

Narrative Agency and Storied Becomings in Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*

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Abstract Set in a future in which North America has succumbed to ecological disaster and the settler-colonial inhabitants have lost the ability to dream, Cherie Dimaline's novel, *The Marrow Thieves*, depicts how an ethics of reciprocal care for both humans and more-than-humans offers a means of resistance toward necropolitical colonial narratives of indigeneity. Throughout the novel, *Story*, dreams, and language are agential, and enact a communal *being with* such that the characters are able to see themselves not just in the past but also in the present and the future.

Keywords Indigenous epistemologies. Agential narrative. Land agency. Eco-critical dystopia. *The Marrow Thieves*.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Language, Dreams, and Story. – 3 Conclusions.



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We needed to remember Story.
It was his job to set the memory in perpetuity.
(Dimaline 2017, 25)

1 Introduction

Cherie Dimaline's young adult Indigenous eco-critical dystopian novel *The Marrow Thieves* depicts how an ethics of reciprocal care for both humans and more-than-humans offers a means of resistance toward necropolitical colonial¹ narratives of indigeneity (Martensen 2021). Indeed, the novel – which tells the story of twenty-first century residential schools re-purposed by the failed Canadian nation-state to extract marrow from Indigenous peoples – narrates the agential power of language while simultaneously enacting the recognition of communal *being with* the land through its own story-telling devices. This article asks how the process of storying with the land can serve to materialise the past, present, and future in a slipstream (Dillon 2012) that recognises agentic materialities for language through narrative becomings. This moves beyond the question of language as the human produced force that shapes our reality, and towards the agency and materiality of stories themselves to assert the possibility that narrative and language are themselves alive. As Patrizia Zanella notes, Dimaline's novel

offers a radically different vision rooted in the liberatory practices of Indigenous worldmaking through an expansive understanding embedded in Indigenous languages and soundscapes. (Zanella 2020, 178)

In the novel, language becomes an embodied practice that serves as a means of resisting landscapes and narratives shaped by colonial practices, forging instead worlds that live in and through Indigenous resistance and resurgence. The novel highlights the ways in which settler colonial practices are themselves part of speculative or science fiction (SF), as

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1 From contact, settler-colonial violence inscribed within Canadian social and political policies toward Indigenous and First Nations peoples have dispossessed inhabitants of the land, that, “coupled with other colonial practices such as the residential school system, intermarriage, and cultural genocide, have resulted in a permanent disruption of Indigenous ways of life” (Martensen 2021, 51). These policies, which continue today in various forms, result in a disruption of ecologies of life that are intimately linked to connection with the land.

settlers changed the landscape with intensive farming, grazing, and settlement patterns that reconfigured traditional indigenous homelands into alien landscapes. (Baldwin et al. 2018, 207)

SF, of course

is storytelling and fact telling; it is the patterning of possible worlds and possible times, material-semiotic worlds, gone, here, and yet to come. (Haraway 2016, 31)

Dimaline foregrounds Indigenous lifeways in her eco-dystopian novel that are shaped by the ongoing environmental crises. These narratives, Conrad Scott contends, do more to

bring us closer to the crises involved, rather than to underline an idea that catastrophe will happen sometime in the future (Scott 2022, 14)

while simultaneously underscoring the ways in which Indigenous being resists settler colonial narratives of “the vanishing or dying Native” (TallBear 2015, 232-3). Throughout the novel, language and Story are key to the characters’ ability to connect with the land and with each other, forging resistant strategies that privilege more-than-human communities of life within ecological disaster.

Within the novel, as we will see, the characters form and are formed by Story, the entity that both creates them all as beings but is also created by them. To accept the narrative agency of more-than-humans is to accept that the human is not exceptional in its ability to story the world. The lack of exceptionality of humans as storied and storying beings has been theorised by Indigenous peoples for far longer than the so-called new materialisms have been circulating in Western academic discourse. Without homogenizing Indigenous cultures and experiences, Simone Bignall and Daryle Rigney remind us that

‘more-than-human’ ways of knowing, being and acting have characterised Indigenous ontology, epistemology, axiology and ethology since time immemorial, and today they constitute a significant site of shared identification across the Indigenous world. (Bignall, Rigney 2018, 159)

These ‘ways of knowing’ that go beyond Western knowledge structures recognise

a cosmology of interconnectedness, which views nonhuman life forms as having inherent rights to exist and be respected as opposed to just serving the shorter-term self-centered needs of people. (Waukau-Villagomez, Malott 2010, 447)

In contrast, “the empiricism of Western science does not represent the interests or epistemological perspectives of non-Western cultures” with colonialism and Western scientific research functioning “as forms of worlding, of shaping relations between peoples and environments (and knowledge about them)” (Jekanowski 2017, 1). The elision of “Indigenous cultural and intellectual authority” within discourse on so-called new materialisms

allows Western philosophy to claim the ‘new Humanities’ as its current ‘discovery’ after modern humanism, but this apparently ‘new’ intellectual frontier in fact traces an ancient philosophical terrain already occupied by Indigenous epistemologies and associated modes of human experience. (Bignall, Rigney 2018, 160)

As the novel attests, the extractivist tendencies of colonial systems are not limited to tangible resources, like petroleum, land, and water (among many others), but extend to systems of knowledge, of ontologies of being-with, of stories and cosmologies as well. Western epistemologies and ontologies that theorise the agency of the more-than-human without taking into account Indigenous knowledges reenact colonial moves to innocence (Tuck, Yang 2012). While the contribution of the so-called new materialisms to environmental studies cannot be understated, these must, in turn, ethically engage with Indigenous knowledge if we are to shape ways of being-with the world that do not reproduce capitalistic, neoliberal futures. These “kindred theories” (Molloy et al. 2023) can and do work in conjunction to offer mutual response-ability (Haraway 2016) beyond the theoretical and discursive. Humans and nonhumans, or more-than-humans, must be understood as implicated in co-constitutive relations of becoming, and *life*, much like storying, cannot be attributed solely to the sentient. The novel, as will be discussed, enacts the very politics it advocates by privileging Indigenous epistemologies, cosmologies, and world-building through its storytelling, which recognises the narrative agency therein, and contests ways of knowing and being that refuse the life of the more-than-human.

2 Language, Dreams, and Story

The Marrow Thieves narrates how settler colonial practices of capitalist extraction decimate the environment of North America to the extent that the connection to the land has been severed and people have lost the ability to dream. Only the Indigenous inhabitants retain this ability, and so they are still, again but in a different way, rendered objects for extraction by the colonial government, hunted and locked-up in residential schools to fuel the demands of the failing

power structures, because their bone marrow is thought to enable them to dream. By capturing Indigenous peoples and literally draining them of their marrow, settler colonists and their state apparatus seek to maintain the extractivist death-ways that have long seen Native inhabitants and the land as commodities or resources to be exploited by the Canadian nation-state. The protagonist of the novel, French, manages to escape the Recruiters, those charged with bringing Indigenous peoples to the schools, and is taken in by a group of other First Nations people who together form a family attempting to forge their own life ecologies with the more-than-human world around them. This family is comprised of Miig, the titular leader, and Minerva, the group's elder, as well as a handful of young people who learn together how to reorient themselves within this post-apocalyptic environment. Kyle Powys Whyte argues, in his thinking through the apocalyptic narratives often used to discuss climate crises, that

the hardships many non-Indigenous people dread most of the climate crisis are ones that Indigenous peoples have endured already due to different forms of colonialism: ecosystem collapse, species loss, economic crash, drastic relocation, and cultural disintegration. (Whyte 2018, 226)

Dimaline's novel exemplifies the ways in which the climate apocalypse in its current iteration in the novel is not separate from those crises marked by the arrival of the colonial powers, as the writer privileges the role of Story as an agent of knowledge and change that is crucial for the survivance and resurgence of the Indigenous characters. In "Story: Part One", Miig tells the group that, initially, "We welcomed visitors, who renamed the land Canada" but that over time,

we got sick with new germs. And then when we were on our knees with fever and puked, they decided they liked us there, on our knees. And that's when they opened the first schools. (Dimaline 2017, 23)

Miig is careful to tell his listeners that despite the "years where we were lost" and the resulting "pain drowned in forgetting", when their people "remembered that we were warriors" (24) they were able to rebuild, relearn, and regroup (24). The Story Miig tells is one of healing, one that reminds his listeners not only of past resurgence, but also of their own potential to not just survive but rather to thrive.

For Scott

much Indigenous SF aims for communal healing from centuries of settler colonial violence to not only Indigenous peoples, but also to the land, waters, plants, and animals – and not just a healing *of* community, but a healing *by* community. (Scott 2022, 24)

Within the novel, much of this healing occurs through “the communal function of storytelling and listening”, wherein

The kinship-making effect of storytelling lies in this intentional act of careful consideration of how stories affect both tellers and listeners. (Zanella 2020, 181)

Within this narrative community, it is important to recognise that humans are not the only beings with a language or with Story, nor are they the only listeners. Indeed, narrative agency is an animating force of all more-than-humans and humans who form part of society from an Indigenous viewpoint, which includes “habitats and ecosystems” as these “have ethical structures, inter-species treaties and agreements” of their own (Watts 2013, 23). These forms of mutual reciprocity - of caring for and being cared for - are inherent to the ways in which all beings, including the more-than-human such as the habitats and ecosystems Watts mentions, depend upon communal being with that understands society as including subjectivities that do not include the human.

As Karen Barad has noted in work that considers the ways in which subjectivities are brought into being,

Outside of particular agential intra-actions, ‘words’ and ‘things’ are indeterminate. Matter is therefore not to be understood as a property of things but, like discursive practices, must be understood in more dynamic and productive terms - in terms of intra-activity. (Barad 2011, 150)

The storied beings that are recognised as such by the members of Miig’s ad hoc family intra-act with the world around them, as do the humans. Their material being-in-common is amplified through Story as one way of ethically understanding the mutual dependence and being-with that exist. Throughout Dimaline’s novel, Story, and the language used to tell it, is recognised as an agential being as well as a material one, that is as much a teller and a listener as the rest of the family. It is the discursive and intra-active practice of Story that sustains the being of the ecological life force. Indeed, it is through the recognition that

matter in all its forms, from subatomic particles to stellar formations, is storied matter composed of narrative agencies actively producing configurations of meaningful expressions (Oppermann 2023, 14)

that French and his kin are able to both return to themselves and expand out toward the world.

One of the other young people in the group, Rose, shares with French language that she learns during her time with Minerva, the woman elder who has lived experience of the 'old' ways and language. Rose teaches him the word *nishin*, and he "turned the word over in [his] throat like a stone; a prayer [he] couldn't add breath to, a world [he] wasn't willing to release" (Dimaline 2017, 39). The word, which Rose explains means 'good', is given a vibrancy and is animated as she and French both speak it releasing it into the air and the world around them. It also, however, retains its connection to the land, as it becomes a stone in French's mouth, a solid being that he can feel. It further becomes part of French as he is unwilling to release it, choosing to hold it in his body so that it may merge with of him. It is not only a word, but also a world. Just as the language comes from the land, so too does it retain its potential for relationality, as Rose learns from Minerva, French learns from Rose, seemingly, the word is also integrated into each of them and furthers their mutual connections as they receive it from each other.

As Zanella notes, "every word Frenchie receives is a gift and has a physical presence in the world, both in its written, syllabic form etched on a tree and in its spoken form" (2020, 189). French explains how he

reached out to feel the language on [his] skin for the first time since Minerva had breathed her words over [his] forehead when she thought [he] was sleeping during her nightly check-ins. (Dimaline 2017, 155)

Thus, language and Story are bound in a physical relationship that further grounds the group to the land. Returning to Zanella,

The words Minerva breathes and the syllabics on the tree that they encounter on their northbound journey constitute a physical act of care, a blessing, a protective charm, and a signpost to Indigenous-centered worlds. (Zanella 2020, 189).

This 'act of care' tells those who can read the syllabics that they are not alone. Etched on trees, they inscribe language onto the landscape, forging links between all beings. The trees themselves absorb the language and convey it to other survivors in such a way that the syllabics, the person who etched them, and the tree are implicated in a mutual being-with.

The importance of Story is imperative to the survivance (Vizenor 2008) of the Indigenous peoples in the novel, because it is, as French says, "imperative that we know" and so Miig tells Story every week as "it was the only way to make the kinds of changes that were necessary to really survive" (Dimaline 2017, 25). The power of Story is

such that it can shape for both good and bad, and the children learn to see themselves in Story, as when Rose joins the group and after three weeks “she [becomes] part of Story” (33). She brings with her a connection to the past – “having been raised by old people, she spoke like them” (33) – and also the future, as she joins the narrative that spills forward in time through its telling. The novel is an example of Indigenous slipstream narrative, what Grace Dillon defines as “viewing time as pasts, presents, and futures that flow together like currents in a navigable stream” (Dillon 2012, 3). The slipstream, that is, the overlapping of time in the novel is enacted through Story as a living entity. The Story Miig tells is not just about the past but, rather, it is an organic being in which each member of the group participates, forming part of the narrative’s own becoming in the present, engaging in the communal sharing that binds them all within Story’s being. The rule is that “everyone tells their own coming-to story. [...] Everyone’s creation story is their own” (Dimaline 2017, 79). The coming-to story, the story that each member has about how they came to the group, is understood as a ‘creation story’, that is, how they not only joined the group but how they became one with the group and with the Story Miig tells of Indigenous history. Thus,

The group’s ethics of story sovereignty stand in stark contrast to the coercive process of extracting Indigenous people’s bone marrow without consent nor concern for the lethal consequences of the extraction process. (Zanella 2020, 179)

In this way, Story is alive, not just an account of the past, but it grows and becomes more with the addition of each person’s private narrative, as this becomes part of the group narrative. Further, it is recognised as its own entity, that will enter the communal in its own time, without a logistics of forced giving or taking as a toll for joining the family.

Story in the novel can be conceived as what Warren Cariou terms “territory”, that “is a relation, or rather a plural and ongoing set of relations” through which “Indigenous people learn their responsibilities” and their identity (Cariou 2020, 2). Territory is the animate, desiring, and thoughtful nature of land as it communicates, and for Cariou, by understanding territory we accept that “instead of humans telling stories to mimetically represent the land, it is the land itself that communicates to humans through stories!” (1-2). This recognition of land as communicative, as animate and alert, reverts narratives of domination and oppression over the land – that is, Western, settler-colonial, capitalist narratives in which the land is an object to be exploited (a narrative that is also imposed on BIPOC – Black, Indigenous or People of Colour – who inhabit the land) – arguing instead for a land that has its own agency. Thus, “it’s crucial to think

seriously about the ways in which the stories do, in an essential way, come from the land" (Cariou 2018, 341). The link between Story and the land is rendered material in the novel, as the failing environment is mirrored in the children's longing for a resurgence that would heal both themselves and the world around them. French says that

with most of the rivers cut into pieces and lakes left as grey sludge puckers on the landscape [his] own history seemed like a myth" and so the kids "longed for the old-timey. (Dimaline 2017, 21)

Thus, when Miig communicates Story, it is something the group yearns for as a way of recognising their own agential identity. By understanding Story's ability to bring into being, by merging their own narrative within it, they can assert their own right to be, joining with the more-than-human landscape to which they belong.

When it is time for Story, Miig exhales "smoke as he spoke" and French and the others watch "the word *Story* puff over the fire and spread into a cumulative haze that smelled of ground roots and acrid burn" (Dimaline 2017, 22). They "listen with every cell" (19) as they wait for Story to penetrate their very being. The word becomes part of the world, joining the air around the group, being breathed in by them and merging with them. Story is part of the world; it is both brought into being by the land itself and is used to give shape and coherence to it. To indicate his positioning, Miig "opened a hand, palm down to indicate the ground, this ground, as he began Story" (22). Miig's gesture enacts the recognition of land aliveness, as he both grounds himself and prepares to connect with the story the land is going to tell. Story also, however, implicates the group in the land's own narrative. For Scott

the storyteller puts the onus of his teachings on those listening, on those who are asked to carry forward community-making into the real-world in opposition to current hyper capitalistic overdrive through the co-opting of science towards profit and petro modern ways of living that disconnect us from the environment and contribute to the ravaging of land and waters. (Scott 2022, 25)

Miig's Story has the double effect of drawing the group into a shared history - a history in which the land speaks through Miig and they can all speak to the land - and also a common future.

For Cariou

territory can be understood as the ground of culture; the living, nurturing, relational medium in which Indigenous communities flourish, and also the entity or being(s) from whom Indigenous people learn their responsibilities. Terristories are a relation, or rather a plural and ongoing set of relations. (Cariou 2020, 2)

This plural, ongoing set of relations, is one of mutual respect and response-ability, and one that requires the recognition of agency beyond the human, beyond the animate. Or, perhaps more clearly, to recognize the vibrancy and animation of all beings: land, rock, stones, lightening, etc. Upon meeting a larger community of Indigenous refugees who have managed to build a space for themselves that does not require frequent running, French is surprised to learn that they still hope to return home. They tell French that they are waiting and that “All we need is the safety to return to our homelands. Then we can start the process of healing” (Dimaline 2017, 193). Wondering why they would postpone healing, French asks “Can’t you just heal out here?” (193). The men in the group are patient in the answer that they are the land, and when one heals so does the other, telling him that

we can start healing the land. We have the knowledge, kept through the first round of these blasted schools, from before that, when these visitors first made their way over here like angry children throwing tantrums. When we heal our land, we are healed also. (193)

Mutual healing arises through processes of mutual care, mutual response-ability, and mutual narratives. These narratives, like Miig’s story, frame the land, as Christina Turner notes, as being granted full agency, and “This agentic earth rebels against her exploitation” (Turner 2021, 43). The land’s rebellion and the rebellion of the people who inhabit it are bound together through their shared Story and language.

Dream, Story, and language in Dimaline’s novel are all part of the same symbiotic process that links being and land aliveness. In the novel, the Canadian settler-colonial state crumbles as the land is killed off, enacting the necropolitical policies that fuel extractivism and capitalist modes. The inability to understand the land as more than an inert substance is mirrored in the inability to understand Story. As the environmental impacts of colonial and neocolonial practices become more apparent, some “people turned to Indigenous people [...] looking for ways we [the Indigenous] could help guide them” but even this desire for help is deaf to Story as they looked “for ways they could take what we had and administer it themselves” asking “How could they best appropriate the uncanny ability we kept to dream? How could they make ceremony better, more efficient, more economical?” And it is the inability to recognize Story, and its corollaries dreaming and language, that is lost on the settler, as “They stopped dreaming. And a man without dreams is just a meaty machine with a broken gauge” (Dimaline 2017, 88). The extractivist drive is solidified in the capitalist view of the Indigenous peoples as a resource to, quite literally, be tapped, as they turn to suck the marrow

from them as the only ones still capable of dreaming. And yet, the inability to see the connection between the dreams, the land, and the inhabitants is precisely the blindness that renders them dreamless.

When Miig attacks a delivery truck in the hopes of rescuing his husband Isaac, he finds instead the vials of marrow. While he cannot save the corporeal forms of the Indigenous peoples who have been violated, he does what he can to return the dreams to the land: he “drove to the lake, one of the last ones [he] knew still held fish”. He returned the marrow to the water and “sang each one of them home when [he] poured them out. It rained, a real good one, too. So [he knew] they made it back safe” (Dimaline 2017, 145). The marrow, including the dreams of those stolen by the nation state, are here returned to the world in an act of what Patrizia Zanella identifies as ethical kinship. She states that

Miig models kinship that not only extends to humans in a wider sense than the nation state’s emphasis on the nuclear family, but to the other-than-human or more-than-human kin, the land, and the waters. Kinship is created through acts of caretaking that restore proper relations between these different yet interconnected entities. (Zanella 2020, 186)

These interconnected identities are the song and language Miig uses, the dreams the marrow contains, and the land and water and all systems supported by, and that support, them. Bearing in mind that “language, culture, religion, and landscape” are entwined and “are integrated cultural resources that defy colonial notions of knowledge, agency, and power” (Baldwin et al. 2018, 205), rather than extractivist tendencies that remove kin from the land in unethical or non-nourishing ways, Miig restores the stolen marrow in the hope that the language, dreams, and Story will serve to replenish some of what has been lost.

The intertwined role of language, dreams, and Story is made even more apparent when Minerva, who has been captured by the state, is recognised by French and the group as the ‘key’ to dismantling the system. When the Recruiters attempt to extract her marrow:

Minerva hummed and drummed out an old song on her flannel thighs throughout it all. But when the wires were fastened to her own neural connectors, and the probes reached into her heartbeat and instinct, that’s when she opened her mouth. That’s when she called on her blood memory, her teachings, her ancestors. That’s when she brought the whole thing down.

She sang. She sang with volume and pitch and a heartbreakingly 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.

As 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 string of nights that wound around her each day, every day until this one. (Dimaline 2017, 172-3)

Minerva's dreams here are the generative force of survivance and resurgence. Her song is embodied, her heartbeat a drum, and her voice the voice of many – past, present, and future. The language connects to the land here as it rattles her relatives' bones, the bones of those who were murdered in the previous residential school system. Her memory is not singular but communal, her blood the visceral legacy of her ancestors' teachings, teachings that became her own, and that would carry on after her through the children. The strength of the language is not just the words themselves, but rather their connection to all beings, living and non, or rather, a connection that recognises all beings as living and agential, as it causes the mechanical failure, the "pop and sizzle" of malfunctioning probes and computers, that cause the system failure (Dimaline 2017, 173).

Minerva's rebellion enacts what Vanessa Watts identifies as *Place-Thought*. That is,

the non-distinctive space where place and thought were never separated because they never could or can be separated. Place-Thought is based upon the premise that the land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts. (Watts 2013, 1)

Here, language, dreams, and Story are agential actors in the rebellion against a state sanctioned violence that would (and does) continue to ignore their lifeways. As Minerva sings, she activates the past, present, and future through a connection to the very land that articulates their being.

The presence and importance of language and Story here, as part of the continued vibrancy of Native being in the novel, is in line with what Baldwin, Noodin, and Perley identify in their work on ecologies of language. Namely, that

American Indian language advocates have been pushing back to shift the focus away from extinction and toward vitalities emerging from communities of continuity. (Baldwin et al. 2018, 204)

While in no way downplaying the devastation of language loss, the authors argue that the “concepts of extinction and endangerment” are colonial legacies, and that they are used to “perpetuate colonial domination and oppression of indigenous concepts and practices” (204). Thus, the authors look for ways to challenge the question of language extinction away from colonial concepts and toward vitalities. Among these challenges the authors cite Bernard Perley’s work on the Maliseet language, in which he

argues that the emphasis on the linguistic code is misplaced and that more attention must be paid to the community and the emerging social relationships that are mediated by the Maliseet language. (Baldwin et al. 2018, 205)

In Dimaline’s novel, the vitality of the language as seen in emergent social relations is enacted through being in common and building futures through their shared past. After losing Minerva, and the “key” (Dimaline 2017, 213) to defeating the settler colonial state because of her knowledge of language and culture, the remaining “Council spent a lot of time piecing together the few words and images each of us carried: hello and goodbye in Cree, a story about a girl named Sedna whose fingers made all the animals of the North” (214). This process of re-memembering through language, Story, and image is here figured as a communal act of survival. Each and every member of the Council and the community has the responsibility to the bonds of more-than-human kinship to keep the past, present, and future alive. This is an act of “emergent vitality” (Baldwin et al. 2018), which stresses the intra-actual (Barad 2011) process of being-with that

places emphasis on the interaction between speakers who produce the texts rather than focusing on the texts at the expense of the social relations. (Baldwin et al. 2018, 217)

For the characters in Dimaline’s novel, the living ecology can only emerge through the interactions between humans and more-than-humans in linguistic, cultural, and thus ecological, becomings.

3 Conclusions

At the end of the novel, as the community attempts to rebuild and move toward an ever-elusive home, they come across a group of four other travellers. In their attempts to determine whether the group are friend or foe, they converse with one of them in Cree. Clarence, the most fluent in Cree, reports to the others that one of the men is “speaking an old Cree I don’t even fully know. He’s way more

fluent than me or anyone else I've met. And walked his lineage back" (Dimaline 2017, 227). When French points out that the man is not old enough to replace Minerva as their key to both the past and future, Rose asks: "Why does he have to be old? [...] The key doesn't have to be old, the language already is" (227). Once French has determined that the man dreams in Cree, that is, that the language lives through him and that it connects him bodily to the past, he is welcomed into the community as a potential new 'key' to connect them all to the future. The group recognises the importance of this connection through language as a means not only of preserving Terristory, but also of reviving practices of futurity that depend on the interactions language enables. Preserving language ecologies goes beyond the linguistic form to preserve "the social relations that are mediated by those languages" (Baldwin et al. 2018, 207). The "social relations" identified go beyond those enacted between humans, extending to the more-than-human as well, to solidify Indigenous ecologies of being. In the novel, the importance is highlighted as the group engages in the work of crafting "more keys, to give shape to the kind of Indians who could not be robbed" (Dimaline 2017, 214), despite the fact that this "was hard, desperate work" and that they "felt hollow in places and at certain hours [they] didn't have names for in [their] language" (214). As the text notes, the inability to name certain hours or places leaves them feeling 'hollow' or empty, with an absence that is identifiable, but cannot be filled without generating more knowledge networks.

French asserts that "We needed to remember Story. It was [Miig's] job to set the memory in perpetuity" (Dimaline 2017, 25). With the understanding that Story, language, and dreams are all intertwined actions of land agency, Dimaline's novel posits a means of countering narratives of extraction and exploitation and the physical repetition of residential school traumas. The novel enacts what Warren Cariou identifies as an "Indigenized ethic of interpretation" as stories "come from the land" and are not merely generated by humans residing on the land (Cariou 2018, 341). This unequivocal relationship to the land, or Place-Thought (Watts 2013), is enacted in Dimaline's novel, and the alternative to thinking and being *with* the land is the apocalyptic destruction and cannibalistic tendencies settler-colonists impose on Indigenous peoples. *The Marrow Thieves* thus works through the modes of Native slipstream and Indigenous futurism (Dillon 2012) to enact resistance to colonial modes of being and becoming through the recital of Story and its unequivocal corollaries of dreams and language as a means of, as Grace Dillon notes, *biskaabi-iyang*, an Anishinaabemowin word connoting the process of "returning to ourselves" (Dillon 2012, 10). The living ecologies that emerge from this 'return' are narratives of resistance to settler-colonial neocolitics that deny Indigenous futuring.

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