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What Indigenous Literatures Have to Do with Decolonization
Selections from Marilyn Dumont's A Really Good Brown Girl (1996) and The Pemmican Eaters (2015)
Ce que les littératures autochtones ont à voir avec la décolonisation
Extraits tirés de A Really Good Brown Girl (1996) et de The Pemmican Eaters (2015) de Marilyn Dumont

Chinelo Ezenwa

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Imaginer des constellations linguistiques et théoriques pour l'étude des littératures autochtones
Imagining Linguistic and Theoretical Constellations for the Study of Indigenous Literatures

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What Indigenous Literatures Have To Do with Decolonization: Selections from Marilyn Dumont's A Really Good Brown Girl *(1996) and* The Pemmican Eaters *(2015)*

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Abstract. *This article explores selected poems from Dumont's A Really Good Brown Girl and The Pemmican Eaters as critical works that address dual aspects of Indigenous decolonization struggles. While the poems from A Really Good Brown Girl adopt the language/poetics of resistance to critique cultural and linguistic discrimination, The Pemmican Eaters focuses on reclaiming and regenerating the author's Indigenous identity. One of the strategies common to the poems is the repositioning of former derogatory*

terms to reclaim the Indigenous-affirming meanings and histories of these words. By representing these words and memories through a Cree Métis perspective, Dumont subverts popular colonial myths and shows the truth about settler-colonization to the colonizer. Dumont's poems offer a strong and direct critique of settler-colonization as well as the colonizer's attempts to control Indigenous bodies and worldviews. And by so doing, they demonstrate the connections between literary activism and ongoing Indigenous journeys to sovereignty.

Keywords*:Marilyn Dumont; settler colonization; culture and language imperialism; Indigenous resurgence and decolonization; postcolonialism*

Résumé. *Cet article explore une sélection de poèmes de A Really Good Brown Girl et The Pemmican Eaters de Dumont en tant qu'œuvres critiques qui abordent deux aspects des luttes de décolonisation autochtones. Alors que les poèmes de A Really Good Brown Girl adoptent le langage/poétique de la résistance pour critiquer la discrimination culturelle et linguistique, The Pemmican Eaters se concentre sur la récupération et la régénération de l'identité autochtone de l'auteure. L'une des stratégies communes aux poèmes est le repositionnement d'anciens termes péjoratifs pour récupérer les significations et les histoires autochtones affirmatives de ces mots. En représentant ces mots et ces souvenirs à travers une perspective métisse crie, Dumont renverse les mythes coloniaux populaires et montre au colonisateur la vérité sur la colonisation par les colons. Les poèmes de Dumont offrent une critique forte et directe de la colonisation ainsi que des tentatives du colonisateur de contrôler les corps et les visions du monde autochtones. Et ce faisant, ils démontrent les liens entre l'activisme littéraire et les efforts continus des Autochtones vers la souveraineté..*

Mots clés *: Marilyn Dumont; colonisation de peuplement; impérialisme culturel et linguistique; résurgence autochtone et décolonisation; postcolonialisme*

This article looks at how Marilyn Dumont's poems in *A Really Good Brown Girl* and *The Pemmican Eaters* subvert English imperialism, while also affirming her Indigenous identity as a Cree/Métis woman. Within the scope of this article, I am primarily interested in "Memoirs of a Really Good Brown Girl," "Squaw Poems," "The Devil's Language," from *A Really Good Brown Girl* and "These are Wintering Words," from *The Pemmican Eaters*. While the writer criticizes English as a colonial language used by the colonizer to judge, oppress, and denigrate Indigenous peoples, she also creatively uses the same language to celebrate Indigenous languages and worldviews. The poems not only show the essence and values of the Michif language and culture, but they also help make the argument that Michif and other Indigenous languages and cultures are not inferior to colonial languages and cultures, like English or French. Yet, the question of Indigenous decolonization, as depicted in the poems, is not limited to the mental reclamation of Indigenous histories, languages, and cultures. The stories, cultures, and histories embedded in the poems help Indigenous communities regain and hold on to their collective memories of sovereignty and will to struggle for Indigenous decolonization. The poems decry colonial violence and speak about the repatriation of Indigenous land,

and in so doing, serve as tangible spaces where both the settler and Indigenous person may envision the imperative for and processes of Indigenous decolonization.

Other Indigenous writers in North America, including Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe), Jo-Ann Episkenew (Métis), Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird (Muscogee Nation and Spokane Tribe), as well as Simon J. Ortiz (Acoma Pueblo) have also considered ways through which Indigenous peoples can participate in decolonization through creative use of imperial languages. In *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*, for instance, Harjo and Bird write that the colonizer's language which often diminishes Indigenous languages and cultures also allows Indigenous peoples "to heal, regenerate, and to create" (22). Similarly, Episkenew emphasizes that reappropriating the colonizer's language is "simultaneously a political act and an act of healing that provides the foundation for the process of decolonization" (12). In other words, in the hands of the Indigenous writer, the colonizing language (in this case, English), which has the potential to demean Indigenous peoples and cultures, can also be reappropriated to support Indigenous peoples' struggles for autonomy.

The question of language imperialism and decolonization, as I further discuss in the next section, has been an ongoing debate among Indigenous and postcolonial scholars. Leading in this debate is Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o who in *Decolonizing the Mind* condemns the continued use of English by African Writers, insisting that the use of English by (post)colonized peoples contributes to their continued mental colonization. Against this idea, the late Nigerian author Chinua Achebe argues that while English should be recognized as an imperial language, it can be redesigned to express speakers' and writers' own ideas and cultures.[1] This polarization about colonial languages, which has merits on both sides of the argument, as well as the resurgence of decolonization as a part of EDIAD-I frameworks (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Accessibility, Decolonization, and Indigenization) in institutions and public spaces make it imperative to consider how the choice of language (whether Indigenous, colonial, or syncretic), is/can be recognized as an intrinsic part of decolonial projects and processes.

However, the idea of (language) decolonization in the Indigenous context is further complicated by what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang identified as settlers' and scholars' tendencies to freely (mis)use the ideas behind decolonization as parts and parcel of social justice and human rights projects. They insist that decolonization should include the return of stolen lands and Indigenous sovereignty. While Tuck and Yang do not completely disavow the importance of language in decolonization processes, they highlight how a focus on issues like language enables the settler colonizer to determine the terms of Indigenous decolonization. Yet, if one thinks about (settler) colonization as a process of annihilation and taking control of all aspects of life, land, and resources of Indigenous peoples and "natives," then it is logical to argue that decolonization would encompass all the aspects of Indigenous lives now controlled by settlers. Moreover, if decolonization is recognized as a process of regaining Indigenous sovereignty, as I argue here, Indigenous writing, like Dumont's poems, represents part of that journey to self-autonomy.

My article starts by engaging with a discussion of colonization (including linguistic imperialism) and what (linguistic) decolonization could look like in a settler colonial context. Close readings of Dumont's poems, which follow, demonstrate how they potentially enable readers to reclaim Indigenous voices within existing colonial systems designed to erase such voices. Ultimately, I interpret the poems as "political, armed, [and] spiritual" (Ortiz 10) acts of decolonization because they counter the colonizer's

[1] Achebe discusses this issue in his essay "The African Writer and the English Language."

viewpoints about Indigenous languages, cultures, and ways of viewing the world. They are living reminders of settler colonization, the importance of Indigenous sovereignty, and forms of Indigenous decolonization.

COLONIZATION, LINGUISTIC IMPERIALISM, AND DECOLONIZATION

One cannot speak about decolonization, even from a literary perspective, without going back to the question of colonization. Colonization is defined here as a situation where an economically advantaged group of people (like the British imperial government), with military superiority, illegally takes over the affairs of a less advantaged group (as was done to Indigenous peoples in Canada, the African continent, etc.). The situation arises because the first group assumes itself superior to the other group and presumes that it should have power over the latter's political and socioeconomic affairs. Furthermore, in *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said reminds us that colonialism does not only happen through the physical force of occupation; it also occurs when the economically advantaged group creates or attempts to create a cultural dependence in a target group through schooling and other forms of acculturation. Said's emphasis on cultural imperialism is especially important to this article because, as he explains, while "the main battle in imperialism is over land … when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future—these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative[s]" (xii-xiii). His point is that the English "narratives" exported to the "colonies," and I would include other cultural materials, like poetry, were means of achieving colonization.[2]

Also viewing the question of colonization outside of economic occupation, European scholar Robert Phillipson focuses on the idea of imperialism through language. Borrowing the words of Gilbert Ansre, a Ghanaian sociolinguist, Phillipson defines Linguistic Imperialism as:

> The phenomenon in which the minds and lives of the speakers of a language are dominated by another language to the point where they believe that they can and should use only that foreign language …. [To Phillipson], Linguistic Imperialism has a subtle way of warping the minds, attitudes, and aspirations of even the noblest in a society and preventing him [or her] from appreciating and realizing the full potentialities of the Indigenous languages (qtd. in Phillipson 56).[3]

In other words, Linguistic Imperialism occurs when one language (or culture), supported by an imperialistic structure, is set to dominate others. Therefore, as Phillipson argues, the assumed superiority of English (or other colonial languages, like French) and its spread are not natural; rather, they are supported by imperialistic systems of government whose aim is the erasure of languages and cultures of colonized or formerly colonized groups. By Phillipson's definitions, Linguistic Imperialism can cause the mental colonization of postcolonial and Indigenous peoples who then come to consider English superior to their Indigenous languages or mother tongues. This form of mental colonization, where it exists, underlies Ngugi wa Thiong'o fears concerning the pervasive use of English. Like Said, he rightly points

[2] See also Indian author and cultural theorist Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation,* where the author argues that attempts to decolonize should include self-re-presentations and re-historizations (Niranjana 2, 41, 63).
[3] See Alastair Pennycook's *English and the Discourses of Colonialism*. There, Pennycook argues that despite the end of colonialism in many English-speaking countries, the continued use of the language enables the effects of colonialism to remain.

out that since language is more than a means of expression, being also a "carrier of culture," it is "the most important vehicle to hold someone prisoner" (Thiong'o 13, 9). In such cases, the (post)colonized speakers of the hegemonic language may continue to exist as subjects to its colonizing influences.

While much of the fears that Phillipson and Ngugi express concerning the link between language use, culture, literary texts, and colonization are valid, their writings do not appear to make sufficient allowances for the autonomy of the contemporary language user. Also, perhaps they do not sufficiently consider the possibility that new varieties of English could be self-affirming and thus decolonizing. The idea of decolonization as I use it in this article stems from Frantz Fanon's explanation of decolonization as

> The encounter between two congenitally antagonistic forces that in fact owe their singularity to the kind of reification secreted and nurtured by the colonial situation. Their first confrontation was coloured by violence and their cohabitation—or rather the exploitation of the colonized by the colonizer—continued at the point of the bayonet and under cannon fire…decolonization is always a violent event. (Fanon 1)

No doubt Fanon does not advocate for violence, but the logic of his words is that since the colonizer took the colonized, their land, and resources by force—during colonization—, the colonized may resort to a similar type of force—during decolonization—to regain possession of self, land, and resources. Indeed, his vivid and apt description of the logic, processes, and effects of colonization suggests that the potential violence of decolonization will be akin to the violence of colonization that came before it (seizure of land, looting, massacres of people, etc.).

In the African so-called postcolonial context, where I belong, countries are presumably free of British and French rule, ostensibly decolonized. But British and French colonizers/former colonizers have not returned the resources which British and French colonizers looted from the continent. Major European interferences have in fact continued through "aid interventions" and the existence of mega companies, like Shell, which sit on Indigenous African land, contributing to the destruction of land and Indigenous Africans who live on the land.[4] Additionally, it is worth noting that most countries in Africa have continued to use the languages, orthographies, and curricula passed on by British and French colonizers. The latter, France, has maintained an imperial hold over "francophone" African countries, compelling them to pay monies to France.[5] Clearly, the question of decolonization in postcolonial countries is still quite contentious.

But decolonization becomes even more complex in a settler colonial context, like Canada, where the colonizer remains on the land and is in charge of governance while setting up frameworks supposed to decolonize the colonized. This raises questions about what decolonization would look like in that context, what it would mean for settlers, and more importantly what it would mean for Indigenous peoples. Tuck

[4] Mahfoud Bennoune makes a similar argument in *The making of contemporary Algeria* (1988). He writes about the "destructuration" and occupation of Algeria by French imperial power, which started from 1830 and continued well into the 20th century (36). In a 2021 presentation at the Humboldt Forum, Chimamanda Adichie also criticizes Europe's attempts to disguise the continuation of colonization as charity given to help Africa.

[5] This recent BBC article highlights how France has maintained economic hegemony over supposedly postcolonial countries in Africa: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-46960532. See also Ndongo Samba Sylla's article about "French Monetary Imperialism in Africa": https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2017/07/12/the-cfa-franc-french-monetary-imperialism-in-africa/.

and Yang address these questions in their article, insisting that decolonization must mean the return of sovereignty and land to Indigenous communities (2-3). Other reformative activities outside the issue of Indigenous sovereignty, they explain, should be defined as social justice programs that may help to further Indigenous human rights and awaken Indigenous critical consciousness but are not the same as Indigenous decolonization. They further argue that the discussions, programs, and initiatives framed as decolonizing/decolonization are especially problematic because they are not even inclusive of Indigenous scholars, activists, and frameworks, and do not majorly pay attention to settler colonization in North America (Tuck and Yang 2-3).

On the one hand, one could argue that since Tuck and Yang published their article in 2012, there have been more Indigenous decolonization programs instituted publicly and privately, especially in educational institutions. See, for instance, Western University's Office of Indigenous Initiatives that were officially opened in November 2022 as part of Western's efforts "to increase Indigenous voices and presence across all levels of work, study and research … [and] advance [Indigenous] truth and reconciliation" (Office of Indigenous Initiatives). [6] But my purpose here is not to measure the existence and impact of such Indigenous initiatives, even if I were qualified to do so. Nevertheless, if I were to follow criticisms of EDIAD – I (e.g., Frank Dobbin and Alexandra Kalev's "Why Diversity Programs Fail" as well as Jean-François Venne's "The Excellence Dilemma"[7]), I would not make an argument about the number of initiatives, but about reconsidering the ways in which decolonizing projects are conceived and actioned to make their impact felt, whether the project is broadly under the EDIAD-I framework or more specifically under Indigenous decolonization frameworks. A case in point is the tuition amounts that some Canadian universities have undertaken to cover. According to Haley Lewis of the *Global News*, the removal of tuition for First Nations students by the University of Toronto, the University of Waterloo, and Kwantlen Polytechnic University is designed as part of those universities' reconciliation efforts. The tuition amounts covered for the First Nations students may not be significant, considering how many Indigenous resources universities in Canada use, but it is noteworthy that the interventions directly benefit individual Indigenous persons. Beyond academic and political rhetorics, publications, and public events, this measure counts as a direct statement of support for victims of settler colonization who most need it.

As far as Indigenous decolonization is concerned, one key initiative could be the critical appropriation of colonial languages to support Indigenous decolonization efforts.[8] Anishinaabe writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor argues that by doing this, colonial languages, like English or French, can become a source of liberation.

> The English language has been the linear tongue of colonial discoveries, racial cruelties … and the unheard literature of dominance in tribal communities; at the same time, this mother tongue of paracolonialism has been a language of liberation for many tribal people. English, a language of paradoxes, learned under duress … at mission and federal schools, was one of the languages that carried the vision and shadows of the Ghost Dance, the religion of renewal, from tribe to tribe on the vast plains of the nineteenth century. (Vizenor 27)

[6] Western University, https://indigenous.uwo.ca/.
[7] Dobbin and Kalev ("Why Diversity Programs Fail"), Venne ("The Excellence Dilemma: Are equity, diversity and inclusion criteria and sustainable development goals compatible with academia's obsession with excellence?")
[8] See Chinua Achebe's discussion in "The African Writer" where he writes about manipulating the formal structures of English to enable him to express his colonial and individual experiences is also relevant.

In naming English "a language of paradoxes," Vizenor recognizes the possibilities of using a hegemonic language, which has been otherwise used to dominate, to also address and subvert colonial injustices. That is what Dumont achieves in her collections *A Really Good Brown Girl* and *The Pemmican Eaters.* In *A Really Good Brown Girl*, poems like "Memoirs of a Really Good Brown Girl" (13) and "The Devil's Language" (54) discuss the author's verbal and emotional silencing and the ways that she resists such attempts at domination through her writing. Beyond the resistance to linguistic colonization, "There are Wintering Words" (*The Pemmican* 16) focuses on Dumont's Indigenous identity and acts as a celebration and resurgence of her Cree/Métis history, identity, and culture. In this sense, Dumont decolonizes existing colonial narratives and histories by rupturing them and allowing the Indigenous person to see their own existence "outside official colonial history" (Scudeler 171).

As becomes obvious in the next section, Dumont's poems are also active reminders of the transformative power of Indigenous art to bring about liberty and autonomy. Neal McLeod (Cree) explains this further in the aptly titled article, "Coming Home through Stories":

> Stories help maintain an Indigenous conscious by providing a sense of place in the world to a people confronting the forces of colonialism. Without stories and language, a people loses its way of bestowing meaning upon the world. Once stories are lost, the process is no longer one of diaspora, but rather cultural genocide and the silence of eternity…. To tell a story is to link, in the moments of telling, the past to the present and the present to the past. From this ongoing dialectic emerges the possibility of a future. (McLeod 52-3)

McLeod also reminds us that since colonization resulted in the loss of both Indigenous lands and ideologies, any "future" of Indigenous sovereignty would require a physical return to land as well as an ideological return to Indigenous ways of being, such as evident in Dumont's poems.

RESISTING THE COLONIZER'S LANGUAGE: "MEMOIRS," "SQUAW POEMS," AND "THE DEVIL'S LANGUAGE"

Dumont's *A Really Good Brown Girl* is a collection of autobiographical poems chronicling Dumont's transition, from a young girl who is forced to repudiate her cultural identity due to the unsettling and judgmental gaze of a white settler colonial society, to an adult who acquires an active voice of resistance. The poems are grouped into four sections: "Squaw Poems," "What More than Dance," "White Noise," and "Made of Water." For the purpose of this article, I am mainly interested in "Memoirs of a Really Good Brown Girl" (13), "Squaw Poems" (18), and "The Devil's Language" (54). While I read them as distinct poems, I also see the ways in which they overlap to show the different stages of the author's maturity. In the end, I interpret "The Devil's Language" as a validation of the critical and resisting voice that the author develops in her earlier poem "Memoirs."

"Memoirs" is written in prose form, and it starts with a narration of the harrowing experience of a young Dumont's first day at school where her sister hands her over to a white teacher. Dumont unhappily reflects on this handover as a "changing of guard" (*A Really Good* 13) from mother to sister and then to teacher. The suggestion is that this handover is symbolic of the loss of the maternal, an integral aspect of her identity that she also references in the last two stanzas of "The Devil's Language" (*A Really Good* 54):

> as if speaking the devil's language is talking back
> Back(words)
> Back to your mother's sound, your mother's tongue, your mother's language
> Back to that clearing in the bush
> In the tall black spruce
> near the sound of horses and wind
> where you sat on her knee in a canvas tent
> and she fed you bannock and tea
> and syllables
> that echo in your mind now, now
> that you can't make the sound
> of that voice that rocks you and sings you sleep
> in the devil's language. (*A Really Good* 55)

The feelings of loss and sadness expressed within these lines do not mask the key message, which is that the "devil's language" robs the speaker of their "mother's tongue" as well as a past and history. And, in turn, this multifaceted loss robs the person of the ability to fully articulate their longings for the maternal or a self that was taken away, especially not in the colonizing language they are forced to assume.

In "Memoirs," the aforementioned handover from maternal to schoolteacher is also symbolic of the gradual loss of Dumont's Cree/Métis identity and assimilation into the white settler culture. She expresses this loss and vulnerability in the face of a new culture in her reflection:

> I am a foreigner, I stay in my seat, frozen, afraid to move, afraid to make a mistake, afraid to speak, they talk differently than I do, I don't sound the way they do, but I don't know how to sound any different, so I don't talk, don't volunteer answers to questions the teacher asks. I become invisible. (Dumont, *A Really Good* 13)

In addition to loneliness, these lines also show the speaker's feeling of insecurity in a new place, a place that should feel like home, but where she is made to feel like a "foreigner." The young Dumont is excluded because of her lack of access to the hegemonic way of speaking and her non-white identity. And while this mental, physical, and social exclusion may seem self-imposed, it is worthwhile considering the fact that the origin lies in colonial language policies. Andrea Sterzuk makes this argument through a contemporary school-based research in Canada, which shows that there are still these forms of exclusions in white settler schools due to the persistence of colonial ideas. Sterzuk's classroom-based research in Saskatchewan demonstrates that despite the proliferation of varieties of Indigenous Englishes, white settler teachers and school authorities use the notion of Canadian "standard" English to "reproduce domination, subjugation, and exclusion" of Indigenous children (2).[9] Reflecting on the forms of colonial exclusions that both Dumont and Sterzuk describe, Episkenew asks:

> What happens…to people of oral cultures if invaders wrest control of the education of their children? And what happens if the invaders … systematically de-educat[e] the children so that they lose their ability to communicate in their native languages and, therefore, lose access to those foundational narratives of their

[9] In the Kenyan, African context, Ngugi notes that the use of English is equally used as a discriminatory marker, where even young children face corporal punishments for failing to speak English. In some cases, the more adept English speakers are turned to "witch hunters and traitors" (Ngugi 11) by school authorities who use them to identify and punish those who speak their Indigenous languages.

> people? What happens if these invading powers supplant the myths of the people with new myths in which the people are either maligned or ignored? (Episkenew 4)

If one were to respond to these questions based on Dumont's individual experiences as narrated in the poems, one could say that the person becomes excluded and alienated from their history, culture, and self. But on a more global level, Sterzuk's research allows us to see the systemic and widespread impact on Indigenous children and communities. Overall, as Dumont explains in an interview with Jennifer Andrews, the poems in *A Really Good Brown Girl* express the shaming forced on Dumont over her non-white identity (Andrews). The shame emanates from the discriminatory attitude of the white settler society towards her family, and it is visible in the ever-present condemnatory white gaze[10] and in the refrain "you are not good enough, not good enough, obviously not good enough" in "Memoirs" (13).

Dumont further discusses the resulting internalized shame in "Squaw Poems" (18) where she argues that the otherwise affirmative Indigenous term ("squaw") became an instrument of individual and "community manipulation" (Andrews 21) used by white male colonizers to monitor and police female Indigenous bodies. Because a younger Dumont was indoctrinated with the erroneous idea that "squaw" is synonymous with "whore" (*A Really Good* 19), she was deeply afraid of being considered one or addressed as one.

> I learned I should never be seen drunk in public, nor should I dress provocatively, because these would be irrefutable signs. So as a teenager, I avoided red lipstick, never wore my skirts too short or too tight, never chose shoes that looked 'hooker-like.' I never moved in ways that might be interpreted as loose. I became what Jean Rhys phrased, 'aggressively respectable.' I'd be so goddamned respectable that white people would feel slovenly in my presence. (*A Really Good* 18)

For a teenage Dumont with a budding sexuality, it was crucial to follow these rules in order not to be considered a "squaw" (see also Andrews 21). But this denial was also tantamount to a denial of her Indigenous female identity and expression of sexuality.

According to Mohawk writer Katsi Cook, the historical meaning of "squaw" shows its relationship to Indigenous female reproduction:

> Squaw comes from the Mohawk word otsiskwah (oh-gee-squaw), which means 'it's slippery,' describing the vagina. Being called a squaw is like being called a cunt. However, otsiskwah is an excellent and empowering word to describe the clear, abundant, thread mucus the cervix produces when a woman is fertile! (Cook 44-45)

The problem is that white colonizers turned the term "squaw" into a derogatory term to exclude the voices of Indigenous women by positioning them as "beast(s) of burden" (Harjo and Bird 30) or "whores." But by reflecting on the historical meaning of the word, both Dumont and Cook reclaim it to emphasize Indigenous female power.

Because the poems are interconnected, one can see that the body policing that Dumont describes as a teenager actually started when she was a younger child. In the earlier poem "Memoirs," she describes how she is forced to take on a whitewashed religious appearance by her brother's "white fiancée," who "scrubbed the hell out of … [her]" …"fed and watered [her] like a lamb for slaughter… [and ultimately

[10] Dumont critiques this "white gaze" more directly in the poem titled "White Judges" also in *A Really Good* (11).

transformed her into] "Ste. Anne…a receptacle of light" (*A Really Good* 14). While common enough social expressions, the ironical use of phrases like "the hell out of" and "lamb to the slaughter" alongside "Ste Anne," as well as the aggressive nature of the physical bodily cleaning, leave the reader with no doubt that Dumont is being critical of white missionization as achieved through degrees of violence.[11] And taken against the "aggressive respectability" described in "Squaw Poems" (*A Really Good* 34), it is obvious that Dumont writes against white social and religious indoctrination that obliterated, at that time, her own female and cultural identities.

Dumont goes further to satirize the negative connotations imposed on the idea of "squaw"/"squawwoman" by extending its usage to men, specifically white men (*A Really Good* 19). In the line "he is a squaw he is a squaw he is a squawman," she pointedly argues that the man/whiteman who has sexual relations with the so-called "squaw" woman should be impugned as much as the woman who is labelled with that term is. More to the point, Andrews opines that by referring to men/white men as "squaws," Dumont "implicitly reformulates the presumption that… [Indigenous] women were responsible for seducing white men and hence creating the Métis population" (22). In that sense, the reference to the man/whiteman as "squaw" is more than a satirical term, it also becomes a weapon to mock both the man and the whiteman who dared to use the term in a derogatory manner to degrade an Indigenous woman.[12] This active form of resistance is not only a form of rejection of the derogatory sense in which words like "squaw" are used, but it also serves to discredit the hegemonic group that arrogates itself with the power to name the colonized woman. By examining the notion of "squaw" through a historical, social, and religious lens in "Squaw Poems," Dumont decolonizes the idea by ridiculing its white interpretations and reclaiming its Indigenous significance. Transforming or "re-inventing the enemy's language" (Joy and Bird 22) in "Squaw Poems" allows Dumont to criticize societal stereotypes, impositions of rigid identities, and discrimination against Indigenous cultural and social identities.[13]

Other Indigenous literary scholars have discussed the types of deliberate shaming and cultural exclusions that Dumont reveals in her poems. For instance, in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, Champion-Jeremiah Okimasis relates his visceral reaction to the shaving of his hair: "clip, clip, clip. Champion could feel his hair falling, like snowflakes, but flakes of human skin. He was being skinned alive, in public; the centre of his nakedness shrivelled to the size and texture of a raisin, the whole world staring, pointing, laughing" (Highway 53). Champion-Jeremiah's narration of this incident, which happens at the point of his entry into the Birch Lake Indian Residential School, highlights the historical violence against Indigenous children in residential schools, and this violence is interwoven with the deliberate public shaming of the children. The derogation tied to this incident is further emphasized by Champion-Jeremiah's loss of his Cree name (and identity) at the insistence of the schoolteacher Brother Stumbo (Highway 53-4). This treatment may be viewed as a deliberate ploy on the part of the colonizer to instill a

[11] I use this term to mean religious colonization and the enforcement of the Christianity to Indigenous groups.
[12] Vesna Lopicˇic' also depicts Dumont's deliberate use of "squaw" as a form of active resistance to empower the Indigenous woman (186).
[13] While noting the value of Dumont's literary critique of the term "squaw"/"squawwoman," it was also brought to my notice that the term is still abhorrent to Indigenous communities in America. Case in point is a recent *San Francisco Valley* news article by Gregory Thomas, where Thomas reports that two towns in California formerly called Squaw Valley and Squaw Hill are now renamed Yokuts Valley and Loybas Hill. Members of these communities find the term "offensive and demeaning" (Thomas).

sense of inferiority in the colonized. Ultimately, it contributes to the "warp(ing) of minds, attitudes, and aspirations" that Ansre discusses specifically (qtd. in Phillipson 56). Ultimately, what both Ansre and Phillipson are concerned with is that such continuous public humiliations inadvertently result in the colonization of the mind and alienation from Indigenous languages and cultures. McLeod discusses this form of alienation as ideological alienation, a situation arising from the colonization of Indigenous worldviews and the imposition of colonial orders (53).

To some degree, this form of alienation is true for a young Dumont as well; however, in the concluding lines of "Memoirs," an older Dumont demonstrates her ability to resist and overturn such mental colonization. Using English, as a regenerative force, she rejects the voice of white authority attempting to teach her "correct/standard" English as follows: "I am in a university classroom, an English professor corrects my spoken English in front of the class. I say, 'really good.' He says, 'You mean, really well, don't know?' I glare at him and say emphatically, 'No, I mean really good.'" (*A Really Good* 15). Narrating this incident allows Dumont to critique the public nature of this "correction," and enforcement of white authority. According to Pennycook, the aim of this public correction is to perpetuate the idea of a hierarchy between the white ('native') speaker and the non-white ('non-native') learner (15). Closer to home, Episkenew also explains that such a superior attitude emanates from a "myth of white superiority," an underserved privilege that white settlers conferred on themselves, enabling them to think they could dominate other groups (3). In Dumont's case, she undermines this imposition of superiority by rejecting a version of English that is alien to her. The incident is strategically placed at the end of "Memoirs" to show how she reclaims the right to a voice and identity by speaking in a way that is reflective of her own identity.

"The Devil's Language" (*A Really Good* 54) is a continuation of some of the ideas of linguistic and cultural reclamation evident in "Memoirs" and "Squaw Poems." Yet, it is somewhat different in the sense that it more directly reflects on the question of language use and classifications and repudiates language imperialism. It is in a more "conventional" free verse form, and its short direct statements help to suggest a sense of decolonial activism throughout the poem. In the first long verse, the adult Dumont presents the case against linguistic colonization. She specifically refers to "The Great White Way" (*A Really Good* 54) of writing English, a phrase that, in her context, could mean the Canadian academic way of writing. Her reference also to "Eliot" (*A Really Good* 54) (presumably George Eliot), leads me to believe that, in a more general sense, Dumont deliberately satirizes English canons and the attempt to maintain language standardizations across different cultural contexts. The satirization of "The Great White Way of Writing English" is likewise apparent in the description of the language that Dumont mockingly uses: "Lily-white words / … picket-fence sentences / and manicured paragraphs" (*A Really Good 54*). In the first place, these words evoke an image of white suburbia where this version of English seemingly belongs. Secondly, phrases such as "… picket-fence / (or) manicured paragraphs [a garden hedge or boundary]" (73) suggest that the colonial English language is *imprisoned* by rules or more precisely "established literary and linguistic structures, practices, and images" and the author struggles to break free from such linguistic colonialism (Blaeser 57).

In the aforementioned interview with Andrews, Dumont talks about the difficulties in attempting to express her Indigenous worldview in English. This is a common theme among other Indigenous writers such as Blaeser, as shown above, as well as Okanagan author Jeannette Armstrong. Armstrong, in particular, argues that English ("standard" English) lacks "fluidity" (159) in terms of structure, tense

usage, and meaning. The exception, according to her, is when the writer can transform English into an Indigenized version such as "Okanagan Rez English" (158). In her essay, she demonstrates such "deficiencies" by looking at the differences between the Okanagan word "Kekwep" (156) and its English equivalent "dog." I am reluctant to use the word equivalent in this context because her main contention is that the reality of the Okanagan "Kekwep" (156) is quite different from the English word. To her, where the Okanagan "Kekwep" (156) recalls "an experience of a little furred life" (157), "the English word solicits an inanimate generic symbol for all dogs, independent of action and isolated from everything else" (157).[14] Ultimately, what Armstrong, Dumont, and Blaeser address are the problems and limitations inherent in attempting to express one's worldviews in an alien language, especially when the language and conventions are imposed on the speaker or writer. Therefore, Dumont's discussion of "The Great White Way of Writing English" is a critique of language standardizations and hierarchizing, as well as an expression of the author's inability to fully portray herself in a language that is restrictive to her worldview. "The Devil's Language" clearly demonstrates that language imposition results in the marginalization and exclusion of Indigenous peoples.

In "The Devil's Language," Dumont also addresses and rejects the stereotypical (mis)representation of the Indigenous person for daring to resist colonial impositions. She writes:

> … Native Literature section
> Resistance writing
> a mad Indian
> unpredictable
> on the warpath
> … dumb drunk or violent. (*A Really Good* 54)

In the first place, by pointing out these overly simplified categorizations, Dumont contests the idea that someone's language choice should be used as a measure to judge their intellectual ability or socioeconomic ranking. She also ridicules the notion of being forced to speak like a particular person who is considered an authority, whether it is a King or Chief, and shows that in Cree culture, people can make their own language choices without fear of condemnation or exclusion. Secondly, I surmise that her humorous description of these classifications is not to deny the activist purpose of her writing but to fundamentally address the lack of respect accorded to Indigenous literary works in the academic world.

In considering issues of stereotypical representations, I have battled with the question of which language or version of language (English or Cree) Dumont poses as "the devil's language." The last two lines of the poem, "of that voice that rocks you and sings you to sleep / in the devil's language" (*A Really Good* 55), suggest that "the devil's language" could be Dumont's mother tongue. But this is a simplified way of looking at the key phrase. I suspect that Dumont presents the notion of "devil's language" as a double entendre, allowing her to critique the imposition of a colonial language and satirize the typical representation of Indigenous or colonized people as "devils" (heathenish and corrupt). Consequently, she leaves it open to the reader to ask and decide what/which language is "the devil's language." This interpretation is made in line with other Indigenous and postcolonial writers who have critiqued the ways in which the white Christian colonizer presented the non-white non-Christian colonized person as the "devil" (connoting negative attributes). For instance, Highway questions the projection of heaven and hell

[14] I am not certain I consider English, or any language, as lacking, and would argue that perhaps it depends on the relationship of the speaker with the language.

or good and evil through a white/non-white dialectic in *Kiss of the Fur Queen.* In the novel, according to young Champion-Jeremiah, "heaven had a substantial population of beautiful blond men with feathery wings and flowing white dresses … among the people… Champion-Jeremiah tried to spot one Indian person but could not" (Highway 59). On the other hand, "Hell looked more engaging … at the ends of the seven tributaries were dank-looking flame-lined caves where dark-skinned people sat… Aha! This is where Indians are" (Highway 60). In the excerpts, Highway satirizes the colonial Christian dichotomy of Heaven/Hell (Good/Evil) by showing that the discrimination against Indigenous peoples extends into the afterlife. Furthermore, he attempts to overturn this negative representation of the non-white person by showing that the hegemonic interpretation of heavenly (good) beings is actually the white imperialists, while the hellish creatures (bad) are the subjugated colonized. Thus, I propose that like Highway, Dumont deliberately uses the term "devil's language" to satirize the colonial interpretation of that Christian concept and to criticize orientalist representations of colonized peoples. By using the term to describe her mother tongue, she repositions what was imposed on Indigenous groups as a term of abuse or subjugation into one of defiance. According to Albert Memmi, colonizers deliberately perpetuate colonial distortions to legitimize colonization and excuse land theft; however, Dumont's "The Devil's Language" encourages the reader to question and re-evaluate the flawed assumptions that justify and validate cultural and linguistic colonization.

In the end, while Dumont's "The Devil's Language" primarily looks at ways that a limiting version of English can be and has been used to silence Indigenous peoples, her choice of expression indicates that she is no longer completely under the influence of this authority. Evidence of this lies in the phrasing of the opening line of the poem, "I have since reconsidered" (*A Really Good* 54), where the word *reconsidered* demonstrates Dumont's new position of self-reflexivity. Therefore, I interpret "The Devil's Language" as evidence of the development of the poet's critical and active voice originally seen at the end of "Memoirs" (*A Really Good* 15). In the earlier poems, a younger Dumont does not have sufficient self-awareness to reject the cultural and linguistic authorities of the colonizer; however, in "The Devil's Language" (54), she demonstrates that she is not merely a victim of colonial circumstances but a voice of resistance. Overall, the decolonial poems in *A Really Good Brown Girl* enable Dumont to reflect on and reject the subjugation implicit in English Imperialism.

INDIGENOUS RESURGENCE AND DECOLONIZATION: "THESE ARE WINTERING WORDS"

Dumont's "These are Wintering Words" (*Pemmican* 16) is part of a collection of poems titled *The Pemmican Eaters*. Different from *A Really Good Brown Girl,* the collection focuses on the author's Michif language and culture. Writing about her poem, Dumont also states that the collection serves to "recreate a palpable sense of the Riel Resistance period" ("The Pemmican Eaters" 83). "These are Wintering Words" (*Pemmican* 16), which is the focus of this final section, is Dumont's way of affirming the diversity and uniqueness of her Michif language. In this poem, the author moves beyond resisting English/colonial authority, which is the emphasis in *A Really Good Brown Girl,* in order to highlight her Indigenous identity. Mareike Neuhaus would describe this as a form of "Rhetorical Sovereignty" (70), where the Indigenous person writes in an Indigenous English variety to celebrate her/his history and cultural identities.

In "These are Wintering Words" (*Pemmican* 16), Dumont explains that the Michif language originates from French and Cree/Salteaux. The poem is partly written as a recipe poem describing the making or preparation of the language as follows, "wintering words: / sliced thin, smoke-dried, pounded fine, folded in fat and berries/pemmican not pidgin or creole" (*Pemmican* 16). By using the analogue of cooking in such a unique way, Dumont seems to emphasize that elements that contribute to the making of both language and self are so finely blended (like a dish) that they are inseparable, and she reinforces this through the non-hyphenated name "FrenchCreeOjibway" (*Pemmican* 16). Dumont's point is that the "wintering words" or the Michif language is a language in its own right, "not pidgin or creole // [and not a] mixed up, nor muddled" way of speaking (*Pemmican* 16). Her emphasis that Michif is not a pidgin or creole in this poem can further be read as a critique of the privileging of certain languages or versions of languages, as she does in "The Devil's Language." This is a point that Sterzuk also makes by stating her own aversion to terms like dialect, standard, or non-standard in her research. According to Sterzuk, such terms "construct a false hierarchy of language varieties" and racialize or discriminate against the speakers (Sterzuk 6). Not surprisingly, this form of social hierarchizing is not limited to the Canadian settler colonial society: in the Caribbean context, postcolonial writer Kamau Brathwaite also criticizes how the colonizer's English is ranked above Indigenous/local varieties. His discussion focuses on "Nation Language" (Brathwaite 5), which he identifies as the language of slaves or former slaves. Even though he acknowledges the influences of European languages and cultures on "Nation Language," he emphasizes that it is not a dialect but a unique language. Like Dumont and Sterzuk, Brathwaite argues that the notion of dialect disparages Indigenous languages and condemns them as socially inferior languages. On the other hand, "Nation Language," like Michif, or Michif English affirms the history and cultural identities of the speakers.

Looking at Dumont's "recipe," I am intrigued by the way that she is able to interweave the making of the "Wintering words" (the Michif language) with the recipe for "pemmican" (*Pemmican* 16). By doing this, she highlights the fact that the Michif language evolved through the Métis Wintering community that emerged between the 1840s and the 1870s, with the Métis hunters of bison (*Pemmican* 65; Neufeld). In a CBC audio interview, Dumont tells Shelagh Rogers that she (Dumont) used the title for the poetry collection to address and reclaim the term pemmican, which former Canadian Prime Minister John A. Macdonald had used in an abusive sense:

> ROGERS. Where does the title The Pemmican Eaters come from?
>
> DUMONT. John A. Macdonald called us the miserable half breeds, the pemmican eaters…when I read that my heart just sank…I knew he didn't like us but to publicly call us the miserable half breeds, the pemmican eaters, I thought was particularly offensive because the fur trade would not have existed without the pemmican…the so-called westward expansion and settlement of Canada would not have existed without the pemmican. (00:02:40-00:03:18)

In the interview, Dumont highlights not only the importance of pemmican to the fur trade and its economic value to Canada, but she also speaks about the intense labour and danger involved in the industry. The last point is evident in the lines, "paddle trade routes along waterways traverse / rapids: white and dangerous with Ojibway women à la façon du / pays" (*Pemmican* 16). It seems that the second part of this line, "white and dangerous with Ojibway women…" (*Pemmican* 16), also hints at intermarriages that may not have been advantageous to Ojibway women. Ultimately, in showing the

relationship between the "wintering words" (*Pemmican* 16) and pemmican, Dumont reclaims their sociocultural importance and recalls the history of the Métis Indigenous community.

Furthermore, her obvious desire to celebrate her Métis history and identity is also evident in the structure and language of the poem. It is written in a one-verse and free verse form, yet this is not a conventional "standard" English verse form. This is because even at a glance, the internal spacing in the poem gives the impression that it is in speech form. This writing form is reminiscent of what Blaeser refers to as "talking on the page" (56), where the Indigenous author writes in a way to show the orality of the work. This orality is enhanced by Dumont's style of punctuation or lack of a recognizable form of "standard" English punctuation. For instance, the only words that are capitalized are Michif, French, Cree/Salteaux, Ojibway, and Métis. I would say that the fact that these words refer to language and cultural identities is not a coincidence, since defining her identity(ies) is the focus of the poem. Also, lines like "Michif problem family among the nuclear language types one" (*Pemmican* 16) show an absence of verbs and a noticeable difference in syntactic structure. In analyzing the language of Maria Campbell's "Jacob" in *Stories of the Road Allowance People,* Anna Mongibello suggests that the lack of verb distinctions in the story could be because in the Métis worldview, the concept of time is circular without any seeming variance between past, present, or future tenses (258). Although the excerpt from Dumont shows a different case, which is an *absence* of verbs, Mongibello's analysis and explanation concerning verb usage in the Métis worldview could apply here. Most importantly, as Mongibello finds through her reading of Campbell, the noticeable difference in language usage and presentation does not impede meaning.

With sufficient knowledge of Cree or Michif, it would be useful and interesting to carry out further analysis of the language of this poem; however, even without such an analysis, the style and form of the poem highlight its Indigenous origin. According to Neuhaus, these elements of Indigeneity in Indigenous writing encourage a style of reading that is guided by the actual language and culture of the literature itself. She refers to this as "holophrastic reading" (Neuhaus 14-7) and, like Mongibello, demonstrates this form of reading through Campbell's *Stories of the Road Allowance People.* As Neuhaus argues there, "by recreating English… Campbell embraces Métis language and discourse traditions while simultaneously undermining the hegemony of standard English" (90).[15] Much of the same arguments can be made about Dumont's "These are Wintering" (*Pemmican* 16). Overall, the re-invention[16] of the "standard" structure of English that Dumont achieves in this poem does not only pertain to a retelling of culture and history; at a very elemental level, it alters the language enough to make it a distinct variety of English.

By focusing on her Cree/Métis identity, and writing in this version of Michif English, Dumont subverts English Linguistic Imperialism, while also showing a resurgence of her Indigenous identity. As such, by celebrating her mixed identities through "These are Wintering Words," Dumont criticizes the stereotypical identities imposed and encouraged by the Canadian white settler society on Indigenous peoples. For instance, in "Popular Images of Nativeness," she specifically alludes to settler categorizations like "too Indian … not Indian enough … pure-too Indian … diluted Indian enough" which limit and contribute to the mental colonization of Indigenous peoples (47-8). Such classifications emerged from official Canadian public policies and were used to control and manage Indigenous peoples and their

[15] Echoing similar sentiments, Achebe also demonstrates in the African context that writing in such a way enables the author to "(extend) the frontiers of English to accommodate African [or Indigenous] thought patterns" (Achebe qtd. in Ogbaa 193).
[16] This term is borrowed from Bird and Harjo's *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*.

resources, the purpose being to deny them rights as Indigenous peoples. And in cases where an Indigenous person was assessed as "not Indian enough" or "diluted Indian" because of a mixed identity, such a person could be denied certain Indigenous rights, including land rights (Dumont, "Popular Images of Nativeness" 47-8). The *Government of Canada* and *The Canadian Encyclopedia* discuss the Métis group from a historical perspective and explain the legal implications of being "status" or "non-status" in Canada. Métis author Maria Campbell as well shares her life stories about living through racial discrimination and extreme poverty in her memoir *Halfbreed* (1973). Dumont's "These are Wintering" (*Pemmican* 16) addresses the types of challenges and issues equally highlighted in Campell's memoir by celebrating the advantages of her mixed Cree/Métis identity Indigenous identities.

CONCLUSION

This article analyzed selected poems from Dumont's *A Really Good Brown Girl* and *The Pemmican Eaters* as critical works that address dual aspects of the Indigenous decolonization struggle. While the earlier poems from *A Really Good Brown Girl* "Memoirs" (13), "Squaw Poems" (18), and "The Devil's Language" (54) adopt the language/poetics of resistance to critique cultural and linguistic discrimination, "These are Wintering Words" (*Pemmican* 16) focuses on reclaiming and regenerating the author's Indigenous identity. One of the strategies common to the poems is how the author repositions former derogatory terms like "squaw" (*A Really Good 34)*, "devil" (*A Really Good 73)*, and "pemmican" (*Pemmican 16)* to reclaim the Indigenous affirming meanings and histories of these words. By representing these words and *memories*, Dumont shows the truth of colonization to the colonizer, subverts popular colonial myths, and reclaims these ideas/stories through a Métis perspective. According to Jarret Martineau and Eric Ritskes, when addressing the question of Indigenous decolonization, it is crucial to "foreground Indigenous creative practices and to explicate the connections between art, activism, resistance and resurgence" (III). Dumont's writing certainly meets these ends through a critique of colonial standards and the colonial attempts to control Indigenous bodies as well as a reassertion of Indigenous worldviews.

However, some of the questions that continue to plague me, an inheritor of my own type of colonial history, is how well/if literary texts address/can address sustained systemic discrimination against speakers of Indigenous varieties of English.[17] It is possible that Indigenous writing, as significant as I have argued that they are in decolonial struggles, masks other everyday concerns of those Indigenous communities. Womack raises a similar concern:

> In addition to the many positive aspects of this burgeoning literature [Indigenous literatures], does the frontier for fiction serve partially to deny Native peoples a place in the nonfictional world…? Overall, it seems to me, Native-written fictional stories about reconnection to Native culture enjoy a much wider popular appeal than non-fiction written by Indians concerning their tribe's land claims or politics. (Womack 10-11)

[17] Sterzuk refers to this as "the struggle for legitimacy" (20-1), where Indigenous varieties of English are not accorded valid spaces in white settler schools. Craig Womack as well as Jace Weaver and others equally write about discriminations against Indigenous voices in North American academia. To a large extent, it is these forms of discrimination that Ngugi warns against in the African context.

No doubt literary texts, like Dumont's, help Indigenous readers maintain community consciousness and keep the struggle for sovereignty alive. Moreover, they also help both Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers engage critically with the historical and contemporary context of settler colonization and maintain the imperative for Indigenous decolonization. Nevertheless, it may be that celebrating creative writing as decolonizing, while settler colonization persists, detracts from the necessity of everyday Indigenous language autonomy and from community and land-based decolonial movements. I was reluctant to discuss the impact of Indigenous initiatives, some of which are relatively recent at the beginning of this article, but it may be something worth including as intrinsic parts of Indigenous decolonization projects. Such impact assessments would be made obvious and clear to people also outside (academic) institutions. This not only clarifies the effectiveness of the Indigenous initiatives and projects but also makes an important link between community, land, and academia, an underlying aspect of Indigenous epistemologies.

My concerns about language/linguistic decolonization are more crucial when the issue of decolonization has become very popular, to the point that it seems too broadly administered as a tool kit to cure the lingering ailment of settler colonization. Hence, Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti et al. lament that "it is it is increasingly difficult to respond with coherence and consistency to unpredictable, short-sighted, and often violent institutional changes [because] decolonization has multiple meanings, and the desires and investments that animate it are diverse, contested, and at times, at odds with one another" (22). They go further to point out that because of the complexity underlying the notion of decolonizing [even linguistically speaking], the tendency is to "suppress these contradictions and conflicts to collapse decolonization into coherent, normative formulas with seemingly unambiguous agendas" (de Oliveira Andreotti et al. 22; see also Jennifer Matsunaga as well as Martineau and Ritskes). It is for reasons such as these that Tuck and Yang warn against decolonial school projects aimed at enhancing mental decolonization but not at community-based Indigenous struggles for self-autonomy and land rights (2-3). The scope and focus of this article do not allow me to explore these lingering concerns, yet I consider them very important when discussing problems of (language) colonization and decolonization.

Ultimately, my questions do not diminish or undermine my appreciation of the transformative power of Dumont's writing or that of other Indigenous literary artists in decolonial movements. They are reminders that language decolonization is not an end in itself but only an aspect of the journey to decolonization. I am persuaded that alongside the resistance of colonial English and assertion of her Cree/Métis Indigenous voice, Dumont is even more concerned with systemic and institutional decolonization as well as Indigenous sovereignty. In Achebe's aptly titled "What Has Literature Got to do with it?", he says that literature is "a second handle on reality; enabling us to encounter in the safe, manageable dimensions of make-believe the very same threats to integrity that may assail the psyche in real life" (170). Dumont's Indigenous literature is a space to decentre settler colonial and neocolonial stories about Indigenous peoples (specifically, Cree/Métis Indigenous people in Canada). As a work of art, it exists as an eternal, urgent call to reimagine and restructure Indigenous worlds formerly destructured by settler colonizers.

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