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Alcoholism, Acculturation, and Barriers to Indigenous Health in Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach*

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CARA FABRE

Young people, those who have not yet learned to accommodate to the fact that they are expected to accept their lesser status quietly, are especially hard hit by defeatism and alienation. . . . Suicide, alcohol and drug abuse, cultural confusion, sexual violence . . . they suffer these scourges worse than anyone else.

— Taiaike Alfred (37)

HAIDA/TSIMPSIAN SCHOLAR MARCIA CROSBY writes that, until she began to analyze Canada’s policies of assimilation, “it seemed . . . that the world was a binary system. First there were white people and then there was the Indian stereotype: The Drunken, Lazy, Dirty, or Promiscuous Indian” (268). The Drunken Indian stereotype has a long history of expression across literary, scientific, sociological, anthropological, and political discourses. This article traces the persistence and operative nature of its production and reproduction and argues that Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach* challenges the stereotype through refiguring addiction as social suffering rather than individual — and racialized — pathology. This is not a study of “how Aboriginal peoples drink,” which James Waldram argues is “an industry unto itself” (134). Rather, I examine the tensions among three issues: the reality of high rates of addiction and other forms of social suffering among Indigenous peoples (i.e., intimate violence and suicide); mainstream Canadian cultural reliance on a stereotype that distills complex socio-economic issues into a racialized — and politically expedient — trait; and the corrosive influence of the myth among Indigenous peoples. Hugh Brody contends that “the confusion of myth, stereotype, self-fulfilling prophecy, and truth which makes up this prevalent atti-

tude . . . amounts to racial prejudice and creates widespread discrimination” (240). Building on his logic, I argue that, while critics largely account for the tenacity of these images as a legacy of colonialism and acculturation, Robinson’s novel emphasizes a present-day economic, as well as ongoing colonial, context to both the stereotype and the realities of addiction in Indigenous communities that must be addressed. Just as naming the interests of colonial and neo-colonial power is crucial in advancing struggles against such power, so, too, is it vital to name the settler capitalist interests that are served by the perpetuation of the Drunken Indian stereotype.

By employing cartographic imagery, generational juxtaposition, and a first-person dual point of view that negotiates between spectral and spiritless worlds, *Monkey Beach* contextualizes habitual drinking as a response to alienation from cultural practices that are becoming increasingly threatened by ongoing colonial and capitalist policies of individualism and acculturation. The Haisla characters contend with the affective consequences of living in what Karl Marx calls a “coerced” and “forced labor” economy (*Manuscripts* 111). Yet, because the forced transition to this mode of production is a relatively recent process within Indigenous histories — one that is violently and insidiously imposed, rather than always already installed — it has not become fully naturalized. Consequently, Robinson depicts addiction as engendered not only by historical trauma emergent from the dismantling of Indigenous lifeways connecting kinship, land, and spirituality, but also by the ideological and material conditions of capital.¹ Ultimately, Robinson’s novel betrays how the material conditions of late capitalism exacerbate colonial trauma, which manifests as social suffering, and extends colonialism’s acculturative shadow.

The concept of social suffering provides a useful lens through which to articulate the subversive representations of addiction in Robinson’s novel. Predominantly employed to analyze the social consequences of global conflict, colonialism, and class struggle,² social suffering refers to that which “results from what political, economic, and institutional power does to people, and reciprocally, from how these forms of power themselves influence responses to social problems” (Kleinman ix). This concept assists in tracing the psychic and material consequences of inequality and injustice on marginalized peoples; it also shows how such suffering is often essentialized as an intrinsic dysfunction of the

sufferer, whether morally, constitutionally, or through a combination of both. Such reciprocal socialization characterizes the trajectory that Robinson's narrative of addiction exposes and undermines.

Monkey Beach refigures addiction as social suffering by portraying chronic drinking and drug use as a common, collective, and adaptive habit of characters who have endured residential schooling, lateral violence, cultural dispossession, and poverty. The novel also situates sobriety as the province of those characters who have attained relative privilege by adjusting to colonial and capitalist transformations imposed on their shared community. The latter group of characters rejects the legitimacy of Indigenous spirituality and resistance through reiterations of an individualistic and secular ethos. This ideological pressure forms the thematic and narrative structure in which substance abuse emerges as a means of both social belonging and personal pain management. Within this clearly delineated character schema, the protagonist, Lisamarie Hill, is positioned as having to negotiate her parents' assimilative expectations against the reality and responsibility of her spiritual visions. As prophet and warrior, Lisamarie loses the remaining members of her community who were invested in fostering her gifts. Following these losses, she begins drinking "as a way to escape" (296) the lonely responsibility demanded by her visions. When she does embrace sobriety, Lisamarie does so by enthusiastically immersing herself in the narrative of individual salvation through work, but the original reasons for her suffering do not evaporate; the novel ends with Lisamarie seeking reunion with those who share her spiritual visions in "The Land of the Dead" (367)³ after experiencing another tragic consequence of past colonial violence. Lisamarie's drinking is refigured as social suffering insofar as her drinking has an adaptive function. I will conclude by addressing the sacrificial logic of Robinson's narrative and its uneasy relation to the settler capitalist myth of the Vanishing Indian.

As Crosby claims, "the fictive stereotypical Indian . . . is still perceived as real by many people because of the enormous body of texts and images that support that notion" (271). Indeed, widespread media images of Indigenous peoples as drunk and poor consistently reproduce a causal link whereby drunkenness becomes synonymous with laziness, which is viewed as the cause of poverty rather than a consequence of dispossession. They have become figures of contempt, a contempt imbued with characteristics defined and abjected by dominant capital-

ist values. Such portrayals directly impact the emotional and material realities of Indigenous people. In a very public example from 2008, a representative of the Canadian government inadvertently but brazenly voiced her belief that the majority of Indigenous peoples are indecorous alcoholics. Darlene Lannigan, aide to then transport minister Lawrence Cannon, patronizingly explained to an Algonquin protester, Norman Matchewan, that he could only enter Cannon's campaign office,

If you behave, and you're sober, and there's no problems, and if you don't do a sit-down and whatever, I don't care. One of them showed up the other day and was drinking. . . . I'm not calling you an alcoholic, it's just to say you're in a federal office. If you're coming in to negotiate, I expect, there's decorum that has to be respected. ("Tories Sorry for Comments to Native Protester")

Matchewan is identified in the news piece only as a protester from Barriere Lake come to deliver that community's demands, the full details of which are left opaque in the article.⁴ Lannigan's racist comments reveal an anxiety of authority expressed through a ready cultural stereotype that seeks to undermine legitimate resistance to practices of settler-state capitalism. In other words, by making the default assumption that all Indigenous peoples are alcoholics, an identity that already bears popular stigma, Lannigan obfuscates the Algonquin Nation's valid and legal land claims through the evocation of a stereotype that "characterize[s] Indigenous peoples as unmodern and dysfunctional"⁵ (Irlbacher-Fox 31). According to Brody, "The Middle Class Idea of the Indian" not only rehearses myths of "relative uncleanness, lack of reliability in work, drunkenness, and violence," but it also frames those traits as "expression[s] of Indian failure in their non-middle class habits and attitudes" (45). The Drunken Indian epithet becomes, then, an insidious mechanism that frames Indigenous peoples as a hostile but containable threat to the values of propertied classes.

Canadian writing, moreover, has a long history of reproducing similarly derogatory portrayals. Mary Lu MacDonald argues that representations of First Nations in nineteenth-century Canadian literature became more negative as contact between European settlers and Indigenous peoples decreased: "In the 1840s . . . Indians were frequently depicted as . . . either drunk or nostalgic for a long-gone heroic age when described in present time" (94). As Thomas King argued in 1987, "the dissipated

savage” (8) can be seen as one of *the* three images of Indigenous literary figures in non-Indigenous writing, all characterized by savagery. In her canonical account of European settlement in Canada, *Roughing it in the Bush*, Susanna Moodie claims that the “worst traits” (287) of the “genuine Indian” (286) are “those which he has in common with the wild animals of the forest . . . [which] the pernicious effects of strong drink, have greatly tended to inflame and debase” (387). Alcohol is figured here as a triggering substance that provokes an already inherent brute nature into grosser acts of degradation.

This image of the “genuine Indian” stems from the underlying biological determinism of the myth of the Drunken Indian. Waldram traces a long history of scientific attempts to prove that “Aboriginal peoples metabolize alcohol differently” (135); he argues that such biological determinism is rooted in “a very European, class-based conceptualization” (136) of what constitutes appropriate intoxicated behaviors. Furthermore, he shows that such racist and classist essentialism “parallels a kind of cultural essentialism[,] . . . a view in which the ‘primitive,’ either Arcadian or Barbarian, naturally succumbs to the demands of the inner savage when inebriated” (136). This belief, as Bonnie Duran explains, found expression through eighteenth-century medical discourse, which constructed drunkenness as a defining aspect of “the Indian character,” along with “‘uncleanliness’ and ‘idleness’” (114). Although such essentialism has lost its scientific and anthropological legitimacy, traces of these theories linger in the contemporary popular imagination — with clear political implications — as is clear from the Lannigan example.

Frances Brooke’s novel *The History of Emily Montague* produces a similarly essentializing portrayal of Indigenous drinking. Col. Rivers describes the “Hurons” as curiously “patient of cold and heat, of hunger and thirst, even beyond all belief when necessity urges . . . yet indulging themselves in their feasts even to the most brutal degree of intemperance” (40). Unlike Moodie’s animalistic, naturalized depiction of the Drunken Indian, Brooke’s is more aligned with a view of willful — though still brute — abandon. While Moodie and Brooke produce more threatening versions of the stereotype, Terry Goldie explores the exploitation of “the drunken ignoble savage” image as a “vehicle for humour” (98) in settler literatures. Underlying these literary depictions of the Drunken Indian stereotype is a broader discourse that constructs

Indigenous peoples as inherently primitive: whether noble or savage, tragic, threatening, or hilarious, the figure of the Drunken Indian, these portrayals suggest, belongs to a dying past, with progress marching inevitably on. And, crucially, Indigenous peoples are imagined as neither capable nor deserving of self-determination.

Robinson's novel significantly revises these racist depictions by refiguring alcoholism as a form of social suffering. *Monkey Beach* foregrounds legacies of both residential schooling and corporate incursions into Haisla territory as reiterating values of secularity and individualism in ways that shape Lisamarie's emotional and spiritual health. In this way, her habitual drinking functions to mute her knowledge not only that life can be otherwise but also that it is already richer and more spiritually meaningful. Her failure, or inability, to conceal her spiritual visions is perceived by her family as a mental health issue — precisely because her gift has become decontextualized from kinship and tribal relations. By mobilizing Indigenous and Marxist theory, I demonstrate how Marxist analytical tools can be deployed in a decolonizing analysis of Indigenous depictions of addiction. Establishing the compatibility between the two anti-capitalist modes of analysis assists in understanding what the imposition of a capitalist mode of production means for Indigenous governance, subsistence, and cultural practices, which arise from a fundamentally antithetical view of the human than that implied under capitalism.

Presupposing that “man's physical and spiritual life is linked to nature mean[ing] simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature” (*Manuscripts* 112), Marx argues that humanity's pre- or non-capitalist state is one of species being, or a state of relationship to the rest of humanity and the natural world that is not separate or individually driven. I do not use Marx's theory to suggest that Indigenous peoples are inherently closer to nature or more spiritual than non-Indigenous peoples. Rather, I emphasize the compatibility between Marx's view of a non-capitalist state of being and an element common to many Indigenous worldviews that sees the relationship among humans, land, nature, the spiritual realm, and ancestors as continuous and interdependent. Daniel Heath Justice, for instance, describes Indigenous kinship relations in ways that particularize, necessarily, the abstraction of Marx's theory: “Indigenous nationhood is . . . an understanding of a common social interdependence within the community, the tribal web

of kinship rights and responsibilities that link the People, the land, and the cosmos together in an ongoing and dynamic system of mutually affecting relationships” (151). Through this critical lens, I seek to articulate the major tension in *Monkey Beach* between Lisamarie’s knowledge and memories of past kinship relations — relations characterized by interdependence and shared spirituality — and her fragmented familial and social relations in the present, which are shaped by the increasing pressures of acculturation into an individualizing economy. I address the evidence and implications of such compelled transition primarily through examining the state of the oolichan industry, the imagined futures of the Haisla youth, and the depictions of psychiatric interventions in Robinson’s novel.

This framework also seeks to expand literary analysis of *Monkey Beach* to address the complex representational critiques of capitalism developed by Robinson, an approach that contributes to unpacking the novel’s decolonizing possibilities. The majority of existing criticism on the novel examines its depictions of past colonial trauma and contemporary cultural tensions and subversions. For example, by reading *Monkey Beach* as a “distinctly Aboriginal reformulation of the Canadian Gothic” (206), Jennifer Andrews argues persuasively that the novel contests and subverts a literary tradition in which “Natives are marginalized, romanticized, or entirely absent[,] . . . creating a space for Native cultural revitalization” (224). Following Andrews, Jodey Castricano interprets the Gothic or “supernatural” elements of the text as contesting dominant cultural norms of secularity and rationality by “confront[ing] the reader . . . with the possibility of a spirit world and asks that we at least reflect upon the ontological, epistemological, and spiritual consequences of Western culture’s materialist drive that has attempted to eradicate ‘superstition’ or ‘mysticism’ in the name of psychology” (808). Similarly, Richard Lane asserts that “in reworking the Canadian Gothic via her use of trickster writing” (164), Robinson contests hegemonic gender norms that reveal the complexities of “mediating between (at least) two cultures (Haisla and western, commodity culture)” (170). Focusing instead on the cultural identity politics surrounding Robinson’s novel, Kit Dobson grapples with what he perceives as the novel’s “anxiety about how it will be recognized as either a representative ‘Native’ text or as a more universal/Western novel aimed at a mainstream audience” (Dobson). Yet, these analyses seem to exemplify

Kristina Fagan's concern that Canadian criticism of Indigenous literatures "look through the lenses of culture and colonialism" (12), while eliding examination of "concrete political issues of law, land ownership, and governance" (12-13), issues that accompany the recognition that "Aboriginal peoples are 'Nations,' not just 'cultures'" (12). My reading of *Monkey Beach* focuses on the ways in which Robinson constructs colonial violence as paving the way for capitalist expansion, which compels dependence on and complicity in the perpetuation of capitalist modes of production and ideological values that seek to produce "economically oriented subjects" (Saltmarsh 50).

Robinson emphasizes the colonial and corporate appropriation of Haisla territory in the North Coast region of British Columbia by employing cartographic imagery, which develops a circuitry among the corporate transformation of Kitimat and Kitimaat Village,⁶ the dismantling of interdependent kinship practices and the habitual drinking of Haisla youth. Industrial capitalism, symbolized by the history and continuing presence of the Alcan Aluminum smelter in Kitimat, is the mechanism that sustains and perpetuates the legacies of colonization and residential schooling, while simultaneously creating new forms of social suffering. Robinson builds this path-clearing function of colonialism into the narrative through the sequencing of historical events that opens the novel. Following her description of colonial settlement in the area, Lisamarie explains that, "when Alcan Aluminum moved into the area in the 1950s, it built a 'city of the future' *for its workers*" (5, emphasis added). This industrialized form of settlement is predicated on the belief that the company is entitled not only to move into Haisla territory but also to build an entire city to house its workers. The possessive pronoun also implies that its workers will be comprised of both settler managers and inhabitants of Kitimat, whose community will be transformed into a host for the plant and delineate the boundaries of economic belonging in the area.

Significantly, this corporate incursion was not an isolated decision of one company but rather a state-driven project. According to Alcan B.C. Operations, "Alcan was invited by the B.C. government to investigate the establishment of an aluminum industry in the northwest" ("A History of Kitimat-Kemano Project") in the 1940s, and, by the 1950s, Alcan and the B.C. government came to an agreement over the necessary land and water rights. Echoing the ways in which mission-

aries established villages to house their converts,⁷ Alcan transformed the Kitimaat region to house its workers and to produce aluminum. According to the official BC tourism website, “Today, Rio Tinto Alcan, Eurocan Pulp and Paper and the construction of the Enbridge oil pipeline make up the economic engine that fuels the economy in this area” (“British Columbia Travel and Discovery”). Over the course of one generation, then, a narrative informed by government, tourism, and industry has discursively positioned progress in the region as indispensable, resulting from a process of intrusion and transformation of the land and people. “Working at the potlines in Alcan was steady” work (59-60) for Lisamarie’s dad and preferable to tenuous self-employment or band council work. Figuring itself as the future of Kitimat (and by extension, Kitimaat), Alcan, in the novel, relegates its pre-existing residents to the past or decaying present. Fostering an image of “a ‘dying people’” (Crosby 279) in the public imaginary, this narrative of progress has been instrumental in reproducing the colonial argument that Indigenous peoples are holding on to an obsolete past. This sentiment has an underlying capitalist logic: Indigenous peoples pose a threat to the Canadian state because they remind settlers that there are other ways of living; for example, Indigenous movements like Idle No More⁸ continue to resist resource extraction and corporate expansion into Indigenous territories. However, as Ella Soper-Jones explains, despite “the company[’s] attempts to naturalize its presence in British Columbia with the slogan ‘Aluminum, an element of B.C.,’ . . . Robinson’s criticism of the smelter . . . is nonetheless palpable” (27). Indeed, Robinson’s criticism constitutes a denaturalization of the state-initiated capitalist settlement in Kitimat and transformations of Kitimaat Village.

The material and social intergenerational effects of Alcan’s presence form the context in which Lisamarie’s drinking becomes refigured as social suffering. Traditional fishing practices — and the kinship relations associated with them — are disrupted by the labour demands of the Alcan factory. While Soper-Jones argues that “Robinson implicates colonial violence for the imminent collapse of the oolichan industry” (24), the details of Lisamarie’s memories of her family’s trips during her childhood to catch oolichan incite another reading. As she explains, not only have resources become severely compromised from pollution “by all the industry in town” (92), but also “you have to pay for gas, and you need a decent boat and have to be able to spend a few weeks out there

if you want to make grease. If you have a job, it's hard to get enough time off work" (92). She traces the practical sequence of events that are interrupted by the imposed dependence on labour to make a living. These utilitarian considerations thus become an ironic confirmation of Ma-ma-oo's advice to Lisamarie: "Old ways don't matter much now. Just hold you back" (153).

The individualism and secularity expressed by Lisamarie's parents, Al and Gladys, reinforce through generational juxtaposition the social consequences of a fundamental shift from traditional forms of subsistence and kinship relations to a capitalist mode of production and family arrangements. Marx argues that the process of forcing estranged labour onto humans "changes for [them] the *life of the species* into a means of individual life. . . . [I]t makes individual life in its abstract form the purpose of the life of the species" (*Manuscripts* 112-13). Gladys, in particular, is portrayed as deliberately disavowing the spiritual gifts of her youth that had connected her to the community and instead rehearsing to her children the promises of individual achievement within a capital-based economy. Ma-ma-oo reveals to Lisamarie that Gladys had "the gift" for "predictions" (153), but she has either forgotten or chosen to ignore how to "see things" (154). Rather than act as guide to her daughter, Gladys refuses to validate Lisamarie's connection to the spirit world, consistently disciplining her daughter to reproduce capitalist norms according to a logic of individualism and secularity. In the novel's opening scene, Gladys responds to her daughter's curiosity about what the crows were trying to tell her by saying, "Clearly a sign, Lisa, . . . that you need Prozac" (3). The terms of this refusal are significant because Lisamarie is refigured as mentally unstable for trying to communicate with a world unrecognized by mainstream society. Although expressed as innocuous sarcasm, this reinterpretation is far from benign when it leads to Lisamarie being sent for psychiatric assessment. Gladys also insists that Lisamarie pursue what constitutes both monetary and class success according to capitalist values. Rejecting her simple desire to make "good money" (277) by working a blue-collar job, Gladys instead argues that she "could be a doctor or lawyer or whatever [she] wanted" (278). The irony is clear: Lisamarie's "idea of being free" (279) means relief from having to constantly strive for material stability, while Gladys's is more attuned to the social dimensions of class; a white-collar professional job

garners more capital *and* class privilege. Significantly, Gladys seems to believe in the promise of unfettered possibility and choice.

Robinson highlights the intergenerational psychological and economic impacts of capitalist ideology within contemporary Indigenous communities through her representation of the ways in which the industry in the town also shapes the dreams expressed (or not) among Indigenous youth in the novel. The juxtaposition between Gladys's generation and Lisamarie's constitutes the second way in which *Monkey Beach* portrays industrial capitalism as a mechanism that sustains and perpetuates the legacy of colonization and residential schooling. The intergenerational consequences of early colonial incursions are symbolized through a clear character schema. Every character in the novel who struggles with addiction (except Lisamarie) is a survivor of residential schooling. Of four Hill siblings, Lisamarie's Uncle Mick and Aunt Trudy were both sent to residential school.⁹ They are the ones who also struggle with alcoholism, while Lisamarie's father Al and his other sister, Kate, do not. The intergenerational impacts and lateral violence wrought by the system are also established in a number of other ways. For example, days before his disappearance, Jimmy learns that his girlfriend, Karaoke, was raped by her uncle, Josh, a local fisherman, who also suffered from sexual abuse at residential school (365). This discovery prompts Jimmy to take a job on Josh's boat, where he kills Josh and accidentally drowns in the process. Robinson further suggests that Josh's nephew and Lisamarie's close friend Pooch may have been abused by Josh, as well (319).

However, the legacy of residential schooling is not the whole story of *Monkey Beach*, nor is it the whole story of settler-state tactics of acquisition and assimilation against Indigenous communities and peoples in North America. Roland Chrisjohn, Sherri Young, and Michael Maraun caution against focusing too closely on addressing individual experiences of residential schooling as the basis for Indigenous health and liberation. They argue that the schools "were only one of the tactics deployed to bring about the 'normalization' of Aboriginal Peoples" (129) and warn that state-funded (even if not entirely state-run) treatment centres are invested in ensuring Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike assimilate, or self-reform, to meet the demands of living in a capital-based economy. While *Monkey Beach* explores the intergenerational legacies of residential schooling, it also reveals the limitations of an

analysis that privileges residential schooling as an historical cause at the expense of more systematic understandings of the myriad present-day factors that continue to inform and compel self-harming behaviors. The intersections between the past and present forces of acculturation in the novel are well illustrated by Sam McKegney's description of the absent presence of residential schooling as "a hidden weapon, a deadhead lying beneath the water's surface" (12).¹⁰ Arguing that "the reality of residential schooling abuse remains, for Lisa-Marie [sic], cryptic and elusive" (12), McKegney also implies that a pervasive complex of contemporary forces works to maintain a silencing surface tension. The deadheads of traumatic memories are often forcibly submerged in the novel by the grinding requirements of economic survival, which work to impede healing, produce aggressive pursuits of inebriation, and offer a single uniform vision of survival. Lisamarie, Tab, Pooch, and Frank all voice similar dreams for the future, which are characterized by individual notions of self and predicated on escape from Kitimaat and separation from family. Lisamarie wants to quit school and work in the cannery (277) because "the idea of being free" appeals to her (279); Tab declares that she will "work in the cannery . . . and save all [her] money. . . . Then [she's] going to buy a house" (81); Pooch commits to a "work in the potlines and buy a truck' plan" (199); and Frank simply intends to "[get] the hell out of [Kitimaat]" (199). Despite their own financial problems, their parents directly and indirectly encourage these goals.

The thematic link between the young people's goals and their drinking is illuminated by Judith Butler's theory of performativity. The novel seems to exaggerate the dreams of Lisamarie and her friends in a way that frames their efforts to achieve them as the "incessant and *panicked* imitation of its own naturalized idealization" (Butler 129). Perhaps we could read such hyperbole as a dramatization of the "point[s] of weakness" (Lane 167) that occur when such norms are forcibly rehearsed. By the end of the novel, Pooch has committed suicide; Tab is living in Vancouver, estranged from her family; and Lisamarie is deciding whether or not to return from the Land of the Dead. And while Frank does find employment working on the Kemano II project,¹¹ it is work unwittingly implicated in the further environmental degradation and social deterioration of Haisla territory.

Unlike the social suffering of the other youth in the novel, however, Lisamarie's has an added spiritual dimension, which results from her

negotiation of dual — validated and invalidated — visions of what she experiences as reality. As Lane points out, the narrative presents “the notion that connecting with spirit worlds can be a normative behaviour” (168) through the continual repetition of such encounters. Reading her as a trickster figure, Lane argues that Lisamarie transcends gender constructs in ways that demonstrate that

notions of normative behavior are constantly produced by society, and constantly need to be re-addressed; if a society comes into conflict with another set of ‘norms,’ say via colonization, then it may be trickster’s talk to show the way back to previous modes of behaviour prior to the “originary” set of norms. Note that the constant re-production of norms is also a point of weakness. (166-67)

As discussed above, the narrative describes Haisla pre-capitalist subsistence and spiritual practices as non-capitalist forms of social reproduction, which can be read as an “originary” set of norms.” Therefore, we can see that Lisamarie is taught through interactions with both Ma-ma-oo and her mother that another set of norms must be practiced in order to survive. Even though Ma-ma-oo still shows Lisamarie the “old ways” (153), she believes they have little practical application in contemporary Kitimaat. However, Lisamarie has little control over the appearances of “the little man” (153),¹² nor does she seem willing to or capable of resisting communication with the crows or the *b’gwus*.¹³ It is Lisamarie’s double-visioned position between these ideological relations to her lived reality that incite her parents to send her to therapy and lead later to her drinking.

In the world of the novel, then, industry and psychiatry are elements of the same circuitry governed by compatible ideologies of individualism and secularity. The industry in town shapes the “dreams,” or sense of possibility, expressed by the Haisla community by reiterating capitalist values of individual survival or achievement and refusing the existence of a spirit world. Lisamarie is not sent to a psychiatrist because of perceived addiction, even though she regularly drinks with her friends. Rather, her parents react to her emotional withdrawal, insomnia, and seeing of ghosts by taking her to the hospital “to find out what was wrong” (266). When no physical causes are found, her mother makes a psychiatric appointment. The therapist, Ms. Jenkins, does all but draw a map for Lisamarie defining the limits of normalcy; after goading her

into falsely admitting that she sees ghosts “for attention” (275), Ms. Jenkins assures Lisamarie she will be “back to normal in no time” (275), where normal is defined as denying the extra-rational elements of the universe. It is important to note that, at this point, the reader knows that Lisamarie has been raped by Cheese, that it is the one-year anniversary of Mick’s death, and that she is struggling with how to communicate with spirits and the responsibility such correspondence involves. But these issues do not find articulation in the therapeutic setting.

Castricano interprets the encounter as exhibiting “Ms. Jenkins’s blindness to the spiritual implications of Lisa’s experience” as well as her determination to impose “her worldview on that experience” (805). This claim supports the argument that “Western culture’s materialist drive has attempted to eradicate ‘superstition’ . . . in the name of psychology” (808), yet the more punitive aspects of the “worldview” (805) being imposed require further examination. The hegemonic secularism underpinning Ms. Jenkins’s outright dismissal of the existence of ghosts is certainly evident. However, requiring more analysis is the significance of “the thing,” with “no flesh, just tight, thin skin over bones,” that Lisamarie sees clinging to Ms. Jenkins, “whispering in her ear” (272). Lisamarie overhears the creature taunting Ms. Jenkins about her partner’s fidelity; it also feeds on Lisamarie while Ms. Jenkins prompts her to deny that she sees ghosts. Crucially, it is the thing that tells Lisamarie what it “knew Ms. Jenkins wanted to hear” (274). In effect, it actually saves her from being pathologized by Ms. Jenkins’s worldview. The scene’s subversive possibility lies in its destabilization of psychiatric authority. But, of course, the underlying threat in the scene is that Lisamarie must capitulate to survive. Following this experience, Lisamarie announces to her parents her plans to quit school and work at the cannery (279). I argue that the narrative establishes a continuum between familial intervention and treatment in ways that suggest that psychiatric treatment functions to reshape a particular kind of subject, according to a secular ideology that reframes spirituality or spiritual awareness as mental illness.

The acculturative logic of Lisamarie’s psychiatric experience has far-reaching consequences, which eventually lead to her drinking as well as shape the tenor of her sobriety. After therapy, she continues to have visions but tries to ignore them. Regardless of the accuracy of her belief, she blames herself for Ma-ma-oo’s death because, as she reasons, “if I

had listened to my gift instead of ignoring it, I could have saved her” (294). Her guilt captures the novel’s broader thematic concerns with the danger of repressing the spiritual realm, not simply because Lisamarie could have prevented Ma-ma-oo’s death but, rather, because her guilt arises from feeling compelled to renounce her gifts given the threat they pose to her social and economic survival. It is this combination of guilt and desire for community that leads her to Vancouver, where, “for the first time in [her] life,” she feels “cool, if only because [she] bought the booze. What had started out as a way to escape turn[s] out to be a ticket to popularity” (296). The specific escape she seeks can only be inferred by the sequence of events. Her guilt regarding Ma-ma-oo’s death is grounded in her fraught relationship with her visions. In order to avoid seeing them, she stays drunk or high, only seeing ghosts “when [she’s] sober” (313). She spends two years living on trust-fund cheques until Tab’s ghost appears to her one morning to say that her recklessness is a threat to others and that her chosen community does not care about her. Evidently ready to listen to ghosts who remind her of her family connections, Lisamarie returns to Kitimaat to get sober.

Throwing herself into schoolwork “with an enthusiasm [she] usually reserved for partying” (326), Lisamarie finds an alternative way to suppress her guilt and her gifts. The parallel between studying and partying suggests that the underlying motivation for such zealotry is escape. She reasons that “it’s hard to philosophize about how crappy life is when you’re trying to finish a zillion things at once. . . . When I started to feel sad, I’d head back inside and hit the books” (327). This period is characterized by Lisamarie’s attempts to fulfill her family’s expectations, figured as a reprieve from her sadness and its broader spiritual significance. However, the Vancouver bender is not portrayed as an entirely negative experience. Lisamarie describes it as “a blur. A smudge. Two years erased, down the toilet, blotto” (296); while this indicates that it was largely a waste of time, money, and her body, the ironic double meaning of “smudge” also suggests that the two years might have been a cleansing — “a smudge” to prepare her body for healing and a return to a participatory role in her family. And yet, Jimmy’s disappearance disrupts Lisamarie’s newfound contentment. His disappearance symbolizes the resilience of colonial violence, which is also facilitated by contemporary confines of class and gender inequalities. Jimmy dies while killing Josh, whose abuse of Karaoke and Pooch is represented as a

repetition of past abuse — “the cyclical extension of violence seemingly initiated through residential school abuse” (McKegney 12).

The novel ends as it begins with cartographic imagery, which seems to reinforce its portrayal of a Haisla nation fractured, dispersed, and contained by persistent forms of colonial and economic violence. The final chapter, entitled “The Land of the Dead,” separates out from the quotidian realm a spiritual world, in which Lisamarie is reunited with Ma-ma-oo and Mick, who signify both tradition and resistance, respectively. There, it seems, Lisamarie finds connection with a sense of “Indigenous nationhood, . . . a common social interdependence within the community, the tribal web of kinship rights and responsibilities that link the People, the land, and the cosmos together” (Justice 151). While Ma-ma-oo tells her to “go back” (372), Lisamarie’s choice is left ambiguous. Yet it is certain that going back means leaving behind the community that would support her growth into a visionary and warrior who sees “magical things” (316) and shares the responsibility to help “Fuck the Oppressors” (69). By returning to her family, who instead support her pursuits of individual achievement and financial security, Lisamarie risks re-immersion in circumstances that engender her spiritual alienation. In the Land of the Living, Lisamarie’s habits of drinking, drug use, and enthusiastic studying in a secular education system are all framed as methods of repressing her “dangerous gift” (371). If readers are to assume she will choose to return to that world, they are given little indication that the ideological and material circuitries of her social suffering have been positively transformed.

The indeterminate ending of *Monkey Beach* hinges on Lisamarie’s ability to choose between assimilation and death (literally, but also through the persistent insensibility of inebriation). While sustaining the novel’s central critique of the unlivable choice faced by Lisamarie’s generation of Haisla youth, the ending also risks re-inscribing the Vanishing Indian myth. A kinship-founded Haisla nationhood characterized by spiritual knowledge (Ma-ma-oo) and political resistance (Uncle Mick) becomes accessible only in the Land of the Dead. Those characters who imagine themselves as part of “an ongoing and dynamic system of mutually affecting relationships” (Justice 151) have all died, except for Lisamarie. The final image of the novel — Lisamarie coming to consciousness on Monkey Beach — implies that she will pursue a middle ground between the Land of the Dead and the world she sees

in dreams, which is “whole, with no clear-cuts, no pollution, no boats, no cars, no planes” (265). As she wakes on the shore of the Land of the Dead, she hears both the *b’gwus* “close, very close” but also “in the distance . . . the sound of a speedboat” (374). Both seem to provide her with solace. The *b’gwus*’ “howling” signifies the enduring, if invisible, presence of “magical things” that profoundly comfort her (316), while the boat perhaps suggests rescue — or at least an equally enduring presence to that of the *b’gwus*. And yet, the underlying source of Lisamarie’s suffering throughout the novel has been negotiating the spiritual within an increasingly secular and individualized context. Until the concluding moment, it has clearly framed this negotiation as untenable. Survival — economic, emotional, and physical — for all the characters risks dependency on assimilation and renunciation of the spiritual.

Within this climate of constraint, addiction in Robinson’s novel might be said to signify what Jo-Ann Episkenew calls “a form of self-medicating to temporarily ease the despair of personal and political powerlessness” (9). Because habitual drinking and drug use are portrayed in *Monkey Beach* as ongoing consequences of colonial and capitalist acculturation, it stands to reason that the interconnected grip of both systems should be taken into consideration in the prevention and treatment of addictions. Fagan’s argument that narrowly focusing on Indigenous cultural issues serves to obfuscate ongoing issues of land rights and the fact that “a foreign justice system has been imposed on Aboriginal nations” (14) applies to reading addiction and its treatment in *Monkey Beach*. During Aunt Trudy’s last party before admitting herself to an eight-week rehabilitation program, someone exclaims, “Alberni? Really? There’s a treatment centre where the residential school used to be?” (310). The image of a treatment facility literally replacing a residential school decades later is potent in several ways. It signifies for Trudy a direct trajectory from residential school to rehab, which suggests that the trauma of residential schooling has led to her drinking and that the treatment centre is an attempt to ameliorate the symptoms of that trauma. Both facilities are also figured as places of state-run cultural separation, confinement, and discipline. Trudy must leave her community for eight weeks; the imposition of treatment seems inevitable given the absence in the novel of any tribal-based healing options. And given that the only other representation of psychiatric discourse in *Monkey Beach* highlights its coercive and regulatory logic, the Alberni

treatment centre symbolizes an extension of colonial and capitalist acculturation. By explicitly identifying drinking as a consequence of the traumas of acculturation, *Monkey Beach* re-signifies addiction as exposing the limits of full participation in a colonial and capitalist economy, precisely because of the cultural, economic, and spiritual violence on which such systems are predicated.

NOTES

¹ I apply here Marx's theory of capital as that which is produced and accrued through "the production of commodities" and "their circulation" (*Reader* 329), processes that necessitate a constant supply of "labour-power offered as commodity" (*Reader* 336). The concept of capital can be conceived within non-capitalist social formations in ways that do not require the exploitation of labour. But, according to Marx, within a capitalist mode of production, "capital can spring into life, only when the owner of the means of production and subsistence meets in the market with the free labourer selling his labour-power. . . . Capital, therefore, announces from its first appearance a new epoch in the process of social production" (*Reader* 339). In a Canadian context, capitalism establishes the conditions for subsistence, for social reproduction, as requiring the selling of one's labour within a capitalist market.

² See Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox on Bourdieu et al., Das, Kleinman, Wilkinson, and Farmer (28-29).

³ The Land of the Dead is figured in the novel as the world beyond the living. Ma-ma-o explains that "everything in the land of the dead is backwards. When you are in the next world, our day is your night; our left is your right; what is burnt and decayed in our world is whole in yours" (140-41).

⁴ In the still ongoing dispute, the Algonquins of Barriere Lake insist that the Ontario government comply with the Trilateral Agreement, "a landmark resource co-management agreement signed in 1991" (*Barriere Lake Solidarity*), which, based on its implicit recognition that the Algonquin Nation never signed treaties relinquishing land and resource rights to the Canadian government, compels the government to consult with them and share profits stemming from any resource extraction initiatives in the region.

⁵ Irlbacher-Fox situates this claim within a broader analysis of what she calls the Canadian state's "dysfunction theodicy," which frames Indigenous suffering as "self-imposed" because of "cultural difference and poor lifestyle choices," while "simultaneously positioning the state as a source of redemption and healing" (31).

⁶ Kitimaat village and Kitimat are geographically discrete, connected by "an eleven-kilometre strip of concrete" (27). Lisamarie and her family live in Kitimaat Village. Kitimat is the town in which Alcan was built. While they are different towns, Robinson emphasizes the direct influence of Kitimat's economy on Kitimaat Village throughout.

⁷ I draw on Sarah De Leeuw's argument that an ideology underlying residential schooling conflated "the transformation of place with the transformation of First Nations children" (185).

⁸ Initiated in November 2012, Idle No More's convergence of mobilizations against Canadian colonial policies and tactics is described as follows by Sheelah McLean, co-founder of the movement: "The struggle is not just about what 'resource sharing' should

and shouldn't look like. This is Indigenous land, and these are Indigenous resources. True sovereignty necessitates redistribution: the land, resources, and decision-making power has to go back to Indigenous people. Many communities have already decided on that route through land protection struggles. Grassy Narrows is an example of a long-standing barricade defending and protecting the lands" (qtd. in Lilley and Shantz 118).

⁹ The school (or schools) to which they were sent is never specified, though there was one in Kitimaat.

¹⁰ McKegney's analysis is built on Robinson's description of the deadheads in *Monkey Beach*.

¹¹ "The 1950 agreement with the province provided Alcan with water rights to the Nechaka and Nanika rivers in perpetuity. It also allowed Alcan to . . . propose a second hydro project in 1984, which would bore new holes in the mountain and use up to 88 per cent of the Nechako River . . . [c]alled Kemano II or the Kemano Completion Project" (Sheppard).

¹² Lisamarie describes "the pattern of the little man's visits" (27) as seemingly random: "A variation of the monster under the bed . . . [h]e liked to sit on the top of [her] dresser . . . and he had a shock of bright red hair which stood up in messy, tangled puffs that he sometimes hid under a black top hat" (27). Lacombe explains that, "Like B'gwus, the red-haired, green-garbed little man . . . is so easily mistaken for an evil leprauchaun by readers and critics alike . . . [but] is a spirit associated with the cedar tree, [who] must be approached with caution. . . . [H]e appears to be a harbinger of death. However, he also represents the gift of vision that Lisamarie inherited from her mother, which is the gift of her Haisla ancestry and bloodline — her history, culture, and identity" ("On Critical Frameworks for Analyzing Indigenous Literature").

¹³ "The term *b'gwus*, common to the Nisga'a, Gitskan, Tsimshian, Kwakw'ala, and Haisla languages, has evolved from an older root word *pa'gwus* or *pi'kis*, defined . . . in at least four different ways: 'monkey,' 'monkey woman,' 'wealth woman,' and 'land otter woman'" (Halpin qtd. in Lacombe).

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