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Oppression, Theft and Exploitation: The Resurgence and Reclaiming of Native  
American Spirituality Through the Adaptation and Representation of Visions in  
Literature and Art

Emily Caitlin Chown

Submitted in fulfilment of the degree of  
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## Abstract

Over the last 160 years there has been a movement of resurgence and reclaiming of Indigenous spirituality in Native American literature and art. The 1860's mark the beginnings of the movement, with Black Elk's account of these years, in his as told to story, leading up to his great vision. The adaptation from Black Elk's oral biographical narrative into written literature signifies a transformation within Indigenous storytelling towards utilising western literature. This transformation continues into the present with authors such as Cherie Dimaline, who continue to adapt storytelling with new genres and literary tropes, whilst still maintaining traditional aesthetics of Native spirituality. This thesis explores how the publication of literature has influenced perceptions of Native American culture and spirituality among the American public and how Indigenous literature and art published in the twentieth and twenty-first century has worked to reclaim representations of Native culture, spirituality and history. Native Americans have faced a pattern of misrepresentation, oppression and appropriation of their spirituality and culture as a consequence of continued colonial structures. A loss of Native language, displacement, widespread appropriation and misrepresentation by non-Natives has contributed to the need to adapt storytelling into western forms of literature in order to reclaim representations. Visions and dreams have been significant in the reclaiming of Native spirituality and are correspondingly a reoccurring feature in Native American literature and art. The representation of visions has been reclaimed by Native American Nations from non-Native twisted representations, constructed by white anthropologists, media and pretendians. Visions influence protest against colonial structures, as they signifying the importance of tradition and community in order for cultural survival and inspire change by providing glimpses of decolonised spaces. Native Americans authors and artist have adapted traditional forms of storytelling through utilising western writing techniques, genres, markets and materials to reach a mainstream audience in order to accurately represent their spirituality and preserve it for future generations.

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## Introduction

After experiencing a pattern of oppression, theft and exploitation, Native Americans have adapted forms of western literature and art in order to preserve their spirituality and traditions. As visions and dreams are a key source of knowledge and power among Ojibwa and Great Plains Nations, their representation in particular has been a central theme in modern, Native literature and art and in recent decades an effort has been made to reclaim and represent Indigenous spirituality from a Native American perspective.

In the last two decades, there has been an increase in literature based around Native American spirituality written by Native American authors, both in academic writing and in novels. Arguably this presents a movement by Native Americans to reclaim the narrative surrounding the significance and understanding of Native American spirituality. This thesis examines the changing conceptions of Native American spirituality over the last 160 years, with a focus on the significance of dreams and visions within Ojibwa and Great Plains cultures. Multiple works of literature and art based around visions will be examined as case studies to present how Native American's have adapted traditional forms of storytelling to more 'westernised' forms of art. This has been used as a tool to reclaim the narrative surrounding Native spirituality, after centuries of twisted misconstrued representations of Native spiritual practices and meanings. A particular focus will be placed on the art works of Norval Morrisseau (Bingwi Neyaashi) and Oscar Howe (Yanktonai Dakota), and the literature *Black Elk Speaks* by Black Elk (Oglala Lakota) and John Neihardt (1932), *The Primal Mind* by Jamake Highwater (1982), *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline (Georgian Bay Metis) (2017) among others. Each of the examined works represent a moment within the history of Native, Euro-American interactions across the last 160 years and stands to support the argument of a changing public perception of Native spirituality, both within Native communities and among non-Natives. They signify a movement within Native literature of gradual resurgence and reclaiming of

representations of Indigenous spirituality through the adaptation of traditional storytelling and the utilisation of western materials and markets.

Although each of the case-studies are of different genres, with a combination of art, novels and academic texts being analysed, this works to present the evolution of how Native spirituality has been represented over the last 160 years. *Black Elk Speaks* is a biographical as told to story of Black Elk's vision and spiritual journey, written by John Neihardt. It was one of the first accounts of it's time, before it's publication the white American audience had not known such intimate details about Native visions and spiritual practices. Black Elk wanted to preserve his vision and pass it on, he did this in the traditional way, orally and his oral account was translated by his son to Neihardt who transformed Black Elk's vision into written words. Entering the 1960s *Black Elk Speaks* was adopted by hippies and New Agers resulting in its second publication as it became a foundation for learning about Native spirituality. Similarly during this period art became a keystone in the public representation of Native American spirituality, with artists such as Norval Morrisseau and Oscar Howe depicting glimpses of the spirit world in their work, they enticed white audiences and found success as artists. Their works expressed what many could not yet put into words about the visionary world, and they allowed white audiences to witness images of the spirit world through their own eyes.

This artistic movement was shortly followed by a flood of academic work on Native American spirituality, however, in the 1970s the New Age movement rapidly grew and commercialised many aspects of Native traditions and beliefs and welcomed an era of "pretendians".<sup>1</sup> Jamake Highwater was a high profile pretendian, he falsely claimed Native American ancestry and published 'academic' works detailing the significance of spiritual practices and ceremonies and expressing opinions of Native culture. His work is used as a case-study in this thesis

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<sup>1</sup> A pretendian is someone who falsely claims an Indigenous identity by claiming to be a citizen of Native American or Indigenous Canadian tribal nations, or to hold Native ancestry.; Rowland Robinson. 'Interlude: Community, Pretendians and Heartbreak' in *Settler Colonialism and Native Ghosts: An Autoethnographic Account of the Imaginarium of Late Capitalist/Colonialist Storytelling*, (Ontario: University of Waterloo, 2020) p. 235

to portray the ongoing minefield among academic literature on Native American spirituality, as readers must continue to be wary of pretendians and make sure to research academic authors. This is a consequence of the New Age movement which commercialised and commodified Native American spirituality so extensively that a number of non-Native academics sought to profit from falsifying their ancestry. However, as the twentieth century progressed, Native American authors adapted the Western forms of literature to continue their tradition of storytelling. From the late 1960s onwards there was a surge in the publication of novels by Native American authors, such as Louise Erdrich (Turtle Mountain Chippewa) and Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), who used their gifts for storytelling to represent and preserve their Native culture and spirituality, whilst Gerald Vizenor (White Earth Anishinaabe) aimed to portray that literariness has long been present in Native Nations and has transformed over time. Erdrich and Silko also make a statement about the traumas that generations of Native Americans have faced and still experience in the present through their storytelling. Progressing into the twenty-first century, Dimaline uses the dystopian genre to represent the deep roots of continued colonial trauma and emphasises the significance of dreams and visions within Indigenous cultures. A consideration will be placed on the intentions each piece of literature examined, in regards to what the intended impact on the audience was and how each source may have individually benefitted the creator. Despite the various genres of the literatures used as case-studies in this thesis, a pattern emerges, as each piece represents the progression of how Native American spirituality has been represented and perceived over time. The different configuration of genres only emphasises how Native Americans have adapted their storytelling traditions in order to preserve their spiritual beliefs and the battles they have faced as their culture has continuously been exploited and manipulated by non-Natives. Indigenous worldviews determine spirituality, culture, religion and science holistically, believing that these concepts are intertwined with one another to create a relationship between life, earth and humanity, this holistic understanding is how this thesis will define such ideas in order to represent Native American

worldviews.<sup>2</sup> Native scholar Greg Cajete has noted that in Indigenous ways of knowing, a thing is only understood with all four aspects of a persons being, the mind, body, emotion and spirit – this thesis defines spirituality and culture in the same way, as western definitions of these concepts are too rigid to express the Native American worldviews, which view spirituality, culture and religion as intertwined and connected to one another, informing a more rounded definition.<sup>3</sup> The utilisation of biographical literature, art and novels expresses the adaptation of spiritual representation over time and the various genres inform a more whole representation of ‘Native American spirituality’.

Visions and dreams are a reoccurring feature within each of the examined texts, as visions are a key source of power and knowledge within Ojibwa and Great Plains Nations, they have become a central aspect in the reclaiming of Native spirituality. As a very meaningful and powerful area of Native American religion, there is much ambiguity and privacy placed around visions and dreams. Within some Nations they are kept to oneself; in others they are shared in dances and rituals as a way to share/transfer their power; among others it is believed that when one relays their vision they will lose the power that it provided them with, or are able to pass it on to another. It is potentially because of the ambiguity placed around dreams and visions that this area of Native spirituality has been manipulated and misrepresented by non-Natives for centuries. Spiritual practices such as vision quests and sun dances were made illegal or viewed as a threat up until 1978, because the U.S. government saw them as opposing their efforts for cultural assimilation among Native Americans and feared the dances/rituals incited opposition against the government. More recently such experiences have been sold to white consumers for financial profits. The deep significance and power visions hold has never truly been understood by non-Natives, as visions are a tool of knowledge and a way to connect and protect Native communities, keeping ties with their ancestors and spirits in the other world. Visions and dreams must be taken seriously, as they can be

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<sup>2</sup> Robin Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013) p. xiii

<sup>3</sup> Gregory Cajete. *Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education*, (Asheville: Kivaki Press, 1994); Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, P. 47

dangerous, yet they are also deeply meaningful, with some visions connecting people to the spiritual world, or connecting them with their spirit guide. Visions have strong links back to creation stories and therefore it is of deep importance that their substance be correctly represented, and why they have become a reoccurring theme in many Native writings and art works in recent decades which aim to reclaim the narrative around Native American spirituality.

A key event that is documented on *Black Elk Speaks* is the introduction of the Ghost Dance among the Sioux and its influence on the Wounded Knee massacre. Black Elk's narrative helps to remove some of the misconceptions surrounding the Ghost Dance and reclaims the representation of the events from the popular press narrative. The white American population interpreted the Ghost Dance to be dangerous and fearful, due to news articles that described "religious ceremonies of the savages" and suggested that participants of the dance were "heavily armed and defiant. It is now estimated that the hostile are 600 strong.", giving the impression of an army forming and implying the dance will cause conflict.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, other newspapers reported on "Indian craze" and "the Messiah lunacy", representing Native spirituality as a form of madness and a threat to peace.<sup>5</sup> Participation in the dance quickly spread across various Native American Nations, spanning from the West to East coast of America. People feared the way that it unified Native Americans and believed its spread would result in conflicts between Natives and the American government as newspapers reported "the dancing Indians have the agency and the surrounding country in a state of terror".<sup>6</sup> Conceivably, it was the building of this fear that led to the actions of the Wounded Knee massacre. Though, James Mooney, a key anthropologist/scholar on the Ghost Dance, fails to aptly analyse the propaganda against Natives and their dance ceremonies, which contributed towards the events of Wounded Knee. Mooney himself contributed to a twisted narrative surrounding events and his

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<sup>4</sup> Library of Congress, 'Peace or War', *Daily tobacco leaf-chronicle*, 25 November 1890, p. 1

<sup>5</sup> Library of Congress, 'The Messiah Lunacy', *The Wichita Daily Eagle*, 22 November 1890, p. 1

<sup>6</sup> Library of Congress, 'Indians Not Ready to Fight', *The Indianapolis journal*, 22 November 1890, p. 1

academic works acts as one of the key representations of events that Native Americans aim to reclaim.

The premise of the Ghost Dance was peaceful, its underlying principle was that a time would come when the whole of Native America race, living and dead, would be reunited upon a regenerated earth, to live a life of aboriginal happiness – forever free from death, disease and misery.<sup>7</sup> The 1800s saw an increase in prophets emphasising the return to tradition, as the United States government pushed in the other direction for Native Americans to take up European ideas of agriculture and adopt Catholicism. Then, Wovoka, the visionary founder of the Ghost Dance of 1889, shared his vision with his community and it became a rallying cry for many different Native peoples across America and throughout the Great Plains. The true powers of the dance lay in the hopes that Native people would be united and free in the next world, this hope gave power to the Ghost Dance and allowed it to take hold in various Native tribes. Arguably, it was centuries of spiritual oppression that led many to turn towards this hope, despite it resulting in their death on Earth. The idea that death was a better outcome than a life on reservations with little religious freedom is a testament to the suffering that Native peoples were facing at the hands of the United States government. As Mooney suggested, the people believed “the happiness of this world may be anticipated in dreams, if not actually hastened in reality, by earnest and frequent attendance of the sacred dance.”<sup>8</sup> While the dance was intended to be peaceful, among the Sioux , it represented a new world that would bring death to all whites.

A precursor to the Ghost Dance and the Wounded Knee massacre was the Battle of Little Big Horn. During the Sun Dance ceremony 1876, the Lakota leader Sitting Bull (Hunkpapa Lakota) had a vision that anticipated an attack by lieutenant colonel Custer’s cavalry, he saw soldiers falling into their camp. On June 25<sup>th</sup> Custer and the 7th cavalry attacked the Lakota camp, killing women and children, however the cavalry had severely underestimated the numbers and ability of the Lakota

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<sup>7</sup> James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1896), p.777

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.778

resulting in their defeat. The Lakota's overwhelming victory in the Battle of the Little Bighorn, 1876, and the death of lieutenant Colonel Custer was celebrated by the Lakota, however, the U.S. government's threat to stop supplying rations to reservations resulted in the loss of ownership of the Black Hills. Following the battle the Lakota encampment scattered into small groups and fled, the fleeing of Sitting Bull, followed by the surrender of Crazy Horse at Fort Robinson led to the end of the Great Sioux War on May 7<sup>th</sup>. Despite this, tensions among the Sioux were high and they were prepared to continue their battle with the U.S. government. It was the Sioux who transformed the ghost shirt into an auxiliary of war, as the shirt was said to be bulletproof, however, southern tribes did not wear the shirts, but they held much power within the Great Plains.<sup>9</sup> The "Code of Indian Offences", approved by Congress 1883, outlawed sun dances and ceremonies that were held within Native communities to connect with their ancestors and the visionary world.<sup>10</sup> The Bureau of Indian Affairs believed the Ghost Dance was a precursor to renewed Native militancy and rebellion, as participation had been banned, therefore taking part in the dance was viewed as a direct violation of U.S. law and seen as rebellious. When the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry went to disarm the Lakota on December 29<sup>th</sup> 1890 near Wounded Knee Creek, Yellow Bird was allegedly about to perform the Ghost Dance. The involvement of the 7<sup>th</sup> cavalry led to immediate tensions on both sides as a result of the Battle of Little Bighorn - there was some resistance to give up a gun, resulting in a scuffle and confusion which led to over 250 members of the Lakota being massacred.

Following the tragic massacre, Native Americans continued to be removed and displaced from their lands which they had occupied for centuries. Not only did laws work to suppress Native spirituality, but the introduction of government funded missionary schools from 1879 onwards, across the United States and Canada disconnected thousands of Native children from their traditional cultures and encouraged them to turn towards Christianity. The aim of the schools was to assimilate Indigenous children into Euro-American culture, while they were still young and

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.791

<sup>10</sup> David Treuer, *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890 to the present*, (New York, Riverhead Books, 2019) pp. 151-158.

impressionable. Separated from their families and communities, the schools stripped the children of any Indigenous cultural signifiers, they had their hair cut, had to conform to a uniform, were given 'English' names and were forbidden to speak their individual Native languages. Punishments for speaking Indigenous languages included isolation, withholding of meals, washing a child's mouth with soap and in extreme circumstances, electrical shocks or pushing needles into to children's tongues to associate the speaking of their Native language with excruciating pain.<sup>12</sup> The schools taught children to follow Christian religious practices and mocked their creation stories and spiritual beliefs – this is referenced in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), "the teacher said those old beliefs were stupid" ... "the kind of old-time superstition the teachers at Indian school used to warn him and Rocky about", meanwhile images and symbols of Christianity were imposed on the children.<sup>13</sup> As a direct result of the residential schools, Native languages were lost and with it, a number of traditions and spiritual practices, as elders and youths became separated by language barriers and oral storytelling was lost.

Author, Theodore Fontaine (Sagkeeng First Nation), describes his experience at Fort Alexander Residential School, growing up only speaking Ojibwa, he was forbidden to speak his Native language, after speaking Obibwa he was "shoved in a closet".<sup>14</sup> He describes his education in English as "long and tedious" and learned that the teachers did not want the children to speak their Native languages because "it was a language of savages and not created by God".<sup>15</sup> Fontaine went on to write a memoir about the struggles he faced after losing his language and culture and the journey of healing that he went on to overcome his traumatising experiences at the school. Native American authors and artists have been confronted with the complex nature of transforming Euro-American literary from a tool that was used to suppress Indigenous languages and identities and into one which Native peoples can utilise in the efforts for preserving their Native heritage and spreading

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<sup>12</sup> 'These Schools Are Our Schools', *The Economist*, October 9, 2013

<sup>13</sup> Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1986) pp. 194-196

<sup>14</sup> Theodore Fontaine, *Broken Circle: The Dark Legacy of Indian Residential Schools* (Victoria: Heritage House Publishing, 2010), pp.106–109.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.106-109

Indigenous voices and stories. Many Native American writers have been influenced by these events and have used their writing to emphasise the horrors that Native children faced in the fight to maintain their Indigenous identity and spiritual freedom. Such authors have emphasised the ongoing persecution that Native American people face and the deeply rooted traumas that such events have embedded in Native communities. Native Americans statistically place among the highest in the USA in leading levels of alcoholism, poverty and depression, many Native people claim the cause of this is rooted in a loss of identity and religion among their communities and the traumatic oppression and suffering they faced in the fight to maintain their spirituality.<sup>16</sup> By adapting Euro-American language Indigenous authors are forced to face how language was used as an oppressive tool for centuries by white non-Natives and the impact that this has directly had on their own identity and Native communities. However, by confronting this complex relationship with language, Native American authors and artists have taken the power that the English language, text and communicative devices held over their Indigenous history and taken away its capacity as a colonial instrument of power and transformed it into a tool to aid their efforts for resurgence and representation of Native spirituality.

Scholars could argue that texts such as *Black Elk Speaks* and other literature centred around the Great Plains, Sioux religion in the late nineteenth century marks the start of a literary movement - as Native Americans began to share very personal aspects of their religion and traditions, such as their visions, with non-Natives. Previously to this, in the nineteenth century other Native American authors had used the autobiographical literary form to document their lives and experiences from a Native American perspective, which was uncommon at the time as literature and novels on Indigenous peoples has been written by white, non-Natives (such as James Fenimore Cooper, *The*

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<sup>16</sup> Derick Asante-Muhammad, Esha Kamra, Connor Sanchez, Kathy Ramirez and Rogelio Tec. *Racial Wealth Snapshot: Native Americans*, (2022) <<https://ncrc.org/racial-wealth-snapshot-american-indians-Native-americans/>> [Accessed 27 May 2022]; American Addiction Centres, *Risks of Alcoholism Among Native Americans*, (2022) <<https://americanaddictioncenters.org/alcoholism-treatment/Native-americans>> [Accessed 27 May 2022]

*Last of the Mohicans*, 1826; Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie*, 1827).<sup>18</sup> Author William Apes (Pequot) described their conversion to Christianity in their autobiography *Son of the Forest* (1829), and advocated a balance between accepting Christianity and retaining pride in ones Native identity; similarly, George Copway's, (Mississaugas Ojibwa) *The Life and Travels of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh* (1847) described Cosways eventual conversion to Christianity.<sup>19</sup> However, Black Hawk's (Sauk) autobiography differs from those that emphasised Christian conversion, *The Life of Ma-ka-tai-me-she-kia-kiak* (1833, mediated by a French- Canadian writer Antoine Le Claire), explained the struggle Black Hawk faced attempting to voice his beliefs in a society that was hostile to his very existence.<sup>20</sup> Black Hawk's text helped pave the way for future Native writers, such as Black Elk, to document their beliefs and make use of written literature to portray oppressive attitudes towards Native Americans and inform representations of Native American cultures. Black Elk's at told to story stands out as the start of the movement towards resurgence and representation because the text explains in detail about his vision and spiritual world, as well as describing Lakota ceremonies and spiritual practices, subjects which had not been shared in such details with non-Natives before. The texts relevance in the 1960s as a source of knowledge and the intentions of Black Elk to pass on his vision and his communities spiritual traditions also distinguishes the text as the start of the literary movement of resurgence and reclaiming the narrative surrounding Native American spirituality. Black Elk claims that he tells of his vision because it is time to share it with white people and pass on the vision's power. Along with narratives of other visions, such as Crazy Horse's Thunder dream, this marks a time in Native American history where, in order to preserve Native spirituality, it must be recorded through written words. This is due to the impact of missionary schools, as Native languages began to die out among some Nations, with the elders being the only ones to hold onto the oral tradition of storytelling. Arguably, non-Natives gained access to such private spiritual experiences because

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<sup>18</sup> James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*, (London: John Miller, 1826); Catherine Maria Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie*, (London: John Miller, 1828)

<sup>19</sup> William Apes, *Son of the Forest: The Experience of William Apes, A Native of the Forest*, (New York: The author, 1829); George Copway, *The Life and Travels of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh*. (London: C. Gilpin, 1847)

<sup>20</sup> Black Hawk, *The Life of Ma-ka-tai-me-she-kia-kiak*, (Boston: Russell, Odiorne & Metcalf, 1834)

literature became a form of preservation of Native spirituality and culture in a 'modern' world. For centuries Native cultures have been so oppressed that they have had to adapt traditional oral storytelling and utilise new materials for art and written words in order to record and preserve spiritual narratives.

The 1960s were a time of great change for minority groups in the USA and during this period a number of Native American artists made their way into the mainstream art scene with new modern and abstract artworks. Artists such as Norval Morrisseau and Oscar Howe used their art to present spiritual experiences with images of the visionary world, dance ceremonies and creation stories. Similarly to Black Elk, Morrisseau expressed that he had felt it was time to share both his own and his grandfathers visions with the world, as he viewed his work as preserving his great culture on paper. Both Black Elk and Morrisseau have had their motivations for sharing their visions questioned and debated, as they each believed they would financially benefit from sharing their experiences. Although, it can be argued that they had no other means of preserving their spirituality and culture, as their traditional storytelling practices were slowly disappearing. Traditionally visions may be recorded with pictograph and bark paintings or would be passed on through oral storytelling or ceremonial dance, however, as the twentieth century progressed, reservations which held onto Native traditions were facing continued displacement. Forced relocations to urban environments in the 1950s with the 1954 Menominee Termination Act further added to disorientation and spiritual loss for many Native families.<sup>21</sup> As Indigenous people continued to struggle to hold onto and connect with their spirituality, desperately trying to preserve their culture and religion, the 1960s also saw an increase in white interest in Native spirituality, as the 'hippie' movement turned to Native American spiritual practices for inspiration.

The late 1960s and early 1970s marked the start of the commercialisation of Native American culture and spirituality. The hippie movement alongside the changing mindset of white

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<sup>21</sup> Milwaukee Public Museum, *Menominee Termination and Restoration*, (2022) <<https://www.mpm.edu/educators/wirp/nations/menominee/termination-resoration>> [Accessed 8 December 2021]

Americans following on from the Civil Rights movement, resulted in a number of white Americans taking inspiration from other cultures religious beliefs, specifically from cultures whose religions were based around appreciation of the Earth. Scholars can only speculate what sparked this shift towards adopting new religion, if it was the new environmental movement or a new openness towards other cultures. It could potentially have been a result of increasing scientific advances which led some people to turn away from science and towards the earth and its mystic powers, which they believed they could access through adopting parts of Native American spirituality. Whatever the cause, Native American spirituality gradually became a part of the consumer market and many people sought to profit from the new tourism it created by selling spiritual experiences, such as sweat lodges and ceremonies. A small number of Native American individuals took advantage of the commercialisation of their spirituality by selling 'authentic' dream catchers, medicine bags and by inducing visions with herbal teas. This commercialisation eventually built into the New Age movement of the 1970s, with white Americans paying to buy their way into Native tribes and religion. Lisa Aldred explains that New Agers romanticised 'authentic' and 'traditional' Native American culture with the false belief that Native spirituality could "save them from their own sense of malaise... as products of the consumer culture they seek to escape" yet, these New Agers pursued spiritual meaning and cultural identification through acts of purchase.<sup>22</sup> Native American spirituality became one of the most popular and profitable sectors of New Age commercialisation.<sup>23</sup> The movement resulted in an increase in people falsely claiming Native American heritage and ancestry in an effort to profit off of New Agers, including a number of academics who claimed Native ancestry in order to validate their works on Native spirituality. This thesis will place a particular focus on Jamake Highwater and his work *The Primal Mind*, which fabricates knowledge about Indigenous spirituality, just as Highwater himself fabricated his ancestry in an attempt to validate his work and profit off of Native religion. The issue of pretendians caused many to question who has the right and

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<sup>22</sup> Lisa Aldred. 'Plastic Shamans and Astroturf Sun Dances: New Age Commercialisation of Native American Spirituality', *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 3, (2000), 329-352. p. 329

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.331

authority to discuss Native American spirituality and culture? James O. Young argues that an act of representing a culture is not an act of appropriating from it, however, “the representation of secret matters is an objectionable form of harm”, Young views it as a violation of a right of privacy, though he does not view it as a kind of theft.<sup>24</sup> Most scholars believe that the academic study of culture should be open to anyone to discuss, so long as they are truthful about their ancestry and point of view on the matter, whether they are simply making an observation from an outside perspective, or if they have experienced the culture first hand.<sup>25</sup>

The New Age movement and false claims of Native ancestry are damaging because they spread incorrect information about Native spirituality and performance of Native rituals. Sweat lodges and vision quests can be dangerous if not performed in the correct manner as they can lead to physical and spiritual harm. However, there is also a deeper damage being caused by the commercialisation of Native spirituality, as stereotypes and commercial imagery of Native American lives overshadows the realities that Indigenous people face, as they continue to suffer from past traumas and continued oppressions. Many Native Americans face issues of poverty, depression and alcohol abuse. Loss of ties to Native communities when living outside of reservations has caused many to lose touch with their Native identity and spirituality. Today Native people are still fighting for their land rights, and to regain sacred lands that were stolen from them. Along with fighting for environmental causes to protect the Earth, which they have deep spiritual ties to, as pipe lines, dams and oil companies continue to disregard Native American voices and concerns and even destroy protected areas of reservation lands. As people continue to commodify and take advantage of Native culture, they undermine Indigenous peoples struggle for survival. The New Age movement has packaged Native spirituality for white people to simply purchase, while Native American communities fight to maintain and protect their spiritual traditions after centuries of oppression and more recently to protect it against misrepresentation. Visions, dreams, dances and rituals are sacred

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<sup>24</sup> James O. Young, *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts*. (New York and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) p. 9

<sup>25</sup> Sam Gill. ‘The Academic Study of Religion’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 62, No. 4, (1994), 965-975. pp. 971-972

and are centuries old traditions that tie Native people to their past and their religion. The commercialisation of these experiences has become one of the most prominent concerns among Native communities in recent decades, for both economic and spiritual reasons. Some have pointed out that it is bitterly ironic that people who misrepresent themselves as Native, profit off of degrading, twisted versions of Native American rituals, while many Indigenous people continue to live below the poverty level.<sup>26</sup>

Native writers, Leslie Marmon Silko and Louise Erdrich use their novels to express the realistic struggles that Native people continued to face in the twentieth century. In her novel *Ceremony* (1977), Silko emphasises the importance of Native people finding their way back to their spirituality and their communities. The main character Tayo, after being traumatised by the loss of his cousin in World War Two, faces struggles with his mental health and alcoholism. After visiting a medicine man and receiving his vision he uses the power the vision provides to begin healing and accepting his past so that he can continue to live in the present. Tayo has to come to terms with accepting Native spiritual beliefs despite being mocked for them at his Christian school growing up. Meanwhile, Erdrich's *Tracks* (1988) uses traditional elements of Anishinaabe oral storytelling to anchor her story to the past and her culture. The novel explores the struggles of living on reservations, the loss of Native lands and the detrimental impact of residential school on Native families and communities. Meanwhile, in 1982 Highwater was releasing academic books on Native spiritual practices and gaining recognition and praise for his work, despite some areas of his writing being totally fictional, including tales of his own upbringing. These contradicting pieces of literature represent the conflicting and twisted narratives surrounding Native American spirituality and life in the period of the New Age movement. As Highwater took advantage of Native culture for commercial reasons, Erdrich and Silko aimed to represent the traumatic struggles and loss of identity that real Native Americans faced and still continue to battle with today.

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<sup>26</sup> Andy Smith, 'For All Those Who Were Indian in a Former Life', *Women of Power*, Winter 1991.

Arguably the twenty-first century has welcomed a movement of reclaiming by Native Americans. Indigenous authors are reclaiming the narrative surrounding Native spirituality and culture and preserving it by informing accurate representations of the significance of visions and traditional spiritual practices. Cherie Dimaline's novel *The Marrow Thieves* is a key example of this, as she uses a dystopian setting to represent the past traumas of colonialism and the New Age movement. The story is set in a future in which everyone but Native Americans have lost the ability to dream, resulting in high rates of suicide and psychological issues. Indigenous people are hunted for their bone marrow which is used to create a serum to treat others. The narrative is reflective of colonial traumas, such as slavery and the loss of Native lands, as the Indigenous characters are forced into fleeing and hiding in order to protect their lives. However, connections can also be drawn with the New Age movement, as the white population in the narrative have lost the ability to dream, and arguably New Agers and consumers of Native American spirituality are facing a loss of spiritual meaning. Conceivably New Agers experience a restlessness in consumer culture so seek out Indigenous spirituality, taking it for themselves to fill some form of loss. A parallel can be drawn in the way dreams are extracted in Dimaline's novel and purchased by consumers in the New Age movement, with no regard for how such actions will impact Native communities or individuals who are simply struggling to survive. Through her novel, Dimaline is using her voice to represent injustices against Native communities, both in the past and in the present, causing readers to reflect and consider the deeper meaning not only of dreams, but of Indigenous spirituality as a whole. By basing her narrative around dreams (a significant aspect of some Native religions) Dimaline is reclaiming the narrative and representation surrounding this area of Native culture and emphasises its deeper significance and power within Indigenous communities.

Leanne Simpson's (Mississauga Nishnaabeg) *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back* (2013), discusses the importance of storytelling and the continuation of Indigenous traditions, with specific reference to Simpson's own Nation, the Nishnaabeg. She quotes Neal McLeod who explains that "storytelling at its core is decolonising because it's a process of remembering, visioning and creating a just reality

where Nishnaabeg live as both Nishnaabeg and peoples.”.<sup>27</sup> Simpson emphasises the importance of continuing to tell stories in modern day America, and although it is not necessarily done in the traditional oral way, it is necessary to preserve Native histories and culture. As well as this, Simpson explains that dreams and visions propel resurgence and the movement of reclaiming, as “they provide Nishnaabeg with both the knowledge from the spiritual world and processes for realising those visions ..., they provide glimpses of decolonised spaces and transformed realities that we have collectively yet to imagine.”.<sup>28</sup> Visions within the Nishnaabeg community are a form of resurgence, they have always been a source of knowledge from the spiritual world and now the visions inform individuals on how to mobilise movements that work to protect and help Native communities against oppressions. Similarly, visions create new worlds and tell stories which are also forms of resurgence. Simpson is using her voice and published literature to push people to participate in the movement of reclaiming and she represents the many ways that visions provide Native communities with power and aid in the movement of resurgence. As Simpson emphasises the importance of storytelling and resurgence she is also suggesting that it is important to preserve Native cultures in any way possible, although that may mean leaning away from traditional oral storytelling. Simpson herself has turned to the written word in order to represent the significance of preserving Native spiritual practices. In a somewhat contrasting way, non-Natives New Agers have turned towards Native spiritual practices, whilst Native Americans have adapted western cultural practices in order to preserve and reclaim the discussion surrounding their own religion and culture.

The fight to reclaim Native spirituality is ongoing, however, Indigenous voices are gaining more mainstream attention. A greater number of published Native authors and academics are gaining recognition, as people acknowledge that an Indigenous writer’s ancestry provides them with an accurate representation of Native spiritual beliefs and practices over others. However, resurgence and the reclaiming of representations are not the only issues Native communities

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<sup>27</sup> Leanne Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*. (Arbeiter Ring Pub., 2011) p. 33

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35

continue to face. Many Nations are fighting an on-going battle to regain sacred lands, overcome poverty and survive in America. Whilst the preservation of spirituality and the representation of visions and dreams helps to preserve culture, Native Americans have to take further measures in order to get their voices heard by the white American population. Protests and political movements are a way of drawing public attention to issues Indigenous people continue to face. Whilst literature such as Leanne Simpson's *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back* and Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*, help to emphasise the importance of these causes for Native communities, as they preserve and protect their spiritual experiences, the occupation of lands such as Mount Rushmore and Alcatraz and the rejection of money to compensate for the loss of sacred lands such as the Black Hills, shows the determination of Native American activists to have past injustices resolved. The Chibimoodaywin social movement, inspired by spiritual vision, as described by Simpson shows the importance and unbound knowledge that visions provide for Indigenous communities and exemplifies their continued relevance within Native groups, as they inspire a movement of reclaiming Native spirituality.

A pattern of exploitation of Native American spirituality can be clearly identified over the past 160 years. Native American communities have fought against the removal of their sacred lands and continued to uphold their spiritual practices at a time when they were outlawed. They then witnessed the theft of their spiritual beliefs for commercial benefits and faced pretendians who twisted their representation to make them profitable, all whilst Native Americans themselves struggled to uphold their Native identity and traditions. The last century has witnessed a movement of reclaiming of spiritual representations and the resurgence of Indigenous storytelling and traditions. Native Americans have adapted and made use of western materials and markets, developing their traditional storytelling techniques in order to preserve their spiritual past and practices in the present day. Pictographs have developed into gallery exhibits and oral storytelling has been transformed into the written word and a variety of fictional novels. Throughout this

development the importance of visions has been continually present as they remain a key source of power and knowledge for Native American communities, inspiring protest against oppressions.

## Literature Review

The literature surrounding Native American spirituality can be somewhat of a minefield, as the New Age movement saw a rise in pretendians taking part in academic writings, therefore scholars must be mindful of this when researching on the topic. There is also much debate among Native community leaders surrounding the question of who has the right to discuss Native American spirituality, as some aspects such as dreams and visions can be very intimate and there is secrecy surrounding particular areas of Native religious practices. Though many of these debates and issues are rooted in the literature published within the 1970s to late 1990s, more recent writing has been focussed on the resurgence of Native American spirituality and its preservation, while also highlighting the struggles that Native American people continue to face in society, breaking down the romanticisation of their cultures and religions.

Literature based around the understanding and representation of visions has altered dramatically in recent years. Academics in the early twentieth century focussed on Freudian understandings of how the brain works and creates dreams. A particular focus was placed on Freud's theories on the subconscious, and later on Carl Jung's ideas that dreams are the psyche's attempt to communicate truths to individuals. However, Jung's understandings of the psyche disregards the perception of the clarity of inter-species communication, a factor that is of deep significance in Native visions, as very often spirits present themselves in animal form. Jung believed that other species appearing in dreams must be "mere" symbols and therefore nothing more than pointers and signifiers of the human psyche. However, more recent literature has disregarded such works by Freud and Jung due to a lack of multi-cultural consideration. Lee Irwin remarks on the subject that "exemplifying neo-Freudian hermeneutics, expressed a remarkable disregard for the religious significance of Native American dreaming by interpreting all dreams as compensatory defence

mechanisms”.<sup>29</sup> Recent scholarship from the last fifty years has been more respectful and considerate of Native American spiritual practices and literature surrounding the subject has placed a greater focus on representing the deeper meaning and significance of dreams and visions as a form of knowledge and power.

Irwin has become a key figure in the study of visions and he acknowledges them as primary sources of knowledge among the Plains people. Much of his works consists of documenting the meaning and experience of the spirit world. However, Irwin himself admits that describing a vision does not equal the experience of the vision itself, “this is a function of the inadequacy of language with regard to visionary experience”.<sup>30</sup> He further explains that “within the visionary realms there are no permanent parts, divisions or fixed boundaries, there are only relative degrees of unfolding perception”.<sup>31</sup> Those that attempt to describe their visionary experience find that they cannot explain many parts of their vision, as there are simply no words to make such descriptions. This is true of Black Elk’s vision, despite the many days that he attempted to explain his vision to Neihardt the deeper experience could not be grasped with words. Due to this a few scholars have turned to visual expressions of dreams and visions in order to ascertain a greater understanding of the visionary world. Irwin argues that “the use of colour for symbolic expression is deeply rooted in a shared cultural repertoire enhanced by visionary experience ... spirits in most visions are dramatically painted and highly memorable, demonstrating that Native American visions were distinctly colour laden and highly saturated with the patterned use of colour”.<sup>32</sup> As the dominant feature of the vision is the visual, not verbal experience, art bridges this gateway of understanding. However, the visionary world is so far beyond comprehension that it will remain a topic that academics continue to ponder about and explore- though many have concluded that they are a key

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<sup>29</sup> Lee Irwin, ‘Dreams, Theory, and Culture: The Plains Vision Quest Paradigm’, *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 2, (1994), 229-245. p.231

<sup>30</sup> Irwin. *The Dream Seekers: Native American Visionary Traditions of the Great Plains*, (USA: University of Oklahoma Press, 199) p.165

<sup>31</sup> Irwin, *Dreams, Theory, and Culture*, p. 239

<sup>32</sup> Irwin, *The Dream Seekers*, p.216

to greater knowledge and bestow both individuals and Native American communities with power and wisdom.

The documentation of visions and tribal histories by Native American academics helps to form a more rounded understanding of the significance of visions within a range of Native American cultures. A number of Native American academics have taken inspiration from the origin stories of their Native Nation and have transformed them into the written word. A more well-known origin story is that of the Sky woman, though there are various adaptations of the story. Gerald Vizenor suggests that there are as many versions of tribal histories as there are listeners and readers. This view is shared by Thomas King who emphasises that every story has endless interpretations and meanings as he tells the story of the turtle who carries the world on his back.<sup>33</sup> N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) published *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1976) with the intention to preserve the stories of his grandmother's Nation, as only oral history survived within their Nation but the language was disappearing.<sup>34</sup> Other scholars have taken the opportunity to observe patterns across these newly documented origin stories, identifying patterns and themes that often reappear in later documentations of visions. Both within origin stories and visions the spirit world holds great power and knowledge, often animal spirits guide those in stories and visions in order to find their purpose or provide them with wisdom to aid their communities. As L. W. Gross has observed, themes such as 'second chances' and 'forgiveness' are essential features of Anishinaabe myths; whilst equality also figures greatly, often in the guise of the need to respect all animals, as often animals save humans in tribal histories.<sup>35</sup> Similarly the role of the trickster reoccurs, he is representative of using one's wits to survive, and this role continues to be a central figure in modern Native storytelling in the works of Louise Erdrich and Gerald Vizenor.<sup>36</sup> The analysis of reoccurring themes within tribal histories and visions still has room to be explored by scholars, though current literature on the subject presents

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*, (Toronto: Anansi Press, 2003)

<sup>34</sup> N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, (USA: University of New Mexico Press, 1976)

<sup>35</sup> Lawrence William Gross, 'The Comic Vision Of Anishinaabe Culture And Religion', *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 26. Part 3, (2002), 436-459. p. 446

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 447-456

clear patterns and suggests links between the spirit/visionary world and the creation of individual Native Nations. This signifies the deep ties that visions hold within Native communities linking to tribal origins, and emphasises the need for their preservation in order to maintain Native spirituality and identity for future generations. More recently this has been achieved through the adaptation of oral storytelling into the written word. As Native languages have begun to die out, Native American academics have taken on the task of documenting tribal histories in order to preserve them to maintain the spiritual beliefs and culture of their tribal community.

There is much literature surrounding the commercialisation of Native American spirituality, a key article being “Plastic Shamans and Astro turf Sun Dances” by Lisa Aldred, her analysis of the New Age movement has been cited by many academics. Aldred condemns the New Agers and suggests that the cause of their interest in Native American spirituality is an attempt to save themselves from their own sense of malaise, however, as products themselves of the consumer culture they continue to pursue spiritual meaning and cultural identification through acts of purchase.<sup>37</sup> The romanticisation of Native spirituality has made it a profitable industry and, propelled by the quest for some form of community and historical tradition, New Agers have fetishised both Native Americans and their religious and cultural practices.<sup>38</sup> The vast majority of literature surrounding the issue of New Age commercialisation view white, non-Native simulation of “authentic Indian” practices as a dominant discourse of racist oppression, as they undermine Indigenous peoples struggle for survival. As Philip Jenkins puts it, “most contemporary scholars have not been sympathetic to New Age adaptations of Native religion and spirituality, instead they see it as a glaring example of colonist cultural intrusion and expropriation”.<sup>39</sup> Geary Hobson (Cherokee and Quapaw/Chickasaw) portrays the attempt to

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<sup>37</sup> Aldred, *Plastic Shamans and Astro turf Sun Dances*, p. 329

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.346

<sup>39</sup> Philip Jenkins, *Dream Catchers: How Mainstream America Discovered Native Spirituality*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) p. 7

steal the Native American religion as the latest callous phase of cultural genocide.<sup>40</sup> These views of cultural expropriations and genocide link to themes in Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*, as the dystopian setting and the literal extraction of dreams from Native Americans is a metaphor for the ongoing exploitation and generational trauma of Native Americans and their oppressed spirituality.

There are a small number of academics who have sought to rationalise and justify the appropriation taking place among New Agers, such as James O. Young. He reasons that many acts of cultural appropriation are morally unobjectionable and some of them result in artworks of great authentic value, arguing that an act of representing a culture is not an act of appropriating it.<sup>41</sup> Whilst the act of representing a culture is arguably not a form of appropriation, many of those involved in the New Age movement falsely claimed to be members of Native American Nations in order to increase their sales of "authentic" spiritual experiences and items. The commercialisation of Native American religious practices is undoubtedly a form of appropriation, as sellers and corporations steal elements of various Native American cultures and misrepresent their meanings and significance in order to gain profits, often combining different elements of various Indigenous Nations religious practices, misrepresenting the differing cultures. Young's definition of 'subject appropriation' – telling stories about Indigenous people while having no links to said culture – is an exploitation of Native culture and a form of theft. The misrepresentation of Native American culture and spirituality is damaging to Native communities and concerning, as mainstream interpretations threaten to overshadow traditional Native American spiritual beliefs and practices for future generations. Young acknowledges this fact and states that "some object appropriation is theft", however, he somewhat controversially goes on to argue that "assimilation is the main threat" and justifies the act of cultural appropriation by artists as they are only borrowing from the culture.<sup>42</sup> However, when a minority culture, such as Native Americans, are faced with the commodification

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<sup>40</sup> Geary Hobson, 'The Rise of White Shaman as the New Version of Cultural Imperialism', in *The Remembered Earth: An Anthology Of Contemporary Native American Literature*, Ed. Hobson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981) pp.100-108

<sup>41</sup> Young, *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts*, pp.2-7

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 152-153

and commercialisation of their culture, the act of 'borrowing' can be damaging, particularly when Native American artist and voices are faced with having to fight against twisted interpretations of their culture. Hence Young's arguments surrounding appropriation are questionable and could be damaging in the process of Native Americans reclaiming their spirituality and the resurgence of their traditions.

Historical literature presents a pattern of ongoing exploitation and oppression of Native American spirituality, dating back centuries to the colonisation of America. Erik Seeman's essay "Native Spirits, Shaker Visions", presents the argument that white Euro-Americans have been exploiting the representation of Native American dreams and visions since the founding of the United States. Seeman uses documented accounts of Shakers communicating with the dead to redeem their departed spirits and bring them posthumously into the Shaker fold. He argues that "Shaker spirit narratives reveal how one religious society appropriated Indian images available in the early republic to express nuanced views about the legacy of colonialism and white male violence, via the groups characteristic method of speaking with the dead."<sup>43</sup> Using records of members of Native Nations, Seeman discerned that most of the Native spirits that spoke through visionary Shaker believers were fictional, similarly to how pretendians of the New Age movement made up their ancestry and aspects of Native culture. Following on from the colonisation of America, Native Americans not only continued to be exploited but their spirituality became severely oppressed by new government restrictions and laws. As Native Americans were forced onto reservations the American government aimed to assimilate them into the larger white American population by targeting their culture and spirituality. In the 1800s laws were put in place that prohibited religious practises such as the Sundance and Native American children were forced into residential schools where they were taught that Native spirituality was sinful. The American government became fearful of Native American spirituality as they thought it would lead to rebellion and war, whereas members

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<sup>43</sup> Erik R. Seeman, 'Native Spirits, Shaker Visions: Speaking with the Dead in the Early Republic', *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 35, No.3, (2015), 347-373. pp.350-352

of Native Nations were simply trying to uphold their traditions. James Mooney discusses the impact of the Ghost Dance religion among the Sioux Nation. He determines that an ongoing oppressive state by the American government led to unrest and, as the Sioux took up the Ghost Dance - going against laws prohibiting such practises - tension built to a climax and led to the Wounded Knee massacre.<sup>44</sup> This traumatic event presents the forced oppression of Native spirituality and the struggle of its survival in the United States. Historical literature shows a clear pattern of exploitation and oppression of Native American spirituality dating back to colonialism, and continued colonial structures have resulted in spiritual theft and appropriation throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century.

The New Age movement also brought with it a number of pretendians, these are people who falsely claim Native American ancestry. Christopher Ronwanienite Jocks (Kahnawake Mohawk), in "Spirituality for Sale", names some such pretendians, for example, Carlos Castaneda and Lynn Andrews, among a number of others, who have outright falsified and made up Native traditions and rituals.<sup>45</sup> Jocks also critiques academics who are selective about the details they discuss, as they only reveal the most pleasing elements of Native experiences, whilst others interpretations can be too accurate or detailed, violating Native rules of privilege.<sup>46</sup> His key argument is that "without firmly grounded and enacted knowledge about the initially prescribed limits of externally available knowledge, such 'data' is liable to be not only ethically clouded, but logically and intellectually unreliable".<sup>47</sup> Jocks expresses concerns surrounding appropriation and intrusion by academics and New Agers, he states that action must be taken to make sure that truthful representations of Native culture and spirituality are available and the pretendians are exposed.<sup>48</sup> However, Jocks does not go as far as some Native Nation leaders, such as the Hopi, who believe that only Native Americans

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<sup>44</sup> Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak 1896*, pp.843-887

<sup>45</sup> Christopher Ronwaniente Jocks, 'Spirituality for Sale: Sacred Knowledge in the Consumer Age', *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 3/4, (1996), 415-443. pp. 417-418

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.418

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 416

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 416-421

themselves have the right to discuss their Indigenous history and spirituality.<sup>49</sup> Sam Gill argues that “to hold one race, ethnicity or gender is somehow privileged in any area of academic study is racism and refute important gains that have been made”, while this is somewhat extreme in its claim of racism, he balances his argument to a more reasonable standpoint, stating that one must know the languages and do the field studies as appropriate to the methods and requirements to the larger academic community.<sup>50</sup> The argument that those of non-Native ancestry must learn the language and make the efforts to understand Native American’s first hand experiences is a fair one and discourages pretendians. As Kathryn Shanley (Fort Peck Assiniboine) states, “there is a difference between claiming an identity and seeking to represent a people to the larger world”, and this seems to be the central argument being made by Native American academics surrounding the issue of pretendians and who has the right to discuss matters of Native American spirituality.<sup>51</sup> So long as the intentions of the academic are to represent Native American culture through an outsiders lens and after undergoing a great deal of research, then it is reasonable to accept their work as truthful, as it would be extreme to dismiss all academic work by non-Natives. The wariness of Native American academics and communities is understandable as the influence of pretendians has been very damaging. Using Highwater as an example, his fraudulent heritage has “appropriated Indianness for his own gain and peddles it as artefact”.<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, many Native communities are fighting to preserve and represent their spirituality, which creates ties to their Native identity and ancestors, the fraudulent acts of pretendians undermines these efforts.

The New Age movement paved the way for new voices in literature on Native American spirituality, as Native American scholars have taken on the effort of a resurgence of their culture and have reclaimed their spirituality from the white non-Native mainstream narrative. Voices such as

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<sup>49</sup> Brown, Michael F. *Who Owns Native Culture?*, (Cambridge MA.: Harvard University Press, 2004)

<sup>50</sup> Gill, *The Academic Study of Religion*, pp. 971-972

<sup>51</sup> Kathryn Shanley, ‘The Indians America Loves to Love and Read: American Indian Identity and Cultural Appropriation’ in *Native American Representations*, Ed. Bataille, Gretchen., (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 26-50. p.44

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.35

Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) have helped to inspire this new wave of literature, as he argued that academics and anthropologists made theories about Natives without considering external factors and white repression- stating that scholars have not used their voice to help.<sup>53</sup> Deloria's belief that "Indian religion will be the salvation of the Indian people" has been a central belief among recent literature.<sup>54</sup> Both Leanne Simpson and Lisa Brooks (Abenaki) have been key figures in this new movement and their work has played a significant role in the effort towards resurgence and reclaiming of spirituality. Leanne Simpson argues that storytelling is the framework of tribal teachings and experiences and is inspired by Neal McLeod's (Cree) belief that storytelling, at its core, is a form of decolonising "as it is a process of remembering, envisioning and creating a just reality where Nishinaabeg live as both Nishinaabeg and people".<sup>55</sup> Simpson pushes for resurgence of tribal cultures, and similarly to Deloria she focusses on spirituality to help preserve Native tradition and reconnect Native people with their ancestry and heritage. Visions provide glimpses of decolonised spaces and realities that are yet to be imagined, this is why they propel the movement to reclaim Native spirituality as they provide knowledge and tie people to their communities. Simpson observes that Native people cannot survive without storytelling and visions, suggesting that they must return to themselves and engage with the traditions they have left behind, resulting in an individual and collective process of decolonisation and resurgence.<sup>56</sup>

Lisa Brooks also encourages the reclaiming of Native spirituality and signifies the importance of storytelling and visions in this process. She states that the recovery of Indigenous voices and knowledge is instrumental to the adaptation and survival of Native nations and the future landscape of America.<sup>57</sup> Brooks looks to the adaptation of traditional oral storytelling into written word as a necessity for the survival of Native spirituality and its representation, after facing twisted

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<sup>53</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, (University of Oklahoma Press, 1969) p.83

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p.120

<sup>55</sup> Simpson, Leanne. *Dancing on Our Turtles Back*, pp.32-33

<sup>56</sup> Simpson, Leanne. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*. (University of Minnesota Press, 2017) pp.16-17

<sup>57</sup> Lisa Tanya Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2008) p.xxxix

interpretations and exploitation by the New Age movement, plastic shamans and pretendians. Brooks uses Louise Erdrich's observation of the Ojibwa words for 'book' and 'rock painting' being almost identical, as an argument that books are not new to Native Americans, they are merely an adaptation. This claim is supported by Leslie Marmon Silko's strong beliefs on the interdependence of oral and written traditions, as Silko points to the adoption of alphabetical writing as a form of adaptation.<sup>58</sup> Literature produced in the twenty-first century supports the argument that Native Americans have adapted their traditional storytelling into written literature and art, utilising western genres, markets and materials. Craig Womack (Cree-Cherokee) argues that "Indian cultures are the only cultures where it is assumed that if they change they are no longer a culture. In most other cultures change is viewed as a sign that the culture is vibrant and alive, capable of surviving."<sup>59</sup> Therefore the recent increase in literature by Native American scholars and the reclaiming of its representation through the adaptation of written storytelling is a form of natural progression and survival for a culture that has faced a great deal of oppression and exploitation by the white American population. Despite the damage of the New Age movement and commodification of Native American culture and religion, new literature has emerged to preserve an accurate representation of Native American spirituality, and argues that its survival is rooted in the knowledge of visions and the continued transformation of storytelling.

Across Indigenous literature there are links between visions and storytelling, as both act as forms of knowledge that aid efforts of resurgence by Native American people. This thesis argues that dreams and visions have guided efforts over the last 160 years to reclaim the representation of Native spirituality. They have become a reoccurring subject in written and visual Native media, as they represent a long misunderstood aspect of Native spirituality which Native authors and artists have worked to correct. Academic literature suggests that the commercialisation of Native American

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.xxi

<sup>59</sup> Craig S. Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) p.31

culture has been extremely damaging to Indigenous communities, as it has led to misrepresentation and exploitation of spiritual practices, as well as having overshadowed the continued struggles for survival that Native communities face, as they try to avoid assimilation into the greater American public and uphold their traditions. The issue of pretendians within academic literature is addressed and examined by this thesis in a case study, arguing that pretendians and plastic shamans exploited and manipulated the representation of Native American spirituality for personal gains. The exploitation and oppression of Native American spirituality dates back centuries, which has resulted in a generational trauma among Native American communities. In order to reclaim and preserve an accurate representation of Native culture and spiritual practices, Native American academics, authors and artists have adapted their traditional forms of storytelling into western forms of literature for preservation and in the hopes of resurgence. This thesis argues that the adaptation of traditional storytelling into written literature is a form of protest against spiritual and cultural oppression and is reclaiming and preserving Native American culture for future generations, through the utilisation of new materials and markets.

## Chapter 1 - Black Elk Speaks: The death of the Sacred Tree and Planting a Seed of Resurgence

The as told to story *Black Elk Speaks*, 1932, marks the beginning of a movement of resurgence and the reclaiming of the representation of Native American spirituality. Black Elk's utilisation of written language and John Neihardt as an author signifies the adaptation of traditional storytelling in western forms of literature. Similarly Indigenous artists, such as Oscar Howe and Norval Morrisseau adapted their artwork by combining tradition and modernism to create new art styles, utilising new material and the exposure of exhibits and galleries to represent Native American spirituality. These adaptations were made in an effort to preserve and record key elements of Native spirituality, such as visions and ceremonies, following a period of religious oppression among Native American Nations, which aimed to eradicate Native culture and spiritual beliefs.

The nineteenth century and early twentieth century were times of fast moving political and economic change and saw an increase in government policies which reinforced religious oppression towards Native Americans. After Native American religion was persecuted and outlawed by the United State's government with the 1883 'Code of Indian Offences' - a legislation that restricted religious and cultural ceremonies, Native groups were forced onto reservations and lost their lands with the Dawes Act of 1887, which regulated land rights and tribal territories.<sup>60</sup> The oppression of Native religion and culture was further reinforced with the introduction of government residential school systems, whose objective was said to be to continue until there was "no Indian question, and no Indian department".<sup>61</sup> This was to be achieved by encouraging Native children to abandon their

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<sup>60</sup> Henry M.Teller, 'Rules Governing the Court of Indian Offences' (letter for Department of the Interior, Office Of Indian Affairs, 2 December 1882) <<http://robert-clinton.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/code-of-indian-offenses.pdf>>; National Archives and Records Administration, *Dawes Act (1887)*, (Feb. 2022) <<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/dawes-act>> [Accessed 6 April 2022]

<sup>61</sup> Facing History and Ourselves, *Stolen Lives: The Indigenous Peoples of Canada and the Indian Residential Schools*, (2022) < <https://www.facinghistory.org/stolen-lives-indigenous-peoples-canada-and-indian-residential-schools/historical-background/until-there-not-single-indian-canada>> [Accessed 6 April 2022]

traditional values, customs, and lifestyles and push Western culture within the Native communities, resulting in assimilation. War and ongoing efforts by the American government to assimilate Native Americans into the larger, white, Euro-American population harmed Native culture and identity, as spirituality and religion were increasingly targeted and persecuted by Indian agencies under the instruction of the government. Arguably, *Black Elk Speaks* is a product of these circumstances, as it marks the adaptation of written literature by Native Americans, rather than traditional oral storytelling, in order to preserve some of the most fundamental aspects of Native spirituality - visions and dreams. The narrative of Black Elk's vision created a new openness with non-Natives and their understanding of Native American spirituality, as previously, there was a deal of secrecy surrounding visions and dreams as they are a private and personal experience. Some believe that to tell a vision is to give up the power that it gifted one-self, while others share their visions with their communities to pass on the power or knowledge that they contain. There is some controversy surrounding Black Elk's motives for sharing his vision, however, his stated intention was to preserve the vision and share his religion with non-natives.<sup>62</sup> Criticism surrounding the literature focuses on John Neihardt's romanticisation and exaggeration of the vision, claiming he twisted the narrative to make it more marketable.

The significance of *Black Elk Speaks* is marked by its impact throughout the 1960s and 1970s, not only did it reach widespread audiences among Native Americans but also Non-Natives, resulting in a range of interpretations and impacts. Unfortunately *Black Elk Speaks* became a staple reading for New Agers and some could argue that its openness to non-Natives helped feed into the New Age movement, decades after its original publication. The book's popularity resulted in its reprint in 1963, gaining a large following around the same time that the careers of Norval Morrisseau and Oscar Howe's were taking off and gaining recognition in the art world. As a result of the resurgence of *Black Elk Speaks* in the 1960s it directly correlates to the increase in interest with Native

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<sup>62</sup> Irwin, *Native American Spirituality: A Critical Reader*, (USA: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), p.308; Jenkins, *Dream Catchers*, pp.120-167

spirituality and its newfound popularity, and gains attention in parallel to Morrisseau and Howe's rise to success. Similarly, all three individuals make efforts towards resurgence and their literatures explore similar themes and held influence among non-Natives throughout the 1960s. It is important to analyse the impact of these individuals within the same context. As accounts of visions from the Great Plains gained a mainstream popularity in the 1960s, the concept of Native American spirituality became more singular and centred around visions and dreams. Combined with the success of artists, such as Morrisseau and Howe, who depicted visions in their artwork, non-Natives became more immersed in Native American spirituality. Previously visions had been feared due to secrecy and ambiguity, dating back to colonial times when colonisers determined that Native Americans "had no notion of sin".<sup>63</sup> However, scholars must consider the intention of these artists, along with Black Elk, as they utilise western materials and markets, and adapt traditional forms of storytelling to record their individual spiritual experiences. Overall, as a result of centuries of spiritual oppression, and persecution by the American government in the late nineteenth century, Native Americans adapted to new forms of literature, utilising new materials for publication and art, whilst taking advantage of new capitalist markets, in order to preserve their spirituality throughout the twentieth century.

### Saving Great Visions

Arguably, *Black Elk Speaks*, a biographical account of Black Elk's early life as a Lakota of the Ogalala band, marks the start of the movement of resurgence of spirituality through literature among the Great Plains area, as previously literature surrounding the Great Plains had been in the genre of romantic novels written by white non-natives.<sup>68</sup> Black Elk was among one of the first members of his Nation, alongside Luther Standing Bear (Sicangu and Oglala Lakota) to bridge the gap between oral

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<sup>63</sup> Oksana Y. Danchevskaya, 'Good and Evil in Native American Mythology' (MA., Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2020)

<sup>68</sup> Frances W. Kaye, 'Literary Traditions', *Encyclopaedia of The Great Plains*, (2011) <<http://plainshumanities.unl.edu/encyclopedia/doc/egp.lt.001>> [Accessed 08/04/22]

and written storytelling. Whilst Standing Bear wrote about his life on the reservations and presented a Native American viewpoint on residential schools and commented on Indigenous cultures, Black Elk told his story in an effort to pass on the power of his great vision and preserve it through the use of literature. Using his son as a translator, Black Elk recalled the first few decades of his life as a member of the Lakota, and he shared his great vision while poet, writer (and honorary tribe member) John Neihardt recorded it on paper in written words. Black Elk utilised Neihardt's experience and reputation as a writer to transform his story into a form of written literature. Black Elk understood that the publication of his story would result in its conservation as it would become a part of the consumer market and would be absorbed by non-Natives, resulting in the story's longevity. Therefore, Black Elk adapted traditional storytelling into a 'westernised' form of literature, utilising paper materials for its publication and the consumer market to ensure the spread and, therefore, the preservation of his vision/ life story.

At the age of nine Black Elk became very ill and lay unresponsive for days while his family cared for him, it was during this time that he had a vision. As he lay in his tepee, men in the sky told him that his Grandfathers were waiting for him, then a cloud took him up into the sky where he was greeted by a bay horse. Horses from the North, East, South and West filled the sky dancing and transformed into diverse animals, guiding Black Elk and the bay horse to the six Grandfathers. The Grandfathers sat in a tepee with a rainbow for a door, they were the powers of the world and they each gifted Black Elk with an object that would aid him with a power. Black Elk was told that he held great power and would guide his people and save his nation, which appeared to be dying, as the nation's hoop was broken and the sacred tree was dying with it. However, in the vision, after using the gifts provided by the Grandfathers the nation was restored and Black Elk saw the hoops of many nations united in one hoop, with a mighty holy tree sheltering everyone. Black Elk was given a mission by the Grandfathers to go back to his world and empower and restore his people, then a spotted Eagle guarded him as he returned to Earth, where his body lay waiting for him.

After his vision, Black Elk explains that he felt sad because he felt that he should share his vision with everybody but was afraid to tell it because he feared no one would believe him as he was only a child. He describes that as he thought of the vision he could feel the meaning “like a strange power glowing in my body”, but he could not find the words to define the meaning: “it would be like a fog and get away from me.”.<sup>69</sup> As Black Elk grows older he begins to use some of the powers the grandfathers provided him with, talking to coyotes who warn him of danger, and praying to the grandfathers to send a thunderstorm to hide his camp from attackers.<sup>70</sup> However, it was not until he was seventeen years old that Black Elk shared his vision with another person. He was greatly tormented by his vision and crows and coyotes called to him “It is time!”. This continued and Black Elk was fearful until he told a medicine man named Black Road of his vision. The medicine man simply instructed him to follow what the bay horse had told him, and to perform the vision for his people upon Earth. The performance of the vision was named the Horse Dance, and his tribe performed the details of the vision. After the dance, people told Black Elk that they or their relatives who had been feeling sick were well again.<sup>71</sup> In 1882, Black Elk sought out the healing herb from his vision and used it to cure a sick boy, he went on to become a medicine man, like his father and grandfather before him. After a brief time of happiness, Black Elk witnessed the introduction of the Ghost Dance as his people continued to be oppressed by new government treaties and laws, he saw the resulting hardships and tensions build up, leading to the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890. Reflecting on the massacre, after detailing events to Neihardt decades later, Black Elk describes a people’s dream dying there and contemplates on his life. Neihardt embellishes and romanticises this moment in the book, stating that Black Elk calls himself a “pitiful old man who has done nothing, for the nation’s hoop is broken and scattered. ... the sacred tree is dead.”.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> John Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux, as told through John G. Neihardt*, (London: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1972) pp.48-49

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 155-162

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276

The tale of Black Elk's vision is a tragic one, as he loses hope and believes he has failed in saving his people and fulfilling the meaning of the vision. The vision was apocalyptic and foretold the hardships and suffering that the Sioux people would face. Black Elk saw them dead or dying at the hands of white invaders, and he believed it was up to him to change this fate. The sacred hoop represented a united community of his people, and while the various Sioux tribes banded together when in need of help, following continued displacement on reservations and the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre, the nation became scattered and struggled to maintain their communities and unity. Some turned away from their Native spirituality, seeking Christianity and Catholicism in the hope that it would secure their future, as Black Elk himself did, while others were displaced and left reservations to seek out jobs. Arguably, following the events of the Ghost Dance and 1890 massacre, the people of the Great Plains had their faith shaken. A great deal of faith, in particular, had been placed on the sacred shirts, which were said to protect the wearer from harm. Whilst it was believed the dead went to a better land and were happy, the powers that were said to be provided by the Ghost Dance's sacred shirts were proven to be powerless against bullets at the Wounded Knee massacre. Such a traumatising and tragic event brought a swift end to the Ghost Dance and left the Great Plains people struggling to maintain their unity and their spirituality, as the government continued to push Christianity onto Native peoples, while they were reeling in grief and struggling to survive.

The Ghost Dance was misunderstood and was feared by the white American population due to a lack of understanding of Native American spiritual practices. However, *Black Elk Speaks* introduces a new representation of Native American religion and reclaims the narrative and representation surrounding the Ghost Dance. While the introduction of the Ghost Dance among the Sioux directly correlated with the outcome of the Wounded Knee massacre, this was not the sole cause of the event. Although tensions were heightened by the banning of Native dance ceremonies, tensions were already high following the Battle of Little Bighorn and the continued poor conditions on reservations and the U.S. government's inability to uphold promises they made in treaties with

the Lakota only made matters worse. As Black Elk described, “the people were hungry and in despair, and many believed in the good new world that was coming” it was the government’s failures to provide food and cattle, resulting in starvation, that pushed many in the Great Plains region to perform the Ghost Dance and turn to it for a form of comfort and hope.<sup>73</sup> There was also the misconception among the Lakota that the ghost shirts that Black Elk had seen in a vision, could repel bullets. After many died or were injured wearing these shirts, faith was lost in the Ghost Dance. Black Elk stated “a peoples’s dream died there. It was a beautiful dream”, foreshadowing the turning away from spiritual traditions among a number of Native Americans and the crisis of identity that many continue to face today. As Raymond J. DeMallie argues the Ghost Dance “held out such hope to the Lakotas that its ultimate failure ... generated a renewed religious crisis that forced a final realisation that the old ways, with the hunting of the buffalo, were actually gone forever.”<sup>74</sup> This resulted in a religious collapse and allowed for new beliefs and twisted interpretations of Native American spirituality to develop. Overall, *Black Elk Speaks* is significant in its representation of the Ghost Dance and the Wounded Knee massacre, as it forms a new representation of events from a Native American view point. Whereas before, there was only the narrative provided by the white non-Native press, who were ignorant to the meanings and various aspects of Native spiritual practices. The vision played a key role in these events as it provided hopes of freedom to Native Americans and unified them, however, the vision’s power was feared by non-Natives and they sought to oppress it by reinforcing their militant power, targeting Native spirituality and resulting in a brutal massacre.

John Neihardt states in the preface of the 1972 publication of *Black Elk Speaks* that Black Elk’s chief purpose was to “save his Great Vision for men”.<sup>75</sup> Arguably, Black Elk utilised the opportunity

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.253

<sup>74</sup> Raymond J. DeMallie, ‘The Lakota Ghost Dance: An Ethnohistorical Account’, *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Nov., 1982) p. 404

<sup>75</sup> Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, p. ix

provided by Neihardt to adapt his oral storytelling of his great vision into a written form of literature. Black Elk made use of Neihardt's reputation as a published poet and writer in order for his own story to be transformed into a published piece of literature that would withstand time and the political and economic changes that were threatening Native spiritual beliefs and traditions. Black Elk believed that by telling Neihardt of his vision, that he would soon die, as he was passing on the power the vision held - he felt a responsibility to document his vision and not only preserve it for Native Americans, but to share it with the 'white world'. There was a strong bond between Neihardt and Black Elk upon their first meeting. When Neihardt went to document the vision, he and his daughters were accepted as members of the Sioux by Black Elk. Neihardt was named 'Flaming Rainbow', as Flaming Rainbow, Neihardt was to enact the role of his power on earth by making the vision "go out", like the flames from the rainbow, so that people would understand its meaning.<sup>76</sup> Arguably Neihardt acted out this role, as the several reprints and publications of *Black Elk Speaks* over the last century have allowed the vision to "go out" and has been passed on to new generations of both Native and non-Native people. Neihardt claims that it was his function to translate the old man's story, "not only in the factual sense – for it was not the facts that mattered most – but rather to recreate in English the mood and manner of the old man's narrative."<sup>77</sup> This statement is crucial in understanding the intentions and meaning of *Black Elk Speaks*, as it cannot be taken as an entirely, historically accurate account of events, not only because it is written from a singular viewpoint, but also due to Neihardt's own romanticised narrative of events. Sherman Alexie, an Indigenous author has objected to the teaching of *Black Elk Speaks* in Native American literature courses because the narrative is "told-through-white-men" and he therefore believes the text is not reflective of Native culture but instead pushes romanticised ideas of Native identity.<sup>78</sup> However, Black Elk's intentions were to document his vision in order to pass it on to others and to share it with

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<sup>76</sup> Neihardt, *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given to John G. Neihardt*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985) p. 37

<sup>77</sup> Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, p. ix

<sup>78</sup> Patrice Hollrah, 'Sherman Alexie's Challenge to the Academy's Teaching of Native American Literature, Non-Native Writers, and Critics', *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Vol. 13, No. 2/3, (2001), 23-35. p. 28

non-Natives. The causes for this can only be speculated about, but it could be suggested that Black Elk believed, that by sharing his vision and story of his early life with non-Natives, they might become sympathetic to Native Americans' situations and be more accepting of their spiritual beliefs; or maybe Black Elk believed an openness towards non-Natives might lead to a new form of unity between Native Americans and non-Natives, hoping to unify the nations. In regards to Black Elk's intentions, his efforts to document his vision for others is of the most significance in regards to this thesis, as he entrusted Neihardt to transform his oral storytelling to written English language, utilising literature and western markets to aid his efforts for preservation.

### *Black Elk Speaks'* Legacy

At the time of its original publication, in 1932, *Black Elk Speaks* received positive reviews but financially it was a total failure and failed to grasp the wider readership Black Elk had hoped to reach. The majority of reviews of the book were respectful of Native beliefs and culture. In his review for the *New York Times*, John Chamberlain treated Black Elk as a serious intellectual figure calling him "a philosopher with a serenity to be envied... a sort of Indian Platonist". Whilst Chamberlain does not fully grasp the significance and meaning of Black Elk's vision, he reasons that although in his view "The story of Black Elk's 'vision' is amorphous and vague" it is "possible the ritual of the Catholic or the high Episcopal church would be just as nebulous to the Indian intelligence, so we can hardly blame Black Elk or Mr. Neihardt on that score."<sup>83</sup> This new, more reasonable and favourable approach to understanding Indigenous spirituality took place after the First World War, when a great deal of social change was taking place. This appreciative approach was just beginning to expand into the mainstream public view, following a considerable interest in Native culture that had previously been taken up by modernists and writers at the turn of the nineteenth century. Spurred on by the possibility of new discoveries, following the archaeological

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<sup>83</sup> Chamberlain, 'A Sioux Tells His Tragic Story', *New York Times*, 6 March 1932

findings at Mesa Verde, which uncovered the sites and farming structures of the ancestral Pueblo people who had lived on the land for more than 700 years. Despite more appreciative views, Native Americans were still struggling to gain religious freedom in the 1930s and continued to contend with displacement and loss of identity as the government continued to push assimilation. The process of assimilation had been a part of U.S. policy since 1791 under the 'civilisation program', however the Code of Indian Offences (1883) and Dawes Act (1887) aimed to rush the process along into the twentieth century and essentially eradicate Native culture and religion.<sup>84</sup> Despite this, Philip Jenkins states that *Black Elk Speaks* was part of a growing genre of books that were highly sympathetic to Native peoples, and the white population's reaction to them was overwhelmingly favourable. Suddenly, "Native cultures were being presented at first hand and not viewed through the missionary lens" these new forms of literature gave a startling amount of detailed facts and commentary about religious life.<sup>85</sup> A result of new sympathetic attitudes towards Native Americans was the Indian Reorganisation Act, 1934, which ordered that "no interference with Indian religious life or ceremonial expression will hereafter be tolerated.", the goal being to reverse assimilation efforts and strengthen Native American communities and their culture.<sup>86</sup> This new genre of literature created an openness with non-Natives about Native American spirituality that previously had been greatly misunderstood and surrounded by ambiguity. In sharing his vision with a white audience, Black Elk helped to emphasise the significance of visions within the Great Plains region, and helped to rid some of the misconceptions and fear associated with Indigenous spirituality. This was a positive step towards reclaiming the representation and narrative of Native spirituality, portraying visions as a powerful and positive source of knowledge to help support Native communities. Unknowingly, Black Elk took some of the first steps towards reclaiming the

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<sup>84</sup> Teller, 'Rules Governing the Court of Indian Offences'; National Archives and Records Administration, *Dawes Act (1887)*

<sup>85</sup> Jenkins, *Dream Catchers*, p. 121

<sup>86</sup> John Collier, "We took away their best land, broke treaties", at *History Matters* (2022) <<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5058/>> [Accessed 4 April 2022]

representation of Native American spirituality, and his narrative was met with positive reviews, despite the book's original financial failure.

Although *Black Elk Speaks* was met with positive reviews by the public, it has faced criticism among academics, which has been heightened by the impact the book had on the New Age movement. The criticism has been focussed around Neihardt's involvement in particular, as he has been accused of exaggerating the narrative to make it more marketable. However it could not be known if the book would be a success in 1932, and financially it was not, until the book was discovered by Carl Jung in the 1950s. It was then adopted by American youth who advertised it through word of mouth causing the book to take off and gain huge success during the New Age movement, resulting in a dramatic increase in its sales.<sup>87</sup> Neihardt does not necessarily deny the accusation of his exaggeration, but rather, he reasons that it was his job to translate Black Elk's story "not only in the factual sense – for it was not the facts that mattered most – but rather to re-create in English the mood and manner of the old man's narrative".<sup>88</sup> However, Black Elk himself stated that he could not find the words to describe the meaning of his vision and Lee Irwin suggests that "the inadequacy of language with regard to the visionary experience" results in the telling of the vision not equalling the experience. Hence, Neihardt's poetic interpretation of Black Elk's vision was arguably an attempt to bridge the gap between the experience itself and the inadequacy of the spoken/written language, "always I felt it a sacred obligation to be true to the old man's meaning and manner of expression".<sup>89</sup> As Neihardt describes, Black Elk's translator (his son Ben Black Elk), was hearing the vision for the first time and "could hardly find the English words to translate his father's account".<sup>90</sup> Therefore, Neihardt had to use Ben's translation alongside Black Elk's manner when talking about his experiences to interpret his meaning, and used adjectives with embellished description "the earth was silent in a sick green light ... everywhere about me were the cries of

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<sup>87</sup> Robert F. Sayre, 'Vision and Experience in Black Elk Speaks', *College English*, Vol. 32, No. 5, (1971) pp. 509-535

<sup>88</sup> Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, p. ix

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix

<sup>90</sup> Neihardt, *The Sixth Grandfather*, p.39

frightened birds and sounds of fleeing wings”, to fittingly describe the sublimity of Black Elk’s experience in the spirit world.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, Neihardt romanticised aspects of the vision “I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being” he emphasises a sense of unity and the sacredness of all living things in an attempt to portray the Great Plains understanding of the spirit world.<sup>92</sup> Neihardt’s embellishment at the end of the book describing the ‘death of a people’s dream’ and ‘the nation’s hoop as broken and scattered’ was intended to emphasise the loss and turmoil Black Elk felt towards the end of his life, after giving up his traditional spiritual ways and losing hope in being able to fulfil the mission of his vision.<sup>93</sup> Arguably Neihardt’s embellishments were made in an effort to express the grandeur of the great vision, which took Black Elk three days to portray and tell.<sup>94</sup>

Some scholars argue that Neihardt’s romanticisation has been damaging due to its influence on the New Age movement. Neihardt himself said that “*Black Elk Speaks* was intended as a work of art, transcending the ordinary to make a larger statement about humanity.”, however as it is Neihardt’s own work of art that reads as a poetic interpretation of Black Elk’s story, many have been led to question its validity.<sup>95</sup> It was Neihardt’s romantic view of the book as a work of art that encouraged misinterpretations of the meaning by white Americans, beginning with the ‘hippie’ movement, as it is interpreted more as a form of fiction than biography. Jenkins states that the reading of *Black Elk Speaks* “initiated a generation of young, white Americans into the mythical and ritual universe of the Plains Indians and familiarised them with such ideas as the sweat lodge, the sacred pipe and vision quest.”.<sup>96</sup> While Black Elk’s openness surrounding Native spirituality was intended to have a positive impact, unfortunately, with its introduction to New Agers, it helped shape attitudes towards Native spirituality and suggested ways in which ordinary consumers could

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<sup>91</sup> Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, p.31

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p.43

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p.276

<sup>94</sup> Neihardt, *The Sixth Grandfather*, p.39

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p.57

<sup>96</sup> Jenkins, *Dream Catchers*, p. 167

participate.<sup>97</sup> Arguably, it also transformed the meaning and definition of 'Native spirituality' among the white population, as it became a singular interpretation, that was based around the Great Plains religious practices and became centred around particular parts of Native practices, such as visions and sweat lodges. However, if one were to explore the Great Plains spirituality further they would discover that these are not the only elements of the religion, and are certainly not the spiritual beliefs of all Native American Nations, as each Nation's spirituality differs substantially in its practices and ideologies, which vary from one region to another. This homogenised understanding of Native spirituality was emphasised by the New Age movement, and it has since been the efforts of Indigenous groups to reclaim the representation of their spirituality, to ensure it is not overshadowed by the dominant representation of the Great Plains religion. Despite these criticisms, it was Black Elk's intention to preserve his vision and create a new openness with non-Natives following the oppression of his Native religion in his early life. Although the book has had a significant influence on the New Age movement and created a dominant discourse surrounding Native spirituality, it was one of the first successful efforts to regain the narrative surrounding Indigenous religion from white American press and anthropologists, and it created sympathy for Native American struggles. Black Elk could not control how people would misinterpret the meaning of the book, but his efforts to preserve his spirituality by utilising written literature and reclaiming the narrative surrounding his religion must be praised, as the book marks the beginning of a movement of reclaiming of representation through literature.

Whilst *Black Elk Speaks* was adopted by the New Age movement, it also had a significant impact among Native American communities. The 1954 Menominee Termination Act, forced relocations from reservations to urban environments which led to displacement and "added to disorientation and spiritual loss as many families were paid to move to large cities where promised job opportunities and employment failed to materialise".<sup>98</sup> Thousands of Native Americans found

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p.166

<sup>98</sup> Irwin, *Native American Spirituality*, p.303

themselves alienated from reservation life, and with a lack of community they became isolated from their community-driven sense of spirituality and traditions, and they were faced with poverty and alcoholism which escalated to extreme proportions in urban areas. *Black Elk Speaks* reached Native American urban populations in the 1960s and 1970s, the text strongly resonated with readers as it provided them with knowledge of traditional Native American practices and spiritual beliefs. As Ann Neumann states, “Young Indians, who for generations had been shamed and taught to despise their history, ... embraced the book as an invaluable record of how pre-reservation Lakota proudly lived and believed”, providing them with a sense of ties to their Indigenous ancestry.<sup>99</sup> Despite controversy surrounding Neihardt’s involvement in writing the book and the omission of Black Elks conversion to Catholicism later in his life, the text became important to Native American activists in the 1970s; one of the goals of the American Indian Movement was to get back Native American cultures and traditions that had been lost as results of U.S. assimilation efforts, the book helped people learn about Lakota culture and traditions. In the introduction of the 1979 edition of *Black Elk Speaks*, Vine Deloria Jr. describes the book as a “North American Bible of all tribes”, due to Native peoples use of the text to learn about Lakota culture and inform their interpretations of Native American spirituality.<sup>100</sup> Ian Frazier claims that young Native Americans used the book along with Black Elks text *The Sacred Pipe* (1953) that provided descriptions of Sioux rites, compiled by Joseph Epes Brown, to “revive religious practices from the past”, allowing them to replicate in traditional spiritual ceremonies.<sup>101</sup> Dale Stover points out that although *Black Elk Speaks* was the same text as when it was originally published in 1932, it was “being read differently because European American discourse was undergoing a major transition” ... “This new reading became a second retelling through a string of interpreters and through popular readership”, the context in which the text was

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<sup>99</sup> Ann Neumann, ‘Black Elk, Woke: On the Remaking of a Native American Prophet’, *The Baffler*, No.32, (2016) p. 177

<sup>100</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr. ‘Introduction’ in *Black Elk Speaks*, Ed. Neihardt, John. (London: University of Nebraska, 1979), pp. xii-xiii

<sup>101</sup> Ian Frazier, ‘Another Vision of Black Elk’, *The New Yorker*, December 26, 2017

being read in the 1960s differed dramatically from the 1930s.<sup>102</sup> Isolated Native Americans read Black Elk's story and connected with the representation of Lakota spirituality and history in the text, arguably helping to fulfil Black Elk's vision of many nations united in one hoop, as his teachings about the Sioux were read by Native Americans descended from a range of nations and through this his nations traditional practices and spiritual beliefs were kept alive through new generations. With the text's contribution to a growing interest in Indigenous spirituality by non-Natives, it helped feed the New Age movement and "by the late 1960s, *Black Elk Speaks* and the spiritualism it made famous released a New Age flood upon the reservations, the likes of which the tribes had rarely seen.", marking a substantial increase in the commercialisation of Native American spirituality moving into the 1970s.<sup>103</sup> Arguably it is the impact and significance that the text had on Native American representations of spirituality in the 1960s that aids the movement of resurgence and the reclaiming of the representation of Native American spirituality that emerges in the twentieth century. Black Elk's utilisation of written language and adaptation of traditional storytelling in western forms of literature makes both his vision and depictions of Lakota culture more accessible to displaced Native Americans and passes on these teachings to new generations of Indigenous peoples.

### Art in the Twentieth Century

During the 1960s a new representation of Native American spirituality also became popular among the white American public, in the form of art. A number of Native American artists were able to break into the world of art auctioning and galleries, gaining fame among artists worldwide. However, their work represents a new openness for Native American religion and marks a movement to preserve spiritual experiences through visual media. Whilst using art to document visions and creation stories can be dated back many centuries among Native Americans, it is the adoption of

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<sup>102</sup> Dale Stover, 'A Postcolonial Reading of Black Elk' in *The Black Elk Reader*, Ed. Clyde Holler (Syracuse University Press, 2000), p. 137

<sup>103</sup> Neumann, *Black Elk, Woke*, p.180

galleries to promote the artwork and the use of canvases that makes these artworks significant in modern America. Drawings of Native American religious events date back as far as petroglyphs and pictographs that were carved into, or painted onto rock, wood, metal and hide and for centuries bark drawings were used. However, in the 1960s a number of Native American artists gained attention with their artwork which depicted spiritual practices, the dream world and landscapes which held spiritual value. These included Carl Ray (Sandy Lake First Nations), who was influenced by the secret legends of the Ojibwa Nation; Alex Janvier (Cold Lake First Nations) painted murals and exhibits about his culture and life experiences; Daphne Odjig (Odawa-Potawatomi) who was known for her pictograph style and painted scenes from Manitoulin legends and the impact of colonialism on her culture; as well as George Morrison, an Anishinaabe expressionist artist who was a romanticist and modernist and “eminent expressionist painter”.<sup>112</sup> An increase in intrigue surrounding Native American artists and their depictions of Indigenous spirituality encouraged sympathetic views of their culture and an appreciation of their traditions and history. Arguably, the aim of these artists was to preserve their culture and the spiritual beliefs held within their individual Native communities, in doing so they created a new openness with the white American public and allowed non-Natives to view their impressions of the visionary world, Native legends and cultural experiences.<sup>113</sup>

Oscar Howe was a Yanktonai Dakota artist from South Dakota, he was an innovative artist and a key figure in the Native American art world. During the 1950s and 1960s he symbolised a revolutionary individual during a time of significant change for Indigenous artists, capturing the nation’s attention at a time when widespread interest in Native American spirituality was taking hold and a new pride for the nation’s ‘original American’ artists was developing.<sup>114</sup> Howe used his artwork to depict dance ceremonies, visions, medicine men and other aspects of Great Plains spirituality. He

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<sup>112</sup> Gerald Vizenor, ‘George Morrison: Anishinaabe Expressionist Artist’, *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 3 /4, (2006), 646-660. p. 647

<sup>113</sup> Armand Garnet Ruffo, *Norval Morrisseau: Man changing into Thunderbird*, (Canada: Douglas & McIntyre, 2014)

<sup>114</sup> Edward Kieth Welch, ‘Distinctly Oscar Howe: Life, Art, Stories’, (Ph.D., University of Arizona, 2011)

used vivid colours and a combination of sharp and soft angles to convey movement in the scenes he painted, particularly in his depictions of dance ceremonies (see Image 1). In the 1950s Howe transformed his painting style in favour of a more abstract art style, utilising bright colours and creating dynamic motion alongside the use of pristine lines.<sup>115</sup> He has been praised for leading the way for other Indigenous artist allowing them “to free themselves from the stereotypical constraints of making “Indian art””, and his work “served as a bridge between his experiences in both Euro-American and Native American cultures”.<sup>116</sup> Howe is credited with opening museums to a greater range of styles and expressions by Native American artists, arguably he utilised museums to gain greater and more widespread recognition for his work and opened the market for other Native Americans to benefit from the exposure that museums can obtain.<sup>117</sup>

Howe has used his artwork to represent his experiences of Native American spirituality, his interpretations of creation stories and dance ceremonies, whilst his work resembles traditional themes depicted in bark drawings. However, Howe used his experiences among Euro-Americans and Native Americans to form a new abstract art style, that he believed gave a modern interpretation of these practices and would evoke the movement and emotions felt when performing dance ceremonies and hearing creation stories. His painting ‘Creation of Weotanica’ [Image 2] shows Howe’s interpretation of the creation story, as each story becomes unique to each listener and their interpretation is individualistic. In the painting a person is emerging out of the flames of a fire which surrounds them, while a mother figure hovers over them and reaches toward them – alluding to a mother and child relationship. The mother figure looks softly at the child, and Howe’s use of gentle curving lines gives the impression that the woman is floating, indicating that she has powers and is the human’s omnipotent creator. This painting gives a feminine impression, as Howe has used soft colours of yellow and orange and smooth lines, making the scene appear heartwarming and gentle,

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<sup>115</sup> South Dakota Art Museum, *Oscar Howe Biography*, (2022) < <https://www.sdstate.edu/south-dakota-art-museum/oscar-howe-biography> > [Accessed 14 April 2022]

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

suggesting that Weotanica's creation was forged with good intentions and by a loving, caring creator. Howe has transformed his impression of a creation story into a singular scene and in doing so he has reclaimed his community's religious beliefs about creation, after Native Americans faced centuries of being forced to convert to the creation story of Adam and Eve.

Howe has also reclaimed the representation of dance ceremonies in his other works, after decades of the ceremonies being portrayed as dangerous and a threat to peace by the white American government. He claims that through art he has realised part of a dream "to present a true image of the Dakota Indian as I understood him and his culture".<sup>118</sup> His painting 'Eagle Dancer' (1957) [Image 1] depicts a man transformed into part human, part eagle, their arms form the shape of wings with sharp feathers sticking out while the blue background reminds the viewer of the sky, as though the man is about to take flight. The geometrical shapes of the background combine with the geometrical shape of the man's body, suggesting that during the dance ceremony the person becomes intertwined with nature and their surroundings. Yet the distinct Native American features of the human, with his strong jaw line and dark hair, reminds the viewer of the dancer's identity and the community that he performs the dance for. The combination of harsh lines with the softness of the dancer's hair and changing shape evokes the viewer to see movement in the painting, as the dancer's body moves to mimic an eagle's form and he appears to be calling out like a bird. The painting is representative of Howe's experience of the eagle dance, the transformation of the dancer into the eagle and the way they are engulfed by the background, combined with the suggested movement of the dancer, allows the viewer to also become immersed into the world of the dancer. Through this visual representation the viewer becomes an onlooker to the dance ceremony and it allows them to gain a greater understanding of the spiritual experiences involved in dance ceremonies. However, it was not until 1978 that the American Indian Religious Freedom Act was passed and such ceremonies were allowed to be freely performed by Native Americans after years

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<sup>118</sup> Warriors Work and Ben West Gallery, *Oscar Howe*, (2021) <<https://www.warriorswork.com/oscarhowe>> [Accessed 14 April 2022]

of suppression. Arguably, Howe's artworks encourage Indigenous religious freedom by allowing the white American audience to view aspects of Native spirituality making them more sympathetic and open to Native religion.<sup>119</sup> Although, an unfortunate consequence of the new openness surrounding Native American spirituality was the New Age movement, which commercialised practices such as dance ceremonies.<sup>120</sup>

Debatably, Howe's representation of Native American religion and his revolutionary painting style not only aided his community in its representation of Native spirituality, but it also opened doors for other Indigenous artists to freely express their experiences of Native religion. Howe reclaimed Native art by creating a new abstract style of work that did not conform to "traditional Indian painting" that was expected in competitions, such as Philbrook Art Centre's national competition.<sup>121</sup> Howe used his knowledge of the Euro-American art world to produce his own authentic experiences of Native American spirituality, similarly to Native writers and their literary experiences. In depicting his community's creation stories and dance ceremonies, both being aspects of his spirituality that had been suppressed by the white American government, he reclaimed the way they are represented and preserved his own appreciation for these aspects of his culture. He adapted traditional forms of Native art by depicting dance ceremonies and spiritual rituals, as, in earlier traditions, rituals and ceremonies were depicted with pictographs, using simplistic two-dimensional shapes to represent the meanings/intentions of the dances.<sup>122</sup> Overall, Howe transformed the way Native art was perceived by using an abstract style to present a modern understanding of Native spirituality.

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<sup>119</sup> Elizabeth Lynn Doughty, 'Modern Individualism: Paintings by Oscar Howe before the Annual National Indian Painting Competition at the Philbrook Museum of Art, 1958' (Thesis, University of Oregon, 2010) pp. 61-63

<sup>120</sup> This subject will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 2

<sup>121</sup> Jeanne Snodgrass King, *Visions and Voices: Native American Paintings from the Philbrook Museum of Art*, Ed. Lydia Wyckoff., (Tulsa: Philbrook Museum of Art, 1996), Foreword.

<sup>122</sup> Gerald Vizenor, Ed. and Int. *Summer in the Spring: Anishinaabe Lyric Poems and Stories*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993) pp.47-61

Similarly, during a time of growing interest in Native American spirituality, Norval Morriseau gained worldwide attention for his paintings of the dream world which were inspired by both his own, and his grandfather's visions. Morriseau was an Indigenous Canadian artist from the Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek First Nation, not only did he depict his visions but also the legends of his people and the struggles and tensions between Native Canadian and European traditions. His art style is abstract but draws on traditional two-dimensional images that were depicted in bark drawings, and thick black outlines and bright colours are characteristic of his art style. Morriseau stated that because the shamans of his tribe were the artists, making recordings of the tribe's history and stories, all his paintings and drawings are really a continuation of the shaman scrolls.<sup>123</sup> He viewed his work as "preserving his great culture on paper." Morriseau used his work to preserve his community's history and spirituality, as he felt he had a duty to do so because of the visions he was provided with, he believed that they gave him a shamanistic power.<sup>124</sup> Similarly to Black Elk, Norval Morriseau expressed that he felt it was time to share both his own and his grandfather's visions with the world. Morriseau learned how to extract multiple interpretations from one vision or story to inspire a large number of paintings. As he gradually gained fame in the art world he would take snippets from his visions of the dream world and transform them into artwork, creating a new openness surrounding Native spirituality, as white audiences were able to view the dream world and Native spirits through Morriseau's art. Lee Irwin has stated that the dominant feature of the vision is its visual contents, and "the use of colour for symbolic expression is deeply rooted in a shared cultural repertoire enhanced by visionary experience. The dreaming spirits in most visions are dramatically painted and highly memorable, demonstrating that Native American visions were distinctly colour laden and highly saturated with the patterned use of colour."<sup>125</sup> This can be seen in Morriseau's work, as he is known for his use of bright stimulating colours to represent the dream

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<sup>123</sup> Ruffo, *Norval Morriseau*, p.37

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p.47, 129.

<sup>125</sup> Irwin, *The Dream Seekers*, p. 216

world and his depictions of spirits are entirely unique and memorable with their unusual shapes and features, which are enhanced with the use of vibrant colours.

In his earlier work, Morrisseau was using birchbark as a canvas for his drawings [see Image 3], harking back to the tradition of drawing or scratching into birchbark which was most commonly an Eastern Woodlands practice. However, Morrisseau's art style is still distinct in his earlier works, as he uses a variety of bright colours on the animals to signify that they are spirits. Spirits are well known to appear in animal forms, and often Morrisseau depicts a bird or eagle that he has seen in his visions. One of his most well-known paintings is 'Man changing into Thunderbird' (1977) [see Image 4], it is a six-panel installation that depicts the transformation of a man (representing Morrisseau himself), into a Thunderbird – Morrisseau's shaman name was Copper Thunderbird. The background colour becomes increasingly more copper with each instalment, changing from yellow to copper, emphasising Morrisseau's own transformation as an artist. Gradually, the man's body transforms, as an arm becomes a wing, then it gains a claw, and the head forms a beak, and the transformation reaches its completion in the final panel which is signified by intense colours and an array of shapes that create the Thunderbird. The extravagant use of colours draws the viewer into the transformation and invites them to view the power of the dream world and Morrisseau's own vision, as the colours mould into new shapes in each panel, finally creating the image of a powerful Thunderbird. The colours signify the power of the transformation and the viewer becomes an onlooker of the dream world and the spirit that has taken over the man's body. When comparing 'Man changing into Thunderbird' to the untitled work from 1957 [Image 3], scholars can still clearly distinguish the works as Morrisseau's by his use of colours and two dimensional shapes, but the changing scale of the works signify how Morrisseau adapted his work. As a relatively unknown artist he used watercolours on birchbark, but he adapted the scale of his work and used new paints and canvas so his work could be displayed in galleries and museums, enabling him to capture wider audiences. Similarly to Black Elk, Morrisseau developed traditional Native American storytelling tools to reach the wider American public and share his spiritual experiences, allowing viewers to

experience the dream world through his own view point. However, some have questioned Morrisseau's intentions as an artist, due to his struggle with alcoholism which led to financial instability and homelessness, his overall intentions were to preserve and share his Anishinaabe heritage which he cared about deeply.<sup>126</sup> Critics argue that his work is devalued by his need to earn quick money, as he would produce hundreds of artworks to sell quickly when facing financial hardships. Despite this, his work allowed audiences to view the dream world and become witness to deeply significant Native spiritual events. As well as this, Morrisseau created a new, positive representation of Native spirituality, as visions were viewed as powerful and significant experiences to white Americans, rather than an ambiguous and feared aspect of Native culture.

Both Howe and Morrisseau used their art to preserve their Native American heritage and history, by representing their interpretations of Indigenous culture and religion through the utilisation of new materials and markets. Each artist utilised the exposure that museum and gallery exhibits offered to draw larger audiences to their work and in doing so their representations became more widespread, reclaiming ideas surrounding Native spirituality that had previously been controlled by the white non-Native media. Both artists created a new openness and formed new representations surrounding Native spirituality. Their art informed a new view point of Native American spirituality and allowed a white American public to visually experience Native religion and the vision world through images. While scholars could suggest these artists may have aided the New Age movement that was beginning to take hold in the 1960s, by inviting non-Natives to view intimate spiritual practices through their artwork; it could also be argued that Native American artists were adapting their art style in order to reclaim representations controlled by the media and anthropologists for decades. Both Morrisseau and Howe adapted their art style in order to reclaim ideas surrounding expectations of Indigenous art, while preserving their Native cultures. Whilst Howe transformed and modernised ideas of what Native American art was expected to look like, by

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<sup>126</sup> Carmen L. Robertson, *Mythologising Norval Morrisseau: Art and the Colonial Narrative in the Canadian Media*, (Canada: University of Manitoba Press, 2016) pp. 4, 112, 129

forming a new abstract art-style that introduced movement to the scenes he depicted, Morriseau created a hybrid art-style that was both modern and traditional in its two-dimensional drawings. Overall, their art shows adaptation to new styles and scales in order to gain worldwide attention and recognition of their work, utilising new materials and forms of exposure as they worked to reclaim and create new representations surrounding Native American art and religion.

## Conclusion

To conclude, *Black Elk Speaks* marks the beginning of a movement of resurgence and the reclaiming of the representation of Native American spirituality. While it has faced criticism for Neihardt's romanticisation of events to boost marketability, Neihardt has defended his exaggerations as a work of art and an authentic representation of the sublimity of Black Elk's telling of events. Black Elk's intentions were to pass his great vision on to others and to share it with the white American public. Similarly, Morriseau used his art to share both his own, and his grandfather's visions with the greater American public. They transformed the representation of Native American spirituality in the twentieth century and, in particular, ideas surrounding visions, which before were perceived as private and dangerous to the white American population. Previously, Euro-American ideas surrounding Native American spirituality had painted visions as threatening, among some they became associated with pagan values and superstitions, which escalated their fears.<sup>127</sup> This fear reached a climax following the widespread adoption of the Ghost Dance, which was portrayed to the white public as a precursor of war and Native revolts. However, Black Elk reclaimed the narrative surrounding the Ghost Dance and portrayed it as peaceful and a happy dream that could have united Native American nations, but that tragically resulted in a brutal massacre created by white fears and ignorance. Similarly, while dance ceremonies were still illegal and Indigenous spirituality was being persecuted, Oscar Howe transformed concepts of what Native American art should look like and

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<sup>127</sup> Lisa A. McLoughlin, 'U.S. Pagans and Indigenous Americans: Land and Identity', *Religions*, Vol. 10, Iss. 3, (2019), 152

created abstract works depicting dance ceremonies and creation stories, inviting audiences to view and become part of these ceremonies. Howe and Morrisseau both adapted their artwork, combining tradition and modernism to create new art styles that gained widespread recognition and were displayed in exhibits and galleries, representing Native American spirituality and the knowledge of visions. These first steps of adapting traditional forms of Indigenous storytelling were necessary due to the United States and Canadian governments ongoing oppression of Native American religion and culture, as languages were lost and Native communities were displaced, resulting in a loss of identity and spirituality. Whilst the new openness surrounding Native spirituality and visions may have opened the doors to pretendians and the New Age movement, the intentions of Black Elk and Morrisseau were to preserve and pass on their visions and to transform representations of Native American spirituality. Both these forms of publication gained recognition and attention in the 1960s at the beginnings of the New Age movement. Whilst *Black Elk Speaks* was originally released in 1932, in the context of this thesis, it is the book's reprinting in the 1960s and its adoption by non-Natives throughout this period that aligns it within the context of individuals such as Howe and Morrisseau. Black Elk and Morrisseau both utilised new materials and markets to preserve their spirituality, adapting traditional forms of storytelling to ensure the longevity of their visions. However, in parallel to this movement of Native Americans utilising new materials and capitalist markets to reclaim the representation of their traditions, these same markets aided the commodification of Native spirituality and the New Age movement throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Hence, as Native Americans fought to preserve their spirituality, their efforts were contradicted by non-Natives, who stole their traditions and misrepresented them further into the 1970s.

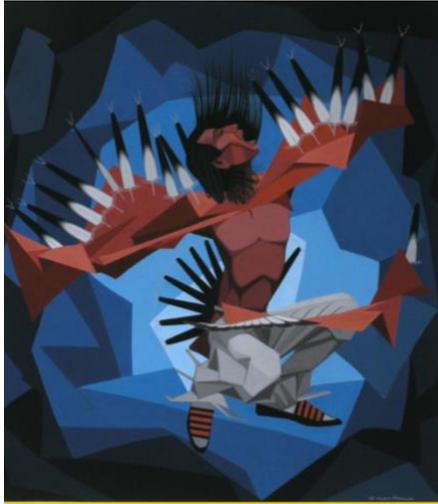


Image 1 – Oscar Howe, *Eagle Dancer*, 1957, casein on paper, South Dakota Art Museum Collection



Image 2 – Howe, *Creation of Weotanica*, 1975, casein on paper, Warriors Work and Ben West Gallery



Image 3 – Norval Morrisseau, *Untitled*, 1958, watercolour and ink on birchbark, Canadian Museum of History



Image 4 – Morrisseau, *Transformation into Thunderbird*, 1977, acrylic on canvas, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

## Chapter 2 – Theft, Commercialisation, Appropriation and Combating the False Narrative of Pretendians

The 1970s saw a dramatic increase in the commercialisation of Native American spirituality and the development of the New Age movement, which has significantly impacted Native American communities in their efforts to preserve their cultures. Deborah Root argues that the New Age movement is a form of new Manifest Destiny, as “white people’s entitlement to possess territory has now been replaced by entitlement to any spiritual practice”.<sup>128</sup> This chapter will argue that the New Age movement was a form of cultural genocide that was perpetuated by pretendians and plastic shamans for commercial gains. Through an analysis of pretendian texts, this chapter will highlight the damages caused by the New Age movement, supporting Jocks argument that New Age appropriation is one of three main concerns of Native traditionalists in recent decades with “continuing threats to Native landholdings and land use, especially in relation to sacred places, [along with] continuing economic and cultural invasion of Native communities causing erosion of self-sufficiency and the decay of integrity in ceremonial work” being the other two.<sup>129</sup>

As Indigenous spirituality became a profitable market, a singular representation of Native American spirituality took hold, based around the Great Plains, Sioux and Cheyenne spiritual practices, and they became the dominant mainstream representation of Native American culture. Not only did a singular representation take hold, but it also became a twisted and somewhat inaccurate representation of the Great Plains cultures. Alongside this, so-called pretendians in academia and literature have only solidified and contributed to these inaccurate and narrow representations of Native American spirituality and culture. The misrepresentation of Native American spirituality has become one of the foremost issues to face Indigenous communities in the

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<sup>128</sup> Deborah Root, *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation and the Commodification of Difference*, (Boulder: Westview, 1996) p.93

<sup>129</sup> Jocks, *Spirituality for Sale*, p. 427

last century and its commercialisation has been detrimental to the preservation of individual Native cultures. While non-Natives and pretendians have been profiting from this market, many Native Americans are simply struggling to survive, as many individuals live below the poverty line in the United States. Native Americans also place among the highest in suicide, depression and domestic violence rates, as they struggle with mental health as a result of intergenerational trauma and loss of identity.<sup>130</sup> For other Indigenous people displacement, including the damage done by misrepresentation and misappropriation, has led to a loss of identity, community and ancestral ties – an issue that impacts all Native people.

The issue of pretendians in academic literature has resulted in the need to navigate reading carefully, and has led to debate surrounding appropriation and how authors approach the issue of heritage and their perspective/firsthand experiences of Native American spirituality, along with their experiences in the subject field. Authors such as Jamake Highwater who have published their work under the pretence that they have Native American ancestry, present themselves as therefore more informed on Indigenous spirituality, have created twisted and misconstrued representations of Native religion and beliefs. Highwater has romanticised the experience of the vision and in doing so he has misrepresented their significance and the ways in which they provide power and knowledge to Native communities; he has also misinformed readers about vision quests and the spirit world. Whilst Native Americans have battled to preserve and freely express their religious beliefs, the New Age movement undermines their efforts. Arguably, the New Age movement is a modern form of cultural genocide and theft.

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<sup>130</sup> National Indian Council on Aging, Inc., *American Indian Suicide Rate Increases*, (September, 2019) <https://www.nicoa.org/national-american-indian-and-alaska-native-hope-for-life-day/> [Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> September 2022]; 'New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, *Domestic Violence and Indigenous Peoples* (2022) <https://www.nyscadv.org/what-we-do/domestic-violence-indigenous-peoples.html> [14<sup>th</sup> September 2022]; Child Welfare Information Gateway, *Engaging Native American Youth at Risk of Suicide*, (2021) <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/diverse-populations/americanindian/wellbeing/depression/> [14<sup>th</sup> September 2022]

## The Vision Quest

Visions are significant and powerful forms of knowledge-acquisition among the Great Plains and Great Lakes Nations, however, they have been represented as a tourist experience by ‘wannabe shamans’ and promoted as a way for consumers to become more deeply connected with nature and the wilderness. Lee Irwin states that, among Native American visionaries “the vision is recognised as a form of encounter with mythically defined sources of personal empowerment and as a manifestation of the mysterious contents of a visionary world”, it is a highly significant spiritual experience for individuals.<sup>131</sup> The representation of visions and the vision quest have become singular, as the Great Plains beliefs surrounding visions have become the dominant discourse as a result of the commodification of the experience. New Agers such as the ‘Wild Rose Dreamers Lodge’ offer ceremonial weekends, in which “participants are sent out on various vision quest ceremonies” although they are simply centred around fasting and isolation.<sup>132</sup> Meanwhile, “plastic shamans” such as Stalking Wolf (along with many others online) offer a version of the vision quest in which they have “removed all the differences ... leaving only the simple pure format that works for everyone”, therefore singularising the experience and erasing the unique variations between vision quests that appear across Native cultures.<sup>133</sup>

Among Algonquian Nations, for instance, the individual quest seems to have been nearly universal for boys, similarly in some other Native groups a vision is viewed as a form of passage into adulthood.<sup>134</sup> Young men are sent on vision quests, where they travel to spiritual places and stay for days with no food or water waiting for a spirit to appear and guide them, sometimes providing them with power or knowledge for themselves or their communities. Victor Barnouw suggests that quests were more central for boys than girls because “a man’s activities – hunting and warfare etc –

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<sup>131</sup> Irwin, *Dreams, Theory and Culture*, p.235

<sup>132</sup> Jenkins, *Dream Catchers*, p. 193

<sup>133</sup> King, ‘Dead Indians: Too Heavy to Lift’, *Hazlitt*, (Nov. 2012) <<https://hazlitt.net/feature/dead-indians-too-heavy-lift>> [Accessed 4th April 2022]

<sup>134</sup> Torrance, Robert M. *The Spiritual Quest: Transcendence in Myth, Religion and Science*, (University of California Press, 1994) p.242

involved unpredictable elements in which magical support was essential for success”, however, women might be more open to spontaneous visions, though it was overwhelmingly a male prerogative.<sup>135</sup> Concepts surrounding who can participate in vision quests vary in different Native groups across North America. Some believe only shamans can have visions, in others only mature adults. However, as Robert M. Torrance has observed “the Plains vision quest, above all in its Teton Sioux version, ... represents the furthest extension of ‘democratised shamanism’ in North America, offering possibility of deliberate visionary self-transcendence, confined in many cultures to shamans alone, to mature adults as well as adolescents and to women no less than men”.<sup>136</sup> It could be argued that the Great Plains beliefs surrounding vision quests has become the dominant representation because those that are seeking to profit from the experience by commercialising it, can justify broadening their market to women and adolescents while still claiming that the experience is following the rules of Plains ‘traditions’. Until a century ago there was much secrecy surrounding visions and dreams. The discussion of a dream or vision would only take place in appropriate, often ritual circumstances; “sharing the dream involves finding the appropriate setting to express a mystery that is not fully comprehended, given by the dream-spirits and participants in the ongoing dynamic process of religious maturation.”<sup>137</sup> Black Elk, along with other Native Americans’ new openness towards the sharing of visions, broke down their perceived secrecy for non-Natives, and some viewed their openness as an invitation for non-Natives to participate in vision quests.

### A History of Appropriation and ‘Wannabees’

Imitations and disrespectful misappropriations of Native spirituality date back centuries in American history, with one of the first instances being the Shakers. As Erik Seeman has discovered, they

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p.243

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p.252

<sup>137</sup> Irwin, *The Dream Seekers*, p.172

imitated visions of the spirit world, claiming to be communicating with dead Native Americans. Shaker spirit narratives have revealed that during the Shaker revival “known as the Era of Manifestations”, beginning in 1837, the religious society appropriated Native images that were well-known in the early republic, to express nuanced views about the legacy of colonialism and white male violence through the group’s characteristic method of speaking with the dead.<sup>138</sup> Shakers that were gifted with visionary power would communicate with the dead for the purpose of redeeming departed dead by converting them and bringing them into the Shaker fold after their death. The Shakers saw it as their mission to convert people to their religion and, as there were a great many dead Native Americans, whose spirituality described the spirit world and an ‘afterlife’, they became an accessible target for Shakers. The power to communicate with the dead also appealed to other non-Natives, encouraging them to also join the Shakers’ fold, hence, the visions acted as a form of marketing for the Shakers. As Seeman has determined through his research, most of the Native spirits that spoke through ‘Believers’ were fictional, there is no record of their names or any proof of their existence. Often Native spirits were created when a ‘visionist’ received a message from the spirit world, and usually the message would be one of praise for the Shakers or would benefit the visionist in some form.<sup>139</sup> However, as Seeman discovered, the appropriated Native images were also used to subtly condemn colonialism and white male violence. The vast majority of Shaker visionists were female and their communication with dead Native American spirits gave them power, purpose and a voice – to summarise Seeman: “Whereas mainstream female reformers used the languages of republican motherhood ‘Whig womanhood’ and female purity to denounce violent men who patronised prostitutes and men who threatened to murder Cherokee women and children, Shaker women and girls used the language of spirit communication”.<sup>140</sup> Native spirits appealed to Shakers partly because they were dead and non-threatening, and deserving of compassion for suffering at the hands of colonialism. Shakers’ instinct to exploit and use elements of Native American

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<sup>138</sup> Seeman, *Native Spirits, Shaker Visions*, pp. 347, 350

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.356-358

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 369

spirituality for their own advantage, is not dissimilar to contemporary appropriations of Native spirituality among pretendians. Similarly, present day appropriations have, in particular, placed a great significance on feminine aspects of Indigenous culture and stress links with Mother Earth.<sup>141</sup> This contemporary representation has combined Native and western ideals surrounding women and nature, not only to appeal to women and gain more consumers, but it has subsequently empowered the image of women as a great creator. Parallels can be drawn between female Shaker visionists and the representation of women having links to Nature – both representations use misinformed stereotypes about Native American spirituality for a greater gain and to the detriment of Indigenous people whose voices are stolen, in death by the Shakers, and are overshadowed and dismissed in life by pretendians.

In the early twentieth century, particularly the 1920s, there was an emergence of ‘wannabees’, as termed by Rayna Green, as people “who play Indian”.<sup>142</sup> The performers engaged in a lifelong impersonation of Native Americans, falsifying their ancestry, and made their reputations and livelihoods on playing the roles of Native Americans, exacerbating stereotypes in the process and misrepresenting Indigenous culture. The figure Grey Owl, also known as Archibald Belaney, disguised himself as a Native American and used stereotyped concepts of Native American beliefs to draw attention to his conservationist efforts and writing. Rayna Green refers to Belaney as an actor, who played the role of Grey Owl until his death. His biographies, prepared and promoted by his wife, were bestsellers that portrayed him as an Ojibwa Native American.<sup>143</sup> As Grey Owl, Belaney wrote articles and books on conservation, he was featured in films and reached wide audiences across Canada and the United States. His books detailed devastating stories about the overhunting of beavers and warned about the future of Canadian forests and nature; he argued that the only way to save the animals from extinction was to remove all trappers from the forests. Belaney played on the

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<sup>141</sup> Jenkins, *Dream Catchers*, p. 206

<sup>142</sup> Rayna Green, ‘The Tribe Called Wannabee: Playing Indian In Europe And America’, *Folklore*, Vol. 99, No. 1, (1988), 30-55, p. 44

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44

well-known perception that Native Americans had a deep respect for nature and that it was highly valued by some Native groups spiritually. He manipulated the white public's association between Indigenous people and nature to present his conservationist efforts as a powerful message about protecting animals, as if he were tasked to do so by the cosmos or for greater spiritual reasons. Although Belaney's intentions may have been positive, his appropriation was damaging to Native Americans who were suffering at the hands of the Canadian government at the time, the same government which Grey Owl was convincing to take action for the protection of beavers. Meanwhile, as Grey Owl was gaining public recognition and filling lecture halls, it was illegal for Indigenous people in Canada to work for land rights, or leave reservations without a pass, or perform spiritual ceremonies or dances, along with facing many other oppressive laws. Many believed Grey Owl's message because it was non-threatening to their own ways of life and thinking, it only impacted a small group of hunters. Similarly, some may believe that the actions of pretendians towards then end of the twentieth century were non-threatening or causing no harm. Yet both Grey Owl and contemporary fake shamans/pretendians are concealing the realities of Native American survival and continue to tell non-Natives what they want to hear, so long as it works to benefit themselves as well.<sup>144</sup> Green argues that Native Americans are, in effect, "loved to death through playing Indian" yet they are despised and persecuted when they want to "act out their real traditional roles on the American landscape".<sup>145</sup>

The issue of pretendians dates back centuries, and a pattern of exploitation and appropriation of Native Americans can clearly be identified through case studies analysing the Shaker visionists, the 'wannabees' and pretendians. All of these groups have appropriated Native American spirituality for their own gains, whilst overshadowing and dismissing the struggles and persecutions committed against Native Americans, who could not freely express their own cultural practices for much of this time. Elements of different Native American cultures are stolen and

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<sup>144</sup> Root, *Cannibal Culture*, pp.105-106

<sup>145</sup> Green, *The Tribe Called Wannabee*, p.50

emphasised by pretendians, misrepresenting Indigenous spirituality and creating stereotypes that become common discourse among non-Natives. Such appropriations have created a narrow idea of Native American spirituality that are based around the Great Plains and Ojibwa cultures; as ideas surrounding Native spirituality are centred around links to nature, visions and spirits. However, these beliefs do not resonate with a large number of Native American groups across North America. Yet, centuries of singular representation has transformed Indigenous spirituality and contributed to 'pan-Indianism', as some Native groups have adopted elements of other Native American spirituality due to loss of their own traditions as a result of homogenised representations. Whilst the forcing together of Native American individuals in urban areas, living in "red ghettos", also created transculturation as elements of cultures from multiple Native Nations bled into one another.<sup>146</sup> The actions and manipulations of pretendians have contributed to the need for Native Americans to adapt their traditional forms of storytelling, in order to maintain their traditions and preserve their spiritual beliefs to protect them from misinformation.

### New Age Commercialisation

The new interest in Native American spirituality that proliferated in the 1970s has been manifested in the countless workshops and programs offering activities such as sweat lodges, vision quests, shamanism and traditions in healing and divination.<sup>147</sup> The commercialisation of Native spirituality quickly became profitable and led to large numbers of fake shamans and pretendians exploiting Native Americans and their cultural/religious traditions for their own benefit. Though it was mostly non-Natives who commodified Native spirituality, a small number of Natives also sought to benefit from their knowledge of Native traditions and ceremonies. Most notable is Sun Bear, also known as Vincent LaDuke, of Ojibwa ancestry, who offered the promise of authentic participation in

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<sup>146</sup> Irwin, *Native American Spirituality*, p.303

<sup>147</sup> Ed McGaa, *Mother Earth Spirituality: Native American Paths to Healing Ourselves*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2011)

‘Indianness’. He was best known for his New Age weekend camp-out retreats with paid workshops and activities, such as dance ceremonies and sweat lodges.<sup>148</sup> He was denounced and picketed by the American Indian Movement for his exploitation of Native American spirituality and was rejected by his Ojibwa community due to his actions.<sup>149</sup> However, it has been non-Natives that have monopolised the commercialisation of spirituality; Philip Jenkins provides many examples of profitable exploits in his book *Dream Catchers* (2004). Jenkins highlights that a number of groups and entrepreneurs offered training in shamanism, such as Bill Brunton, a member of faculty of the ‘Foundation of Shamanic Studies’, which offers “rigorous training” to 5,000 citizens each year called “The way of the shaman”.<sup>150</sup> As the New Age movement continued to gain popularity, opportunity to profit from the more appealing aspects of Native American spirituality and culture increased. New literature also appeared with instructions on how to perform ceremonies, such as Joseph Epes Brown’s *Sacred Pipe*.<sup>151</sup> Similarly to Neihardt’s *Black Elk Speaks*, this text was translated from Black Elk’s oral account of details about Sioux spirituality over the space of a year, in which Brown resided with Black Elk. It describes the details and meanings of the seven rites, which had been passed onto the Sioux through visions. The book also details the process of performing the Sun dance and other sacred rites, which previously had not been disclosed to non-Natives, the popularity of this text alongside *Black Elk Speaks* helped to inform New Agers as they recreated ceremonies. These forms of literature and pretendians increasingly caught the attention of academics, after falsely claiming themselves to be of Native American heritage and due the impact on Native American representation in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>152</sup>

Jamake Highwater has been a key influence in the commercialisation of Native American spirituality. He falsely claimed Native American heritage and twisted the representation of

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<sup>148</sup> Jenkins, *Dream Catchers*, p.172

<sup>149</sup> Graham Harvey, Ed., *Shamanism: A Reader*, (New York: Routledge, 2003) pp. 328-330

<sup>150</sup> Jenkins, *Dream Catchers*, p. 191

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 172-191

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 172-191

Indigenous spirituality, romanticising it to make it more marketable, with much of his work being made up of fictional tales about Native traditions and beliefs. In 1982, Highwater released his 'non-fiction' book *The Primal Mind: Vision and Reality in Indian America*, it was a hit and was adapted as the basis of a documentary about Native American culture by PBS. Highwater has Eastern European Jewish parentage, but he claimed to be of Cherokee ancestry, giving the impression that his knowledge of Native American practices was authentic and came from first-hand experiences. Highwater often altered his story about his heritage and his parents and made costumed appearances in 'Santa Fe Chic' clothes, insisting that he was Indian "because I say I am".<sup>153</sup> Hank Adams, a Native rights activist, first documented Highwater's false ancestry claims in a 1984 article in the *Akwesasne Notes*.<sup>154</sup> He highlighted inconsistencies surrounding Highwater's birthplace and date, parents and education, exposing his identity as Jack Marks, born with European ancestry. These claims were further solidified by reporter Jack Anderson's publication in *The Washington Post*, titled "A Fabricated Indian?".<sup>155</sup> Wendy Rose claims that his work was an "extended repackaging of Greek mythology and pop psychology in the garb of supposed primal Native American legends".<sup>156</sup> His misrepresentation of Native spirituality was twisted with false information and has been viewed by many Native Americans as fiction.<sup>157</sup>

In *The Primal Mind*, he discusses the significance of visions, dreaming and the cosmos, discussing Carl Jung's views on "the reality of existing in our dreams" and how they provide "elements of an unlimited consciousness". He suggests that Native Americans have access to an 'unlimited consciousness' as they do not make a distinction between dreaming and waking and are "capable of a type of projection or transference which they experience as 'transformation'".<sup>158</sup> He

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<sup>153</sup> Green, *The Tribe Called Wannabee*, p. 45; Highwater, *The Primal Mind*.

<sup>154</sup> Shanley, *The Indians America Loves to Love and Read*, pp. 32-33

<sup>155</sup> Jack Anderson, 'A Fabricated Indian?', *Washington Post*, 16 Feb. 1984

<sup>156</sup> Wendy Rose, 'The Great Pretenders: Further Reflections on Whiteshamanism', in *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization, and Resistance*, Ed. M. Annette Jaimes, (Boston: South End Press, 1992) p.405

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 405

<sup>158</sup> Jamake Highwater, *The Primal Mind: Vision and Reality in Indian America*, (New York: Meridian, 1982) pp. 51-61

gives the mythical impression that Native Americans travel in and out of a visionary world, as though it is a common occurrence. This contrasts starkly with the ways visions result from significant ascetic practices. Highwater also emphasises the importance of nature to Native American spirituality, and whilst this is a significant aspect of some Native religions, Highwater has romanticised this relationship to appeal to audiences. He uses poetic descriptions of being intertwined with nature, “their [Natives] participation in the world is symbiotic to such an extent that they discover nature within and outside themselves”, he suggests that Indigenous people value their lives as equal to animals or lesser: “Indians do not consider themselves the centre of the cosmos or the special creatures intended to dominate the world”.<sup>159</sup> However, Highwater fails to highlight that Native Americans were reliant on hunting animals to survive and though they have a deep respect for nature, they also utilise nature’s gifts for their own benefit and survival.

Contemporary Native thinkers centre relationality, the notion of humans being in relation with animals and nature that requires them to seek balance. However, throughout *The Primal Mind* Highwater romanticises an unrealistic subjugated relationship that is not dissimilar to Disney’s depiction of Pocahontas and her talking animal friends, referring to relationships between Indigenous people and animals as one of “equals” and “spiritual friends”.<sup>160</sup> Highwater takes inspiration from the romantics of the nineteenth century, for whom “primal people were now depicted as living in a perfect relationship with nature,” and he portrays a relationship with nature that is mystical and holy: “nature is the aesthetic perfection with which we aspire to become identical, harmonious, and bound by immediacy and wholeness”.<sup>161</sup> Using exaggerated descriptions to portray sublimation to nature, he expresses the deep desire among Native people to become identical to such perfection in order to become whole. Whilst Native Nations such as the Ojibwa and Plains people understand nature as being part of the spiritual world, in which everything living exists harmoniously, Highwater’s depiction of nature as a friend and an equal to Native people is a

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., pp. 71-83

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 83

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., pp. 27, 159

romantic notion that does not reflect the reality in which Indigenous people utilise nature in order to survive. However, Native cultures believe in only taking what is necessary, unlike Western concepts of simply taking whatever they please from nature merely because they can. As Indigenous writer Robin Kimmerer (Potawatomi Nation) explains, “we are all fed from the same bowl that Mother Earth has filled for us. [...] The earths gifts are to be shared, but gifts are not limitless. The generosity of the earth is not an invitation to take it all.”, Kimmerer argues that humans cannot survive without the gifts that earth provides and the generosity of the earth must be respected and appreciated.<sup>162</sup> Philip Jenkins has argued that recent writing is highly problematic due to the idealisation of subjects in order to assert value on Native spirituality “ignoring and underplaying those aspects that they might find unsettling or inconvenient”.<sup>163</sup> Highwater quotes Joseph Epes Brown’s suggestion that “it is perhaps this message of the sacred nature of the land that today has been most responsible for forcing the Native American vision upon the mind and consciousness of the non-Indian”, and Highwater utilises this fascination with sacred nature and romanticises it to draw in more consumers.<sup>164</sup> He is culpable of editing representations of Native American spirituality to fit into a white American audience’s romanticised perception of the ‘shamanic Native’ that can view the cosmos and has a greater connection with nature, in doing so he consequently downplays the significance and power of visions. Hence, Native reality becomes subsumed and negated by the imposition of a ‘greater’ or ‘more universal’ contrivance, that is based on general beliefs of Native spirituality but is a form of fiction due to an edited and twisted representation used to appeal to a non-Native public.<sup>165</sup> Similarly, the suggestion that the visionary experience is a common occurrence among Native Americans helps to gentrify it for others, encouraging its commercialisation in the New Age movement and benefitting Highwater financially in the process.

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<sup>162</sup> Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, p.382

<sup>163</sup> Jenkins, *Dream Catchers*, p. 219

<sup>164</sup> Highwater, *The Primal Mind*, p. 206-207

<sup>165</sup> Rose, *The Great Pretenders*, p. 405

When discussing visions and the vision quest Highwater only delves into specifics about how members of the Plains Nations complete a vision quest, placing emphasis on isolation and fasting.<sup>166</sup> Similarly to other New Agers Highwater utilises the accessible knowledge on Plains rituals in order to present the façade that he is knowledgeable on the subject because he himself is 'Native' - despite claiming to have Cherokee, so non-Plains, ancestry. In his discussions of other Nations' ceremonies, rituals and visions he is vague and non-specific about details. However, he uses anecdotes of other individuals' spiritual experiences and steals their stories in order to present himself as educated on Native culture.<sup>167</sup> In doing this, he has twisted the narratives of Indigenous people, misrepresenting their beliefs and stealing their voices by publishing their stories in order to uphold the façade of his own identity. Similarly, his depiction of Plains people using a "hallucinogenic cactus" in order to access the visionary world portrays Plains people in a negative way. He is suggesting they utilise the hallucinogenic in order to "escape from the humiliation of military defeat", in the same way people may abuse alcohol and drugs to escape their reality.<sup>168</sup> However, the peyote cactus was specific to the southern Plains, the Lakota traditionally used mushrooms with psychoactive qualities and were not introduced to the peyote until much later. This shows the limitations of Highwater's knowledge, as he bases his research around generalised stereotypes. He is also insensitive to spiritual beliefs surrounding the vision quest and visionary world, referring to visions as "hallucinations", stating that their "rapidly disintegrating" culture after the 1850s resulted in their turn to hallucinogenics. He insinuates that Plains people are no longer 'pure' in their spiritual practices because of the introduction of psychoactive plants, though he cites no evidence of its widespread use among Plains people.<sup>169</sup> Highwater's lack of evidence to support the majority of his claims about visions and Native spirituality reinforces the argument that his writing should be viewed as a form of fiction, due to his extensive misinformation and misrepresentation of Native American culture and spirituality.

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<sup>166</sup> Highwater, *The Primal Mind*, p. 84

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.78-79, Highwater tells the story of Wolf Collar and his visionary experience.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85

Highwater portrays Native Nations as being so tightly centred around the idea of community that individualism is viewed as a form of insanity. He represents tribal Nations to be cult-like and extremely exclusive, almost trying to entice non-Natives to try to infiltrate such communities and become part of an 'exclusive' group. However, such a narrative is very damaging to the representation of Indigenous Nations because Highwater represents the idea of community as robbing people of their individualism. Similarly, he makes the bold suggestion that Native American Nations do not account for the concept of free will, "there is nothing in Indian tribal life that even begins to approximate the Western conception of individuality and free will".<sup>170</sup> Meanwhile it was the United States and Canadian (Crown) governments that robbed Indigenous people of their free will by criminalising dance ceremonies and religious practices. Highwater continues to misrepresent and singularise individual Native Nations' spiritual beliefs, stating that "most North American tribes possess what must be called a "communal soul", reinforcing the misconstrued idea that tribalism equates to lack of individualism.<sup>171</sup> The concept of a "communal soul" misrepresents Native spirituality and creates an image of Native people as void of their own unique ideas and robs them of their rights as individuals by suggesting they are valued as less than non-Natives because Native people do not have their own soul or individualism. However, strong communities within Native Nations have ensured the survival of culture and traditions as they pass knowledge and histories onto one another, reinforcing Native identity and ancestry. Ties to a community and identity have proven to be essential among Indigenous people in the face of oppression as it reminds individuals of the struggles that their ancestors have overcome in order for the continuation of their culture and spiritual beliefs. Individualism is of course allowed within Native Nations but community is also an essential aspect of Indigenous identities and is highly valued to individuals within a Nation. Such ideas are harmful to Native communities and grossly misinform what it means to identify as part of a Native Nation and follow Native spirituality.

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 179

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 169

Not only does Highwater misrepresent and misinform on Native American cultures and spiritual beliefs, but he also praises the work of other pretendians, furthering his reach of misrepresentation by pointing readers towards their writing. In Highwater's discussion of Native American literature, for instance, he comments on the "brilliantly" attempted "transliteration from one culture to another of central metaphysical ideas" by Carlos Castaneda and Hyemeyohsts Storm.<sup>172</sup> Whilst Highwater himself may not have known that these two authors were also pretendians, his admiration of their use of writing in order to represent Native traditions is extremely concerning. Both Storm and Castaneda are now well known as 'plastic shamans' and their writings are considered fictional, however at the time of *The Primal Mind's* publication and throughout the 1980s many non-Natives believed their writing to be true representations of Native cultures, which taught them about shamanism and Native spirituality. Storm misappropriated a variety of Native American traditions and cultures and created the modern Medicine Wheel symbol in 1972, which was invented through misinformed ideas surrounding symbolism connected to the Plains Sun Dance.<sup>173</sup> Meanwhile, Castaneda published several books on his training in shamanism by a man named Don Juan Matus, a Yaqui Native from northern Mexico, passing on his shamanistic 'teaching' to his readers. By 1998 Castaneda's books had sold over eight million copies and were published in multiple languages across the world. Although all of his teachings are now considered fictional his misrepresentation of Native spirituality was widespread and damaging to Indigenous communities.<sup>174</sup> The fact that Highwater is praising the work of other pretendians and plastic shamans for their representation of Native traditions only stands to show how problematic and deep rooted the issue of pretendians was throughout the New Age movement. They unwittingly work together to misinform the non-Native public on Native American spirituality, instinctively promoting

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., P. 110

<sup>173</sup> Steve Beyer, 'Selling Spirituality', *Singing to the Plants*, (Feb. 2008)  
 <<https://singingtotheplants.com/2008/02/selling-spirituality/>> [Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> August 2022]

<sup>174</sup> Peter Applebome, 'Carlos Castaneda, Mystical and Mysterious Writer Dies', *The New York Times*, June 1998,  
 <<https://www.nytimes.com/1998/06/20/arts/carlos-castaneda-mystical-and-mysterious-writer-dies.html>>

writing that they recognise as akin to their own, resulting in the boosting one another's publication sales and aiding in the commercialisation of Native culture.

Highwater claims that the purpose of the book is to "speak out of that plurality of mentalities while at the same time illuminating the values and viewpoints of primal peoples whose ideas have been largely ignored by the dominant cultures".<sup>175</sup> Ironically, Highwater himself is ignoring Native American ideas by singularising the concept of "Native spirituality" and he, as a non-Native, is part of the dominant culture that is continuing to overshadow Native voices and representations. Examining his use of language throughout *The Primal Mind*, Highwater inadvertently others Indigenous people.<sup>176</sup> He repeatedly places Native people in a position separated from himself and non-Native people, continuously referring to Native Americans as "primal people", "they", "Indians", "them", making a distinction between himself and Native people, despite claiming to identify as a Native American. He even refers to Native Americans as "primitive" and "savages", reinforcing racist stereotypes that Native Americans are somehow less developed in the process of evolution than white non-Natives. Not only does this language subtly marginalise Native Americans, it also homogenises individual Native Nations into the broader, racist term "primal people".

Within *The Primal Mind* Highwater recalls his ancestry and states that "my cultural background follows none of the easy stereotypes," yet his knowledge of Native culture is informed "out of my personal history", provided by his mother's vivid teachings of the Native world.<sup>177</sup> However, as it has been proven that Highwater does not have Native ancestry, scholars must view his information in *The Primal Mind* as a form of fiction because Highwater's proclaimed sources of Native knowledge (his mother) are an invention.<sup>178</sup> Highwater refers to himself as an outsider to

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<sup>175</sup> Highwater, *The Primal Mind*, P. Xiv

<sup>176</sup> "Othering" is in post colonial theory a reference to the 'colonised others' who are "marginalised by imperial discourse".; Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin., *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies*, (London: Routledge, 1999) p. 168

<sup>177</sup> Highwater, *The Primal Mind*, pp. xvi-xvii

<sup>178</sup> Shanley. *The Indians America Loves to Love and Read*, pp. 32-33

both Native and western culture due to his upbringing which was centred around Native values and beliefs but was detached from extended family life as he moved from one place to another. As Shanley argues, Highwater's heritage is fraudulent and damaging as "he has appropriated Indianness for his own gain and peddles it as artefact."<sup>179</sup> He identifies himself as an outsider, yet feels entitled to speak for Native American peoples as a whole, singularising Indigenous people as "Indians" and stating that "Indians have never fully recovered a crucial aspect of their worldview since that terrible day at Wounded Knee."<sup>180</sup> While the Wounded Knee massacre was a traumatic event for the Great Plains people and the loss of life and freedom might have resonated with other Native American groups, it is a bold claim to suggest the event impacted the spiritual worldview of other Indigenous people that were not directly involved or practiced the Ghost Dance ceremony which was at the centre of events. Although the Ghost Dance was pan-tribal, it was by no means universal and Canadian Natives and Native Nations from Southern states of the U.S. would have felt little direct impact from the event, although its ramifications sent aftershocks well beyond Lakota territory.

The popularity and support originally given to Highwater's *The Primal Mind* resulted in it gaining a dominant place in mainstream understandings of Native American spirituality. Highwater's misrepresentation of Indigenous culture and particularly visions helped to inform new stereotypes about Native spirituality. His influence was so far reaching that he made several documentaries on PBS television that informed the wider American public about Native American culture and he became somewhat of a household name.<sup>181</sup> He was also used as a consultant for the television series *Star Trek: Voyager*, for a character named Chakotay, which only broadened his influence and aided the growth of his misinformed stereotypes of Native peoples.<sup>182</sup> The New Age movement has fed these stereotypes that tie Native American spirituality to Mother Nature and the cosmos,

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 35

<sup>180</sup> Highwater, *The Primal Mind*, p.xii

<sup>181</sup> Oliver Myrna, 'Jamake Highwater; Wrote About Native American Culture, History', *Los Angeles Times*, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2001 <<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2001-jun-09-me-8404-story.html>>

<sup>182</sup> Alex Jacobs, 'Fool's Gold: The Story of Jamake Highwater, the Fake Indian Who Won't Die', *Indian Country Today*, (September, 2018) <<https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/fools-gold-the-story-of-jamake-highwater-the-fake-indian-who-wont-die>> [Accessed 12 June 2022]

romanticising dreams and visions as a mystical experience that provides visionaries with a spirit helper that will guide them through their endeavours.

Works such as Highwater's, along with many other pretendians, like Carlos Castaneda and Lynn Andrews to name just a couple, have spawned large and voracious audiences for 'Indian' religious experience and have enlarged the market for more exploitative impersonations.<sup>183</sup> One such example is Bill Plotkin, a psychologist and proclaimed "agent of cultural evolutions", who guides others on their spiritual journeys with a "Western adaption of the pan-cultural vision fast", using elements of Native American culture, along with other religious beliefs, crafting them into a tourist experience of the wilderness.<sup>184</sup> Plotkin has marketed the vision quest as a wilderness experience that will transform participants and help them grow and expand their soul: "in the subjective approach, the dream is seen as information for the ego as to how to grow more whole".<sup>185</sup> While he also represents dreams and visions as a source of knowledge, he represents them as "information for the ego", giving the impression that the power and knowledge provided in visions is a purely individual and egotistical experience. This contrasts with the Great Plains understanding of visions, which can inform and give power to an individual but are given with the intention to aid or protect a whole community. Plotkin also promotes sweat ceremonies, a traditional Great Plains ceremony that is only performed by experienced shamans and medicine men. Plotkin describes them as a way to "purify body, emotions and mind, support our journeys through the landscapes of the psyche and facilitate our communion with each other and the other beings of our world".<sup>186</sup> Similarly to other advertisements for sweat ceremonies, the experience is romanticised as a way to communicate with the other world and to purify the body. Traditionally, a sweat ceremony is intended for prayer and

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<sup>183</sup> Green, *The Tribe Called Wannabee*, p. 45

<sup>184</sup> Animas Valley Institute, *Bill Plotkin*, (2022) <<https://www.animas.org/about-us/our-founder/>> [Accessed 10th March 2022]

<sup>185</sup> Bill Plotkin, *Soulcraft: Crossing Into The Mysteries Of Nature And Psyche*, (California: New World Library, 2003) p.133

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165

healing and is performed by elders that know the Native language and songs. This aspect of Plains spirituality has been adopted by other Native American groups with a rise in pan-Indianism, contributing to the singular representation of Native American spirituality. However, non-Natives' imitation of the ceremonies has caused controversy, as Native groups have declared the imitations to be dangerous and disrespectful misappropriations.

## Damages

The New Age movement, the commercialisation of Native spirituality and the role of pretendians have many damaging effects and are of great concern to many Native American communities. The key issue is one of representation, as discussed in chapter 1, representation of Native spirituality has been controlled by the white, non-Native government, media and anthropologists. With the newfound appreciation and interest in Indigenous religion in the late twentieth century, it has been harmful that the narrative was again guided by non-Natives, and even more unsettling that the culprits profited from it. Meanwhile, at the founding of the New Age movement, Native Americans were still being denied their own full religious expression, as large numbers of non-Natives were "devouring Native American spiritual traditions in the same way they consumed Native American art, jewellery, clothing, weaving and crafts - with no thought to the real present-day political, social, economic and cultural religious struggles in which Native people are engaged".<sup>187</sup> It was not until 1978 that the 'American Indian Religious Freedom Act' was passed, allowing Native Americans to again freely perform dance ceremonies and spiritual practices without fear of punishment. Similarly, residential schools were still in operation until the 1990s with the final school closing down in 1996 in Canada, whereas in the U.S. the schools were taken over by Native Nations throughout the 1980s

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<sup>187</sup> Ines Hernandez-Avila, 'Mediations of the Spirit: Native American Religious Traditions and the Ethics of Representation', *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 20, Iss. 3/4, (1996), 329-352. p. 25

and 1990s following the signing of the Indian Child Welfare Act by Congress in 1978.<sup>188</sup> At the same time ‘fake shamans’ and pretendians were profiting from Indigenous cultures, Native Americans were facing a loss of identity and spirituality due to displacement and were struggling to survive on reservations and in urban areas, with many living below the poverty line and struggling with alcoholism and abuse.

Some scholars “portray the attempt to steal the Indians’ religion as the latest callous phase of cultural genocide”.<sup>189</sup> Yet, as Lisa Aldred has highlighted, New Agers consistently argue for their right to religious freedom, claiming the rights of the First Amendment in the U.S. constitution, meaning they should be allowed to practice Native American religion.<sup>190</sup> Whilst everyone is entitled to their own religious beliefs, the same rights were not preached when Native Americans themselves were banned from performing their dance ceremonies. Nor were they preached when Indigenous people were displaced from their homes and had their lands stolen during colonisation and westward expansion, as Native Americans were forced onto reservations. They were distanced from lands that their ancestors had occupied for centuries, and some of which were considered sacred and were used for sacred pilgrimages and as sites for spiritual ceremonies and practices such as vision quests. For decades, Indigenous Americans have fought for the rights to re-inhabit those lands through protests and in courts, yet they are still denied such rights and their sacred spaces have been transformed into tourist attractions and dwellings for non-Natives.<sup>191</sup> Similarly, in the 1950s Native Americans were displaced into urban areas and suffered at the loss of their communities and were poverty stricken, an issue that is still present to this day, yet those that preached their right to

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<sup>188</sup> ‘Union of the Ontario Indians, *Overview of the Indian Residential School System*, (2013) <<https://www.anishinabek.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/An-Overview-of-the-IRS-System-Booklet.pdf>> [Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> June 2022] ; *Indian Child Welfare Act*, Public Law 95-608, 8<sup>th</sup> Nov., 1978

<sup>189</sup> Jenkins, *Dream Catchers*, p.7; Hobson, *The Rise of the White Shaman as the New Version of Cultural Imperialism*, pp.100-108

<sup>190</sup> Aldred, *Plastic Shamans and Astroturf Sun Dances*, p.336

<sup>191</sup> National Archives and Records Administration, ‘Sioux Treaty of 1868’, *General Records of the United States Government*, Record Group 11, 299803 <<https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/sioux-treaty>> [Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> April 2022]; Amy McKeever, ‘The Heartbreaking, Controversial History of Mount Rushmore’, *National Geographic*, (Oct., 2020) <<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/the-strange-and-controversial-history-of-mount-rushmore>> [Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> April 2022]

practice Native spirituality did not support or aid the communities they misappropriated from.<sup>192</sup> Meanwhile, Native Americans struggled with displacement and were (and have still) not been entitled their rights to stolen lands and were only able to freely/legally practice their religions from 1978 onwards.<sup>193</sup> Still, in residential schools, children were forced to abandon their Native spiritual beliefs for Catholicism. While they lived separate to their communities, they lost their languages and traditions, which they could not regain as their forms of communication with community elders were lost and they became cut off from their Native culture and religions.<sup>194</sup> Christian beliefs were forced onto them and the children were stripped of their Native characteristics, and punished for celebrating their culture, they were robbed of their rights to practice their own religion, up until the end of the twentieth century.<sup>195</sup> Combined with centuries of war and oppression, the consequence has been a generational trauma that resonates and is felt by Native Americans to this day.<sup>196</sup> As New Agers argue for their rights to Native spirituality, they dismiss the trauma and suffering that Native Americans have faced in an effort to practice their own religions and save their spiritual traditions. Indigenous people have struggled to simply survive yet have continued to fight for their own rights for religious freedom, meanwhile commercialism and the New Age movement continue to steal their spirituality and add to their struggles to preserve their culture against misrepresentation.

Another damaging effect of the New Age movement is the singular definition of 'Native spirituality' that has formed and become the dominant representation, and has worked along with stereotypes to overlook and neglect the vast differences between different Native groups spiritual beliefs. Arguably, the most notable representations of Native American spirituality have been based

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<sup>192</sup> Donald L. Fixico, *The Urban Indian Experience in America*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000) Pp. 8-42

<sup>193</sup> *American Indian Religious Freedom Act*, Public Law 95-341, Aug. 11, 1978

<sup>194</sup> Zoe Oxaal, "'Removing that which was Indian from the Plaintiff': Tort Recovery for Loss of Culture and Language in Residential Schools Litigation', *Saskatchewan Law Review*, Rev. 367, (2005) p. 367

<sup>195</sup> Andrew J. Mallam, 'Reparations for Cultural Loss to Survivors of Indian Residential Schools' (MA., University of Ottawa, 2010)

<sup>196</sup> Bonnie Duran, Duran, Eduardo and Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart. 'Native Americans and the Trauma of History' in *Studying Native America: Problems and Prospects in Native American Studies*, Ed. Thornton, Russell (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998) pp. 62-67

around the beliefs and practices of the Great Plains people. This could be a result of their subjection to extraction of information surrounding spiritual practices and beliefs, as many anthropologists and historians visited reservations to gain knowledge on their culture throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Alongside the greater visibility surrounding the Great Plains region in Western films and television, which were informed by racist anti-Native attitudes portrayed in white media in the early twentieth century.<sup>201</sup> As western films became part of popular culture, symbols and stereotypes established in earlier productions were recycled and built on by writers and directors, removing the genre from real history into an allegorical history.<sup>202</sup> Such depiction portrayed Great Plains people as caricatures that were available to impersonate and mimic by pretendians and plastic-shamans. With the development of the commercialisation of Native spirituality, the dominant discourse and representation has been based around the Great Plains and also Ojibwa ceremonies and beliefs, and the success of their commercialisation has proven their spiritual beliefs to be marketable and profitable. Dream catchers and medicine bags were extracted from such Nations' cultures and marketed as affordable ways to participate in Native spirituality, their international success has created a large market for such items as they have become a mainstream symbol of Native culture.<sup>203</sup> Navajo sand paintings, Hopi katsina dolls and West coast totem poles are also symbols from other Native Nations that were commercialised and are associated with Native spirituality, contributing to pan-Indianism. However, all these symbols were stripped of their spiritual and sacred value when they became commoditised. This is damaging for other Indigenous groups, as new generations struggle to hold onto their traditions and spirituality as they are lost in the dominant representations that have developed and been reinforced with stereotypes, in literature and with marketing. Visions and nature have been romanticised and marketed as central aspects of Native spirituality, greatly simplifying Great Plains and Ojibwa religion

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<sup>201</sup> John A. Price, 'The Stereotyping of North American Indians in Motion Pictures', *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 20, No. 2, (1973), 153-171. p. 154

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p.154

<sup>203</sup> Cath Oberholtzer, 'The Re-Invention of Tradition and the Marketing of Cultural Values', *Anthropologica*, Vol. 37, No. 2, (1995), 141-153. pp. 142-145

while simultaneously disregarding other Native American ideas of spirituality and creation. Scholars could question if the commodification and simplification of ideas surrounding Native spirituality takes away from the significance of spiritual ceremonies, or sacred practices, such as visions and dreams? Vision quests and dreaming enhanced by hallucinatory teas have become a commodity among New Agers, however “Among traditional Plains people dreaming is given a strong ontological priority and is regarded as a primary source of knowledge and power.”<sup>204</sup> While visions and dreams are still held in high regard among Native communities, the saturation of such experiences, which were once considered rare occurrences, presented the experience to be common and less meaningful as now anyone can participate. Hence the significance of spiritual ceremonies and practices are still powerful and held in high regard to Native Americans but they have been inaccurately represented by New Age tourism, unjustly representing them as common experiences and failing to portray their significance and meanings.

Vine Deloria Jr. had claimed that “The non-Indian appropriator conveys the message that Indians are indeed a conquered people and that there is nothing that Indians possess – pipes, dances, land, water, feathers, drums and even prayers — that non-Indians cannot take whenever and wherever they wish”, as they sell Native culture and religion as a commodity.<sup>205</sup> This claim supports Deborah Root’s argument that the New Age movement is a form of new Manifest Destiny.<sup>206</sup> Root points out that some believe that the greatest threat facing Native survival today is the spiritual appropriation of the New Age movement because “it saps and distorts the strength of the culture under siege”.<sup>207</sup> Similarly, as earlier mentioned, Jocks believes it is one of three main concerns of Native traditionalists in recent decades, alongside continuing threats to Native landholdings, and economic and cultural invasion of Native communities.<sup>208</sup> These issues are all

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<sup>204</sup> Irwin, *Dreams Theory and Culture*, p.236

<sup>205</sup> Deloria, ‘Is Religion Possible? An Evaluation of Present Efforts to Revive Traditional Tribal Religions’ *Wacazo Sa Review*, Vol. 8, No. 1, (Spring, 1992), 35-39. p. 37

<sup>206</sup> Root, *Cannibal Culture*, p.93

<sup>207</sup> Root, *Cannibal Culture*, p.96

<sup>208</sup> Jocks, *Spirituality for Sale*, p. 427

intertwined, as the damage caused by the theft of spirituality seeps into the issue of stolen sacred lands and the erosion of ceremonial work, as traditional ceremonial practices become lost in the vast number of non-Native ceremonies performed by fake shamans and written about by pretendians. Each of these issues poses a threat to the loss of Indigenous spirituality and have pushed Native Americans to take action to preserve their spirituality and reclaim its representation.

The issues of white-shamans and the commercialisation of spirituality has caused Native community leaders and elders to debate who should be able to discuss and sell Native spirituality, whilst a number of scholars have contributed to the discussion on the subject. Native American spirituality is one of the most profitable sectors of New Age commercialism and some Native Americans would argue that they are entitled to profit from their own culture.<sup>209</sup> Those Native Americans that sell participation in ceremonies etc., argue that the aspects and experiences which they sell are not considered spiritual or sacred within their individual Nation, therefore, why should they not benefit from commercialisation of Native cultures? Native Americans have commented on the bitter irony that while many Indigenous people continue to live below the poverty line, white-shamans are profiting from degrading and misinformed versions of Native American rituals.<sup>210</sup> Natives such as Sun Bear - a New Age author of Ojibwa heritage - would argue they are doing no more harm than white appropriators. Sun Bear wrote about the Medicine Wheel and sold workshops and activities for spiritual seekers however, as an Ojibwa, the 'medicine wheel' was not traditionally used by his Ojibwa ancestors. Sun Bear could argue that he was using the symbol of the medicine wheel to profit from the New Age movement just as fake shamans would, and as it was a symbol appropriated by non-Natives, then he has a right to profit from it, as it is not of great significance to Ojibwa spirituality, nor considered secret/sacred. Nevertheless he was still directly engaged in appropriation and exploitation. As Jocks argues, "knowledge cannot be traded in some imagined neutral 'market place of ideas' as if it were itself a neutral, disembodied object," whether it

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<sup>209</sup> Aldred, *Plastic Shamans and Astro turf Sun Dances*, p.331

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, p.333

is considered sacred or not and most other Natives would agree on this matter.<sup>211</sup> Non-Native author Ken Carey of *The Return of the Bird Tribes* (1988) suggested in an interview the controversial view that “computer-literate white people are the most appropriate heirs to Native spiritual tradition because the poverty of reservations has “debased” the culture and made it unworthy of the spiritual traditions that have always been part of Native community life”.<sup>212</sup> Carey implies that Natives that participate in commercialisation have damaged the integrity of Native spirituality. However, many would argue that the poverty Indigenous communities face is a result of white oppression and that their spiritual traditions have not been debased by Natives, rather, such traditions have been significantly misrepresented by non-Natives who know little of Native community life or traditions. Hence the argument stands, that non-Natives should not appropriate Native spirituality, and it should be practiced and represented in its traditional forms by those knowledgeable on the subject who are members of the Native group which the practices originated from. Whereas the issue of Natives themselves participating in the commercialisation of Native spirituality is still a grey area and debatable, though many Native Americans frown upon it and believe that such people are only contributing to the misrepresentation of their spirituality and culture.<sup>213</sup>

The commercialisation of Native spirituality has become a significant issue and caused damage to Native communities, enough for Native American groups to put out statements and declarations denouncing and objecting to fake practices.<sup>214</sup> At the Lakota Summit V, June 1993, the imitation and sale of Lakota ceremonies by non-Native people was discussed and a ‘Declaration of War’ was drawn up to warn non-Natives against the appropriation of Native spirituality.<sup>215</sup> The declaration against all “plastic Indians” expressed the frustration and anger that many Native peoples felt about the sale of Indigenous religious objects, along with the marketing of Native ceremonies by unqualified and usually non-Native people. It states “We hereby and henceforth

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<sup>211</sup> Jocks, *Spirituality for Sale*, p.420

<sup>212</sup> Root, *Cannibal Culture*, P.93

<sup>213</sup> Jocks, *Spirituality for Sale*, pp. 421-22

<sup>214</sup> Aldred, *Plastic Shamans and Astro turf Sun Dances*, p. 336

<sup>215</sup> Irwin, *Native American Spirituality*, p.306

declare war against all persons who persist in exploiting, abusing and misrepresenting the sacred traditions and spiritual practices of our Lakota, Dakota and Nakota people.”<sup>216</sup> The rhetoric of war is used to signify the significant damage that the exploitation and misrepresentation of sacred and spiritual traditions has had on Native communities. The New Age movement was defined as a new form of cultural genocide by Native American writer Geary Hobson, hence the implication of war is considered an appropriate metaphor as it implies the struggle that Indigenous people are facing in order for their spirituality to prevail against exploitation and misrepresentation.<sup>217</sup> This statement is evidence of the severity of damage that pretendians, white-shamans and New Agers have had on the representation of Native spirituality and the negative impact it has had on Indigenous communities, following years of exploitation and oppression. As a result, Native Americans have been forced to use new tools and materials to make their voices heard and correct the misrepresentation of their spirituality, whilst some have banned non-Natives from attending ceremonies and prevented them from accessing sacred materials.<sup>218</sup>

## Conclusion

The commercialisation of Native American spirituality during the New Age movement led people to view it as a commodity, leading to the emergence of pretendians and fake shamans that aimed to profit from it. Appropriations of Native spirituality rely on the romanticisation and objectification of Indigenous people, dismissing their struggles to survive and the oppression they have faced in order to gain religious freedom. Pretendians such as Highwater, who gained mainstream fame and influence on the subject of Native spirituality by claiming fraudulent heritage, have appropriated ‘Indianness’ for their own gain - whilst simultaneously informing stereotypes and homogenising the concept of Native spirituality. While Pretendians and fake-shamans have profited from the

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<sup>216</sup> ‘Declaration of War’, Lakota Summit V, June 1993,  
<[https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp\\_textbook.cfm?smtid=3&psid=730](https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtid=3&psid=730)>

<sup>217</sup> Hobson, *The Rise of White Shaman as the New Version of Cultural Imperialism*.

<sup>218</sup> Such as the Hopi, this topic will be explored further in Chapter 3

commercialisation of spirituality, many Native Americans live below the poverty line and struggle with a loss of identity and spiritual traditions. Ines Hernandez-Avila argues that “the commodification and commercialisation of Native American spirituality disturbs and disrupts the work of sustaining the spiritual traditions that belong to specific Native American communities and the work of retrieving those traditions have been almost forgotten.”<sup>257</sup> Commercialisation of spirituality has led to the simplistic and narrow representation of Indigenous spirituality, romanticising aspects of Great Plains and Ojibwa traditional beliefs in particular, in order to appeal to a wider consumer audience. This has had greatly damaging effects on Native American communities, the most significant being the misrepresentation of spirituality leading to a loss of traditions and the exploitation and appropriation of Native culture at the expense of Native American communities themselves. Hernandez-Avila believes that “the high rate of alcoholism and suicide among Native peoples is directly related to the immense despair and grief over our losses”, following centuries of religious oppression, whilst New Agers view it as their right to steal Native spirituality, under the First Amendment.<sup>258</sup> These rights were not extended to Native Americans when they had their sacred lands stolen; nor when they were massacred for performing dance ceremonies; nor when their children were stripped of their Native identity in residential schools, and still continue to face further oppression when their culture and religion is appropriated and misrepresented. Arguably, the New Age movement performed a form of cultural genocide that has become a prominent issue among Native American communities and threatens to misrepresent Native spirituality and result in the loss of traditional beliefs.

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<sup>257</sup> Hernandez-Avila, *Mediations of the Spirit*, p. 348

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, p.342; Aldred, *Plastic Shamans and Astro turf Sun Dances* p.336

## Chapter 3 – A Movement of Resurgence and Reclaiming

In conjunction with the New Age movement, Indigenous authors utilised literature and adapted creation stories and ceremonies into fictional novels. An analysis of some of their published works will show that Native authors transformed oral storytelling into fictional novels in an effort to reclaim and celebrate their spirituality, whilst also highlighting the traumas and oppressions that Native Americans have overcome in order to gain religious freedom. Although more pretendians emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, such as Charles (Hyemeyohsts) Storm, Carlos Castaneda, Asa Earl Carter (Forrest Carter) to name a few - this period also witnessed ‘the Native American Renaissance’ as an increasing number of Native authors published novels.<sup>259</sup> Indigenous authors increasingly adapted traditional storytelling to Western culture and utilised capitalist markets in order to publish narratives from a Native perspective, which reflected the lives and culture of Native people, helping to combat misrepresentations and misconceptions about Indigenous culture, simultaneously preserving traditions and spiritual beliefs through their incorporation in Native narratives. This movement continued into the twenty-first century, as a new generation of Indigenous writers such as Leanne Simpson and Lisa Brooks addressed damages caused by colonial attitudes and continued to inspire resurgence of Native spirituality.

### Literature as a Tool for Representation

Throughout the New Age movement, Indigenous authors used literature in the form of fictional novels to accurately represent both their culture and the struggles and traumas that Native Americans faced trying to survive against cultural oppression. Whilst literature has been adapted as a tool to preserve Indigenous history and (in some cases) spirituality by Native authors, as Bataille highlights “It took nearly seventy years before Native writers were taken seriously by scholars and then it was because N.Scott Momaday’s 1968 novel *House Made of Dawn* received the 1969 Pulitzer

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<sup>259</sup> See pages 94 for more information of the ‘Native Renaissance’

Prize”, and yet still, “The ‘Indian’ voices most popular in mainstream America are often these of would-be Indians, who reinscribe nineteenth century romantic images of ‘Nobel savages’...”.<sup>260</sup> Similarly, Rayna Green states that “Indian-ness somehow makes good press if promoted well, though it has rarely worked for Indian authors in that competitive business”, rather it has worked best for pretendians, including Highwater, most likely because they play up to Native American stereotypes that appeal to a non-Native audience.<sup>261</sup> This is the struggle that Indigenous authors face to get their stories published and get their representations of Native culture to be read by the greater public. However, some authors utilised the sudden appreciation of Native spirituality that erupted with the New Age movement to get their stories published and use their voices to reclaim the narrative surrounding Native American culture. Some such writers, who have become well-known and have established their careers as popular authors are Louise Erdrich, Gerald Vizenor and Leslie Marmon Silko. Erdrich and Silko have adapted traditional forms of Indigenous storytelling in their work and portray how Native spirituality has survived in spite of oppression. Meanwhile, Vizenor has compiled Ojibwa poetry and history in order to preserve such stories for his Nation and illustrate the essential literariness of Ojibwa traditions, showing that literature is not ‘new’ for Ojibwa people’s, but rather it has transformed over time.

Louise Erdrich has adapted traditional themes and forms of Anishinaabe oral storytelling to her written novels, and in doing so she has preserved key elements of storytelling in her culture while expressing Native American struggles for survival and spiritual freedom. Margaret Noodin praises Erdrich for the way her stories of a place create an Anishinaabe identity that is not only “anchored to the long-ago past, [but] also show how the early 1900s marked a time of political resignation and change on the Anishinaabe landscape.”<sup>262</sup> Erdrich published a series of books throughout the 1980s and 1990s that centred around the same four Anishinaabe families living on a

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<sup>260</sup> Gretchen Bataille, *Native American Representations: First Encounters, Distorted Images, and Literary Appropriations*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001) pp.3-28

<sup>261</sup> Green, *The Tribe Called Wannabe*, P.45

<sup>262</sup> Margaret Noodin, *Bawaajimo: A Dialect Of Dreams In Anishinaabe Language And Literature*, (Michigan State University Press, 2014) p.59

reservation in North Dakota, which were set throughout the twentieth century. Erdrich has written many novels since the publication of her so-called tetralogy, which extend into the late twentieth century. Erdrich's novel *Tracks* (1988) is the third book in her tetralogy of novels but chronologically it is the earliest, giving readers a background to the Anishinaabe families which the previous novels (*Love Medicine*, 1984; *The Beet Queen*, 1986; *The Bingo Palace*, 1994) have followed. The novel explores the struggles of living on reservations and the gradual loss of land and traditional beliefs in conflict with Christianity. While displacement and religion are key themes in the novel, Erdrich also explores how spirits and dreams fit into Anishinaabe spirituality, in particular through the character Fleur Pillager, who has medicine powers and travels to the spirit world to negotiate with a water spirit. The novel has a circular structure, beginning and ending with a significant loss. This structure is indicative of oral narrative tradition.<sup>263</sup> One of the narrators, Nanapush, a tribal elder, is telling the story of Fleur to his granddaughter Lulu following her return from a government residential school – Fleur is Lulu's mother but they have become estranged due to her decision to send Lulu to the school. The changes in narration between Nanapush and the character Pauline, a young woman of mixed heritage and a Catholic convert who is in denial of her Native American heritage, represent the tensions between traditional Anishinaabe spirituality and the influence of white Christian America. In denying her Native heritage and beliefs, Pauline brings death and suffering to the reservation, while Nanapush and Fleur uphold tradition and actively combat white oppression by maintaining their beliefs and fighting against land seizures.

Erdrich uses Nanapush as the 'trickster' character in her novels and he represents Anishinaabe past and traditional beliefs. Traditionally in Anishinaabe stories, the trickster plays a heroic role, using their wits to liberate the Anishinaabe "from the oppression of colonialism and open healing vistas of the imagination".<sup>264</sup> Nanapush uses his wits to help save Fleur on several occasions, such as during the consumption epidemic in 1912, and throughout Fleur's life Nanapush

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<sup>263</sup> Sajjad Gheytsi and Mohsen Hanif 'Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*: Survival or Subversion', *ESC: English Studies in Canada*, Vol. 44, No. 1, (2017), 151-166. p. 152

<sup>264</sup> Gross, *The Comic Vision of Anishinaabe Culture and Religion*, p. 456

provides her with care and works with her to uphold traditional spiritual beliefs. He also helps to save money in an attempt to keep their lands when they face displacement. Erdrich uses Nanapush's role as narrator to open healing for Lulu, a key trait of the trickster character, as she hears of the struggles her mother Fleur faced trying to survive and she comes to understand the sacrifices she made to try and keep them both safe from harm. Similarly, Erdrich uses Nanapush's storytelling to present how storytelling and maintaining Native traditions can help to heal the traumas of the past, an act which Erdrich herself is achieving through her writing. Nanapush uses his gift of speech to negotiate with government representatives, on behalf of his community. Lawrence Gross (White Earth Anishinaabe) argues that Nanapush uses his trickster qualities to adapt white culture to his own traditions and interests, suggesting "it is the tricksters who will survive to build a new world on the ashes of the old".<sup>265</sup> It is maintained that even when there is no land to rely on for survival, stories of the past will help a culture to survive "during the year of the sickness, when I was the last one left, I saved myself by starting a story [...] But I continued and recovered. I got well by talking".<sup>266</sup> Arguably, in the face of displacement, poverty and loss of spirituality, memory and storytelling become the most important tools of survival, through this the Anishinaabe culture survives. Similarly, during the New Age movement when the representation of Native American spirituality is under threat, Erdrich adapts storytelling as a tool to preserve tradition and illustrates aspects of Anishinaabe culture and traditional beliefs.

Similarly, Gerald Vizenor, an author of Anishinaabe ancestry, uses traditional elements of Ojibwa oral storytelling in his writing to preserve the histories of his culture. In his book *Summer in the Spring* (1981), Vizenor compiles Ojibwa lyric poems and tribal histories. Some of the poems are reworked from Frances Densmore's collection of Ojibwa dreamsongs which she recorded from

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<sup>265</sup> Gross, 'The Trickster and World Maintenance: An Anishinaabe Reading of Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*', *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Vol. 17, No. 3. (2005), 48-66. pp. 48-66

<sup>266</sup> Gheytsi & Hanif, *Louise Erdrich's 'Tracks'*, p.163; Louise Erdrich, *Tracks*, (London: Pan Books Ltd, 1989) p. 46

others, however, Vizenor has removed/ deemphasised the first person pronoun in some of the poems and slightly altered the relationship of the singer with nature – making the poems closer to haiku.<sup>267</sup> Patricia Haseltine suggests that “Vizenor’s voice is paradoxically identifying with the Native tradition and claiming universality in his syntheses of the haiku and the dream song”.<sup>268</sup> Noodin argues that Vizenor uses the technique of dream songs and haikus to place the images and imagination of the Anishinaabe world in his work”.<sup>269</sup> The book stands to preserve the tribal histories of the Anishinaabeg with the documentation of the dream songs and stories. Vizenor explains that “the Anishinaabe heard their histories as stories, a source of natural reason and traditional esteem”, he has transformed these histories into short written stories, each of which pertains to knowledge about traditions and beliefs. Throughout Vizenor includes pictographs to accompany the dreamsongs, allowing the reader to participate in Ojibwa literature in both written and traditional visual form, signifying that literature is not new for Native Americans, rather it takes multiple forms and has adapted over time. He features a variety of stories about visions and spirits, each passing on knowledge of the visionary world. Some stories warn readers about the importance of following the customs of a spirit guide, “Saycosegay further told about the custom of giigwishimowin which was for the purpose of guarding against majimanidoog, evil spirits. He believes that every Anishinaabe has a guardian spirit. ... those who did not comply with the custom of giigwishimowin frequent became insane when attacked by the manidoo”.<sup>270</sup> Other stories provide instructions and customs among the Anishinaabe, narrated by a grandparent / elder, such as the custom regarding the naming of children “the real name of the Anishinaabe child is given only by his niiawee, which is usually done when the child has become sick for the first time.”<sup>271</sup> Along with how the Anishinaabe people came into existence “when the great spirit, or gichimanidoo made up his mind to create man, he took a

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<sup>267</sup> Patricia Haseltine, ‘The Voices of Gerald Vizenor: Survival Through Transformation’, *American Indian Quarterly*, Vo. 9, No. 1, (1985), 31-47. pp. 32

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32

<sup>269</sup> Noodin, *Bawaajimo*, p.163

<sup>270</sup> Vizenor, *Summer in the Spring*, pp. 86-88

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60-66

handful of earth and rubbed it together in his palms and a man was formed”, this is significant because Vizenor is sharing the creation story of his nation through English language, making it accessible to non-Natives.<sup>272</sup>

Throughout, the stories follow traditional oral storytelling structures and pertain to the character of the trickster. The trickster is an important figure in the origin stories of the Anishinaabe, “the performance of the trickster stories is natural wisdom”, as he uses his wit to outsmart great spirits and gains help from animals to travel to the underworld and save his people.<sup>273</sup> Vizenor documents these stories and, in doing so, he preserves his Nation’s culture and spirituality. He has transformed dreamsongs and stories that were traditionally performed orally and adapted forms of written literature, using poetic techniques and combining them with traditional elements of Ojibwa storytelling to portray the stories the way they would be performed. Vizenor has adapted both westernised and east Asian (in his movement towards the haiku) forms of storytelling, displaying how literature transforms over time, similarly to Indigenous cultural practices which evolve and develop over time as a result of changing contexts. Vizenor aims to celebrate Ojibwa literariness in his display of various forms of storytelling, indicating how Ojibwa literature is not a new concept, rather it adapts and transforms, enduring change.

Leslie Marmon Silko uses the modern world to represent traditional creation story – incorporating spirit guides, evil forces, ceremony and appreciation of one’s community and heritage in her first novel, *Ceremony* (1977). In doing this she emphasises the importance of blending cultures and adaptation in order for tradition to become part of the modern world and become incorporated into the new generation of Native American lives. In *Ceremony*, Silko tells the story of Tayo, a half-Laguna Pueblo man who is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder following World War II, he goes on a spiritual mission to save himself and his community from a drought. As Silko tells Tayo’s

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid., p. 64

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., p.10

story she also tells the creation story of the Hummingbird, the Bottle fly and Reed Woman in parallel. In each story the act of ceremonial reunion brings an end to the drought, saving the Pueblo community. The act of performing ceremony is representative of healing, and Silko is suggesting that when Native Americans perform their spiritual ceremonies they are remembering their past and celebrating their struggles for religious freedom, helping them to heal from past traumas. The story of Tayo is not told in chronological order, the timeline jumps from his childhood, to the war, and to the present – in doing this Silko gradually reveals the events that have caused Tayo’s suffering and his loss of identity and spirituality. Cousineau argues that Tayo was never ‘crazy’, rather “he had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transition through all distances and time”; Silko’s non-chronological chapters portray his perception of the world, which does not conform to chronological time or distance, much like the visionary world – suggesting that as Tayo performed the ceremony, he was travelling through visionary planes as the healing process progressed.<sup>274</sup> His experiences at a government school and in the war have pushed Tayo to reject his Native identity. Tayo is stuck between his Native identity and the white western world. He fought a war for the white people and it only brought him suffering, which caused him to turn to alcohol for comfort. He goes on to seek help from a medicine man named Betonie, a mixed-race Navajo healer who incorporates elements of the modern world into his ceremonies. Through Betonie, Silko is representing the impact of pan-Indianism and the nature of spirituality in the modern world, as Tayo is sent to seek help from a healer of Navajo descent rather than Laguna. He uses ceremony and storytelling to help Tayo come to terms with both his American and Laguna identity. Betonie himself is a “half-blood” and helps Tayo come to terms with spirituality in the modern world, as he performs ceremonies that incorporate elements from other Native Nations, whilst surrounded by signifiers of the modern world, such as large buildings and phonebooks.<sup>275</sup> Betonie’s storytelling of myths and

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<sup>274</sup> Diane Cousineau, ‘Leslie Silko’s ‘Ceremony’: The Spiderweb as Text’, *Revue Française d’études Américaines*, No. 43 (1990), 19-3. P.31

<sup>275</sup> Sean Kicummah Teuton, *Red Land, Red Power: Grounding Knowledge in the American Indian Novel*, (Duke University Press, 2008) pp. 121-155

rituals throughout the ceremonies help Tayo learn about and connect with his Laguna culture, helping him to heal from his lack of understanding of his identity, despite Betonie himself being Navajo. Tayo is sent on his mission to save the Pueblo community. Whilst searching for his uncle's herd of cows (which function as his spirit guides in the novel), Tayo rejects the temptations that have been imposed on him by the white world / witchery, such as violence and alcohol. As Tayo confronts and faces the traumas of his past, he can begin to heal – similarly Silko and her Native American community can also reflect on the past, acknowledge the struggles they have faced to survive and appreciate their traditions which have adapted and prevailed against oppression. Carol Mitchell states that “Silko intends the novel itself as a curing ceremony, not just for Indians but for anybody who reads it” as “the novel emphasises a principle to which we can all relate that the past and present are all one”.<sup>276</sup> Similarly, Denise Cummings praises the novel for “altering previously established understandings of the relationship between reader and text”, as the reader becomes part of the healing ceremony by reading and engaging with the text, much like in oral storytelling as participants listen and engage.<sup>277</sup> Silko has adapted traditional forms of ceremony and oral storytelling into the form of a fictional novel through her writing structures and paralleled storytelling in *Ceremony*. By incorporating creation stories and using conventions and tropes of oral storytelling, Silko has adapted a spiritual ceremony into a written story, encouraging readers to engage in the ceremony and reflect on the past in order to heal and appreciate Native American spirituality in the present.

Silko's *Ceremony*, is considered to be a key publication in the 'Native American Renaissance', a term coined by Kenneth Lincoln in the 1983 book *Native American Renaissance*.<sup>278</sup> The term categorises the increase in production of literature written by Native Americans in the late 1960s

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<sup>276</sup> Kathleen M. Sands, A. Lavonne Ruoff, Paula Gunn Allen, Peter G. Beidler, Susan J. Scarberry, Carol Mitchell, Elaine Jahner, et al. 'A Discussion of "Ceremony"', *American Indian Quarterly* Vol. 5, No. 1, (1979), 63-70. pp. 63-64

<sup>277</sup> Denise Cummings, "'Settling" History: Understanding Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, Storyteller, Almanac of the Dead and Gardens in the Dunes', *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Vol. 12, No. 4, (Winter, 2000), 65-90. pp.65-90

<sup>278</sup> Kenneth Lincoln, *Native American Renaissance*, (London: University of California Press, 1983)

and onwards. Louise Erdrich and Gerald Vizenor are also considered to be included in this Renaissance, as each of the authors reclaim their heritage through their literature and have “renewed interest in customary tribal artistic expression”.<sup>279</sup> However, the term ‘Native American Renaissance’ has been criticised as it implies a rebirth and that work published before this time was not significant. Rebecca Tillett argues that the term is “profoundly inaccurate in its tendency to obscure the often specifically political histories of Indian oratory and writings upon which many Native writers are drawing”.<sup>280</sup> Whilst a significant increase in Native American literature can be seen, scholars could also argue that it correlates with the sudden interest in Native American spirituality and the New Age movement. Although Erdrich, Vizenor and Silko are reclaiming their heritage through literature, this movement of resurgence and reclaiming arguably began in the early twentieth century, with texts such as Black Elk’s *Black Elk Speaks*. Black Elk alongside each of these authors adapted traditional oral storytelling into written literature, paralleling the circular and non-chronological structures of oral storytelling and through the incorporation of creation stories and spiritual experiences/ceremonies. One could also argue that, as a result of the commercialisation of Native spirituality, the process of reclaiming heritage and tradition is still ongoing today, and the literature published between the 1960s and 1980s mark a significant moment of reclaiming during a period of misrepresentation. Native American authors adapted fictional novels into homages to oral storytelling, preserving traditional beliefs and depicting Native American culture from an informed perspective, whilst simultaneously representing the oppressions and struggles that Indigenous people have faced in order to freely participate in their culture traditions and spiritual practices.

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<sup>279</sup> Suzanne Everts Lundquist, *Native American Literatures: An Introduction*, (New York: Consortium International Publishing Group, 2004) p. 38

<sup>280</sup> Rebecca Tillett, ‘On the Cutting Edge: Leslie Marmon Silko’, in *Native American Renaissance: Literary Imagination and Achievement*, Ed. Velie, Alan and A. Robert Lee, (USA: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013) p. 85

“Change is not a violation of culture but a realisation of a potential.”<sup>281</sup> - Resurgence in the Twenty-First Century

Resurgence is defined by Leanne Simpson and Alfred Taiaiake as “draw[ing] on the past with an eye to radically transform the colonial power relations that have come to dominate our present”.<sup>283</sup>

Since the late twentieth century, a shift in efforts to reclaim Native American spirituality has occurred in academic writing and in literature. Following on from an era of pretendians that misrepresented Indigenous spirituality and culture, academic writing has been focussed around the importance of storytelling and the continuation of traditions. Native American scholars have highlighted the importance of using both Indigenous and English language in efforts of resurgence and have suggested that the adaption of written literature is a natural form of evolving in order to maintain traditions and pass them on to future generations.<sup>284</sup> Native American scholars have reclaimed academic literature from earlier pretendians, such as Highwater, and have made efforts to ensure the accuracy of other non-Natives’ literature by reviewing their intentions and claims surrounding scholars’ ancestry. Whilst this has led to some controversy and scrutiny, these efforts have been significant in ensuring the representation of Native American spirituality and culture.<sup>285</sup> However, a movement by Native tribal governments “to assert control over academic research” surrounding the representation of their culture has created some backlash among non-Native scholars.<sup>286</sup> The result has been a great deal of debate surrounding who can discuss Native culture and how to prevent the intrusion of pretendians without restricting non-Natives from contributing to Native American studies. The increase in published work by Native American scholars has been essential in the reclaiming of Indigenous spirituality and traditional beliefs. Such scholars have

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<sup>281</sup> Claire Smith, Heather Burke and Graeme K. Ward, ‘Globalisation and Indigenous Peoples: Threat or Empowerment?’ in *Indigenous Cultures in an Interconnected World*, (London: Routledge, 2000) pp.23-24

<sup>283</sup> Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014) pp. 154-156

<sup>284</sup> Brooks, *The Common Pot*, pp. 246-255

<sup>285</sup> Jace Weaver, ‘More Light Than Heat: The Current State of Native American Studies’, *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 2, (2007), 233-255. pp.240- 242

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, p.239

worked to correct misinformation and break down stereotypes and singularising ideas of Native spirituality. Leanne Simpson has differentiated the Nishinaabeg beliefs surrounding dreams and vision from the Sioux's beliefs and has emphasised the significance of visions in the modern world. Often in the 1800s dreams and visions were associated with providing powers and knowledge to aid in battle during wartimes, most famously documented is Crazy Horse's vision that informed him with instructions that would ensure he would be unharmed in battle.<sup>287</sup> However, Simpson states that today visions provide knowledge on how to preserve traditions and that "many resurgence or re-creation mobilisations within Nishinaabeg thought starts with a vision or dreams".<sup>288</sup> Arguably, visions and dreams are a source knowledge for survival. At times of war, they provided powers for battle and in modern day, when misrepresentation has become one of the most significant concerns surrounding cultural survival among Natives, visions gift knowledge on how to ensure the resurgence of a tribe's culture and how to ensure the continuation of traditions.

Among the Sioux Nation fears surrounding the loss of traditional spiritual beliefs have prompted protests and political movements throughout the last century. A well-established site for protest is the Black Hills. The area of land considered to be sacred has been the centre of multiple protests. In 1970, a group of Native Americans occupied Mount Rushmore to protest the broken Treaty of Fort Laramie (1868), which had reserved the Black Hills for the Lakota, and they demanded the land be returned to their nation.<sup>289</sup> More recently, the Dakota Access Pipeline protests (2016-2017) has gained international attention, as a grassroots group of Natives opposed the construction of a pipeline that directly threatens the sacred land which is home to ancient burial grounds and is historically a site of cultural importance.<sup>290</sup> As these protests and movements are working towards reclaiming and preserving Native spirituality and culture, a comparison can be drawn between these

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<sup>287</sup> Mari Sandoz, *Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas*, (University of Nebraska Press, 2008) p.1023

<sup>288</sup> Simpson, Leanne. *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, p.146

<sup>289</sup> National Archives and Records Administration, 'Sioux Treaty of 1868'; McKeever, 'The Heartbreaking, Controversial History of Mount Rushmore'.

<sup>290</sup> Carla Javier, 'A Timeline of the Year of Resistance at Standing Rock', *Splinter*, 24<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2017 <<https://splinternews.com/a-timeline-of-the-year-of-resistance-at-standing-rock-1794269727>> [Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> April 2022]

more direct forms of action and the movement of gradual adaptation of written literature and utilisation of markets to ensure the preservation of Indigenous traditional beliefs. If scholars examine the impact of both forms of reclaiming and resurgence, they will observe that political movements gain the attention of headlines and can conclude in a result either for or against the movement within a fairly short timeline. Whereas the adaptation of westernised literature and the utilisation of new materials and markets is a long, ongoing process that aims to result in the longevity of traditions and reclaim/maintain a well-informed representation of Native spirituality. Compared to more explicit forms of protest the utilisation of written literature is more subtle but aims to benefit Native communities by preserving the representation of their beliefs for future generations and reclaiming representation from misinformed non-Natives.

Changes in attitudes towards Native American studies has seen a large increase in Indigenous voices at the forefront of literature focussed on Native spirituality and beliefs. Authors such as Leanne Simpson and Lisa Brooks have argued for the adaptation of new materials and storytelling to aid the resurgence of Native American religion and to reclaim the representation of various Native tribal traditions. The twisted and singularised representations of Native spirituality that took hold due to the New Age movement have resulted in conflicting beliefs over who should be discussing Native culture in academia. This debate has resulted in the persevering efforts towards informed representations of individual Native tribes and has led to a new outlook of how non-Natives should consider themselves when writing from an 'outsider' perspective, within the context of the representation of Native American studies. Both reclaiming representations in academia and fictional literature could be viewed by scholars as a form of protest against the theft of Native culture and parallel recent political movements and protests that are working towards the same goals, such as the reclaiming of stolen sacred lands.<sup>291</sup> Hence, the adaptation of storytelling into

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<sup>291</sup> Links between Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* and the Idle No More Movement are explored further on page 123. Pages 123-127 further explore ties between recent Native literature and protest movements.

literature and the utilisation of academic writing and fictional genres should be viewed as a movement of resurgence and reclaiming of Native American spirituality and traditions.

### The Importance of Visions and Creation Stories in the Twenty-First Century

Leanne Simpson attributes the survival of Ojibwa spirituality and culture to the knowledge provided by dreams, visions and the continuation of storytelling.<sup>292</sup> Dreams and visions are a significant aspect of Great Plains and Ojibwa spirituality, they guide individuals and provide them knowledge and powers to help aid their community, ensuring their survival in times of hardship and oppression. During times of war the visionary world guided Crazy Horse with the knowledge of how to remain unharmed in battle, and as the Sioux faced religious oppression and loss of sacred lands Black Elk was tasked with maintaining the nation's hoop and protecting the sacred tree. However, as the twentieth century progressed, the threats that Native Americans faced were no longer centred around war, yet the threat to Native American survival was still apparent. The theft and misrepresentation of traditions and spirituality threatened to wipe out Native traditions and beliefs. Now in the twenty-first century, visions and dreams have propelled resurgence and resistance by gifting knowledge and providing glimpses of different social realities. Simpson makes pains to emphasise that she only speaks for Anishinaabeg, explaining that the visionary world upholds the spiritual beliefs that tribes such as the Nishnaabeg have held for centuries and they propel resurgence by providing "Nishinaabeg with both the knowledge from the spiritual world and processes for realising those visions".<sup>293</sup> The Chibimoodaywin social movement was inspired by a spiritual vision, known as 'The Seven Fires prophecy' within Anishinaabe culture, the vision has been passed on through oral tradition for centuries. The prophecy predicted the arrival of white settlers and their destruction to Nishinaabeg ways of life, it ignited the westward migration of the

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<sup>292</sup> Simpson, Leanne. *Dancing on our Turtle's Back*, p. 146

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.34-35

Nishnaabeg to ensure their survival – also known as Chibimoodaywin movement.<sup>294</sup> The prophecy is split into seven parts (fires), it is the fifth and sixth fire that are most relevant to Native Anishinaabe peoples today. The prophecy threatens that if the people “abandon the old teachings, then the struggle of the Fifth Fire will be with the people for many generations”; this would result in the elders losing “their reason for living...they will lose their purpose in life.”<sup>295</sup> The prophecy is urging the Nishinaabeg to make efforts to preserve their culture for future generations in order for a resurgence of traditions to occur. The prophecy is relevant to modern day struggles of spiritual misrepresentation and the vision continues to guide the Chibimoodaywin social movement today. Among Anishinaabe tribes and bands, visions and dreams “provide glimpses of decolonised realities that we are collectively yet to imagine”, they act as a source of hope and vision for the future among Natives, encouraging them to transform their realities and push for change in order to realise their visions.<sup>296</sup> Arguably, the knowledge provided by dreams and visions has always been centred around a community’s survival, and as the threats to Native spirituality and culture have progressed and changed with the times, so too has the knowledge that the visions provide. Yet Simpson argues that the knowledge gifted from the visionary world is not all that makes them valuable, but rather, it is the act of viewing the visionary world that is in itself a powerful act of resurgence because these visions create new worlds and inspire the future.<sup>297</sup> As Neal McLeod states “We must attempt to dream and have visions. Without dreams and idealism, we will truly be a conquered people”.<sup>298</sup>

Similarly, Simpson argues that the continued retelling of creation stories provides Nishinaabeg people with the knowledge that “another world is possible and that I [Native people] have the tools to vision it and bring it to reality”.<sup>299</sup> Simpson reinforces the significance of visions and creation stories in her writing and reiterates how they mobilise resurgence and social movements, as

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<sup>294</sup> Edward Benton-Banai. *The Mishomis Book – The Voice of the Ojibway*, (St. Paul: Red School House Publishers, 1988)

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Simpson, Leanne. *Dancing on our Turtle’s Back*, pp.34-35

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., p. 146

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., p.146

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., p. 42

“echoes of past resistance come to the present through dreams, visions and Dibaajimowinan”.<sup>300</sup> Dibaajimowinan is Anishinaabemowin for “a story”, the importance of storytelling is emphasised by academics such as Simpson and McLeod because the process of telling a story “is at its core decolonising because it’s a process of or remembering, visioning and creating a just reality where Nishnaabeg live as both Nishnaabeg and peoples”.<sup>301</sup> Hence, the adaptation of oral storytelling to written literature is a form of resistance against singularising and twisted representation of Native cultures and spiritual beliefs that have been created by non-Natives, as storytelling maintains traditions and individual Indigenous beliefs and passes them on to future generations. The utilisation of written literature and the English language have enabled Native individuals to remain connected as a community with their elders, despite the loss of traditional language as a result of government schools and assimilation. Simpson suggests that creation stories “set the ‘theoretical framework’ from within which we can interpret other stories, teachings and experience”. Scholars can identify traditional elements of creation stories in fictional literature written by Native American authors throughout the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>302</sup> Similarly, in literature produced by Native Americans within the last decade, the novels echo elements of the past and identify tradition and spirituality as the key to survival in the future. Simpson argues that “the more we tell stories the more stories there are to tell, the more echoes [of the past] that come up to the present”, with the literature published by Native American authors in the last fifty years, the authors are reclaiming their past and their present, whilst allowing for more stories for Natives in the future as they preserve representations of their cultures. Hence, in the twenty-first century, visions and dreams inspire resurgence and mobilise social movements, whilst creation stories provide the framework for storytelling which echoes the past and provides visions for the future. Both visions and creation stories hold strong ties to Native spiritual beliefs and are still present and greatly significant to Ojibway communities today,

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid., p. 146

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., p. 33

<sup>302</sup> As discussed on pages 86-95.

as they have been adapted to aid with efforts of preservation and resurgence in order for the survival of Native communities—as anticipated by the Seven Fires prophecy.

### Reclaiming Academia and the Natural Adaptation of the English Language

As pretendians in academic literature were exposed as frauds throughout the 1990s Native American communities and scholars have made efforts to reclaim academic writing about Native American culture and spirituality and correct misrepresentations. In the last two decades, scholars have also focussed on the survival of traditions and spirituality and this has been central to their writing. As discussed, Simpson argues that storytelling and visions will enable the survival of Nishnaabeg spirituality and culture. Similarly, Lisa Brooks identifies storytelling and Indigenous writing as a form of cultural survival, suggesting that the adaptation of written literature from oral storytelling is a natural form of progression for the continuation of tradition. Brooks also suggests that the “idea that writing has been an instrumental tool for the reconstruction of ‘Native space’ and for resistance to colonialism is not a new one”.<sup>303</sup> The context and utilisation of new materials and linguistic techniques have developed the ways writing ‘as a tool’ has been adapted over time and in parallel to significant events that have impacted Indigenous communities. Brooks uses the analogy of Indigenous writing being like corn, it “emerged from within Native space out of great need”, drawing parallels to conventions of creation stories where corn emerges and ensures the survival of the Native tribe.<sup>304</sup> Examining the period of colonial expansion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Brooks uses petitions, letters, communal histories and political speeches to portray how Native leaders used writing as a tool for social community reconstruction and land reclamation. However, she suggests that Native people incorporated European writing into older Indigenous “spatialized writing tradition” – the notion of ‘writing’ was not a foreign concept, as birchbark scrolls and wampum belts symbolise writing traditions. As a result of colonial contact, northeastern

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<sup>303</sup> Brooks. *The Common Pot*, p. 254

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254

Indigenous people adapted from symbolic and mnemonic information to the English language, as they reacted to new threats and circumstances that required the utilisation of new materials and communicative forms to liaise with colonisers.<sup>305</sup> Brooks considers this step to be a short and natural one, with the incorporation of European writing being used as a tool of resistance and a way to shape the future for Native communities from the eighteenth century forward. Similarly, progressing on from the colonial period and westward expansion, the utilisation of the English language has been adapted again into forms of literature used to preserve the representation of Native spirituality and culture and resist assimilation into white America. In novels written by Native American authors throughout the 1970s and onwards, elements of older storytelling and writing traditions have been identified, this is a reoccurring theme in Indigenous writing – as stories are adapted from the framework of creation stories and spiritual traditions.<sup>306</sup> Laurent argues that oral and written traditions have become intertwined and interrelated, they are “not in contest with one another, but each contributing to the sustenance and growth of the other and reliant on their interdependence for the continuation of the whole”.<sup>307</sup> Supporting the argument that Native Americans have adapted oral storytelling to written literature, whilst maintaining the sentiments of oral traditions and key elements of Indigenous spiritual beliefs. Brooks argues that “writing in English is the means through which boundaries have been maintained, asserted and reclaimed” hence the adaptation of storytelling into English language has ensured the survival of traditions and reclaimed the representation of Indigenous culture and spirituality.<sup>308</sup>

Other Native scholars and authors support the argument of natural adaptation. Louise Erdrich defines the Ojibwa words for ‘book’ and ‘rock painting’, stating that the words are almost identical and that the root of both these words, “mazina”, is “the root for dozens of words all

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid., p. 229

<sup>306</sup> Simpson, Leanne. *Dancing on our Turtle’s Back*, p. 32

<sup>307</sup> Joseph Laurent, *New Familiar Abenakis and English Dialogues: The First Ever Published on the Grammatical System*, (Quebec: Leger Brousseau, 1884) p.20

<sup>308</sup> Brooks, *The Common Pot*, p.254

concerned with made images and with the substances upon which the images are put”.<sup>309</sup> Erdrich suggests that traditional forms of communication are adapted to the context of the environment Indigenous people live within and that different materials are utilised for storytelling. Yet each of them serves the same purpose – to pass on and share stories and traditions. Similarly, Silko speaks strongly about the interdependence of oral and written traditions, she points to the “adoption of alphabetic writing as a form of adaptation”, as Native communities have utilised the language for resurgence among new generations, ensuring the continuation of spirituality and culture.<sup>310</sup> Brooks has been praised for her contribution to the academic field on northeastern Native groups and her arguments support the thesis of Native resurgence through the adaptation of written literature and utilisation of new materials.<sup>311</sup> However, not all scholars support the argument that the adaptation of written language was a natural transformation from oral traditions. Some non-Native literary scholars have assumed and argued that the only ‘authentic’ Native literature is oral, believing that by transforming oral storytelling into writing, Native Americans are moving away from a ‘pure’ Native culture.<sup>312</sup> However, scholars could question how the oral tradition is to be maintained when new generations of Native Americans have lost their Native languages and, therefore, their connections to elders oral traditions as a result of government schools. Similarly, drawing on Brooks’ argument that ‘writing’ was already a part of many Indigenous cultures, but following on from colonial contact, these forms of birchbark, symbolic writing were adapted to the English language as a tool for resistance in the face of colonial expansions. As Womack states “Indian cultures are the only cultures where it is assumed that if they change they are no longer a culture. In most other cultures change is viewed as a sign that the culture is vibrant and alive, capable of surviving”.<sup>313</sup> Jenkins agrees, stating

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid., p. xx; Erdrich, *Books and Islands in Ojibwa Country*, (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2003) pp. 5-11

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., p. xxi

<sup>311</sup> C. Joseph Genetin-Pilawa, ‘The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast’, *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 57, Iss. 4, (2010) pp. 744–746; Margo Lukens, ‘Review’ *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Vol. 22, No. 2, (2010), 96-99

<sup>312</sup> See Maureen Konkle’s critique of Arnold Krupat in *Writing in Indian Nations: Native Intellectuals and the Politics of Historiography, 1827-1863*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) pp. 28-29, 35

<sup>313</sup> Womack, *Red on Red*, p. 31

that “nor is a religion less valid if it adapts... to some degree all new religions do something like this”.<sup>314</sup> He suggests that adaptations within Native spirituality, such as oral storytelling to written, is an action taken for survival and preservation in a continuously evolving world and it is no different to the ways other forms of religion have adapted elements of their traditions and beliefs.<sup>315</sup> Brooks, Simpson and a number of other Native American scholars have used their voices to argue for the reclaiming and resurgence of their Native cultures and spirituality.<sup>316</sup> They have worked to combat ignorant arguments that suggest Native American culture and religion is no longer considered ‘authentic’ if it transforms and adapts. Rather, Indigenous scholars have worked to reclaim academic literature from pretendians in the last three decades, informing representations of Native traditions and spirituality, as well as highlighting how Native Americans have fought and adapted in order to survive in the face of oppression and ignorance. As Brooks states “the recovery of Indigenous voices and knowledge is instrumental ... to the adaptation and survival of Native nations ... and future landscape of America”.<sup>317</sup> The twenty-first century has welcomed the recovery of Indigenous voices and knowledge, as they have reclaimed representations of Native spirituality in academia and their published works aim to inspire other Native Americans towards resurgence.

### Who Can Discuss Native American Culture?

Whilst Native American academics and authors have made efforts to reclaim the narrative surrounding their cultures and traditions, a debate surrounding who can discuss Indigenous culture has emerged as a few non-Native scholars feel they have been denied participation in the field of Native American studies.<sup>318</sup> In the 2000s, Jace Weaver describes a movement among Native tribal governments to assert control over academic research that was centred around the representations

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<sup>314</sup> Jenkins, *Dream Catchers*, p.249

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., p.249

<sup>316</sup> Brooks, *The Common Pot*; Simpson, Leanne. *Dancing on our Turtle’s Back*; Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*.

<sup>317</sup> Brooks, *The Common Pot*, p. xxxix

<sup>318</sup> Brown, *Who Owns Native Culture?*, p. 11-53

of their cultures.<sup>319</sup> Whilst these actions were motivated by the reclaiming and preservation of representations of individual Native cultures, there was backlash among some non-Native scholars.<sup>320</sup> Jace Weaver refers to actions by the Hopi tribe as one example of such backlash, as in 1994 the tribal chairman, Vernon Masayesva, sent a letter to museums and repositories whose holdings include information about the Hopi. The letter “asserted the Hopis’ ownership interest in all materials relating to their culture and the expectation that those materials will eventually be returned to the Hopi Tribe as part of a comprehensive process of reparations”.<sup>321</sup> This action was said to be done in the ‘spirit of cultural protection’.<sup>322</sup> Weaver argues that they “have every right as tribal nations to restrict or prohibit access to their archives, ceremonies, and cultural material”, he goes on to justify these actions highlighting the “years of violations and misrepresentations by scholars”.<sup>323</sup> However, he is disturbed by tribal governments’ attempts to control research agendas and conclusions, suggesting that this would deprive scholars from academic freedom and that their focus should be centred around a commitment to the truth.<sup>324</sup>

Meanwhile, Michael Brown argues that non-Natives are entitled to study Native American religion and to deny access to religious materials is a form of censorship, as technology and science have transformed culture into a commodity.<sup>325</sup> Brown states that “in public discourse, culture and such related concepts as ‘tradition’ and ‘heritage’ have become sources that groups own and defend from competing interests.”<sup>326</sup> He views these moves towards protection of culture as a form of ‘censorship’ and conflated with a violation of access, impeding the free flow of information.<sup>327</sup> Brown’s text is liberal and assumes an ‘even playing field’ with the understanding that there is an

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<sup>319</sup> Weaver, Jace. *More Light Than Heat*, pp. 233-255

<sup>320</sup> Brown, *Who Owns Native Culture?*, pp. 11-20

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.14-15; Jonathan Haas, ‘Power, Objects, and a Voice for Anthropology’, *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 37, No. 1, (1996) 1-22

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14

<sup>323</sup> Weaver, Jace. *More Light Than Heat*, p. 239

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239

<sup>325</sup> Brown, *Who Owns Native Culture?*, p. 4

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4

<sup>327</sup> Audra Simpson, ‘On the Logic of Discernment’, *American Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 2, (2007), 479-491. pp. 486

intellectual commons where both Indigenous and settler actors must share their cultural and religious knowledge.<sup>328</sup> However, Brown's position requires an ahistorical premise and, following on from the centuries of misrepresentation of Native culture and religion by non-Natives, the actions taken by Native American tribes to protect their spirituality and culture can be viewed from a sympathetic standpoint as a way to ensure the survival of sacred traditions and beliefs. Whilst Brown argues that "The adoption of religious practices by members of one community does not prevent other communities from following suit. In fact, widespread emulation of the practice only strengthens the religion's influence."<sup>329</sup> However, this sentiment was also felt by New Agers and as a result of their cultural appropriation throughout the 1970s and 1980s a singular and misinformed representation of Native American spirituality took hold. Scholars must consider the damage caused within Native American communities as a result of cultural theft and appropriation and how it has resulted in a need for preservation and resurgence of spirituality and traditions. The widespread practice of Native culture during the New Age movement only strengthened misrepresentations of spiritual practices and threatened the continuation of individual tribes sacred traditions, as they were lost in the dominant representation of the Great Plains religion.

Whilst tribal governments' attempts to control research agendas and conclusions threatens to diminish the accuracy of historical events as a singularised narrative of events would begin to develop, this action would be difficult to achieve due to freedom of speech and publication rights. However, it is arguably within a tribal government's rights to deny sacred religious and cultural materials from non-Natives (though this implies that tribes actually have control over materials, which is not always the case), and whilst this might limit academics' sources, it preserves Native representations of these materials for future generations. Scholars such as Weaver understand that actions taken to assert control over research based on a tribe's cultural representation is a consequence of threats created by the New Age movement and it aims to protect the individual

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid., pp. 486- 487

<sup>329</sup> Brown, *Who Owns Native Culture?*, p. 5; Lawrence Lessig, *The Future of Ideas: The Fate of Commons in a Connected World*, (New York: Random House, 2001) p. 21

representation of a tribes traditions. Over the last twenty-five years or so, since the publication of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonising Methodologies* (1999), a series of protocols guiding ethical engagement with Indigenous knowledges has developed, these voluntary protocols have set the agenda for Non-Native scholars' participation in American Studies.<sup>330</sup> Non-Native academics must be aware of the context of pretensions and threats to representations, making sure to be respectful of individual tribes' sacred materials and their requests to uphold an accurate representation of their culture. Brown's liberal view of an 'even playing field' dismisses the struggles and oppressions that Native Americans have faced in order for their religion and culture to survive, making his argument of "a violation of access" less convincing.<sup>331</sup> An increase in academic work written by Native Americans is a testament to the survival of Indigenous spirituality and culture and the ways in which Native Americans have adapted their traditions to preserve and reclaim their spirituality. As Native academics reclaim the representations and narratives surrounding their tribe's beliefs, non-Native scholars should aim to aid these efforts as they focus on a "commitment of the truth".<sup>332</sup> Academic literature has transformed in the twenty-first century, focussing on reclaiming and preserving Native Americans' representations of spirituality and traditions. Although faced with some backlash, the majority of non-Native scholars work alongside Native American academics to correct misrepresentations created by pretensions and stereotypes that have presided since colonial times as a result of white media and anthropologists that were ignorant to sacred traditions and misinformed on Indigenous culture.

### *The Marrow Thieves* and Colonialism in the Science Fiction Genre

As previously discussed in earlier chapters, there has been a movement within fictional literature by Native American authors to reclaim representations of Native spirituality and culture whilst

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<sup>330</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, (Zed Books, 2021)

<sup>331</sup> Simpson, Audra. *On the Logic of Discernment*, pp. 486- 487

<sup>332</sup> Weaver, Jace. *More Light Than Heat*, p. 239

highlighting generational traumas imposed on Indigenous people in North America. This movement has continued into the twenty-first century and can be seen in Cherie Dimaline's novel *The Marrow Thieves* (2017). The novel is set in an apocalyptic dystopian future, in which Native Americans are hunted and taken to 'new residential schools' where their dreams are extracted from their bone marrow in order to provide medicine for the white population. As the polluted planet deteriorates, Non-Natives have been impacted by a new disease which prohibits their reproduction and doesn't allow them to dream anymore, resulting in mental illness and suicide. The novel draws parallels with colonialism and the commodification of Native American peoples and cultures, it makes a statement about oppression towards Native Americans and the key to their survival being the maintenance of traditions and spirituality. Dimaline has utilised apocalyptic motifs and language to revisit and retell colonial history, exposing the damaging impacts of colonial expansion, governments' efforts to assimilate Native people into the white population through oppressive laws and residential schools, and the spiritual appropriation of the New Age movement. Within the science fiction genre the apocalyptic futures are often centred around the survival of white non-Natives and "can be susceptible to racist attitudes to minority groups and dismissive of non-white history".<sup>333</sup> Dimaline is intervening in the science-fiction genre, as she writes from the perspective of a minority group that suffered at the hands of non-Natives and draws on colonial attitudes towards Indigenous people to remind readers about Native history and to warn against these attitudes in the future. Arguably, Dimaline is using the concept of cultural genocide within her narrative, through the plot of stealing Natives' dreams by extracting their bone marrow, to reiterate the threat of Native spirituality being commodified by non-Natives and how it damages Native communities and dismisses their struggle to survive.

Arguably, Dimaline is intervening in the Science-fiction genre, which often uses the trope of colonial conquest of land and Native people as a narrative device, dismissing the damaging and

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<sup>333</sup> Roslyn Weaver, "'Smudged, Distorted and Hidden": Apocalypse as Protest in Indigenous Speculative Fiction' in *Science Fiction, Imperialism and the Third World: Essays on Postcolonial Literature and Film*, Ed. Ericka Hoagland & Reema Sarwal, (North Carolina: McFarland, 2014) pp. 99-115

traumatic history of imperialism and the impact of colonial settlements on the Native American populations. Often in the science-fiction (sci-fi) genre, there are themes of empire and colonialism, as humans expand their colonial conquest into space and in new worlds. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. argued that sci-fi prospered and was bound up in the process of European imperialism and that it was “driven by a desire for the imaginative transformation of imperialism into Empire”.<sup>334</sup> Hence, some of the earlier sci-fi novels, written by white authors, expanded ‘manifest destiny’ into space where discovery and exploration of new worlds were reflective of Columbus and colonial conquest. When encountered by new life forms, the humans’ advanced weapons would be used against creatures on other worlds to force them to conform to their rule or result in their extinction.<sup>335</sup> The solar system acts as the inevitable extension of the Earth, it being a spatial expanse that is prime for exploration and imperial conquest.<sup>336</sup> The theme of colonial expansion in sci-fi continues to place minority groups (represented through alien creatures) in a position of conquest, while their lands are stolen and exploited for materials or used as new human settlements. Similarly, in narratives that are based on apocalyptic scenarios, these fantasies “conveniently reject the past as irrelevant, a strategy that suppresses other (Indigenous) versions of history”.<sup>337</sup> In many representations of the future in sci-fi novels the white characters often feature at the expense of other ethnic groups, often entirely erasing Indigenous people from the narrative. However, Dimaline centres her novel around Native people and focuses on their survival in an apocalyptic future.<sup>338</sup> Critics have argued that “apocalypse provides a discourse through which dominant members of society can legitimate their persecution of minority groups”.<sup>339</sup> However, James Berger claims that apocalypse has the potential to be radical, and within the movement of reclaiming and resurgence through Native American

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<sup>334</sup> Csicsery-Ronay, Istvan, Jr. ‘Science Fiction and Empire’, *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2003), 231-245. p. 232

<sup>335</sup> David Seed, ‘The Course of Empire: A Survey of the Imperial Theme in Early Anglophone Science Fiction’, *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2, (2010), 230-252. p. 230

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237

<sup>337</sup> Weaver, Roslyn. ‘*Smudged, Distorted and Hidden*’, p. 100

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100

literature it has the potential to critique Eurocentric political and historical systems and reveal an alterNative history.<sup>340</sup> Dimaline has utilised apocalyptic literature to interrogate the effects of colonialism on Native peoples by drawing parallels between Native loss of land and life, and the residential schools that targeted Indigenous culture and spirituality. Dimaline is reclaiming the narrative of colonial conquest in the sci-fi genre by representing the damage caused by oppressions against Natives and by ensuring that Native American versions of history are represented. In her novel the minority group refuses to be conquered and fights back through a resurgence of Native tradition, the novel expresses the significance of spirituality and community in order for survival of Native peoples.

#### Inspiring Resurgence with a Dystopian Future

Dimaline's dystopian society in *The Marrow Thieves* reflects present day fears surrounding Indigenous survival and represents how the continuation of Native spirituality aids efforts of resurgence and the preservation of traditional beliefs and practices. Dreams are a central and significant aspect within the plot of *The Marrow Thieves* as they are the key to the cure against a new pandemic. Yet these dreams are extracted by force from Indigenous bodies and the need to find a cure results in the commodification of Indigenous bodies. This commodification is exemplified in the novel by language used to describe Native people as "commodities", "crop", "product" to be "harvested", they are viewed by white non-Natives as resources that require extraction.<sup>341</sup> This is a reflection of the commodification of spirituality during the New Age movement and mirrors the extractive basis of western economies. Dimaline directly highlights the connection between the two as Miig explains in a passage that, when the illness first spread "people turned to Indigenous people the way the New Agers had, all reverence and curiosity, looking for ways we could guide them. They

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid., p. 101-103; James Berger, *After the End: Representations of Post-apocalypse*, (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) pp. 211-223

<sup>341</sup> Cherie Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*, (London: Jacaranda Books Art Music Ltd., 2019) pp. 218, 37, 105, 60

asked to come to ceremony. ... And then they changed on us, like the New Agers, looking for ways they could take what we had and administer it themselves.”.<sup>342</sup> Miig’s character reflects on the way non-Natives steal Native culture, land and spirituality – wanting and taking what does not belong to them because they feel an entitlement which is reminiscent of colonial mindsets. Dimaline creates links between the New Age and her apocalyptic dystopia in order to present the harmful influence of the commodification and commercialisation of Native spirituality and culture, hinting that if white Americans are willing to sell Indigenous spirituality then the commodification of actual Native bodies is only a small leap given a threatening situation. Patrizia Zanella describes the novel as depicting the apocalypse not as something new but as something “that hasn’t ended” as colonial attitudes intrude into modern ideas of commercialisation and capitalist markets.<sup>343</sup>

Although non-Natives in the novel view dreams as a resource, much like the New Age movement, among the Indigenous characters dreams represent ties to Native past and future. This idea aligns with recent Indigenous academic writing, such as Leanne Simpson’s argument that dreams and visions provide hope for the future and inspire Indigenous movements by providing glimpses of decolonised worlds.<sup>344</sup> Laura Maria De Vos states that *The Marrow Thieves* responds to the Native youth suicide epidemic as it invites “youth to see the central role they play in the spiralic history of their nations and how thriving futures can be lived in the present”; “spiralic history” is explained by De Vos as meaning that the worldview is organised in a cyclical experience of time but transforming for the moment rather than repeating, resulting in a spiral.<sup>345</sup> In an interview Dimaline explained that during her work with Indigenous youth she realised “they didn’t look forward, they didn’t see themselves in any kind of a viable future” explaining that this attitude correlates to the

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid., p. 101

<sup>343</sup> Patrizia Zanella, ‘Witnessing Story and Creating Kinship in a New Era of Residential Schools: Cherie Dimalines’s *The Marrow Thieves*’, *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Vol. 32, No. 3-4, (2020), 176-200. pp. 176-177

<sup>344</sup> Simpson, Leanne. *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back*, pp. 34-35

<sup>345</sup> Laura Maria De Vos, ‘Spiralic Temporality and Culture Continuity for Indigenous Sovereignty: Idle No More and *The Marrow Thieves*’, *Transmotion*, Vol. 6, No. 2, (2020), 1-42. p. 2-4

youth suicide epidemic on Native communities.<sup>346</sup> Dimaline thought “what if they read this book where they literally see themselves in the future, not just surviving but being the heroes and being the answer”.<sup>347</sup> Throughout the novel Dimaline portrays the power of learning and the continuation of Native traditions and spirituality, the narrative exemplifies how knowledge and tradition create a connection with one’s ancestry and helps to form a sense of community. The central character, Frenchie, describes “us kids, we longed for the old-timey. We wore our hair in braids to show it. We made sweat lodges” - they recreate pan-Indian Native practices.<sup>348</sup> Arguably, they wear braids and perform sweat lodges because they have become separated from their individual tribes’ practices and hence, they follow the singular stereotyped Native practices because of singular representations. Throughout the novel Frenchie also recites his dreams; when stressed he sees his deceased mother and his brother being taken by recruiters, however during brief intervals of peace he dreams of the moose that he spared while out hunting. The moose comes to him like a spirit guide and provides a “soft warmth”. These dreams represent the possibility for peace for Frenchie and his tribe as they show a world where those who were hunted no longer fear hunters.<sup>349</sup>

Dimaline’s novel presents that cultural persistence is the key to survival both in her apocalyptic future and in the present day. As Indigenous people continue to combat struggles for survival, which have persisted due to colonial structures and attitudes, Dimaline aims to inspire Native youth through spiritual and cultural representation. As the characters of *The Marrow Thieves* face threatening and oppressive circumstances, they find comfort and hope in learning about their culture and spirituality. Similarly, dreams provide the Indigenous characters with a unique power as it ties the characters to their ancestry and inspires their future as they hope to heal the planet and their Native communities, portraying the significance of resurgence of spiritual representation to readers.

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<sup>346</sup> Deborah Dundas, ‘Cherie Dimaline: Hopes and Dreams in the Apocalypse’, *Toronto Star*, 6<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2017

<sup>347</sup> Zanella, *Witnessing Story and Creating Kinship in a New Era of Residential Schools*, p. 186-187

<sup>348</sup> Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*, p. 33

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64

## Importance of Story and Language

Importance is placed on the telling of Story throughout *The Marrow Thieves*. Dimaline capitalises the word 'Story' in the novel making it a character in its own right as its role as a source of information, connection between characters and the links it has with traditional oral storytelling has a large impact on each of the characters. As the main character in the novel, Frenchie, becomes accepted by his adoptive tribe, he becomes privy to Story. Story is an important and sacred activity, as members of the tribe share the events of their lives with one another and the 'elders' of the group tell stories of the past and inform the younger members on traditional beliefs. Story acts as a form of remembering, as the characters remember and tell the traumatic events of their own lives and Miig informs them about the original residential schools and how Indigenous lands were stolen – he does this because “it was the only way to make the kinds of changes that were necessary to really survive”.<sup>350</sup> Miig describes how “the Church and the scientists” realised a cure may be found in Indigenous bodies and that they quickly “turned to history to show them how to best keep us warehoused”.<sup>351</sup> He describes “That’s when the new residential schools started growing up from the dirt like poisonous brick mushrooms”, he makes clear parallels to historical and ongoing settler-colonial mechanisms of elimination.<sup>352</sup> As Miigwans traces the progression from cultural appropriation to severe spiritual and physical harm he unveils “the settler presumption that all things Indigenous are ripe for the taking: blood, land, heritage, spirituality, being, voice”.<sup>353</sup> This echoes arguments surrounding the New Age movement, as white Americans stole Native spiritual practices and culture claiming it for themselves, presuming it is their right to appropriate sacred traditions. Dimaline uses Story to make clear connections between present day forms of cultural

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid., p.36

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., p.102

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., p. 102; Zanella, *Witnessing Story and Creating Kinship in a New Era of Residential Schools* p. 183

<sup>353</sup> Zanella, *Witnessing Story and Creating Kinship in a New Era of Residential Schools*, pp. 181-182; Daniel Heath Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, (Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2018) p. 138

appropriation and reflects them in her dystopian future. By forming these connections between present day issues and an apocalyptic scenario Dimaline is emphasising the damage of cultural appropriation and spiritual oppression on Native American communities, suggesting that the cultural exploitation has the potential to progress to develop into physical exploitation of Indigenous bodies. Miigwans' Story acts as a warning, not just for the other characters but also for the reader, warning against history repeating itself as white non-Natives continue to take from Indigenous communities and cultures. Zanella argues that Story "hints not only at the importance of inter-generational knowledge transmission but also at the cyclical nature of settler colonialism with its recurring pattern of cultural appropriation, land dispossession, broken treaties, lack of consultation, commodification of Indigenous ways of life, medical experiments, missing people, and residential schools."<sup>354</sup>

Story also plays an important role alongside language in upholding Native traditions and the continuation of Indigenous spirituality and culture. Story follows the Indigenous tradition of oral storytelling, the 'elders' use storytelling to pass on knowledge of the past and uphold spiritual beliefs. As the characters hide from recruiters in the wilderness they utilise traditional Native forms of survival and tradition, they hunt for food, set up camp and use oral storytelling to pass on the groups' history to one another. The concept of maintaining tradition and Native culture during times of oppression aligns with twenty-first century academic writing, which suggests that Native American survival relies on the continuation of traditions, such as storytelling and language. Frenchie aims to learn Native language from the tribe elder Minerva and he expresses that when he speaks the traditional language he feels ties with the past and it empowers him. After learning the word "Nishin" Frenchie describes "I turned the word over in my throat like a stone; a prayer I couldn't add breath to, a word I wasn't willing to release" this single word from a Native language connects him to his ancestors and his culture.<sup>355</sup> Comparing the word to a "prayer" emphasises how the

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid., p. 181

<sup>355</sup> Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*, p. 51

maintenance of Native tradition and language in times of oppression helps to uphold Indigenous spirituality and ensure the survival of traditional beliefs for future generations. Efforts to learn Native language among the younger characters whilst on the run presents an example of what Leanne Simpson calls “Indigenous fugitivity”, as ““a flight inwards’ a movement towards kin in order to take care of one’s relations”.<sup>356</sup> Through learning the language, the characters “resist the epistemicide caused by the attempts to sever Indigenous people’s ties to language and land”.<sup>357</sup> Language is mobile, as they can learn it as they move around, yet it ties the protagonists back to their ancestry, culture, spirituality and land. Both Story and language maintain ties to the past but also represent the future as the younger members of the tribe learn the tribal history and the language which they can pass on to the next generation. Dimaline presents that cultural persistence and knowledge is key to Indigenous survival, as seen through Minerva’s character who, once captured by recruiters, holds onto her Native ancestry and those elements that help define her identity, “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”, bringing down the school.<sup>358</sup> The power of language helps Indigenous people to ‘remember themselves’ and acts as a tool for healing from coloniser violence, it provides a path to cultural continuation which is why story, poetry and novels are so important to Indigenous resurgence.<sup>359</sup> The significance of story and language in the novel is reflective of current efforts by Native American authors to adapt storytelling and utilise written literature and literature genres to represent Native spirituality, culture and struggles for survival, just as Dimaline herself has done by writing about Indigenous culture and representing Native spirituality.

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<sup>356</sup> Zanella, *Witnessing Story and Creating Kinship in a New Era of Residential Schools*, p. 191; Simpson, Leanne. *As We Have Always Done*.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 191-192

<sup>358</sup> Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*, p. 187

<sup>359</sup> De Vos, *Spirallic Temporality and Culture Continuity for Indigenous Sovereignty*, p. 9

## DNA and Indigenous Identity

The aim of the new residential schools in Dimaline's novel is to hunt down people with Native American DNA as they are immune to the new disease which has caused the white population to stop dreaming. The focus on DNA is representative of the ways in which Canada and the U.S. governments classify an individual's Native identity. However, Dimaline represents that community and ties to Native traditions are what connects a person to their Native identity, not simply their DNA. Throughout the narrative it becomes clear that the school "recruiters" target people based on their racial features and follow stereotypes of Native appearance, hunting those that have "a braid in [their] hair" and assuming Indigenous heritage based on their skin colour.<sup>360</sup> Wab describes hiding from recruiters with a mute named Freddie, stating "Freddie was Malaysian but he wasn't taking any chances. Freddie's wife has been carried away ... she was from Taiwan, but no one believed her".<sup>361</sup> Similarly, Rose recounts her father being taken away: "they didn't care that he was half black and his kind of Indian was the kind from the warm oceans". As people are mistakenly abducted based on their skin colour a form of kinship between minority groups is created as the genocidal violence quickly spreads beyond the Native population.<sup>362</sup> Later in the novel we also see two black women ally themselves with the Indigenous characters, rescuing them from the school through an underground network of friends. Zanella suggests this is a nod to the Underground Railroad which freed enslaved people from the American South.<sup>363</sup> The kinship and resistance that emerges between Indigenous and other minority groups is arguably reflective of colonial times when Black slaves would flee their enslavers and seek refuge in Native American tribes, this mutual support between minority groups has been continuous in the face of white oppression.<sup>364</sup> Dimaline incorporates this issue of racially motivated attacks to represent how Indigenous communities are

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<sup>360</sup> Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*, p. 81

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70

<sup>363</sup> Zanella, *Witnessing Story and Creating Kinship in a New Era of Residential Schools*, p. 185

<sup>364</sup> Tiya Miles and Sharon P. Holland, *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country*, Ed. Tiya Miles and Sharon Holland, (London: Duke University Press, 2006) P. 4

structured around kinship networks and structures of care. Similarly, Shital Pravinchandra argues that Dimaline incorporates terminology of genetics as a way to “underscore that genetics is ill-equipped to understand Indigenous ways of articulating kinship and belonging”.<sup>365</sup> As, throughout the novel, Dimaline expresses the complexity of Indigenous self-recognition practices which are centred around Story, memory and language – exceeding the superficial sense of connection that DNA may produce and informing an identity defined by experiences and relationships.<sup>366</sup> Dimaline emphasises kinship throughout her novel, indicating that in times of oppression (such as during slavery in colonial times) minority groups ally with one another creating a larger sense of community in order to survive. Similarly, Dimaline highlights that community and Indigenous identity is formed through ties to traditions and memory of the past rather than genetics, indicating that resurgence of Native traditions and beliefs will lead to the survival of Indigenous people as they withstand efforts to erase their communities and culture.

### Residential Schools and Indigenous Protest Movements

Scholars have interpreted Dimaline’s *The Marrow Thieves* as a critique of Canada’s current reconciliation discourse, an issue that is prominent within Canadian Indigenous academic literature. De Vos argues that Dimaline’s novel takes up themes from the Idle No More movement “to illustrate how spiralic temporality informs Indigenous resurgence and resistance”.<sup>367</sup> Similarly, Dimaline’s direct reference to residential schools and the impact of global warming being the cause of her apocalyptic future presents superficial attempts of reconciliation by the Canadian government, an issue that resonates with Native Americans in the United States as many Indigenous nations have faced century long battles with the U.S. government over reconciliation issues, such as land rights. The novel not only aligns with academic arguments that encourage resurgence, but it also aligns

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<sup>365</sup> Shital Pravinchandra, “More than Biological’: Cherie Dimaline’s *The Marrow Thieves* as Indigenous Counter-genetic Fiction” *Medical Humanities*, Vol. 47, Iss. 2, (2021), 135-144. p. 135

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135

<sup>367</sup> De Vos, *Spiralic Temporality and Culture Continuity for Indigenous Sovereignty*, p. 5

with Indigenous protest movements. Both Dimaline and the Idle No More movement emphasise the central role of “culture and continuity for Indigenous sovereignty” – arguably the novel is a written form of protest against Canada’s ineffectual reconciliation efforts.<sup>368</sup>

Dimaline sets the novel in a dystopian future where the downfall of civilisation began with the pollution of the planet, resulting in mass extinction, extreme weather and disease. Stating, “The Earth was broken. Too much taking for too damn long, so she finally broke”, the taking of materials and hunting of animals without giving back to the land and appreciating it has resulted in its destruction. Many Native groups believe respect and appreciation must be paid to whatever they take from the Earth and in order to maintain balance people should only take that which they need. Dimaline refers to Earth as “she” because in many Indigenous creation stories a woman is at the centre of the Earth’s creation and her body which represents the Earth helps give life to the people and provides them with the materials to survive. It is the spiritual beliefs of a number of North-eastern tribes that they should live in harmony and respect the earth as each element of the Earth is connected to the spirit world in various ways, including plant, rivers and mountains – with some of these sites being sacred due to their strong association with the spirit world.<sup>369</sup> Dimaline describes the impact of “a melting North” and how rising sea levels resulted in “tsunamis, spinning tornados, crumbling earthquakes, and the shapes of countries ... changed forever, whole coasts breaking off like crust”.<sup>370</sup> This setting is based around current and real fears surrounding global warming issues, Dimaline warns readers with her description of a world terrorised by extreme weather of the potential outcome of harmful and unsustainable living. This issue is prominent in many Indigenous cultures as they fight for greater respect and protection of the Earth, the novel also aligns itself with the Pipeline protests that have taken place across North America in recent decades. Dimaline makes mention of “all those pipelines in the ground” which “snapped like icicles and spewed bile over

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid., p. 36

<sup>369</sup> Milwaukee Public Museum, *Ojibwe*, (2022) <<https://www.mpm.edu/educators/wirp/nations/ojibwe>> [Accessed 27 May 2022]

<sup>370</sup> Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*, p. 100

forests, into lakes, drowning whole reserves and towns.”<sup>371</sup> Dimaline reminds readers of the harm that the pipelines could cause and her description of them “snapping like icicles” suggests that it is only a matter of time before this disturbing scene becomes a reality. Explaining that “So much laid to waste from the miscalculation of infallibility in the face of a planet’s revolt”, arguably presents Dimaline’s view that the government is wrong in their installation of the pipelines but are too ignorant to see this and too stubborn to ever turn back on their decision.<sup>372</sup> However, Indigenous people are not only protesting pipelines because of environmental issues, but also due to their encroachment on Native reservations and on sacred lands. The Dakota Access Pipeline 2016 protests gained global attention and high-profile activists, celebrities and politicians supported the cause, whilst the battle to shut down the operation is still ongoing the protests have drawn attention to the issue and many support Indigenous views to shut down the pipeline. Dimaline’s dystopian novel continues to draw attention to this issue and criticises the lack of support from the government, suggesting it is a result of their “infallibility” and that this will only result in harm and destruction to the planet and people that inhabit the areas near the pipelines. Dimaline’s representation of Earth and its destruction links back to Native spiritual beliefs that everything is connected to the spirit world and that people must respect the Earth and give back what they take in order to maintain balance and protect that which the earth has provided.

Zanella suggests that the novel “arguably intervenes in ongoing national conversations around reconciliation and Indigenous sovereignty” through its “unsettling portrayal of an era of ‘new residential schools’”.<sup>373</sup> Conceivably, “the physical removal of the inside through marrow extraction presents an escalation of historically inflicted violence. By largely forbidding the use of Indigenous languages, removing Indigenous children from the land, separating kin and imposing cis-heteropatriarchal norms the old system of residential schools similarly participated in the theft of

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid., p. 100

<sup>372</sup> Ibid., p. 100

<sup>373</sup> Zanella, *Witnessing Story and Creating Kinship in a New Era of Residential Schools*, p. 177

memory, growth and dreams".<sup>374</sup> Hence, Dimaline's novel is an adapted version of past events which are escalated in order to emphasise the damaging and harmful impact that residential schools had on Native people and to represent how they metaphorically stole Indigenous dreams by removing culture and spirituality and, subsequently, the hopes and visions of Indigenous youth for a non-oppressive future. De Vos argues that "using the term "residential school" makes a powerful and clear connection by commenting on the past and on residential school violence through presenting the superficial Canadian reconciliation attempts, that are a violence in their wish for easy 'progress' and erasure of the past harms, despite their current reverberations."<sup>375</sup> Indigenous communities cannot erase the past when their families were lost, their cultures diminished and while new horrors continue to be unveiled and cause communities to revisit and grieve old pains. In 2021 mass gravesites were discovered at residential school grounds which confirmed the claims of Indigenous people who feared harm had come to their children which had vanished after being forced into the schools.<sup>376</sup> The apocalyptic horror and genocide within Dimaline's novel had already come to fruition decades ago and Native communities mourn the lives lost in the past and seek justice. The discovery of the mass graves has pushed the Canadian government to take action as Justice minister David Lametti has been called on to launch an independent investigation into crimes against humanity in Canada.<sup>377</sup> A Canada-wide curriculum on Indigenous history has been proposed by the Canadian School Boards Association to be taught to all students.<sup>378</sup> Meanwhile, literature such as Dimaline's (along with many other Native authors) stand to not only represent the power of spirituality and tradition but they also do not allow readers to forget the trauma and oppressions inflicted on Native American communities in the past because they continue to impact Indigenous people in the present. *The Marrow Thieves* emphasises the building of community and resistance towards settler

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid., p. 180

<sup>375</sup> De Vos, *Spirallic Temporality and Culture Continuity for Indigenous Sovereignty*, pp. 18-19

<sup>376</sup> Ian Austen, 'Mass Grave May Contain Canadian Indigenous Youth' *New York Times*, 29th May 2021

<sup>377</sup> Darren Major, 'NDP MPs call for investigation of child abuse at residential schools', *CBC News*, 9th July 2021

<sup>378</sup> Colin Perkel, 'Convenient Ignorance: Canadians' Knowledge of Residential Schools Sorely Lacking', *The Canadian Press*, 6th June 2021

coloniser structures in order for survival, much like the Idle No More movement. This message is presented through the utilisation of the sci-fi genre as Dimaline reflects on Native past and provides visions for future generations, in which their spirituality and culture will secure their futures and rebuild their communities.<sup>379</sup>

## Conclusion

From the late 1960s and into 1980s, Native American authors adapted traditional oral storytelling into written and fictional literature, preserving their beliefs and representing Native peoples struggles for survival and freedom to participate in their cultural and spiritual practices. Authors utilised, not only poetic and language techniques to celebrate their traditions and religions, but also the new market that emerged with the New Age movement, resulting in a significant increase in the publication of Native American literature. This resulted in the 'Native American Renaissance', in which Indigenous authors adapted creation stories and ceremonies and transformed them into fictional novels, reclaiming and celebrating their ancestry, culture and spirituality, whilst also highlighting the traumas and damages that Native Americans have had to overcome. Once again in the twenty-first century Native American authors and academics adapted literature in order to represent Indigenous spirituality and portray its significance in upholding communities and ensuring resurgence and hope for future generations. Authors and academics have utilised the market centred around Indigenous culture, created by non-Native and pretendians, and have reclaimed it as their own by publishing informed and first-hand experiences of Indigenous culture. New published literature has been centred around the representation of Indigenous spirituality, culture and the importance of resurgence in Native communities, whilst also criticising Canada and the United States reconciliation efforts. Indigenous authors in both academia and fictional literature have utilised their platforms and public reach as writers to inform non-Natives about the traumas inflicted on Native

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<sup>379</sup> De Vos, *Spirallic Temporality and Culture Continuity for Indigenous Sovereignty*, p. 21

people and have shown that governments efforts to forget this past is only harmful as it erases Native history and dismisses the suffering and oppression that they have overcome through cultural persistence. Academic writing has portrayed the transformed role of visions in Native culture, as the spirit world gives hope and inspires new generations of Indigenous people by providing glimpses of decolonised spaces. Native authors and academics portray the importance of maintaining traditional beliefs and practices as a way of reclaiming them from white non-Natives that oppressed these beliefs, stole them and formed misrepresentations. Recent Native literature suggests that “through remembering traditional practices, relations across time are strengthened and rebuilt” and this rebuilding of community and connections to the past will, in-hand, ensure the future for Native Americans.<sup>380</sup> Academic writing has been reclaimed and adapted by Indigenous authors as they utilise the academic market to publish first-hand representations of their individual Native spiritual beliefs and culture. Whilst efforts within individual Native communities have been made to protect their spirituality and culture from pretendians by restricting access to sacred materials and revealing those discovered to be pretendians. Native authors have continued to utilise fictional literature and its popular market to reach non-Native audiences and represent their Indigenous spirituality and its significance in guiding communities, alongside representing the struggles faced due to oppression and persecution by non-Natives and North American governments. Dimaline’s adaptation of the science-fiction genre to represent Indigenous spirituality and political issues represents the transformed ways in which Native authors are utilising literature genres and western markets to reach larger audiences. Dimaline has adapted traditional storytelling and remoulded apocalyptic motifs and language from the apocalyptic western literature, to retell colonial history and expose the damaging impacts of colonial expansion and government’s efforts to assimilate Native people into the white population through oppressive laws and residential schools, and the spiritual appropriation of the New Age movement. Dimaline warns readers of continued colonial structures but suggests the key to survival for Indigenous people is cultural resilience, resurgence and the

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid., p. 7

continuation of storytelling traditions in adapted forms. Arguably, recent Native literature has paralleled the sentiments of Native political movements and protests as both work towards the reclaiming the representation of Indigenous spirituality and culture and seek to confront the traumas of the past in order to support the future generations in their cultural survival.

## Conclusion – Transformation: From Great Visions to Best Selling Novels

Over the last 160 years, spanning from Black Elk's birth to present, there has been an evolution of resurgence and reclaiming of spirituality in Native American literature. Native Americans have adapted traditional forms of storytelling, through utilising western writing techniques, genres, markets and materials to reach a mainstream audience in order to accurately represent their spirituality and preserve it for future generations. Visions have inspired Native protest and been a central theme within Indigenous literature, as their representation has been reclaimed by Native Americans. The need to adapt storytelling into western forms of literature was, in part, a result of widespread appropriation and misrepresentation by the white media and pretendians. This reclaiming and preservation of representations through storytelling has been essential to the survival of Indigenous spirituality and identity for centuries. In the last 160 years literature has played a central role in informing perceptions on Native culture, hence Native Americans have utilised literature as a tool for reclaiming representations surrounding their spirituality and culture.

Visions have been a central factor in the reclaiming and resurgence of Indigenous spirituality. Visions and spirituality have inspired various forms of protest among individual Native tribes, such as the Sioux and Ojibwa for centuries. Their protests were presented in the form of retaliation in battle in the nineteenth century and prior. Although, more recently, visions and spiritual beliefs have spurred on non-violent protest movements, as Native Nations fight to protect and regain the rights to land sights which are considered sacred and were used for practices such as the vision quest.<sup>381</sup> Similarly, the 'Seven fires' prophecy, known among the Anishinaabe, foretold

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<sup>381</sup> National Museum of the American Indian, *Treaties Still Matter: The Dakota Access Pipeline*, (2018) <<https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/plains-treaties/dap>> [Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022]; Katherine Gammon, 'Line 3: Protests over pipeline through tribal lands spark clashes and mass arrests', *The Guardian*, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2021, <<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jun/10/line-3-pipeline-arrests-minnesota>> [Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022]

that the seventh fire would lead people to return to their elders and traditions. This prophecy inspires a movement of resurgence among the Anishinaabe, as Simpson describes in her writing.<sup>382</sup> In times of war visions were gifted to individuals, such as Crazy Horse, with powers to protect themselves or succeed in battle. As the forms of oppression that Native people faced developed from physical conquering to cultural and spiritual oppressions, visions have continued to inspire retaliation. They provide glimpses of the visionary world showing decolonised spaces, this motivates and inspires Native communities to reclaim their lands, rights and culture. In the literature this thesis has examined, visions are a reoccurring theme, they represent Native spirituality, ties to the past and tradition, survival and resurgence. Despite their representation being twisted by fearful non-Natives, pretendians and plastic shamans, among a number of Native communities they are considered a key source of knowledge and power. Visions are correspondingly a reoccurring feature in Native American literature. This is significant because the representation of visions is being reclaimed, whilst portraying knowledge about the importance of upholding traditions and spiritual practices in order for Indigenous cultures survival. This thesis has argued that adaptations of storytelling by Native Americans are a form of indirect protest against non-Native oppressions as they stand to reclaim representations from non-Natives and highlight the traumas and persecution of Native peoples by North American governments. As the U.S. and Canadian governments have encouraged people to forget the past in their 'reconciliation' efforts, Native literature has pushed against this and encourage people to remember the past and acknowledge the struggles that Native people have overcome in order for their Nations and cultures to survive. Visions have inspired and informed this movement which continues to develop as more Native Americans utilise literature and reclaim the narrative surrounding Native past and cultural practices and beliefs.

Native Americans have faced a pattern of misrepresentation, oppression and appropriation of their spirituality and culture as a consequence of continued colonial structures, which have come

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<sup>382</sup> Simpson, Leanne. *Dancing On Our Turtle's Back*, p. 67

from different directions, such as cultural fear and pretendians. In the nineteenth century Native spirituality and visions were surrounded by ambiguity which resulted in misconceptions by the white media. The media perpetuated fears about Indigenous spiritual practices, contributing to the banning of ceremonies and dances. Newspaper headlines continued to promote fear when the Ghost Dance became widely practiced across Native tribes; they warned non-Natives of “the Messiah lunacy”.<sup>383</sup> Conceivably, the media contributed to already heightened tensions between white Americans and Native peoples, following on from the memorable defeat of the 7<sup>th</sup> cavalry at the Battle of Little Bighorn. The tensions reached a climax with the Wounded Knee massacre in 1890. The as told to biographical story *Black Elk Speaks* reclaimed the narrative surrounding the events at Wounded Knee. Black Elk’s unnerving account of events accurately portrayed the horrors of the massacre from an Indigenous perspective, whilst highlighting that the Ghost Dance was centred around peace rather than a “defiant” rallying of troops, as the media had portrayed it.<sup>384</sup> Similarly, as spiritual ceremonies remained banned throughout the 1960s, Morrisseau and Howe used their artwork to represent the significance of ceremonies, visions and Native traditions. Their art portrayed the peaceful nature of such practices and how they connect Native communities to their ancestors and tribal histories. The art allowed the non-Native public to visually experience the visionary world themselves, demonstrating that their spirituality was harmless yet meaningful. However, following on from this period, the New Age movement appropriated and commodified Indigenous spirituality. An increase of pretendians in academia, literature and media damaged representations by contributing to stereotypes, the spread of misinformation and by homogenising ‘Native spirituality’. Whilst Indigenous people continued to have their spirituality suppressed by the U.S. and Canadian governments, plastic shamans profited from the appropriation of their culture and simultaneously singularised Native spirituality. This damaged efforts towards resurgence and

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<sup>383</sup> The Wichita Daily Eagle, ‘*The Messiah Lunacy*’, p.1

<sup>384</sup> Daily Tobacco Leaf-Chronicle, ‘*Peace or War*’, p. 1

the preservation of individual tribal traditions and beliefs as they became blended into the dominant representation of Plains and Ojibwa spirituality.

An outcome of this period was an increase in the publishing of Native American fictional literature. Similarly to Black Elk, Morrisseau and Howe, authors such as Silko and Erdrich utilised western markets and materials to publish and preserve their individual Nation's spiritual beliefs and cultural traditions. Upon entering the twenty-first century, there has also been a movement within academic literature to reclaim representations from distorted narratives that were spread by pretendians and plastic shamans. Examining this period scholars can see a pattern of misrepresentation and suppression of Native spirituality caused by continued colonial structures which suggest Native people are a conquered people, hence the non-Native public felt entitled to take what they please, including their culture, traditions and spirituality. However, Native Americans have fought back by utilising western materials and markets to publish their own representations of Native spirituality and culture, reclaiming them for future generations in the hopes of resurgence.

Misrepresentations of Indigenous cultures date back to the colonial period, with the publishing of print aiding in informing widespread misconceptions of Native spirituality. In the 1800s newspaper headlines solidified fears surrounding Native culture, whilst anthropologists published romanticised and misconstrued accounts and observations on Native traditions and practices. These forms of misinformation characterised Native spirituality as something to fear, while Indigenous people were portrayed as primal, yet also ambiguous and mystical beings that worshipped the earth and harnessed powers from nature. Following a short period of relief from these perpetuated fabrications in the 1930s, the emergence of pretendians only continued to damage representations of Native spirituality. Characters such as Grey Owl emerged in the early twentieth century, followed by an influx of plastic shamans and pretendians with the introduction of the New Age movement. Highwater's work stands to highlight how pretendians took advantage of the commercialisation of

Indigenous culture, falsifying their identity and ancestry to become part of a new tourism market which exploited Native communities.

Similarly to anthropologists and romanticists in the nineteenth century, Highwater and Grey Owl emphasised Indigenous peoples' relationships with nature, misrepresenting spirits from the visionary world (which often took animal forms) as animal companions, much like Disney did with the character Pocahontas. The mainstream attention that Highwater's writing gained was built upon the backs of already preconceived stereotypes about Native culture. Works such as Highwater's, alongside the commercialisation of Indigenous practices, which were sold as tourist attractions and the sale of Native spiritual symbols, transformed Native spirituality and culture into a commodity. It allowed non-Natives to purchase spirituality at their pleasure when they felt they wanted to participate in something new. Arguably this was extremely damaging to Native communities as their cultures were singularised and exploited, and meanwhile white pretendians profited from their manipulations. Following the exposure of pretendians there has been a movement by Native American academics to reclaim representations of Indigenous spirituality and encourage Native peoples to participate in their cultural traditions and spirituality in order to preserve it and reclaim it from non-Natives that sought to exploit it. Arguably academic works such as Simpson's and Brooks's not only reclaim representations and narratives about Indigenous culture from pretendians such as Highwater, but also from anthropologists such as Mooney and from misconceptions and stereotypes that date back centuries and were heightened by printed media. Although published literature aided in the perpetuation of stereotypes and misrepresentation, the last 160 years has seen the gradual reclaiming of such narratives. Native American individuals have adapted literature and utilised its wide audience reach to correct understandings of Indigenous spirituality, and in the process they have worked to preserve accurate representations for future generations.

Native American authors have also utilised western literary tropes and genres and adapted traditional storytelling tools in efforts of resurgence and the continuation of cultural practices.

Arguably Black Elk worked with Neihardt and utilised his romanticised form of storytelling to portray the sublimity of his vision and his spirituality. Similarly, Dimaline utilised tropes and motifs of the sci-fi and apocalyptic genre in order to emphasise parallels between her dystopian fiction and colonialism and the exploitative nature of the New Age movement. Although Black Elk's narrative is biographical, it connotes to the apocalyptic genre, as the story ends with the Wounded Knee massacre and with the impression that the Sioux culture is under threat of extinction. Both Black Elk and Dimaline employed the use of popular western literature trends and genres in order to emphasise the messages they were presenting, which in-turn drew attention to the significance of Native spirituality and its ties to Native identity as they both represent it as the key to Indigenous cultural survival. In Black Elk's narrative he attempted to ensure his tribe's survival against white oppression and assimilation, just as Dimaline's characters turned to Native tradition and culture to survive and defeat non-Natives who aim to steal it. Links can also be drawn between Morrisseau and Howe's artwork and Native literature published throughout the New Age movement. Morrisseau and Howe modernised traditional elements of Native art with abstract styles and materials such as canvases and vibrant colours. Likewise, Vizenor adapted traditional dreamsongs and tribal histories into haiku and published written narratives, whilst still featuring traditional characters and narratives, such as the 'trickster'. Erdrich also adapts the trickster character to her novels, representing Native past and tradition. Meanwhile, Silko adapted creation stories and used conventions and tropes of oral storytelling, transforming her novel *Ceremony* into a written form of spiritual ceremony. Each utilised modern techniques to portray Native spirituality and culture, whilst also inserting traditional elements of Indigenous storytelling, such as two-dimensional line drawing, circular storytelling structures and traditional characters / figures. As they adapt their storytelling from Native traditional storytelling techniques, this signifies literariness has long been present in Native cultures, yet aesthetic and literary narratives have transformed over time. This signifies how Native Americans have adapted traditional storytelling into western literary forms, presenting

Indigenous spirituality with a modern twist whilst remaining, at the core, centred around tradition and the preservation of Native spirituality and practices.

Some scholars could question whether adaptations of storytelling into fictional literature over the last sixty years could, in-turn, threaten to obscure continuities. However, traditional oral storytelling, petroglyphs and pictographs were all interpreted uniquely by each listener or viewer, dating back centuries. As Thomas King demonstrates in *The Truth About Stories*, there are endless interpretations and understandings of every story, creating an immeasurable number of alternative story retellings as each one is passed on. Therefore the adaptation of storytelling into fictional literature only continues to pass on endless interpretations, as has always been the way. Although fictional elements, in particular apocalyptic motifs, may change the way a story is presented to the reader, at the core the message is still clear and inspiring for Native audiences. Dimaline's literature utilises genre tropes to emphasise the damages of colonial structures and portray the significance of Native spirituality and traditions. Similarly, Erdrich used fictional literature and published a series of novels in order to represent how Native identity has survived in spite of government oppression and that that survival was centred around tradition, spirituality and community. Just as literature translated from Black Elk represents how Native identity is tied to community and the continuation of spiritual practices during times of simply trying to survive. Hence, adaptations do not threaten to obscure continuities, rather they offer new forms of preservation and open up interpretation for both Native and non-Native audiences to take away and think on, in the way that oral storytelling also did. The longevity of stories through new forms of literature allows the story to be passed on to a larger audience and over a longer period of time, supporting continuities in a way that oral storytelling has not been able to. The point of storytelling is to allow others to take their own interpretations away, yet at their core Native fictional novels still hold key representations of Native culture and spirituality which are difficult to obscure.

Oppression, cultural theft, appropriation and exploitation have been damaging to Native American communities as their spirituality and cultures have been homogenised and misrepresented. However over the past 160 years Native Americans have, with increasing success, utilised western literature and art and have taken advantage of new materials and markets in an effort to preserve their culture and reclaim its representation from white non-Natives in the aim of resurgence. Visions have been significant in inspiring protest against colonial structures and as a key representation of Native spirituality – signifying the importance of tradition and community in order for cultural survival. Black Elk’s adaptation from oral to written literature marks the beginnings of this movement, which continues into the present with authors such as Dimaline, who continue to transform storytelling with new genres and literary tropes, whilst still maintaining traditional aesthetics of Native spirituality. Native American individuals have utilised literature to preserve accurate representations and reclaim them from a stereotyped and twisted discourse that was perpetuated in the twentieth century by New Age commercialisation and pretendians. The representation of visions in Native literature signifies Native spiritual and cultural resilience in the face of oppression and inspires resurgence. Traditional oral storytelling has been adapted and the publication of literature and art has been employed as a tool by Native Americans for their cultural survival, as they reclaim the narrative surrounding Indigenous spirituality.

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