

Reclaiming Fossil Ghosts

Indigenous Resistance to Resource Extraction in Works by Warren Cariou, Cherie Dimaline, and Nathan Adler

Settler colonialism relies on the fabrication and extraction of fossils. As an elaborate system of forces and pressures, the institutionalized mechanics of dispossession and forced assimilation that have come to be associated with settler colonialism push Indigenous populations underground while naturalizing this very process as an inevitable fact of cultural evolution and stratification. Within the Euro-Western narrative of modernity, the representation of Indigenous traditions, knowledges, and modes of existence as immobile and anachronistic traces of a surmounted past—as fossils to be disinterred, examined, displayed, and discarded—has in consequence become an essential element of foundational ideologies of colonial place-making in both Canada and the US. Correspondingly, what continues to drive settler-colonial economies is the systematic exploitation of Indigenous populations as commodifiable resources, more often than not stripped of meaningful political agency and relegated to the sidelines of neoliberal visions of progress. At the time of writing in the winter of 2020, the ongoing militarized RCMP raid on unceded Wet’suwet’en territory in BC to enforce the corporate construction of the Coastal GasLink Pipeline is only one of many blatant examples of the line that leads from the dehumanization of colonized peoples as fossils to the oppression of Indigenous cultures and lands by the regimes of fossil fuel. Building on Kathryn Yusoff’s critical analysis of “colonial geo-logics” as a shorthand for the historical convergence of “the extractive grammars of geology” and “the violent dispossession of [I]ndigenous land” (*A Billion* 2),

this article examines the employment of fossil metaphors in three fictional works by contemporary Indigenous writers from Canada that critically engage with the complicity between settler colonialism and resource extraction: Métis writer Warren Cariou's short story "An Athabasca Story" (2012), Métis writer Cherie Dimaline's novel *The Marrow Thieves* (2017), and Anishinaabe writer Nathan Niigan Noodin Adler's novel *Wrist* (2016). All three texts hinge on the dehumanization of Indigenous protagonists as resources and variously imagine resistance to settler-colonial fossil fuel economies by invoking a relationship between Indigenous subjectivity and geologic entities that refuse to stay underground. I suggest it is especially through their employment of gothic and horror tropes in the portrayal of Indigenous resurgence amidst a world marked by ecological precarity and resource exploitation that these works can be read as a response to recent articulations of the Anthropocene, a paradigmatic framework that rests on the declaration of the human as a geologic subject.

Geologic Subjectivity

Bruno Latour takes the Anthropocene as an occasion to postulate the "return of object and subject back to the *ground*—the 'metamorphic zone'—they had both believed it possible to escape" (17). The Anthropocene in his diction is a matter not of history but of "geostory," whose agents cut across the modern divide between humans and nonhumans and, next to engineers, novelists, and politicians, include rivers, plate tectonics, and microbes (16). Similarly, Donna Haraway positions "Chthonic ones," "beings of the earth, both ancient and up-to-the-minute" (2), as the figureheads of her Chthulucene, itself a speculative revision designed as an emancipatory counterpoint to the Anthropocene concept. In their rejection of anthropocentrism, such celebrations of geologic subjectivity are frequently compounded with approaches to ecology as the study of more-than-human kinship, nonhuman agency, and human-nature enmeshments—concepts predominantly formulated within a Euro-Western frame despite their rich history in Indigenous traditions.¹ Implicit in much of the early scholarship in this field is the tendency to de-historicize the condition of the Anthropocene, glossing over the links among resource extraction, the environmental crisis, and (settler) colonialism, thereby obscuring the mechanisms by which an analogous rhetoric of human-geologic hybrids has for centuries served to position Indigenous populations as less than fully human, exploitable, and inert—in effect closer to fossils than to human subjects. The conspicuous

proliferation of ghosts, monsters, and nonhuman revenants in much of recent Anthropocene scholarship and variations of ecohorror, moreover, stands in a generic tradition that, particularly in North America, is notorious for the interrelated construction of capital “N” Nature as a site of the uncanny and a settler-colonial gaze that views Indigenous people as monstrous. This article seeks to link up with a growing number of critiques by Indigenous and decolonial scholars who contend that in order to retain the Anthropocene as a critical concept, it has to be grounded in a thorough examination of the structural links among resource extractivism, settler colonialism, and the Euro-Western construction of modernity.

An Indigenous perspective on the Anthropocene helps illustrate that the *anthropos* that is posited as a universal geologic agent functions, not unlike the dominant narrative of North American modernity, as a tool of symbolic and representational erasure. Making a strong case for the inclusion of Indigenous voices in contemporary Anthropocene debates, Métis scholar Zoe Todd explains: “Not all humans are equally implicated in the forces that created the disasters driving contemporary human-environmental crises, and I argue that not all humans are equally invited into the conceptual spaces where these disasters are theorized” (“Indigenizing” 244). Following up on this argument in a widely-received essay from 2016 that builds on Indigenous critiques of posthumanist theory by Sarah Hunt, Vanessa Watts, and Juanita Sundberg, Todd calls out Latour in particular and European new materialist scholars more generally for peddling “insights into the ‘more-than-human,’ sentience and agency” while failing to “credit Indigenous thinkers for their millennia of engagement with sentient environments, with cosmologies that enmesh people into complex relationships between themselves and all relations, and with climates and atmospheres as important points of organization and action” (“An Indigenous Feminist’s” 6-7). Together with Heather Davis, Todd builds on this critique to propose ways to decolonize the Anthropocene by anchoring it in the structural conditions of settler colonialism. In their 2017 essay “Decolonizing the Anthropocene” they argue “that the Anthropocene is not a new event, but is rather the continuation of practices of dispossession and genocide, coupled with a literal transformation of the environment, that have been at work for the last five hundred years” (761). In her recent study *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2018), Kathryn Yusoff proposes a similar revision of Anthropocene origin stories and provides an immediate linkage to theorizations of geologic subjectivity. Tracing the Anthropocene to the onset of colonization, she

shows how the nineteenth-century discourse of geology perpetuated an extractivist grammar that had also been central in the dehumanization of Indigenous peoples and slaves as resources: “The human and its subcategory, the inhuman, are historically relational to a discourse of settler-colonial rights and the material practices of extraction,” which is to say that “racialization belongs to a material categorization of matter (corporeal and mineralogical) into active and inert” (2). In resonance with emerging fields such as “political geology” (Bobette and Donovan) and “geontology” (Povinelli), this analysis proceeds from her theorization of “‘geologic life’—a mineralogical dimension of human composition that remains currently undertheorised in social thought and is directly relevant for the material, temporal, and corporeal conceptualization of fossil fuels” (“Geologic Life” 779). Let me follow Yusoff and propose that the narrative of the Anthropocene is not driven by a newly hybridized yet universal geomorphic *anthropos*, but by the resurgence of fossils, understood “as material and discursive knots in the narrative arc of human becoming (780). Fossils are ciphers for the mineralization of life and its far-future disinterment. Envisioned as “human-lithic enmeshments” (Cohen 6) they indicate that “[t]he lithic has for too long served as an allegory for nature stilled into resource” (11). In this vein, Yusoff explains how “[c]onsidering the geologic as defining strata of contemporary subjectivity within the designation of the Anthropocene opens up the question of what forms of geologic life subtend subjectivity; and how this geologic life holds the potential for a more expansive inhuman thought” (“Geologic Life” 780). Against the backdrop of this theoretical reorientation, I argue that by engaging the metaphors of fossils to capture the settler-colonial violence upon Indigenous bodies and land and by raising the spectre of geologic life as a function of ecological resistance in resonance with Indigenous mythology and elements of gothic fiction, the texts by Cariou, Dimaline, and Adler discussed in this article effectively trouble the narratives and genealogies undergirding the very idea of the Anthropocene, reminding their readers that the current geological epoch is haunted not by monstrous natures but by its combined origins in colonization and resource extraction.

Implicit in Yusoff’s understanding of fossils as indicative of “questions about human genealogy, inheritance, and modes of future and past survival” (788) is a complication not only of ontology but also of temporality that may be mobilized for what Mark Rifkin in *Beyond Settler Time* (2017) calls “temporal sovereignty” (2). In contrast to images of Indigenous subjects

as “ghostly remainders” of an inert past (5), invocations of geologic life in Indigenous fiction bear the potential of “indicating ways of being-in-time that are not reducible to participation in a singular, given time—a unitary flow—largely contoured by non-native patterns and priorities” (3). Not unlike *biskaabiyyang*, or “returning to ourselves,” a frequently cited Nishnaabeg concept of resurgence and decolonization,² the folding of times and the living agency of fossils may “not literally mean returning to the past, but rather re-creating the cultural and political flourishing of the past to support the well-being of our contemporary citizens” (Simpson, *Dancing* 51). Related to the concept of the ghost, the return of fossils in Indigenous fiction has less in common with settler imaginaries of haunted lands than with an Indigenous mode of being-in-time in which the boundaries between past, present, and future are not clear-cut but porous, in which ontological hybrids across time and space are signifiers of survivance and reconnection, rather than signs of a “neocolonial uncanny” (Cariou, “Haunted” 727).

Tellingly, the parallel construction of “nature” as resource and the dehumanization of Indigenous peoples informs the roots of both the Anthropocene and the North American gothic tradition. Scholars such as Cynthia Sugars, Renée Bergland, and Teresa Goddu have examined how foundational works in North American gothic fiction rely on the representation of Indigenous figures as inhuman avatars of a haunted, untamed wilderness. With respect to early Canadian literature, Sugars points to “two dichotomous features of Gothic expression . . . : one positing the Canadian wilderness as a Gothic landscape inhabited by savage creatures . . . ; the other conjuring the place as an equally terrifying *terra nullius* that was devoid of Gothic effects or ghosts” (410). Through the related semantics of wilderness and *terra nullius*, Indigenous subjectivity in this setup was first demonized and then denied, rendering appearances of the supposedly vanishing Indian a particularly salient trope of territorial anxieties in nineteenth-century North American literature. Against the backdrop of an ongoing history of displacement and longstanding struggles of North American Indigenous communities and activists to resist the commodification of land and cultural knowledge by fossil fuel industries and Western environmentalists alike, the works of Cariou, Dimaline, and Adler discussed below are evidence of Colleen Boyd and Coll-Peter Thrush’s obvious, yet pertinent point that “Indigenous people are more than metaphors in the settler imagination, or silenced victims of removal. Rather, they are active participants in the shaping of uncanny narratives as a form of both resistance and persistence” (xi).

In line with critics from Sugars to Cariou and Michelle Burnham, who confirm the existence of modes reminiscent of the gothic in Indigenous literatures and stories, yet caution against the uncritical postulation of a full-fledged Indigenous or Aboriginal Gothic, I want to resist categorizing the texts examined in this article as unambiguously fitting into the genre of gothic fiction, not least because, as a quintessential Euro-Western literary form, the Gothic fundamentally relies on a structural haunting that proceeds from imagining marginalized or colonized others as monstrous (see Burnham). Sugars illustrates how the ambivalent Canadian attachment to the Gothic, characterized by the fear of territorial illegitimacy and inhuman beasts on the one side, and the “active attempt to ‘gothicize’ the Canadian landscape in order to render it ‘home(l)y,’ [on the other,] gave Aboriginal authors a means to ‘write back’ to the colonizing culture by reasserting their own understanding of the Canadian landscape as infused with [I]ndigenous spirits” (Sugars 410). It is in this sense that the following analysis aims at positioning Cariou, Dimaline, and Adler’s fiction as not only overt ecopolitical commentaries but also successful examples of Indigenous authors writing back to a literary tradition shaped by wilderness survival and Indigenous hauntings.

Reclaiming the Fossil

The opening scene of “An Athabasca Story” by Saskatchewan-born artist, critic, and writer of Métis/European heritage Warren Cariou recalls a classic trope of dark romanticist gothic tales: riven by hunger and cold, a lone figure stumbles through the remote winter forest in the hope of finding a place to warm himself, despondent from encountering “none of his relations” as he enters unfamiliar lands on his way west (99). Introduced as Elder Brother, a recurring spiritual figure in Cree and Nishnaabeg histories, Cariou’s protagonist seems alienated and shrouded by an air of doom. As if to comment on the pervasive trope of the vanishing Indigenous presence, ghostly and on the brink of extinction, Elder Brother is presented like a time traveller from the world of nineteenth-century North American landscape painting—perhaps Thomas Cole’s *Falls of Kaaterskill* (1826)—the aesthetics of which relied on what Bergland calls “Indian spectralization” (20). Cariou himself has written about how the Native ghosts prominently featured as a stock element of Canadian gothic fiction appear to be “haunting the very project of colonialism which has displaced Native people from their land” (“Haunted” 727). Imagined by non-Native writers, such as “Aboriginal hauntings,” he notes, are easily read as “the return of the repressed” (728). Yet, he cautions,

in the work of Native writers “these spirits are not necessarily figures of uncanny terror;” rather, Cariou maintains that “while many such spirits do seem to address the transgressions of the colonial past, they usually do so as part of a call for some kind of redress or change in the present” (731). Following this lead, we can read “An Athabasca Story” as an inversion of the settler-colonial gaze, focalized as the narrative is through an Indigenous ghost who beholds the evacuation of his relations from the landscape with confusion and an almost naive disbelief. Tracing the scent of “a kind of smoke he never encountered before,” Elder Brother is stopped short by “a vast expanse of empty land. Empty of trees, of muskeg, of birds and animals. . . . The only things moving on that vacant landscape were enormous yellow contraptions that clawed and bored and bit the dark earth” (99). In an aesthetic resonance with the dark sublime, this “vast expanse” and the connotations of its vacancy—an unmistakable reference to the Athabasca tar sands explored in much of Cariou’s artistic work—hold up a mirror to the Canadian settler gothic. Settler confrontations between “civilization” and “wilderness” are inverted by invoking as unhomey not the lack of human (i.e., European) ancestry but “the newly naked earth itself” (99). Whereas the settler imaginary is haunted by “bestial Indians” who unmask Canadian and American delusions of territorial hegemony (see Yao), Elder Brother is faced with “great yellow beasts” that bore and claw and bite and haul amidst an ambient smell of “something dead” (99). Spotting a human at the helm of one of the contraptions, Elder Brother attempts to establish a connection: “Oh my brother, my dear relation, . . . I am very hungry and cold and I was hoping . . . to come and visit you in your house” (100). The response is swift and makes clear that Elder Brother has no place on this land: “You’re saying you’re not with the company? . . . Are you Greenpeace? . . . [Y]ou’ll be a lot worse than cold . . . if you don’t get the hell out of my way and off this goddamn property” (100). Less intimidated than disappointed, Elder Brother observes that “[t]his man talked as if he had no relations at all” (100). Against the backdrop of the “ecological Indian” stereotype perpetuated by twentieth-century Euro-American environmentalist movements, it is telling that Elder Brother is mistaken for a Greenpeace activist. To the operator of the machine, Indigenous subjectivity, it seems, is only legible through an environmentalist discourse that has historically reduced it to a powerless and passive surface for the projection of European environmental grief and guilt. As if to emphasize the vibrant reality of Indigenous ecological activism obscured by this trope, the story’s 2018 graphic adaptation is contextualized

with images of the Standing Rock protests, the Idle No More movement, and the Fort McMurray fires, indicating that Indigenous environmentalism is urgent and thriving and has little need for paternalist Greenpeace appropriations (see Cariou and Burns 49-50).

What could be read as a commentary on early Canadian anxieties about the lack of ancestral ties to the land also serves to introduce an element shared by many Indigenous onto-epistemological frameworks—the importance of relationality and an understanding of ecological enmeshment as kinship with a broad range of relatives that include other-than-human entities like stone, plants, animals, and spirits. Compounding the vital importance of these frameworks is the trauma of disconnection, the severing of Indigenous peoples from land, language, and culturally inherent knowledge that has defined settler-colonial agendas of displacement and cultural genocide since their inception. Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice picks up on these histories to connect the mechanics of settler colonialism with the ongoing destruction of ecosystems, noting that “[t]he world increasingly becomes a commodity to be purchased, consumed, and flushed away” as a result of the interventions by which “a great resource-consuming part of humanity is busy ravaging . . . delicate threads of interdependence” (39). Highlighting the importance of relations, Justice explains that “[t]o be a good relative is to counter these exploitative [settler-colonial] forces and the stories that legitimize them, while at the same time affirming—or reaffirming—better, more generative, more generous ways to uphold our obligations and our commitments to our diverse and varied kin” (84). As the personification of a cosmological framework in which everything can be kin and alive, Cariou’s protagonist finds himself in a barren landscape that signals death. After he learns that the machines are extracting “very special dirt” that promises eternal warmth, Elder Brother claims his own share but gets stuck (Cariou, “An Athabasca Story” 100). Spending days “[e]ncased there in the tar as if he was a fossil” (103), he is eventually hauled out by one of the excavating machines and dumped into the hopper of the smoking refinery. This is where Cariou’s story ends on a note of ambivalent reassurance:

Of course Elder Brother can’t die, luckily for him. Or perhaps not so luckily. He’s still alive even now, after everything he’s been through. It’s true that people don’t see him much anymore, but sometimes when you’re driving your car and you press hard on the accelerator, you might hear a knocking, rattling sound down deep in the bowels of the machine. That’s Elder Brother, trying to get your attention, begging you to let him out. (103)

While Elder Brother literally merges with the earth to become first fossil and then fossil fuel, he is not dead, but transformed into a figuration of geologic life poised for resurgence. I want to resist reading “An Athabasca Story” as merely an allegory of the erasure and commodification of Indigenous people via the related extractive grammars of industrial capitalism and colonialism, but rather position it as an articulation and prediction of Indigenous survivance and futurity. Therefore, I suggest we read the story’s ending as an apposite example of what it might mean to refract the often-belaboured notion of global ecological entanglements through the lens of an Indigenous onto-epistemological framework where webs of relationality between humans and nonhumans do not end at the refinery but extend into every aspect of modern consumer culture. What Cariou offers is not a simple infusion of the Canadian wilderness with Indigenous spirits, but an apt literalization of what it means to make the enmeshments of the Anthropocene visible, to become attuned to the recalcitrant noise of one’s petrocarbon relations every time someone hits the accelerator. Folded back into the registers of gothic fiction, Elder Brother’s metamorphosis and continuing existence and resistance in the “bowels” of modern automobiles resonates with what some scholars in the footsteps of Timothy Morton or Amitav Ghosh theorize as the environmental unconscious—a repressed physicality perpetually unsettling comforting beliefs in territorial hegemony, sustainability, linear temporality, and bounded individualism. Therein lies the shape-shifting and time-travelling power of the fossil, that “abandoned being that suddenly in the midst of the present reconfigures the possibilities of times” (Yusoff, “Life” 789), whose “geologic corporeality” resists extractivist semantics of inert inhuman matter and fossilized life (788).

Métis writer Cherie Dimaline’s award-winning novel *The Marrow Thieves* serves as a second paradigmatic example of the negotiation of Canada’s ongoing settler-colonial history as a function of industrialized resource extraction. Less gothic than ecological science fiction, it is set in the aftermath of a cataclysmic escalation of the contemporary environmental crisis that is captured in the crushing line: “The Earth was broken. Too much taking for too damn long” (Dimaline 87). In what might be read as a comment on the dire need for speculative fiction in an age of uncertain climate futures, the entire non-Native population of Canada (if not the globe) has lost its ability to dream and looks to Indigenous peoples for a remedy. Dimaline’s description of the insidious progression from the exoticization to the dispossession of Indigenous culture unmistakably talks

back to the appropriation and commodification of so-called “Traditional Ecological Knowledge” by Western scientists and environmentalist movements from the 1970s onwards (see Simpson, *Traditional*): “At first, people turned to Indigenous people the way the New Agers had, all reverence and curiosity, looking for ways we could help them guide. . . . And then they changed on us, like the New Agers, looking for ways they could take what we had and administer it themselves” (88). In a twist that recalls elements of 1980s body horror and that also mirrors the colonization of Black bodies in Jordan Peele’s neo-horror film *Get Out*, released in the same year as *The Marrow Thieves*, the Indigenous body itself becomes a commodity and the site for a gruesome practice of resource extraction: “It began as a rumor, that they had found a way to siphon the dreams right out of our bones, a rumor whispered every time their doctors sent us to hospitals and treatment centers never to return” (89). The “culling” of Indigenous peoples by killing their dreams (89), reducing them to ossiferous raw material to be “harvested” and “used-up” in order to fuel the continuation of settler economies (143), is closer to the rationale for and ongoing effects of the Canadian residential schools system than to science-fictional literalization of metaphor.

Other than a description of glass tubes filled with “a thick, viscous liquid that was neither cool nor warm” labelled with age, gender, and tribal affiliation (144), little detail is given on how the extracted “dream stuff” (145) is used or what happens to Native dreams when transplanted into non-Native bodies and society. Instead, Dimaline’s novel focuses on the vital role of dreams and stories for the survival of a multi-tribal and intergenerational group of fugitives on the run from the “Recruiters” of the Canadian government’s “Department of Oneirology” (4). In weekly sessions, the group’s leader Miigwans tells “Story”—consistently capitalized and in zero-marking as if to allude to the transcendent and performative quality of ceremonial storytelling—through which both younger members of the group and readers learn about the events that have shaped the diegetic present. To remember a collective history, “to set the memory in perpetuity” (25), reinforces the webs of relationships among the group and, as the protagonist Frenchie recognizes about the significance of Story for the younger RiRi, becomes a means for her “to form into a real human before she understood that some saw her as little more than crop” (26). Story thus constitutes a powerful tool of resistance against the dehumanizing and fragmenting forces of a state system that views Indigenous people primarily as resource.

The novel's plot alternates collective Story with each individual character's "coming-to story," the telling of which, in contrast to the appropriation of Indigenous dreams, becomes an enactment of sovereign agency: "Everyone's creation story is their own" (79). Insofar as they provide the infrastructure and frame for Indigenous flourishing, survival, and world-building, stories, like dreams, are literally invoked as cultural bone marrow.

The analogous decolonial power of stories and dreams heralded by Nishnaabeg poet, critic, and activist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson also holds true for Dimaline's world:

Storytelling is an important process for visioning, imagining, critiquing the social space around us, and ultimately challenging the colonial norms fraught in our daily lives. In a similar way, dreams and visions propel resurgence because they provide Nishnaabeg with both the knowledge from the spiritual world and processes for realizing those visions. Dreams and visions provide glimpses of decolonized spaces and transformed realities that we have collectively yet to imagine. (*Dancing* 34-35)

"[B]uried in our bones" by "our ancestors" (Dimaline 90), dreams in *The Marrow Thieves*, as in many Indigenous cultures, function as primordial archives and vehicles of cultural tradition, ancestral knowledges, and storied kinship relations that link the present to the future as much as to a past which, even if buried, is not dead. Considering their embodiment in and extraction from bone, Dimaline ambivalently invokes fossils as a metonymy of both Indigenous erasure and resurgence. Reminiscent of Yusoff's theorization of fossils as a manifestation of geologic life, Indigenous bones are envisioned as reservoirs of a material-semiotic life-force or energy that, if properly channelled, can also be wielded as a decolonial weapon. This potential is vividly depicted at the novel's climax. As the authorities attempt to extract the dreams of the group's Elder, Minerva, the dream energy stored in her marrow overwhelms the system and literally spills out, causing the machinery to collapse:

She sang. She sang with volume and pitch and a heartbreaking wail that echoed through her relatives' bones, rattling them in the ground under the school itself. Wave after wave, changing her heartbeat to drum, morphing her singular voice to many, pulling every dream from her own marrow and into her song. And there were words: words in the language that the conductor couldn't process, words the Cardinals couldn't bear, words the wires couldn't transfer. (172)

The animation of ancestral bones and the summoning of the performative power of Indigenous language and knowing as a self-sacrificial act of defiance and collective empowerment in this scene simultaneously recalls the long-

suppressed atrocities of the Canadian residential school system and subverts the recurring settler-gothic trope of Indigenous burial grounds. Culminating in this revitalization of the past and the raising of bones into song to create viable and vibrant futures for Indigenous peoples against the backdrop of an ecological breakdown, *The Marrow Thieves* is exemplary of what it means to reclaim fossil narratives and unmask the complicities between settler colonialism and resource extractivism in the age of the Anthropocene.

Reclaiming the Human

An examination of geologic life as a recurring trope in narratives of Indigenous resurgence requires attention to more flexible categories of humanity, kinship, and personhood that complicate Western demarcations of the monstrous and the inanimate. What unites many Indigenous oral traditions, according to Justice, is that “we learned to be human in large part from the land and our other-than-human relatives” (76). In this final section, I focus on the horror novel *Wrist* by Anishinaabe author Nathan Adler as a negotiation of what it means to reclaim Indigenous humanity in the face of resource extraction economies by embracing kinship relations to the land that are unapologetically coded as monstrous.

Adler’s narrative is set on the fictional Ghost Lake Reserve in northern Ontario, the grounds of which harbour both dinosaur bones and oil: “By some geologic fate, the same physical processes by which dinosaur bones had been preserved, had also preserved marine life deposited in layers of sediment, which became oil and natural gas captured in the folds and draperies of the rock, the black sludge of the modern energy economy” (376). The novel hinges on a multiplication of fossil metaphors that relate dinosaur bones and oil to the resurrection of Indigenous kinship relations and ancestral heritage in response to a colonial rhetoric that posits Indigenous subjectivity as dead or inhuman. With reverberations in Justice’s argument that “as long as our relationship to the land persists, there are possibilities for reawakening what has gone dormant” (51), *Wrist* propels a vision of resurgence based in “[Anishinaabe] stories about the ghosts of extinct species, awakened from their long sleep” (114). Reminiscent of both Elder Brother’s metamorphic fate in “An Athabasca Story” and the summoning of spiritual energy from Minerva’s bones in *The Marrow Thieves*, Adler develops an extended analogy between the extractive industries and the consumption of bodies that hinges on the proximity between fossils and fossil fuel. Transport trucks prompt a vision of “pistons pumping black

bile through mechanical veins,” leading the protagonist to imagine “souls of extinct species filling the sky, clogging the air and breaking down the molecules of ozone with their viscous, primordial presence; the vengeance of disturbed ghosts terraforming the world to suit their lost one—a warmer world, a world with more lizard-brained violence” (376). Modern energy economies are here imagined as releasing an environmental unconscious that is not necessarily benign but follows its own agendas and operates beyond the bounds of human control—a predicament that in analogous registers also shapes the lives of Adler’s Indigenous protagonists.

Set in the 1990s, the main story follows the coming-of-age of Church, the fourth-generation “quasi-human” descendant of a voracious Wiindigo spirit, struggling to keep his monstrous heritage in check (132). A parallel epistolary narrative set a century in the past introduces Harker Lockwood, a medical doctor who joins a paleontological excavation of dinosaur bones on the territory of Church’s ancestors in 1872 to study “Wiindigo Culture Amongst the Northern Ojibwe” (36)—research he hopes, with unmistakably extractivist undertones, will “yield rich discoveries” (29). The intertextual references to Jonathan Harker, the tormented protagonist of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, and Mr. Lockwood, the haunted narrator in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, are programmatic in that they deliberately invoke the European gothic as a foil. Via the baroque interweaving of dinosaurs, Wiindigo, and, ultimately, vampires, the novel generates a multiplication of hauntings that pivot on the metaphors of extraction and consumption. Cast as a protector of the land and embodiment of fossil ghosts, the Wiindigo—an insatiable and emaciated giant who feeds on human flesh and, according to Ojibway scholar Basil Johnston, represents the most terrifying “of the evil beings who dwelt on the periphery of the world of the Anishinaubae peoples” (221)—seems ever lurking in the shadows of the Ghost Lake forest and in the back of Church’s mind: “Some people say he’s gone. Some people say he’s just sleeping or hibernating like a bear. That one day he’ll wake up, and you can be sure, that when he does, he’ll be hungry” (130). As “animal ancestors” (130) and spirits, fossils and their incarnations as fuel are repeatedly coded in the registers of more-than-human kin and emphasize the centrality of relatives in Church’s life, indicating that “Anishinaabe stories are filled with such intersections, across species, across-states of being, between animate objects” (23). As if in allusion to the historical dehumanization of North American Indigenous peoples as either yielding fossils or “savage beasts,” the members of Church’s family self-

identify as not entirely human, always on the verge of turning monstrous.

This intrinsic liminality is compounded by intersections of Church's family with a range of other hybrid positions on the socio-ontological periphery—from the “other-worldly nature” of Church's Two-Spirit/queer uncle Inri and his paraplegic grandmother, who sacrificed her legs in exchange for her humanity (92); to his father, a Holocaust survivor who was killed and resurrected more than a dozen times as a victim of Josef Mengele's horrific twin experiments in Auschwitz; to his great-grandmother's ghost twin sister, and his great-great-grandaunt, a descendant of tree spirits. To understand the dislocation of human-monster delineations in *Wrist*, exclusionary liberal humanist schemata may have to be discarded in favour of more expansive and generous conceptions. Justice heralds this task as one of the guiding principles of Indigenous literatures. Rather than “limiting the ‘human’ to specific classes of beings, with powers and privileges distributed accordingly” (36), Indigenous literatures may be approached as articulations of “how to learn to be human” via the recuperation of an “active network of connections, a process of continual acknowledgment and enactment” (42). Framed in this rejoinder to Latour's iconic pronouncement “we have never been modern,” Indigenous literatures can be understood as linking up with a critique of modernity that especially in the context of the Anthropocene has served to re-orient the human as always already hybridized and intimately enmeshed in more-than-human ecologies (which is not to say that all Indigenous literature is didactic in this sense). In its sprawling portrayal of Church's variegated family relations and their intersections with spirits and land, *Wrist* foregrounds the humanity of its Indigenous protagonists by ultimately rehabilitating their monstrously-coded heritage as a boon rather than a deficiency, pivotal in defeating the colonial intruders intent on squeezing their land for bones and oil across the span of over a century.

Not out of place in a narrative teeming with references to contemporary American pop culture and horror film, the villains in both timelines are invoked as veritable vampires. Offhandedly, Lockwood describes the “eyeteeth” of the Victorian-mannered paleontologist Edward Drinker Cope as “pointed and as sharp as fangs” (172), a peculiar observation that recurs almost verbatim a hundred years later as Church is lured into the car of three “details-men hired by a resource extraction company called Magnon Incorporated” who soon overpower him not only to suck his blood but also to extort the oil-soaked land belonging to his family (360). Contemporary fossil fuel industries are here cast as direct extensions of nineteenth-century

geological discourses and their personification as vampires renders the related extractivist violence perpetrated upon Indigenous bodies, culture, and land explicit. An observation tellingly made by Justice in a discussion of *The Marrow Thieves* that collates blood, marrow, and DNA is also pertinent for a reading of *Wrist*: “Indian blood . . . has long carried powerful symbolic resonance for settler societies: first pathologized as source of contamination, and later sought as a totemic presence by settler colonial people to claim belonging without relationship” (138). Through the parallelism of blood, bones, and oil,³ Church and his family are doubly commodified as hosts of exploitable resources to be extracted and processed for the advancement of European industry and science. The only way to resist these forces, Church realizes, is by reaffirming rather than disavowing the connection to his monstrous ancestor, summoning the Wiindigo by nursing his hunger to the point of starvation—“how else could he learn to be human? It was a right [sic] of passage” (133). As readers learn at the very end of the novel, the Wiindigo appears as an avatar of ravaged land and has already slain two Magnon oil prospectors because he “didn’t want them to discover the tar-like substance oozing from the rock-shelf like congealed blood” (414). In a climactic showdown that plays itself out on the “Burnt Grounds,” a barren stretch of rock that recalls the bleak scenery of Cariou’s tar sands and is described as a place where the “boundary between this world and the next is thin,” “everything broken and destroyed is made whole, and everything burnt and wrecked is alive” (430), the vampires are eventually killed by an alliance among Church’s Wiindigo forefather and the “ticked-off” spirits of his mother and uncle (432).

Adler’s juxtaposition of Wiindigo and Vampire is clever, not least because both figures frequently serve as personifications of capitalist resource industries. In his book on Ojibway Manitou, Johnston describes “the modern Weendigoes” as “corporations, conglomerates, and multinationals” who’ve “renounced their cravings for raw human flesh in return for more refined viands” (235).⁴ Through the confrontation and, at times, even alignment of Wiindigo and Vampire, Adler seems to reject the unilateral traffic from European gothic tropes into North American imaginaries, reminding his readers that Indigenous cultures have their own monsters and ghosts, some of whom may also be transformed into “figures of healing, ceremony, or political action” (Cariou, “Haunted” 730)—sources of empowerment, rather than victimization or demonization. As if to comment on the valence of gothic fiction as a vehicle of cultural colonialism,

Church's grandmother warns: "Immigrants brought their own monsters with them. Their own hungers, their own forms of wiindigo" (209). Adler's rehabilitation of the Wiindigo as a culturally-specific avenger and land defender, thus, offers a compelling response to the entangled histories of colonization and resource extraction. By staging decolonial resistance to European fossil industries as the resurgence of an Indigenous monster metonymically tied to oil and bones, he seems to talk back to the ways in which nineteenth-century geology in its legitimation of Indigenous genocide and slavery relied on a mechanism of "inhuman differentiation" through which the colonized other was "'transformed from the *human subject* of his own culture into the *inhuman object* of the European culture'" (Sylvia Wynter qtd. in Yusoff, *A Billion* 16, emphasis original). Estranged from its European context, the human/inhuman differentiation in *Wrist* is refracted through an Indigenous lens by which its protagonist becomes attuned to the manifold kinship relations that bind him not only to his monstrous ancestors but also to the land, the forest, the spiritual world, and the fossils in the ground. By eventually embracing his ostensibly inhuman heritage, Church enacts a return to his own culture that allows him to realize that the relationship between humans and monsters may be far more complex than his favourite (American) horror movies insinuate.

Reclaiming fossils implies a material-discursive dimension of decolonization that complements the physical repatriation of looted ancestral bones and Indigenous artifacts with the production of self-determined Indigenous narratives of geologic corporeality. It entails exposing the bio- and geopolitical delineations of being and nonbeing that underly the conjoined histories of settler-colonialism and resource extraction and anchoring stories of resistance in gradations of animacy and economies of value that accentuate variegated networks of relationality rather than rigid ontological divides. The texts discussed above talk back to a key paradigm of the Anthropocene while rejecting universalizing narratives of a catastrophe that is still to come. Rather, they link up with Anthropocene critiques such as Potawatomi scholar Kyle Powys Whyte's, who recognizes that ecological collapse has been felt by Indigenous populations since colonization and understands "much of the conservation and environmental justice work that Indigenous peoples do as a type of science (fiction) that seeks to 'waken' protagonists and particular qualities of relationships" (232). With this restorative potential of Indigenous science (fiction) in mind, I am inclined to read Cariou, Dimaline, and Adler's visions of ongoing reconstruction and

survival as expressions of a narrative imagination that functions as type of theory in its own right and holds the potential for important dialogues with ecopolitical scholarship, art, and activism within and beyond the bounds of North American Indigenous literatures.

NOTES

- 1 See Todd “An Indigenous Feminist’s”; Watts; Sundberg.
- 2 See Dillon 10; Simpson, *As We Have* 17-21.
- 3 I am grateful to Sarah Henzi for pointing me to Elle Máijá Tailfeathers’ (Blackfoot/Sámi) 2011 body horror short film *Bloodland*, which stages the parallel violences upon Indigenous land by fossil fuel industries and the bodies of Indigenous women via the enmeshed visual semantics of blood and oil.
- 4 A contemporary use of the vampire trope to describe the Canadian oil industry can be found in John K. Samson’s 2016 song “Vampire Alberta Blues.”

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