"You've Heard It Now"

Storytelling and Acts of Citizenship in Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*

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> Want a different ethic? Tell a different story.
> *Thomas King, The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*

Positioning Statement

As a white settler scholar working and living on the lands of the Cherokee and Catawba Peoples in what is currently North Carolina, I am directly implicated in the very networks of colonial power analyzed in this chapter. Even though I am committed to being a good reader and listener who lets the texts with which I engage speak for themselves, as an outsider to the stories and communities discussed here there are undoubtedly ways in which my understanding falls short. Working to mitigate these limitations, I employ a specific attentiveness to citation politics and theoretical traditions, ensuring that the voices I engage with are those of Indigenous and settler scholars working ethically—that is, scholars who center and sustain Indigenous knowledges—within Indigenous (literary) studies and citizenship studies.

Introduction

In the first chapter of Cherie Dimaline's (Métis) *The Marrow Thieves*, the protagonist French(ie) is lost, wandering and wounded, on the apocalyptic lands of what was once Canada. Frenchie's brother, Mitch, has just been taken by settler Recruiters: "truancy officers" modeled after the Indian agents who took Indigenous children

from their families and placed them in residential schools (Dimaline 2).[1] Mitch will be taken to a facility where his body will be mined for its bone marrow—the antidote to an illness that has rendered the settler population unable to dream and resulted in "a plague of madness" (Dimaline 53). In this "new" world, Indigenous Peoples retain the ability to dream and are hunted by Recruiters working for neo-residential schools, propping up a settler state structure that is once again actively pursuing genocide.[2] When Frenchie is found by an Indigenous family of two Elders and eight youth, he collapses into sobs: "no one made a motion or mouthed a reproach. They just let me be broken, because soon I wouldn't be anymore. Eventually, I wouldn't be alone, either. And maybe tomorrow I'd wake up and find myself closer to *home*" (Dimaline 17; emphasis added). The early feeling of belonging implied by the word "home" introduces some of the novel's core questions: what does belonging look like for Indigenous Peoples after another apocalypse? What kind of belonging can be cultivated in such a space, and how does it differ from—or extend—what came before?

Offering one possible answer, *Marrow Thieves* imagines what Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) believes to be all too rare in contemporary Canada: "alternatives to our present situation and relationship with colonial government and settler states" (114). Imagining one such alternative, *Marrow Thieves* centers the role that storytelling plays in creating and affirming belonging beyond the constraints of settler state membership. Here, belonging within a particular Indigenous community or nation comes with its own citizenship responsibilities. Because Indigenous nationhood is "based on the idea that the earth gives and sustains all life," people should give more to the land than they take (Simpson, *As We Have Always Done* 8–9). In this way, the integrity of Indigenous homelands is protected for future generations through an understanding of nationhood that is based on a "series of radiating responsibilities" (Simpson, *As We Have Always Done* 9). Speaking about Nishnaabeg citizenship, Simpson writes: "[w]hile our ways d[o] not require [newcomers] to give up their identity, the expression of that identity [i]s modulated" such that those wanting to be Nishnaabeg have to be "willing to live as Nishnaabeg" (*As We Have Always Done* 90). Nishnaabeg citizenship, then, is "based on a self-determination of individual families to decide who their family members are; it is an individual choice in terms of maintaining those responsibilities *and* local community acceptance" (Simpson, *As We Have Always Done* 90; emphasis original).

1 As representatives of the Canadian federal government, Indian Agents upheld governmental policies on reserves.

2 I use the noun *Indigenous Peoples* because of its breadth, spirit of inclusion, and international recognition following the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The proper noun affirms "spiritual, political, territorial, linguistic, and cultural distinctions" while the plural *Peoples* reflects "cultural integrity and diversity" (Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* 6; Younging 65). At the same time, I acknowledge the erasure such an umbrella term can cause, and I invoke specificity wherever possible.

This reciprocal recognition informs my continued use of the word "citizenship" in this chapter which I employ in the same spirit as Simpson—in rejection of settler state citizenship and its forms of recognition.

Alternatives to present relationships with the settler state are expressed throughout *Marrow Thieves*. In particular, these expressions manifest in what citizenship studies refers to as "acts of citizenship": the "collective or individual deeds" that produce subjects who belong within the wider ecology of their worlds (Isin and Nielsen 2). In the context of *Marrow Thieves*, however, these acts of citizenship are articulated as acts of *Indigenous resurgence*: the "set of practices through which the regeneration and reestablishment of Indigenous nations [can] be achieved" (*As We Have Always Done* 16). These practices are those that make someone Nishnaabeg: "story or theory, language learning, ceremony, hunting, fishing, ricing, sugar making, medicine making, politics, and governance" (*As We Have Always Done* 19). Importantly, this significant reinvestment in Indigenous ways of being is a form of "nation building, not nation-state building" (Simpson, "Indigenous Resurgence and Co-Resistance" 22; Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back* 17).[3] In this context, acts of resurgence are acts of decolonial citizenship that rebuild Indigenous nations and communities.

My reading of *Marrow Thieves* focuses on one act of citizenship in particular: storytelling. Story, or storytelling, is central to the identities and worldviews of Indigenous Peoples and their nations. Story carries knowledge imparted by the land and theorized over millennia to form codes of ethics for living a balanced life full of accountability (Settee 436). Within Indigenous communities the relationship between story and knowing is often inseparable as stories are essential pedagogical tools that empower their audience to become informed about the world in which they live and how they should relate to that world (Iseke and Brennus 245; Kovach 94). In this way, storytelling is often used as a method of teaching that invites its listeners to search for meaning by engaging with the storyteller in reflection and analysis (Dumbrill and Green 492). These teachings are the foundation for Indigenous ways of knowing which impart guidance on how to understand and relate to the environment. Story, then, does more than entertain: it conjures "vessels for passing along teachings, medicines, and practices that can assist members of the collective" (Kovach 95). In the oral tradition, stories cannot be "decontextualised from the teller. They are active agents within a relational world … and are thus recounted relationally"

3 *Marrow Thieves* deeply engages with Nishnaabeg worldviews and, as such, my analysis relies heavily on Anishinaabe teachings and scholarship. Although they are not the focus of my analysis, I recognize that Cree and Métis worldviews also play central roles in community resurgence within the novel. See Turner for a reading of the novel that engages both Cree and Métis knowledges.

(Kovach 94). Storytelling is therefore a relational and reciprocal process that necessitates the presence of more than one participant: the presence of a community. As Lawrence W. Gross (Anishinaabe) writes, "the Anishinaabe are storytellers" and their stories teach "the stock of knowledge and wisdom found in the culture" (155). For Anishinaabeg, understanding the stories imparted by community Elders means understanding yourself, your world, where you come from and where you are going (Gross 157). Nishnaabeg thought—present throughout *Marrow Thieves*—underscores the importance of thinking about belonging as a social phenomenon, what citizenship studies calls "the art of being with others" (Isin et al. 7). After all, "citizenship is social before it is civil or political" (Isin et al. 285). In this way, *Marrow Thieves* shows readers how an Indigenous understanding of belonging, of a citizenship taught by the land through story, can create sustainable communities. This citizenship centers a relational understanding of the wider kinship networks each citizen is responsible to by virtue of their presence on the land. Ultimately, I contend that by theorizing acts of resurgence—and storytelling in particular—as acts of citizenship, *Marrow Thieves* imagines more equitable futures for all relations.

Context(s)

The importance of this bond between resurgence and citizenship becomes even more urgent when readers consider how belonging is too often theorized in terms of state-sanctioned citizenship. Within the Eurowestern imaginary, citizenship is "a set of practices (cultural, symbolic and economic) and a bundle of rights and duties (civil, political and social) that define an individual's membership in a polity" (Isin and Wood 4). Who makes a good candidate for citizenship is frequently defined through opposition with the citizen's other, through what the citizen is not (Isin 4). Settler state belonging in what is currently Canada has historically and contemporarily relied upon a particular iteration of this other—the concept of the "savage"—to delineate and arbitrate boundaries of belonging, as well as the grounds upon which Indigenous Peoples can be granted differentiated citizenship.[4] Tracing the concept of the "savage" from ancient Greece to the European Enlightenment and colonization of the "new" world, Robert Williams Jr. (Lumbee) notes that "From its very beginnings in ancient Greece, Western civilization has sought to invent itself through the idea of the savage" (1). This form of otherness attempted to legitimate westward expansion in what became North America by constructing Indigenous

4 Differentiated citizenship refers to "the legal entitlement of particular groups to different rights in addition to the individual rights common to all citizens of a polity" (Blackburn 66). Indian Status in Canada, as determined by the Indian Act, is one example of differentiated citizenship.

Peoples as "uncivilized" and, consequently, unable to hold property.[5] These attempts at legitimation hinge upon the 1823 legal precedent establish in *Johnson v. M'Intosh* which gave ownership rights to the European sovereigns who "discovered" the land "empty" of anyone "civilized" (Robertson 3). Over time, the concept of the "savage" became the Indian simulation: the "uncivilized" other responsible for the definition of the civilized settler citizen who always already belongs.[6] As Pauline Wakeham writes in *Taxidermic Signs*, Indigenous Peoples are too often conceived of as existing outside of the present. In this way, they are disappeared to an "always already anterior realm" so a settler future can be guaranteed (Wakeham 16).

For Indigenous Peoples living within Canada, citizenship was equated with loss. Canadian citizenship was initially only achievable through enfranchised assimilation—specifically, the giving up of differentiated citizenship, Indian Status, bestowed by the 1876 Indian Act. In other words, Indigenous Peoples "had to become 'civilized' before they could take on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, including the franchise and the ability to own property" (Blackburn 67). Such enfranchisement, as James (Sákéj) Youngblood Henderson (Chickasaw and Cheyenne) writes, "inverts rather than respects the constitutional relationship" (415). This inversion comes through a stripping of the rights that make possible any nation-to-nation relationship between Indigenous and settler people. To this day, Indian Status remains determined by a politics of recognition arbitrated by the Indian Act. It is through activism and amendments that political and civil rights have been made available to Indigenous Peoples without the condition that they give up their identity and separate status (King, *The Inconvenient Indian* 68; Blackburn 68). Despite these amendments, Indigenous Peoples in Canada continue to agitate for self-determination against a hegemonic criteria of belonging that is bound to a normative white identity (Blackburn 68).

The politics and realities of Indian Status in Canada ultimately reveal the settler state's disturbing reliance on Indigenous disappearance through enfranchisement. The state's explicit goal of erasure is symptomatic of the complications Indigenous

5 Property ownership is problematic not only within the context of citizenship where inequality is entrenched by, for example, birthright citizenship's role in inheritance (see Shachar 2009), but by its ability to perpetuate the invisibility of marginalized peoples via limits to their material participation in what Scott Obernesser's chapter rightly calls petro-capitalism. As Obernesser points out, this erasure is thinly veiled as nation-building. Additionally, it is worth noting that because of the reciprocal relationship between Indigenous Peoples and land, a Eurowestern understanding of land as property is irreconcilable with Indigenous worldviews.

6 See Gerald Vizenor's *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* for his theorization of the concept of the Indian/*indian*, an "occidental invention that became a bankable simulation," drawn from Jean Baudrillard's concepts of simulation and simulacrum (11).

identity brings to bear on settler citizenship, "challenging the basis of the very existence of the nation-state" (Wood 371). Indigenous presence, then, is a reminder of the lack of legitimacy at the core of settler belonging in North America and is a threat to settler state permanence. The settler anxiety stemming from this reality has initiated and sustained systems of surveillance such as reserves/reservations,[7] the Pass System,[8] the Sixties Scoop and Millennium Scoop,[9] boarding/residential schools,[10] and prisons.[11] These modes of surveillance aim to maintain settler supremacy by limiting Indigenous Peoples' access to land.[12]

In stark contrast with Euroamerican interpretations of belonging to or within a particular state, theorizations of belonging within the Indigenous nations of North America have historically been grounded in the belief that people belong to the land and the land does not and cannot belong to people. To live by this understanding is to offer a further threat to the settler way of life which relies of the faulty Doctrine of Discovery to legitimize claim to land (Whitt et al. 712). According to Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux), Indigenous Peoples "hold their lands—*places*—as having the highest possible meaning, and all their statements are made with this reference

7 In Canada, the legal term is "reserve"; in the US, it is "reservation." In Canada, Indigenous children were taken from their families and placed in "Indian Residential Schools." In the US, these are referred to as "American Indian Boarding Schools" and occasionally "American Indian Residential Schools."

8 The Pass System (1885–1951) was a segregationist policy primarily practiced in the western prairie regions that made it impossible for Indigenous Peoples to leave reservations without a signed pass from an Indian Agent. While heavily enforced, the system was never made law in part because it disrespected existing treaty agreements.

9 The "Sixties Scoop" refers to a series of decades that, beginning in the 1960s, saw the removal of Indigenous children from their families and the adoption of those children into primarily non-Indigenous, middle-class families in both Canada, the US, and beyond. The "Millennium Scoop" recognizes that this process continues to happen today in Canada. In September, 2019, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) found that "40 000 – 80 000 First Nations children were deprived of public services and wrongfully removed from their families between 2006 and 2017" (Hay et al.). The CHRT ordered the federal government to pay $40,000 to each victim of discrimination—a decision which Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is appealing at the time of this work's publication.

10 The residential school system aimed to completely detach students from their societies and kin by "killing the Indian in the child" (Young 65).

11 The relationship between the Sixties Scoop, residential school systems, and incarceration is receiving steadily greater attention. It has been argued that the Canadian prison system is an extension of not only the Indian Residential School system, but the child welfare system as well (Chartrand; Finaly; MacDonald; "'Child Welfare to Prison Pipeline'"). Indigenous Peoples are disproportionately represented in Canadian prisons, with Indigenous men and woman making up thirty percent of the federal prison population ("'Child Welfare to Prison Pipeline'").

12 For more on citizenship and surveillance, see Cho.

point in mind" (62; emphasis original). Land is therefore more than home, land is an "ontological framework for understanding relationships" (Coulthard, "Place Against Empire" 79); land imparts the very ways of knowing and being that comprise Indigenous worldviews (Blaeser 31). In this way, land is "everything: identity, the connection to our ancestors, the home of our nonhuman kinfolk, our pharmacy, our library, the source of all that sustained us. Our lands are where our responsibility to the world was enacted, sacred ground. It belonged to itself; it was a gift, not a commodity, so it could never be bought or sold" (Blaeser 29–30). Rather than land functioning as property, resource, or capital, land is the foundation of a holistic and reciprocal set of relations that impart ways of being and knowing. It is for this very reason that settler colonialism is so deeply invested in "undoing" Indigenous relationships to land so that extractive structures may be installed (Justice, "A Better World Becoming" 21–22). Understanding this disturbing reality illuminates the logic behind settler colonialism's obsession with the separation of Indigenous Peoples from land that goes far beyond access to resources. As Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) reminds readers, the goal of destroying Indigenous Peoples' "specific, constitutive relationships" to place pursues the goal of total Indigenous erasure ("A Better World Becoming" 33). According to Glen Sean Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene), "Indigenous struggles against capitalist imperialism are best understood as struggles oriented around the question of *land*—struggles not only *for* land, but also deeply *informed* by what the land as a mode of reciprocal *relationship* … ought to teach us" (*Red Skin, White Masks* 60; emphasis original). Even in the face of such destruction, Indigenous nations and people have found ways to carry these relations with them, to survive, adapt, and thrive in contexts that consistently work to discredit and devalue their knowledges. In the next section, I situate my contribution within the relevant literature before turning to my close reading of storytelling in the novel.

Critical Reception of *Marrow Thieves*

Marrow Thieves is Dimaline's fifth novel and arguably the one that has conjured the most attention: it won the 2017 Governor General's Award for English-language children's literature; a 2017 Kirkus Prize, in the young adult category; the Burt Award for First Nations, Métis and Inuit Literature; and the 2018 Sunburst Award for young adult fiction. Since its publication, *Marrow Thieves* has continued to receive steady critical attention. Scholars have attended to the text's critical take on resource extraction, climate change, racism, and the impacts of the anthropocene (Amanolahi; Ingwersen; Xausa); its unique approaches to transgenerational and transnational concerns (Brydon; Cannella; Heise-von der Lippe); the connection between grounded normativity (connection to land and community) and coming of age (Rose); as well as its pedagogic functions (Ketcheson). More recently, scholars

have considered how water can be interpreted through wahkohtowin, the Cree and Métis concept for kinship, family, or relation (Turner); or how Dimaline infuses the novel with Anishinaabemowin as a means to connect with literary predecessors and ancestors (Fachinger 128). Taken together, these interventions highlight the ways in which *Marrow Thieves* attends to contemporary issues with a story about the not-so-distant future.

Little work has been done, however, to specifically consider the role of storytelling in *Marrow Thieves*. Emily Childers and Hannah Menendez have considered how linear reality, under scientific progress, is challenged by collective memory and storytelling in both *Marrow Thieves* and Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* (Childers and Menendez). Differently, Patrizia Zanella asserts that the novel's depiction of "coming-to stories" (narrated personal experiences) and "Story" (communal oral history) "revea[l] settler colonialism's co-constitutive attempts at self-supersession and Indigenous elimination" (177). Zanella sees these storytelling episodes as disruptions to the larger settler narrative that uncover "the tracks settler colonialism seeks to hide" as it pursues a linear understanding of reconciliation without truth (177). Anah-Jayne Samuelson and I focus on how both storytelling and language empower youth through reconnection to knowledge systems and ways of being while creating the conditions for a collective resurgence (Samuelson and Evans). By observing how story functions as a resurgent act of citizenship, scholars can see how *Marrow Thieves* invites readers to imagine a world away from settler colonialism where belonging is defined by a reciprocal relationship with the land, imparted by story. In this chapter's next section, I turn to my close reading of the novel.

History of the Land

The Story chapters in *Marrow Thieves*—"Story: Part One" and "Story: Part 2"—present a communal oral history of the land upon which the characters reside. Told by Migwans, Story communicates "precolonial Anishinaabe history and stories of resistance, from the West Coast to nêhiyawaskiy and Northern communities" (Zanella 181).[13] I observe this act of storytelling, and its reciprocal act of listening, as an act of resurgence *and* citizenship that situates Frenchie's family within a wider ecological community of human and non-human kin. Receiving and telling Story thereby offers one means through which the youth characters come to understand their citizenship responsibilities to the land.

13 In the novel, it is important that characters are ready to hear Story. Their readiness is decided by their community rather than an arbitrary age that they reach regardless of personal development. I discuss one example of this in reference to RiRi in the next section.

Through Story, Miigwans connects his family members to what they call the "real old-timey": Indigenous ways of being and knowing built over millennia (Dimaline 21, 174).[14] Frenchie thinks to himself, "[u]s kids, we longed for the old-timey. We wore our hair in braids to show it. We made sweat lodges out of broken branches dug back into the earth, covered over with our shirts tied together at the buttonholes" (21–22). Hearing Story puts them in touch with the "old-timey" continuum of events and knowledge that Frenchie and his family carry forward through acts of resurgence. Frenchie reflects on the importance of Miig's Story sessions:

> We needed to remember Story. It was [Miig's] job to set the memory in perpetuity. He spoke to us every week. Sometimes Story was focused on one area, like the first residential schools … Other times he told a hundred years in one long narrative … sometimes we gathered for an hour so he could explain treaties, and others it was ten minutes to list the earthquakes in the sequence that they occurred … But every week we spoke, because it was imperative that we know. He said it was the only way to make the kinds of changes that were necessary to really survive. (25)

Making "the kinds of changes that [are] necessary to survive" means living in communion with the land. Frenchie's statement clarifies one of Story's key imperatives: understanding how people belong to the land and what happens when this understanding is abused or obscured. In "Story: Part One," Miig details how the Anishinaabe People "lived on these lands for a thousand years" and "welcomed visitors, who renamed the land Canada" (23). At moments like this the "boys always puffed out their chests" and the women "straightened their spines and elongated their necks" demonstrating pride in their histories (23). Among the chronology of events Miig details are conflicts with settlers and the diseases they brought to North America, the residential school system, the ten years of "Water Wars" that occurred when America "reached up and started sipping on our lakes with a great metal straw" (24), the melting of the North and the rising seas, the "tectonic shifts" and the "disease that spread from too many corpses and not enough graves" (26). Here, history is not just stories

14 Although "old-timey" can appear to characterize Indigenous ways of being and knowing as part of the past, the use of the term in *Marrow Thieves* asserts the presence of these knowledges in rejection of such characterization. The characters are regenerating Indigenous ways and knowledges in the present that have been a sustained (if challenged) presence for millennia. In depicting this regeneration across generations and in pursuit of Indigenous futures, the "old-timey" comes to describes Indigenous presence across the past, present, and future in a reflection of a spiralic understanding of temporality. As Anah-Jayne Samuelson and I write in our article on *Marrow Thieves* for *Studies in the Novel*, "[o]ld-timey resurgence in *Marrow* is therefore not only speculative of the ways things could be for Indigenous Peoples, but representative of a sustained and ongoing way of being that is an alternative to the iterative, cyclical process of colonialism" (289).

of the people but stories of the land that situate humans in a holistic relationship with non-human kin.

In "Story: Part 2," Miig underscores the importance of a reciprocal relationship with the land whereby humans care for land so it will care for them. Miig picks up where he left off: when the earth was broken by human exploitation after "[t]oo much taking for too damn long" (87). He explains that when rising water levels came so too did changing weather: tsunamis, tornadoes, and earthquakes, that permanently altered the borders of various countries. The pipelines in the ground "snapped like icicles and spewed bile over forests, into lakes, drowning whole reserves and towns" (87). Living outside of reciprocal relations with land results in dangerous weather patterns and the land's rejection of extractive infrastructures. Eventually non-Indigenous people stopped dreaming and the "plague of madness" began (53). That is, until scientists found the cure for the missing dreams "in the honeycombs of slushy marrow buried in [Indigenous Peoples'] bones" (90). This discovery resulted in the removal of Indigenous Peoples from their lands for the (re)building of residential schools that "gro[w] up from the dirt like poisonous brick mushrooms" (89). Miig states plainly that if caught by the marrow thieves: "'we join our ancestors, hoping we left enough dreams behind for the next generation to stumble across'" (90). This grim reality echoes the fallout from yet another settler-induced apocalypse as non-Indigenous people seek to secure their future at the expense of Indigenous lives.

To practically apply what they learn about this history of the land and respecting their relationship with it, Miig and Minerva alternate teaching the young characters Hunting and Homesteading. In doing so, the Elders seek to impart what it means to belong to the land. Alternating every three months, Miig takes a group into the bush to learn how to track, trap, hunt, and build shelter, while Minerva teaches Anishinaabemowin (the language indigenous to the land they reside upon), how to care for the camp, and how to prepare and cook what is brought back from the hunt. Miig refers to his teachings as "Apocalyptic Boy Scouts," a reference that falls flat for the youth: "[w]e didn't know what in the hell he was talking about, but we liked fashioning bows and arrows and whooping to each other through the bush and feeling all Chiefy" (34). From Miig and Minerva's perspective, to belong is to live *with* the land by embodying a "terrestrial consciousness" that ethically engages with place (Henderson 432). Miig's commitment to telling and retelling the oral history of the land which informs and grounds Hunting and Homesteading is an act of citizenship that imparts a narrative of sustainable and sustained Indigenous presence. In continually retelling and returning to Story, Frenchie's family bolsters their terrestrial consciousness with a deeper understanding of what it means to belong to place.

On a solo hunting exercise, Frenchie applies what he has learned from Story and from his Elders. When a moose appears, Frenchie initially sees "food for a week. Hide and sinew to stitch together for tarps, blankets, ponchos. This was bone for pegs and chisels" (Dimaline 49). He sees the materials, the resources the moose could

provide. As Frenchie stares into the moose's eyes, he realizes that there would be too much meat to carry, no time to smoke or dry it, that they would leave at least half of the moose behind to rot (49). Reducing the animal to its parts results in waste and does not align with the teachings he has received from Miig and Minerva. To kill this relation, this non-human community member, would be to take more than his family needs. In deciding not to kill the moose, Frenchie performs an act of citizenship that shows a deep understanding of what it means to ethically belong to place. Frenchie demonstrates the terrestrial consciousness that reciprocally engages with place and manifests resurgence in the return to "old-timey" ways of being. Next, I turn to the role of genealogy in *Marrow Thieves* as I extend this consideration of storytelling as an act of citizenship.

Coming-To Stories

With survival so precarious in *Marrow Thieves*, the characters must be cautious about who they engage with and who they permit to join their family and community. The disclosure, acknowledgement, and recognition of genealogy is one way in which a sense of trust and safety is cultivated between characters. Coming-to stories are genealogies that reflect the Indigenous practice of what Dimaline calls "Indian geography … how we figure out who we're related to and where we're from" (Dimaline qtd. in Battiste). The importance of land to Indigenous storytelling is underscored in this process through the way genealogies "map affiliations spatially … placing individuals and families in relation to one another, and locating them in—by connecting them to—*the earth*" (Whitt et. al. 706; emphasis added). Genealogies are "stories … [that] relate how a person or a people belongs in a particular time and place, how the nonhuman things in that place have to belong there, and how all of these belong to one another" (Whitt et al. 706). Knowing where someone is from importantly situates them within a broader ecology of belonging. Offering one's genealogy thereby affirms a reciprocal belonging, a moral bond, that communicates safety through a shared set of values imparted by the land (Whitt et al. 716).

In *Marrow Thieves*, readers are privy to the full coming-to stories of just three members of Frenchie's family of ten. His family consists of Elders (Miigwans or Miig, and Minerva) and youths ranging in age from seven to eighteen (RiRi, Chi-Boy, Rose, the twins Tree and Zheegwon, Slopper, and Wab).[15] Individual chapters are dedicated to each of the three characters who share their coming-to stories: Frenchie, Wab, and Miig. While most of the novel is told from Frenchie's

15 None of the members of Frenchie's family are "related by blood" (Dimaline 20), a reality that further underscores the importance of ethical relations with land through resurgence as signifier of belonging.

perspective, these specific chapters are each narrated in first-person by the respective storyteller—a use of the first-person that highlights how each coming-to story belongs solely to its teller.

In the novel's first chapter, "Frenchie's Coming-to Story," readers learn how Frenchie found his new community after being separated from his father, mother, and brother. When existing societal structures collapsed, Frenchie's father made the decision to move the family up North. At "what was supposed to be my father's last Council meeting before he took his family north, it was decided they'd make one last-ditch effort to talk to the Governors in the capital. They never came back" (Dimaline 7). Frenchie's mother goes out in search of food but never returns having likely been taken by Recruiters. After Mitch's abduction, Frenchie decides to travel "north to the old lands" as his father had planned. It is on this journey that he is found by Miig after passing out from hunger and exhaustion (9). Upon waking, Frenchie observes the group: "they seemed to all be Native, like me" (16). Asking who they are, the oldest man speaks "'I'm Miigwans, and this is my family … We seem to be heading in the same direction. Might as well trudge on together then, eh?'" (16). This invitation to be part of Miig's family, regardless of affiliation with a particular Indigenous nation, becomes an integral part of Frenchie's coming-to story.

While readers experience Frenchie's coming-to story as the novel's first chapter where he is separated from his brother, the story simultaneously reads as though Frenchie is telling it to his new family at a later time. The events are narrated through the first-person in the past tense, shifting between simple past and past continuous. Consequently, the story exists both as beginning of the linear narrative and as a coming-to story told by Frenchie to this new family in the space between when he joins them and the years that pass before the second chapter. Frenchie's disclosure is an act of citizenship that strengthens his sense of belonging by situating him in relation to kin, thereby enacting resurgence.

Years after Frenchie's genealogy is disclosed, Wab's coming-to story is also given its own chapter. Prior to this moment, Wab is described as distant, never having said more than a few words to Frenchie in the years they have been living together (76). Frenchie reflects, "[w]e were all a little uneasy around her, I think. She was hard to figure out … Wab's [trauma] was less defined, messier somehow, and therefore more dangerous" (77). Wab's trauma is written on her face in a "a long red slash from her right cheekbone to the middle of her forehead over the other. The scar had knotted itself into a raw seam that closed the [eye] socket forever" (77). As Miig later tells Frenchie, Wab was alone for two years before joining their family and she followed them for six weeks before announcing her presence (98). Wab knew that her odds of survival were increased by joining a group, but her previous experiences led her to isolate herself and prevented her from sharing her genealogy with anyone beyond Miig. When the boys beg Miig for her story, he reminds them that "'everyone tells their own coming-to story. That's the rule. Everyone's creation story is their own'"

(79). This rule underscores story's role as an act of citizenship, of reciprocal belonging. Although it has taken years for Wab to arrive at this moment, her story functions as her own expression of consent and commitment to belonging more fully.

Wab narrates her coming-to story while the group is staying in an abandoned Four-Winds hotel. Her story begins years earlier, not long after societal structures fell apart but before the cities had emptied out. A long-distance runner, Wab had been transporting packages and messages across the city for anyone who would pay. After a year spent surviving off messenger work, she is tricked into a false delivery by a group who felt she was infringing upon their courier business. Held hostage by the men for two days, Wab is physically and sexually assaulted before eventually being released (80–85). Sharing her coming-to story, Wab performs an act of citizenship by establishing a reciprocal connection with her family members as they bear witness to her experiences and gain an understanding of where she is from and how she relates to the world.

Miig's coming-to story appears midway through the novel, but is situated as having been told at an earlier time—"a story he'd told us when RiRi had asked about the black outline of a buffalo on the back of his left hand" (99). While sheltering with his husband Isaac at Isaac's grandfather's cottage, Miig explains that their location was revealed to Recruiters by two women and a man who pretended to be Indigenous and in need of help. Miigwans and Isaac are taken to one of the new residential schools where they are separated (100–07). Miig's coming-to story ends abruptly here as the family comes across the remains of a recently inhabited camp and decide to follow its trail.

The following chapter, titled "The Other Indians," explores the limits of genealogy as a means by which story can ensure safety and belonging. After three days of tracking, the family close in on a group of two men. Miig tells his family that they have an obligation to see "who they are and if they need help. Or if maybe one of us knows one of them from before" (119). If they are true strangers, he warns, the family needs to keep moving, to take care of each other first. When one of the men hears them approaching and asks who is there, Miig cautiously initiates introductions:

> "Ahneen?"
> Silence.
> "Aandi Wenjibaayan?" Miig asked where they were from. Playing Indian geography meant you could figure out who was who before you even saw them. And for Miig, I could see why it was doubly important to establish nationhood.
> Silence. Then the reply came from a second voice. "Boozhoo. Anishinaabe?"
> "Mmmm. Niin Miigwans nindizhinikaaz." Miig moved slowly forward, introducing himself and asking for a name in return. "Aaniin ezhinikaazoyan?"
> "Niin Travis nindizhinikaaz."

> Mumbling from their end and then another voice: "Lincoln, from Hobemma Nation, out west. Tansi." The second man, the one who had called out to us at first, answered in English and then greeted Miig in Cree. (120)

This exchange, particularly the use of Anishinaabemowin in establishing genealogy, creates a sense of security that results in the family cautiously trusting Lincoln and Travis enough to set up camp with them. This sense of security proves false when events take a violent turn during the night. The men reveal themselves to be Recruiters and Lincoln grabs Riri, running off with her. In a traumatic scene, Lincoln and RiRi fall to their deaths off one of the very "sharp hills," "craggy cliffs," and "shifting rocks" grafted from "[p]recambrian rock" that the family has worked so hard to avoid as they travelled (113). Discovering RiRi's "single pink boot" at the edge of the cliff, Frenchie runs back to the camp and kills Travis in retaliation for RiRi's death (135–37). In taking advantage of genealogy's ability to create a sense of security and shared community, this scene suggests the limitations of "Indian geography" and the importance of its use alongside other modes of observation to ensure community safety. Here, Frenchie's family is reminded of the necessary risk that comes with new people and that genealogy, while an important act of citizenship, is not always a guarantee of mutual safety and shared ethics.

Frenchie killing Travis prompts Miig to reveal the rest of his coming-to story, underscoring the diverse role of story as not only an act of citizenship, but a medicine too. Miig explains how he managed to escape the school but when he went back for Isaac, he learned all the Indigenous Peoples had been killed for their bone marrow and that there was no Isaac to rescue. Miig shoots the man who provides this information, a truck driver transporting the vials of bone marrow, leaving him to die (140–45). Miig concludes by situating his story as one that Frenchie *needs* to hear as he contends with the emotional fallout from taking another person's life: "'sometimes you do things you wouldn't do in another time and place. Sometimes the path in front of you alters. Sometimes it goes through some pretty dark territory. Just make sure it doesn't change the intent of the trip…As long as the intent is good, nothing else matters. Not in these days, son'" (145). This code of ethics is part of a wider commitment to Indigenous resurgence—nation building—that Frenchie needs to hear so he can understand his actions do not put him outside the group but, rather, make him all the more a part of it.

Ultimately, specific acts of citizenship, like storytelling, are effective tools that safeguard the community at particular moments. Coming-to stories are told to the appropriate audience at the appropriate time in service of resurgence and keeping the community safe. When Wab tells her origin story "the littlest kids [RiRi and Slopper] were safe on the back porch in rocking chairs with Minerva," not yet ready to carry the weight of what Wab has to say (79). Still, protocols are occasionally transgressed, and RiRi reveals herself to have been secretly listening to Wab's story. Wab

is mortified by the event: "God, how long had she been there? What did she hear? And how could I take it back?" (86). Because this act of citizenship is a two-way street, the damage of a story told too soon is taken seriously by the group as they want RiRi to "form into a real human before she underst[ands] that some saw her as little more than a crop" (26). By walking back family history, narrating their personal oral histories, and agreeing to live under a shared ethics, the characters create a space of belonging that aids their survival. By reasserting an Indigenous understanding of what it means to belong, to be in relation to others, these coming-to stories perform acts of citizenship.

Conclusion

When Minerva is captured by recruiters, Frenchie's family embarks on a mission to rescue her by allying with the growing resistance movement outside Espanola in what was northern Ontario. It is here that Frenchie is reunited with his father who joined the resistance after being unable to find Frenchie, Mitch, and their mother. While staying with the resistance at their settlement, the characters are informed of what happened to Minerva by one of the Council's undercover spies. At School #47E, Minerva was hooked up to the machine that would drain her bone marrow but she begins to sing in the language: "[a]s it turns out, every dream Minerva had ever dreamed was in the language. It was her gift, her secret, her plan. She'd collected the dreams like bright beads on a strong of nights that wound around her each day, every day until this one" (172–73). Her song creates a force so strong it reduces the entire school to rubble: "[t]orn down by the words of a dreaming old lady" (173). Dreaming in the language proves incredibly powerful because it indicates a strong connection to Indigenous ways of being and knowing.

It is a devastating loss, then, when the "key" to their survival—Minerva—is killed by a recruiter during the group's attempt to rescue her. But dreaming in the language can be taught, and Frenchie's community does the "hard, desperate work" to "craft more keys, to give shape to the kind of Indians who could not be robbed" by beginning a youth council "to start passing on the teachings right away" (214). Still, they lack enough knowledge to enact the kind of destruction Minerva did, and they hope to find someone who can teach them.

In the novel's final chapter, when investigating strangers near their camp, the group meets a man who is fluent in a very "old Cree" and who can walk "his lineage back" in the language (227). When asked what language the man dreams in, he responds: "'Nehiyawok, big man…I dream in Cree" (228). Energized by the prospect of connection with the land through language and a way to destroy the schools, they walk back to camp. On the walk, Frenchie realizes the man is Isaac, Miigwans' husband. Watching the men reunite, Frenchie reflects: "I understood that as long as

there are dreamers left, there will never be want for a dream. And I understood just what we would do for each other, just what we would do for the ebb and pull of the dream, the bigger dream that held us all. Anything. Everything" (231). This "bigger dream" is the very process of nation building Simpson talks about when she describes resurgence, where acts of citizenship connect Frenchie and his family with their ways of being and knowing.

In demonstrating how an Indigenous community continues to survive and cultivate resurgence after yet another apocalypse, *Marrow Thieves* reminds readers of an inconvenient truth: by binding itself to the concept of the "savage" and making it necessary to the construction of its own subjectivity, citizenship as settler society has come to know it is as fragile as it is unsustainable. The complicated future presented in *Marrow Thieves* pushes the contemporary Canadian moment to its end, actualizing settler colonialism's fear of its own erasure and offering an opportunity for imagining the world otherwise through a decolonial understanding of citizenship and belonging. The novel's conclusion is hopeful, but it does not shield its audience from the work to come both for Frenchie and for the reader. The members of Frenchie's new nation safeguard their futures by sharing their coming-to stories and learning the oral stories of their people and the land so they might enter more ethical, reciprocal relationships. The reader, warned of the future being conjured by the current settler state's disregard for a sustainable understanding of citizenship through relation to land, would do well to remember Thomas King's (Cherokee) words about the responsibility of hearing story: "Take [this] story … It's yours. Do with it what you will … But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now" (*The Truth About Stories* 60).

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