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Fall 2018

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Establishing a Future by Creating in the Present
Reading Resistance in the Literature of Indigenous Futurisms

By

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A Master's Essay submitted to the faculty of the
Graduate Program in English in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in English

University of St. Thomas
Saint Paul, Minnesota

December 2018

ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the Indigenous Futurisms movement, specifically literature, and the ways that it can serve as a tool resistance for Indigenous Women. By creating stories within the movement, Indigenous Women are actively resisting a dominant patriarchal society that has tried for centuries to destroy them. The writing, publishing, and reading of these stories reaffirms the power and presence of Indigenous women in the past, present, and future when they are so often seen as museum props, relics of the past. Indigenous Futurisms is important for how it reworks and interrogates literary tropes of the SciFi genre. In my essay I analyze the ways that Science Fiction hides and helps Indigenous writers - giving them space for imaginative creation but also profiting from stories that eerily echo that harsh colonization of Indigenous peoples. I look at Indigenous Futurisms as being made up of waves, with different texts defining the ideas of the movement at that time. The two texts I look at in this paper represent different waves of the genre: Celu Amberstone's short story "Refugees" would make up the first wave while *Trail of Lightning* by Rebecca Roanhorse makes up the second and current wave. Indigenous Futurism literature by women is about creating, healing, and resisting. These stories assert an Indigenous presence in the present and future.

For decades the genre of Science Fiction has been filled with stories that not only inspire humanity to push the boundaries of science and society but also to reflect on what it means to go forward into the future. For Indigenous readers and writers, the genre offers an opportunity to imagine an Indigenous future. There is a chance to reclaim agency and reassert an Indigenous presence in narratives about science, space, and futurity. SF literature and Indigenous literature share a commonality in that they tend not to be seen as “literary”, especially when written by a woman. Rather they are seen as pulp fiction, a cheap novel to pick up and read for fun but never a text that merits intense academic analysis. In response to this, academic and writer Daniel Heath Justice says, “Fantasy, science fiction, and horror merit consideration as serious literature with ethical import, deserving of critical and pedagogical regard. It’s time for a reappraisal of the relationship between realism and the fantastic, especially when considering the work that marginalized writers are doing to challenge oppressive lived realities through the intentional employment of the fantastic to imagine otherwise” (Justice 142-143).

Indigenous writers have created within SF their own genre, Indigenous Futurisms, modeled after the genre Afro Futurism. The term was created by writer Grace Dillon - according to her, “Writers of Indigenous futurisms sometimes intentionally experiment with, sometimes intentionally dislodge, sometimes merely accompany, but invariably *change* the perimeters of sf. Liberated from the constraints of genre expectations, or what ‘serious’ Native authors are *supposed* to write, they have room to play with setting, character, and dialogue” (Dillon 3). In the grand history of literature, the genre of Indigenous Futurisms has been around for only a small amount of time. Amberstone’s short story “Refugees” was published in 2004 - eight years later Grace Dillon would use an excerpt of the story in her anthology *Walking the Clouds* in which she

creates the term Indigenous Futurisms. If one was to look at Indigenous Futurisms in waves, Amberstone would make up the first wave, Dillon would be the second wave, and Roanhorse is bringing about the start of what could be a third wave. Like the physical waves that I draw this analogy from, every new story in the genre of Indigenous Futurisms flows into each other, like an endless cycle churning out new ideas and stories. Generations learn from the ones who have come before, pushing ahead and then pulling back to give the next generation room to speak. Indigenous Futurisms literature acts as a space and a tool of resistance for Indigenous women and their communities. The novel *Trail of Lightning* by Rebecca Roanhorse and the short story “Refugees” by Celu Amberstone create futures where Indigenous women not only exist but are thriving. The stories also reflect Indigenous tapping into classic SF elements: apocalypse stories and alien encounters. These are stories by Indigenous women writers for Indigenous readers, giving communities stories where they can see themselves in the future and not just as relics of the past.

Indigenous communities have been decimated by colonization. I remember the first time someone used that word to describe what had happened to my ancestors - my sister drumming her fingers on the steering wheel of a parked car quietly saying, “You know it was a genocide right?” The words hit me and floated through the back of my head in history classes where Indigenous people were a bullet point skimmed over then left for “more important” material. The few stories schools offered me about Indigenous peoples were sparse narratives from over a hundred years ago. The narrative presented to me was that my people were in the past, something from long ago that was no longer relevant. It wasn’t until graduate school where I started to become more in touch with my Indigenous identity on a personal and academic level. In an

academic course I found Paula Gunn Allen and her writing. Her words were clear and to the point, a perfect arrow that went straight to my heart. Allen writes in the introduction to her text *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*, “Indians have endured--both in the sense of living through something so complete in its destructiveness that the mere presence of survivors is a testament to the human will to survive and in the sense of duration or longevity” (Allen 2). The women of my family were survivors, are survivors. Survivors have stories to tell, wisdom to pass down and traditions to share.

Stories are important, especially the stories of groups who have been marginalized and threatened with extinction throughout the course of history. Through stories identity is formed - the stories we learn from our families and communities influence how we see ourselves. The importance of stories is never truly realized until one is on the brink of apocalypse, grasping tightly to words that can plant the seeds of rebirth. Stories create a place where healing and the rebirth for Indigenous communities can occur. Old stories or new stories, the words create a place for recovery to occur. In the preface to his book *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Daniel Heath Justice writes, “Our literatures are just one more vital way that we have countered those forces of erasure and given shape to our own ways of being in the world. [...] Fundamentally, they affirm Indigenous presence - and our *present*. That our nations do indeed have a vibrant present gives us hope that we’ll have a future, too” (Justice xix). Politics and protests are helpful and have done a lot for Indigenous groups, but resistance can also take subtler forms like novels and poems.

Indigenous writers have been writing science fiction since its arrival in the Americas but the themes of time, future, and the state of the planet have always existed within our culture’s

stories. Concepts of time travel, or generally moving through space and time in a nonlinear fashion, is not a groundbreaking concept for Indigenous peoples. As Paula Gunn Allen writes about the differences between western and Indigenous literature, “Another difference between these two ways of perceiving reality lies in the tendency of the American Indian to view space as spherical and time as cyclical, whereas the non-indian tends to view space as linear and time as sequential” (Allen 59). In recent years, and with the creation of the term Indigenous Futurisms, more Indigenous authors are creating science fiction stories. As the genre has emerged and begun to form so has a resurgence in Indigenous political and social activism. Scholar Danika Medak-Saltzman notes, “Instead, I see an emergence and proliferation of narrative and filmic imaginings of Indigenous futures as representing the creative arm of the Indigenous futurist movement, which joins the more overtly political arm of the movement evident in protest, legal, and advocacy work, all of which are vital to seeing our way toward, fighting for, and calling forth better futures” (Saltzman 144). Indigenous communities are working and fighting for our continued presence in the present as well as in the future through literature.

Out of all the genres to write in it may seem odd for Indigenous writers to find a home in Science Fiction. The genre has heavy themes of colonialism, conquests in space eerily echoing the conquests of colonizers. In an introduction to an anthology of postcolonial SF stories, editor Nalo Hopkinson explains:

Arguably one of the most familiar memes of science fiction is that of going to foreign countries and colonizing the natives, and as I’ve said elsewhere, for many of us, that’s not a thrilling adventure story; it’s non-fiction, and we are on the wrong side of the strange-looking ship that appears out of nowhere. To be a person of colour writing

science fiction is to be under suspicion of having internalized one's colonization.

(Hopkinson 7)

First contact stories lose their appeal when one's ancestors have already experienced the ships arriving on their shores, the strangers who treat them like aliens incapable of human understanding. Apocalyptic narratives, stories of survival in the face of humanity's hubris are unoriginal. Indigenous communities have already faced their great cataclysm. The apocalypse has already occurred and Indigenous peoples today are the survivors working to pick up the pieces.

Not all science fiction stories are based around these tropes but there are a lot of them. Science Fiction themes that are born of western thought appear novel and unique to western audiences. These fun and exciting ideas of time travel, otherworldly patrons, and doomsday appear to be far off in the distance for western readers. These stories are the looming spectres of the past and present for Indigenous communities. It is because of this that Indigenous Futurisms is born, a genre that pushes back against these colonial tropes. Rebecca Roanhorse writes that Indigenous Futurisms, "asks us to reject these colonial ideas and instead re-imagine space, both outer and inner, from another perspective. One that makes room for stories that celebrate relationship and connection to community, coexistence, and sharing of land and technology, the honoring of caretakers and protectors" ("Postcards from the Apocalypse").

Science Fiction exists in a space where it can promote negative ideas of colonialism and racism but also critique them. There are stories within the genre that put rose colored glasses over the lens of colonial action - images of brave men encountering and conquering aliens on far away planets creating a safe space for their fellow humans. Stories like this have led to their

being an emergence of postcolonial approaches to Science Fiction. In *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* Michelle Reid writes:

Postcolonialism interrogates the complex Self/Other power relationships created by the colonial encounter. Sf imagines encounters with the Other (the alien, the strange newness brought by chance), typically from the perspective of the dominant Self. It perpetuates images of pioneering spaceship crews landing on other planets and exterminating bug-eyed aliens, but also questions and undermines the supposed manifest destiny of space exploration and the oppression of the other as alien. (Reid 257)

Descriptions of the “other” in these stories tend to be thinly veiled prejudices against minorities, using colorful aliens as stand ins for those who have suffered the most under the heel of colonial advancement. Space becomes a second chance for manifest destiny, a fantastical unknown to be scoured and explored just as North America was to the first settlers. Reid writes further that “The European colonial project was an ideological ‘fantasy’ that enabled colonizers to justify their subjugation of colonized people by denying that they were fully human or civilized” (257-258). The future may be diverse and a true melting pot of races but if the same conqueror ideologies remain than civilization hasn’t truly advanced. For those who were on the receiving end of colonization, the fantastical exploration of the unknown is not as appealing. For Indigenous people it is a daily struggle of being seen as alien in the land one has always inhabited, to have the land of your ancestors still viewed as something to take and plunder. This feeling of being alien and under the pressure of colonial authority is a large part of Celu Amberstone’s short story “Refugees”.

There are a lot of ways that Amberstone's story serves as parable and also creates idea and scenarios that work with and against science fiction tropes. In her chapter on Postcolonialism SF Michelle Reid writes, "Sf is a means of playing out the consequences and alternative scenarios of imperialism, while drawing parallels with our own world and time" (Reid 262). With a parable, Amberstone is able to tell the story of the colonization and forced removal of Indigenous peoples in North America. Instead of a story that dwells in the past, steeped with hurt and pessimism, Amberstone looks to the future to give a biting critique of reservations and the ways in which westerners interact with them. Amberstone also uses the alien encounter narrative to critique colonialism. As Joy Sanchez-Taylor writes in her essay on 'Refugees' and diaspora, "Amberstone employs an alien environment to represent the grief of diasporic peoples who are forced to relocate. The Benefactors become a metaphor for colonial or governmental powers keeping diasporic groups from returning to their homes" (Sanchez-Taylor 90).

The world that Amberstone has created in her story at first glance seems like a utopia of sorts for Indigenous peoples but the further one reads it becomes more apparent that something is not quite right. There is something too perfect about Qwalshina's world - like a museum diorama brought to life. With Qwalshina as the narrator the reader is able to see the perfect facade of the community crack apart to reveal a strictly controlled world that is at the mercy of an alien race. Taken from an earth that is dying from environmental misuse, Indigenous communities are brought to a new planet called Tallav'Wahir, to flourish. The history of the planet is that of Indigenous refugees creating community under the watchful eyes of an alien lizard race called The Benefactors. The reader learns this through the narrator, Qwalshina. Explaining to a group of newly arrived Indigenous peoples Qwalshina says, "We have been here for generations. [...]"

There are others from Earth Mother here too, rescued from disaster as you were. Our Benefactors wish only good for us” (Amberstone 171). Qwalshina’s mother’s and father’s communities each suffered at the hands of “pale-skinned invaders” causing The Benefactors to step in and save them.

Putting the alien involvement aside, the community that exists is incredibly women-centric. From the planet to the elder leaders of the community, Amberstone has made a place that embodies matriarchal values. The people of Tallav’Wahir worship the Mother Stone and the elder of village is a medicine woman. This is a return to a more matriarchal structure which many indigenous groups had before colonization. On this planet there is a complete return to traditional values - it’s as if only by returning to these beliefs can the people of Tallav’Wahir prevent the planet from meeting the same fate as Mother Earth. Indigenous communities were the only ones worthy of a new planet. There is an understanding in many Indigenous groups that planets are not to be mined and stripped of all resources. In the story, the Earth has been ravaged to the point of no return:

Today our Benefactors confirmed our worst fears. Earth is now a fiery cloud of poisons, a blackened cinder. When it happened, our ancient soul-link with Earth Mother enabled us to sense the disaster even from this far world across the void. Tallav’Wahir felt it too. But we told our foster planet mother that our life patterns were sound. Our Benefactors would help us. Such a tragedy would never happen here. (162)

Almost like The Rapture, these aliens came down and lifted a chosen few into the heavens. It is the gross misuse and treatment of Indigenous peoples and the environment that has doomed western civilizations unworthy of their intergalactic Rapture. On Tallav’Wahir, there is an

embrace of Indigenous beliefs and traditions, though this is complicated by the involvement of The Benefactors.

Indigenous people have always been telling stories, using them to impart wisdom, familial history, or cultural history. Stories are a subtle way of resisting where the writer can create a tale that makes the reader question the general narrative of history. By creating stories about their culture and experiences, Indigenous peoples are able to keep themselves from being swept away as forgotten history. Amberstone's story echoes many past and present issues that Indigenous groups face. The way Indigenous groups are shoved together on Tallav'Wahir feels similar to the forced relocation and reservation system that has and is still happening in North America. Writer Grace Dillon expands on this point writing:

In the context of Amerindian history, Tallav'Wahir appears to be a Reserve, rez, or reservation, housing 'suitables' who are culled by the ambiguously intentioned 'benefactor' culture. The mediating 'implants' of matched tongues and the Benefactor-borrowed language of Adjustment are sore reminders of banned indigenous languages and the harsh expulsion of Native tongues in reservation schools. (Dillon 234)

The Benefactors' "rescue" of Indigenous groups has an uncanny feeling to it - there is something not right, something too good to be true about the situation.

Qwalshina was born on Tallav'Wahir, born into the world created by these aliens. Groups of Indigenous peoples are brought to the planet by The Benefactors - the last and most recent group to arrive are refugees who were taken from the earth as the planet died. The reader and Qwalshina learn that the refugees are various Indigenous peoples from Vancouver who are not on Tallav'Wahir of their own will while in conversation with Jimtalbot. While comforting

Jimtalbot, Qwalshina calls him and the other refugees brave for leaving earth: “He shook his head; I could see the gleam of unshed tears in his eyes by the lantern light. ‘Not brave at all. Your *Benefactors* gave us no choice’” (Amberstone 166). It becomes clear that The Benefactors have been taking Indigenous groups from earth and relocating them to the planet of Tallav’Wahir, interbreeding the groups and using their skills and labor for profit.

A moment in the story that would seem touching is soured by the involvement of The Benefactors. Qwalshina is weaving and discusses traditional crafts with Sleek - the women share knowledge that is an important part of their communities. Yet the weaving that Qwalshina does will most likely be taken by The Benefactors and sold because “Some of our Benefactors pay high prices for our art back on their world” (168). Dillon examines this interaction writing, “Even the products of Qwalshina’s master weaving recall reservation economics. Like Navajo blankets and other Native curiosities that fetch a profit, Tallav’Wahir commodities reflect the tourist gaze upon the postcolonial exotic” (Dillon 234). The Benefactors are participating in the same actions of those whom they scorn for causing Mother Earth to be destroyed. The planet of Tallav’Wahir begins to look less like a sanctuary for Indigenous peoples and more of a zoo. The Benefactors can cherry pick which aspects of Indigenous traditions that they find pleasing, enjoy them for a few days, then fly off on their ships. This is similar to how many Americans view Indigenous events like pow-wows or reservations as an exotic wonder to visit for the day and then leave behind. Commodification of Indigenous crafts, forced relocation, and language control are some of the things that western colonizers and Benefactors have in common. A Western reader who has objections to the ways that The Benefactors treat Qwalshina and the people of Tallav’Wahir will also have to reckon with the history of colonialism.

Moments like her conversation with Jimtalbot or weaving with Sleek begin to build up doubt about the benefactors in Qwalshina's mind. The serene life she lived at the start of the story is crumbling. The environment of Tallav'Wahir is not fit for human life, something that Qwalshina briefly mentions in the beginning: "Tallav'Wahir is kind, but there is something in this adoptive environment that is hard on us too. We aren't a perfect match for our new home, but our Benefactors have great hopes for us" (Amberstone 163). There are constant problems with birth defects and the Indigenous groups are often "culled" and bred for more healthy and strong humans. This fact lurks in the back for most of the story, an unnerving fact that seems to not bother Qwalshina until her daughter gives birth to a deformed child. The first sentence in the entry following the one on Qwalshina's grief over her daughter's tragedy is: "When I looked into the faces of our guests from the Homeworld today I felt such a rage building up inside me that I could hardly breath at times. [...] This new emotion I feel frightens me. What if we are living a lie - what if the people from Earth are right?" (178). As Qwalshina's mind begins to decolonize and unlearn all that the Benefactors have taught her, a group of Indigenous peoples attempt to escape Tallav'Wahir. Sleek, along with those who are from Earth and those who grew up on the planet, break into the ship of visiting Benefactors. The ship is more of an organic being and violently attacks the group, killing everyone on board. Following this incident the Benefactors have a meeting where they decide the fate of Qwalshina and her community: "Some of our Benefactors claim that we are a genetically flawed species. We should all be eliminated, and this world reseeded with another more stable species" (181). Sanchez-Taylor sees these final scenes as Amberstone depicting "the pain and difficulties of decolonization" (Sanchez-Taylor 91). Resistance against the colonizer is frequently met with violence and even death. This is the case

in 'Refugees'. Continuing with her thought on the ending of the story Sanchez-Taylor writes, "The ending is purposely bleak to show how difficult it is for a colonized people to gain agency. The humans who tried to resist are all dead and those left are not fighting" (91). Under colonization it is difficult for there to be a balance of tradition and modernity. In Amberstone's future, Indigenous people will not be able to fully break free to the stars if they remain under the influence and at the whim of colonial authority.

Writing stories that are about Indigenous people do, like Justice says, solidify their presence in the present. These stories also counteract the harmful stereotypes that have been born from decades of inaccurate stories and accounts of Indigenous communities by writers of colonizing nations. These stories depict Indigenous communities as objects existing only in the past, costumes and props to dress up a story. The stereotypes also erase the real Indigenous people - Johnnie Jae addresses this writing in a roundtable discussion with other Indigenous female writers: "The problem is that we have been rendered invisible by the hypervisibility of stereotypes and preconceived misconceptions of who Indigenous people are in a contemporary context" ("Decolonizing Science Fiction and Imagining Futures"). A lot of these stereotypes and their stories focus on Indigenous people in the past tense. Further in the Strange Horizons discussion, when discussing survival, Darcie Little Badger comments, "Please, please, please give me stories that acknowledge we survived the 1800s. I've had my fill of Apaches in Westerns and historical fantasies, which is saying a lot, since Native American characters, even secondary ones, are so rare. Both in and outside fiction, we are pushed to the past tense" ("Decolonizing Science Fiction and Imagining Futures"). This is why Indigenous literature is important. When Indigenous writers are able to tell their own stories, craft their own narratives, then the lens can

change and the image can shift to a more positive outlook. The books one consumes affects how one sees the world, and the stories about Indigenous people that one consumes affects how they see those people. When Indigenous peoples write and share their stories they offer “in place of settler colonial curses that disfigure and diminish us, our writers plant songs and stories of joy and sorrow, praise and loss, remembrance and hope, rage and defiance and dedication, old memories and new possibilities, deep roots in rich soil” (Justice 70). When the world wants to see Indigenous nations as a chapter or footnote in a history book, Indigenous writers resist and push back creating a present and future that reflects reality: Indigenous communities have survived and are living. Indigenous Futurisms literature written by women acts as a tool of resistance by creating stories that are active resistance to a dominant patriarchal society that has tried for centuries to destroy them. The writing, publishing, and reading of these stories reaffirms the power and presence of Indigenous women in the past, present, and future.

Theorists not only pick apart the problems of the SF genre but also bring forward stories that use the tropes of the genre to critique and push back against colonialism. As Adam Roberts notes, “One of the strengths of science fiction is that it allows for a more complex and sophisticated response to the dynamics of difference, as well as allowing these issues to be addressed in a popular idiom” (Roberts 94). Stories are a space for writers and readers to engage with complex issues, to expand and investigate things that are too hard to process in day to day life. In terms of literary genres it is Science Fiction, and Fantasy, that offer an unlimited to landscape to create. Societal norms can be challenged or they can be enforced, it is all up to the writer how they wish to use the genre. Writing on Critical Race Theory and Science fiction, Isiah Lavender III points out:

With its emphasis on the relationship between self and world, sf is an ideal genre through which to explore some of the consequences of these racial structures. It allows authors to posit worlds organized around other categories of difference or alternative histories that refigure key events in the history of US racism, such as slavery or the end of segregation, and consider how subjectivity would be changed by such changes. (Lavender 187)

With Science Fiction minority authors can challenge the assumption of whiteness as the neural and default identity in Western culture. These stories not only challenge the present day idea of white as the norm but also the idea that in 100 years white will still be the norm. For marginalized groups resistance can take the form of Science Fiction storytelling: “Postcolonial perspectives are useful in identifying strands of political and cultural resistance in sf traditions from countries marginal to the mainstream of American and British sf” (Reid 260). Science Fiction stories can also serve as a way to process or explain colonialism. The story of the space travellers arriving onto an alien planet can be repurposed, no longer enforcing colonial ideals but creating more understanding for those who were colonized.

Where Amberstone shows a future where tradition survives but doesn't move forward, Roanhorse is able bring forth a future that does just that. Roanhorse melds tradition with technology, the old and the new combine to create a place where Indigenous people thrive. The future in Rebecca Roanhorse's *Trail of Lightning* is full of Indigenous people - there are no white people in this story where half of the Americas are flooded and underwater. This is a future and a story for Indigenous peoples. Roanhorse is not writing for a white western audience, she is writing for people like her, indigenous readers who have grown up loving the SF genre but never feeling like that love was reciprocated. In an interview with Den of Geek about *Trail of*

Lightning Roanhorse touches on this point, saying, “I’m a huge science fiction and fantasy fan; I’ve been reading in the genre my entire life, and I never have seen a story that I thought represented me as an indigenous woman. I looked around and I didn’t see any stories [...] where the Native American character was truly centered in their Native culture surrounded by the gods, monsters, and heroes of their culture” (Den of Geek). This is exactly what Roanhorse does, taking the tools and endless expanse for storytelling that Science Fiction offers and creating a world about Indigenous peoples for Indigenous peoples. A big way that this is reflected in the story is that there are no footnotes or glossaries for Diné words, stories, or customs. With this lack of explanation Roanhorse is making a big statement - Indigenous culture is not some exotic other that needs to be laid out piece by piece for inquiring minds. If someone wants to know more they can do the work themselves. As one reviewer writes, “I went into *Trail of Lightning* knowing little about Diné culture or spiritual beliefs. While Roanhorse doesn’t hold your hand through the culturally-specific bits, she does offer the reader enough context to figure it out on their own” (Tor.com).

The future is called the Sixth World, a time following an societal, economic, and environmental collapse within North America. Like *Amberstone*, Roanhorse imagines a future where Indigenous peoples survive and thrive despite horrifying circumstances. Indigenous people are part of the future, whether that future is on a planet controlled by lizard aliens or in the ecologically devastated southwest. These are not utopian futures and they don’t need to be. This, the future, is the rebirth. Indigenous people have been resisting since the first boat arrived. Continuing to live and be a part of the future is resistance. This isn’t a pessimistic tale of the end times but a story of continued triumph and growth in the face of adversity. Roanhorse

specifically wrote her story like this saying, “it was really important to me to show that Native Americans are still here, and that we will continue to be here, and that our stories can be sovereign. [...] They don’t always have to be depressing death marches or stories of alcoholism and trauma” (Den of Geeks). This story is different than western apocalypse stories because it is written by someone whose ancestors suffered their apocalypse. For many western groups the apocalypse has always seemed far off making it a fun concept to play with in literature. For any group that suffered colonization the apocalypse is real and those who exist today are the survivors. For Maggie and her people the Energy Wars and Big Water were Apocalypse Round Two and this time they were ready. This is a thought that is constant in the book - only twenty pages in Maggie thinks, “But I had forgotten that the Diné had already suffered their apocalypse over a century before. This wasn’t our end. This was our rebirth” (Roanhorse 23).

In this story, tradition moves forward and mixes with the future. Indigenous wisdom, storytelling, and oral history are key to the continued survival of the Indigenous population. The oral aspect is an important part of the novel and of Indigenous history. Oral history and wisdom comes in the form of an old medicine man named Tah but also in the form of CD’s. Maggie and her companion Kai, a medicine man, go to a library in search of these types of CD’s, the information that they contain would help the two on their journey. As Kai explains, “These are oral histories. Knowledge from elders about their lives, their time in residential schools, stories of parents who survived the Long Walk. Anything they were willing to share, really. Navajo scholars were afraid we’d lose the knowledge when elders passed on” (69). That push to record and compile every bit of tradition and information is present today. It is incredibly important for

Roanhorse to show that the efforts that countless Indigenous people put in every day to preserve their culture will matter in the future.

Two of the key characters that Roanhorse has created, Maggie and Kai, break down and push against stereotypes of Indigenous peoples. From the moment colonizers stepped onto Indigenous land they have been misrepresenting Indigenous peoples through art, writing, and media. The images in western culture are steeped in horrible assumptions about Indigenous cultures and communities. Most of the portrayals of Indigenous groups are in period pieces, usually Westerns, and are either background props or serve as a plot device to enhance the journey of the main character. In the present day there are very few positive images of Indigenous women in culture - generally, the list of indigenous women starts and stops with Pocahontas, specifically the Disney version. The Indigenous woman is either a young maiden in need of saving or an old woman giving some form of advice. These women are also side characters, props that uphold a male-centric story. In *Trail of Lightning* a woman is at the forefront of the future. Maggie is a fully fleshed out person, not a stereotype out of a western. It feels powerful and affirming to read about a character like Maggie, to see an Indigenous woman fully fleshed out on the page. In the current political climate being a woman, especially an Indigenous woman, feels like an act of resistance. To live one's life in the face of a patriarchal, colonial, white supremacist government is daunting which is why stories of the Indigenous future matter. Indigenous women are the ones who are writing our present and future literally and figuratively. Their writing helps us process a history of trauma while seeing ourselves in the future. The stories of and by Indigenous women need to be acknowledged. The focus of literature, and of society, is always on men. To move the focus to women is to invite in new

ideas, to breathe life into literature. Indigenous women are manifesting a better future for themselves and their communities, whether it be through activism, protest, writing, or proudly embracing their heritage. Rebecca Roanhorse writes on how she resists by existing: “I am an Indigenous woman. Every day I am alive is resistance. Every day I am alive, I am resisting those who would reduce Native Americans to a footnote in a bad history book” (*How I Resist* 31).

Along with Maggie, Kai serves to recreate the image of Indigenous men specifically the image of the Medicine Man. When Kai is first introduced even Maggie has her doubts about Kai - he doesn't fit with her preconceived notions of a Medicine Man: “I don't have anything against Kai, I really don't, but I'm going to have to be more direct if I want to get through to Tah. ‘Look, he may be your grandson, and, sure, maybe he's learning some healing songs or whatever, but he's a Burqueño, Tah. Do you really expect him to go fight monsters wearing that?’” (Roanhorse 41). The usual image of a Medicine man in western media is archaic and racist - Kai creates a new image that embodies the Indigenous men Roanhorse herself knows while creating a character that balances tradition with modern culture. In her Den of Geeks interview, when discussing Kai, Roanhorse says, “I wanted to create a medicine man character, because that seemed important. But I didn't want to fall into any of the stereotypes or conventions of what non-Natives think of when they think of medicine men. Because I know medicine men. And I know medicine men in training. Very traditional guys who are just like Kai: they're young, they want to go to the club! They're modern, contemporary people. But they have also this traditional side that leads them to want to train to be medicine men” (Den of Geeks). Kai is not a caricature but an image of what Roanhorse sees as the future.

Every bit of life and survival in the Sixth World is tied to Indigenous foods, customs, and history. This can also be seen in the small details and parts of Maggie's life. One way that Roanhorse wanted to show her Indigenous future was through food. In a Post-Apocalyptic world food is usually scarce and what a character is eating says a lot about where they are and where they've come from. Roanhorse comments that, "There's not a ton of food in the book, but when they do eat it's important, as is who makes the food and what kind of food they're eating and where they're eating it. All of these are details of the Native experience" (Den of Geek). Fry bread is such a well known staple of Native American culture that its appearance in the story further solidifies that this is an Indigenous future. An important meal that occurs in the book is when Maggie makes fry bread for Kai and Coyote. The meal brings together two strangers and a deity, creating common ground around a simple meal. For that small moment there is peace, all because of some fry bread and beans. Roanhorse sees the fry bread as more than just food, that the bread has a more pivotal role in the history of Maggie and of Indigenous Peoples:

It [Frybread] came from nothing; it came from the equivalent of being on rations. It's the basic ingredient. So they took something that was basically starvation rations, and made something delicious. For me that's a great metaphor for Native American culture in general, particularly post-1492. We took the things that were meant to kill us and we made them nourishment. We make them strength. (Den of Geek)

In the genre of SF these small details matter and are crucial to worldbuilding - Roanhorse is using details like food to make her world more fully formed but to also establish an Indigenous narrative. When encountering *ch'į́dii*, a type of ghost that can possess a person, Maggie uses shotgun shells filled with corn pollen and obsidian (Roanhorse 66). These two natural resources

save Maggie and Kai. Maggie has outfitted her gun, a modern piece of tech, with ammunition that draws on the knowledge of her people. The gun perfectly exemplifies the balance of old and new that Roanhorse has brought to her Sixth World. Indigenous customs and knowledge have moved out of the past, serving a purpose in the future. And in this future if you aren't Indigenous than you probably won't survive.

Now in 2018, Indigenous Futurisms is beginning to gain momentum. Rebecca Roanhorse's SF short story 'Welcome to Your Authentic Indian Experience™' won the the 2018 Hugo and Nebula awards for short story. Indigenous Comic Con, a convention dedicated to "Indginerds" with a focus on comics and Science Fiction, is in its third year and gaining national attention. A Facebook group called Imagining Indigenous Futurisms has almost 2,000 members who post about and share writing, art, publishing and conference opportunities. Indigenous Futurisms is growing and this is just the beginning. This belief is shared by other Indigenous writers, scholars, and peoples. Roanhorse believes this as well, writing:

I'm still dreaming. And I'm not alone. Writers and scholars and creators like the ones I mentioned earlier are dreaming, too. And every good Native knows that your dreams are trying to tell you something. Maybe that something is that our time has come. We are rising from the apocalypse, folding the past into our present and writing a future that is decidedly Indigenous. (Postcards)

Indigenous writers created this genre and are using it to not only create incredible stories but using it as a tool of resistance. The Indigenous Future is creating, healing, resisting and it is happening right now. This is not just the beginning of a new genre, this is a revolution.

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