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Apocalypse When? Storytelling and Spiralic Time in Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* and Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God*

ABSTRACT

Contemporary climate fiction (cli-fi) frequently invokes the concept of apocalypse to explore the experience of living through the era of unprecedented climate change and environmental disaster that has been named the Anthropocene. Yet, as often as apocalyptic narratives are deployed to express those anxieties and experiences, they so often ignore the histories and presents of peoples who have already lived through multiple apocalypses—in particular, the ongoing violence of settler colonial exploitation of the land now called North America. Considering the role that settler colonialism has played in the development of the current crisis, we turn to two recent works by the Métis writer Cherie Dimaline and Ojibwe author Louise Erdrich to consider how the act of cultural storytelling challenges Western notions of linear temporalities. Our analysis of Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* will explore how the settler-colonial narratives of scientific progress is challenged through Indigenous storytelling and collective memory, and our analysis of Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* will examine how Indigenous modes of understanding operate through a cyclical timescape that allows for alternative methods of existing with and within the larger world.

Keywords: Indigenous literature, speculative fiction, apocalypse, storytelling, survivance, settler colonialism.

INTRODUCTION¹

The term Anthropocene remains the de facto way of discussing the current geological era characterized by environmental crisis brought upon by the exploitation of the planet's natural resources by humans, though many have proposed alternatives such as Plantationocene, Capitalocene, and even Chthulucene among others. The proliferation of labels comes from the fundamental flaws of a term like "Anthropocene," which implies an equal share of responsibility for human involvement in the current climate crisis, erasing centuries of Western colonial and capitalist exploitation of the land and its peoples (Hayman 78). The practices that have stripped the land of its resources, resulted in the extensive loss of biodiversity, and produced massive amounts of pollution, are directly tied to the modernizing project and Enlightenment humanist privileging of man above all else.

The relationship between Indigenous² peoples and the land is fraught, as Western colonial narratives often treat ecologically-minded Indigenous cultures as primitive and premodern. Even contemporary ecocritical work is not free from the fetishized and appropriative view of Indigenous knowledge about the land. However, as Indigenous scholars and artists alike have shown, the experience of being Indigenous to North America offers generative ways of thinking about what it means to face the threat of ecological disaster. With a history of apocalyptic events in the form of settler colonialism's destruction of their lands, their people, and their cultures, Indigenous peoples' relationship to the apocalypse is not so much a future to be feared, but a cyclical continuation of what has already been their reality for the last six centuries.

This unique position leads to a different type of dystopian narrative, one that centres the resurgence of Indigenous knowledge and practices as solution to the threat. To look to the past, however, is not the same as white narratives of an idealized agrarianism; rather, the turn to the past is a temporal mode of understanding that there is no linear movement forward. In two recent novels, Cherie Dimaline and Louise Erdrich deploy alternative temporalities that reject the Western narrative of modernity and its linear progression and instead operate within a framework of

¹ The authors of this essay identify as non-Indigenous women of colour; this essay is not meant to speak over or speak for Indigenous scholars or Indigenous knowledge-keepers. Rather, the authors intend to highlight the importance of Indigenous perspectives to the discussion of modernity and the Anthropocene presented in this issue.

² The authors recognize that many different peoples and nations exist within the literatures we discuss in this essay, who cannot and should not be collapsed under one neat term or definition. Where possible, we have included the specific people or nation being referred to; where we are speaking of multiple nations or peoples, we have used "Indigenous" as a descriptor for the sake of ease and clarity.

cyclical or spiraling time. These temporalities, accessible to the Indigenous characters of each novel through the act of storytelling, allow for the Indigenous characters to challenge the settler-colonial state and reclaim Indigenous sovereignty. Our analysis of Dimaline's novel *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) will explore how the settler-colonial state is challenged through multi-nation Indigenous storytelling, knowledge, and collective memory; we then turn to Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* (2017) to examine how Ojibwe modes of understanding operate through a cyclical timescape that allows for alternative methods of existing with and within the larger world.

STORY, MEMORY, AND LANDSCAPE IN CHERIE DIMALINE'S *THE MARROW THIEVES*

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In his critique of dystopian and post-apocalyptic literature's perspective of the Anthropocene, Potawatomi scholar Kyle Whyte writes that Indigenous perspectives "offer the idea that we confront climate change having already passed through environmental and climate crises arising from the impacts of colonialism" ("Indigenous Science (Fiction)" 226). *The Marrow Thieves*, a young adult novel by Métis author Cherie Dimaline, serves as an excellent example of Whyte's critique. Set approximately forty years in the future, *The Marrow Thieves* imagines a world plagued by climate change and disease, the first major crisis consisting of the "Water Wars," a decade during which fresh water became scarce (Dimaline 24). After the Water Wars, "the rest of the continent sank into a new era. The world's edge had been clipped by the rising waters . . . Half the population was lost in the disaster and from the disease" (26). These diseases eventually result in the inability to dream, which causes insanity in those afflicted. The only people unaffected by this disease are Indigenous peoples, leading white settler-colonists to believe that the bone marrow of Indigenous people is the disease's cure. "Recruiters" capture Indigenous people and hold them in a future version of residential schools while they extract bone marrow. In the post-apocalyptic landscape of the Anthropocene, Dimaline's reordered world is a reflection of past and present apocalypses: Indigenous bodies become literal commodities in yet another settler-state-enacted genocide.

Francis, called "French," the novel's teenage Métis narrator, is alone on the run from Recruiters after losing the rest of his family. A small group of other Indigenous escapees—a mixture of Cree, Anishinaabe, White River, and Métis peoples—are travelling northward to where a larger group of Indigenous survivors are rumored to be living outside of the influence of the oppressive settler-state's Recruiter program. While they travel,

the found-family participates in collective storytelling that pushes back against settler-colonialist progress narratives and uses collective memory to reestablish ties with the poisoned, post-apocalyptic landscape.

COMMUNITY, COLLECTIVE MEMORY, AND STORYTELLING

The Marrow Thieves is structured to elevate storytelling as a method for community and identity-formation, presenting its non-linear flashbacks and alternate timelines through communal storytelling. Dimaline uses two kinds of storytelling, “Story” and “coming-to stories,” both of which function as an anthology of collective memory and knowledge from which the characters construct their own identities and survive the post-apocalyptic world. Patrizia Zanella argues that the coming-to stories and Story speak back to Canada’s paltry attempts to reconcile a history of genocide enacted by the violent settler-colonial state; the “shared oral history” in *The Marrow Thieves* “reveals settler colonialism’s co-constitutive attempts at . . . Indigenous elimination” (177). This elimination attempt played out in the Canadian government’s residential schools, where Indigenous children were separated from their families and stripped of their cultures, as well as in the removal of Indigenous groups from their lands to make that land available for the settler-colonial state to exploit. Dimaline critiques this history (and the lack of reparations for it) through the stories her characters tell. Collective storytelling becomes an important space for the individual Indigenous characters to reclaim their identities, communities, and lands while resisting settler-colonial constructs.

“Coming-to” stories are the personal accounts of each character in the novel describing the way they came to join the refugee group, providing a space for each character to define themselves and the way they survived settler-colonial violence, rather than being defined by Western constructs (Fachinger). By ending each coming-to story at the point of the individual joining the community of survivors, the collected stories function as an anthology of memory. This anthology produces its own epistemology that works toward creating an Indigenous-defined future. Wab, an Anishinaabe girl who is the oldest of the youth, tells her story after she sees a man in the wild who abused her in the past. Her previous reluctance to tell her story resulted in the other youth speculating about her past and identity, but the elder Miigwan, overhearing their speculations, reminds them: “Everyone tells their own coming-to story. Everyone’s creation story is their own” (Dimaline 78–79), emphasizing that each member of the group is free to

define themselves and tell their story when they are ready. Significantly, Wab only chooses to tell her story when she recognizes the telling of it is necessary for the others' safety. Her story, which is one of the most difficult ones in the novel and includes extensive child neglect and sexual assault, doubles as identity-creation and a warning about a man who later betrays them. Likewise, Miigwan's coming-to story is told soon after Wab's and serves as a warning not to trust even other Indigenous strangers, as some are working for the Recruiters: Miigwan's husband Isaac was captured after they took in several people the couple assumed were Indigenous refugees (100–07). Wab and Miigwan's personal apocalypses become part of the group's collective memory, which influences the youth to be rightfully wary towards the newcomers—and underscores the importance of individual storytelling to the protection of the wider community.

The second kind of storytelling, "Story," collapses apocalypses, weaving the history of residential schools—compulsory education for all First Nations children in Canada that aimed to "civilize" a "primitive" people from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth—with Dimaline's imagined institutions where Indigenous people are kept and their bone marrow extracted. "Story" is told primarily by Miigwan (Miig), one of the two elders of the refugee group, whose Anishinaabe teachings are significant as resistance against Westernized education, particularly in light of the residential schools the novel critiques both directly and in analogous form (Dimaline 23). Every night, the group gathers by the fire to listen to a piece of Story, though the novel itself presents Story in two sections, separated by nearly sixty pages, and forms the backdrop of the novel: the history, present, and future of Indigenous peoples. Miigwan weaves in the history of residential schools with the settler-state destroying Indigenous lands for the sake of capitalism, resulting in environmental, political, and economic collapse in Canada (Dimaline 24). The telling of Story by the fireside every night serves to rekindle traditional Indigenous knowledge, passing it from one generation to the next. As Frenchie narrates, Story might be "a hundred years in one long narrative, blunt and without detail. . . . It was imperative that we know. [Miig] said it was the only way to make the kinds of changes that were necessary to really survive" (25). Miig's purpose in Story is for the youth to survive, not only physically, but also culturally, by remembering their collective history, learning from it, and keeping it for future generations. However, Story is not limited to one direction, Elder to youth: one of the teenagers, Rose, vocally rebels against the way Miig tells Story. French says "she became part of Story . . . And we loved the way she rebelled anyway; having been raised by old people, she spoke like them. It made us feel surrounded on both ends—like we have a future and a past all bundled up in her" (32). As Sium and Ritskes write, "[s]tories as

Indigenous knowledge work to not only regenerate Indigenous traditions and knowledge production, but also work against the colonial epistemic frame to subvert and recreate possibilities and spaces for resistance” (III). Story is a mode of resistance against colonial whitewashing of the past; Story is also living and current, flexible to the needs of the storyteller and the listeners both, keeping it from becoming stagnant history unable to be negotiated or reinterpreted. Story and coming-to stories are an integral part of forming an Indigenous-centered community and identity.

STORYTELLING AND SPIRALING TIME AS RESISTANCE TO PROGRESS NARRATIVES

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The settler-colonial state, motivated by capitalism, cannot see Indigenous peoples or their land as anything other than commodities to be bought and sold, even in the midst of environmental collapse. Miigwan explains during Story that at the beginning of the Water Wars, White settlers “turned to Indigenous people” and their knowledges of the environment, “looking for ways we might guide them” (Dimaline 88). But a short while after settlers attempted to learn from Indigenous ways, Miig claims: “they changed on us . . . looking for ways they could take what we had and administer it themselves” (88). This led to the belief that Indigenous peoples’ bone marrow could cure the disease brought about by settler destruction of the environment: the Recruiters are partly a symbol of history—the residential schools where many Indigenous children were stripped of their cultures and languages, abused, and murdered—and partly a symbol of what constitutes scientific “progress” when constructed within and by a violent settler-state.

This dystopian future Canadian government’s solution to widespread disease is to murder Indigenous peoples in order to cure settlers (particularly wealthy, white people, according to Story). In her essay on *The Marrow Thieves* and Indigenous sovereignty, Laura Maria De Vos writes: “The settler colonial project limits Indigenous nationhood to . . . something from a long ago past that is no longer relevant . . . [and] which makes Indigenous sovereignty unthinkable in the present, let alone the future” (6). Though the events of the past have occurred again, and are still recurring, Indigenous community and sovereignty become an alternative to Western narratives of progress. “Progress” for Indigenous people as it exists in Dimaline’s novel is not linear, but spiralic: temporality is cyclical, as the stories of the past are needed to explain the present and look toward a future that is not new. As De Vos explains in the same essay, the “Indigenous experience of time [is] informed by a people’s particular

relationships to the seasonal cycles on their lands, which acknowledges the present generations' responsibilities to the ancestors and those not yet born" (2). French and his companions show the possible future(s) for Indigenous youth even in the Anthropocene, spurred by their Elders' teachings of responsibility to the land and to future generations.

Miigwan tells the youth in Story that in the first apocalypse, settler-colonialism, Indigenous people survived despite the genocide and cultural oppression enacted by the settler state. In the first half of the novel, between the sections of Story and coming-to stories, French and his young companions spend time learning from the two elders of the group, Miigwan and Minerva. Every day the groups divides into "old-timey" roles, as French puts it: Hunters and Homestead. Miigwan teaches the youth how to hunt respectfully while Minerva teaches them how to care for food, as well as words of the Cree language (Dimaline 31–41). While these roles would seem primitive from a Western point of view, to the Elders it is a return to the relationship the Anishinaabe, Cree, Tutchone, and Métis peoples (and others) had to the land. As Michael Dockry and Kyle Whyte write, "[s]ettler colonialism involves the efforts of a society to replace existing ecological relationships and establish their own in the lands of another peoples" (98). This line of thinking is important in establishing that the Anthropocene is not the work of *all* peoples—Indigenous peoples do not have the same history of affecting the land as settler-colonialists, who altered the environment beyond recognition through exploitation. Toward the beginning of the novel, French says during these "old-timey" lessons given by his Elders, "I came from a long line of hunters, trappers, and voyageurs. But now, with most of the rivers cut into the pieces and lakes left as grey sludge pickers on the landscape, my own history seemed like a myth along the lines of dragons" (Dimaline 21). But throughout the novel, French reconnects with his ancestors' ways as he observes his Elders' lessons, as well as Story and the coming-to stories.

This reconnection is particularly evident during a scene when French is hunting and comes across a moose. While at first he imagines how impressed the others will be with him for killing such a large animal, a moment later French empathizes with the moose, thinking of the animal as a survivor much like himself: "It was like [the moose] was a hundred years old, like it watched all of this happen. Imagine being here through it all—the wars, the sickness, the earthquakes, the schools—only to come to this?" (49). French considers the moose's ability to survive, to resist the threat of settler-colonialism and habitat destruction, and then turns to thinking of the ways in which his community could use the moose's body. But French realizes they "could not travel with the meat before it rotted . . . we'd be leaving half, at least half, behind to rot," leading him to

decide not to kill the moose, despite his worry that refusing to kill could result in his community going hungry (49–50). While French’s decision could impact his community physically, his unwillingness to kill a creature of which they would be forced to waste a considerable portion shows that he has been paying attention to Miigwan’s teachings about hunting—and to Story, when Miig recounts the way the settler-colonial state wasted and exploited the resources provided by the land (24–26). French’s decision is an important part of his character development. As he says early on in the scene, “I always listen to my Elders” (49).

Dimaline’s novel argues that Indigenous people’s knowledges are complete in themselves; their theories and connections with each other and with their environment are enough to move them spatially and chronologically through any apocalypse. In her essay on Indigenous young adult dystopian literature, Sandra Cox writes: “Dimaline participate[s] in a radical speculation that extends survivance out of the past, through the present, and into the future” (66). Dimaline likewise connects chronological *survivance*—a term Chippewa scholar Gerald Vizenor coined, meaning a “sense of native presence over absence, nihility, and victimry” (1)—to environmental survivance in the sense that the characters move toward their stolen homelands and bring healing to both themselves and the land. As Miig tells Frenchie toward the end of the novel: “All we need is the safety to return to our homelands” (Dimaline 193). If disaster is cyclical, so is healing; the end is never really the end.

BACKWARDS, FORWARDS, SIDEWAYS: SPATIOTEMPORAL MOVEMENTS IN *FUTURE HOME OF THE LIVING GOD*

Where Dimaline’s *The Marrow Thieves* collects the stories of a mixed group of Indigenous peoples forced to move continuously through the land, Erdrich’s *Future Home of the Living God* is one woman’s story of navigating Indigeneity in the different spaces of city, suburbs, and reservation. The dystopian setting of this novel is biomedical in nature as well, but framed in terms of evolution, specifically that evolution begins to “run Backwards” leading to the commodification of pregnant women as the government seeks to access and control their reproductive power. The novel is epistolary in nature, written as a journal in which 26-year-old Cedar Hawk Songmaker, an Indigenous woman who was adopted by a white liberal family, narrates approximately five months’ time following the beginning of an undefined ecological disaster. Directly addressing her unborn child throughout the entries, Cedar narrates her pregnancy, reconnecting with her birth mother

and Ojibwe heritage, and attempting to maintain her independence as the government imprisons pregnant women.

Adopted into the Songmaker family, Cedar was severed from her cultural and biological heritage and instead raised with white fetishization of her Ojibwe identity. The Songmakers attempt to celebrate Cedar's Indigeneity, but always through an exoticized and whitewashed lens: Cedar's adoptive mother, Sera, has a history of "self-invent[ing] ceremonies, which she put together from her eclectic readings on Indigenous culture and Rudolf Steiner" (Erdrich 53). Sera's reliance on Steiner, a twentieth-century Austrian philosopher and spiritualist, implies a disregard for the culturally and personally significant specificity of Cedar's Ojibwe heritage. Further fetishized within the white institutional setting of her childhood school—she is referred to as "Native girl! Indian Princess!" and treated with reverence in her school for her "hotline to nature"—Cedar experiences a crisis of identity when in college she meets other Indigenous students who had been raised within their cultures (4). Cedar's experience of the ecological disaster coincides with the reclamation of her Ojibwe heritage as she seeks out her genetic history. Though she instigates a meeting with her birth mother purely to gain medical information, Cedar's entrance into the reservation marks the beginning of her transition into Indigenous modes of being that reject white notions of linear temporality.

STORYTELLING, IDENTITY, AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES

Cedar first begins her education in Ojibwe cultural practices when she enters the space of the reservation. She cannot find her mother's house as she was not given a specific address but rather a series of vague directions that force Cedar to go down multiple "false-alarm" roads before finally finding her destination (14). These spatial diversions symbolically mark Cedar's uncertain relationship to her Ojibwe identity. She develops her Indigeneity in fits and starts, which introduce Cedar to the principle of indeterminacy and, more importantly, the embrace of uncertainty that marks Indigenous knowledges in this novel. Silvia Martínez-Falquina writes that "Erdrich theorizes uncertainty as a way of denouncing the vulnerability of the rights of women and Natives" (165). Or, in other words, uncertainty marks a way of being in the world in which vulnerability has become the norm. Though this is denounced within the context of colonialist exploitation of Indigenous peoples, particularly women, this also marks a different way of experiencing the world that leaves Cedar uniquely prepared for the dystopian events to come.

Even upon finally reaching her biological mother's house, Cedar's mother and the rest of her family refuse to give her the information she seeks forcing her instead to continue confronting the sense of uncertainty. Cedar's grandmother ignores her completely until Cedar finally reveals that she is pregnant. This information manages to get her grandmother to speak, but again in a way that seemingly evades the question: "the word 'pregnant' may have registered, because that word triggers a story, and then another story, many of them. . . . She seems to have lived out many versions of her own history" (Erdrich 34–35). That the grandmother offers Cedar traditional narratives rather than genetic information shows that she prioritizes Ojibwe cultural knowledge over Western scientific knowledge, and also reminds Cedar that inheritance is about more than just genes. Lorena Laura Stookey notes that Erdrich's "fiction commonly features the telling of stories within stories in what might be regarded as arrangements of narratives that resemble Chinese boxes" and that they "serve a variety of functions," one of which is to remind the reader that reality "must always be understood in respect to point of view" (16). This style is reminiscent of Dimaline's grouping of coming-to stories within the larger framework of *Story*, but, in an uncharacteristic show of narrative restraint, Erdrich withholds the grandmother's actual stories, instead giving us only the list of titles. The withholding of these Ojibwe stories, which include "the Story of the Two-Faced Child, the Tooth-Spitting Grave . . . and others which [Cedar] can't just now recall" forces readers unfamiliar with this cultural background to confront their own subject position and either actively search for Ojibwe stories or to sit with the feeling of uncertainty that Cedar herself experiences throughout the novel (Erdrich 35).

Instead of giving the reader what are presumably traditional Ojibwe stories, Erdrich incorporates pieces of a book that Eddy, Cedar's biological mother's husband, is writing. The book is not necessarily about Indigeneity, though it does incorporate aspects of Indigenous philosophy; instead, it is an over 3,000-page collection of "reason[s] not to kill yourself" (29). There is a level of the absurd in this collection, but this is tempered by the pathologizing of Eddy's mental state, which is described as manic-depressive. By incorporating the fractured and disturbing musings of Eddy's fascination with death and dying, and withholding the traditional Indigenous narratives of the grandmother, Erdrich prioritizes sharing the debilitating effects of settler colonialism on the Indigenous psyche. Cedar is not the only Native American with a fractured identity; even those living on the reservation have a tenuous and broken hold on their identities and culture.

It is also through the act of storytelling that Cedar comes to understand her Indigenous identity, and most importantly for her to begin challenging

her white beliefs through her adoption of Indigenous knowledges. Rather than accept the narrative that evolution is running backwards, Cedar reframes the issue:

So if evolution has actually stopped . . . then we would not see an orderly backward progression of human types that evolutionary charts are so fond of presenting. Life might skip forward, sideways, in unforeseen directions. We wouldn't see the narrative we think we know. Why? Because there was never a story moving forward and there wouldn't be one moving backward. (54–55)

This passage early in the novel requires the reader to experience the uncertainty that marks precarious living. Erdrich never provides definitive reasons for why species are rapidly changing; however, she does hint that it is related to climate change with multiple references to events like the melting of the permafrost, winters without snow in Minnesota, and strings of natural disasters (8–9). These moments are fleeting, as are the news fragments that remind the reader that humans are not the only ones affected by the molecular changes: “[S]mall-celled creatures and plants have been shuffling through random adaptations” (44) and prehistoric animals return to the planet (92). Though not as overtly interested in the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the land as *The Marrow Thieves*, the more-than-human world is far from absent from the pages of Erdrich’s novel. The urban setting of *Future Home* unsettles the myth of the nature-culture divide that plagues modernity. In the prologue of *There There*, Cheyenne and Arapaho novelist Tommy Orange reminds us that to be a part of the urban is not to be divorced from the environment; rather, “[a]n Urban Indian belongs to the city, and cities belong to the earth” (11). Like *There There*, Erdrich’s focus on an urban location challenges the tendency to read Indigenous cultural practices, particularly those related to environmentalism, as premodern.

Traditional representations of Indigenous peoples located in North America have focused on smaller towns or reservations as the locus of Indigeneity leading to the invisibility of Indigenous life in the city. By moving Cedar through the various locations within the city, her parents’ suburban home, and the reservation, Erdrich reminds us that the experiences of Indigenous peoples have been diverse and complex and lead to subject positions as “hybrid entities” (Kot 7). These different spaces operate as contact zones, not just for people like Cedar who confront various images of indigeneity, but also contact with the environment and different environmental practices. With the history of settler colonial violence, Indigenous peoples have been forced to turn to collective identities, to share

their knowledges across tribes and space (Whyte, “Indigenous Climate Change” 157–58). The history of violent relocation and exploitation has forced Indigenous peoples to learn how to adapt and continue to adapt. Even as cultures are preserved through the act of storytelling, the ability to adapt has also created the conditions through which Indigenous peoples may experience a resurgence and reclaim sovereignty.

ALTERNATIVE TEMPORALITIES AND INDIGENOUS RESURGENCE

Through the epistolary form, Erdrich promotes a layered, multifaceted understanding of temporality. The journal format is used to track the unfolding of the biomedical crisis, but it also narrates the development of her child, including detailed descriptions of what stage of development it should be at any given time. Cedar’s painstaking documentation of its development indicates an at least partial acceptance of the linear temporality imposed by Western science and the calendar. Yet even as she operates within that temporality, Cedar challenges it: through the story she tells, Cedar challenges the narrative of progression that attempts to explain the biological changes happening to humans and animals. She ties this temporal shift to the body itself, to the gene sequence: “Our entire evolution up until now has apparently been coded into some part of the blood or tissue we haven’t noticed or deciphered. . . . Our bodies have always remembered who we were. And now they have decided to return” (Erdrich 68). She later adds to this discussion of genetic mutations: “We talk about how the redundant gene, or twin, becomes a kind of ghost gene, a silent pseudogene. An untranslated DNA sequence” that carried the “history of our genetic mishaps” (106–07). Though these passages indicate a sense of failure, she further challenges any understanding of backwards movement as regression, instead positing that the evolutionary changes might be to “restore us to some former physical equilibrium” (107). Like *The Marrow Thieves*, *Future Home* engages with the idea of modernity as something constantly reformed by shifting understandings of the past. Erdrich’s gene functions much like Rose’s challenging of Story: history is not merely a thing to be carried forward, but something to be challenged and adapted, something that mutates so that the past is reformed within and for the present.

The temporal shift, insofar as it relates to the idea of progress and evolution, exists not only within the body, but ties the material conditions of life to the abstract quality of time. Despite the apocalypse generally being regarded as an ending, whether to the world or to a particular way of life, Cedar’s embrace of Indigenous knowledges allows her to understand

it merely as another time of change and potential: “I have that sense of time folding in on itself, the same tranced awareness I experienced in the ultrasound room. I realize this: I am not at the end of things, but the beginning” (92). This moment of realization that the apocalypse is not definitive but rather an opening, a moment of possibility, mirrors an earlier conversation with her stepfather, Eddy, in which he rejects Cedar’s assertion that the world is ending:

“Indians have been adapting since before 1492 so I guess we’ll keep adapting.”

“But the world is going to pieces.”

“It is always going to pieces.”

“This is different.”

“It is always different. We’ll adapt.” (28)

At this point in the novel, still operating within her white upbringing, Cedar seems to accept the narrative that the apocalypse is a form of ending, that the only way of understanding what is happening is to think in terms of linear progress. Eddy, however, reminds Cedar that Indigenous Americans have already survived multiple apocalypses all related to the violent and debilitating practices of settler colonialism that include not only the widespread decimation of the Indigenous population, but also the destruction of the land and the loss of Indigenous cultural practices.

Rather than treat this latest development as an ending, the Ojibwe see it as merely another challenge to adapt to. The fall of the US government and rise of a fundamental Christian authoritarian state marks a time of Indigenous resurgence and reclamation that revitalizes the entire space of the reservation. Like Miig’s focus on educating young people in *The Marrow Thieves*, Eddy “[t]hinks of survival measures, ways to draft our young people into working for a higher purpose . . . He wants to make the reservation one huge, intensively worked, highly productive farm” (226). They have also fought back against “[t]he chimookamaanag . . . the white people, and . . . seized the National Guard arsenal up at Camp Riley, which is on our original treaty grounds” (227). This moment, then, that disrupts the linearity of time to create an open space of transformation leads to not only a resurgence of Indigenous identity and culture, but also a literal reclamation of the land that was stolen. It does not erase the history of settler colonialism, evident in the damage to the environment that will remain, but it does signal a turn toward possibilities that did not exist before.

As hopeful as the resurgence of the Ojibwe tribe is, Erdrich does not depict a complete overthrow of the settler colonial state. The gains made

by the Ojibwe people do not erase the damage done by settler colonialism: the damage to the environment remains as does much of the precarity of life for people living on the reservation. The legacy of disenfranchisement is not immediately nor completely overcome; the novel ends with Cedar once again held in a detention center, having been turned in by members of the tribe who are “broke, so dead broke . . . [and] need the money” (248). Further, Cedar gives birth to a baby boy who is immediately taken from her and placed in the care of the new state order, continuing the separation of Indigenous peoples from their identity and community. What Erdrich offers is an ambiguous and ambivalent ending in which the collective appears to experience a resurgence, though individual members might still be trapped within settler colonial mindsets or institutions.

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CONCLUSION

For many speculative writers, cli-fi (climate fiction) has become a generative space to express anxieties regarding the extended trauma of waiting for the apocalypse while feeling powerless to prevent it. Dystopian, apocalyptic, and post-apocalyptic narratives have exploded, but they tell only one story of the apocalypse: they depict a world that is ending, with clear boundaries for before and after. They often miss that apocalypses have happened and continue to happen globally. The fear of the apocalypse also makes it easy to forget that the word does not only signal the biblical end of times, but that apocalypse can refer to any revelation. Dimaline’s *The Marrow Thieves* and Erdrich’s *Future Home* remind us that there is no singular apocalypse. The definite article “the” only makes sense when one belongs to a group who has not yet lived through an apocalypse. Apocalypses are multiple, personal, as well as collective, and they cannot be understood as simply an end. The stories that we tell about apocalypse matter for thinking about our position in the world.

Potawatomi botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer’s *Braiding Sweetgrass* opens with a comparison of the Potawatomi creation story of Skywoman’s fall to the earth with the biblical story of the Garden of Eden. Kimmerer offers the story as a way to remind us that the stories we tell about where we came from affect the stories that we tell about our present and our future. She notes that the cosmology offered by Skywoman is one in which humans are part of the world, not one in which ownership of the planet is given to humans. Perhaps reframing the idea of apocalypse and of the temporal mode the apocalypse inhabits might allow for a shift in our cosmology, and thus a shift in the stories that we tell about human relationships with the land and nonhuman animals, creating an environment more sustainable for us all.

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