A n g e l a   V a n   E s s e n

nêhiyawaskiy[1] (Cree Land) and Canada

Location, Language, and Borders in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*

In Harold Cardinal's politically charged response to Pierre Trudeau's "White Paper," he claims, "There exists a great need for knowledge in the white society about Indians and similarly a need in Indian communities for more information about white society" (80). In light of this reciprocal need for education, I would like to make it clear that I am not a Cree person. However, I have been studying the *paskwâw* (Plains) Cree dialect for several years and spent some time in Winnipeg learning *mushkêgo* (Swampy) and Woods Cree. In preparation for writing this paper, I consulted Dorothy Thunder at the University of Alberta, who helped me with the translation of some of Highway's more colourful names for places and people; in these ways, my reading is a response to Renate Eigenbrod's call to take up Highway's use of Cree as an "invitation to learn about his people *with* his people" (77).

Anishinaabe scholar and language teacher Basil Johnston says, "Language is crucial. If scholars are to increase their knowledge and if they are to add depth and width to their studies, they must study a native language and literature" (11). Although scholars have written at length about Tomson Highway's novel, few have addressed his use of Cree, although Kristina Fagan's work on code-switching humour has begun to take a closer look at bilingual Aboriginal literature. A careful study of the glossed and unglossed Cree in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* will help readers understand how Highway uses language to establish and trouble the boundaries between different readers, different communities, and different power relations. His novel reveals how languages set up and map out these borders; at the same time, Highway uses language to trouble and disrupt these maps and boundaries.

Dialects play a crucial role in mapping human communities. According to J. Edward Chamberlin, "Language is the signature of both individual and collective identity, and even small differences of accent identify speakers of a community or a country" (15). This cartographic potential is especially true among Cree speakers in Canada, since Cree communities are spread across the land, from Quebec to British Columbia. Within this large territory, linguists map approximately five primary dialects (Hunter and Karpinski iii). *paskwâw* (Plains) Cree is, according to Highway, "[w]idely considered to be the 'classical' dialect, the Castillian, shall we say, of Cree. . . . If the Queen of England were to speak Cree, for instance, she would speak [the Plains Cree] dialect" (*Iskooniguni* x). Plains Cree is spoken in central Alberta, central Saskatchewan, and southern Manitoba. Woods Cree, which is Highway's dialect, is spoken in a smaller area that straddles the northern Saskatchewan/Manitoba border. *mushkêgo* (Swampy) Cree is spoken in northeastern Manitoba and northern Ontario, along the southwest lowlands of Hudson Bay and the west coast of James Bay. Moose Cree is spoken in a smaller area in north-central Ontario, and Eastern Cree is spoken in Quebec, along the eastern coast of James Bay and Hudson Bay. These dialects differ in a few sounds, idioms, and occasional words, and several speakers (including Highway) and linguists claim that fluent speakers of any dialect can usually understand a speaker from a different dialectic region (Hunter and Karpinski iii; Wolfart and Carroll xvii; Highway, *Iskooniguni* xi). However, this is debatable: some linguists suggest that Cree dialects are *not* mutually intelligible (Ahenakew 2-8). For a straightforward example of how Cree dialects differ, we can see that the Cree word for "not/no" differs systematically by a single sound in each major dialect:

  namôya (Plains/*paskwâw* Cree)
  namôtha (Woods Cree)
  namôna (Swampy/*mushkêgo* Cree)
  namôla (Moose Cree)
  namôra (James Bay/Eastern Cree)

Therefore, a reader or a listener can quickly decipher approximately which region in Canada a Cree speaker is from by noting these distinguishing dialect markers. These linguistic differences function cartographically, since they locate and demarcate particular speech communities. Indeed, the borders of these speech communities often follow natural boundaries in the landscape, rather than the unnatural borders set up by European colonizers, and if one were to look at a map of Canada along these linguistic lines, one

would see the dialect territories pointing to a map of Canada that predates all the maps created by European explorers and Canadian settlers.

Highway's dialect maps his characters within the broad territories of the five main dialects, and his idioms and description of the language locate them more specifically in a small Cree community in northern Manitoba. For example, when Jeremiah says, "*Mootha nantow*" (it's all right or not bad) (70), readers can see that he is speaking Woods Cree (since a Plains Cree speaker, for example, would say *môya nântow*). This example also demonstrates elision in common fluent speech, since a textbook example of this phrase would be spelled *namootha nantow*. It is also important to note that Highway does not use the Standard Roman Orthography (SRO)[2] that has been designed and adopted by (predominantly Plains Cree) language educators and linguists (in SRO, this phrase would be *namôtha nânitaw*). As a result, his spelling reflects the language phonetically as he hears it and reminds readers that Cree is a language that varies from community to community. However, because his spelling is not standard, speakers of other dialects or students still learning the language may have difficulties reading it.

Thus, Highway's Cree dialect maps his characters onto the land in northern Manitoba Woods Cree territory. This exclusive linguistic mapping is corroborated in Highway's "Note on Dialect" in his recent publication of *Iskooniguni Isweewuk (The Rez Sisters in Its Original Version: Cree)*, where he explains that his Cree records precisely how his mother and sisters, those women of Brochet, talked (x). He then goes on to explain that that "is precisely how *we* talk up in those parts to this very day. It is, in other words, the dialect that I feel most comfortable with, the dialect I dream in" (xi). This dialect marks members of the community even when they are far from home, and even when they are not speaking Cree, since to Gabriel's ears, "the northern Manitoba Cree [is] unmistakable in the rising and falling of [Madeline Lavoix's] English" (*Kiss* 132). Highway's Woods Cree therefore functions as a signature of belonging to a community; at the same time, it maps his characters onto the land and evokes their connection to it even when they are elsewhere.

Highway's Cree also functions cartographically on a more complex level beyond general and particular dialect and community locations. In the first few pages of the first chapter, Highway uses English and Cree to create a complicated map of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. This map includes commonly accessible names of places in Manitoba, such as Flin Flon, Cranberry Portage, and Reindeer Lake. These place names are relatively familiar to many Canadian readers; furthermore, readers who are from

Manitoba will feel the thrill of recognition when they read them. This pleasure immediately evokes a sense of belonging because the familiar names suggest that the reader and the characters share an experience of the landscape. However, Highway also includes names of places that are less accessible to a non-Cree speaking reader, and the names of these places cannot be found on published maps of the area. This esoteric map includes non-fictional places such as Oopaskooyak[3] (the Cree name for The Pas) and fictional place names such as Moosoogoot[4] and Eematat.[5] These Cree place names immediately trouble the sense of familiarity that a reader may have established through the recognition of the factual English place names and creates an insider readership of Cree speakers, because Cree readers will be laughing at these names. With these Cree place names, Highway is defining the land as Cree territory, for they create a linguistic boundary between Cree people and the rest of the world; his repeated references to Oopaskooyak are particularly interesting because, like Cree dialect distribution in Canada, they point to a map that predates European contact and hence trouble the English names and the colonizer's claim to the land. According to Kenneth Paupanekis, a Cree language instructor from Norway House, the French name "Le Pas" (and subsequent English name "The Pas") comes from the French mispronunciation and shortening of the original Cree name: when the French tried to pronounce *ohpâs* (short for *ohpâskowêyâhk*), it became, over time, Le Pas ("Cree Place Names").

Through the stories of his ancestors, Cree theorist Neal McLeod remembers how "with the coming of newcomers to the territory of the Cree, the landscape was transformed. . . . Today, the road maps of western Canada show little evidence that Indigenous people dwell in the territory, or that we have marked the place with our memory" (*Narrative Memory* 6-7). By using the original Cree name Oopaskooyak, Highway is reversing colonial appropriation and possession and reasserting Cree cultural memory by recalling the names that have been erased by the colonizing language(s). Highway's map of the territory functions as a hybrid counter-map, because it includes names from both the dominant English-language map and an older Cree-language one. By including both Cree and English place names, Highway creates coordinates of common understanding between the dominant culture and Cree culture; nonetheless, he also unsettles and destabilizes a non-Cree reader through his inclusion of Cree place names.

Highway's fictional Cree place names set up borders between insiders (Cree speakers) and outsiders (Cree and non-Cree people who cannot

understand the Cree language). Because these place names are not included in the glossary of Cree terms at the back of the book, their meaning remains hidden from a non-Cree-speaking reader; their inaccessibility is significant because Highway's fictional place names are often humorous. Highway's decision not to include any proper nouns in his Cree glossary may imply that names are meant only for a Cree-speaking audience, and suggest that Highway uses unglossed Cree to include his fellow Cree-speaking readers in some intoxicating, silly, and giddy humour ("Funniest" 161), while excluding those readers illiterate in Cree. To be sure, by setting up this double-layered map, Highway arranges disparate experiences of the text, where readers who understand Cree will have comic relief but readers who cannot understand Cree will not, unless they consult a Cree speaker. For example, to foreign ears, Wuchusk Oochisk might sound impressive or distinguished, with the soft musical rising and falling of the beginning vowel sounds, the alliteration of the middle "ch" (/tʃ/) sound, and its appealing near rhyme. But a Cree reader will know that the name means "muskrat anus." Notably, this name is mentioned during scenes where Roman Catholic priests vigorously assert their narratives and ceremonies: in Abraham Okimasis' deathbed scene (225) and during Jeremiah's lesson on Hell at the residential school (60). As a result, Cree readers may simultaneously laugh and recall the story about the weasel and the Weetigo (118), since an *oochisk* (the boys translate the word as "bumhole") is the gateway to a body's innards. The association with this censored Cree myth continues in both of these scenes, with Abraham's posthumous experience in the body of the beast (235) as well as Jeremiah's thoughts on the tunnels of hell (60). Cree readers will thus link the image of the weasel in the Weetigo's *oochisk* with Abraham's turn towards Cree mythology on his deathbed and Jeremiah's internal struggle with white narratives at the residential school and in the shopping mall. Indeed, since Highway includes many of these funny Cree names in scenes that explore the sinister influence of white society on Cree communities, I imagine that these jokes not only invoke humour for Cree readers, but they also inspire resistance to the destructive powers that the novel works to reveal.

Of course, this trend cannot be applied to every instance of Highway's unglossed Cree (in keeping with the complex and disruptive nature of the novel in general). For instance, Nigoostachin Island, three miles from "the island where Father Thibodeau's men caught Chachagathoo" (90), means "I am afraid" in Cree.[6] The last Cree Shaman's name also works to trouble a totalizing reading of the text, such as Sherrill Grace's theory that "Highway

links the priests (black robes) and their rape of the boys with black, and the spirit world of the Cree with white—white fur, white Stanfield's, white snow, and so on" (296), because Chachagathoo[7] means "blackbird," so her name troubles a simple black/white binary. In this case, the Cree names are not humorous, but they point to a sinister power. The memory and enforced silence surrounding Chachagathoo's story and the boys' sexual abuse are two powerful examples of the haunting effects of colonialism. Like the scenes where Wuchusk Oochisk is mentioned, this scene suggests a site of spiritual warfare, where colonial narratives seek to overpower Cree narratives (as we later learn some of the censored Cree history concerning Chachagathoo and her conflict with the priest [246]). At other times, the Cree names are simply funny: for example, Bad Robber Gazandlaree's dog is named Chuksees[8] (which means penis), but he is not mentioned in the context of any sinister threat or destructive force. Consequently, Highway's Cree disrupts an easy reading of the text, on many levels.

For the most part, Highway's Cree names seem to evoke resistance and laughter. Indeed, the comical sketches of Annie Moostoos,[9] the one "renowned throughout the north for the one tooth left in her head" (16), are symbolically linked to the enduring spirit of the Okimasis' reserve Eemanapiteepitat,[10] because this Cree place name means "s/he is pulling his/her tooth out."[11] Thus, her one tooth and her resilience (she is declared dead after the airport outhouse door slams her head, but later shows up to welcome the boys home with her shiny Javex-whitened tooth) inspire hope for the small northern reserve, despite its complex problems. Accordingly, she embodies what Gerald Vizenor describes as Native survivance, since her presence in the novel "renounces dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (vii). Along the same lines, McLeod asserts, "Through humour, through words which capture fragments of eternity, we will continue to survive" ("Coming Home" 64). For McLeod and Highway, Cree language and humour are powerful tools of resistance. Without doubt, these insider jokes affirm and connect Cree readers.

If the Cree names of people and places inspire hope and laughter in a Cree-speaking audience, what do they inspire in a non-Cree-speaking one? Certainly Highway's use of Cree (both glossed and unglossed) unsettles the anglophone readership. On a material level, anglophones' experience of reading the novel is disrupted by the continual need to flip to the back of the book whenever they need to search for a Cree word in the glossary. Although some critics argue that glossaries give "the translated word, and thus the 'receptor' culture, the higher status" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin

65), for readers illiterate in Cree the continual disruption often leads to feelings of frustration and alienation. These feelings may be heightened if readers notice that proper nouns are not glossed. These readers are thus reminded that their knowledge and understanding are limited. On a deeper level, many Canadian readers may be reminded that we live in traditionally Aboriginal territory. Cree people who do not have Cree-language skills may feel a deep sense of loss, of being excluded from their linguistic community and culture. On the other hand, humbled or intrigued, they may feel inspired to learn Cree. In her dissertation on Native humour in Canadian fiction, Fagan suggests that code-switching humour cautions outsiders "against being too certain of any culturally distanced interpretation. More specifically, we are warned away from thinking that we can always understand humour that passes through or from a language that we do not understand" (146).

Highway's Cree names create boundaries between various sorts of readers, but also have the potential to inspire hope and healing, or humility and awareness. Indeed, later in the novel when Kiputz (the boys' dog) disrupts the Okimasis brothers' "church service" with his barking, the reader is reminded that "[w]ars start when two parties haven't taken the time to learn each other's tongues" (95). This humorous scene can be understood as a gentle reminder to non-Cree speakers that their linguistic knowledge is limited, and it suggests that these limitations have political ramifications. A more radical interpretation of this scene might see it as a call for non-Cree readers to take the time to learn the language.

Even though the Cree language jokes may not be accessible to all readers, the humour, as maintained by Highway, is not entirely lost on a non-Cree speaking audience. According to Highway, the Cree language is intrinsically funny: "It is as if a clown lives inside [the syllables]" ("Funniest" 161). Highway believes that an audience is not required to understand the meaning of the words; the simple act of reading them out loud with friends will cause readers to be laughing, and "laughing not lightly, but from the pit of [their] respective groins" (161). Although linguists, fluent speakers, and critics may not all agree that the Cree language is inherently funny, there is something funny about a foreign language and about the nonsense humans experience when linguistic sounds are separated from any knowledge of that language— Highway clearly knows this, because he demonstrates this sort of nonsensical humour with the Okimasis family's understanding of English.

Chamberlin has suggested that, in general, human beings tend to "dismiss others who haven't grown up exactly like us as incorrigible babblers," and

that this distinction is "one of the ways we divide the world into Them and Us . . . [so] there are those who speak properly, . . . like Us; and those who babble, more or less meaninglessly, as They do" (8). Highway frequently exploits this divisive human instinct in his humour. Throughout the book, he subverts the English language by relegating it to noise or nonsense: for example, as Abraham Okimasis wins the World Championship Dog Derby, he experiences the English announcer's words as noise, and the "syllables become one vast, roiling rumble" (6). Similarly, for Jeremiah, English sounds "like the *putt-putt-putt* of Happy Doll Magipom's pathetic three-horsepower outboard motor" (52). Along these lines, Highway draws readers' attention to the divisive nature of languages, because both of these examples demonstrate that the characters experience English as noise without meaning, and thus English speakers as barbarians (or babblers). In this way, Highway overturns the dominance of English and shows readers a perspective of the world where Cree speakers are insiders and English speakers are outsiders. On another level, Highway's playful reversal mirrors non-Cree speakers' experience of Cree, so while these readers are prompted to realize that English may be babble for some, they have at the same time encountered words in a language that *they* cannot understand. Hence, Highway reminds readers that human communities draw borders based on language, but he also troubles this concept with his presentation of the English language (in a primarily English text) as a foreign language. By giving non-Cree anglophone readers a glimpse of a Cree perspective of English, Highway disrupts a simple reading of either language or either perspective.

Highway also explores linguistic perspectives by creating nonsense out of English. At the residential school, Gabriel innocently apes Brother Stumbo's recitation of the Roman Catholic "Hail Mary" by chanting, "Hello merry, mutter of cod, play for ussinees, now anat tee ower of ower beth, aw, men" (71). This comical scene forces readers to think carefully about the nature of languages as it illustrates some differences between Cree and English, and some challenges a Cree English-language learner might face. From the perspective of a monolingual Cree speaker, one of the English language's challenges must be that there are so many small words (because Cree is a polysynthetic language based on verbs) that can carry multiple meanings. Gabriel's parroting of the prayer highlights some of these slippery little words, such as "hour" and "our" or "Mary," "merry," and "marry." Similarly, in Cree there is a less clear distinction between the velar consonants *g* and *k*: there is no letter *g* in SRO, and the syllabic system also does not

differentiate between the two sounds. A *k* at the beginning of a word is usually pronounced as a /k/ sound, but if it occurs in the middle of a word, it is usually pronounced with a /g/ sound. Therefore, it is completely natural for Gabriel to hear "cod" instead of "God." Finally, Gabriel hears Cree words in the nonsensical English—another natural response to a foreign language. In a few lines, Highway clearly illustrates how English is understood (or not understood) from the perspective of a Cree child, and Gabriel's lack of understanding emphasizes the linguistic and cultural boundary between the boy and the Roman Catholic brother. On a more serious note, however, Gabriel's lack of understanding also points to the boys' staggering powerlessness at the school, because Cree is forbidden and English lies (at this point) beyond their grasp.

At the same time, the gap between Gabriel's understanding and the reader's perspective is funny; as Fagan points out, "Highway's joke works because we can make sense of [Gabriel's] strange syllables, even though he cannot" ("Code-Switching" 36). Readers laugh because they are included in the group that understands English. Readers may be more amused (or shocked) if they are also part of the group that knows the original Roman Catholic prayer. However, a Cree reader may see black humour in this scene, since *ussinees* (little rock or pebble) can carry sexual connotations[12] (in Cree, as in English, "rocks" can refer to testicles) that foreshadow Gabriel's sexual abuse at the hands of Father Lafleur. Here, the gap between the child's understanding and the reader's is less funny: the English nonsensical humour appears innocent and cerebral juxtaposed with the disturbing reference to Cree *ussinees*.

The boys are not the only ones rendered powerless through language: when Ooneemeetoo is baptized, the priest uses his knowledge (and Annie Moostoos' ignorance) of Latin to suppress and dominate the Cree community. Ironically, Annie Moostoos understands what is happening during the baptism, though she does not understand the language. She confronts the priest by emphatically stating that his name "is Ooneemeetoo. Ooneemeetoo Okimasis. Not Satanae Okimasis" (37). Readers can laugh at this point, but by the end of the page, the priest has blasted the child's godmother and gone ahead and done what Annie Moostoos had feared: he renames the boy Gabriel.

Just as Highway's place names remind readers of colonial power in Canada, the baptism scene, along with Highway's other scenes and references to the Okimasis children's name changes, poignantly reminds readers of the power dynamics involved in naming or renaming. In his

essay on Cree poetic discourse, Neal McLeod asserts: "One of the key components of Indigenous Studies involves the use of names. Names define and articulate a place within society and the world" (111). In order to reframe reality into a Cree world view, Highway works to subvert the Cree community's disempowerment by continually referring to white positions of power by their Cree names. For example, Annie Moostoos whines to her cousin about "*awa aymeegimow*" (this priest, literally "this prayer chief") after he rebukes her during the baptismal ceremony. Similarly, the nuns are called "*aymeeskweewuk*" (prayer women), and Indian agents are consistently dubbed "*sooni-eye-gimow*," a particularly subversive term because the word literally means "money-chief." In these instances, Highway's Cree words work to subvert and resist the dominant power, particularly for a Cree-speaking audience (since they will understand the humorous undertones to the word "*sooni-eye-gimow*"[13]).

Even though Highway often uses language to explore the divide between characters and to include or exclude readers, the boundary between English and Cree is not always clear. For example, the characters' Cree dialect often bears the markers of English or French influence. Abraham hears his daughter shout *ni̱mama!* (29) instead of *nikâwiy!* and Gabriel calls his father *Papa* (190) instead of *nôhtawiy.* In these examples, the European influence on the characters' Cree is not something Highway invents (these English or French loan words have become part of fluent Cree speech in many dialects), but it is noteworthy that Highway has not chosen the "original" Cree words. These linguistic markers support what Jennifer Henderson and others have pointed out: "Highway is insistent . . . that there is no pure, uncompromised Aboriginal culture available to be recovered" (182).

Highway also humorously assimilates English (and French) words, thus troubling the assumption "that things Indian are always swallowed up by European culture . . . [and] the supremacist notion that assimilation can only go in one direction" (Womack 12). For example, Highway often appropriates English words in his names, invoking the mix of Cree and English called "Creenglish": Jeremiah's sister is named Chichilia (a common Cree name, according to Thunder, who suggests it is a Creenglish version of Cecilia), their neighbour is called Choggylut[14] McDermott (Choggylut, again, a Creenglish version of the word "chocolate"), and Ann-Adele Ghostrider's Cree nickname is Poosees[15] (a Creenglish version of "pussy"). Finally, Abraham and Mariesis Okimasis' names are also both Cree and Judeo-Christian: Abraham is of course the name of the Israelite patriarch,

and Mariesis means "little Mary."[16] Their family name Okimasis[17] means "little chief" or "boss." This hybridization blurs the lines between English and Cree and resists a simplistic understanding of their relationship. Moreover, Highway plays with these languages in ways that suggest that the Cree language and Cree people are powerful and adaptable.

At the same time, Highway's novel indicates that both languages are limited. Jeremiah struggles with the English language's lack of humour (273) and the Cree language's limited vocabulary (as the brothers do not know how to say "concert pianist" [189] or "AIDS"[18] [296] in Cree). While they are at the residential school, Jeremiah also wishes his English skills were better: he curses himself "for not sounding more impressive, more stentorian" (64-65), and he wishes he "could toss off an English sentence just as jazzy" as the priest's (69). This desire for "white knowledge" points to the complex struggle that Cree people have faced for many years, and the one that Cardinal refers to in *The Unjust Society.* The late Cree Elder Peter Vandall explains, "*mitoni nitawêyihtamwak nêhiyawak kahkiyaw, tâpiskôt otawâsimisiwâwa môniyâw-kiskêyihtamowin kit-âyâyit*": all Cree people really seem to want their children to have white knowledge (36, my translation). His words articulate the troubled relationship Cree people have with English: English offers powerful skills for success in mainstream society, but these skills are often gained at the cost of fluency in Cree. Highway's novel does not call for (or allow) a return to a pre-contact Cree way of life, and despite the horrors of the residential schools, the boys do gain western skills (piano-playing and ballet dancing) that allow them to fulfil their destiny (193). Highway's vision is not simple; his novel resists an idealized return to the past as well as trite images of "Native authenticity."

Chamberlin explains that "[l]anguage . . . is supposed to nourish communication, and yet often it does just the opposite. It is supposed to sustain communities, but often it breaks them apart" (113). Readers can see the destructive power of language in the novel, since the boys' English skills have been gained at the expense of their Cree language development, which divides them from their parents. Mariesis tells her sons that when she first heard English on Father Thibodeau's radio, "the words sounded like music, . . . 'Great war, great war,' I used to sing and skip—I was five years old—until my father, your grandfather Muskoosis, told me to shut up, that the words meant death" (195). Her English-language skills do not develop much further than this; as a grandmother, "[a]ll she knows in English are 'tank you' and 'fuckin' bullshit'" (289), and she cannot read English at all (and as a result she mistakenly buys a microwave, thinking that it's a television) (289). Abraham

also lacks English-language skills; even the word "'salt' in English was beyond his ken" (196). As a result, the boys can use English as an exclusive weapon for confrontation and restraint: Jeremiah confronts Gabriel about his ballet lessons (and indirectly about his sexual orientation) in English (195), and Jeremiah uses English to exclude his parents from their discussion when Gabriel tries to talk about Father Lafleur's sexual abuse (92). Sadly, in this scene, the Cree-speaking parents become outside audience members, even though the English speakers are seated on either side of their mother, ironically making English the language of insiders in a landscape that is intimately Cree territory (89-92). At the same time, Highway continually makes it clear that the boys' English fluency is gained at the expense of their Cree language development. In contrast to their parents' impeccable and exquisite Cree (189), their Cree remains stunted (191) and grows rusty (226). And Abraham can see this: "Visit by visit, word by word, these sons were splintering from their subarctic roots, their Cree beginnings" (193). Just as Highway's Cree place names have the potential to divide Cree readers along lines of fluency, so the boys' English fluency and limited Cree language skills divide them from their parents and each other. This, of course, was the intention of the founders of the Indian residential school system.

However, language is not always divisive, and at other times in the novel the brothers find joy and comfort in their ability to speak Cree to each other (114). Indeed, for Jeremiah the language is soul food: each vowel like jam and "the consonants great gobs of peanut butter" (241). Cree also helps the boys establish a deeper sense of their identity; we see Gabriel's Cree bloom when he discusses Cree religion with Jeremiah (182) and it is even more eloquent when they attend a powwow together (241). The Cree language also becomes an important element in Jeremiah's plays and the brothers' performances. Near the end of the novel, Jeremiah works as a "Cree-language revivalist" (270) for the Muskoosis[19] Club of Ontario, where he teaches urban Aboriginal children Cree legends in the Cree language (269). Interestingly, Muskoosis means "bear-cub," and this name is noteworthy because it puts a Cree name on the traditionally white youth group, Boy Scouts (where boys are taught wilderness survival skills, and the younger members are called "Cub Scouts"). Muskoosis is also the name of Jeremiah's maternal grandfather (195). The name can therefore be understood as subversive, yet working within an Anglo paradigm; at the same time, it is also in line with Cree narrative memory, where knowledge and survival skills are passed down from generation to generation through stories and language. Thus, Highway

exemplifies a way for Cree people to survive and adapt by remaining powerfully Cree in a world that seeks to assimilate them.

Even though much of these scenes (and the majority of the novel) is written in English, Highway's use of language (including unglossed Cree and Creenglish) resists colonialism and complicates the dominant anglophone perspective. In various ways, English-speakers become outsiders while Cree-speakers become insiders, and Highway creates different experiences of the text, depending on readers' fluency in both languages. For Cree readers, the linguistic play arouses laughter and resistance, and the Cree place names remind readers how Cree language, narrative, and land are intimately connected. For non-Cree readers, the untranslated names and missed humour are a reminder to be humble: our linguistic limitations have political consequences. Readers may be encouraged to learn Cree, and all are encouraged to seek to understand each other's perspectives.

NOTES

1 Following the example of Cree scholars such as Neal McLeod, I have put most Cree words into italics, and in keeping with established Standard Roman Orthography, I have used only lowercase letters for these words and phrases. However, I have kept Highway's proper nouns capitalized and not italicized them, to be true to his text. Note that Highway italicizes the Cree he has included in his glossary, but keeps the unglossed Cree in roman font.

2 Arok Wolvengrey, along with members of the Cree editing council, has done important work in standardizing written Cree. Although some may argue that standardization endangers diversity and creativity, proponents argue that it advances larger goals such as official language status in Canada.

3 For the reading pleasure of linguists, language learners, and Plains Cree readers, I will transliterate some of Highway's Cree into both Plains Cree SRO and Cree syllabics. For all translations, unless otherwise noted, I have used Wolvengrey's dictionary *nēhiýawēwin: itwēwina / Cree: Words (Volume 1: Cree-English)*. At the same time, I am aware of some of the problems that come with standardizing and translating the language. The name Oopaskooyak highlights some of them: Wolvengrey spells "Oopaskooyak" *opâskwêyâhk* (ᐅᐹᐢᑫᐧᔮᕽ), and I have heard that the name can be literally translated as "a place where two rivers meet" (from *paskêhtin*—a verb meaning to be a small river branching off from the main). Meanwhile, Paupanekis' phrasebook spells it *ohpâskowêyâhk* and he translates the name as "a high ridge" from the Cree root *ohpâs*. At the same time, Dorothy Thunder and I saw the root for prairie (*paskw-*) in Highway's spelling. His spelling could support any one of these transliterations and translations, and his decision not to use SRO might be to preserve the language's potential to act as a marker of specific communities, histories, and places.

4 *môsokot* (ᒨᓱᑯᐟ) literally means "moose nose." There is, however, a non-fictional place in Manitoba originally called Moosocoot Lake, located southeast of Split Lake, so I am reluctant to declare this place indisputably fictional.

5 *êmâtât* (∇Ĺ·Ċ′); *mât* is a transitive animate verb meaning "to have sexual intercourse with someone," and here it is conjugated in the conjunct mode with a third person singular actor and an obviative object. Although this name is not italicized, this phrase is used later on in the novel, where it is italicized (203). Highway glosses the phrase as "he/she's fucking her/him" (307).

6 *kostâci* (ḋ∩Ċ∩) means "to be afraid." *nikostâcin* (σḋ∩Ċ∩⸱) means "I am afraid."

7 *cahcahkayow* (∪"∪"bᐟ∘). Thanks to Thunder for translating this word for me.

8 Thanks to Thunder for translating this word for me.

9 Moostoos is a common family name and is also funny in Cree: *mostos* (⅃∩Ɔ∩) means "bovine" or "cow."

10 *êmanâpitêpitât* (∇Ĺ·ȯ∧∪∧Ċ′); *manâpitêpis* is a transitive animate verb, meaning "to loosen, pull, or knock out someone's tooth," and it is conjugated in the conjunct mode with a third person singular actor and an obviative object. Note that in this form of the verb the final "s" changes to a "t," hence you read or hear *êmanâpitêpitât* and not *êmanâpitêpisât*. Thanks to Thunder for helping me translate this word.

11 Thunder and I laughed a lot when we figured this one out. I later read that Heather Hodgson's mother and Tomson Highway also had a good laugh at Eemanapiteepitat. Highway explains, "In English it would mean 'he pulls her teeth or his teeth,' as a dentist would. . . . It sounds really funny in Cree" (par. 5).

12 Thanks to Thunder for telling me the connotations of "rocks" in our discussion of "Ootasneema Saskatchewan" (Highway, *Kiss* 25).

13 *sôniyâwikimâw* or *sôniyâw-okimâw* (�)ᐃᐲⴶᴸ∘ or ᐸσᐸᴶ∘-ᐅᐲᴸ∘); *sôniyâw* means "money" and *okimâw* means "chief," so the word is literally "money-chief."

14 Thanks to Thunder for making the connection between Choggylut and "chocolate."

15 *pôsiy* (>ᵣᐩ) from the English loan word pussy: a domestic cat, with the diminutive added to make *pôsîs* (>ᵣⁱ∩): kitten. Again, this European loan word has been part of many Cree dialects for years, and can be found in Faries' Cree-English dictionary, which is based on Watkins' 1865 work.

16 Her name is Marie+sis; as noted above, *-sis* is the diminutive ending in Cree.

17 *okimâw* (ᐅᐲᴸ∘) means chief, and *okimâsis* (little chief) is the same word with the diminutive suffix. When you add a diminutive suffix, the semivowel (*w* or *y*) is dropped and the preceding vowel is lengthened. Okimâsis is also a common Cree family name.

18 Kenneth Paupanekis' 2009 *Pocket Cree* phrasebook includes a Cree word for AIDS: *nînamisîwâspinêwin*, thus illustrating the Cree language's vitality.

19 *maskosis* (ᴸ∩ḋᐟ∩).

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