Heather Olaveson

"Coming Home" Through Music

Cree and Classical Music in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*

After seating himself at the nine-foot Bösendorfer during the climax of part four in Tomson Highway's novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, "Jeremiah played a northern Manitoba shorn of its Gabriel Okimasis, he played the loon cry, the wolves at nightfall, the aurora borealis in Mistik Lake. . . . These weren't keys on a piano but a length of curved, peeled spruce, the handlebar of a sled" (213). Here at a prominent classical piano competition for the Crookshank Memorial Trophy, two cultural "voices"—Cree and classical—work in counterpoint, resulting in a "passion[ate]" performance featuring a "scorching" melody (*Kiss* 213). Transforming into a dogsled, the piano connects the pianist back to his Cree childhood, recalling the passion that had driven his father to win another trophy, the Millington Cup at the World Championship Dog Derby. Although the term "counterpoint" originates from the Latin *punctus contra punctum*, meaning "point against point" or "note against note," and is therefore suggestive of contrast, in this scene Western art music and images of Jeremiah's northern Cree home blend together. In musical counterpoint, despite the relative independence of simultaneous melodic lines, these lines are harmonically interdependent: "transitory and dependent" dissonances lead to consonant resolutions in tonal music, as "two or more melodic lines combine into a meaningful whole" (Salzer and Schachter 13, 3). This notion of counterpoint helps to illustrate the novel's cultural politics, for the ending points toward a new understanding of the modern Cree artist and personal healing for the central character, as European musical traditions give way to and become part of Indigenous cultural renewal.

To date, Sarah Wylie Krotz's "Productive Dissonance: Classical Music in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*" is the only scholarly article which specifically focuses on music in the novel. Persuasive in her analysis of classical music as a representation of the "productive dissonance"[1] between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures in the text (183-84), Krotz considers how Highway "'writes back' to Eurocentric practices and ideals" (183). My article will expand on Krotz's analysis of the purpose of music in Highway's novel by exploring its connection to the growth and development of one of the two protagonists, Champion/Jeremiah[2] Okimasis, who becomes a classically trained concert pianist after being captivated by the sound of the instrument at Birch Lake Indian Residential School and subsequently requesting lessons. Some important questions arise when considering this connection: How does Highway's use of musical aesthetics help to exemplify and yet also problematize the use of the *Bildungsroman* or, more specifically, *Künstlerroman* structure as well as to illuminate the ways in which youth establish their place in the community? More importantly for the scope of this paper, how does musical aesthetics help us rethink the concept of home and belonging, if not on a Canadian national basis, then in terms of Cree culture in the 1960s? In considering the growth of Jeremiah's character, I examine the connection between music and the development of Cree youth identity as well as the re-establishing of a cultural or ideological "home." Ultimately, I reveal a musical trickster poetics at work in the novel, as demonstrated by music's ability to lure characters into and out of cultural spaces of belonging, and illustrate how music acts as an important method for Cree cultural survival, particularly through the text's movement from linear Western art music to more cyclical Cree forms.

Krotz's paper begins by privileging the European classical tradition amongst "a heterogeneous musical backdrop" (182) and concludes with an assessment that "[t]he political force of *Kiss of the Fur Queen* lies in its ultimate refusal to privilege any single cultural or generic influence," and that such a formulation might be termed "contrapuntal" (199). However, more needs to be said about the politics of reading this "contrapuntal juxtaposition of equal-but-different voices" in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* as "often dissonant," and about whether the novel "preserves this feeling of being out of tune," as Krotz argues (200), or, as I will discuss, whether it emphasizes counterpoint as a dialogue that shapes not only the structure, but also the cultural politics of the novel.

Highway's semi-autobiographical *Bildungsroman* spans several decades, following the Cree brothers Champion/Jeremiah and Ooneemeetoo/Gabriel

as they are torn from their families in their small northern Manitoba community and are forced to negotiate the harsh realities of a Catholic residential school and later the urban landscapes of Winnipeg and Toronto. The nature of such a *Bildung* presupposes a movement *toward* or a teleological progression—an "emergence," in Mikhail Bakhtin's terms, or "the image of *man in the process of becoming*" (19, emphasis original). How do we read a novel in which the emphasis is not so much on this progress *toward*, but on a *return* to Cree cultural traditions? Although the novel traces the development of the Okimasis brothers from birth until well into adulthood, in many ways the text resists the forward trajectory of a traditional *Bildungsroman*. Highway reconfigures the development-oriented *Bildungsroman* genre by placing it within a Cree worldview that favours a cyclical rather than linear concept of time.[3] Combining these two culturally different models in order to complicate and dismantle culture-based binaries, the novel simultaneously operates under a cyclical home-away-home structure that returns to and recuperates Cree cultural practices through music and dance, a structure perhaps best exemplified musically by Champion's caribou song "in its simple circle of three chords" (Highway, *Kiss* 42). Susan Cocalis expresses the link between the *Bildung* and an odyssey (400), a word which conjures up Homer's ancient Greek text on Odysseus's ten-year journey home. This home, however—a cultural rather than a geographic home in the case of *Kiss of the Fur Queen*—is no longer intact and unchanged, or arguably was never "intact" to begin with.

For instance, non-Indigenous music and instruments have historically become part of Cree traditions: as a child, Champion inherits his father's battered accordion, just as he inherits "a gift for the making of music, one to whom [Abraham] could pass on his father's, his grandfather's, and his great-grandfather's legacy" (Highway, *Kiss* 27). The musical legacy embodied by this accordion reveals the lasting impact of colonial contact, and neatly collapses the binary thinking that sets cultures in opposition, as none can claim to embody a false ideal of "purity" free of outside influence—all cultures are dynamic and constantly evolving. Such binary thinking is simultaneously upheld and dismantled at an Ojibway house party in the novel, where the Wasaychigan Hill Philharmonic Orkestraw and its audience reject Jeremiah's rendition of Chopin's Sonata in B-minor as being "whiteman music," and yet seem to identify "real music" as "honky-tonk," "Half a Nageela," and "a sentimental country waltz" (256-57). Although these types of music initially appear to have about as much to do with traditional Cree music as Chopin

does, they share an important similarity which weakens the cultural boundaries dividing them: a folk aesthetic. Although the term "folk music" has been often debated, it tends to indicate an oral tradition of communal, culturally representative music. In fact, even Chopin can be seen to parallel traditional Cree music in this way, for he counted Polish folk dances among his influences, as evidenced by his many mazurkas and polonaises for solo piano. In this scene, "real music" is identified as not necessarily classical or European, but simply as being for the people. The transcultural connections made possible through musical aesthetics help to highlight the impossibility of any "pure" culture; thus the notion of a simple home-away-home structure is problematized by the fact that the "home" environment is mutable, undergoing constant change while the characters are "away."

The notion that one's environment[4] can and does have an enormously far-reaching effect on a person is conveyed in Douglas Mao's book *Fateful Beauty: Aesthetic Environments, Juvenile Development, and Literature 1860-1960*. In the chapter "Stealthy Environments," Mao summarizes some of William James' arguments from his 1890 publication *Principles of Psychology*: "The smallest stroke of virtue or vice leaves a scar; acts that consciousness might wish to banish still find a corporeal location among the nerve cells and fibers; nothing we ever do is wiped out" (50). Of course, this idea of the permanence of actions can not only be applied to the individual, but also to the collective. Cree culture has been affected by its contact with European settlers as well as other Indigenous nations, interactions which sometimes left "a scar." For instance, in *Essential Song: Three Decades of Northern Cree Music*, the first detailed ethnomusicological study of subarctic Cree hunting songs, Lynn Whidden remarks on the gradual disappearance of traditional songs particularly due to "the music and entertainment of the mass media" (3), that is, the music of the dominant culture. Cree-Swedish poet and academic Neal McLeod echoes this loss when he explains how a dominated group loses some of its narratives when the dominating group imposes its own ("Coming Home" 18). He goes on to argue that the process of alienation—specifically Cree alienation—occurred in two simultaneous and interconnected ways: through Cree peoples' removal from their land ("spatial diaspora") and through their removal from their own stories or collective consciousness ("ideological diaspora") (19). McLeod continues, "In contrast to 'being home,' diaspora is the process of being alienated from the collective memory of one's people," "a state of exile" that Indigenous peoples may experience even while residing in the land of their ancestors (19).

The imbrication of home and exile also appears in Mavis Reimer's work on youth and homelessness in which she discusses the mobile subject and contemporary literature's "embrac[ing of] metaphorical homelessness as an ideal" (2). She argues that "the geographical and psychological separation of 'home' and 'away' typically is represented as impossible," since both "are enacted on the same place" (2). Although Reimer is writing about English-language Canadian children's literature, her ideas are still applicable to *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, especially her identification of "the most valued story" within this body of literature (1). The kind of story she refers to bears a striking resemblance to the general events of Highway's novel: "a narrative in which the central child character, pushed out of an originary home by the decisions or behaviour of powerful adults, journeys to an alien place" (1). Although it can be argued that Jeremiah and Gabriel "choos[e] to claim the unfamiliar space as a new home" (1), their search for home and belonging is necessarily a cultural quest as well. If colonization in North America has resulted in Indigenous cultural homes that are no longer intact, might we see Jeremiah as being—and in some ways remaining—"unhomed"? Although returning to their originary home is impossible, Indigenous peoples—and Highway's novel—are involved in the creation of a *new* cultural home, one that perhaps does not bridge the gap between cultures so much as it lives in the space between them.[5] One of the ways in which the creation of this new home can be accomplished is through the retelling of stories, a concept explored by McLeod in "Coming Home Through Stories" and later in his book *Cree Narrative Memory*. At the beginning of his article, McLeod considers what it means "to be home":

> "To be home" means to dwell within the landscape of the familiar, a landscape of collective memories; it is an oppositional concept to being in exile. . . . A collective memory emerges from a specific location, spatially and temporally, and includes such things as a relationship to land, songs, ceremonies, language and stories. Language grounds *Nehiyâwiwin* (Creeness). To tell a story is to link, in the moments of telling, the past to the present, and the present to the past. (17)

This explains the number of references to Cree stories and mythologies that appear in Highway's text: by retelling such culturally specific tales, Highway is "link[ing] . . . the present to the past," not only highlighting the circular nature of the Cree conception of time, but also grounding the present in Cree history and thus aiding in the survival of a culture. I consider a similar method of "coming home" or effecting cultural survival: through music.

A character in Highway's novel that provides a substantial link between music and cultural survival is the trickster, a transformer who leaps in and

out of the text in a variety of guises: as Weesageechak;[6] as the Fur Queen; and as the arctic fox showgirl Maggie Sees, also called "Miss Maggie-Weesageechak-Nanabush-Coyote-Raven-Glooscap-oh-you-should-hear-the-things-they-call-me-honeypot-Sees, weaver of dreams, sparker of magic, showgirl from hell" (233-34). This trickster figure, particularly in her latter form, is often associated with music, appearing as a "Cree chanteuse" "leaning against a grand piano made of ice" who dispenses sage advice to Jeremiah about life (234, 231): "[W]ithout entertainment, honeypot, without distraction, without dreams, life's a drag. . . . Without celebration, without magic to massage your tired, trampled-on old soul, it's all pretty pointless, innit?" (233). It is only after internalizing Maggie Sees' life lesson that Jeremiah is able to harness his musical gifts and use them to tell Cree narratives and celebrate Indigenous culture in stage productions. Coral Ann Howells similarly notes that this showgirl scene "marks the beginning of Jeremiah's psychological and spiritual healing" (90). Like music, the trickster's insights also become—to use the words from Highway's retelling of the Cree myth of the Son of Ayash—"magic weapons [to] make a new world" (*Kiss* 227, 267). The connection between Maggie Sees and magic weapons is made in one of Jeremiah's stage scripts when he types out a mother's line to her son: "Here, the *weapons* you will need: a spear, an axe, *a fox's pelt*" (275, emphases mine). In this way, music, magic, and trickster all become linked in the text. Such figures appear in numerous Indigenous narratives, and are explored by Dee Horne in relation to Indigenous cultural survival in her article "Settler Culture Under Reconstruction" where she, like McLeod, recognizes the need for "continuity with the past" (79). Specifically, Horne points to the traditional trickster Nanabush as an embodiment of cultural survival in two of Highway's other works, the plays *The Rez Sisters* and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, and argues that this "post-colonial trickster, and trickster discourse . . . [are] deploy[ed] as a paradigm for resisting colonization" (80).[7] It is the trickster's "weapons" that aid in resisting colonization in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, but it is important to note that such tools are meant not for destructive purposes, but for positive and creative change—to "make a new world."

Besides Maggie Sees and the Fur Queen, there is "another woman in white fur" that appears in the novel (Highway, *Kiss* 96), also "leaning against the crook of a Steinway" (99): Lola van Beethoven, Jeremiah's "piano teacher nonpareil, grande dame of the Winnipeg classical music scene" (99). Krotz positions Lola as an anti-trickster, "an oppositional, destabilizing force that

encourages a turn away from Aboriginal ways of seeing" (192). I wonder, however, if Lola is not so much an "anti-trickster" as simply another manifestation of the trickster, whose very nature presupposes a certain degree of deception and subversion. Considered in this light, such a figure helps to not only complicate but also break down binaries of Cree and classical music and, more generally, Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural practices. This is similarly noted by Judith Leggatt, who writes, "Trickster figures break down either/or dichotomies, with their propensity for being both/and: *both* male *and* female, *both* creator *and* destroyer, *both* role model *and* cautionary figure, *both* spiritual *and* physical, *both* animal *and* human" (221). Heather Hodgson recognizes the trickster as "Native peoples' most important teacher" who not only "assume[s] various guises and can change shape at will," but who also "teach[es] by negative example and, in doing so . . . do[es] something good and regain[s] our trust, only to hoodwink us again" (n. pag.). As a piano teacher, Lola van Beethoven encourages Jeremiah's dedication to and passion for his craft as well as his pursuit of the Crookshank Memorial Trophy. As a trickster who teaches, however, she and her Eurocentric classical music act as a catalyst for Jeremiah's later identity crisis and self-reassessment, which ultimately allow him to reconnect with, rejoice in, and "champion" his cultural heritage. The notion of a trickster figure can be expanded in order to discuss the presence of a trickster poetics or discourse in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, a concept often attributed to Anishinaabe writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor that recognizes the "comic trope" of the trickster as both an identifiable character and a textual form (Vizenor 282).

Although by definition the term "poetics" is concerned with the literary, I propose there is a *musical* trickster poetics at work in the novel. If tricksters "dismantl[e] and decentr[e] words, language, narrative structure, and discourse" (Leggatt 226), the novel's musical trickster poetics similarly unsettles the binary of Cree and classical music, eventually transforming into "both/and" during a Toronto stage production. The notion of a musical trickster poetics is supported by the fact that Highway considers music to be a language in and of itself: in his recently published lecture, *A Tale of Monstrous Extravagance: Imagining Multilingualism*, he describes music as "a language with its own history" and "the original and only universal language, the only one understood and spoken in all 195 countries on this planet" (28, 25). Stó:lō author and critic Lee Maracle also links music to poetics when she writes, "our community needs the old stories, the old poems, and the old songs—our poetics—which have charted this journey to the good life

for thousands of years. The revival of these songs, poems, and stories are [*sic*] critical to understanding that we are and always will be" (309-10). While Maracle recognizes the importance of song and other orature to the identities of Indigenous communities, Highway elevates music to a universal form of communication, one which, due to its cross-cultural nature, is able to strengthen relationships and induce greater understanding between cultures. The necessity of contemporary Indigenous poetics in "map[ping] the past . . . and imagin[ing] future possibilities" for Indigenous peoples—thus effecting cultural survival—is echoed by McLeod, who adds, "One of the challenges of contemporary Indigenous poetics is to move from a state of wandering and uprootedness toward a poetics of being home" (Introduction 10). Citing Christine Sy's use and translation of the Anishinaabe term "biskaabiiyang," or "returning to ourselves," McLeod connects a poetics of place with cultural healing, at the same time suggesting that "our home is already within us" (10).

Art as a vehicle for forging relationships, developing understanding, and effecting cultural healing has been discussed by numerous Indigenous authors, including Highway. In *A Tale of Monstrous Extravagance* he emphasizes the importance of multilingualism—including the language of music—as a means of not only understanding others' perspectives, but ultimately as a tool for "aid[ing] in the process of bringing the world together, of helping in the nurturing of world peace and stability" (36). In effect, Highway advocates for the use of cross-cultural dialogue to initiate positive global change through the building of relationships. In *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, however, music has a dual role to fulfill, a "trickster" function: it has both the ability to lure Jeremiah further away from his cultural heritage via the Eurocentric ideologies of classical music and also the ability to lead Jeremiah back to his cultural heritage via the dissemination of Cree musical practices such as hunting songs and round dances.[8] In other words, like Lola van Beethoven and Maggie Sees, music can both obscure and illuminate the way "home." At the same time, however, music's trickster nature allows the reader to interpret this dual role without simply reinscribing binaries about culture and authenticity. This is achieved by revealing the mutual influence of these musical traditions as exemplified by the literal blending of Cree and Western art music in Jeremiah's hybrid compositions on the Toronto stage.

From the beginning of the novel, Champion is connected to both the Fur Queen trickster and to music. Nine months before he is physically born, he appears as a spirit baby, bursting "from the seven stars on [the Fur Queen's]

tiara . . . fully formed, opalescent, ghostly" (12), and floating "above the aboriginal jamboree" of music and dance that is held in honour of Abraham Okimasis's victory in the World Championship Dog Derby (17). Champion is born with a musical talent, and it is his father Abraham's "greatest pride to have finally sired a child with a gift for the making of music" (27). Abraham presumably teaches his son how to sing and to play the accordion, passing down his knowledge of traditional Cree hunting songs. As Whidden notes, such songs "provided facts about the animals and the local environment; they contained ancient wisdom . . . ; they were prayers . . . ; they energized the hunter . . . ; they were mental play, bringing disparate subjects together, as well as artistic creations" (50). Most importantly, "the songs also allowed the hunter's spirit to communicate with the spirits of the animals" (51), something that Champion seems to have forgotten by the time he converses with the fox-cum-lounge singer Maggie Sees as a young man. Champion initially uses his musical gift to call the caribou and assist in his father's hunt by singing, "*Ateek, ateek, astum, astum, yoah, ho-ho!* . . . Caribou, caribou, come to me, come to me, *yoah, ho-ho!*" (Highway, *Kiss* 23). Perhaps the fact that Champion's music causes a stampede not only attests to the sheer power of art—specifically Champion's music—to effect change, but also suggests a trickster poetics (and perhaps also a trickster polemic) at work: here, music seems to have the capacity to both sustain life and to threaten it. Interestingly, Champion protects himself and his brother from being trampled by remaining still and clinging to a rock in a sea of "a thousand caribou swirling around him like rapids" (45). Here, Champion acts as the immovable rock amid a sea of change. As he has yet to move "away" from his childhood "home," perhaps this scene implies that the key to cultural survival is to remain still and cling to "home" or, more specifically, to the land, as evidenced by his repetition of the traditional Cree caribou song to celebrate his continued existence.

As a young boy growing up in northern Manitoba, Champion inherits the Okimasis family's "ancient treasure" (27), its musical legacy: the accordion. At age seven, Champion is forced to leave home and attend residential school. Amidst the strangeness of a new place, a new language, a new people, and a new way of life, he latches on to the one thing he can relate to: music. When he hears a piano for the first time, Champion is reminded of the natural beauty of his childhood home: "Pretty as the song of chickadees in spring," the sound allows him to forget "the odour of metal and bleach, and . . . the funny shape of his exposed [shaved] head that had caused such jeering

from the boys of other reserves" (56). For a moment, the sound transports him away from the harsh reality of the residential school and takes him home. Initially thinking the instrument is "the biggest accordion [he] had ever seen" and "want[ing] to listen until the world [comes] to an end" (56), Champion effectively trades his Cree music for Western art music, just as his birth name is replaced by a Judeo-Christian one by Father Bouchard during baptism. The literal exchange takes place when Champion asks Father Lafleur, principal of the residential school, for piano lessons, demonstrating his affinity for music by singing his beloved caribou song, "*Ateek, ateek! Astum, astum!*" (66).

It is the teachings of the residential school that result in the Okimasis brothers' "splintering from their subarctic roots, their Cree beginnings" (193), leading to the loss of so much of their Cree heritage, as Amanda Clear Sky's grandmother Poosees points out: "'You northern people,' she sigh[s], as with nostalgia, 'it's too bad you lost all them dances, you know? All them beautiful songs? Thousands of years of . . . But never mind. [. . .] Them little ol' priests,' Poosees persist[s], 'the things they did? Pooh! No wonder us Indian folk are all the shits'" (175). This "splintering" becomes particularly evident when Jeremiah moves to the city of Winnipeg and, while practicing the piano, imagines the people of his childhood community crying, "Come home, Jeremiah, come home; you don't belong there, you don't belong there" (101). The rejection of indigeneity within urban space is similarly demonstrated by an "Indian woman" Jeremiah sees reflected on an image of Vladimir Ashkenazy's piano in a Plexiglas-covered advertisement for a Chopin concert, a woman whose murder is later reported in the *Winnipeg Tribune*, but relegated to the back page (106-07). It is only later that Jeremiah realizes that not only is the term "concert pianist" untranslatable from English to Cree (189), but also perhaps that his brother Gabriel is right when he accuses him of wanting to "become a whiteman" (207). Indeed, Jeremiah's denial of his heritage is seen much earlier in the text, such as when he is uncomfortably "confronted . . . with his own Indianness" upon first meeting the "undeniably Indian" Amanda Clear Sky at Winnipeg's primarily white Anderson High School (123), despite having "worked so hard at transforming himself into a perfect little 'transplanted European'—anything to survive" (124). Winning the coveted Crookshank Memorial Trophy for piano performance loses its meaning when Jeremiah eventually suffers an identity crisis and rejects Western art music altogether: he says to Amanda, "I just couldn't figure it out. I mean, what the fuck are Indians doing playing . . . Chopin?" (257).

Here at the Wasaychigan Hill house party, the cultural gap between classical music and what one woman calls "real music" seems insurmountable (256), and Jeremiah experiences acute feelings of displacement from his own racial and cultural heritage.

Highway's indebtedness to Western art music such as Chopin's sonatas is made evident through the use of Italian musical terms as titles for each structural section of the text, thereby framing the novel in an imperial discourse. As Highway says in an interview with Hodgson, "the novel is like a grand piano: it is built as a sonata, to which the younger brother dances" (n. pag.). The term "sonata," originally used simply to differentiate music that was played from music that was sung, evolved throughout music history until it became known in the Classical period (ca. 1760-1830) as a very specific form for organizing large-scale works usually composed for a solo instrument. It is interesting to note that while Highway likens his novel to a sonata, it does not quite behave as a typical sonata should. The titles of the first four parts of the novel—*Allegro ma non troppo*, *Andante cantabile*, *Allegretto grazioso*, and *Molto agitato*—are characteristic tempi for the standard four-movement later-period Classical sonata. Highway adds the movements *Adagio espressivo* and *Presto con fuoco*,[9] however, subtly subverting the teleology of this European structure and perhaps suggesting a continuity more indicative of the Cree circular notion of time. His sonata does not cease after only four movements but persists, much in the same way that Champion Okimasis's story—and indeed, the "story" of the Cree in today's society—is ongoing. Significantly, it is not until the final section of the novel, which lies outside or beyond the typical Western musical form, that the piano becomes "a pow wow drum propelling a Cree Round Dance with the clangour and dissonance of the twentieth century" and that, with the encouragement of his brother and friends, Jeremiah finally reconnects with some of his Cree heritage (Highway, *Kiss* 267). By appropriating a Western musical instrument and form and transforming them into "magic weapons" with which he can "make a new world" (267), Highway ushers in a new kind of Cree artist, one that Howells recognizes as a "modern Cree culture warrior" (90).

Performed by a quintet of male dancers onstage, this Cree Round Dance—whose basic dance formation is clearly a symbol of unity and continuance, "a large circle in which people join hands" (Whidden 110)—is not just a form of entertainment, but also an occasion to experience community. Whidden describes the round dance as "an opportunity to bring wellness and healing

through social interaction. It is a sacred event in that the drums are blessed and prayers are said to the Creator. Above all, the dance is about creating good feelings among the participants" (110). Thus the dance performed by Gabriel and the other cast members is a way to experience positive communal interaction and to share that positive energy with the audience. If the piano acts as the powwow drum, the idea that this "drum" is blessed suggests not just the appropriation of the piano, but more specifically its acceptance into Cree culture. Highway's deliberate inclusion of a Cree Round Dance near the end of the novel is also an indication of Jeremiah's re-embracing of his cultural heritage, especially since this is the first time in the novel that he performs an original work with his brother rather than a piece by a classical composer.

What is particularly interesting about the Cree Round Dance is that, like the powwow,[10] it has no historical roots in northern Cree culture: it is an adopted Plains event, and is likewise "a new music borrowed from the outside" to help combat cultural disintegration (Whidden 126). Notice, however, that in Highway's novel it is specifically identified as belonging to the Cree, which signifies their adoption of the music. More importantly, the dancers performing the Cree Round Dance simultaneously chant the caribou hunting song Champion learned in childhood, a musical genre which *is* historically Cree. In this way, Jeremiah and Gabriel's "casual improvisation" from less than a year before grows "into a showpiece stomped to by professional dancers, a sonata in four contrasting movements scored, phrased, liberally fermataed" and then into "a Cree Round Dance" (Highway, *Kiss* 267). This movement from Western art music to Cree music—a return home for the Okimasis brothers—also indicates movement from a linear to a cyclical conception of time due to the sonata's highly structured, goal-oriented nature, and the round dance's tendency toward repetition and continuity.

The Round Dance scene is also significant in that Jeremiah moves from performing solo piano works to performing as a member of a theatrical production, a shift from isolated individual to member of a community. Métis scholar Jo-Ann Episkenew highlights the importance of community—which she states is "one of the values common to the many diverse Indigenous cultures" (148)—in her exploration of the adaptation of European theatre to Indigenous contexts, noting that "[u]nlike other literary forms, theatrical productions are not the creation of solitary individuals working in isolation. They are communal both in production and in performance" (147). In *Taking Back Our Spirits*, Episkenew examines linkages between Canadian

public policy, Indigenous historical trauma, and the individual and communal healing powers of Indigenous literature—cultural powers that might be extended to include music as "a catalyst for healing" (149). Jeremiah expands the border of this healing circle by disseminating Cree songs and stories to the theatre audiences as well as to the children of the Muskoosis Club of Ontario he teaches (Highway, *Kiss* 269), thus cementing his "destined . . . didactic role in society" (Cocalis 408).

Although Jeremiah can be seen as eventually taking on a position akin to an elder wielding music and narrative as his "magic weapons," music—trickster-like—assumes both culturally distancing and culturally healing roles in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, and this binary cannot be simply divided between non-Indigenous and Indigenous music. Significantly, it is a Western instrument that allows Jeremiah to eventually return to his roots and revisit the first song he ever learned, a traditional Cree hunting tune. It must be noted, however, that this song has evolved from its original form in the novel: while it was first performed as a solo by a young boy accompanying himself on his father's old accordion, at the end it is performed by a group of artists on a Toronto stage with the percussive accompaniment of a piano. By demonstrating a movement from the individual to the collective through music, the novel positions Jeremiah as a protagonist who, in Bakhtin's terms, "emerges *along with the world* and . . . reflects the historical emergence of the world itself. He is no longer within an epoch, but on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other. . . . What is happening here is precisely the emergence of a new man" (23, emphasis original), and the emergence of a new Creeness. As Howells argues, in "work[ing] through and beyond the European literary model, transforming it with drum music and dance until it is filled with the sounds of [N]ative voices, the howling of the north wind, and the figures of Cree mythology" (91), Jeremiah as "modern Cree culture warrior" does not just transform Western cultural models, but Cree ones as well (90). His trickster-inspired amalgamation of Cree and classical musical aesthetics suggests that this new Creeness is one that is adaptive—a "transfigured [N]ative cultural identity," as Howells proposes (91)[11]—and able to utilize Western musical practices to celebrate Cree culture. Through his final piano performance in the novel, Jeremiah counters the old colonial notion of the "vanishing Indian," instead demonstrating the resilience of a people who possess an adaptive spirit and who work to carve out a new cultural home. Using the contrapuntal framework of Cree and classical music to shape the novel's cultural politics, Highway moves toward

consonant resolution by pointing the way back to Cree cultural traditions, thus evincing cultural survival and creating new space within "the liminal space between Cree culture and the mainstream society" (McLeod, "Coming Home" 20). Western music itself, despite its fundamentally teleological nature, also often contains an element of circularity. Highway reminds the reader of this when Jeremiah ends Bach's D-major Toccata by "[coming] back home to the tonic" (*Kiss* 101), a piece's tonal centre and place of resolution. In this way, Jeremiah, too, accomplishes a kind of homecoming.

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NOTES

1 Krotz argues that Highway uses classical music not to bridge the gap between cultures and create harmony, but to "[dwell] within the chasms between cultures" (183), which "creates . . . a productive dissonance from the violent clash of worlds through which Highway's characters move" (183-84).

2 I use the names Champion/Jeremiah and Ooneemeetoo/Gabriel interchangeably in this paper, according to how the novel refers to the Okimasis brothers at specific times.

3 In conversation with Highway, Heather Hodgson's mother notes that "Cree time . . . works in a circular way because the past and present inform each other" (qtd. in Hodgson n. pag.), a comment to which Highway responds: "It's the Cree way of thinking: not hierarchical but communal . . . and simultaneous" (qtd. in Hodgson n. pag., ellipsis in original). In *Canada and the Idea of North*, Sherrill E. Grace also notes the way in which the structure of Highway's novel "bends to the power of Cree story-telling as its linear progression . . . slows, then circles back to its beginning, then repeats earlier scenes with disrupting variations and speed, until the narrative soars free of Western, Christian teleology to float off into mythic space and cyclic time with the Fur Queen" (259).

4 For Douglas Mao, the term "environment" has a large scope that includes both "the largest set of factors affecting youth and the conditions of the individual household" (38).

5 A similar notion is voiced by Dee Horne in her article "Settler Culture Under Reconstruction" when she asserts that "First Nation writers can subvert settler society by playing in slippages—cultural cracks in-between settler and First Nations societies" (79).

6 A note at the beginning of the novel explains that, as there are no words denoting gender in many North American Indigenous languages, the trickster figure—"'Weesageechak' in Cree, 'Nanabush' in Ojibway, 'Raven' in others, 'Coyote' in still others" (n. pag.)—is gender neutral. For the sake of readability—and because the manifestations of Highway's trickster are feminine, contrasting the male Christian God—I will use feminine pronouns throughout my paper when necessary.

7 The potential problems of using postcolonial terminology should be noted, as some critics within the debate argue that it is inherently hierarchical. In "Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial," for instance, Thomas King wrestles with the "monstrous" terminology of

postcolonialism which makes a number of assumptions regarding Indigenous peoples and their literature, the "worst" being that "the idea of post-colonial writing effectively cuts us off from our traditions . . . and it supposes that contemporary Native writing is largely a construct of oppression" (185). To describe the range of Indigenous writing, King offers several alternate terms that refuse to privilege one culture over another, such as the word "polemical" (186). As Katherine Bell recognizes, "in order to treat Indigenous literature with respect, we need to indigenize methodology" (n. pag.).

8 Although Krotz does not use the term "trickster" to describe Highway's treatment of music in the novel, she does capture its trickster-like function when she states, "Music embodies a capacity to unite as well as divide, to liberate as well as oppress, to create as well as destroy, to transcend barriers as well as erect them—often all at the same time" (183).

9 The Italian tempi can be translated as follows: *Allegro ma non troppo*: fast but not too much; *Andante cantabile*: a walking pace (moderately slow) in a singing style; *Allegretto grazioso*: fairly quick (slightly slower than allegro) and graceful; *Molto agitato*: very agitated; *Adagio espressivo*: slowly expressive; and *Presto con fuoco*: very fast with fire. The movements in a typical sonata shift from fast to slow and back again, but Highway's addition continues this cycle.

10 Whidden defines powwow as "a musico-religious movement that proclaims Indian identity and that is spreading through the subarctic" (101), a movement that invites participation in "a broader Native American heritage" (3). Although she views the adoption of this music—so different from traditional Cree hunting songs—as a signal of the weakening of local traditions, she also recognizes how it has revitalized Indigenous music in general, "serv[ing] politically to unite the very diverse First Nations groups across Canada" and "le[ading] many Cree back to the study and appreciation of their own hunting culture" (103, 3).

11 Howells' paper does not focus on music, but is instead interested in what she calls the "double vision" of the novel, "where different cultural systems of representation are held together in tension" (84). While this image aligns more with Krotz's notion of "productive dissonance," Howells' use of terminology indicating transformation also gestures toward the dissolution of cultural binaries and a positive change. Although the word "transfiguration" has strong Christian associations that complicate such a reading, *Oxford Dictionaries* also defines it as "a complete change of form or appearance into a more beautiful or spiritual state" (n. pag.).

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