] Far from being invaders or a threat to Toronto, the spirits come out of the otherworld as a final act of resistance, to end Rudy's tyranny before they return to Guinea Land. Ti-Jeanne does not call on Legbara because she wants to kill, or have sovereignty over who ought to live or die, but to put things back in order, to put spirits where they are meant to be. This commitment to the natural cycle of life and death, to the dead making it to Guinea Land instead of being trapped as duppies, is also a commitment to life. As Gros-Jeanne tells Ti-Jeanne

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[9] nine-night: ceremony held for nine nights after someone's death, like an extended wake (Hopkinson 242).

[10] Guinea Land: the land of the dead (Hopkinson 104)

about Legbara, "he does watch over the crossroads between death and life, too. Dead people precious to he because he does shepherd them across one way, but children precious to he because he does shepherd them across the other way" (123-24). Legbara's prominence in Toronto is not a sign that the people are dying, at least, no more than they ought to. He keeps the cycle of life moving, and Ti-Jeanne's connection not only with her baby but also with the street children is a manifestation of his work and is its own point of resistance against the colonial narrative that Toronto is full of the living dead; if Ti-Jeanne and Legbara have any say in it, it will only be full of the living.

3.4 The Inescapable Colonial Legacy

Despite the safety and provision that Gros-Jeanne, Ti-Jeanne, and the flock are able to offer the community, the people of Toronto are not able to thrive physically outside of the colonial system. They have their newfound cultural freedom, but they are often starving and vulnerable. Rudy observes that so many street children simply disappear that "no one would have noticed a few more of the rats going missing" (7). Even at the end, when Rudy is gone, the people are vulnerable to other gangs that might rise up in his place; after all, the posse's power and wealth came from the drug trade (29). With the posse gone, there will be new suppliers, and there is no real health infrastructure for harm reduction or help with addiction in inner-city Toronto. Toronto needs the resources and services that the colonial government can provide.

This model of Toronto as a decolonized space in some ways parallels the real-life example of Haiti. Following the Haitian Declaration of Independence in 1804, several countries, namely France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, refused to recognize Haiti as an independent country and isolated it from trade. In exchange for recognition, France eventually demanded that Haiti pay them 150 million francs as restitution for lost property (in the form of slaves) and the deaths of colonists during the Revolution. In isolation, Haiti suffered significant political instability and financial difficulties. In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Toronto is also cut off from the rest of the world: "the only unguarded exit from the city core was now over water, by boat or prop plane from the Toronto Island mini-airport to the American side of Niagara Falls" (Hopkinson 4). This isolation contributes to the unmet physical needs of the residents of Toronto, who survive mostly on what can be sourced inside the city's boundaries. The residents are also trapped inside, denied sanctuary in the outside world. For Tony to leave Toronto, he would have

to hike through the woods to skirt the guard posts set up along the highways (110-11). In order to improve their conditions of life, the residents of Toronto will have to reintegrate in some way back into Canadian colonial society.

Gros-Jeanne's final action is an attempt to find control over the necessary reintegration by possessing Premier Uttley's body. Possession in West African religion is not solely the province of the orishas—one can also be possessed by other spirits—and the description of Uttley's inner experience is similar to Ti-Jeanne's experience of possession. Notably, the experience begins not with the invasion but with welcome: "[Uttley]'d been aware that the lifesaving organ had been placed in her body, had felt relief and a sense of welcome toward the donated heart. *But then the dream had changed. She had realised that she was being invaded in some way, taken over*" (236, emphasis in original). Slowly, Uttley loses control and feeling of her body until everything fades to black, and she wakes up changed. She looks down at herself and sees her blood in "*two distinct streams, intertwined*" (237). Similarly, when Ti-Jeanne is first possessed by Legbara, she loses control and sense of herself: "the cadence caught her mind in a loop, spun it in on itself, smaller and smaller until she was no longer aware of her body . . . . She barely knew when she stood up" (93). Gros-Jeanne's cohabitation in Uttley's body is longer-term than Legbara's possession of Ti-Jeanne, but it begins with a welcome the same way that being possessed by the orishas begins with calling out to them.

Gros-Jeanne possesses Uttley in order to make opportunities for the people of Toronto. Under her influence, Uttley suggests rejuvenating Toronto by offering "interest-free loans to small enterprises that are already there" (240). Previous attempts have involved incentivizing businesses from the outside to return to Toronto—essentially a neocolonial invasion which takes resources and space from the people already there. Gros-Jeanne/Uttley's alternative instead provides more resources to the current residents and builds the economy from within, giving the people more freedom. That freedom is not, of course, complete. In order to gain the respectability they need, the residents of Toronto may have to make sacrifices, including cultural sacrifices, to appeal to colonial norms. This is, however, Gros-Jeanne's last act of protection for her flock's space and cultural freedoms: a way for them to stay in control of themselves. Toronto cannot fully escape colonial influence and truly thrive, but Uttley's solution is a best-case-scenario compromise.

Brown Girl in the Ring treats the Canadian government's retreat from Toronto as decolonial in a way that frees the people of Toronto from colonial rule and expectations; however, this treatment focuses on the immigrant Afro-Caribbean community as the primary colonized people in Toronto, failing to truly consider the Indigenous population in Toronto or the immigrants' ongoing occupation of Indigenous lands. The presence of Afro-Caribbean communities in Canada is due to European colonial powers that took them from their homelands and brought them over to the Americas in the first place, and the Canadian colonial government and European settler majority are assimilative forces in the lives of Afro-Caribbean communities. In *The Transit of Empire*, Jodi Byrd uses the word "arrivants" to describe people who have come to North America because they have been displaced by global imperial activity (xix); arrivants are neither people with the power of settlers, nor the Indigenous people to whom the land belongs. Ungoverned Toronto, in which white settlers are a minority, would be the first truly non-colonial space the Afro-Caribbean community of arrivants has had in centuries. However, as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang point out, "colonial subjects who are displaced by external colonialism, as well as racialized and minoritized by internal colonialism, still occupy and settle stolen Indigenous land. . . . Decolonization in the settler colonial context must involve the repatriation of land" (7). In short, for arrivants to have a space of their own in Canada, as they do in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, they must continue to occupy Indigenous land. Perhaps the occupation of Indigenous land is ignored because of a perceived lack of dispute over the land Toronto occupies compared to the (at the time) ongoing dispute over Teme-Augama Anishnabai title. However, such an understanding would ignore the fact that the Mississaugas of New Credit entered a land claims process regarding land in the Greater Toronto Area in 1986, and a settlement was not reached until 2010 (Edwards par. 8). Beyond that, if Canada purchases land under treaty and then withdraws its political presence from that land, that land is not now free for anyone who would like to settle there. In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Indigenous title is treated fairly and favourably in the case of the Teme-Augama Anishnabai—they win their case—and it is possible that this opens up space for other decolonization efforts across the country. However, the requirements for true decolonization and acknowledgement of Indigenous title in Toronto are simply never considered.

Brown Girl in the Ring also makes very little mention of Indigenous people in Toronto, nor does it acknowledge whether they, too, are experiencing the freedom to practice cultural

traditions or a shift in their relationships with their neighbours. The only Indigenous character in Toronto is Frank Greyeyes, who is clearly participating in two presumably traditional practices: growing wild rice (243) and offering tobacco as part of Gros-Jeanne's nine-night (245). *Brown Girl in the Ring* also does not discuss any characters from Indigenous (Mississauga or otherwise) cultural narratives or indicate whether they have the same physical existence as the orishas. This is a significant oversight, particularly in comparison with the orishas, who represent the cultural survival of the Afro-Caribbean people. In the Toronto of *Brown Girl in the Ring*, reality is being reshaped outside of white settler bounds, but it is shaped exclusively towards Afro-Caribbean understanding and imagining, leaving little space for Indigenous people or their stories. Due to the novel's focus on a single Afro-Caribbean family, it is understandable that Hopkinson prioritizes the Afro-Caribbean experience, and this is why this thesis examines the potential of urban fantasy writing from settler, arrivant/immigrant, and Indigenous perspectives. Each one has a different potential for envisioning the process of decolonization.

Brown Girl in the Ring envisions a society outside of colonial laws and norms, where traditional cultural practices flourish and the spirits play a role in ensuring the well-being of their servants. Gros-Jeanne and Ti-Jeanne invite the orishas into Toronto, build bonds with them and serve them in order to help the community thrive in defiance of the outside colonial gaze that attempts to define them. Ti-Jeanne and her grandmother's connections to their living traditions help them envision a brighter future. However, the persistence and flourishing of Afro-Caribbean culture is not mirrored by a flourishing of Indigenous culture and practice. Instead, Indigenous presence is crowded out as the land is re-occupied by the immigrant community. The next chapter will examine another immigrant community, the Taiwanese-American community, and will focus on how urban fantasy can illustrate how the legacy and trauma of colonialism around the world follows immigrants to North America.

4. Transcultural Tiger: Anti-Colonial Resistance and Intergenerational Recovery in K-Ming Chang's *Bestiary*

K-Ming Chang's 2020 novel *Bestiary* follows three generations of women in a family that moves from Taiwan to the United States, witnessing the women come to terms with their family history and their own identities. The narrative intertwines Daughter's account of her life with stories from Mother to Daughter, and letters from Ama (Grandmother) to her daughters, read by Daughter. Not only is this a family of Taiwanese immigrants, but also its members are specifically identified as descended matrilineally from the Indigenous Tayal people of Taiwan. The early establishment in the novel of all three main characters as storytellers also sets up their storytelling as part of an intergenerational resistance to colonial rule. The family carries their traditional Tayal stories with them to America, but they are specifically followed by Hu Gu Po, a tiger spirit of Chinese origin who inhabits women and eats children's toes. Their engagement with Hu Gu Po is part of a process of transculturation by which Ama, Mother, and Daughter push back against their colonial experiences and build new representations of themselves. *Bestiary* engages with stories and storytelling on a personal level, as tools for recovering from colonial trauma as individuals and families. The potential of traditional narratives is tied to personal identity and individual resistance: these are not, necessarily, stories to change the world, but they are stories to redefine the characters beyond the framework of the colonized subject.

This chapter will begin with a synopsis of the novel's plot and context, and an outline of its urban fantasy elements. From there, it will examine how the novel focuses on the women of a single family in order to create a distinctly gendered model of colonialism and colonial trauma, and how the characters engage with figures of Tayal and colonial traditional narratives in the process of resisting and overcoming colonialism. In particular, I will examine how the women in Daughter's family turn the power of Hu Gu Po back against the colonial forces in their lives, a living process of transculturation which positions the storyteller—she who decides what the tiger will be—as someone with decolonial potential.

4.1 *Bestiary* and the History of Colonization in Taiwan

Because it was published only in 2020, and it is Chang's first novel, there is little existing scholarship on *Bestiary*. As a recent novel, however, *Bestiary* is valuable to this thesis' discussion of urban fantasy because it offers a vision of the genre's future trajectory. As *Bestiary*

blurs the line between urban fantasy and magical realism, it also offers the opportunity to discuss specifically how the genre conventions of urban fantasy build a decolonial narrative while acknowledging that genre fiction like fantasy, science fiction, and magical realism, particularly by non-white authors, often does not fit comfortably into one genre classification. This chapter will discuss the genre of *Bestiary* in more detail later on.

In *Bestiary*, almost all the characters are identified by family relationships—for example, when the narrative is from Daughter's perspective, she refers to her grandmother as Ama, but when the narrative is from Mother's perspective, the same woman is "Ma." The only character with a given name instead of a relationship is Ben, who is not related to the main characters. For simplicity's sake, this chapter will identify characters by their relationships to Daughter, unless it is in a direct citation. The story follows Daughter, who lives with her parents and brother in an unspecified city in California, "a drivable distance to LA and Agong [grandfather], but still far north enough from Ama that [she and Mother] only spoke on the phone" (Chang 36). As a preteen, Daughter digs holes in her backyard which seem to come to life and breathe, particularly the centre hole, which looks square, like the Chinese character for mouth, 口, pronounced 'kǒu.' Eventually she feeds the 口 and begins to receive letters through it in return, letters written by Ama to Ama's five daughters. At the same time, after Mother beats Daughter with the garden hose, Daughter grows a tiger tail, which she takes as a sign that she is being inhabited by Hu Gu Po. As Daughter and her girlfriend Ben make their way through Ama's letters, Daughter tries to discover why Hu Gu Po has inhabited her and concludes that her tail is a weapon meant to rescue her Agong, who is deeply traumatized from his past as a soldier and whom Ama refuses to care for. Mother's stories about growing up in Taiwan and immigrating to Arkansas and then to California are interspersed with Daughter's story, alongside other short stories about their older ancestors.

Although this novel is set primarily in the United States, it does not take up the issue of colonialism in North America. Rather, it focuses mainly on the intergenerational effects of colonialism in Taiwan. Taiwan's history of colonialization is long and complicated. In the 1620s, both the Dutch East India Company and the Spanish Empire established outposts on the island— the Dutch in the south and the Spanish in the north—with a great deal of unoccupied territory in between (Wills 88, 91). By the end of the 1640s the Dutch had driven out the Spanish and conquered much of the island (91), but their administration was short-lived. In 1662, the Dutch

were defeated by Chinese Ming Dynasty loyalists, and they abandoned the island (95). In 1683, the Ming loyalists surrendered to the Chinese Qing[1] Dynasty (102). The Qing controlled Taiwan for over two hundred years, though they did not functionally govern the entire island, and the highland areas in particular remained outside their control (Shepherd 121-22). By the end of their rule, most of the population of the island consisted of Han Chinese settlers (Gardella 166). In 1895, Taiwan was surrendered to the Japanese at the end of the Sino-Japanese War (Lamley 202). The Japanese controlled the island until the Republic of China—usually referred to in *Bestiary* as the Chinese Nationalists—drove them out following the Second World War (247). Since then, Taiwan has been contested territory, occupied by the Republic of China but also claimed by the People's Republic of China. Throughout this history of occupation and settlement, the Indigenous peoples of Taiwan have undergone successive waves of assimilative policies surrounding language, religion, and cultural practice. The earliest stories in *Bestiary* take place during the Qing Dynasty occupation. The narrative deals with significant Taiwanese historical events, among them the White Terror, which was the approximately forty-year period of martial law under the Republic of China government designed to root out political dissidents and prevent communism from taking hold (Philips 302).

 Bestiary does not acknowledge America's history of internal colonialism or identity as a settler state. Despite the city's grimy foundations, it is only mentioned that it is built on a landfill, not that it is built on Indigenous land the same way Taiwan is. However, the novel does not entirely ignore American imperialism. Mother reminds Daughter that it was America that gave the Chinese Nationalists the supplies to hold the island against the communists (Chang 209), and Ama's land on the island surrounded a U.S. army base (233). In America, the family is lumped in with Chinese immigrants. Their landlord tells them, "*I love Chinese people. I love China*" (38). In school, the children learn English, distancing them linguistically and culturally from their past (80). There is no mention of what America represents to anyone except their family, but to their family America is the country that helps put a colonial government into power, and,

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[1] Wills and subsequent sources on Taiwanese history (all from *Taiwan: A New History*, edited by Murray A. Rubinstein) use 'Ch'ing' instead of 'Qing.' 'Ch'ing' is the Wade-Giles romanization of 清, whereas 'Qing' is the Pinyin romanization. Pinyin is the modern standard romanization system used by the People's Republic of China and in many English-language sources ("Pinyin romanization"). I have elected to use the Pinyin romanization to fit with this standardization.

when their family leaves the place in which they are being colonized, America is the country that assimilates them.

4.2 *Bestiary* as Urban Fantasy

Bestiary exists firmly in the overlapping space of urban fantasy and magical realism. Some of the stories and supernatural occurrences are specifically connected to traditional narratives like those of Hu Gu Po or Papakwaka, but many are also singular magical occurrences.[2] The primary differences between urban fantasy and magical realism are the text's cultural grounding and the approach to reality, and in those areas *Bestiary* falls more into magical realism: there are no European traditional figures in this novel, and nobody in the novel questions the existence of Hu Gu Po or what is happening to Daughter.[3] Nevertheless, the novel cannot be straightforwardly classified as magical realism. Rather, it draws elements and approaches from both magical realism and urban fantasy, blending the genres in order to bring forward insights about the ongoing colonial experiences of Taiwanese, and specifically Tayal, immigrants. There are four significant elements that connect *Bestiary* to urban fantasy: the figure of Daughter as the classic investigatory protagonist, the urban setting of Daughter's story, the classification of urban fantasy as an intrusion narrative, and the ever-present Hu Gu Po. Both the character of Daughter and the world around her are characteristic of urban fantasy. Helen Young identifies the protagonist of an urban fantasy story as a "detective," someone who "create[s] meaning from chaos and disorder" (142). In my introductory chapter, I identified a preoccupation with storytelling as a common characteristic of urban fantasy protagonists (artists, scholars, and detectives alike). Ama, Mother, and Daughter are all storytellers. Ama writes letters to her daughters telling the stories of their childhoods, but she also tells Daughter stories about her ancestors. Mother tells Daughter stories about her childhood, traditional Chinese stories like Hu Gu Po and Meng Jiang Nu, and stories about her own experiences of colonization.

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[2] Papakwaka: from Tayal tradition. The first humans were born from the rock on the side of the mountain Papakwaka.

[3] Another sign of the influence of magical realism on *Bestiary* is its similarities, in name and concept, to Julio Cortázor's 1951 short story "Bestiary." Cortázor's story revolves around a girl, Isabel, who is visiting friends in their country house, where a tiger roams the house freely. When Isabel realizes that Rema, her caretaker, is being abused by her husband, Isabel deceives the husband about the location of the tiger, leading to him being eaten. In Chang's *Bestiary,* Daughter similarly uses her tiger against her abusive father, as will be discussed further below.

It is Daughter, however, who takes the many stories that Mother and Ama give her and tries to create meaning with them. Daughter collects Ama's letters and scours them in an attempt to make sense of her world, to understand why she has her tail and understand her family's pain. Eventually she is led to two conclusions: the letters lead her to the realization that Ama is going to harm Agong (Chang 195), but they also lead her to realize why and to understand how Hu Gu Po came to her family.

Daughter's investigations are carefully framed by their setting. Though *Bestiary* is not set in a specific city, the urban setting is important to the narrative because it is a meeting place in a variety of ways. Daughter and her family live near Chinese immigrants, allowing the novel to explore how the dynamics between colonized and colonizer persist and change in a new land. More than being a meeting-place between people, however, the city is a meeting place between past and present. Young notes that, in urban fantasy, the urban setting "is understood as both symbol and manifestation of the problems of modernity" (141)—the city represents the present, and in *Bestiary* the present, like the city, is built on a dangerous foundation. Daughter and her brother originally dig the holes in their backyard because the city is built over a landfill, and "there were gases trapped in the soil wherever trash was buried, and if [they] didn't dig holes for the ground to fart out its gas, the whole city would explode" (Chang 40). Young defines urban fantasy as stories of "the suppressed history of modernity resurfacing" (143), and in *Bestiary* the landfill beneath the city literalizes this element of resurfacing. Daughter digs holes to allow the dirty history of the city to surface, to release the tension upon which her city is built. Instead of gas, however, the holes release Ama's letters, and the mess and tragedy upon which Daughter's own life has been precariously built comes to the surface. In this way the urban landscape, run-down and sometimes hostile but nevertheless familiar, mirrors Daughter's life as everything familiar to her, no matter how difficult it may be, is overturned to reveal the history of colonial trauma upon which it is built.

The intrusion of history into Daughter's life in the form of the letters is only one way in which *Bestiary* is an intrusion narrative. As noted in my introductory chapter, Young's analysis of urban fantasy opens space for the discussion of other intrusions, including colonial invasion. In *Bestiary*, the intrusion of colonial power is repeatedly shown in both mundane and magical contexts, from the story of Daughter's great-great grandfather, living at the tail end of the Qing Empire's period of control in Taiwan, to Daughter's experience as a 'Chinese' immigrant in

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America. Simply on a mundane level, the narrative frequently references the colonial history of Taiwan and emphasizes the family's experiences as Tayal people. When Ama tells Daughter the story of her great-great-grandfather, she opens by defining him in colonial terms: "The empire had two categories for us: cooked and raw. If you married a mainlander and let them stew their children inside you, you were cooked. If you lived in the mountains and fucked rivers, you were raw. Grandfather Isaw was yolkraw" (Chang 139). Grandfather Isaw goes down from the mountains and marries a mainlander, but as each generation's story is told, their Indigeneity is constantly reinforced. Ama grows up in the Indigenous township (231). Daughter and her brother deduce from her stories that Mother "was not the last granddaughter of a Tayal chief but descended from lower-ranked warriors, born with a shark's tooth under her tongue" (37). Daughter, growing up entirely in America, still knows the difference between herself and Chinese immigrants, and she compares herself deliberately to Ben, who is from Ningxia, by noting "[s]he was 1.5 shades lighter than me and two inches closer to the sun" (73).[4]

While they all remember and identify with their Tayal ancestry, the women's lives are also marked by constant colonial invasions, and the impacts of those invasions are passed down. When Ama tells the story of Grandfather Isaw, who becomes a pirate and calls himself Old Guang, Daughter clarifies in the footnotes, "yes, this story is being told in Mandarin. See: linguistic imperialism" (143). Daughter is aware of the irony of using the colonizer's language to tell a story about her Tayal ancestor running away to sea instead of staying with his colonizer family. Every time the island changes hands it is simply a different invasion. Daughter continues to tell her family's story: "The Nationalists confiscated my grandmother's land a second time. *Watakushi*, she said again and again. *It is mine. It is mine.* She claims her land in a language that's not hers" (232).[5] Ama's entire life is taken up by the ongoing colonization of her island, and even when the family moves to America, the relationship between the Tayal and their colonizers follows them. When Mother first meets her husband, one of his first questions is if she is Chinese (168). When a richer mainlander moves in next door to them, Mother says, "*It's like martial law on this goddamn street"* (37), and when they get in trouble with the landlord it is the mainlander who speaks for them, rubbing away the cultural gulf between them by telling the

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[4] Ningxia: the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region on the Chinese mainland. The main populations there are Hui Chinese and Han Chinese.

[5] All the dialogue in *Bestiary* is written in italics, not marked by quotation marks.

landlord that "*cutting down trees is a cultural thing*" (39). In America, where both Daughter's Tayal family and the mainlanders they meet are immigrants, the Chinese immigrants seem to absorb Daughter's family into their larger whole.

4.3 Gendered Invasions and Hu Gu Po

Colonization in Daughter's family is a gendered phenomenon: colonizers are men, husbands, and the colonized are women, or they are queer. Old Guang marries a colonizer woman, but he runs away to sea and becomes a Tanka pirate captain's gay lover, and Daughter's family is born of that partnership.[6] Ama marries two soldiers, both mainlanders fighting for control of the island. She writes to her third daughter that her first husband was "a red spy . . . your father arrived   on my island   a boat we didn't recognize   the soldiers brought guns   a language" (157). Ama's second husband is a Chinese Nationalist, and Mother tells Daughter about his role: "The White Terror: When I tell you its name, you think I mean *white* as in the American kind. It's true, the Americans gave the bullets, but these are the men that spent them: your agong your agong your agong" (209). Ama consistently describes her marriages as invasions of her body, and through the letters Daughter comes to understand Ama's experience. Daughter writes back, "You define a daughter   as something   done to you   at night without your permission" (249). Ama cannot forgive her daughters for existing. As Daughter notes, they are the products of invasion. Ama tells Daughter, "*When I gave birth to my first daughter . . . I saw her face and it was a soldier's*" (223). Ama hates her husbands and the invasions they perpetrate and represent, and by extension hates her daughters, to the point that, when they are small, she throws them into the river, wading in to pull them out again as fish who grow back into girls (113-14). The experience of invasion keeps Ama separate from her whole family.

Mother also marries a mainlander, and similarly experiences marriage as an invasion, telling Daughter that her cavities came from her marriage: "*This is what you get from kissing a mainlander, from marrying one. Remember: This hole in my tooth is the one you were born*

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[6] In a long and complicated story, great-grandmother Nawi is born of a magical crab. The details are not important, except to note that Nawi is "born from a half-cooked man and a pirate" (Chang 149), and is thus specifically not descended from mainlander colonizers.

through" (37). Marriage puts holes in Mother's body, injuries that are compared to those caused by Chinese soldiers. In the same passage, Daughter recounts how

> Our mother once ran from an entire army, climbing a tree so soft-boned that it collapsed, shish-kebabing two soldiers and ending martial law on the island forever. The part about the tree is true at least. Her wrist wears a scar like a bracelet, where the bones battled out of the skin. She imagined the soldiers skewered and strung, her injuries dormant inside their bodies. (37).

Mother projects the injuries that she received during the occupation onto the invading soldiers, but she also experiences her piercing injuries again every time she has to deal with mainlander men. Her marriage causes cavities, but her marriage is not the only relationship that Mother compares to invasion; as Daughter says, "My mother said, *It's like martial law on this goddamn street*, when the mainlander moved in next door" (37). The mainlander neighbour, whom Daughter and Brother call Duck Uncle, has a tree that breaks up Mother's driveway, and she tells him, "*The roots of your tree are canyoning me!*" (36). Duck Uncle also owns a restaurant, however, and while Mother's husband is back in China, not sending money, she sleeps with Duck Uncle in order to keep their house (39). Over and over, Mother's experience of mainlander men is directly discussed as the invasion of her home, and sex and invading armies leave the same kinds of injuries.

The political invasion of the island is mirrored in the personal, bodily invasion of Tayal women by mainlander men, and this invasion is mirrored again by Hu Gu Po. The tiger spirit is always an invader. Mother tells this story like this:

> Mothers ago, there was a tiger spirit who wanted to live inside a woman. One night when the moon was as brown as a nipple, the tiger spirit braided itself into a rope of light and lowered itself into a woman's mouth, rappeling down her throat and taking the name of Hu Gu Po (14).

Hu Gu Po is a mainlander figure, not a Tayal one, a tiger come over to the island with the people. Ama tells Daughter that "there were no tigers on her island and there had never been. The story had been born somewhere else, brought over by men and stuffed into the bellies of women who didn't want it" (223). Daughter recognizes this invasion when she writes to Ama, "you aren't the tiger spirit   you're the woman   it wears" (250). Like the family's history of marriage to colonizers, the invasions of Hu Gu Po are repetitive. Daughter does not realize that Ama is

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connected to Hu Gu Po until the end of the novel, but it turns out that the invasion of the tiger spirit is inherited. Daughter is certain Hu Gu Po is inhabiting her from the moment she discovers the tiger tail. She narrates, "I was tigering. Hu Gu Po was the new governor of my bones" (49). Similarly, however, there are many hints that Hu Gu Po also inhabited Mother. Daughter recounts that

> My mother lifted the bedsheet over us both when she told me this story [of Hu Gu Po], crouching down over my feet, grasping them in her fists, and ferrying them to her mouth. . . . She let go of my feet when I begged her not to eat them, but one night she concluded the story by biting down on my big toe. Her teeth encircled it like a tiara, resting on the skin rather than breaking it, but I could feel her trembling, her jaw reined back by something I couldn't see. In the morning, my toe wore a ringlet of white where the blood didn't return again for months (15-16).

This story of Mother having to actively resist biting suggests that she is resisting the urges of the tiger spirit inside, who is always hungry and craves children's toes (14).

For Mother, Hu Gu Po is both a part of her and a danger to her. Mother is missing three toes, and she tells Daughter, "you think [the toes] were thieved by Hu Gu Po, the tiger who inhabits us like our own bones. Sometimes I want to pluck the rest of my toes like grapes, suck the sweet from their skins" (206). Unlike Ama, for whom Hu Gu Po is always a separate being inside her body, Mother feels that Hu Gu Po does belong in her, is as much a part of her as her bones. However, Hu Gu Po, with its hunger for toes, makes her a danger to herself. She needs to consume, even to the point of self-consumption. This relationship with Hu Gu Po mirrors other aspects of Mother's complicated identity. As discussed above, Mother shares Ama's distaste for mainlanders, even understanding her own marriage as something that pierces and invades, creating holes in her and demanding sacrifices of her body. Ama and Mother share their experiences of colonization. Mother, too, grew up on the island for much of her childhood, and her experience of colonization follows her to America. As noted above, Mother remembers fleeing armies, and even in America she associates mainlanders with invasion and martial law (37). Mother carries many of the same traumas as Ama and has many of the same associations with mainlanders. In this sense, her identity is Tayal. However, just as Ama cannot forgive her daughters for existing, Mother cannot forgive Ama for throwing them into the river. She retells the experience in her own stories to Daughter, saying at one point, "It's not that she's ashamed of

having tried to kill us. It's that she failed, changed her mind, which means she wanted us despite what we made her: a mother" (201). Another time, she thinks, as she pulls Ama's bleeding hands from the sink, "I don't know why I'm rescuing her hands from the water when they once tried to d____ me in the r____" (185).[7] This resentment between Ama and Mother leads Mother to instead grow closer to her mainlander father, despite the painful history of colonization with which he is associated. His experience as a soldier has left him with PTSD, and Ama treats him with resentment as well, to the point that Mother and Daughter become convinced that she may kill him (195).

Mother's disconnect from Ama and connection instead with Agong is a connection as well with colonial Chinese practices and the stories Agong brings. Mother actually loses her toes not to Hu Gu Po, but because Agong shoots them during a PTSD episode and they have to be amputated (212-13). When, in the end, Mother retrieves Agong from Ama and brings him home, she also grinds up her toe bones and feeds them to him to cure his memory loss as part of the practice of gegu (244).[8] This is a specifically Chinese practice requiring Mother to sacrifice part of herself, and it signifies Mother's acceptance of the colonial expectations in her life. Mother frequently has to make sacrifices of her body and of her autonomy in order to appease mainlander men and keep her family safe and well—sleeping with Duck Uncle so that her children have enough to eat and the landlord does not evict them (39), telling mainlander stories to keep her husband happy (24), and caring for her father through Chinese filial rituals (244). This is also a reflection of Mother's relationship with Hu Gu Po. From Ama's perspective, Mother's embracing of Hu Gu Po is a full renunciation of her Tayal identity and specifically of the position of resistance to colonialism of which Ama was a part. Ama writes to Mother, "you drew stripes on your skin with ink   you the tiger-woman   never the child commissioned to

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[7] This is the only place in the novel where words are censored like this, but missing pieces of language are common in *Bestiary*. Ama and Daughter's letters to each other are characterized by large gaps between the words, and those gaps also show up in Daughter's prayer to Papakwaka (see below). In *Bestiary*, language begins to break down whenever characters are trying to talk about their trauma. For example, Mother's near-drowning is an event that she can barely speak about.

[8] Gegu: "a ritualized filial practice of using one's own flesh to make healing medicine for sick parents or other elders in the family" (Yu 62). Yu suggests that it began around the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE) and was still culturally mainstream during the late Ming dynasty (early 1600s) (62).

kill it" (193-94). Mother's assertion that sometimes she wants to eat her own remaining toes, however, suggests that she does understand Hu Gu Po as a dangerous invader who asks too much of her, just as colonial expectations ask her to let her father consume her. Mother embraces her father due to her mother's rejection, but she does not truly come to terms with the tension between herself and the mainlander men who colonize her life.

4.4 Transculturation and Hu Gu Po as a Figure of Resistance

　　　In contrast with her mother, Daughter's relationship with Hu Gu Po changes and grows over the course of the novel. At first, she recognizes the tiger spirit as a colonizing force and responds accordingly. She reaches towards her Tayal knowledge in response, praying to Papakwaka to remove the tail: "*dear papakwaka please let my skin rescind all scars all tails let my teeth be benign as butterflies*" (53). Daughter recognizes Hu Gu Po as part of a legacy of violence and does not want to become part of that violence. She also recognizes Hu Gu Po as foreign to her body, praying "*dear papakwaka　I know this story　is outside your language but is hu gu po born one limb at a time or all at once which part of her　am I already o papakwaka mountain teat　mouth of us all　please don't strand my body　outside its myth*" (54). To Daughter, Hu Gu Po is both the invader and the consequence of invasion. She recognizes Hu Gu Po in Ama as that which causes her to hate her family and wants to separate them, telling her mother they would "fell [Ama] together, cleave the woman from the tiger inside her" (45). Daughter even asks for an axe to fight Hu Gu Po. However, despite Daughter's immediate fear and sense of Hu Gu Po as an invader, she comes to accept the tail, and even to turn Hu Gu Po back against the colonizing forces in her life.

　　　Because Hu Gu Po is, in *Bestiary*, both a real figure and a story, Daughter's fraught relationship with Hu Gu Po resembles a process of transculturation "whereby members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture" (Pratt 36). Pratt notes that, with transculturation, the colonized do not get to choose what the colonizers bring them, but they do decide "what gets absorbed into their own [culture] and what it gets used for" (36). None of the family necessarily chose to have Hu Gu Po inhabit them, but Daughter takes the tiger into her own hands and chooses how to use it. Ben tells Daughter, "*you're becoming the species that will save you*" (Chang 91), and not long after, this prophecy comes true when Daughter turns her tail on her father, who is a constant colonizing

presence in her home. Daughter describes the way he "hierarchized the house: his dishes in the sink stacked on top of ours, his slippers lined up closest to the door, his place at the table facing the window, ours facing the walls" (68). The father returns from his work on the mainland to re-invade their physical space, but he is always also a cultural colonial force, instructing Mother to tell the children mainlander stories (24). The father controls their space, controls what they are told, and often controls their bodies by beating them or otherwise teaching them physical control. One day, when he is beating his son in the parking lot of the zoo, Daughter takes matters into her own hands. First, she tries to stop him with her own body: "I ringed my arms around my father's waist and dangled from him, trying to weaponize the weight of my body" (96). When she is disregarded, Daughter takes the power of Hu Gu Po for herself, using the colonizing tiger spirit to fight off the one who brought it: "I stood behind my father, standing in his shadow while my tail wrapped around his ankle, yanking so quick his leg buckled beneath him. . . . I spoke down to him: *We're going home. You will not follow us.*" (96-97). In this moment, not only does Daughter engage with Hu Gu Po transculturally by choosing when and how to embrace the tiger spirit, but also she "mirrors back" (Pratt 35) at her father his controlling colonial violence. When Daughter tells Mother what happened, she fully embraces the tiger spirit, taking from the invader and making it her own strength, telling Mother, "Hu Gu Po had kept us from getting hurt" (Chang 98).

In the end, Daughter realizes that her experience with Hu Gu Po is only the most recent step in the process of transculturation, and that the tiger spirit which she has turned against her father first began to turn against its colonial roots in her grandmother's body. Mother and Daughter go to Ama's house with the intention of rescuing Agong, intending to use Daughter's tail to drive Ama back. Daughter instead hits Agong with her tail (222). Ama tells Daughter, "*See . . . . We're the same beast*" (223). Even as she sees Hu Gu Po in Daughter as the invader, she also sees her own experience reflected, her history of resistance resurfacing. Ama takes control of Daughter's tail, leading her around by it (224). Hu Gu Po inhabited Ama first, and their connection is clear. When Daughter tries to use her tail against Ama, the tail lashes out against Agong instead, following Ama's own desire for violence against her colonizer. Daughter's unintentional violence here mirrors her intentional violence against her father, and the implication is that each individual chooses what to do with what the colonizer brings to them, how and where to use it in resistance. Daughter at first sees Hu Gu Po as having betrayed her, as

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being a thing which can only hurt people (246). She wants to cut off her tail and rid herself of Hu Gu Po, but Ben asks, *"What would you be without this tail"* (246), and Daughter is forced to come to terms with how Hu Gu Po is now a part of her lineage, how the trauma of colonialism has shaped her family and how the slow turning of Hu Gu Po against its origins connects her to her mother and grandmother. Daughter regrets hurting Agong, regrets that Hu Gu Po is violent, but it is more important to her that Hu Gu Po allows her what she wants the most: the ability to protect her mother. It is, after all, not her father's violence against her brother which first prompts her to embrace Hu Gu Po, but the theft of her mother. Daughter feels the tiger spirit demanding violence after her father returns to them, saying, *"Bury his hands in the yard for pickpocketing my mother from me"* (71). Daughter recognizes that the protection and power she gets from Hu Gu Po, the ability to resist further invasion, is worth the price of having the tiger.

4.5 Storytelling as a Personal and Interpersonal Decolonial Tool

The tiger spirit passes through their family line despite the fact that nobody in Daughter's direct line is a child of a mainlander. Daughter's ancestors are instead almost all born supernaturally. As noted above, in *Bestiary* colonialism is a distinctly gendered and embodied experience. Old Guang comes down the mountain to marry a mainlander, but he runs away and his daughter is born "from a half-cooked man and a pirate" (149). Nawi marries an unspecified man, probably not a mainlander, who was born a beaver (230). Ama marries two mainlanders, but she specifically tells Mother, "the one you call Ba [Father]   is not yours   I conceived you with the river" (192). Ama takes a woman born from the river near her home as a lover, specifically a lover who belongs to her land and her stories—the river comes from Papakwaka— and who does not invade her body (234), and Mother is born of that relationship. Mother goes on to tell Daughter that she was "conceived in her mouth, born between her teeth and tongue" (197)—Daughter is spoken or maybe consumed into being. Each time a child is born she seems to be the product of turning away from the colonizer and back towards her ancestors and their stories, so it makes sense that Hu Gu Po, as it inhabits them, is also turned away from the colonizers who brought the tiger.

The cycle of turning back to family roots repeats at the end of the book, as Daughter reconciles with Hu Gu Po inside her and sends her letter back to Ama through the □, writing, "what survives   is what I choose to remember" (250). Daughter also births her own

supernatural child. In the middle of the night, sleeping in the backyard, Ben and Daughter hear chirping coming from the □, so they begin to dig into it again. They dig up a cage full of birds, and then the ground changes, "the road rearing and bucking into a river, asphalt dissolving to ink, a flood reaching our feet" (253-54). The ground breaks open just as Daughter and her brother feared it would when they first dug the holes, but instead of revealing the city's garbage underbelly, the river breaks free, the same river from which Mother was born and into which she was thrown, the history of Daughter's family spilling out into the American city. Daughter recounts, "a tail breaches the surface, legs wading after it. Out of the riverroad   the tiger runs to us   brightwet   mouth wider than night   calling   *Mother   mothermothermother*" (254). This is the next generation, born strangely like their ancestors, and this time reconciled with the tiger spirit from the beginning. That Daughter's child is born a tiger shows that the effects of colonialism cannot be undone, that the stories and hurt of the past will stay with the family, but also that they have chosen how to take those stories and that hurt and turn it into a new, stronger identity.

The stories of Ama, Mother, and Daughter about their family history, and how that personal history is entwined with and representative of the colonial history of Taiwan, demonstrate the centrality of storytelling as decolonial praxis. The experience of colonization has created intergenerational trauma, fear, anger and hatred passed from mother to daughter along with the story that colonized them. However, it is also storytelling—the central work of urban fantasy protagonists—that moves them slowly towards recovery, towards a new life. As Mother and Daughter prepare to rescue Agong, Mother tells Daughter, "Three stories, then you can live" (199), and tells her a Tayal story, a mainlander story, and a personal family story. These are almost the last stories in the novel, except for Ama's final story, and the stories finally solidify Daughter's knowledge of where she comes from—to give her a full understanding of her cultural and personal heritage—so that she can move forward. Slemon argues that one of the things that makes magical realism effective in representing colonialism and postcolonialism is the "foreshortening of history so that the time scheme of the novel metaphorically contains the long process of colonization and its aftermath" (411). Between Ama's letters and her stories of their ancestors, Mother's stories of her childhood, and Daughter's story, *Bestiary* covers over a hundred years of history: three different colonial regimes on the island of Taiwan and the family's immigration to America, where their history follows them. The telling and retelling of

their family history allows Daughter to begin to come to terms with the conflict and anger in her family and in herself. The telling and retelling of stories of Papakwaka and Hu Gu Po, Daughter's engagement with both of them through her prayers and through being inhabited by Hu Gu Po, allows Daughter to understand herself and build her identity, one that connects her to her ancestors and accepts the past. When Ben asks, "*What would you be without this tail*," Daughter replies, "*Free*" (246), but she also recognizes that "it wasn't true. [The tail] was my umbilical cord, and I'd never been freer than inside my mother's belly, Ama's blood braiding into me. My body multiplied by theirs" (246-47). Hu Gu Po, the new, invasive story, the pain of colonialism, cannot be shed. It is part of them, but it is something they can take and turn back on those who cause them pain as well. It can become theirs. Daughter's child braids together the Tayal stories and Hu Gu Po as the tiger rises from the river that flows from Papakwaka, where the Tayal people were born. Keeping those stories close allows the family to move, slowly, towards new freedom.

Bestiary is an example of writing from a marginal population, a story to be read against the dominant narrative. The characters hold on to their own traditional narratives, remember them and turn back to them, but they also take the colonizers' narrative and turn it back against them. The inhabitation of Daughter's family by Hu Gu Po becomes a living process of transculturation as, with every generation, the tiger spirit becomes more theirs, more an agent of their protection. In the end, the family's storytelling becomes the means by which Daughter can reconcile her identity and begin to move her family forward into a postcolonial future.

However, *Bestiary* uses America as a setting without consideration of the colonial processes which are ongoing in America. The next, and final, chapter's discussion of Darcie Little Badger's *Elatsoe* will address the colonial history and present of the United States, in particular, and discuss how urban fantasy by Indigenous authors can function as a narrative vehicle of resistance and decolonization.

5. "All Land is Ours, and No Land is Ours": Little Badger's *Elatsoe* as Urban Fantasy Metatext

Darcie Little Badger's young adult novel *Elatsoe* (2020) is about a seventeen-year-old Lipan Apache girl named Elatsoe, or Ellie, who can summon the ghosts of dead animals, a power she inherited from her mother's female ancestors.[1] Set in Texas, the novel frames Ellie's world as very similar to our own, an alternative reality of the United States, except for the fact that magic and monsters are acknowledged elements of reality. The parallels between Ellie's world and the reader's world range from the mundane, like the existence of pistachio ice cream, to the broad and political: Ellie makes specific references to the history of colonialism and Indigenous genocide in Texas, such as Colonel Ranald Mackenzie's raid against Lipan rancherias at El Remolino.[2] In *Elatsoe*, however, real-world historical events and contemporary racial dynamics are integrated with the supernatural history of Ellie's own family and the dynamics between settler magic use and Ellie's ghost-calling. The modern settler state in Ellie's Texas, with its cities, fairy rings, and vampires, is tied directly to her people's loss of power after her Six-Great Grandmother's death. *Elatsoe* engages metatextually with urban fantasy, using the genre conventions around intrusion narratives, urban spaces, and cultural figures to push back against the colonial assumptions about modernity, survival, and reality that underpin the urban fantasy genre. The novel also locates identity and power in the individual and community connection to tradition and traditional stories, and presents Indigenous people's traditional practices as personally, politically, and physically anti-colonial.

This chapter will begin with a brief plot summary of the novel and a review of urban fantasy as an invasion narrative before moving on to discuss the novel's primary urban setting: the fictional town of Willowbee, Texas, and how *Elatsoe* uses setting to subvert the generic expectations of invasion. The chapter will then explore the negative impact of settler magic on

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[1] In Lipan, 'élatsoe' means 'hummingbird' (Little Badger 180).

[2] Ellie recounts that "After the Civil War ended, the souped-up United States Federal Army fell upon Texas and slaughtered the men, women, children in her tribe" (Little Badger 204), which appears to coincide with Mackenzie's 1873 raid. This raid was carried out in response to complaints from Texas settlers. While the Mackenzie raid, and many subsequent U.S. military attacks on Lipans, involved crossing the border into Mexico, the website of the Lipan Apache Tribe of Texas notes that "not only were Lipans chased back and forth across the border, but there were active criminal warrants against them in Texas and bounties for their scalps in Mexico" (par. 2).

the people and environment and the novel's challenge to settler concepts of reality, again examining how the novel subverts the colonial conventions of urban fantasy with regard to the natural world and the real. Finally, the chapter will discuss how Ellie follows in her ancestors' footsteps by using her gift to resist ongoing colonialism and work towards decolonization.

5.1 *Elatsoe* and the Conventions of Urban Fantasy

 Elatsoe is Little Badger's first novel, and is very new, so there is no prior scholarship on it. Discussing *Elatsoe* in this thesis is important for three reasons, however. First, because *Elatsoe* is a young adult novel, it diversifies the discussion of urban fantasy. As discussed in earlier chapters, adult urban fantasy in particular places an emphasis on 'social issues' writing, directly tackling systemic issues like homelessness, abuse, and violence. *Elatsoe*'s focus on systemic violence against Indigenous people demonstrates that a focus on systemic justice is characteristic of the genre as a whole, not just a function of writing for adults using dark themes in order to emphasize its 'adult' nature. *Elatsoe* is also particularly useful as a comparison to *The Book of Dreams*, the other young adult novel in this study, which demonstrates a similar attention to historical systemic violence, but does not have the same decolonial ethic. Second, because it, like *Bestiary*, is quite new, it is more representative of where urban fantasy is going and what potential the genre has in the future as urban fantasy becomes more prominent and popular.[3] Third, as a novel from an Indigenous author, it offers an Indigenous perspective on the origins of urban fantasy and the question of decolonization.

 Elatsoe begins with a scene in which Ellie's ghost dog, Kirby, becomes distressed while playing fetch, a behaviour which, in Ellie's experience, only happens when her family members are in trouble. Appropriately, her family soon receives the news that Ellie's older cousin Trevor

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 [3] In 2020, the same year as its publication, *Elatsoe* was on *Time*'s list of the one hundred best fantasy novels of all time, along with genre-founding novels like *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and recent big names like Rothfuss' *The Name of the Wind* (2007) and Martin's *A Storm of Swords* (2000). Other urban fantasy books (or books with urban fantasy elements) on this list include *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Roshani Chokshi's middle-grade novel *Aru Shah and the End of Time* (2018), and *Gods of Jade and Shadow* (2019), an adult urban fantasy by Silvia Moreno-Garcia. Chokshi's novel is the first among many books under the 'Rick Riordan presents' imprint, which focuses on publishing middle-grade urban fantasy by diverse authors (Riordan). As the genre becomes more popular, it is also opening up in terms of authorship and cultural focus across age ranges. *Elatsoe* is only one example, but it is a strong example of the genre's current direction.

is dying from injuries sustained in a car accident. That night, however, Ellie is visited by Trevor's spirit as he passes into the underworld, and Trevor tells her that he was murdered by Abe Allerton of Willowbee, Texas. In their investigation into Trevor's death, Ellie and her best friend, Jay, discover that Abe Allerton is a doctor who possesses the power to take injuries sustained by one person and transfer them to someone else. Like Ellie's ghost-summoning powers, Allerton's ability is inherited through his family line. Ellie and Jay learn that Allerton was the one who got into a car accident and used his power to transfer his fatal injuries to Trevor when Trevor stopped to help him on the side of the road. They also discover that Allerton and his ancestors have been magically supporting the town of Willowbee, turning their ability to transfer injuries against the town's enemies and even magically moving the town to a new area when people grow suspicious. Ellie also has to contend with Trevor's wife Lenore, who wants the younger girl to use her ghost-calling powers to bring Trevor back to life, despite traditional Apache knowledge that human ghosts always come back wrong. Allerton disturbs Trevor's grave while trying to hide the evidence of his crime, Trevor's ghost returns to seek vengeance against his murderer, and Ellie must send Trevor back to the underworld before she can banish Allerton to its depths as well, thus leaving him to the mercy of his many victims' spirits.

Throughout the novel, Ellie tells and hears stories about her namesake Six-Great Grandmother, who was also a very powerful ghost-caller and who fought both monsters and colonizers to protect her people. The illustrations by Rovina Cai at the beginning of each chapter also tell the story of Six-Great's life and adventures, right up to the point that it intersects with Ellie's narrative when Kirby finds Ellie's ancestors in the underworld.

At first glance, the setting of *Elatsoe* appears to defy the standard conventions of urban fantasy in two remarkable ways: the 'urban' setting is, in fact, a small town, and, more importantly, the existence of the supernatural is well-known and accepted, rather than hidden. Stefan Ekman argues that urban fantasy is "a literature of the unseen" (463), but in Ellie's world, the supernatural is very visible. Ellie brings her ghost dog to school with her and Al, the boyfriend of Jay's sister, is a vampire in a pre-med college program. As noted earlier, Helen Young characterizes the "intrusions of the supernatural" in urban fantasy as "the suppressed history of modernity resurfacing" (142). In this conception of the genre, it is possible to have a supernatural norm, as long as there is also a supernatural being or occurrence that is not the norm and that brings with it a revelation about "the history of a place, be it migration, colonisation,

indigenous history, war, famine, the past of the protagonist, or some combination of these" (142). Young adds that urban fantasy "also includes the . . . suburban" (141-42), which opens space for small towns and suburbs to fill the same narrative space as a city in urban fantasy, so long as they are a meeting place between people and between past and present. In *Elatsoe,* the concept of the supernatural intrusion is both straightforwardly reproduced and re-examined in the town of Willowbee.

5.2 Willowbee as Invaded and Invader

To the residents of Willowbee, Ellie is the intruder, a perspective that she is acutely aware of. Upon their arrival in the town, Jay alerts Ellie to the fact that people are staring at them (Little Badger 189), and later the same day Ellie notices that "she and Jay were being watched by an elderly couple eating hamburgers, a waitress in a bright yellow apron, and a grizzled man with a shake in one hand and a fork in the other" (197). Despite her presence with Jay, who is white, Ellie hypothesizes that her race is the source of the attention, noting that "although the cities around Willowbee had plenty of residents with Ellie's skin tone, she hadn't seen any in Willowbee" (189). In other urban fantasy narratives, an Apache girl showing up in town, sticking her nose into everyone's business and asking suspicious questions, would be the beginning of an intrusion narrative, and the climax of the story would be the vengeful ghost (her deceased cousin Trevor) who shows up at the town's bicentennial, presumably because of her. This conventional expectation specifically mirrors the racial dynamics that Young identifies as typical of urban fantasy: "Beings marked as indigenous to the American landscape are always threatening monsters" (145). Jodi Byrd goes one step further in identifying Indigenous figures as invaders in genre fiction, comparing settler writing about Indigenous people to zombie narratives and explaining that "the Indian burial ground and the vengeful Indian spirit are the transgressive border-crossers that slip the Western into . . . the horror story" ("Red" 348). As noted above, transgressive border crossing—invasion—is also a central element of urban fantasy, and in *Elatsoe*, the dead and, more specifically, Trevor's vengeful spirit, are central invasive figures. From the perspective of the white townspeople, Ellie's appearance, the vengeful ghost, and the horrible revelations that accompany her appearance in town threaten their way of life, but when the exorcists manage to send Trevor's spirit back to the underworld and Ellie and her family leave town, the appearance of order is restored, although only superficially.

Before Ellie drags him to the underworld, Allerton exclaims, "If I die, Willowbee rots with me" (322). Without Allerton, the source of the town's prosperity—his healing powers—will dry up, and the people of the town will not be able to start over somewhere new, without suspicion. From the perspective of the townsfolk, though the immediate threat of Trevor's ghost is gone, their lives cannot return to normal. By the settler urban fantasy conventions discussed above, *Elatsoe* is a tragedy in which Willowbee's powerful protector is defeated. Ellie's awareness of how she stands out by being Apache becomes a sort of urban fantasy genre awareness, an understanding of the role that settlers see her in, which effectively draws attention to the actual source of intrusion: settler colonialism.

The intrusion narrative at the heart of this novel is colonial in nature: the people of Willowbee invade Lipan Apache territory. Ellie's observation about the absence of Indigenous residents in Willowbee is one index of this invasion, but the more the town is described, the clearer it becomes that the entire town is not "native" to the southwestern United States. Upon her first glimpse of it, Ellie notices that "the town architecture was unusual for the region; it seemed inspired by colonial New England" (81). Not only is the town architecturally out of place, but also it has an entirely different ecosystem. Ellie observes that it has "the kind of green, wooded acreage that belonged in the Pacific Northwest. The lawn was speckled by white polka-dots, the heads of round mushrooms. . . . Oaks and firs blocked most of the mansion's side wings" (82). This is nothing like the surrounding environment, which Ellie describes as "naturally a dry, yellowish country" (82), with vegetation like "thorny desert willow, mesquite, and calico bush" (118). The entire town of Willowbee, not just its residents, obviously does not belong in this environment. Near the end of the novel, when Trevor's ghost has been sent back to the underworld and Abe Allerton is trying to escape without consequences, Allerton reveals that he can magically move the entire town. He tells Ellie, "Willowbee was founded in Massachusetts. We've only been in Texas, oh, about thirty years. All land is ours, and no land is ours" (328). Allerton and the people of Willowbee feel entitled to settle and lay claim to any land they want, a two-hundred-year-old pattern of colonization repeated over and over again as Allerton moves the town according to its needs. Willowbee is the supernatural intrusion, not only on Lipan Apache land but also everywhere it has settled since its foundation, and like other supernatural intrusions of urban fantasy, it is dangerous "to [the protagonist's] very life, and . . . to the mundane human world" (Young 145). This time, however, instead of Indigenous people

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and traditional figures being the dangerous invaders of settler spaces, settlers and their way of life are explicitly the invaders of Indigenous people's lives.

The existence of Willowbee as a travelling town which repeats colonialism all over the United States also allows it to embody Stephen Slemon's concept of "transformational regionalism" (411), becoming "metonymic of the postcolonial culture as a whole" (411). Ellie considers that "tourists probably visited the town for a taste of good old-fashioned Americana" (Little Badger 81). Willowbee embodies the stereotypical image of America, and that image is, as Ellie notes, all white. The town also literally paints over its own unsavoury history, as Ellie observes that the word 'Texas' on the town sign seems freshly painted (81). Willowbee is deliberately trying to be any and every American city, the perfect image of 'post-colonial' America, but at the same time it is constantly reproducing colonialism.

Willowbee also serves a third narrative purpose; it is a metatextual commentary on the foundations of urban fantasy. As Young asserts, if urban fantasy "brings [the] past forward into the present" (141), then the figures of traditional narratives represent the past, and "the metropolis is understood as both symbol and manifestation of the problems of modernity" (141). However, the city, or even the suburban town, as the symbol of modernity is an inherently colonial construct in North America, as is the idea that traditional narratives and practices such as oral traditions, particularly those of Indigenous people, are relics of the past.[4] The repeated emphasis on Willowbee as colonial both in action and in aesthetic, particularly paralleled with Ellie and her family's contemporary practice of Apache traditions, is a constant reminder that the binary oppositions of urban fantasy are colonial by nature.

5.3 Colonial Expectations of the Natural and Supernatural

The urban setting is not the only colonial underpinning of urban fantasy that *Elatsoe* challenges, however. As Young notes, "the supernatural world in Suburban Fantasy television is dominated by the folktales and mythologies of Western European cultures" (145), and this is often true of novels as well. Urban fantasy audiences expect a city, and in that city they expect

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[4] Robert Dale Parker writes that "the representation of orality and oral storytelling ... becomes a means for non-Indians to imagine escape from modernity, conflating Indians and Indian orality with a romantically recoverable past" (4).

the presence of fairies, magic, and European vampires.[5] These elements are present in *Elatsoe,* but fairies and magic are not the ancient, 'natural' forces they often are, in opposition to the modern, industrial nature of cities. Rather, they are specifically unnatural, alien forces that, like settler industrial cities and settler agriculture, change and pollute the landscape. In *Elatsoe*, magic use, including travel by fairy ring, is an environmental issue, discussed in a manner akin to other elements of climate change:

> Magic came from an alien place, and the use of too much corrupted the natural state of the Earth. That's what scientists were reporting, anyway. Elements from a different realm were slipping through atom-sized fissures at busy [Fairy] Ring Transport Centers, adding trace amounts of helium and argon and who knew what else to the atmosphere, and major spells left obvious mutations in nearby bacteria. In fact, that year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Magic Use, which was backed by over two hundred scientists, published a warning that excessive magic posed an existential threat, one nobody understood completely and very few people seemed to take seriously. (205)

This representation of magic and fairies as an alien threat possessing exponentially harmful effects acts as a commentary on industrial imperialism, but it also challenges the colonial assumptions of the urban fantasy genre and the expectation that Western European traditional figures are good, natural, or the rightful owners of the land.

Much like the town of Willowbee itself, magic and monsters also represent the in-text dynamics of colonialism. Ellie cannot travel by Fairy Ring Transport because "all portal travel had to be approved and facilitated by fairy folk, and fairies didn't like 'strangers.' Strangers, in their opinion, constituted anybody without familial ties to at least one interdimensional person, commonly known as 'fae'" (71). However, her friend Jay, who is descended from Oberon, is able to use the Fairy Ring network.[6] The ability to access and use magical innovations is therefore restricted on the basis of race in two ways—the categorization of fae and human is comparable to racial categorization, but there are also human races who are more and less likely to be descended from the fae.

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[5] There are vampire-like figures in cultural narratives around the globe, but the vampire of the Western popular imagination is a combination of Eastern European traditional beliefs and Western European novelistic invention.

[6] Oberon: the king of the fairies in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and other medieval and Renaissance literature, namely, *Huon de Bordeaux.*

Not only does magic have adverse environmental effects, but also settlers have brought with them their own monsters, thus changing the local ecosystem. Ellie recalls visiting Trevor when she was younger and encountering a monster— the Leech— while they were out on a hike. The Leech was an ancient monster who existed long before the invasion of Turtle Island by European settlers, who had battled Six-Great, and was now so old and weak that Ellie could defeat him with a swarm of ghostly mosquitoes. Despite her victory, however, Ellie is sad to remember that "the Leech was the last of its kind. The monsters of her ancestors had been replaced by different threats. Invasive creatures, foreign curses, cruel magics, and alchemies. Vampires were the new big bloodsuckers" (63). After hearing a story from her father about a man who was caught by cursed scarecrows, Ellie also reflects that "evil scarecrows were becoming a pest. Probably spreading with fields of monoculture corn and soy crops. The formerly diverse scary stories of the prairie were being replaced by repetitive encounters with straw-filled bodies and dead, button eyes" (65). Though the Leech and the monsters of the prairies are dangerous, *Elatsoe* creates a definite sense of loss around their disappearance and replacement. Colonial settlement and agriculture have disrupted the historical relationships between the Apache people and the ecosystem around them, including the ecosystems of plant life and monsters and other figures from traditional Apache stories. Ellie's mother, Vivian, also mentions the animal people, saying, "You won't see them very often . . . . They're too good at hiding in plain sight. Pretending to be something else to get by. Kind of like our people did after the Civil War" (104). Though Ellie's family has stories of good relationships with animal people, like the coyote woman who was friends with Six-Great, Ellie herself has never met any animal people. The animal people have to hide to survive the settler state, thereby disrupting the relationship between Apache people, the animals, and the land.

Despite how settler colonialism has changed the world between Six-Great's time and Ellie's, Lipan Apache traditional knowledge still carries important, lifesaving truths. The narrative never dismisses Ellie's traditions and experiences, which are central to the novel's portrayal of Indigenous knowledge and practice as powerful, decolonial forces. As Daniel Heath Justice writes,

> For secular, post-Enlightenment readers of the industrialized West, the very ideas of spirit beings and little people, individualized and speaking animals, stones, and plants . . . . , human actions changing weather and affecting various elemental forces, and other

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worlds of being and kinship with the other-than-human peoples, are the stuff of childish

make-believe or even pathology, not generally understood as the mature, experiential

realities they are in most traditional Indigenous systems. (141)

In *Elatsoe*, however, while magic and fairies are alien forces, the Indigenous monsters, the animal people, and Ellie's traditional ghost-calling ability are not alien. They belong firmly in Ellie's reality. When people question Ellie's knowledge and experiences, Ellie is always right. She recalls being challenged by a classmate who said, "ghosts don't work that way" (225), when she first brought ghost-Kirby to school, and the ensuing incident when she told Kirby to howl, proving herself right and giving her classmates nosebleeds. Throughout the text, Ellie and her mother tell people, including Jay and Lenore, that "human ghosts are bad news. Period" (185). They encourage everyone to follow Apache mourning protocols so as not to disturb the dead, which include not speaking the dead person's name, not visiting their burial site, and not looking at pictures of the deceased (23, 161). Lenore begs Ellie to bring Trevor back anyway, not understanding the risk, and Jay brings up stories of friendly ghosts, but Vivian and Ellie are right. Allerton's exhumation of Trevor's body brings back Trevor's spirit, but the spirit is nothing like the kind teacher Trevor was in life. Rather, it calls itself "an impression Trevor made . . . , an emissary of a murdered man, unleashed to right a terrible wrong" (295), and it is determined to kill everyone in Willowbee (296). Those who ignore or disregard Vivian and Ellie's stories and knowledge about the dead and who do not follow traditional practices soon discover that it is dangerous to dismiss Apache knowledge and traditions.

The truth and reality of Apache tradition and experience extend to more than just Ellie's ghost knowledge. When Ellie dreams of Trevor the night that he dies, and tells her family about the dream, they believe her. When Ellie enlists Jay's help to find information about Allerton, she worries that Jay will push back: "She braced herself for the question: *Are you sure Abe is a murderer? He seems like a first-rate guy*" (78). Jay, however, never questions Ellie's knowledge or where she got it; his only question is, "Are you sure you're safe?" (78). Jay may not understand or share Ellie's experiences of the world, but he believes her. Apache tradition and history are also validated and prioritized when it comes to land title. While they are out looking for Lenore one night, Ellie and Vivian encounter a vampire who jumps on their car and tries to attack them. Vampires, however, cannot remain in a home where they are not welcome, so Vivian tells him, "This is my home, my people's home!. . . You aren't welcome along the

Kunétai!" (153).[7] At first the vampire does not believe Vivian's claim and dismisses Apache people as relics of the past, saying, "I know what Apaches were" (Little Badger 154), but Vivian replies, "*Were?* This land is still our home . . . . What you *believe* means nothing" (154). The relationship between the Apache people and the land persists and has power, even after centuries of colonization, and the vampire is driven north, off Apache land. The frequent emphasis on the validity and power of Apache traditions, knowledge, and experience is important to understanding *Elatsoe* as decolonial storytelling. Justice emphasizes that stories which centre Indigenous ways of knowing over settler realism "make space for meaningful engagements and encounters that are dismissed by colonial authorities but are central to cultural resurgence and . . . insist on possibilities beyond cynicism and despair" (154). In *Elatsoe*, Apache traditions are alive and well; they help people protect themselves and others from settler threats and they even have the power to drive settler monsters off the land entirely.

5.4 Anticolonial Traditions and Decolonial Actions

The power of Apache practice and tradition is demonstrated not only in Ellie's decolonial work but also in her family's long history of anti-colonial action. It is important that Ellie's ghost-calling ability is not a random magical ability specific to her, but part of her family practice for at least nine generations. Everything Ellie knows about dealing with ghosts and hunting monsters is carefully preserved historical knowledge and grounded in Apache understandings of death, passed down from her Six-Great Grandmother. The novel repeatedly draws direct parallels between Ellie and Six-Great, both through regular comparisons made by Ellie and her family and through the illustrations that accompany the text. Ellie's father tells her, "You and Six-Great are so much alike" (25), and Ellie regularly thinks back to the stories about Six-Great when she is trying to understand a situation or solve a problem. When she and Jay fall into the local river, Ellie remembers the story of Six-Great confronting a river monster and asks herself, "How did Six-Great survive the encounter at the Kunétai?" (43). Vivian tells the story of Six-Great's journey to the underworld to warn Ellie against being drawn Below, telling her that "Some stories are particularly important. They're more than entertainment. They're knowledge" (245). The stories that Ellie hears about Six-Great are meant to keep her alive.

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[7] The Kunétai: the Lipan Apache name for the Rio Grande River (Little Badger 19).

The knowledge that is passed down to Ellie from Six-Great, knowledge drawn from experience, is about more than just ghost-calling and fighting monsters; it is about protecting her family and her people from settler threats. Ellie tells Jay about how Six-Great woke an army of ghost bison to crush an invading army (51). She also recalls that "After the Civil War ended, the souped-up United States Federal Army fell upon Texas and slaughtered the men, women, children in her tribe. With her six-great-grandmother dead, there was nobody to stop them" (204). Six-Great was a protector of her people. Early in the novel, Ellie is characterized as the person who will finish the work that Six-Great started. When Ellie encounters the Leech while hiking with Trevor, Trevor exclaims that Six-Great killed the Leech, and the Leech responds, "She tried to kill me . . . . You [Ellie] smell like the one who wronged me" (61). Ellie defeats the Leech by summoning a horde of ghost-mosquitoes, making sure it is finally truly dead: "Ellie had finished Six-Great's task" (63). Similarly, when Trevor shows up in Ellie's dream, he begs her, "Don't let Abe hurt my family" (17), calling on Ellie to continue the same work of protection that Six-Great started. Though bringing Allerton to justice is personal for Ellie, both she and Trevor's ghost understand that to deal with Willowbee is to deal directly with colonial power. Trevor's ghost tells Ellie, "Willowbee puts a bounty on the Indigenous, the poor, and the *vulnerable*" (296, emphasis in original). When it looks like Allerton is going to get away with his crimes, move the entire town and start over, Ellie very deliberately picks up Six-Great's legacy in order to avenge Trevor and all of Willowbee's victims: "Dr. Abraham Allerton would not get away with *anything*. If Ellie had to fly into the sun to stop him, so be it. . . . She was Elatsoe, daughter of Vivian, Pat, and the Kunétai. Six-great-granddaughter of a hummingbird woman who protected her people" (329). In what she knows might be the last action she will ever take, Ellie follows in Six-Great's footsteps, descending into the underworld, taking the danger with her, in order to avenge and protect those she cares about.

The parallels between Ellie and Six-Great in their experiences and their anti-colonial work also contributes to what Slemon identifies as the second way that magical realism represents the social relations of postcolonialism: "the foreshortening of history so that the time scheme of the novel metaphorically contains the long process of colonization and its aftermath" (411). This foreshortening is primarily accomplished by the parallel narratives told by the text and the accompanying illustrations. On the first page of all thirty-six chapters, there is an illustration by Rovina Cai, not of the chapter's contents, but of a story related to the life of Six-

Great. They begin with a toddler-aged Six-Great meeting her own family dog, and follow her through her life, including the stories that Ellie hears or recalls in the text. The illustrations, through Six-Great's story, tell of early encounters with white settlers, including the time that Six-Great summoned the bison ghosts. The final two illustrations show Kirby the ghost dog finding Six-Great and her pack in the underworld and retrieving an old dog toy from her (348, 354-55). At the end of Ellie's story, Kirby returns with the dog toy to the land of the living (353). This connection reinforces the novel's focus on an unbroken line of Lipan tradition, but the different methods of storytelling—illustrations and text—reinforce how difficult it is to maintain that tradition. The novel does not initially provide any context for the illustrations, and it is not until the reader starts to see the stories they have already read in the text being depicted in the illustrations that they realize the illustrations depict Six-Great's life. The apparent disconnect between text and illustrations throughout the first part of *Elatsoe* mirrors a sense of cultural distance between Six-Great and Ellie—a distance due to colonization. The world that Six-Great lived in is gone, and Ellie must figure out how to draw knowledge from Six-Great's experiences, which Ellie will never have. The more stories she hears, however, the more she learns and understands about her power and her responsibilities, just as the reader eventually puts the stories in the text together with the illustrations. Both Ellie and the reader must gain context in order to understand Six-Great's life and the traditions she passed down. Despite the sense of disconnect, however, the parallel storytelling demonstrates that there is a connection between Six-Great and Ellie, and that is proven when Kirby meets Six-Great and returns to Ellie. Six-Great's meeting with Kirby also allows Six-Great, who saw the early stages of colonial expansion on Apache land, to learn about Ellie, who is beginning the process of decolonization. The novel ends with the vision of a better, decolonial future for Apache people, and the foreshortening of history allows the reader to see that future as the result of generations' worth of anti-colonial resistance.

Ellie's defeat of Allerton and the resulting loss of Willowbee's power goes beyond a personal vengeance; it has decolonial power on political and physical levels as well. In the wake of Willowbee's and Allerton's magic being revealed to the world, Ellie receives both media attention and requests for help. People send her letters asking for her advice and help with anything to do with ghosts or the dead (350-51). While the people close to Ellie have, for the most part, always taken her knowledge, traditions, and experiences seriously, the public attention she receives represents a shift in public consciousness. In the storyworld of the novel, people

begin to turn to Apache traditional knowledge instead of to settlers like Chloe Alamor, a reality TV psychic, or even academics from settler institutions like the Herotonic University ParAb department (350-51).[8] Acknowledging and respecting Indigenous ways of knowing and implementing Indigenous practices is a significant element in the processes of reconciliation, Indigenization, and decolonization, and Ellie's actions have led to a shift in public attitudes towards that acknowledgement and implementation.

The aftermath of Willowbee also extends beyond the human world, to the very beginnings of decolonization for the other-than-human inhabitants of Apache land. As Ellie and her parents are leaving Willowbee, they pick up a hitchhiking coyote woman who observes, "Something changed last night. It's safer" (341). The coyote woman expresses an affinity for Ellie, and Ellie tells her the story of what happened in Willowbee. Ellie is able to begin building a relationship that has been denied to her until now due to the dangers of the settler state. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang explain that Indigenous peoples' "relationships to land comprise our/their epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies" (6), and that these relationships threaten and obstruct settler goals of dominion over the land. The process of colonization relies on the destruction of those relationships, and decolonization, therefore, is the restoration of the relationships between Indigenous peoples and the land and "the repatriation of land" (Tuck and Yang 7). Ellie's defeat of Allerton and Willowbee is not full repatriation of the land. The town, with its remaining residents, will continue to exist on Apache land, but, slowly, the Apache relationship with the land is becoming more visible and less deniable. Vivian is able to drive away vampires through the strength of her relationship to the land, and Ellie is making it safer for their other-than-human relatives to live freely. Ellie's work allows her to begin to undo the long damage that colonization has done.

Elatsoe challenges settler expectations of genre and decolonization. It not only represents settlers, their infrastructure, and their magic as the invasive force, reversing traditional racial dynamics of urban fantasy, but it also challenges urban fantasy's inherent association between the city and modernity. The text prioritizes Indigenous ways of knowing and emphasizes the importance of Indigenous traditions and practices as actively anti- and de-colonial. It also refuses to compromise on its vision of decolonization, focusing on justice and safety for Indigenous

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[8] ParAb: probably the Paranormal and Abnormal studies department

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people and the rights of Indigenous human and other-than-human people to the land. *Elatsoe* allows little space for the reinforcement of settler institutions, but, through Jay and others, it also emphasizes the important role that settler allies can play in achieving decolonization. Vivian tells Ellie, "Some stories are particularly important. They're more than entertainment. They're knowledge" (Little Badger 245). The many stories and traditions that Ellie's family has passed to her, and that Ellie will one day pass to the next generation, carry the potential to create a new, brighter future, and *Elatsoe* offers its image of what that future ought to be, in Ellie's world and in our own. *Elatsoe* challenges the colonial roots and expectations of the urban fantasy genre, but it also uses some of those same generic expectations to build a story of anticolonial resistance and to imagine a decolonial future.

6. Conclusion: The Buffalo Spirits and the Future

In Elk Island National Park, outside of Edmonton, Alberta, there is a herd of bison. When I drive the Yellowhead highway between Saskatoon and Edmonton, as I have many times, I can often see them from the highway. They remind me of being nine years old and learning about buffalo hunting. They make me think of Minisino's army of buffalo spirits gathering in the otherworld, and they make me think of Six-Great summoning an army of bison ghosts to protect her people. Stories are powerful things; they create us. The Elk Island bison make me wonder which stories I am hearing, which stories I am telling, and which stories we are choosing to lay as the foundation upon which we will build a common future.

A book is not an action, but storytelling is. If, as Edward Said argues, the popular stories of colonial Britain were central to building the ideological framework of English imperialism (70-73), then, as he also argues, telling the right stories can help tear that framework down (200). As we wrestle with settler colonial hegemony and pursue a just path forward, we must recognize that this path begins in the popular imagination. We must uncover where storytelling has been used in the past as a tool to reinforce colonial institutions, and put that tool to a better use—in short, we must recognize storytelling as praxis. In this paper, I argue that urban fantasy is inherently a metanarrative—it is *about* storytelling as praxis, and each urban fantasy story itself contributes to the framework of popular culture upon which is built social change. Each novel models particular postcolonial ideologies and strategies. Therefore, I also argue that urban fantasy's focus on revealing the hidden and marginalized past is storytelling which, increasingly, contributes primarily—though often imperfectly—to anti-colonial frameworks.

Urban fantasy as a genre is invested in the nature and power of stories. This thesis discusses novels wherein the figures of diverse cultural narratives are living beings who interact directly with the human world. In these novels, the strength and presence of those traditional figures act as a metaphor for the physical and cultural survival of the human people with whom they are associated. In the settler state context of these five novels, the connection between cultural stories and power in urban fantasy frames stories as colonial or anti-colonial tools. The connection between humans and their cultural narratives and traditional knowledge is directly equated with the ability to resist evil, evil which is frequently framed as colonial in nature.

De Lint's *Widdershins* and Melling's *The Book of Dreams* are prototypical examples of urban fantasy—so much so that de Lint is generally considered one of the trademark authors of

the genre. It is no surprise, then, that these novels make such specific use of urban fantasy conventions, particularly the unveiling of the hidden past of modernity and the narrative of invasion which stems from it. Both novels are able to use those genre conventions to confront the violent colonial history of North America and imagine reconciliatory futures, but they are unable to escape settler colonial frameworks. In particular, the novels are limited by the way in which urban fantasy conflates urbanity and modernity, which has two effects on the portrayal of Indigenous people and traditional figures. Firstly, it portrays Indigenous people as outside of modernity and slowly disappearing or withdrawing from the wider world. Secondly, it restricts the possibilities of what Indigenous survival can look like by binding the idea of survival to urban, settler modernity. In this way, though these novels imagine kinder futures in which settlers and Indigenous people are able to recognize a common personhood and build better relationships, they cannot imagine a just or decolonial future.

Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* is less conventional urban fantasy, since it borders on many other genres, including science fiction and post-apocalyptic fiction. Nevertheless, the novel plays into some of the expectations of urban fantasy while also reframing them. One of the primary expectations of the genre is that there will be magic and supernatural beings in a modern urban setting, and this is certainly true of the characters' magical practices and the presence of the orishas in Toronto. However, instead of the orishas being invaders, the products or remnants of a dark past pushed to the surface, they are welcomed victors, signalling survival through a long history of hiding. This new way of considering the most basic urban fantasy convention makes space within the genre for narratives of resisting and overcoming colonial influence, encouraging a view of the future where colonial hegemony no longer restricts cultural practices.

If *Brown Girl in the Ring* is pushing the boundaries of urban fantasy, K-Ming Chang's *Bestiary* is perhaps breaking the borders. *Bestiary*'s straightforward acceptance of the many magical occurrences in the novel draw it well into the territory of magical realism, and so do some of the magical occurrences themselves, especially those which do not come with an attached cultural story. Nevertheless, *Bestiary* draws on many urban fantasy conventions, particularly the importance of the city as symbolic of modernity and the narrative of invasion, and turns those conventions to its own use. The city, built on a landfill, becomes a metaphor not so much for modern society as for the contemporary state of the novel's central family: an unstable edifice built on a potentially explosive past which must be released. The narrative of

invasion, embodied by Hu Gu Po, becomes a narrative of transculturation, wherein the invader is taken, changed, and turned to anti-colonial purposes. *Bestiary* opens up the possibilities of what can be considered urban fantasy. Pushing genre boundaries, particularly where those boundaries surround colonial expectations of 'truth' and reality,' challenges colonial hegemony. *Bestiary*'s focus on family also factors personal and intergenerational recovery from trauma into the narrative of a decolonial future.

Little Badger's *Elatsoe* returns to the standard expectations of urban fantasy only to pull apart those expectations and expose the colonial underpinnings of the genre. *Elatsoe* challenges the correlation between cities and contemporary survival, suggesting that urbanity—and in particular the 'all-American town'—is in some places itself a colonial imposition in North America. The novel also subverts the racist conventions of urban fantasy, which expect Indigenous people and traditional figures to be the invaders in an intrusion narrative, by giving the protagonist an awareness of those expectations. Ellie's genre-awareness allows her to expose how the intrusion narrative is also built on colonial foundations, and to expose the settlers as the true invaders. *Elatsoe* troubles the conventions of urban fantasy, revealing how it has been used in the past to reinforce settler colonialism, but it also makes use of those conventions to tell a new story of decolonization.

In all of these novels, the root of the conflict is colonialism. Stefen Ekman describes urban fantasy as "literature of the unseen" (463), as literature which centers on that which has been suppressed or hidden. Helen Young suggests that the intrusion narrative of urban fantasy is "the suppressed history of modernity resurfacing" (142). I argue that, in North American urban fantasy, that which has been hidden and which is revealed is usually either hidden due to colonialism or is itself a result of colonialism. In *The Book of Dreams*, Dana comes to realize that her enemy is fueled by greed and violence, and that the history of violence in Canada stems from settler colonialism. In *Widdershins*, the army of buffalo people and spirits that threatens Newford has formed to avenge colonial violence done to them over centuries. In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, the orishas and their servants have spent centuries hiding from colonial power, and are only now free to reveal themselves. In *Bestiary*, Daughter's family trauma, which comes bubbling to the surface, stems back to generations of colonialism in Taiwan. In *Elatsoe*, settler colonial hegemony has allowed the people of Willowbee to hide their violence and murders for centuries, and Ellie exposes them to the world. Even in those novels that are unable to imagine a

future truly outside of settler frameworks, the root of conflict and evil in North America is grounded in colonialism.

The counterpoint to the novels' common understanding of colonial evils is their portrayal of cultural narratives and practices as the power and means by which to build a better future. In *The Book of Dreams,* Dana and her allies find their identities in the stories to which they belong, and they fight together to save their connections to those stories. To make peace, *Widdershins'* Grey, Anwatan, and others seek out their most powerful and ancient figures, such as Raven, because even the story of their power is enough to give the buffalo pause. Hopkinson's Ti-Jeanne learns her grandmother's traditions and welcomes the orishas into herself in order to free inner-city Toronto from Rudy's tyranny. In *Bestiary,* Daughter embraces Hu Gu Po to turn his power against her father, and learns to balance her Tayal traditions with the traditions she has taken from the colonizer in order to begin healing her family trauma. The protagonist of *Elatsoe* grounds herself in her ancestral knowledge in order to build her power strong enough to defeat settler magicians who prey on her people. These urban fantasies end with hope, and that hope is possible because the characters remain connected to their living traditions, which give them strength.

That hope does not always look the same, however. One reason for this may be the different cultural and social positions of the protagonists, as the ideal outcome of colonial conflict for the protagonists helps establish what constitutes a 'happy ending.' The novels written from settler perspectives are inextricable from their investment in settler futurity. *Brown Girl in the Ring*, written from a Caribbean-Canadian arrivant perspective, treats inner-city Toronto like a decolonizing Caribbean diaspora more than a diasporic community built on Indigenous land, and therefore hopes for relative autonomy and cultural freedom. *Bestiary,* because the protagonist is a first-generation child of immigrants, focuses on the effect that colonialism overseas continues to have on immigrants, and therefore focuses its hope on the possibility of individual recovery, without paying much attention to widespread social change. Finally, *Elatsoe'*s young Apache protagonist accepts no compromises, building her image of a better future on Indigenous social norms and the recuperation of Indigenous land. These diverse images of the future demonstrate the inherent potential of urban fantasy as a genre to become, itself, a tool for social change, particularly in exposing, confronting, and resisting colonialism. The genre does not need to be bound to its colonial origins; the futures of urban fantasy are variable, and they are bright.

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