

LIVING THROUGH EXTINCTION
THE MÉTIS BUFFALO HUNTING MEMOIR

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Abstract

Today, *L'espace de Louis Goulet* and *The Last Buffalo Hunter* are primarily understood as historical documents, and both works are valued by scholars for their ability to convey facts about late-nineteenth century Métis life. In contrast to this approach, this thesis offers an aesthetic analysis of these works, one that considers the passage of these narratives from the oral tradition to the written form, along with their formal, thematic, rhetorical, and descriptive devices. Through this mode of analysis, this reading argues that these works use the medium of storytelling in order to grapple with the conflicts and contradictions that arose within the buffalo hunting Métis community due to the role that these hunters played in the extinction of the buffalo. *L'espace de Louis Goulet* calls our attention towards the Métis oral tradition in order to reflect the author's own immersion into, as well as his eventual disconnection from, the prairie landscape. Ultimately, Goulet's narrative is concerned with questions of how one survives and what one survives as within a milieu that one's own actions have devastated. *The Last Buffalo Hunter* evokes the tradition of Western autobiography in order to subvert the expected narrative of self-formation through economic activity in favour of a narrative that intertwines economic growth and communal sustenance with environmental decline and communal dissipation. Both narratives conclude with their narrators going blind and bankrupt, and the thesis ends on a consideration of this subject position in relation to anthropogenic extinction events.

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Glossary of Terms

Métis: There are cultural and racial understandings of the term “Métis.” A racial understanding refers to anyone with a mixture of First Nations and European heritage. A cultural understanding refers to a specific group of people with a shared history and culture. My own usage of the term refers to the cultural understanding of “Métis,” articulated well by Chris Andersen here:

I use “Métis” to refer to the history, events, leaders, territories, language, and culture associated with the growth of the buffalo hunting and trading Métis of the northern Plains, in particular during the period between the beginning of the Métis buffalo brigades in the early nineteenth century and the 1885 Northwest Uprising. (24)

Buffalo: I use the term “buffalo” rather than “bison,” because buffalo is the local name for this species.

The Prairies/The Northwest/ The Plains: Throughout this work, I use the terms “the prairies,” “the plains,” and “the Northwest” interchangeably to refer to the vast territory which the buffalo hunting and trading Métis of the nineteenth-century traversed. This territory spanned the three Canadian prairie provinces as well as North Dakota, Montana and Minnesota. As Étienne Rivard notes, these terms refer to a multitude of ecological zones:

If many consider the prairie to be limited to grassland, a distinct landscape mostly of low-prairie vegetation (grasses, wild flowers, or mosses), and exclude the parkland, known as the ecological transition between grassland and woodland, the Métis narratives do not often make these distinctions ... “prairie” was defined as wherever the buffalo were.

Some species of bison, such as the wood bison, occupied both parkland and woodland zones. Even the plains bison, the most economically significant type of bison, which generally ranged within the grassland, was often chased up to Edmonton, in the parkland, by Métis hunters. (152)

Buffalo Hunter and Trader: Both buffalo hunters and traders participated in the Métis buffalo hunts, but they played different roles. A buffalo hunter is one who hunts buffalo and then trades the products he and his family derive from the hunt for goods. Traders typically do not hunt the buffalo themselves. Rather, they purchase large amounts of goods before the hunt, and then join buffalo hunting brigades in order to trade the wares they purchased to the buffalo hunters during the hunt *or* to First Nations groups whom they encounter on the prairies. Sometimes, one would be both a hunter *and* a trader—as in the case of Norbert Welsh.

Buffalo Extinction: Arguably, the term “extinction” is not appropriate for what was technically a near-extinction of the buffalo from the North American prairies. Buffalo still exist today, yet, as John Levi Barnard notes, “the bison exists in a state of what scientists call ‘ecological extinction,’ unable to perform its prior function in relation to its ecosystem and entirely dependent on human intervention for its survival” (378). Despite the persistence of this small population of buffalo, I use the term “extinction” to convey how the near- or virtual-extinction of the buffalo instantiated an unrecoverable loss of the lifeways of both the wild buffalo and the Indigenous buffalo hunter.

Introduction

mankind preserves itself not despite all the irrationalities and conflicts but by virtue of them.

Theodor Adorno (102 *History and Freedom*)

A night in open, unspoiled nature is bustling with life, so much so that anyone who isn't used to it has trouble getting to sleep. Prick up your ears, listen to the night: thousands and thousands of bulls bellowing that hoarse buffalo call, shaking the earth with their challenging roars, their battle cries; the little wild prairie dog yaps like a fox ...

... What a shame I can't write down the music. Nature in the wide open spaces offered a feast of sound to the ears of the plains voyageurs. *I for one could never hear those songs, noises and calls without imagining past generations who'd fallen asleep to the same rhythms.*ⁱ (Charette 28-29 my emphasis)

This passage from *L'espace de Louis Goulet* came to mind the first night that my Dad, my brother Adam, and I spent camping in the Grasslands National Park in Southern Saskatchewan. This 907-square-kilometre conservation area remains one of the few places in North America where herds of buffalo roam freely. My father, brother, and I camped inside the park in an area with no electricity, wifi, cellphone reception, or plumbing. At our campground, we could hear the "feast of sound" described so enthusiastically by the narrator of *L'espace de Louis Goulet*. Though the "hoarse buffalo call[s]" were absent—the existing herd in the park being too small

and too far away from our campground to contribute to its soundscape—the birds, insects, and coyotes could be heard at an intense pitch from dusk well into the morning of the next day.ⁱⁱ



(Fig. 1. Adam Beauchemin - My Dad, at our Campground)

We travelled by car (technically, by campervan) from Winnipeg to Calgary, staying at sites such as the Grasslands and Cypress Hills along the way. My aim was to inhabit the spaces in which the narratives surveyed in this thesis took place. The texts in question, *L'espace de Louis Goulet* and *The Last Buffalo Hunter*, are presented as the memoirs of Louis Goulet and Norbert Welsh, respectively. Both of these Métis men participated in the great buffalo hunts of the nineteenth century, and they both lived through the extinction of the buffalo from the North American prairies in 1882.ⁱⁱⁱ Though both works are narrated in the first person by the men

whose lives they depict, neither text was actually written by Welsh or Goulet. As blind, elderly men, both Goulet and Welsh shared their life stories with others who would eventually write and publish these first-person memoirs of their lives, memoirs that neither Goulet nor Welsh would live to see in print. The journey from the telling of these stories to their transcriptions and eventual publication will be examined in further detail in the following two chapters. What I wish to note here is that the narratives informing *L'espace de Louis Goulet* and *The Last Buffalo Hunter* began within the Métis oral tradition. This tradition hearkens back to, in the words of Goulet,^{iv} “[t]he old-timers who’d lived through the old days and the wars on the prairies ... those old boys [who] really know how to cast a spell in the evening around a campfire under the stars, telling us their stories one after the other” (42). It is in such spaces, the campgrounds of the buffalo hunting brigades and the *hivernant* communities^v that both Goulet and Welsh became storytellers.

The importance, to my mind, of going to the physical location of the Grasslands (and Cypress Hills, Pincher Creek, Fort Walsh, etc), was to acknowledge the important role that land holds in Métis oral tradition. Though the oral traditions of different Indigenous nations vary in many aspects, one component that appears to unite these various traditions is the important role that the speakers’ relationship to land and territory holds in the construction and articulation of their narratives. Helen Agger, for instance, writing on Anishinaabe oral tradition, states that one’s self-narrative “is a reflection and extension of individual and even *community identity*. Narratives thus inform and are informed by *the spaces in which a person self-situates*, comprising her or his frame of reference”^{vi} (39 my emphasis). An example of this can be found in the opening of *L'espace de Louis Goulet*, which begins with the narrator situating himself

within the Red River territory, weaving together his own personal narrative with that of the landscape:

I came into the world on October 6, 1859 by the banks of the Gratiass River, a tiny stream branching into the Red River a few miles downstream from the United States. The Gratiass got its name from a type of burdock that grew on the banks for the whole length of the river. The old-time Métis used to call that burdock *gratchias*.

I was born right after my parents got back from a buffalo hunting expedition that set out from St. Norbert on the Sale River, went in the direction of the Missouri, and got as far as the foothills of the first range of the Rocky Mountains. From there they'd headed straight back towards the Red River, meeting it at its junction with the Cheyenne River in North Dakota. (1 emphasis in original)

In narrating his parents' route through the landscape and especially in his explanation of the placename "Gratiass River," Goulet evokes what Étienne Rivard refers to as an "oral geography" a concept which "represents *the connection between spatial structures*—the material, political, and symbolic orderings of space—and *social structures* (e.g., cultural practices, norms, or institutions) inherent to oral cultures" (156).

Rivard's research is built from the written narratives of nineteenth-century Métis men—including *L'espace de Louis Goulet* and *The Last Buffalo Hunter*. Through these and other sources, Rivard argues that the oral geographies of Métis buffalo hunters provided the brigades both with ecological knowledge of their hunting grounds *and* the cultural histories of previous hunting parties: "Métis behaviour and space was socially structured ... Finding bison, berries, or firewood were all activities facilitated by landmarks and geographical knowledge, and

expressions of Métis historical land use” (156). Goulet’s description of the Sale River, for instance, demonstrates how the ecological knowledge of a given site is tied into the placename attributed to it by his community:

The old-timers used to call it *Rivière Sale* (dirty river) because of the muddy waters it used to carry down from the immense, marshy plain that fed its headwaters. The mouth of that river was always known as the best fishing spot in the country. Midsummer saw it swarming with carp, pike, and *barbues*, as some of us still call the *barbotte*, a kind of catfish much prized by the old-timers in the West because of its good-tasting flesh. (1-2)

Rivard argues that placenames, such as *Rivière Sale*, “thicke[n] the experience of space by giving meaning to places, justifying collective and individual appropriation of space, and enhancing a sense of belonging to them” (156). Furthermore, Rivard argues that the formation of oral geographies helped shape Métis culture and self-understanding. He explicates this process through “[t]he concept of *territorialité* ... both the process by which a people appropriate space and create territory through their identity markers, and the process by which they redefine, at least partially, their identity and sense of belonging in relation to that territory” (144). Blending the pedagogical and the aesthetic, Métis oral tradition tangibly mediated the community’s sensory apprehension of the prairies—an ecosystem experienced *as* narrative and cultural memory. Far more than being stories passed around the fire at night, these narratives were *inhabited* by the community as they navigated the landscape.



(Fig. 2. Adam Beauchemin - The Author, Looking out into the Grasslands at dusk)

Having inhabited the texts of *L'espace* and *The Last Buffalo Hunter* in my own way over the course of two years—reading, re-reading, taking notes, and presenting on them at conferences—the next step, I felt, was to immerse myself in the territory from which they emerged. During our first night at the campground, I lay in my tent listening to the “the same rhythms” that had lulled Goulet to sleep over the course of many evenings (Charette 29). The next morning, I woke up at four-thirty AM, determined to experience this space myself. Near our site was an eleven-kilometre trail that would take me to the highest point in the park. I embarked on it well before sunrise, when the prairie orchestra was still at its full pitch.

On my way to the trail, I passed an information plaque warning hikers about wild buffalo and rattlesnakes. I paid these warnings little mind at first, but after an hour or so of feeling small and

vulnerable in an immense landscape—one that was both loud and, as far as I could see, empty—I grew more and more worried about what such an encounter might entail. The fear of rattlesnakes, in particular, intensified during the many long stretches where the trail disappeared beneath tall grasses and overgrown bush. Unable to see where I was placing my feet, I tried listening for the dry shaking sound that was supposed to warn me if I was coming too close to someone who did not want me there. During one of these stretches, as I was daintily placing one foot in front of the other, I landed my left boot next to a large bush. As I did so, the plant began to quiver. Freezing mid-stride was probably not the correct decision to make, but I did not know how else to respond to this signal. The bush shook, more violently this time, and before I knew what to do, two birds flew out from it and launched themselves into the air. This should have been a relief, but I jumped and screamed, then ran along the path until it became visible again.

This story embarrasses me to even think about, let alone write and share with the few people who are going to read this thing.^{vii} But, I am including it here because this episode was a stark reminder that I was a tourist in this space. Despite my best efforts to reconnect to ancestral territory, my own cozy upbringing in the snug suburbs of Saint Vital^{viii} will always drive a wedge between me and these spaces.

The landscape itself—its shades of green ranging from deep hunter and mossy to bright emeralds; the splashes of silver sage bushes; the bright red, purple, yellow, and pink flowers of cacti—filled out, in my mind, the landscapes about which Goulet and Welsh spoke. The endless rolling hills of this space gave a shape to the narratives that, up until this point, I had imagined only as flat. But for all this, I did not feel that my stay in the park was a homecoming. I did not *know* this land, and as such, I was not equipped to respond to its signals and rhythms. In

recognizing this, I could not help but be reminded of the distance between me and my buffalo hunting forebears who made their homes in spaces such as these.



(Fig. 3. Adam Beauchemin)



(Fig. 4. Adam Beauchemin)



(Fig. 5. Adam Beauchemin)

My inability to navigate this space only reinforced the importance that something like an oral geography must have held. Within my own family, our stories about the buffalo hunts did not survive into my generation. The closest I have come to hearing these tales is my Dad telling me that *his* aunt told him about how my great-great-grandmother passed on stories of the buffalo hunts to her. For whatever reason, these stories appear to have vanished sometime during my father's generation. Unfortunately, disconnection from one's heritage is a fairly common story amongst Métis people. The way such disconnections were effected is a subject whose scope far exceeds this paper. Suffice to say, these disconnections speak to why the work of reconnection is both so important and so resonant in Métis cultural and academic production. Much Métis scholarship operates in the reconnecting or reparative mode—salvaging aspects of our heritage

that have been neglected by colonial histories and/or illuminating sites of resilience within Métis culture and communities that stand against these colonial forces.^{ix} The two works studied in this thesis have been used in this manner—both *L'espace de Louis Goulet* and *The Last Buffalo Hunter* have been cited for the historical information they provide about the buffalo hunt, along with the customs and rituals of nineteenth-century Métis people.^x In this way, they have helped scholars glean information about and, in a way, reconnect to our ancestral practices.

My own research on these texts, however, begins with a consideration of their relationship to extinction. In particular, with a consideration of the role that Métis buffalo hunters played in effecting the extinction of the buffalo from the Canadian^{xi} prairies. In the first place, an extinction event refers to a loss that is, by definition, unrecoverable. Though the buffalo are not, as it were, extinct, the virtual- or near-extinction of this species is represented in *L'espace de Louis Goulet* and *The Last Buffalo Hunter* as an event that severed their narrator's connections to land, community, and to self. These narratives are both stories of absolute collapse; the extinction event around which these works are organized is not something that *can* be re-connected to. A breakdown of the social order predicated on buffalo hunting is dramatized through the blindness that afflicts both Goulet and Welsh at the ends of their respective narratives. Goulet, “not wanting to burden anybody” with his blindness, spends the final thirty years of his life in a “Home for Incurables in Portage la Prairie” (Charette 167). Welsh, whose sense of self—as we will see in chapter two—is informed by his capacity to work and earn money, ends his narrative with the statement that, “[i]f I still had my eyesight I could still make money. Instead, I am obliged to sit here and review in my mind the passing of the old West” (Weekes 174). These memoirs are organized, narratively and conceptually, around the ending of the buffalo hunt and the buffalo economy that so profoundly shaped how they and their

communities were able to exist. As such, both *L'espace de Louis Goulet* and *The Last Buffalo Hunter* register the extinction of the buffalo as an ontological rupture—one which changed their communities on the level of their being. Respecting and thinking through this loss necessitates a shift away from the mode of reconnection and repair that is dominant in Métis scholarship today. This is not a repudiation of that scholarship by any means, so much as a recognition that the modes of reconnection, recovery, and repair aim to *overcome loss* rather than dwell with it.^{xii}

The title of this work, *Living Through Extinction*, is meant to highlight the conflicted position held by the Red River Métis buffalo hunters and traders regarding the extinction of the buffalo. These men^{xiii} and their families *lived through* this extinction event as one passes through a state of affairs, endures an event, or persists through a given set of circumstances; they *also*, however, lived through this extinction in the sense that they lived *by the means of* an activity—the hunting of buffalo—that led to an extinction event. In hunting buffalo, the nineteenth-century Red River Métis people gained political, military, and economic power. The Métis buffalo hunting brigades constituted a unique social and cultural space, contributing heavily to the process of ethnogenesis through which various families of mixed First Nations and European descent came into being as the people now known as the Red River Métis.^{xiv} But, despite that “[t]he buffalo hunt ... fully established the Métis Nation” (Teillet 109), the Métis buffalo hunt, in answering to the demands of the broader colonial marketplace, was *also* largely responsible for the extinction of the buffalo in Canadian territory.

My approach to this work begins with an understanding of the Métis buffalo hunt as a contradictory or self-conflicting activity: the very means by which it built itself up and came into creation—the hunting of buffalo—*also* ended up destroying the environment that sustained it. Beginning with this central conflict, I build out a literary analysis of the two texts in question,

one that interrogates how dis-connection—from land, community, and self—is communicated in these narratives that are so informed by their proximity to extinction. My research on *L'espace de Louis Goulet* and *The Last Buffalo Hunter*, in other words, is guided by an interest in what the aesthetic can convey about subject formation (and de-formation) in relation to anthropogenic extinction events. Through aesthetic analyses, I interrogate the social, political, and cultural terrains that have been made (and unmade) through economic systems that demand the extinction of their own resources; explore how the acts of creation and destruction intertwine within extinction events; and finally, consider what it means to survive, what possibilities for being remain, within an environment that one's own actions have destroyed.

The Métis Buffalo Hunt – A Brief Economic History

Drawing out the long history of the extinction of the buffalo from North America is a project whose scope far exceeds that of this thesis. Numerous factors, most of which are linked in some way to colonization, contributed to this extinction event. The most frequently cited cause of this extinction event is the rapacious hunting of buffalo—for profit and for sport—undertaken by white settler hunting parties in the United States shortly after the Civil War had concluded.^{xv} What is important to note for this project, however, is that these highly destructive settler hunting parties were an *American-only* phenomenon (x Cunfer and Waiser). In Canadian territory—where the buffalo population went extinct earlier than in the United States—only Indigenous peoples organized large-scale buffalo hunting parties (x Cunfer and Waiser). In Canada, Métis buffalo hunters responded forcefully to the market demand for buffalo products and thus hunted the greatest number of buffalo (Colpitts *Pemmican Empire*, Foster “The Metis and the End of the

Plains Buffalo in Alberta”). Though we cannot blame the extinction of the buffalo on the hunting practices of any single population, the significant impact that these Métis hunting parties had must be recognized.

Regarding the Red River Métis hunters, I understand that their practices of overhunting resulted from the twin pressures of debt and the rapid reduction in the price of buffalo products at key moments in the hunt’s history. For the hunters, debt was primarily incurred through the goods they used while on the hunts, such as horses, carts, ammunition, tools, etc. The traders incurred steep debts when buying commercial products on credit from major retailers, products which were then exchanged for buffalo robes, pemmican, and other commodities derived from various Métis and First Nations hunters. The commodities derived from hunting buffalo were then sold to purchasers, such as the Hudson’s Bay Company and other large retailers, to recoup the debts incurred and to hopefully turn a profit. Alexander Ross, a man who lived in the Red River settlement during the nineteenth century, described the Métis buffalo brigades (which contained both hunters and traders) as being fueled by “the evils of long credit” (qtd in Colpitts 175). The system of debt, Ross notes, “is now deeply rooted, and infused into all the affairs and the transactions of the [Red River settlement]” (qtd in Colpitts 175). This debt, as environmental historian George Colpitts notes, “necessitated greater returns to make a hunting contingent meet its initial outlay,” thus leading eventually to a pace and scale of market hunting that was unsustainable (175).

Price suppression also played a major role in the size and scale of the Métis hunts. Colpitts argues that unsustainable rates of hunting by the Métis began as early as 1821, when the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) and the North West Company (NWC)—the two major purchasers of pemmican from the Métis people—merged under the HBC name. With their

exclusive purchasing power for pemmican, this new HBC, by 1826, “had moved pemmican, dried meat, and fat to a quarter of their prices from two decades before. Prices remained suppressed until the end of the bison era” (151). The combination of debt and price suppression meant that the Métis hunters had to greatly increase the yields of their hunts to turn any sort of profit.

The increasing demand for surplus production led the Métis hunters to “organiz[e] the first large-scale and highly destructive summer hunting [parties]” (Colpitts 152). Perhaps the most damaging effect of these hunts was that, by taking place during the summer, Métis hunters were killing off buffalo during an important part of their life cycle: “The market was, in effect, pushing the Métis to develop a hunt that killed cows [meaning, female buffalo], generally, at a time when they were sometimes half their prime, in summer” (Colpitts 169). The summer hunt eventually led to the spring hunt, which targeted *only* female buffalo as the meat from males was, as Goulet describes it, “inedible” during this time of year (49). It is this spring hunt that Goulet credits with the extinction of the buffalo:

One of the main reasons for the decimation of the buffalo herds was that cows were hunted in the spring, during the calving season. Right off, a generation ceased to exist before it was even born, dying with the slaughtered mothers. It was the quickest and surest way to wipe out a race of animals, by reducing its numbers and also its capacity to reproduce. (50)

The amount of pemmican *sold* by the Métis increased exponentially as these hunting parties got larger and their technology more sophisticated: beginning from 16,000 lbs in 1827 and growing to over 100,000 lbs in 1843 (Colpitts 165). It should be noted that these figures do *not* include pemmican consumed by the Métis during the hunt, pemmican that was preserved for future

provisioning, or pemmican that was traded to purchasers other than the HBC. These pemmican sales were responding to both the growing size of the Red River settlement^{xvi} *and* the growing HBC enterprise which, through this now very cheap energy resource, was able to expand its own commercial operations, “*both the reach of capital and the pace of colonization in its train*” (Colpitts 149 my emphasis). The exhaustion of this resource and the extinction of the buffalo in “Canadian” territory proved to be an important step in the greater expansion of this colonial capitalist enterprise; this expansion of colonization, therefore, cannot be disentangled from the labour of Métis buffalo hunters and traders.

The problems of debt and price suppression were only exacerbated by the trade in buffalo robes and the turn towards the free-trade, capitalist economic model adopted by hunters and traders during the 1840s. After the Sayer trial in 1849,^{xvii} the HBC was forced to give up its monopoly on purchasing products from Métis hunters and traders. This allowed the Métis to sell their products to American trading enterprises, gaining access to a lucrative, transnational market for buffalo robes and other products. Following this, the Métis turned their production more consciously towards “commodity production for market (furs, particularly buffalo robes) ... Their surplus production ... was increasingly appropriated by merchant traders, many of whom were Metis themselves” (Ens 77).

The exhaustion of the Canadian buffalo herds through surplus production is dramatized in chapter five of *The Last Buffalo Hunter*. This chapter, titled “A Winter Hunt,” opens on Welsh and a number of other Métis buffalo hunters carving up the corpse of a buffalo: “I cut a hole in the tripe. The manure was hot, and whenever our hands got cold, we would run them and put them in the manure, and they would get warm as fire” (Weekes 39). Following this, Welsh describes the buffalo herds in Saskatchewan, characterizing them through their plenty: “I could

see the buffalo all over. There were thousands and thousands of them ... All around us, as far as we could see, the plains were black with buffalo. The prairie seemed to be moving” (42).

Alongside this plenitude, the hunting practices witnessed by Welsh are characterized by waste: “I saw hundreds of buffalo, during that week, slaughtered for their hides. The whole carcass was left to rot on the plains” (42). Though Welsh abdicates himself and the majority of his brigade from such wasteful practices (there were, it appears, numerous brigades sharing this hunting ground), he notes how this wasteful form of hunting continues: “After the second day of this particular hunt there were a great many buffalo shot for their hides. Too many” (43).^{xviii}

Surplus and waste come together in the commodification of the buffalo and its exchange into goods through trade. Following the hunt, chapter five concludes with Welsh trading buffalo robes to two businessmen from the United States—nameless, featureless characters standing in for the transnational network of trade that circulated buffalo products. During their negotiations, the offers from each party differ by eighty dollars. This is a relatively small sum, but, as Welsh states, “I told him my price and must get it” (46). Welsh notices that one of the men “was wearing a fine watch and chain,” which Welsh then asks for to cover the difference between the two parties’ offers. The American purchaser agrees, and the exchange is settled, with Welsh now in the possession of “forty-three hundred dollars in cash and a good watch” (46). The very next paragraph begins, however, with Welsh giving away the watch as a present to his brother-in-law “because I didn’t know how to use it” (46). Welsh’s demand for the watch in the negotiation process is understandable in terms of the need to create surplus value through exchange. But his immediate discarding of the watch figures this surplus value as an unnecessary excess.

Chapter five begins with Welsh’s hand in buffalo excrement, and it ends with him holding a luxury trade good. There are various ways to interpret this. One is a pro-capitalist narrative arc

whereby buffalo gore, through Welsh's hard work, is transformed into something of immense monetary value. Another reading could contrast the actual use-value of these two items, noting the irony in that the buffalo excrement (which holds no exchange value) turns out to have far more utility *for* Welsh than the (to him) useless luxury article. What I find more interesting, however, is how the watch comes to signify, *not just* surplus value generated through the hunt, but instead, surplus-as-waste. In this way, the wasteful hunting practices described by Welsh are reified as the very goods for which the buffalo are being hunted.

Focusing on the Métis hunters and the role they played in the extinction of the buffalo exposes the irrational conflicts that arise from the otherwise rational actions taken within the structure of colonial capitalism.^{xix} Again, focusing on *only* Métis hunters misses the full scope of factors leading to this extinction event. It is also worth noting that a group of Métis hunters in 1875 attempted to regulate hunting so that the remaining buffalo population could be conserved. Led by Gabriel Dumont, it was this group of Métis “who were seemingly trying to control the hunt from its completely chaotic turn” (Colpitts 253). Despite all of this, what makes studying the impact of Métis on this extinction so important for us to do today, is that the self-conflicted *position* of the Métis buffalo hunter—one who sustains oneself and one's community through unsustainable practices—so uncannily reflects the position that we in the global North hold with regards to the contemporary climate crisis. Currently, we are contending with a multitude of environmental crises caused primarily by human activity—crises which include a mass extinction event whose scope and scale dwarfs the loss of life that resulted from hunting buffalo. In the global North, even the most environmentally conscious of us are still heavily dependent on an incredibly destructive and wasteful economic system for the procurement of our most basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. Jean-Thomas Tremblay and Steven Swarbrick sum up

this predicament so well when they state that the central ecological contradiction of our own era is that “to live today is to accelerate extinction” (128). Focusing on the figure of the Métis buffalo hunter allows us to think through how and why environmental contradictions replicate themselves across eras and how such contradictions serve to expand the reach and pace of capitalism *while also* undermining the livelihoods of those dependent on this economic system.

The Aesthetic Approach

L'espace de Louis Goulet and *The Last Buffalo Hunter* are both widely cited documents in the field of Métis studies. Many scholars understand and cite these works as historical documents—ones whose claims are facts and whose statements are self-identical to their surface meanings. This understanding of these works deserves to be complicated. My own approach has been to read these texts as imaginative, literary creations—stories told by experienced storytellers who are making use of the various artistic techniques within the medium. I do not deny that these works can and do contain valuable information for historians; nor am I saying that these texts are being used erroneously as historical documents. What I am saying is that different understandings of and approaches to these works will yield different insights. In emphasizing the storytelling elements of these documents, I hope to begin new conversations about these works within the field of Métis studies and the many other disciplines I engage with throughout this work.

Consider the brief episode described above, in which Welsh sells the products of his hunt to two American businessmen. Of this episode, historian Gerhard Ens writes that Welsh's accounting of that transaction “must be an exaggeration as it is based on claims of having sold

his buffalo robes ... at 20\$/robe—an unrealistic figure even for the late 1860s” (84). Approached as an aesthetic work, however, my consideration is not to inform my reader what a more realistic price for these robes might have been (10\$ at most, argues Ens [84]). Rather, I consider this excessive price alongside the other images of excess that this chapter presents us with, those being the descriptions of wasteful hunting practices and of expensive but functionally useless luxury articles. These thematically linked images of waste and excess ask us to consider surplus production *as* waste, a concept crystallized in Welsh’s giving away of the watch he bargained so hard for. In my reading of this text, the point is not that Welsh fibbed about the dollar amount he sold his robes for, but rather that the story prompts us to consider surplus and waste in tandem, thereby contrasting with the more normative associations held between surplus and growth. Understood as a work of art, the purpose of *The Last Buffalo Hunter* is not to inform its readers of robe prices, but instead to get us to re-think the concepts of surplus and growth by using formal and thematic techniques to connect these processes to the consequences they engender.

Understood aesthetically, these texts are powerful mediations on the various contradictions of living through extinction. The central contradiction is that the buffalo hunt both built itself up and sustained itself through an activity that ultimately destroyed the environmental conditions that sustained it. This contradiction has only become exacerbated within our own societies in the global North, as we likewise—for the most part—live through highly destructive and fundamentally unsustainable means. The urgency of attending to this contradiction lies in how today, the environmental consequences of the lives of affluent citizens in the global North are so often displaced onto populations in the global South. Addressing this phenomenon, Frédéric Neyrat criticizes the term “Anthropocene” because, he argues, it propagates the myth that there is a single, unified humanity, one which is wholly responsible for and wholly threatened by the

consequences of the climate crisis—one of which is, again, a mass extinction event. More accurately, Neyrat argues, there are populations who have benefited from the economies and technologies that have altered the earth so drastically, and other populations who have suffered the consequences of this progress (19-20). Neyrat uses the term the “*double-body of the Anthropocene*” to reference this unequal split (20 emphasis in original). Through the Métis buffalo hunter, one can observe this double-body within the same figure. The causal relationship between Métis hunting and the buffalo extinction—an extinction event which led them to a prolonged period of “economic [and, I would add political and social] marginalization” (Ens and Sawchuck 239-242)—really brings to the fore the severe contradictions within capitalism, making consequences that are often easily obfuscated, because so often displaced onto others, difficult to ignore.

Today, extinction is both ubiquitous and largely invisible, often only approachable through abstract concepts or bloodless sets of data. Unlike the Indigenous peoples of the prairies, who felt the loss of the buffalo in every aspect of their lives, the effects of this current mass extinction event are often occluded from the day-to-day lives of citizens of the global North. Even scientists who track species extinction estimate that the majority of species going extinct today are those which are not yet known to humankind (Dawson 9). These extinction events often result in consequences that are impossible to predict, because it is not known how all species within a given ecosystem are connected to their environment. One pertinent example of this is how the localized extinction of India’s vulture population, due to the role they played in that country’s sanitation by their consumption of garbage, has led to over 64.4 billion dollars in damages per year and over 500,000 human deaths (Frank and Sudarshan “The Social Costs of Keystone Species Collapse: Evidence from the Decline of Vultures in India”). The role humanity plays in

effecting these extinctions is likewise occluded by the fact that most of these species are not dying off through humans killing them directly—as in the case of hunting—but rather through habitat loss. The leading cause of this habitat loss is the space required for animal agriculture (Machovina et al, “Biodiversity Conservation”).

Suturing the affective distance between humans (particularly citizens of the global North) and the environmental consequences of our livelihoods is the impetus behind much work in the environmental humanities. Philosopher Baptiste Morizot argues that “impoverishment of the scope of our sensibility towards living beings, of the forms of attention and of the qualities of openness towards them, is both an effect and one of the causes of the ecological crisis” (6). Morizot thus advocates for engaging in “rituals without mysticism,” such as “think[ing] of the ocean every time we add salt - think[ing] of what we owe it” and, when using a “natural sponge in the shower,” thinking about how “you are rubbing your body with the body of your ancestor ... [showering thus becomes] ancestor worship performed in secret and unconsciously: a sensual and silent ritual of connection with the whole animal kingdom, of which the sponge is ... the common ancestor” (115). The discipline of material ecocriticism, likewise, seeks to “reenchan[t]” the world we live in through emphasizing the “expressive creativity” of *all* forms of matter (27 Oppermann). In doing so, it is argued, humans will be “invit[ed] [to] fee[l] empathy with all objects, human and nonhuman entities, and forces that constitute the matter of Earth within which human and nonhuman natures intertwine in complex ways” (Oppermann 27). These approaches to environmental crisis emphasize embodiment and meaning making, they “fuse matter and meaning together to posit a world that is animate, object-oriented, and geared towards repair” (Swarbrick 249). They conceptualize the human subject as one who, through a recognition of their embodied connection to other forms of matter, will be able to take their

proper position within a co-operative network of benevolent forces: “The mystery of being a body, a body that interprets and lives its life, is shared by all living beings: it’s the universal vital condition, and it is this which should summon up the most powerful sense of belonging” (Morizot 10).

For my own Métis buffalo hunting and trading ancestors, an embodied interconnection to the buffalo and the prairie ecosystem did not prevent them from perpetuating an ecological crisis. The hunters and their families subsisted on buffalo meat and fat, wore clothing made from buffalo hides, and slept in buffalo robes—the buffalo was always on and in them. Their dependency on this animal did not—could not—have escaped recognition. The creation of oral geographies and the ascription of placenames to various sites in the prairies, as Rivard’s research cited above notes, also emphasizes how the Metis hunter’s selfhood was conceived of in relation to the very environment in which their hunting led to an extinction event. This extinction event, which was effected not in a manner that was affectively distant, but on the contrary, through the visceral, affectively charged form of hunting, demonstrates the limitations of an approach founded on the recognition-of-relationality as a means to curb environmental devastation. It also speaks to the greater difficulty of becoming the transcendental subject who can unproblematically merge oneself into a greater web of living relations.

My buffalo hunting ancestors were deeply conflicted, complicated, and very *human* actors trying to navigate their own lives within the imperfect milieus in which they were situated. Rather than envisioning or promoting an idealized human subject—the transcendental or pastoral subject who exists in an unconflicted relationship with their milieu—my analysis instead aims to re-centre the contradictions and difficulties of the human subject within eco-critical discourse. This approach, I hope, resonates with the work of critical Indigenous theorist M Murphy, “a

Métis person of white skin who also descends from white settlers,” and their concept of “alterlife” (499). Murphy’s alterlife conceptualizes contemporary relationships with toxic chemicals and settler-colonial violence:

Living in Toronto, I am a guest and a settler, caught up in the chemicals and water, noninnocently making relations and suspending damage. Alterlife acknowledges that one cannot simply get out, that this hurtful and deadly entanglement forms part of contemporary existence in this moment, in the ongoing aftermath. (500)

Murphy states that alterlife is informed by their Métis identity, one which, they state “is complicated, not least because it is noninnocently entangled with whiteness” (500). Though the Métis, as Murphy notes, have been victimized by and have fought against settler colonialism, “[s]ome Métis ancestors were active agents of colonialism, working with the Hudson’s Bay Company, and in the twentieth century many white Métis became more and more assimilated into settler colonialism” (499-500). As a result of these considerations, Murphy states, alterlife is partly “an autobiographical category about *traumatic and noninnocent relations with settler colonialism and capitalism*” (500 my emphasis). Studying the Métis buffalo hunt entails recognizing it as a capitalist endeavour. Though these hunts supported and benefited many Indigenous communities, they *also*, as I mentioned above, aided in the expansion of settler colonialism and market capitalism in North America. I, too, feel that my research must also be informed by “traumatic and noninnocent relations with settler colonialism and capitalism” in order to consider both the damage done to the Métis people by the extinction of the buffalo and the role that the Métis population played in effecting it.

In approaching *L'espace de Louis Goulet* and *The Last Buffalo Hunter* as literary works, my goal is to analyze how conflicts and contradictions that cannot be explicated in a fully rational manner come to be expressed and contended with through an aesthetic medium. Throughout, I utilize historical works and primary sources to contextualize the texts in question. Though this project would not have been possible without the work of the historians I cite and the historians—Jesse Thistle and Carolyn Podruchny—who have so generously guided my academic development, the purpose of this work is not to assess *L'espace de Louis Goulet* or *The Last Buffalo Hunter* on the basis of whether or not the claims they make can be considered historically accurate. My analysis of these works is informed by the disciplines of literary studies, aesthetic philosophy, critical Indigenous theory, and queer theory. I also make use of psychoanalytic terminology throughout this project because, as Dana Seitler puts it, “psychoanalysis is so good at placing emphasis on forms and expressions of psychic confliction” (2). Reading these works as stories also means that I take the representations of “Goulet,” “Welsh,” and various others within the text as representations—characters within works of literature. As such, my statements about the characters in these works should not be taken as statements on the historical people whom they are meant to represent. This approach allows me to critically reflect on the practice of representation (of self and others) and the greater social and political consequences of doing so.

The first chapter of this work, “Truth in *L'espace de Louis Goulet*,” focuses on the text’s own claims to communicate truth. This chapter begins by looking at its authors’ claim that the work is entirely truthful, but that it is *not* a history—it is, in Charette and Goulet’s words, “a story, nothing more” (Charette ix). Of the two memoirs studied in this work, *L'espace* is more consciously linked to the practice of oral storytelling; it evokes oral tradition directly as a major

influence in Goulet's life and stylistically through specific turns of phrase that are directed towards the reader as though they were in Goulet's presence. By examining theorists of the oral tradition and Indigenous storytelling, along with a close reading of the epistemological claims made by the narrator of this work, I build a concept of "truth" that speaks to how this term is deployed and understood within *L'espace de Louis Goulet*. In this work, a "truth" is not an enduring, objective, historical fact, but rather, a provisional, contingent, and highly subjective experience that is mediated by cultural and environmental factors. In stressing the contingency of truth, *L'espace* portrays the extinction of the buffalo as an ontological rupture. How and as what Goulet and his community were able to *be* as Métis people were forever changed following the ending of the buffalo hunt and the multitude of practices that went along with it.

The second chapter, "Figures of Indigeneity in *The Last Buffalo Hunter*," critically examines the portrayal of the self and various others in the autobiographical form. *The Last Buffalo Hunter* consciously evokes the tradition of Western autobiography, specifically in its narrative of one's self-realization through economic means. However, the text portrays Welsh as being subservient to the economic demands of his hunting and trading enterprise. As such, the character of "Welsh" becomes less of an articulation of a specific individual and more of a figure for the economic logic of the buffalo hunt. Through this figure, the contradictions of this practice are enacted—specifically during moments where he puts his own self at risk in the pursuit of profit. Focusing on the economic also reveals the logic behind the work's, at times deeply offensive, portrayals of First Nations people. Working with the idea that these portrayals are *also* figures that are recognizable within settler-colonial discourse, I argue that *The Last Buffalo Hunter* both deploys (and to an extent, naturalizes) these figures, while also pointing out how the tropes it relies on to

depict First Nations peoples are themselves informed by the material conditions of settler colonialism.

Though these works are stylistically and even thematically very different from one another, they are both grounded in their relationship to an unrecoverable loss. The conclusion analyzes the subject position that the narrators of *L'espace de Louis Goulet* and *The Last Buffalo Hunter* ultimately inhabit at the end of their narratives. Both narrators, blind and financially destitute, express and articulate a subjectivity formed through anthropogenic extinction and the losses that this process bespeaks. From these subject positions, we can critically reflect upon our own (again, for those of us in the affluent global North) positions within the contemporary climate crisis.

Chapter 1:

Truth in *L'espace de Louis Goulet*

Voulez-vous écouter chanter

Une chanson de vérité?

- Pierre Falcon, “Chanson de la Grenouillère”

“this did not signify to me a stable identity: I came to understand that what kind of *Native* you are can shift”

- Deanna Reder, *Autobiography as Indigenous Intellectual Tradition: Cree and Métis âcimsowina*

L'espace de Louis Goulet focuses on Louis Goulet's early life as he navigates one of the most fraught periods in Métis history: the era in which the buffalo went virtually extinct from the prairies and the Northwest resistance of 1885 concluded with the defeat of the Métis forces at Batoche and the public execution of Métis leader Louis Riel. As a blind, elderly man, Goulet shared the story of his life with Guillaume Charette—himself a prominent Métis lawyer, radio host, and one-time president of the L'Union Nationale Métisse de Saint Joseph—when he spent a winter at Charette's home in Saint Boniface sometime between 1932 and 1934 (Ellenwood “Voices of Louis Goulet” 108). Following this encounter, Charette authored at least two different, full-length versions of Goulet's narrative, writing these works in the first person as “Louis Goulet.” Emile Pelletier later discovered these writings in Charette's archives at the Société Historique de Saint Boniface. Pelletier edited Charette's work, gave the narrative its title, and published it in 1977—fifteen years after Charette's death and forty-one years after Louis Goulet's passing. I will return to the editing process Pelletier undertook for this project towards the end of this chapter. I note Charette's important role in the composition of this text here only because it lends credence to the provocation he makes in the work's foreword: “The reader will

not find one word of fiction in the following account. All the characters existed, all of them were known, but *the narrator denies writing history*. He simply wants to tell *a story*, nothing more,” followed by the assertion that Goulet was “one of the most truthful^{xx} [storytellers]” (ix my emphasis). Charette’s statement in the original French makes the distinction between “writing history” and “telling a story” more forcefully: “bien que le narrateur *refuse de faire de l’histoire*, il veut *raconter tout simplement* et c’est tout” (*L’espace* 11 my emphasis). The translation of “raconter” to “tell a story” is accurate, but the English phrase misses an important connotation associated with *raconter*, which is that the story being told is exaggerated or even partly made up—more of a tall-tale than the kind of true-to-life story typically associated with the memoir genre. Charette and Goulet ask us to accept as true what might otherwise be dismissed as exaggeration or fantasy. More importantly, they ask the reader to differentiate between the truth of a story and the truth of a historical document.

This chapter presents a reading of *L’espace de Louis Goulet* that is informed by how the text conceptualizes “truth.” The first section of this chapter argues that claims to truth in this work are not concerned with the indexing of historical facts. Rather, *L’espace* is better understood as an extended meditation on how, in categorically different ways, practices, circumstances, and environmental conditions enabled the Métis people to be. In other words, a claim to truth in *L’espace* is a claim about how life was lived and how reality was experienced. In conceptualizing truth in this manner, *L’espace* presents the extinction of the buffalo as an ontological rupture for the Métis community—one which engendered a change in their being. Goulet’s narrative occurs during a moment of extreme turmoil. As the Northwest underwent great changes, Goulet and his community were made to navigate different ways of relating to, perceiving, and existing within their environs. The second and third sections of this chapter

examine Goulet's ardent embrace of Catholicism, contextualizing it within the understanding of truth articulated above. The fourth and final section of this chapter considers Goulet's position within the ontological rupture of this extinction event, focusing on moments in which the conflicts of the text are set against one another. It is in attending to these contradictions that the work most forcefully communicates and contends with living through extinction.

Une Chanson de Vérité

I will begin by looking at how "truth" and "fact" have been written about and understood within the Métis oral tradition. In her book, *Autobiography as Indigenous Intellectual Tradition: Cree and Métis âcimsowina*, Deanna Reder, citing H. C. Wolfart, defines "âcimowina" as "stories or accounts of daily life, although, 'in this genre the supernatural is decidedly a part of the *factual* world'" (6 my emphasis). In her glossary, Reder re-emphasizes the truth content of "âcimowin(a)" by defining the term as "*factual story* (stories)" (xi my emphasis). The factual content of such narratives remains implied in Reder's definition of the term "âcimisowin(a)," which she describes as "story (stories) about oneself/autobiography (autobiographies)"^{xxi} (xi). Reder's repeated use of the term "factual" and her characterization of *âcimisowina* as a practice that "best allow[s] us to assert control over our identities, histories, and knowledge systems" invokes historiography (18). Thus, Reder explicates the practice of Métis-storytelling in a manner categorically different from (though not necessarily opposed to) Charette, who explicitly rejects Goulet's storytelling practice as "history" (Charette ix). For Reder, *âcimsowina* allows for narrative control over and preservation of Indigenous histories within a culture that too often neglects or tries to erase them (18, 97-110).

Reder emphasizes the importance of creating Indigenous modes of historiography when she writes about the barriers to publishing that Métis activist, intellectual, and author James Brady encountered when submitting his manuscript about the Cree leader Chief Papasschayo.^{xxii} Brady had sent his manuscript to anthropologist Charles Brant for feedback and had submitted it to historian Hugh Dempsey for publication in the *Alberta Historical Review*. Brant rejected Brady's work *as* a work of scholarship based on what he described as the "occultist, supernaturalistic" elements of the text (Brant, qtd in Reder 101). Dempsey, for his part, rejected Brady's work for publication on the grounds that what Brady documents in the text—the seizure of Chief Papasschayo's reserve land by white settlers—"do[es] not completely agree with the historical record" (Dempsey, qtd in Reder 101). In claiming that the designations of "fact" and "history" accurately describe the practice of Cree-Métis storytelling, Reder's work reappropriates both terms as an important corrective to the attitude that the work of Indigenous authors is "deficient or *unbelievable*" (102 my emphasis).

In insisting on the truth of *L'espace* while maintaining its status as a *story* rather than a *history*, Goulet and Charette ask us to consider how different media convey, communicate, and problematize different conceptions of "truth." Ray Ellenwood considers this provocation in the afterword to his translation of the text, noting that *L'espace* contains "a core of what we might call 'historical truth' to it" ("Translator's Afterword" 169). After corroborating Goulet's presence at certain events with documents from the historical record, "the *Official Reports of the North-West Mounted Police*" and "the *Sessional Papers of the Dominion of Canada*," Ellenwood concludes by stating that "[i]n the final analysis, however, this book ... is not a history but a story ... [Goulet's] reminiscences go beyond the *limited truth of historical fact* into the realm of myth especially with their haunting themes of freedom and space and the loss of both"

(“Translator’s Afterword” 170 my emphasis). The themes of *L’espace* and the truths they convey about Goulet and his community’s experience of this era cannot be apprehended by referencing documents such as the *Official Reports of the North-West Mounted Police*. In *L’espace*, these truths are found in the artistic properties of the text: the formal, descriptive, and thematic devices that the work makes use of. In other words, we have to look at the aspects of the text that help us understand it *beyond* the literal statements made in the work. This is what it means to approach *L’espace* as a story—that is, as an aesthetic object—rather than as a history.

Ojibwe scholar Basil Johnston, in his essay, “Is That All There Is? Tribal Literature,” argues that works studying Indigenous peoples remain too committed to understanding Indigenous stories through their surface-level meanings. In other words, there is a preference for the literal over the literary. This hermeneutic, Johnston contends, results in research that “present[s] Native peoples [only] in terms of their physical existence, as if Indians were incapable of meditating upon or grasping the abstract” (4). Johnston continues, “[w]ithout knowing the spiritual and the intellectual, aesthetic sides of Indian culture ... the literature of the peoples they are studying” scholars are unable to understand Indigenous peoples (5). Regarding the analysis of Indigenous narratives, Johnston argues that surface-level readings often miss the point of Indigenous stories, so much so that a well-known narrative whose mythological meaning suggests “that love may bloom even in circumstances where it is least expected to flower and endure ... has been presented as an explanation for the origin of pine trees” (10).

Johnston presents a concept of truth that speaks to how a single statement can contain a depth of meanings^{xxiii}:

When we say “w’daeb-- awae,” we mean he or she is telling the truth, is correct, is right.

But the expression ... is as well a philosophical proposition, in the saying of which a

speaker casts his words and his voice as far as his perception and his vocabulary will enable him or her; *it is a denial that there is such a thing as absolute truth*—that the best and most the speaker can achieve and a listener expect is the highest degree of accuracy. Somehow that one expression, *w'daeb-- awae*, sets the limits to a single statement, as well as *setting limits to truth*. (6-7 my emphasis)

The concept of *w'daeb- awae* speaks to how truth operates in *L'espace de Louis Goulet*: not as an absolute fact, but as a mediated experience. One's subjectivity—"his perception and his vocabulary"—always shapes a truth claim. If *w'daeb- awae* sets the "limits to truth," *L'espace* investigates what those limits might be. *L'espace* interrogates the conditions that produce the reality we experience as "true" and asks how new "truths" might emerge within different circumstances.

L'espace most forcefully challenges the synonymy of "truth" with "historical fact" when depicting the supernatural. Through his encounters with the fantastic, Goulet presents the truth not only as subjective but as mediated by cultural practices. Similarly, Kanien'keha:ka scholar Ki'en Debicki argues that "our sensual interpretation of the world expands or contracts depending on cultural foundations" (250). Consequently, Debicki argues, different cultures will have different experiences of what is *real* or *truthful*: "Indigenous peoples' cultural knowledge leads to a different experience of what is real—real to us is the aliveness and agency of the earth, our mother, and all other beings in creation. We can perceive these things *empirically through our expanded cultural senses*" (250 my emphasis). For Goulet, the "cultural senses" of he and his community were "expanded" through oral tradition:

it wasn't just memories of the old days that the old-timers passed on in their stories. Most of all, these stories were embellished with superstitions, with sightings of ghosts, with

Indian legends and who knows what else! ... with tales of werewolves, magic flying canoes and a thousand other frightening things like that.

That was *my first education*, and it certainly left an indelible mark on me for the rest of my life ... By the time I was ten years old, I'd begun to believe that the bush and the forests were full of a fairly-tale world that constantly occupied my imagination. *For me, the night was filled with baleful shadows and other demons from the land of dreams.* (7 Charette my emphasis)

In contrast to Debicki, whose own cultural practices enable them to experience a plenitude of life in their milieu, Goulet presents oral tradition as an “education” that enabled him to apprehend the prairies as a supernatural space.

To demonstrate the world opened to him and his community through oral tradition, Goulet recounts a number of stories featuring supernatural experiences. The first of these narratives takes place when Goulet is still a teenager^{xxiv}:

when working for Father Ritchot as a farmhand, I was deeply moved by an incident which was strange, to say the least. A father had lost his eldest son. For some unknown reason, the son *refused to see the priest* at the moment of his death. No matter how much Father Ritchot pleaded, it did no good. After the young man died, the priest refused to bury him in sacred ground ... His father was so upset he fell sick and died. On his deathbed *he also refused to see the priest*, out of resentment, and died without the sacraments. (8 my emphasis)

Shortly after these deaths, Goulet and a few other farmhands hear someone chopping at the ground of the cemetery. The workers go outside to investigate. Despite the light of the full moon,

no one or nothing is to be found. The workers are shaken by this, the assumption being that the father and son have returned as ghosts and are attempting to dig their way into the sacred burial ground that had been denied to them. The commotion is settled when “Father Ritchot shouted down to us: ‘What was it you heard? Let's say the rosary. I'll lead, you reply.’ That's all there was to it” (8). Admittedly, this is not a great ghost story. The tales which immediately follow this one—including one wherein Goulet is visited by the apparition of a Sioux warrior whom he ends up killing the next day (9)—convey far more convincingly the concept of the prairies as a supernatural space.

The above-quoted story highlights the important role that *sight* plays in establishing a truth claim within *L'espace de Louis Goulet*. The father and son both “refused to see” the priest on their deathbeds (7); in doing so, they denied themselves the experience of Catholicism by declining to acknowledge the representative of that faith visually. In the original French, the connection between sight and reception is made more explicit: the son refused to *see* the priest, “le fils *refusa de voir* le prêtre,” while the father refused to *receive* the priest, “il refusa à son tour, par dépit, *de recevoir* le prêtre” (Charette *L'espace* 22-23 my emphasis). In the French, there is an implicit connection between *seeing* the priest, “de voir le prêtre,” and *receiving* the salvation he offers at the moment of one's death, “de recevoir le prêtre.”

This refusal to receive Catholicism through sight gains thematic significance when we consider how Goulet appeals to sight as the guarantor of the truth of the supernatural episodes he and his community experienced:

Now then, what about these phenomena I've just been describing? Were they superstitions? Were they hallucinations, or what? In my opinion, the *witnesses* were very

trustworthy people. As for me, *I only know what I saw*. I'm only telling what I can swear *I saw with my own eyes*. (11 my emphasis)

Goulet states elsewhere that “these three cases and others I’ve told you about during these reminiscences are only a few facts among hundreds *I witnessed*. Call it superstition or anything you like!” (156 my emphasis). Importantly, Goulet leaves open the possibility that the “phenomena” he had been describing could be “hallucinations” or “superstitions.” Yet, he still asserts that these episodes are true. We can think again about *w’daeb- awae* and consider how Goulet claims an event to be “true” whilst allowing that said event may not be what one would call “objective reality.” For Goulet, truth takes on a decidedly subjective formation; what is true is what is witnessed by himself and his community.

This epistemic claim of truth-through-sight is related to the practice of hunting buffalo. For learning *how to see* is emphasized in Goulet’s descriptions of the buffalo hunt. This is evident in his explanation of the important role that scouts played in the brigades:

In choosing our scouts, we always took care to team up an old hand with one who had little or no experience. It was a wise custom because that way everyone got training on the job ... Every scout had to keep in mind, always, that the life of the whole caravan depended on him. It was crucial, therefore, that *he develop his powers of observation and absolutely never take anything for granted*. Everything that caught his eye had to be checked out. (22 my emphasis)

To *see* like a scout—whom Goulet refers to as “the eyes of the caravan” (22)—requires a culturally specific and land-based education. Only through developing one’s “powers of

observation” was one able to respond to the prairie ecosystem in a manner that ensured communal survival.

Another important epistemological claim made in *L’espace de Louis Goulet* is that the prairie ecology subtends what, for Goulet and his community, is understood and experienced as true. Explicating how numerous members of his community can divine future events through dreams and sensations in their person, Goulet remarks that: “*life on the open plains affected us, I’ve often thought our minds were marked by superstition as well as intuition*” (157 my emphasis). These intuitions—an imminent death in the family, a husband getting drunk—are received *through* sensory experiences such as a quivering eyelid or a sharp pain in the back (156). What Goulet describes as “superstition” *is* a sensation, the reception of which is made possible to those in the Métis community who “lived on the prairie for years and spent a lot of time with the Indians” (156). Goulet understands the prairies not only as something *to be sensed* but as a space *which develops* one’s sensory faculties.

Elizabeth Povinelli’s research, built from the philosophies of her Indigenous Australian colleagues, provides crucial insights into how a proper mode of attentiveness to land can reveal truths. Povinelli’s colleagues, Betty Bilawag and Gracie Binbin, understand truth *not* as a stable absolute, but rather as something which persists under certain circumstances; these thinkers make “a claim about *the relationship between truth and the entanglements of substance*” (Povinelli 77-78 my emphasis). For Bilawag and Binbin, a “truth” is revealed to one who attends purposefully and intentionally to the “arrangement of existence” one finds oneself within (Povinelli 59). These truths *also* require effort to be maintained and to persist *as* true: “Truth was not a set of abstract propositions but a *manner of attentiveness and proper behaviour to the manifestations of a field of intervolved materials*” (Povinelli 79). Recognizing and attending to

the networks that maintain one's way of being is how one discovers the truth about one's own reality and circumstances: "If it was true that the continual reinvolvement of substances would alter [one's milieu], *turning it toward the humans that it was making and being made by*, then the truth would be found in a certain obligated coresponsiveness to each other" (Povinelli 79 my emphasis). The land reveals truths about how an ecosystem is maintained; attending to what has been revealed to one in the above-described fashion enables one's continued existence in the manner that has been thus far facilitated by one's environs.

With the philosophies of Bilawag and Binbin in mind, let us return to *L'espace*. In the following passage, Goulet articulates how a communal "superstition" enables the continued maintenance of ecological conditions:

When a flock of prairie chickens is dancing, the hens seem to lose all touch with their surroundings. You can walk right into their midst. Once in a while a hunter would come along while a dance was in progress and there'd be a slaughter before the birds had time to fly away, *but this didn't happen too often because the old-time Métis, like the Indians, had a taboo against taking advantage of a dance to kill prairie chickens*. It was supposed to be bad luck. Just *superstition*, you might say, *but it was certainly a more effective kind of protection than the conservation laws nowadays*. (31 my emphasis)

What appears as "superstition" reflects a truth about how the lives of Goulet and his community were maintained within the prairie ecosystem. The logic underlying this "taboo" coheres with R. Grace Morgan's explanations of how certain Indigenous rituals and prohibitions bespeak environmental knowledge. Morgan's research sought to understand why certain Woodlands Indigenous groups attended to the colonial marketplace's demands for beaver pelts while Plains Indigenous groups refused to partake in this lucrative opportunity. Morgan notes that, on the

plains, the beaver plays a crucial role in conserving and stabilizing surface water—an important resource for the people and buffalo of the plains (10-11). As a result, “the value of beaver in conserving and maintaining a critical resource (surface water) would have far outweighed its value as food. Supernatural control was invoked [to prevent beaver hunting] through the mechanisms of story, ritual, and ceremony” (11). As such, Morgan argues, these “[r]eligious prohibitions were clearly related to ecological factors” (9). The same could be said for the “superstition” described above: “the old-time Métis, like the Indians,” recognized that a one-time wholesale slaughter of chickens was of less communal benefit than maintaining that population over time.

For Bilawag and Binbin, *how* we persist and *what* we persist *as* are central philosophical concerns. Not attending to these concerns, to the truths revealed during one’s analyses of the milieu that one is situated within, risks losing the conditions that sustain your current mode of being: “the alternative was that the world, as [it is] currently ... *turned away* from your kind of existence and as a result, you turned into another kind of existence. *You become, not what you are not, but what you are in a different arrangement of existence*” (Povinelli 59 my emphasis). These concerns came to the fore for Bilawag and Binbin’s community during the era of Australian colonization, an event which so drastically changed the “arrangement[s] of existence” Bilawag and Binbin’s community had existed within that it constituted an ontological disturbance—one in which new truths, different relationships, and other ways of being emerged (59).

Concerns about *how* we survive and *what* we survive *as* also lie at the heart of *L’espace de Louis Goulet*. The narrative of *L’espace* follows how the changes to Métis life during the era of the buffalo’s extinction cause Goulet to be, not *not* himself, but, to borrow again from Povinelli,

himself “in a different arrangement of existence” (59). Goulet documents how one particular “arrangement of existence” enabled the community of Métis buffalo hunters to come into being. This arrangement included the prairie ecosystem, local knowledge, and traditions derived from First Nations peoples. But this arrangement also included colonization—the fathers of the Métis nation being European settlers and the Métis buffalo hunt itself coming into being as a response to the provisioning demands of European trading companies. Within this arrangement of existence, the hunters attended to their environmental circumstances and the relationships they formed in and with this milieu. This allowed for a particular set of truths to come into being. But as buffalo hunters, these communities *also* attended to the needs of a capitalist, colonial marketplace—needs which exhausted the buffalo population. We can understand this phenomenon as, to again use Povinelli’s parlance, a mutual turning-away-from. As the hunters turned towards market forces to dictate the pace and scale of their hunting, the buffalo, in turn, turned away from the Métis population, dissipating to the point where they no longer provided them with the sustenance that our people had come to rely upon throughout the century.

The pace and scale of Métis buffalo hunting and the extinction event that resulted from it supported the coming-into-being of a new arrangement of existence. As mentioned earlier, this narrative takes place during an era of expanded Anglo-Canadian colonization into the Northwest. With the extinction of the buffalo, the many changes engendered by the expansion of the Canadian state—treaty negotiations, the Indian Act, the reservation system and residential schools, the increasing conversion of Indigenous peoples to Christianity, the agricultural economy—became far more difficult for Indigenous peoples to resist. As Métis scholar Michel Hogue notes, “The unraveling of fur trade economies [due to the extinction of the buffalo] and their replacement by settler economies premised on the taking of land undermined the sources of

Metis power[:] Metis economic power, military might, and cultural connections to neighbours and kin” (230). Within this new space, new truths were produced and attended to. It is with the knowledge of these shifting circumstances and the radical changes they engendered to the reality of Goulet and his community that I interpret Goulet’s ardent embrace of Catholicism at this work’s conclusion.

The Catholic Imaginary

“I prefer to their dogma my excursions into the natural gardens where the voice of the Great Spirit is heard in the twittering of birds, the rippling of mighty waters, and the sweet breathing of flowers. If this is Paganism, then at present, at least, I am a Pagan.”

- Zitkala-Sa “Why I am a Pagan”

Goulet’s narrative ends with him going blind and fervently committing himself to the Catholic faith. I argue that Goulet’s ardent Catholicism at the end of his narrative can be interpreted as a commentary on the modes of being available to Goulet and his community once the conditions that enabled their prior mode of being—as buffalo hunters, traders, and citizens of the “wide open spaces [of the prairies], with every kind of freedom and no restrictions at all” (Charette 27-28)—ceased to exist. In *L’espace de Louis Goulet*, the practice of Catholicism, like oral tradition, serves to mediate a particular relationship between Goulet’s community and the prairie landscape.

It is not quite accurate to state that Goulet converts to Catholicism; he was raised Catholic and his narrative presents the Métis as a Catholic people. Goulet describes the buffalo hunting brigades as spaces in which Catholic rituals *and* the oral story-telling tradition, a tradition which “always [included] a heavy dose of mysticism and superstition, with stories of ghosts,

premonitions and other frightful things like that” co-existed (27, 42). Though the hunt held space for both of these practices, the antagonism between Catholicism and oral tradition is evident in the above-mentioned story of the father and son who refused Catholicism at the moment of their deaths. This refusal, along with the priest’s own refusal to bury the men in “sacred ground,” it is implied, causes them to return as ghosts (Charette 8). As mentioned above, Goulet’s ability to bring the supernatural into his realm of perception is made possible through oral tradition, a practice which, for Goulet, filled “the night ... with baleful shadows and other demons from the land of dreams” (7). In contrast, Father Ritchot’s performance of a Catholic ritual, his claiming of the space *as* Catholic, dispenses with the possibility of encountering the father and son in their ghostly states. Catholicism functions in a similar manner when Goulet and two other Métis, captured by Cree warriors, are told that an old woman in the Cree encampment is “going wendigo” (135). As it is presented in *L’espace*, “going wendigo” refers to someone transforming into a monstrous cannibal (136). A Métis with whom Goulet is travelling, André Nault,^{xxv} is asked to kill the old woman before she turns into a wendigo, because “[t]he best way to get rid of them is to have a Catholic kill them or else load the gun with some kind of holy object”^{xxvi} (136). In both stories, the introduction of Catholicism into the spaces in which they take place alters what is possible within them.

In his re-telling of his near encounter with a wendigo, Goulet expresses that what was possible for him and his community during the era of the buffalo hunt would not be so for the contemporary listeners with whom he shared his story, roughly five decades after the extinction of the buffalo. The story of the wendigo begins with the statement, “[y]ou folks there, you don’t know what a wendigo is, do you? Well listen and you’ll see it’s no joke” (135). Here, Goulet reinscribes himself into the oral tradition through the evocation of living audience. On one hand,

this evocation of oral tradition, “*listen*,” brings his audience into the practice that enabled him to apprehend the supernatural in the first place. On the other hand, Goulet is also *denying* his contemporary listeners their ability to have this same kind of experience: “you don’t know what a wendigo is, do you?” (135). Goulet asserts that his audience, living in a time now far removed from the days of the buffalo hunt, would not be able to have had encountered—to “know”—a wendigo. In this denial, Goulet reminds us that the conditions which made such experiences possible for himself no longer exist.^{xxvii}

Catholic salvation in *L’espace* is predicated on a disconnection from the landscape rather than a greater knowledge or experience of it. This can be observed in the work’s sixth chapter, “Prairie Fire.” This chapter commences with Goulet (still a child) and his family leaving the Red River settlement for the United States^{xxviii} because of the increase in Anglophones from Ontario settling in the Red River: “all of them Orange-men,^{xxix} [who] looked as if their one dream in life was to make war on the Hudson’s Bay Company, the Catholic Church and anyone who spoke French” (59). Goulet and his siblings did not want to leave the settlement, but they are convinced to do so when their father tells them that, should they remain, they would have to attend school: “That clinched it for us. We’d gladly go right now rather than live like White kids and go to school” (59). At this time, formal education in the Northwest was administered by Christian priests and missionaries. This chapter begins, then with Goulet and his family relocating due to colonization and to avoid a Christian, colonial education.

Several miles into their journey, the Métis travelers are made aware of an impending prairie fire by the smell of smoke: “fires would be preceded by a thick cloud of smoke that made breathing difficult—seeing, too, *if it didn’t blind you altogether*” (62 my emphasis). As the smoke overtakes them, the familiar landscape disappears and the travelers are confronted by

waves of panicked and dying animals: “Prairie chickens began flying over very high ... only to fall to the ground ... suffocated ... Deer, antelope, elk, large hares, little prairie dogs, foxes, wolves, *even the buffalo we hadn’t seen since the day we left*, came out of hiding *as if by magic*, all of them fleeing at full speed” (62 my emphasis). Through their knowledge of the prairie ecosystem, the brigade maneuvers into a safer position. From there, they shield themselves from the fire by pre-burning a ring of grass around their encampment (62-64).

The fire overtakes them, and for a brief moment, Goulet and the caravan are surrounded by “a roaring wall of flames nearly a hundred feet high” (64). The animals caught in the flames “sounded like lost souls desperately trying to drown out the echoes of hell” (64). Within this milieu, the Catholic imaginary takes hold—and not only through Goulet’s descriptions of the burning world, the “hell and its howls of the damned” which surround him (65). Within the confines of the caravan, Catholic ritual determines the community’s affective response to this devastated ecology:

One astonishing thing, however: our women and children, the people who normally would be terrified by imminent death hurling itself on them with such a hellish face, *grew calm as if by magic*. I’ve always thought this was caused by the presence in our midst of Fathers Saint-Germain and Lacombe, inspiring us with confidence ... *Both priests had made the people in the caravan promise three days of fasting and communion*, assuring them that no harm would come to any of them. Is that what did it? Anyway, the priests’ encouragement seemed to have driven away all fear, and when the whirlwind of fire passed above our heads it was over so quickly nobody had time to think about what had happened. In the space of less than one minute, the burst of flame engulfed us, and the next minute it was gone. Not a single person had so much as a scratch. (64 my emphasis)

When “imminent death hurl[ed] itself on them with such a hellish face,” the Métis families, by virtue of Catholic ritual, confronted this hellscape with an unwavering calm. This serenity amongst the Métis families is so at odds with the environmental devastation that surrounded them. This is true especially when their response is contrasted with that of the fleeing, dying animals who were outside of their encampment and “the panic among the harnessed animals” who were with the brigade (65). In this contrast, we notice how Catholic ritual prevents these families from being *of* the prairies, in that there is a marked distinction between these Catholics and the panicked animality that characterizes all other life in the landscape. Blinded by smoke and hemmed in by an environment that has turned hostile and inhospitable, the families find refuge in Catholic ritual and prayer, one which grants them an affective distance from their environment.

The chapter concludes with Goulet and his siblings being enrolled in Catholic school—the very fate they had tried to avoid by leaving the Red River settlement. After discovering that the prairie fire had destroyed the buffalo grazing territory at their destination in the United States, they headed north to Fort Layusse in Alberta, as a large herd of buffalo had been spotted there. This was good news for the Métis, but it was “great news for the missionaries who were always looking for ways of coaxing the Catholic Métis back into Canadian territory”^{xxx} (65). The Goulets end up settling in St. Albert for the winter, a locale he describes as being “in the bush” and “a kind of paradise on earth,” whose woods “were swarming with rabbits and partridge” (67). Unfortunately for him, Goulet is unable to fully enjoy these paradisiacal woodlands as he is forced to attend school at the St. Albert Mission “about three miles away” because, according to his mother, “there was no reason for missing school ... while we were here in the woodlands” (67). Goulet introduces this devastating news by paraphrasing those same Catholic missionaries

who “often told us, perfect happiness is not on this earth” (67). This statement, understood as Catholic doctrine, is a reference to the promise of the afterlife of heaven: the only space in which something like a “perfect happiness” can be enjoyed. Through an ironic use of this phrase, “perfect happiness is not on this earth,” Goulet uses the words of the preachers to frame them and their religion as the means through which a certain *kind* of “paradise” and “perfect happiness” is lost.

The chapter on the prairie fire presents us with two episodes in which, through Catholicism, Goulet and his family are extricated from their material circumstances. When their environment is rendered inhospitable, the Catholic imaginary takes hold—the prairie fire becomes hell-fire, animals become “the damned” (65). In this space, coloured by a Catholic imaginary, an extrication from their circumstances through Catholic ritual—even if only on an affective level—is welcomed, and more importantly, willingly participated in. However, Catholicism is far less welcomed by Goulet after he and his family return to “the bush” (67). In this space—a “paradise” characterized by an ecosystem which enables them to live off the land—Goulet seemingly has no need for whatever Catholicism is offering him. Despite this, he finds himself extricated from these circumstances and forced into the missionary school. In both cases, Catholicism is aligned with a distance from the prairie ecosystem—whether this distance is welcomed or not depends on how hospitable that system is for Goulet in each instance.

A short passage in which Catholic prayer is framed as effecting an extinction event furthers the association between Catholicism and distance from the prairie ecosystem. Writing on the now extinct passenger pigeon, Goulet notes that this species was once thought to be a threat to the Red River settlement’s nascent agricultural industry:

they became so numerous in my time that people started to get worried about it, for some reason. Anyway, [the Métis community at the Red River Settlement] *remembered how the missionaries used to conjure things away* and they begged Bishop Taché to chase the passenger pigeons off *the same as he'd done for the grasshoppers*^{xxxii} or so they said.

Bishop Taché was quite willing to humour the people. I can't say whether his prayer was the cause or not, but the passenger pigeons disappeared in the space of less than three years. In the autumn of 1878 they flew south to warmer climes, as usual, but they didn't come back the following spring. (35 my emphasis)

Goulet does not so firmly make the causal link here between Bishop Taché's prayer and the extinction of the passenger pigeon as he does with the Métis' adoption of a spring hunt and the extinction of the buffalo^{xxxiii} (50 Charette). He does, however, explain this phenomenon through the Catholic imaginary, noting how an extinction event becomes understood through Catholic ritual. Here, too, we see how what could be understood as superstition is subtended by a factual association between Catholicism and agriculture, the church having been, as I will go into further detail below, a major proponent of the agricultural economy. This superstition, too, is informed by a knowledge of the deleterious environmental effects caused by the economic activity that the church helped usher into the Northwest.

The relationship between Catholicism and agriculture is well documented, both in *L'espace de Louis Goulet* and in the historical record. It is true that *L'espace* and other works derived from the oral testimonies of Métis buffalo hunters, such as Marcien Ferland's *Au Temps de la Prairie*, highlight the important role that priests played in the buffalo hunt (Ferland 110-111). However, despite their participation in these hunting parties, Catholic emissaries generally tried to turn the Métis population away from buffalo hunting and instead towards agriculture. Regarding this,

Goulet states: “People knew the prairie soil was very rich, capable of feeding the larger population who would share it sooner or later. That was what the missionaries (*most of whom preached farming as much as the gospel*) were always predicting” (15 my emphasis). Chantal Fiola’s research grants us insight into the efforts undertaken by Christian missionaries and priests to promote agriculture. As Fiola notes, the first missionaries arrived after 1816, when many Métis^{xxxiii} people were already making their living hunting buffalo. Fiola argues that the mobile, buffalo hunting Métis families—as opposed to the sedentary Métis families who took up farming within the Red River settlement—were quite resistant to Christianity, often frustrating the priests through their continued participation in Indigenous spiritual ceremonies (22-45). The buffalo hunting Métis population also frustrated the priests because of their resistance to agriculture, drawing condemnation from these priests for “their refusal to exchange their semi-nomadic lifestyle[s] for ... agrarian one[s]” (Fiola 39). Rather than accepting a Christian faith, many of these hunters, at least initially, “openly mock[ed]” the priests and their rituals (Fiola 39).

There is an irony in the priests’ attempts to dissuade the Métis from hunting buffalo in order to embrace agriculture. For the extinction of the buffalo—effected through market hunting—proved to be necessary for the establishment of agriculture in the Northwest. As Goulet recognized, “[t]he great hunts were disappearing to make way for grain farming” (13). Because agriculture is predicated on the ownership of large portions of land, the imposition of the agricultural economy “includ[ed] not only the displacement of Indigenous people and the expropriation of their lands but also the transformation of complex ecosystems to the comparative homogeneity of agricultural landscapes dominated by domesticated animals” (Barnard 383). Taken together, agriculture, extinction, and Christianity all worked towards the displacement and segregation of plains Indigenous peoples while also transforming the

ecosystem itself, necessarily upsetting and altering the relations between beings within that space.

Two Forms of Salvation

Goulet credits two different spiritual practices with saving him during his narrative: Indigenous medicine and Roman Catholicism. In each instance, there is connection between these practices and both the prairie landscape and the faculty of sight.

Goulet's return to Catholicism—a faith whose practice he had lapsed in as an adult—begins after his above-mentioned capture by Cree warriors in 1885, the same Cree with whom he encountered an elderly woman “going wendigo” (135). During his time as a prisoner of the Cree, Goulet and two other Métis prisoners, André Nault and William Gladu, are brought to the settlement of Frog Lake, which the Cree warriors then raided. The attack on this settlement was, at least partly, in response to the intentional starvation of the Cree people by John A. Macdonald and his Conservative government (Dashuck *Clearing the Plains*). In his depiction of this raid, Goulet makes use of the Catholic imagery to describe the Cree warriors, stating that their “fiendish look reminded me of demons fit for hell-fire” (122). Amidst the violence, Gouin tells Goulet that he is not afraid, as he had just confessed to Father Marchand (the priest at Frog Lake) and so “he didn’t care what happened to him” (122). Upon hearing this, Goulet immediately felt that *he too* should have confessed, a thought that he admits to be “unusual ... and annoying” (122). Despite this initial apprehension, Goulet finds himself turning towards Catholicism during the attack on Frog Lake. Amidst the violence happening around him and after feeling a sharp sense of guilt over the death of a man whom he believed he could have saved, Goulet states, “Once again I had the feeling I was all alone in a horrible nightmare” echoing his sentiments

during the prairie fire, an event he had also referred to as a “terrible nightmare” (126, 63).

Following this, Goulet states “I kept having visions of my childhood and I caught myself thinking: ‘If I get out of here alive, I’m gonna take up my religion again.’ I thought I saw the face of Marguerite Bourbon smiling sadly at me through the mists. ‘She’s praying for me!’ I said to myself” (126). Details about Marguerite Bourbon in this work are quite vague.^{xxxiv} What the reader is told about Bourbon is that Goulet loved her *and* that she was devoutly Catholic. Goulet’s commitment to Catholicism here is an important first step he takes back to this religion of his youth, and it is worth noting that this occurs in a moment of violence, confusion, and the upending of an established order.

Even after this commitment, there are moments where Goulet’s faith is shaken and his adherence to Catholicism is thrown into doubt. Once the dust has settled, Goulet, Gladu, and an unnamed Cree man are picking up the bodies of the dead and bringing them into the church basement. While picking up the body of Father Marchand, Goulet notices that “[t]he bullets had ripped his skull open. When we lifted him his head fell back and his brains ran into one of my boots. That little picture stuck in my mind for a long time and even today it gives me a turn just to think about it” (127). The final sentence in this passage differs slightly from the French version of the text, which is written “J’ai eu cela *devant mes yeux pendant longtemps* et, même encore aujourd’hui je ne suis pas le même chaque fois que j’y pense” (*L’espace* 154 my emphasis). In the context of this reading, these slight changes are important, as the original French translates more literally to *I had that* [the image described in the previous sentences] *in front of my eyes for a long time, and even today I am not the same each time I think about it.*^{xxxv} In a narrative that aligns sight with the capacity to apprehend the truth, that the image of the priest’s brains falling into Goulet’s boots overlays his sight—it *stayed in front of my eyes for a*

long time—is important to highlight. The representative of Catholic salvation in this scene—the very priest whom Gouin had confessed to—is unable to survive the circumstances Goulet now finds himself in. This is followed by the Cree warriors, several days later and on Easter Sunday, burning down the church itself (130). Goulet’s recommitment to Catholicism is followed by a recognition of Catholicism’s inability to exert an influence in this space and in these circumstances.

These images of Catholicism being overcome by a people who are resisting—among many other things—the church’s attempts to convert *them*, are matched by a consistent association between whiteness and an inability to see and blend into the landscape. A certain white prisoner is depicted as *unable* to escape the Cree encampment because of his whiteness: “Taking all the precautions a White man *was capable of* so as not to be seen, he still let his head show just a little over the bank” (134 my emphasis). Later, after Goulet and the other Métis prisoners have escaped the Cree camp, they are able to avoid the Canadian soldiers precisely because those soldiers, being white, are unable to *see* properly in this landscape: “we noticed a big army encampment, just in time to get out of the range of vision of patrols and sentries. We’d have been goners if they hadn’t been White men!” (146). This inability to navigate the landscape proves to be fatal for a policeman named Cowan who had tried sneak past the Cree encampment and was killed during his efforts to do so:

the Indians had opened up Cowan’s chest and torn out his heart. Seeing us, Gladu and me, they burst out laughing and one of them said to me: “Take a look at this. An Indian can eat the heart of a White man, but a White man can’t eat an Indian’s.” Faced with that custom, I couldn’t help saying, “You’re absolutely right.” (133)

In a shocking image that combines death and vitality—the eating of a heart—the narrator dramatizes the distance between what is possible *in this space* as a white man, a settler, and a stranger, versus what is thinkable and doable as a native inhabitant of this place. As the institutions and representatives of settler colonialism—the church, the trading posts, the police—are overtaken, whiteness and Catholicism are figured as powerless in their ability to respond to these new circumstances.

After they escape the Cree encampment, Goulet turns to Indigenous spirituality to save himself and the other Métis. After stealing away during the night, the trio attempts to navigate their way back to Battleford through dense forest terrain in order to evade detection by either the Cree or the Canadian forces who were at that moment battling the Métis gathered at Batoche. While in this territory, Goulet credits his practice of Indigenous medicine with granting him the ability to navigate and survive in this environment:

In my travels among the Indian tribes in Alberta, Montana and elsewhere I'd spent some time with various medicine men thinking that I might one day want to take up the art of Indian medicine. I'd learned the rudiments and each night I would try to put myself in touch with the spirits of the night so I could learn what the next day would bring. I was *able to foresee* a good part of the road I had to cover and anticipate the dangers waiting for me. *Thanks to that foresight more than my knowledge of the country*, I could adjust our bearings every time I risked taking a peek out of the forest that hid us for almost the full length of our journey. (145-146 my emphasis)

This interest in Indigenous medicine is inculcated in Goulet by oral tradition—a tradition which he states had “turned my wandering steps in the direction of Indian mysticism and opened the

door to secrets of the medicine man” (7 Charette). The point, I believe, is not to conflate these two traditions or practices, but rather to note how, as a storyteller, Goulet connects both of them to a *mode of being* in the prairie landscape. Through his practice of Indigenous medicine,^{xxxvi} Goulet navigates the terrain, saving himself and his companions.

After 1885, the Métis people found themselves in radically different circumstances than those of only a few years before. Not only had the Northwest Resistance ended with the defeat of the Métis forces and the public execution of the Métis leader Louis Riel, but by this time, the buffalo were all but gone from the prairies. Taken together, these circumstances (along with an increase in Anglo-Canadian settlement) left the Métis in a situation of political and economic marginalization that lasted well into the twentieth century (Gerhard and Ens 239-359). Reder notes how the writings of ardently Christian First Nations writers such as George Copway (Ojibwe) and James Settee (Cree) were likewise born from periods of great upheaval. Pushing back against the commonplace interpretations of these writers as having “reject[ed] [their First Nations] culture as [they] embraced literacy and Christianity” (35), Reder instead argues that these men were:

living in a near-apocalyptic moment; previous Indigenous economic and governance systems were undermined by the encroachment of settlers and the usurpation of land. Food systems were failing. People were traumatized at a time when alcohol was being used as a trade good and being pressed upon Indigenous people. *There was no way for Settee or other Cree people to choose ‘traditional heritage’ that is separate from the invasion of the colonizers and separate from the economic and ecological destruction.*

Settee did not choose between traditional Cree ways of living and European Christianized ways; instead, he rejected the toxicity of despair to find a way to continue. (35)

Goulet, too, lived “in a near-apocalyptic moment” for his people. His conversion to Catholicism likewise needs to be understood through the “economic and ecological destruction” that had taken place during his lifetime.

Goulet’s return to Catholicism begins while working as a ranch hand in Pincher Creek, Alberta. Here, Goulet labours in the very industry that had answered the market demand for red meat and leather after the ending of the buffalo hunts a few years prior (Barnard “The Bison and the Cow: Food, Empire, Extinction”). While at work, Goulet notices that he has lost sight in his right eye. After visiting a doctor, he is informed that he will be losing sight in his left eye shortly. Following this, Goulet contemplates suicide when, “[s]uddenly, the thought of my mother came to mind and with it ... a memory of Margeurite Bourbon’s face, smiling sadly” (164). Enticed again by this vision of these two devoutly Catholic women, Goulet seeks out Father Lacombe, a famous missionary priest known for converting many plains Indigenous peoples Catholicism. After spending ten days with Lacombe, throughout which Goulet confesses “all the details of my vagabond life” (165), Goulet is absolved by Lacombe for straying from his Catholic faith. About this experience, he states:

Oh! what I wouldn’t give to be able to describe for you what was happening inside me. If I’d had to make a quick choice then between having a cure for my impending blindness and feeling the emotions sweeping me away at that moment, I’m sure I would have chosen the latter. *How true is it that happiness is a state of mind, not body.* (165 my emphasis)

In the midst of ecological devastation, Goulet turns to Catholicism. This faith allows him to experience “happiness” in a manner completely detached from the material world, “a state of mind, not body.” Salvation, here, entails a separation from his material circumstances—a marked contrast to the salvation provided by Indigenous medicine, which allows him to integrate himself more fully into the ecosystem.

This salvation through Catholicism reflects the modes of being available to Goulet within the post-extinction arrangement of existence in the Northwest. Facilitated by Father Albert Lacombe, Goulet’s Catholic salvation occurs in circumstances—political, ecological, and economic—that marked a major shift in the *kind* of life now available to Goulet and his community. With the ending of the buffalo hunt, the land-based, prairie lifestyle of the nomadic Métis hunters likewise disappears. Within this new arrangement of existence, the truth of Catholicism emerges most forcefully for Goulet.

Like other truths in *L’espace*, the truth of Catholicism is affirmed by Goulet through sight: “It was a priest who made me see the light, with the help of *God who took away the use of my eyes so I could see clearly!*” (167 my emphasis). Understood as a literary device, as Ellenwood points out, Goulet’s blindness dramatizes the impact that the near extinction of the buffalo had on him and his community (“Translator’s Afterword” 170). Goulet’s statement, “God ... took away the use of my eyes so I could see clearly,” also shows us what *had* to be lost in order for him to accept Catholicism. What had been previously apprehended and asserted *as truth* through sight—the myths, legends, ghosts, and other fantastic and supernatural denizens of the Northwest—are for Goulet, in his blindness, extinguished, so that he can “see clearly.”

Extinction Aesthetics

For this final section on the Goulet chapter, I want to turn our attention towards what I will call this work's extinction aesthetic. Through moments in which the text collapses becoming and undoing, emergence and dissolution, through its formal, thematic, and descriptive properties, *L'espace de Louis Goulet* communicates, aesthetically, the central contradiction of the Métis buffalo hunt. For the hunt was not solely a vehicle for meaning, identity, and self-sustenance (though it was certainly that as well), but it was also a site of conflict, non-identity, and communal dissolution due to the extinction event it effected. This extinction aesthetic communicates Goulet's experience of living through extinction and the disorienting, self-conflicted positionality that such an experience produces.

We can return to this work's composition. At the outset of this chapter, I noted how the narrative of *L'espace* begins within the Métis oral tradition. As a practitioner of that tradition, Louis Goulet shared his story with Charette, whose own compositions of Goulet's narrative were discovered, edited and published by Pelletier. No date is assigned to either of Charette's drafts held in his archives and there are no notes from his encounter with Goulet. What appears to be the earliest of his drafts corresponds to a series of twenty-two newspaper articles published in 1949, roughly fifteen years after Goulet had shared his narrative with Charette (Ellenwood "Voices" 108). The most significant difference between Charette's drafts is on the level of diction. As Ellenwood has noted, the language between the two archival drafts differs in that one is written in more colloquial and another in more literary prose ("Voices" 111). This clearly conflicts with Charette's statement in the work's introduction that *L'espace* is written "just as it came from the lips of [Louis Goulet]" (ix). In editing this work, Pelletier negotiated between the stylistic registers of the two drafts, removed some of the racist language, and edited out roughly

thirty pages of what he had recognized as a speech *of* Charette's—presented *in* and *as* the voice of Louis Goulet—regarding the Red River Resistance movements (Ellenwood “Voices” 111). Though Pelletier edited this out of the published work, one has to imagine that there are other passages in this work that are distinctly *more* Charette than Goulet.

This is not to say that historical Louis Goulet is absent from the work. Regarding the genre of “told-to” narratives in which an Indigenous person tells their life-story to an author who then writes and publishes it, Sophie McCall argues that these texts should be understood as collaborations: “Power relationships are volatile and shifting, influencing cross-cultural negotiation in unpredictable ways. The relations of authority in the told-to narrative are open to alteration, recombination, and transformation” (8). I agree with McCall and feel that one must understand the narrative voice of this work, “Louis Goulet,” as one in which multiple voices and perspectives speak through.

Ultimately, with the publication of works like *L'espace de Louis Goulet* and *The Last Buffalo Hunter*, the speaker's full control over the narrative has been relinquished. This loss of control is formalized in the textual medium of the narrative itself. As *a material text*, rather than an orally delivered narrative, Goulet's story becomes detached from his speaking person, the relationships between himself and his community that oral tradition presupposes, and even the landscape within which it was derived and that so significantly shaped it. In this way, extinction itself, as a force which ruptured Goulet's community, inheres in the material medium through which we today apprehend Goulet's story. Goulet's experience of and his community's relationship to this extinction event can be found in the manifold conflicts and contradictions that are refracted through *L'espace de Louis Goulet*. These conflicts and contradictions are given aesthetic form during some of the sequences I will describe below: the structural enfolding of the buffalo hunt

within the extinction event it perpetuated; the *jouissance* at the consumption of extinct birds; and Goulet's relationship to his Catholic faith.

The most oft-cited chapter in *L'espace de Louis Goulet* is chapter two, the one which Goulet describes the buffalo-hunt. This chapter has provided much valuable information to historians studying the buffalo hunt, but so far little (if any) attention has been paid to the aesthetic arrangement of this section. Importantly, Goulet foregrounds the buffalo's extinction and the ending of the hunt *prior to* describing the hunt itself: "For the past couple of years *the buffalo had been nothing but a memory of days gone by ... The great hunts were disappearing to make way for grain farming*" (13 my emphasis). The ending of the buffalo-hunt due to extinction is emphasized again, two pages later, prior to Goulet's descriptions of both the buffalo^{xxxvii} (19-20) and the hunt itself (20-27): "We had just seen proof that the old-timers were wrong in thinking that the immense herds could never be wiped out, and we know that *from now on the age of the great hunt was over*" (15 my emphasis). Following these passages, Goulet describes the hunt in romantic and nostalgic tones. He begins by stating that he and his family would "travel at the speed of an ox towards the setting sun through the vast, fragrant air of the endless plain, stopping only for meals and to camp at night in tents or under the stars" (16). The narrator conceptualizes the hunt as an event around which the Métis community came together. He describes the logistical aspects of this activity, the way families coordinated and co-operated with one another throughout the hunt, as well as the religious and cultural practices the community participated in (20-27). As Hogue notes, the buffalo hunt and oral tradition worked together to provide "a source of community cohesion and an expression of Plains Metis culture" (38). However, in foregrounding extinction and the end of the hunt prior to his romantic descriptions of the buffalo brigades, Goulet colours his descriptions of the hunt and the community realized through it with

a knowledge of the dissolution of the hunting community and the extinction event effected through the hunting of buffalo.

Chapter two also closes with a lamentation on the loss of the buffalo hunt. As such, the form of the narrative brackets the buffalo-hunt in between forceful reminders of the extinction event it effected:

We in the very youngest generation had no idea that this happy existence, full of wide open spaces, with every kind of freedom and no restrictions at all, was passing like childhood, like an adolescence full of beautiful promises, fading away in the space of a night. (27-28)

In bracketing his descriptions of the buffalo hunt between passages evoking its ending through extinction, Goulet presents the hunt as *internal to* the extinction event that caused its undoing. Through form, the community-making activity of the hunt is rendered inextricable from the extinction event that it both caused and that forced its eventual dissolution. Eschewing a temporally linear depiction of the hunt emerging and then disappearing, *L'espace de Louis Goulet* instead entwines emergence and disappearance, asking that we think about these apparently contradictory concepts as occurring through one another.

L'espace's extinction aesthetic is also noticeable in Goulet's descriptions of four extinct or near-extinct birds that he hunted and consumed as a child: the passenger pigeon, the woodcock, the yellow crane, and the great white or whooping crane. Goulet laments the extinctions and near-extinctions of these birds, but he also does not extricate himself and his community from their consumption. After noting how the passenger pigeon went extinct "suddenly, tragically even, leaving no trace" (33), Goulet recounts how, as a child, he and other kids from his community would hunt them: "You should have seen how those youngsters would *rush to*

crunch the birds' heads in their teeth! ... We ate huge quantities of them" (35). Beyond acknowledging the consumption of this now extinct species of bird, Goulet depicts this consumption as *pleasurable*—the crunching of the passenger pigeon's skulls between one's teeth being an activity that children "would rush to" (35). The connection between extinction and enjoyment is extended to Goulet's consumption of the woodcock, a bird, "on the edge of decline," that "was prized for its *delicate-tasting* flesh" (37 my emphasis). This phrase registers the precarity of the woodcock—"its *delicate-tasting* flesh"—while framing that precarity as an aesthetic pleasure. In the original French, this precarity serves as a lure for the woodcock's hunters: "on *la recherchait pour la saveur de sa chair délicate*" (*L'espace* 55 my emphasis). The literal translation of this phrase being "we pursued it (or sought it out) for the taste of its delicate flesh." The layering of loss and pleasure—what, in Lacanian psychoanalysis would be termed *jouissance*—permeates Goulet's descriptions of these extinct or near-extinct birds. Though the activities of hunting and consumption sustain life, Goulet's descriptions of these activities here are also very much informed by death, the erasure of life through extinction, and a tacit acknowledgement of his community's sustenance and expansion *through* extinction events.

L'espace also figures its central character, Louis Goulet, as a site in which irresolvable contradictions collide. The conflicted character of Goulet is most readily observable in the following passage. After having amassed a considerable sum of money during his work as a scout for the U.S. Army, Goulet considers taking up land and becoming a farmer:

I thought about the advice Father Ritchot gave us ... and I had a notion to pick out a section of good land and turn myself into a farmer. *I should have done it, that's for sure.* I'd be rich today and *maybe I even wouldn't have lost my eyesight*, who knows? On the other hand, *I might never have gone back to the religion of my childhood which I had*

abandoned, alas, in my low-life days among pagans and all sorts of people. It's even possible I might have gone back to the ways of my Indian ancestors because at one time I fancied taking a Sioux woman for [my] wife. (99 my emphasis)

Though hints of a racist disposition toward First Nations people are evident in this passage, the presentation of indigeneity as a lower form of existence is far more evident in Charette's drafts held in the archives at the Société Historique de Saint Boniface. In one of the archival versions of this work, the narrator states—regarding his Catholicism—that he had “l’abandonnée dans mes galvaudages au milieu des pains [*sic*] et de toutes sortes de gens,” and, following this, the final sentence of the above-quoted passage appears thusly: “Il est même possible que j’aurais retourné à la sauvagerie car j’eus un moment aussi la velléité de prendre une femme souise” (MS 1/13/409). The phrase “galvaudages au milieu des pains [*sic*]” was translated to “low-life days among the pagans.” This is an accurate translation; the term “lowlife” denotes a more base, less dignified mode of living. However, the term “lowlife” fails to capture the sense of *degradation* and *deterioration*—the *active decline* from a “regular” life to that of a “low-life”—that is associated with the word *galvaudages*. The final sentence of the archival draft is more literally translated to: “It is even possible that I might have returned to savagery.” What this draft forcefully conveys is a decidedly racist opposition between indigeneity as a baser form of existence and Christianity as an elevated, more “human” mode of being.

The purpose of mentioning these changes is to highlight the conflicts and contradictions of this passage. For this racist conception of First Nations peoples is also coupled with Goulet's statement evincing a clear sense of regret in having *not chosen* to live such a lifestyle: “I should have done it, that's for sure” (99). It is worth noting that Goulet makes this statement *as a* Catholic, and as one who, as we have seen from the above-quoted sections regarding his return to

this faith, is adamant about his commitment to Catholicism: “God ... took away the use of my eyes so I could see clearly!” (167). This conflict is heightened when we consider how it opposes Catholicism *to* agriculture, noting that had he taken up farming, “I might have returned to savagery.” Reminding us how strange this opposition is, the narrator opens this paragraph by mentioning how it was Father Ritchot who encouraged Goulet to take up farming in the first place.

It is the above block-quoted passage from *L'espace* that has most frustrated my attempts to analyze and explicate this fascinating text. I was speaking about the difficulty of presenting a coherent analysis of this work while still acknowledging its manifold contradictions with two of my friends and colleagues: Mylène Gamache and Sarah Hourie. Both thinkers (Métis scholars *par excellence*!) were quite insistent on taking an approach to this work that does not attempt to “master” it through a definitive analysis. This conversation with Mylène and Sarah made me recall the work of queer theorist Jean-Paul Ricco, specifically his writings on Leo Bersani, incongruity, and the aesthetic, wherein he states that “sense operates via the incongruous: things in the world and our sense of them are not divided from the world but are immanent to it, yet in ways that are not congruous (mastered and known) but incongruous (received and sensed)” (160). An analysis which receives and senses this work, as opposed to mastering and knowing it, is one in which we dwell within the contradictory space that Goulet opens up in this passage.

Mylène and Sarah’s^{xxxviii} insistence upon non-mastery resonates with discourses considering the position of the human during ecological catastrophe. As Julietta Singh argues, “moment[s]^{xxxix} in which human-induced ecological catastrophe [are] both in effect and immanent ... and species extinctions have become normative expectations” are moments when “human practices of mastery fold over onto themselves and collapse” (19). It is ironic, then, that

a dominant response to climate change has been what Neyrat has called “Geoconstructivism,” a movement that seeks to use technology to “reconstruct the climate, reconstruct everything in an anthropic way” (49). This solution, Neyrat notes, “privleg[es] technologies that consider nature as nonexistent,” bolstered by a philosophical outlook that “posit[s] [nature] as a ‘nonbeing’ and incapable of disturbing the anthropogenic modification of environments in any way whatsoever” (4). During a moment in which our own limitations in controlling the environment are exposed, one major response—at least from those who, as Neyrat points out, stand to benefit financially from the construction of these new technologies (6-9)—appears to be to turn away from nature, from what challenges human mastery, and to turn instead towards an expanding technological apparatus that supports the illusions of our own control.

These discourses on mastery and on the ontology of nature (as a being or a non-being) return us to the epistemological claims made earlier on in this chapter. Beyond the afore-cited philosophies of Bilawag and Binbin (via Povinelli), another oft-cited concept within critical Indigenous theory that seeks to address the problems raised by climate crises (or at least, the modes of being that cause these crises to arise) is that of “*grounded normativity*,” which Glen Sean Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene) explicates as a philosophy for ways of living “deeply informed by what the land *as a system of reciprocal relations and obligations* can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in non-dominant and nonexploitative terms” (13 emphasis in original). Anishinaabe Elder Dedibaayaanimanook Sarah Keesick Olsen likewise advocates for turning towards the land as a means of experiencing what she calls “truth:”

the land underpins Anishinaabe understanding ... *the land and its constituent parts set the standard for the highest order of truth*, not humans. Ultimately, the profoundest and *most*

encompassing of truths reveal themselves to those who live in a balanced relationship with the natural world.^{x1} (cited in Agger 14 my emphasis)

This focus on land as a site which is productive of knowledge, and especially of “truth,” should make us reconsider the ecological circumstances that Goulet’s narrative was composed within. For if truth exists in relation to the land, then what becomes of the truth during an extinction event? If one’s milieu is a devastated ecology, perhaps the truth *cannot* exist as a “most encompassing” totality (Olsen cited in Agger 14). For those in Goulet and Welsh’s situation, perhaps truths can only exist as fleeting, fractious, and conflicted impressions. Considering this, we might understand the above block-quoted passage from *L’espace* as one of the most “truthful” in the work: rather than leading us towards greater knowledge, it instead presents conflict without resolution and a site where meaning fails. Instead of finding the transcendental subject (realized either ecologically or through Catholicism), the reader is confronted only with the dizzying abyss of a subjectivity set against itself.

Chapter 2

Figures of Indigeneity in *The Last Buffalo Hunter*

Reading *The Last Buffalo Hunter* as a literary and aesthetic text, rather than as a “history,” allows us to analyze how the text engages with both the genre of Western autobiography and the act of representation (of self and others) more broadly. *The Last Buffalo Hunter* is another told-to autobiography. The speaker of this work, Norbert Welsh, much like Louis Goulet, was also emerged in the oral tradition of his community. However, like with *L’espace de Louis Goulet*, the writing and editing process of *The Last Buffalo Hunter* was long and intensive. The writer of the work, Mary Weekes—a settler journalist and creative writer—would work with material derived from her interviews with Welsh for nearly a decade as she wrote and re-wrote the manuscript that would eventually be published as *The Last Buffalo Hunter* (Waiser vii). Though Weekes claims the story is told in Welsh’s “own words,” these words, at the very least, required significant effort on the part of Weekes to craft into a coherent narrative (x). Welsh, at the age of eighty-seven, told his story to Weekes over “months,” in what proved to be a rather arduous process as “Welsh often drifted off to sleep during their sessions, and sometimes lost his train of thought and fell helplessly silent” (Waiser vi). Unfortunately, these recordings do not exist in Weekes’ archives held at the Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan and are not known by Weekes’ archivist to be available elsewhere (Martin). What we do know is that Welsh’s story was first published serially in *Maclean’s* magazine in 1933, then worked on by Weekes through a number of creative writing seminars held at Harvard University, then turned into a “a twelve-part radio dramatization” which aired on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in 1937, before being finally published in 1938 as *The Last Buffalo Hunter* (Waiser vii). In giving shape to Welsh’s memories, one can observe how Weekes was informed by the generic expectations and conventions of the Western

autobiography. Though these expectations and conventions are adhered to, *The Last Buffalo Hunter* also subverts and pushes back against them in effective and inventive ways.

Lisa Lowe describes autobiography as “the liberal genre par excellence” because it gives “aesthetic form” to the narrative of the individual subject developing themselves through institutions such as the church and the state, and through their commercial ventures (46, 47). Though Welsh actively supports the Catholic Church and the Canadian state in this work, the narrative of *The Last Buffalo Hunter* adheres to these generic conventions most recognizably in that Welsh’s journey towards self-realization is effected primarily through his pursuit of capital. Lowe notes that authors such as Benjamin Franklin and Olaudah Equiano use the autobiography to demonstrate the achievement of personal—and, by extension, collective—freedom through commerce (43-71). Equiano, being a former slave, uses his economic pursuits to ascend to Subject-hood, as he goes from being “mere property” to an autonomous liberal subject through the literal purchasing his own freedom^{xli} (Lowe 47). Initially, Welsh’s narrative appears poised to follow a similar arc: the story begins with Welsh’s first job, and it details the various economic pursuits he undertakes until his blindness prevents him from continuing to work. In contrast to the typical narrative trajectory of self-development, which Lowe argues characterizes the autobiography form, in *The Last Buffalo Hunter*, one witnesses a breakdown of Welsh and his community *through* the pursuit of profit. As the expanding network of exchange that Welsh participates in ultimately depletes the buffalo herds that it is initially predicated on, the collapse of the buffalo hunting economy is figured through the character of Welsh, whose narrative concludes with him going blind and bankrupt: “I lost my eyesight in 1916. If I had my eyesight I could still make money. Instead, I am obliged to sit here and review in my mind the passing of the old West” (Weekes 174). Welsh’s narrative ends, then, with his inability to meaningfully

participate in the settler economic system. The irony of this ending is that this very economic system—predicated on agriculture, a national railway, and a transnational system of trade—was only made possible, as noted in chapter one, by the extinction of the buffalo through market hunting and trading—the very ventures that made Welsh a wealthy man before his economic collapse.

Informed by the life of Norbert Welsh, *The Last Buffalo Hunter* is also very much a narrative of capital in the Northwest. The first section of this chapter examines how Welsh's individuality becomes subordinated to his economic activities in this work, rather than realized through them. As such, the character of Norbert Welsh in this narrative comes to stand in more as a figure for market demands and capitalist logic, rather than as a character that represents a particular individual. On the first page of the work, Welsh, aged eight, describes getting his first job, that of weeding his neighbour's garden: "Harvin paid me coppers—six ... The second week, I got six cents again" (2). This sentence marks the beginning of a major through line of the work, which is a minute indexing of Welsh's financial transactions. Throughout the entirety of his narrative, Welsh will keep an ongoing tabulation of his profits and losses—often remembered to the dollar amount—as he pursues buffalo herds, trading opportunities, and other economic ventures throughout the prairies. Here, one can again contrast Welsh with Equiano, about whom Lowe argues that "the autobiographer marks his humanity sentimentally in expressions of interiority and feeling ... and economically by his industry as a merchant marine" (47). In *The Last Buffalo Hunter*, Welsh's humanity is almost solely marked economically; the narrator's "interiority and feeling" remaining almost completely absent from the text. In the place of a self-reflexive interiority that might otherwise mark character development through the changing of values, ideas, and conceptions of self and others, the narrator of *The Last Buffalo Hunter* instead

presents us with a running calculation of gains and losses. The lack of self-reflexive interiority on the part of Welsh asks that one consider him through his actions alone, and these actions are primarily motivated by the pursuit of profit. It is his work, in other words, that brings Welsh from one location to another and that drives forward the plot of his narrative. While commerce brings Equiano out of object-hood and into liberal, individual, subject-hood, what occurs in Welsh's autobiography is more akin to a conforming of the individual *to* the logic and demands of market capitalism. As a result, Welsh becomes more of a figure than a character, one through whom the flows of capital and trade extend across the prairies. As a figure, Welsh comes to enact and embody the economic contradictions of the Métis buffalo hunt.

The second and third parts of this chapter are critical analyses of the First Nations peoples depicted in this text. In these sections, I argue that the text creates contradictory figures of the Indian, one of which is characterized by an excessive, brutal violence, and another one presented as a passive, pliant, potential citizen of the Canadian state. Thinking with Indigenous Critical Theorist Jodi Byrd (Chickasaw), I will examine how settler colonial discourse creates specific figures of the Indian that are then used to support and justify the project of colonization. Rather than naturalizing these representations *as* "history," I aim to demonstrate the ideological work that such figures perform for the settler-colonial imaginary. Analyzed critically, and with an eye towards the literary devices it makes use of, *The Last Buffalo Hunter* reveals the artifice behind the creation of these figures and demonstrates their mutual connection to *and* production through the settler-colonial economic system.

Homo Economicus

As a character in *The Last Buffalo Hunter*, Welsh is more of a representation of abstract economic principles than a representation of a particular individual. Welsh does have character traits—he is hard-working, brave, intelligent, and strong—but these qualities remain static throughout the work, and are only reinforced, rather than questioned or doubted, as the plot moves forward. Welsh's character development is marked not by a change in Welsh as a person, but instead by changes in Welsh's economic circumstances. This is articulated powerfully in the work's fourth chapter, "I Find my Life Partner," which formalizes a subversion of the personal to the economic. Ostensibly about Welsh's marriage to his wife, chapter four devotes the majority of its space to the important union between Welsh and his creditor, A.G.J. Bannatyne. Welsh's courtship of his wife, Cecilia Boyer,^{xliii} is told in less than half a page: Welsh sees her on the street, follows her home, and asks for her hand in marriage (26). Ens interprets this love-at-first-sight moment as a shrewd economic decision on Welsh's part: recognizing Boyer as a prominent trader's daughter, Ens argues, Welsh's marriage benefitted him *economically* as their relationship enabled him to join her family's hunting brigade (Ens 88-89). Ens' argument coheres with later research that demonstrates how hunting brigades were organized matrilineally, with membership conferred through the marrying of female members of brigade families (Macdougall and St-Onge "Rooted in Mobility"). Regardless of Welsh's motives in marrying Boyer, after she consents to his proposal, the narrative immediately turns its attention back to Welsh's financial circumstances. The first thing Welsh needs is cloth for his bride-to-be's dress, and he acquires this material on credit from Bannatyne, a man whom he had worked for previously and who was one of the major merchants in Fort Garry at that time. To repay this

expense, Welsh agrees to work for Bannatyne, transporting a “cargo of furs” from the Red River to Saint Paul. “I would make it my wedding trip,” Welsh decides (27).

Welsh’s brief description of his marriage and subsequent “wedding trip” centralizes his work transporting goods for Bannatyne:

I was married on the 26th of May, 1864, and three days later my wife and I started with Bannatyne for Saint Paul. Bannatyne put me in charge of the whole outfit. We had three hundred Red River carts loaded with furs. These furs represented a fortune. I sent the carts on three days ahead. Bannatyne, my wife and I followed in our own cart, in which we carried a trunk, containing money and papers, and a tent. (27)

Beginning with Welsh’s wedding, this paragraph concludes, not on the bride and groom riding off together in celebration of their union, but bride, groom, and the groom’s creditor all sharing the intimate space of a cart and, eventually, “a tent.” This paragraph is followed by five pages detailing Welsh’s longer relationship with Bannatyne, including one story about Bannatyne falling ill with gout whilst he and Welsh were transporting goods together between Fort Garry and Saint Paul. During this episode, a scene of greater intimacy between Welsh and Bannatyne is suggested: “Bannatyne wanted me to sleep with him, but I was afraid to do that, because my mother had told me that gout was catching” (30). The narrative skips from this request to the next morning, and we do not get an answer as to whether the young Welsh bedded with Bannatyne that night until much later on in the text, when, as an adult, Welsh too becomes afflicted with gout: “I suspected that I had caught gout from Bannatyne who, when we travelled together, had made me sleep with him” (147). In the chapter about finding his “Life Partner,” Welsh lies not with his wife but with the man who finances his career as a hunter and trader.

In “I Find my Life Partner,” Welsh’s relationship with his creditor supersedes his relationship with his wife. This allows for a reading that understands the “Life Partner” referred to in the chapter’s title as the system of debt and credit which fuels Welsh’s hunting and trading enterprise for the rest of the narrative. Up until this chapter, Welsh had only worked as a hired hand for other traders but had not yet set up a trading outfit for himself. After being paid for the work he completed on his wedding trip, Welsh proposes to Bannatyne:

I told him that I knew what trading was and wanted to trade for myself, that I wanted an outfit—goods for trading. He told me that I was the right kind of man, and that he would supply me with all the goods I needed. This was *all to be on credit*, for I had no money to pay for them. (32 my emphasis)

At the end of this first expedition, Welsh is unable to pay back his debts to Bannatyne. Welsh is initially concerned with this outcome, but Bannatyne merely “laughed and told me not to feel discouraged” (36). Bannatyne’s blasé attitude towards Welsh’s inability to pay off his debts underscores the normalcy of, as Hogue notes, Métis hunters and traders being unable to pay off the debts they had incurred prior to going out on their expeditions (39). With Bannatyne’s encouragement, Welsh “got three more carts, doubled [his] outfit, and took two hundred and fifty dollars worth of goods from Bannatyne” bringing his total debt to “three hundred dollars” (36). Welsh documents this next trip, noting which goods he sold and for how much, tallying the final amount as “eleven hundred and seventy-five dollars,” enough to pay off his debts and turn a handsome profit (37). Welsh’s next trip begins with him taking on an even greater amount of debt, “a thousand dollar outfit of goods” (37). This pattern of taking out goods on credit, calculating how much money he took them out for and how much he then resold them for, continues through to the conclusion of *The Last Buffalo Hunter*.

Welsh's relationship to credit reflects that of the majority of Métis hunters and traders from this era, who were under constant pressure to repay the debts that resulted from financing their outfits. The goods that traders such as Welsh procured through debt included "tobacco, tea, sugar powder, shot, small bullets, Hudson's Bay blankets, all kinds of prints and cottons, vermillion (lots of vermillion), axes, butcher knives, files, copper kettles, guns, and—*the main thing*—*alcohol*, lots and lots of alcohol" (Weekes 3 my emphasis). We can read these goods as the materialization of the steep debts taken on by traders such as Welsh. Historian John Foster notes that, by the 1870s, the goods imported into Indigenous communities through the trade in buffalo products "became more numerous and more varied" as "the [Métis] traders and the hunters seemed to be testing the capacity of [nomadic Indigenous peoples] to consume the vast array of trade goods, including whisky, at their disposal" (72). As these goods flooded into Indigenous communities throughout the prairies, they demanded repayment, not of equivalent exchange, but *in excess of* what they were acquired for: buffalo robes, tongues, pemmican, tallow, in addition to the furs of other game animals in the prairies, were the products used to pay back these debts and to realize surplus value. That these commodities were initially procured on credit ensured that they took more back more than they gave. The debt of the Métis hunters and traders demanded a rate of production that the buffalo population could not sustain, ultimately leading to the extinction of that species.

As mentioned above, character development in *The Last Buffalo Hunter* is marked by Welsh's economic successes and failures. These gains and losses take the place of the changes in one's values, relationships, and conceptions, which more typically signify character growth in prose narratives. As Welsh's economic success leads to him "becoming a more important trader all the time," he signifies his heightened status through the purchase of wagons made in Saint

Paul which “were lighter, stronger, and looked neater than the old Red River carts that I had been using” as well as “a whole new set of harnesses ... bridles, straps, back-straps, and a lot of buckles” (59). Immediately following his accumulation of these new goods, the next paragraph of Welsh’s narrative begins with him noticing that “[t]he buffalo were beginning to get scarce ... the *big* herds had disappeared. The Indians almost starved that winter” (59 emphasis in original). Foster makes the argument that the increased acquisition of trade goods by the nineteenth-century Métis people held a causal relationship to the extinction of the buffalo. While the “triggermen” whose direct actions caused the extinction of the buffalo in Canadian territory were Indigenous hunters, Foster argues, it was “the commercial system rooted in the industrial cities of eastern North America, which for a time seemed to offer an insatiable market for buffalo robes and a cornucopia of material goods in return” that was ultimately “responsible” for the extinction of the buffalo in Canadian territory (61). In 1875, Foster notes, the collapse of the buffalo robe market led to a massive decrease in the price of buffalo products, a decrease in price that was matched inversely by a growing demand for commercial goods by the Métis people (73). This combination of factors led to an increase in buffalo hunting and robe production as “[m]ore robes were necessary to attempt to *sustain the flow of material goods from the east*. But with the increase in robe production prices tumbled further” (73 my emphasis). In Welsh’s narrative, the proximity of the disappearance of the “big herds” to the narrator’s personal development—“becoming a more important trader all the time” (59)—conceptualizes growth and depletion, not in opposition to one another, but as coterminous.

Welsh’s status as a hunter and trader reaches its height just prior to moment when buffalo hunting becomes untenable due to the near-extinction of the species. Welsh’s heightened status is signified again by a substantial purchase:

I was very fine at this time, making a big splash. Before leaving Fort Garry on this trip, I had bought a stove ... with all the equipment for it—a tea-kettle, frying pans, a steamer for potatoes, and all the other things that went with it. When the Indians saw it, they thought it was very wonderful. They asked me what I called it in Cree. I told them “Coota-wana-pisk,” which meant cooking stove. *This stove made my house the most important one in the brigade on the wintering ground.* All the women came to our house to bake bread. *The Indians came to trade, and to see the stove.* (94 my emphasis)

The stove reorganizes the social space of the encampment; it “made [Welsh’s] house the most important one in the brigade.” Beyond its utility as cookware and as a means of signifying status, it also facilitated further trade and accumulation, “[t]he Indians came to trade, and to see the stove.” Here, however, the plot takes a sharp turn, as in the very next chapter, Welsh announces his retirement from market hunting^{xliii} as “the buffalo had practically gone” (98). The plot’s trajectory of Welsh beginning as a labourer, going into business for himself with mixed results, and then finally attaining his high status as an important hunter and trader is mirrored by an extinction plot whereby accumulation’s inverse, depletion, comes to characterize the landscape in which, and through which, Welsh creates his fortune.

Welsh embodies the conflicted nature of the buffalo hunt—an activity that both grew and sustained the Métis community while also threatening its continued survival—most explicitly during the moments in which he puts his own safety at risk in the pursuit of capital. Chapter seven, “A Hunter’s Handicap,” begins with Welsh noticing that he “had a very sore hand. It was all swollen up and blood poisoning had set in” (55). Despite this, and against the protests of his wife, Welsh joins a brigade and hunts buffalo. As he does so, his hand continues to deteriorate. The pain gets so “terrible” that he “couldn’t sleep,” and the hand itself swells “to more than

twice its size” (57). Following this, Welsh is visited by “[a]n old half-breed doctor, Louis Landry—Chu-bu-toon ... We were no relation, but he called me grandchild,” who tells Welsh that his hand is “fester[ing]” and likely to “break out in eight or nine days” (57). Landry informs Welsh that he can cure him, but to do so:

I must rest, and I must stop chasing buffalo. I told him that *I could not stop running buffalo. I must take my part, with all the other people who were killing buffalo and getting rich. I never gave up* ... At the end of the ninth day the hand broke. The sinews had rotted. The old half-breed doctor pulled them out. (58 my emphasis)

Had Welsh’s concern been provisioning, the communal ethics of sharing food with those in need—which will be looked at in further detail below—would have likely ensured that he and his family would have been provided for. Even if that was not the case, it is striking that Welsh justifies continuing to hunt (despite the protests of his wife and doctor) in entirely economic terms: like “all the other people who were killing buffalo,” Welsh was intent on “getting rich.” Faced with such a lucrative hunting opportunity, Welsh simply “could not stop running buffalo.” In this passage, a conflict between self-preservation and the pursuit of one’s economic self-interest concludes with the subversion of personal safety to profit.

The conflicts between self-preservation and self-sustenance through buffalo hunting come into even sharper focus during chapter twelve, “Welsh’s ‘Crazy Race’.” This chapter begins with Welsh and a small group of hunters having difficulty tracking and hunting buffalo. After five days, Welsh’s party spots a large herd, and they drive their horses in amongst them. However, this “surprised and terrified [herd] ... instead of taking the direction in which we tried to drive them, out on the level prairie on top of the hill ... all galloped down the hill, which was very steep” (90). While the other hunters manage to rein in their horses, Welsh is unable to do so:

I couldn't hold mine—he was right in among the buffalo, galloping with them—I thought, *well I'm as good as dead anyway. I'll take the chance!* So I gave him a tip with my halter-shank to make him jump down the hill as far as possible. Still on my horse, I landed part way down the hill and went galloping on with the herd. (90 my emphasis)

Amidst the panicked buffalo, Welsh takes out his rifle and begins firing. When everything settles, and with “[t]he dying buffalo ... rolling around my horse’s legs,” Welsh notices that “I had killed twenty buffalo,” despite his rifle chamber only holding fourteen cartridges (91). Welsh remarks that, “[i]n my excitement, I must have re-loaded my gun unconsciously ... I had no recollection of having re-loaded my gun” (91). In his unthinking pursuit of buffalo, Welsh embodies the economic drive of the hunt itself—one which is also, clearly, death-driven. His companions, “surprised that [he is] still alive,” chastise Welsh for the suicidal nature of this action, and call him foolish for “whip[ing] up his horse and gallop[ping] downhill with a herd of furious buffalo” (90-91). Yet, and this is crucial to note, Welsh divides the proceeds from this hunt equally among all the hunters present (91). Later, when “everyone in the wintering place was out of fresh meat,” Welsh’s proceeds from this hunt are used to feed the community (93). Furthermore, this chapter also ends with Welsh purchasing the above-mentioned stove—a luxury article which signifies his personal wealth and success (94). This chapter sets the contradictions of the Métis buffalo hunt writ large against one another. The conflicts between survival and self-destruction are given form in a sequence of scenes wherein survival, wealth, and communal well-being are achieved through a particularly reckless pursuit of buffalo.

After the extinction of the buffalo, Welsh’s adjustment to new market opportunities does not prevent him from losing his fortune by the end of the narrative. Welsh takes on a number of jobs after the extinction of the buffalo and he also helps build up the infrastructure of the Canadian

state through the building of a church—“the first in this part of the country”—the building of railroad tracks, the claiming and cultivation of land for agriculture, and, finally, the freighting of trade goods across the Northwest (95, 115, 116-125, 138-142). After “settlers had crowded around and had taken up all the land” for agriculture, Welsh, “began a livery [business] between Lebret and Troy (Qu’Appelle). We did a fine business. Money was coming in from all over. Then the railroad ... came to Fort Qu’Appelle and our business was, you might say, ended” (174). In the end, the colonial infrastructure that Welsh developed through his own labour undermines the freighting and ranching businesses that he creates and comes to rely on after the extinction of the buffalo.

Welsh’s narrative cannot claim to be the definitive story for *all* Métis hunters and traders—no single account can. But in figuring the abstract economic principles underlying market hunting, the character of Norbert Welsh in *The Last Buffalo Hunter* does represent the Métis buffalo hunt as an economic institution. In contrast to an autobiographical narrative, such as Equiano’s, whereby one comes into subjectivity through one’s economic pursuits, Welsh’s autobiography instead depicts a subversion of the individual to the economic activities he engages in. This is realized through a lack of interiority on the part of Welsh, his self-destructive pursuit of profits, and the majority of the text’s narrative space being given over to his economic, rather than personal, experiences. The gains Welsh makes through hunting buffalo enable him to both become financially successful and to serve the needs of his community. However, this same profit motive also effects an extinction event that undermines Welsh’s ability to continue hunting, and, eventually, leaves him destitute at the conclusion of his narrative.

The Primitive

“He’s like the Indian chief one reads about, who, when he comes up to Washington to see the Great Father, stands, wrapt in his blanket and gives no sign. I might be the Great Father—from the way he takes everything.”

-Henry James, *The Ambassadors*

Reading *The Last Buffalo Hunter* as an aesthetic work enables us to consider the social and political stakes of the representational practices in this text. This will begin with a continued interrogation of the figuration of Welsh in *The Last Buffalo Hunter*. Following the research of post-colonial scholar David Lloyd, I argue that Welsh’s figuration as the economic logic of the buffalo coheres with Immanuel Kant’s conception of the universal Subject. This Subject, derived from Kant’s aesthetic philosophy, Lloyd argues, is founded on an ideal of universal communication and serves as Kant’s model for the ideal Subject of the Western state (*Under Representation*). Lloyd argues that this Subject is imagined as the endpoint along an axis of human development, one which positions the supposedly primitive races at its base. Along this developmental trajectory, Lloyd argues, the figure of the Primitive^{xliv} is characterized by an as-yet-undeveloped capacity to both represent himself and to be represented (7). Through the character of Chief Starblanket, *The Last Buffalo Hunter* represents a Primitive figure^{xlv} who ascends to a Subject of the Canadian state, beginning with his participation in the colonial economy. During the gradual process of assimilation that Starblanket undertakes, the movement from particular to universal is replicated as Starblanket is made to put aside his own personal wants and concerns in order to be recognized and accepted as a Canadian Subject.

Lloyd argues that since Kant published his aesthetic theory, the discourse of aesthetics has been “concerned not only with the refinement of taste but with the formation or cultivation of

human beings as civil subjects, necessarily defined ... against the undeveloped racial other” (9-10). Kant’s conception of the universal Subject, the ostensibly civilized human being capable of representing themselves and of being represented in Liberal democracy, argues Lloyd, is informed by that Subject’s ability to make properly “disinterested” aesthetic judgements (10). What this mode of judging entails is the ability to move from one’s personal sensory experience of an object towards a purely formal judgement about said object that theoretically anyone would be able to make. In other words, Lloyd argues that, for Kant, the universal nature of an aesthetic judgement is predicated on an abstract consideration of that object’s formal properties *rather than* by considering the feelings that are provoked in oneself when one engages with it^{xlvii} (Lloyd 19-43). For Kant, Lloyd argues, the abstraction *from* one’s particular sensory experience *to* a universal judgement is necessary in order to arrive at “a universally valid subjective accord” (52); because the judgement of an object is *not* predicated on one’s own personal feelings, the judgement made could theoretically be agreed on by all who are able to observe the object in question. Relying solely on the “physiological” aspect of aesthetic judgement risks “leaving judgement either subordinate to the despotic ‘command’ of an arbitrary standard of taste or dissolved in the potential errancy of assertions of individual idiosyncrasy” (Lloyd 52). Lloyd argues that this movement from the particular to the universal, as described by Kant in *The Critique of Judgement*

acknowledges *the political stakes of the aesthetic*: The ideal republic that consists of autonomous subjects, *whose possibility is given by the common sense instantiated in the reflective formal subject of judgement*, is threatened by the immediacy of judgements predicted on sensations. (52 my emphasis)

Here, Lloyd argues, Kant's "ideal republic" is grounded in the possibility of universal communication between various Subjects. For Kant, Lloyd argues, this universal mode of communication can be achieved only through a properly disinterested mode of making judgements—a mode of judgement that could be undertaken, theoretically, by any particular individual Subject. The requirements for making said judgements are outlined in Kant's aesthetic philosophy, Lloyd argues, as Kant understands that aesthetic judgements predicated on one's sensory experiences would undermine the possibility of arriving at a universally valid judgement, as sensory experiences will vary from person to person. Judgements predicated on immediate sensory experience (rather than abstract formal considerations), in other words, would *not be universal and shared*, but rather *particular to each individual*—thereby proving to be antithetical to a mode of judging that could produce a universal accord. In this way, one can observe how the mode of judging explicated in Kant's aesthetic philosophy shapes his political philosophy, and in particular, his understanding of what mode of judging is required in order to be considered a Subject of the ideal Western state.

The Subject articulated through Kant's aesthetic theory, Lloyd maintains, is situated in opposition to a "Primitive" form of humanity along a developmental axis. At the base of this axis, Lloyd argues, "The ... Primitive... remain[s] on the threshold of an unrealized humanity, *still subject to affect and to the force of nature*, not yet capable of representation, not yet apt for freedom and civility" (7). What is meant by "not yet capable of representation," is that the Primitive, in Kant's formulation, is not yet able to move from their particular sensory experiences to a universal judgement: "still pathologically subject to mere stimuli, whether charms of terrors, the [Primitive] is not yet the possible subject of representation, *incapable of*

moving from the Darstellung (presentation) of a mere sensation to the Vorstellung (re-presentation) that reflects on its formal properties ‘as if’ from the standpoint of humanity in general” (39 my emphasis). Lloyd argues that the ability or supposed inability to make these disinterested aesthetic judgments underwrites a developmental logic of human societies that is found in Enlightenment and Post-Enlightenment Western thought: “since these transitions within the individual involve the transformation of private sensation into a ‘public sense,’ the way is opened to an analogous development of human societies in general from a state of dependence upon the charm of sensation to one in which ‘universal communication’ is of prime value” (31). Lloyd cites Silvia Wynter who argues that this articulation of a universal Subject is a post-colonial invention, one which inaugurated a “conception of Man that at once divided the world between rational humans and irrational [racialized] subhumans” (5).

As we saw in the previous section, *The Last Buffalo Hunter* replicates this movement of the particular individual to the universal Subject in explicitly economic terms—Welsh comes to represent, not *himself*, but the economic principles of buffalo hunting and trading. Lloyd argues that the aesthetic realm—which is to say, one’s experience of *and representation within* works of art—“performs its ideological function through its claim to compensate for the fragmentation of humans by the division of labor and social conflicts with an exemplary experience of wholeness and harmonization” (10). This experience of “wholeness and harmonization” is, again, predicated on the move from a particular sensory experience towards a universal judgement; as such, the ability of the aesthetic to heal a humanity fragmented through the division of labour in capitalism is predicated on the annexation (or suppression) of one’s own personal and particular experiences. Therefore, Lloyd argues, this universal Subject—the Subject who grounds the promises of the Western democracy—“represents ... *the ideological figure of the individual*

summoned and annulled in the same moment” (38 my emphasis). In this representative universal Subject, Lloyd sees the same logic that produces the Subject of the capitalist economy: “The ‘individual’ that capitalism supposedly unleashed in the pure interchangeable form of abstract labour. It is in this form ... that the [Subject] of aesthetic culture is actualized in all its representativeness and exchangeability” (38). The subordination of the personal to the economic in *The Last Buffalo Hunter* replicates the process of coming-into-Subjecthood required for recognition and participation in the democratic states predicated on Enlightenment values, such as the settler nation of Canada.

In chapter fourteen of *The Last Buffalo Hunter*, titled “My Friend, Chief Starblanket,” the text connects participation in the settler economy to the development from a Primitive figure to a Subject of the Canadian state. This chapter begins in 1878, with Welsh embarking on a trading expedition only to find the land he had arrived at to be completely barren: “we didn’t see a buffalo, an Indian, or anything. Everything was bare” (99). From here, Welsh moves to Milk River where he finds Chief Starblanket’s band. On Welsh’s arrival, Starblanket announces, “Wa-ka-kootchick [phonetic Cree for “turned-up nose,” the name Welsh was known by to the Cree people] turned up at our camp to-day. Now we can get something to live on” (99). Welsh notes how the decimation of the buffalo has left the Cree in a position of extreme deprivation: “They had nothing at all” (99).^{xlvi} Starblanket’s band were signatories of the “Qu’Appelle treaty,” and so, they could expect to receive government funds in two months’ time (Weekes 101). Recognizing this, Starblanket asks Welsh if he can procure goods from him on credit, to which Welsh responds: “*no trader could give an Indian credit on the expectation of collecting his bill when treaty money was paid*. He agreed, but said that he and I were as one—that we were brothers. He always called me his brother”^{xlvi} (101 my emphasis). What is assumed in the first

of the two above-quoted sentences is that an “Indian” is only capable of the immediate satisfaction of their needs; a trader cannot expect to receive repayment from an “Indian” because an “Indian” cannot be trusted to hold onto their resources long enough to make this repayment.

Here, we can observe something of what Lloyd describes as the:

interchangeable ethical, political, and aesthetic judgement as to the inferiority of the ‘[primitive] races’ ... The inadequacy of the native to self-government is empirically demonstrated by ‘his’ lack of aesthetic productions or by ‘his’ subordination to immediate sensual gratification, ‘his’ laziness or inconsistency. These frequently cited empirical observations, which appear as ascriptions of an essential inadequacy, are organized by the judgement that in the [Primitive] *the capacity for autonomy is either as yet underdeveloped or is lacking and requires to be developed or supplemented by external force.* (75 my emphasis)

Welsh eventually agrees to grant Starblanket and his band goods on credit, bringing them into an economic system that heretofore had only been accessible to white and Métis men. Recognizing this economic barrier provides insight as to why, in *The Last Buffalo Hunter*, the Métis are frequently called “white” (161). This classification arises despite the extension of nominal kinship relationships between Métis and First Nations people in this work *and* the blood kinships that are frequently acknowledged between these characters as well. As many have noted, the racial ambiguity of the Métis people has led them to be understood as either white or as Indigenous depending on various circumstances (Hogue *Métis and the Medicine Line*; Ens and Sawchuck 51-59). What extends the quality of whiteness to the Métis in *The Last Buffalo Hunter*

is that they have credit extended *to* them, demarcating them from their First Nations relations, who are assumed to be unable to bear such a responsibility.

Starblanket and his band's repayment of their debt to Welsh marks a pivotal turning point for them in this work in that it demarcates them from the "Indians," who, both Welsh and Starblanket agree, are unable to participate in the modern, credit-based economy. That the dramatic tension in this chapter arises from whether or not Starblanket will repay Welsh highlights how significant this extension of credit is: Welsh's wife insists that he "had thrown the money away," and Welsh himself notes how, "I didn't sleep much that night. I kept thinking about what a risk I was taking in giving that much money or goods on credit to a band of Indians" (102). When their treaty money comes in, Starblanket and his band repay Welsh "in full ... I didn't lose a cent on the transaction" (104). Through this leap of faith which "no [other] trader" would have taken, Welsh brings Starblanket into the modern economic system and establishes a longstanding trading relationship with the Cree leader on these terms: "I traded with Starblanket for a great many years after that" (101, 104). Following his inclusion into the credit economy, three other important sequences mark Starblanket's gradual (and conflicted) integration into the Canadian state: Starblanket and his band moving onto a reserve; Starblanket and his band sending their children to residential schools;^{xlix} and Starblanket and his band agreeing to *not* join with Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont in their resistance to Canadian colonialism.

Welsh is presented as integral to Starblanket and his band's assimilation into the Canadian state. Of the three above-noted sequences, the only one in which Welsh appears to have played no part is in Starblanket's movement onto a reservation. About this, little is said other than that "[a]bout two years after this transaction [that of lending Starblanket goods on credit], Starblanket

took up his Reserve north-east of the Fort” and that this decision left him “very unhappy because his freedom had been taken from him. He wanted to live his life as he had always lived it, roaming on the prairie with the wild buffalo” (104). However, Welsh is presented as an important influence on Starblanket regarding both his eventual decision to send the children from his Reserve to residential schools and his decision not to join the Métis resistance fighters. Noting Starblanket’s dissatisfaction with life on the reservation, Welsh states that Starblanket “would not consent to send his children to school” (104). Of course, Welsh could not have known at the time the horrors that were born out by the Canadian residential school system; it is also worth noting that Welsh himself sends his own children to these schools, citing the benefits he believes they will receive from this education (104). Despite the good faith that Welsh displays here, it is still deeply discomfoting to read Welsh trying to convince Starblanket to send his children to these institutions. He does so by appealing to the idea that these schools will be able to provide their children with the skills they will need to work and participate in Canadian society: “they would be able to read and put things down in writing” (104). Following this, Welsh reminds Starblanket of the power that Canadian authorities have to enforce such schooling: “I told him that he had better send his children to school willingly, otherwise the authorities would come to his tent and take them” (105). Starblanket agrees to do so; “he said that he would send them *for my sake*, but that he wouldn’t sent them for the Agent or anybody else” (105 my emphasis). Both the priest and the Indian agent on Starblanket’s reserve had attempted to convince the Cree leader to send his children to their schools, but without any success. Welsh, explaining to these men (and a visiting archbishop) how he had managed to convince Starblanket to do so, states that: “because we had been friends on the plains, he had promised me to send his children to the white man’s school” (105).

Unsurprisingly, resentment builds in Starblanket and his people against the Canadian authorities. This culminates in his attempt to join the 1885 resistance of the Métis people, led by Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont. Of this decision, Welsh writes: “he came to my place at Lebret all dressed up and painted for war ... He was going to rebel against Father Hugonard and General Middleton” (106). General Middleton was the British general leading the Canadian forces against the Métis resistance fighters at Batoche; Father Hugonard was the priest on Starblanket’s reserve. Though Hugonard was not involved in this conflict, Starblanket’s grouping of the two signals his understanding of the connection between Church and State authorities. Starblanket also communicates an ongoing anger towards the Church for their role in the seizure of the children from his reserve, as he singles out, “this white medicine man (Father Hugonard) who wants all our children” as a target of his animosity (107). I will return, briefly, to this conflict and Welsh’s role in mediating it towards the end of this chapter. For now, it is important to note that Welsh (along with the Chief factor at the Hudson’s Bay Company) talks Starblanket out of this decision and he sets up a meeting between Starblanket and Middleton to agree to a peace (108). A generous interpretation of this would be one that assumes that Welsh recognized that the Métis forces were vastly outnumbered and undersupplied compared to the Canadian forces; as such, his convincing Starblanket to remain out of this conflict was done with the safety of his longtime friend in mind.

Despite whatever valid safety concerns Welsh may have held about Starblanket’s possible participation in an armed revolt, we cannot discount how his subduing of the Cree Chief’s anger in this moment delimits the possibilities of Starblanket to effect political change. As Coulthard argues, the resentment and anger of Indigenous peoples “ought to be seen as an affective indication that we care deeply about ourselves, about our land and cultural communities, and

about the rights and obligations we hold as First Peoples” (126). Coulthard likewise maintains that these emotions hold transformative potential:

under certain conditions Indigenous peoples’ individual and collective expressions of anger and resentment can help prompt the very forms of self-affirmative praxis that generate rehabilitated Indigenous subjectivities and decolonized forms of life in ways that the combined politics of recognition and reconciliation has proven itself incapable of doing. (109)

Rather than finding an outlet for Starblanket’s anger, Welsh instead tells the Cree leader that “[y]ou will agree with what the Chief Factor and I tell you, because you know what we say will be the best for you and your children ... *We will tell you what is the right thing.* That will be to sign a peace” (108 my emphasis). By demanding that Starblanket, during his negotiations with Middleton, abide by what he believes “will be best for you and your children,” Welsh suppresses Starblanket’s anger—along with its affective self-affirmation and its potentially transformative potential—prior to this crucial meeting. Moreover, in telling Starblanket what and how he will agree to terms with Middleton, Welsh effectively *represents* Starblanket to state authorities in a manner that he knows will be understood and accepted by those authorities. To be represented by Welsh in this way, Starblanket must agree to put aside his own feelings and thoughts on the situation, in order to take up those of Welsh and the HBC factor.

Chapter fourteen concludes with a scene depicting Welsh, Starblanket, and their wives having dinner together to celebrate the peace deal achieved between Starblanket and General Middleton: Starblanket agrees to “go back [to his reservation] and remain quiet” and Middleton agrees to keep his forces away from Starblanket’s reservation (109). Though the tone of the dinner, as we will see below, is celebratory, one should keep in mind the longer trajectory of

Starblanket's path to this meal that is played out throughout the chapter: it begins with an evocation of extinction along with images of emptiness and privation, "everything was bare" and "[t]hey had nothing at all" (99); this is followed by Starblanket's inclusion into the credit-based financial system, an inclusion which demarcates Starblanket and his band from the other "Indians" who are assumed to be unable to handle this responsibility; further inclusion into the Canadian state necessitates that Starblanket move onto a reserve, give away his children to church authorities, and abdicate from an armed resistance against the state's injustices—not giving voice or action to the legitimate anger that brought him to the point of considering armed revolt. The lack of autonomy on Starblanket's behalf during this process suggests that assimilation into the Canadian state, for Starblanket, entails giving up his own particular concerns, wants, and conceptions of how he and his children should be able to live.

Welsh suppresses Starblanket's autonomy during this process and eventually comes to represent Starblanket in a way that makes him an appropriate Subject to state authorities. This is demonstrated in Welsh's frequent references to Starblanket and his band in the possessive, calling them "my Indians" (103, 110); the passage in which Welsh demands Starblanket abide by his (and the HBC's) terms prior to his negotiations with Middleton; and in the passage where Welsh speaks *for* Starblanket regarding the seizure of his children: "I explained to the Agent, to the Bishop and to the whole crowd just how Starblanket felt" (106). Only in being represented *by* Welsh¹ in these last instances is Starblanket able to be recognized and comprehended by state authorities. This recognition allows Starblanket to hold a seat at Welsh's table and to enjoy a feast that contrasts so sharply with the images of emptiness and privation that this chapter opens with. Yet, along the way, in order to *be* represented by Welsh and to hold his spot at this table, Starblanket is made to forego his own wants, his legitimate (and legitimizing) anger, his capacity

for political action against injustice, and ultimately his capacity to speak for himself and his people.^{li}

The feast celebrating the peace between Starblanket and the Canadian forces concludes chapter fourteen:

“My friend,” I said to him, “We will now sit down to this feast.” Always in those days, we gave the Chief the place of honor when we made a feast for him. ‘Sit at the head of the table,’ I told him. I sat at his right hand. His wives sat on either side of him. *I said grace*. Starblanket and his wives clasped their hands and bowed their heads. Now we ate our meal. Not a word was spoken. The Indians eat in complete silence. We always observed the Indian customs. *This was their way of giving thanks to their Manitou*. When the meal was finished, *I said grace again*. That was the conclusion of the peace that Starblanket had agreed to keep with the white queen. I thought a great deal of Starblanket. As I have said elsewhere, we were like brothers. He was a reasonable man.

(110 my emphasis)

There is a reparative mode of reading this passage, one which finds a negotiation or a coming together in the mixing of Welsh and Starblanket’s faith practices during this meal. But in terms of its aesthetic presentation, beginning and ending this meal with the saying of grace provides a formal enclosure (or hemming in) of Starblanket’s spiritual practices by Welsh’s Catholic rituals. Starblanket’s cultural practices are recognized and afforded to him, but, as Coulthard argues, regarding colonized-colonizer modes of recognition, the Canadian state favours a form of inclusion that is limited to recognizing the rights of Indigenous peoples to express themselves *culturally*, so long as these cultural expressions “d[o] not throw into question the background legal, political, and economic framework of the colonial relationship itself” (41). Though

Starblanket's spiritual practice here is allotted a limited space between a boundary of Catholic ritual, the Cree Chief's political grievances remain unattended to. While this chapter ends on a peace accord, Starblanket's journey in chapter fourteen formalizes the process of assimilation as a gradual loss of self. As such, it provokes a critical reflection on the sacrifices necessary for Indigenous peoples' (limited) recognition and protection by the Canadian state.

The Savage

Starblanket, in *The Last Buffalo Hunter*, stands in stark contrast to the dominant figuration of First Nations people that is presented in this work, which I will call the figure of the Savage. Though there are First Nations characters in this text who do not fit into either of these categories, such as Sitting Bull and Tapapachakonap, I am interested in these figures or tropes because of the important ideological work they perform within colonial discourse. The Savage, in this work, represents First Nations people characterized by graphic and brutal acts of violence. This Savage figure appears primarily in the many short, episodic digressions made by Welsh during the otherwise largely linear narrative of his life. I do not deny that acts of violence were perpetuated by and on all manner of people in the nineteenth-century Northwest, but ultimately my analysis is not concerned with whether the acts of violence depicted in this work are historically accurate. What I want to consider instead is how this figure of the Savage is deployed within the text and how it functions within the broader aesthetic arrangement of *The Last Buffalo Hunter*. Continuing to pull from Lloyd's research along with the critical Indigenous theories of Jodi Byrd (Chickasaw) and Ned Blackhawk (Western Shoshone), I interrogate what is being communicated through the figure of the Savage in this work and how the naturalization of First Nations peoples as embodiments of violence is crucial to the project of settler colonialism.

What I wish to mark first is the opposition between the figures of the Savage and the Primitive in *The Last Buffalo Hunter*. Byrd and their inventive appropriation of Slavoj Žižek’s parallax view is helpful for thinking through the discontinuities between these figures. The crux of Byrd’s theory is that multiple figures of the Indian—figures often incommensurable with one another—are produced by the discourse of settler colonialism. Settler colonialism, argues Byrd, relies on the production of various “ideas of Indians and Indianness [that] have served as the ontological ground through which U.S. settler colonialism enacts itself” (xix). Though Byrd cites in particular the United States in their work,^{lii} they frequently note how these notions of the Indian and Indianness grew from the discourse of colonizing European states. Due to the variety of ways in which the Indian has been understood and represented in colonial discourse, Byrd argues, the Indian functions as a *transferable signification* that is applied to various “others” in order to justify imperialism in its many forms, often through the reiterating of frontier logics (xx). Though, as I will demonstrate, *The Last Buffalo Hunter* de-naturalizes the figures of the Indian it deploys, we can understand as a preliminary that the Savage is presented as a violence that needs to be expunged, while the Primitive, as I argue above, is presented as an impoverished subject who benefits from their inclusion into the Canadian state.

The apparent opposition between different figures of the Indian, Byrd argues, serves to obfuscate what produces them mutually. In *The Last Buffalo Hunter*, the Savage who must be expunged from settler society and the Primitive who must be integrated into it, create a contradictory identity for the various First Nations peoples that the work represents. Byrd argues that the oppositional nature of these various Indian figures creates a “parallax gap” between them (31). Through Žižek’s theory, Byrd argues that these oppositional figures of the Indian can be understood as “two sides of the same phenomenon which, precisely as two sides, can never

meet” (Žižek, qtd in Byrd 29). These figures, in other words, are produced by the phenomenon of settler colonialism, but, in their construction *as* figures, *they in turn produce* a “distortive parallax effect centre[ing] on the colonization of indigenous peoples” (31). The opposition between these figures obfuscates the manner in which they are mutually produced by settler colonial discourses and the material conditions of colonization itself.

According to Byrd, critical analysis of these figures can reveal “a sticky edge of the Real, partial though it may be,” whereby the “Real” referenced here is settler colonialism^{liii} (30). What is “real” about these figures is not *how* they are represented, but rather:

the antagonism which causes [the] perspectival distortion. The site of truth is not the way ‘things really are in themselves,’ beyond their perspectival distortions, but the very gap, passage, which separates one perspective from another, the gap ... which makes the two perspectives radically *incommensurable*” (Žižek, qtd in Byrd 29 emphasis in original).

The reality revealed through these figures that contradict one another is not found in the depictions of the figures themselves, but rather in the antagonism between them, the phenomenon that produces these figures in opposition to one another. Regarding *The Last Buffalo Hunter*, the antagonism between the Primitive and the Savage again comes down to capital. Not only do settler economics discursively demarcate Starblanket from the other “Indians,” but this economic system materially produces both the violent conditions within which the Savage is represented *and* the extinction event which engenders the conditions of privation within which the Primitive is initially presented. The figures of the Savage and the Primitive become naturalized *as* the conditions within which they appear, leading them to be understood differentially as either a violence incompatible with a so-called civilized society or as an impoverished race in need of guidance and direction by an ostensibly more evolved race.

What makes *The Last Buffalo Hunter* such an interesting intertext for Byrd's theory of the parallax gap is that the text makes use of these figures of the Indian while also drawing our attention towards the artifice—the material conditions of colonial-capitalism—behind their construction. As a trader and as a figuration himself of the logic of capital in this work, Welsh traverses the parallax gap between these oppositional figures, demonstrating their mutual production through the system of trade and exchange that he builds out throughout the narrative. In the case of the Savage, the *Last Buffalo Hunter* points to how the growth of settler trade markets produces the violence that characterizes many of the First Nations peoples depicted within this narrative.

Though Welsh is presented as having many important relationships with First Nations peoples in this work, these are forged primarily through commodity exchange—a qualifier we could add to nearly all of Welsh's interpersonal relationships in *The Last Buffalo Hunter*. Chapter two, "My First Trading Trip," depicts Welsh's introduction to First Nations communities.^{liv} This chapter begins with Welsh indexing trade goods and noting the profit margins on items he sold to First Nations peoples, which results in nearly two pages of sentences such as "[f]or one buffalo robe valued at a dollar and a quarter, we gave in trade one pound of tea, which cost twenty-five cents at Fort Garry and a pound of sugar which cost five cents" (9). Following this, Welsh describes the group he is trading with, "mixed ... some Crees, a few Assiniboines ... a few Chipewyans" (11). After introducing the reader to this community through trade, Welsh then digresses into a story about "Ka-min-akose. He was a regular brave. I knew him well. I used to trade with him and he told me the story. He had only one eye. A Blackfoot had knocked out the other" (12). This story does not feature Welsh in any way and instead follows Ka-min-akose and a number of other Cree warriors in their pursuit of a band of Blackfoot. When Ka-min-akose and

the Cree chase the Blackfoot into a den, Ka-min-akose “asked [the other Cree warriors] that they let him do the butchering [alone],” a request which they begrudgingly assented to (12). Before entering the Blackfoot den, Ka-min-akose takes out “a big knife—the *Hudson’s Bay Company* used to sell these knives, more like an axe than a knife—and went off to the den, singing his war song” (13 my emphasis). While in the den amongst his enemies, Ka-min-akose, despite being heavily outnumbered by the Blackfoot, “butchered them all. *He had scared them with his big knife*” (13 my emphasis). What follows this story, *immediately*, is a return to Welsh balancing his “account[s] to see whether I was in the hole or not” (13). This pattern—Welsh’s repetitive and often banal remembrances of commodity exchange interrupted by eruptions of violence through stories about First Nations people—is repeated throughout the work.

The calm, rational, practice of accounting presents itself as the “civilized” contrast to the endless, brutal warfare which characterizes the life of First Nations peoples in these episodic digressions. Implicitly, this frames the world of European-style “civilization” as the necessary corrective to and possible container for these otherwise barbaric and violent Savage figures. Byrd notes how such a logic is deployed in The Declaration Of Independence, which invokes “on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages whose known rule of warfare,” as the United States’ own justification for its existence *as* a protective force against this Savage other (Jefferson et al, qtd in Byrd xxi). Byrd argues that it is *this* figure, the “merciless Indian Savage” which “functions as [the] abjected horror through whom civilization is articulated oppositionally” (xxi). What principally differentiates the “merciless Indian Savage” from the Primitive examined above, is that the Indian Savage is a “*non-recuperable*” category of being (Byrd xxi). While the Primitive represents one who can develop into a member of the settler state, the Savage, by contrast, represents a violence that the state must expunge from “its”

territory.^{lv} This definitional exclusion of the Savage from settler civilization recalls the category of the Subaltern, understood in post-colonial studies as the “agencies and social sites that have proven theoretically and politically unincorporable” (Lloyd 97).

The centrality of trade goods in the violent episodes featuring the Savage in *The Last Buffalo Hunter* brings colonial-capitalism into the supposedly barbaric acts of violence against which settler civilization defines itself. Lloyd argues that populations construed as Subaltern:

stan[d] outside or to the side of such modernizing, developmental logics and in doing so represen[t] not merely an inert mass awaiting incorporation or assimilation but a specific form, or set of forms, of recalcitrance *not primordial and prior to colonialism or capitalism but formed in relation to those forces*. (98 my emphasis)

Consider how Ka-min-akose’s butchering is only made possible by his Hudson’s Bay Company knife, which, like Welsh’s above-mentioned stove, has both a material use and a psychological use—the sight of it causes such debilitating fear that Ka-min-akose is able to defeat his enemies despite being vastly outnumbered. Ka-min-akose’s story introduces the reader to a cycle of violence between the Blackfoot and the Cree that is played out at numerous points in this work, primarily through these short, digressive episodes. What is notable about this ongoing warfare is how Hudson’s Bay Company iconography remains so central to it. Describing the preparations made by “Indian[s] ... on the war-path,” Welsh notes that a warrior would often tie a buffalo robe or “a Hudson’s Bay blanket, around his neck ... many of the warriors *preferred the Hudson’s Bay blankets ... I had a great trade in these blankets*” (68). Additionally, many of these violent episodes are said to have taken place on trade routes or are fueled by trade goods such as alcohol, as in the story of *Oosh-ka-chee-mush-shak*, “the Little Dogs,” a mixed First Nations group composed of “Crees, Salteaux, Assiniboines, and Stoneys” (64). This group “drank so

much alcohol that it made them insane,” an insanity which manifested in the Little Dogs “kill[ing] each other at every chance” (64-65). Alcohol is not only *a* trade good but is positioned as *the crucial* trade good in *The Last Buffalo Hunter*—as outlined in chapter three, “Alcohol—The Staff of Trade” (19-25). Chapter two likewise concludes with Welsh himself being attacked by the First Nations people with whom he is trading because of his refusal to give them alcohol for free, after they had run out of buffalo robes to trade to him for it. Welsh refuses to circumvent the logic of exchange, and though he makes it out alive, the attack leaves Welsh “gashed [on] my chest and shoulders ... I carry the scars to this day” (17). Beyond the influence of alcohol, the violence amongst *Oosh-ka-chee-mush-shak* is exacerbated by a smallpox epidemic, carried into their community by “Alexander Goulet, a trader, too” (65). The centralization of trade within these episodes of brutal violence challenges the binary opposition between “savagery” and “civilization” that the logic of settler-colonialism is predicated upon.

Blackhawk’s research demonstrates how integral trade was to the violent conflicts between Indigenous peoples in North America. Focusing on the Great Basin area of the United States, Blackhawk examines how the “dialectics of trade, enslavement, and warfare” plunged the Great Basin area into a state of violence that lasted for over two centuries (26). Blackhawk draws out the dynamics of trade and violence in greater detail than I will be able to reproduce here. What is important to realize for the sake of this thesis is how trade goods significantly transformed the Indigenous communities into which they were introduced. In acquiring horses and metal weapons through trade with the Spanish, the Ute people were able to militarily dominate neighbouring First Nations communities, thereby transforming themselves into “migratory slaving societies” who, in turn, increased the flow of trade goods back into their communities through satisfying the market demands of the Spanish empire for Indigenous slaves (Blackhawk

26). The Ute people were not alone in regards to this transformation, as Geoff Cunfer argues that the introduction of the horse into First Nations societies tended to turn those societies, “[b]y necessity [into] warrior societies ... cultures of conquest [who] followed a policy of aggressive population expansion” (14-15 Cunfer). As Blackhawk argues, the militarization of the Ute people led to conflicts between different Indigenous groups in this region because “[h]orses, metals, and other trade goods *had become so intrinsic to survival* that no [defensive measures taken by the raided communities] could extinguish the *need* to raid” (33 my emphasis). This relationship between trade and violence has been noted by Hogue and Colpitts as well, regarding the trade in buffalo products and the various Indigenous nations on the prairies (Hogue 17, Colpitts 151).

I remain with Blackhawk’s work because he draws our attention to the *representational consequences* that the introduction of commercial trade with settlers had for Indigenous people. Exploiting the aforementioned need for trade goods, American settlers established themselves and their industries in the Great Basin area as Spanish influence in the region waned. In doing so, they introduced extractive industries such as logging, mining, and agriculture to the region. The environmental consequences of these industries “devastated Indian subsistence economies, rapidly propelling many [Indigenous people] into mines, settlements, and ranches as wage laborers” (Blackhawk 268). These ecological consequences—which included localized extinction events—provided these industries with an impoverished labour base whom they could pay very little for their work. Following this, Blackhawk argues, popular and academic writings on Indigenous peoples from this region, representing them *in* this state of impoverishment, naturalized them as an *essentially* primitive and debased form of humanity:

vision[s] of timeless Shoshone ‘primitives’ ... consigned these Native peoples to the dusty shelves of ‘prehistory.’ Antitheses of modernity and ‘civilization,’ Shoshones have become intellectually synonymous with deprivation as the least ‘developed’ peoples in the world.

(278)

Though it was true that the Shoshones (and other Indigenous peoples from this region) existed in these impoverished states, Blackhawk argues that these representations of them as *essentially* impoverished erased the colonial and capitalist systems which formed the conditions within which they were depicted. These representations naturalized the Shoshone and Ute peoples as an inherently debased form of humanity, thereby supporting the “supreme forms of racial logic [that] have been deployed to explain [the] difference” between the Indigenous and the settler populations (Blackhawk 276). Though the depictions Blackhawk analyzes are more akin to the Primitive than the Savage (in the terms used in this work), the same logic can be applied with regards to the violent conflicts produced by trade and *The Last Buffalo Hunter*’s representations of First Nations peoples within these conflicts.

The important role that aesthetic representations of Indigenous peoples play in justifying settler colonialism returns us to Welsh’s work and my argument about the need to critically examine the First Nations’ peoples represented in *The Last Buffalo Hunter*. As I mentioned earlier, the category of the Subaltern or the Savage does *not* characterize all First Nations peoples represented in *The Last Buffalo Hunter*. However, the frequency of episodes within the text that depict First Nations peoples as violent does craft a specific figure of the Savage/Subaltern Indian in this work. As an aesthetic category, Lloyd argues that the Subaltern is “constituted by its externality to representation,” and that it *only* “appear[s] not simply as violent, or in violence, but *as* violence” (96, 97 emphasis in original). Amongst Welsh’s ongoing calculations—how much

money he paid for goods, what items he then traded those goods for, how much he then made selling those new goods and the goods he produced as a hunter, etc,—depictions of the Savage bring explosive and graphic violence into the text. Notable examples include an episode in which two Cree warriors ambush “a Blackfoot and his wife ... stabb[ing] him and cut[ting] him open” and then decapitating his wife (68-69); a band of Blackfoot who, after ambushing a Métis man and his wife, “had shot and cut them to pieces, and had drunk the blood out of their hearts” (43); and multiple references to First Nations peoples fighting amongst each other “like dogs” (64, 67). This violence, it should be noted, is not always initiated by First Nations peoples. Sometimes their very presence occasions violence, as in the case of the “Minnesota massacre.” This event begins with a starving band of Sioux entering a settler town in Minnesota. One of the Sioux, an elderly man, approached a house and knocked on the door. When a woman answered it, the elderly Sioux “told her that his brigade was starving, and asked her for some bread. She grabbed an axe and split his skull in two” (162). Lloyd argues that “the Subaltern ... need not actually engage in violence, commit or organize acts of violence to be understood *as* violence” (116). In the case of this starving, elderly Sioux man, his mere presence within settler society drew forth an act of violence^{lvi} into the text.

Though these violent episodes contrast so starkly with the narrator’s tireless accounting, the constant repetition of these episodes causes one to think of violence not as exceptional but as normative. Writing on the repeated use of episodic digressions within Aristophanes’ *Birds*, Mario Telò argues that each such scene “constitute[s] a moment of crisis, but *through their seriality* they contest the very idea of crisis as an emergency, an *individual moment*” (102-103 my emphasis). In the same way, these eruptions of violence are presented as being part of the fabric of the Northwest during this era.

Much like how Blackhawk argues that the depictions of Shoshone peoples as essentially primitive and debased are informed by the conditions created by settler-colonialism, the Subaltern class, Lloyd argues, is “the permanent and inexpugnable remainder of the process of state formation” (100). Regarding the Sioux in the above-mentioned story, we can consider how this band’s desperate condition was the product of the extinction of the buffalo—a major source of food—and the Indian wars being waged by the United States against the Sioux and the Nez Perce. These processes, integral to the formation of the settler state, produced the abject conditions in which this band of Sioux found themselves and through which they were represented to the settler citizens of Minnesota. These abject conditions, though produced by the state, guaranteed the externality of the Sioux from settler civilization.

The libidinal investment of the colonizer in the figure of the Savage, an investment that justifies colonial violence, is highlighted in the penultimate chapter of *The Last Buffalo Hunter*. During the 1885 rebellion, a policeman named “O’Brien” decides to “stage a sham battle between Starblanket’s Indians and his [Canadian] troops, just to scare the Indians [who were still considering joining the resistance against Canada]” (167). To execute this, Welsh is asked to be at the staged battle and “to take charge of the Indians because [O’Brien] knew I could control them” (167). This sham battle begins and ends rather quickly: “The order was given. The Indians made a wild rush. The police ... bolted. They were terrified at the sight of the advancing Indians” (168). Byrd argues that settler colonialism relies upon “a foundational concept of ‘Indianness’ that aligns it with the savage other [producing] the constitutive rationale for imperial domination” (27). Despite knowing in advance that Starblanket’s troops were *not* there to inflict violence, and in fact, were there to support the Canadian troops by performing a loss-in-battle so as to dissuade further armed resistance to the Canadian government, these Canadian forces’

investment in an understanding of “Indians” as *essentially* violent remained too powerful for them to forego. Seeing First Nations people as anything *other* than violent, even when it is known beforehand that these people were only representing themselves *as* violent *for their benefit*, would have undermined their understanding of the First Nations person *as* the Savage. The cathexis of these Canadian soldiers in the image of the Savage is what justifies, to them, their own violence against First Nations peoples, and therefore this cathexis could not have been relinquished at any point.

Though *The Last Buffalo Hunter* naturalizes these violent representations in presenting itself as a “history,” it also, through making the connection between violence and trade, de-naturalizes them by revealing the underlying economic forces that produce these figures. The most potent example of how the Savage is connected to trade occurs in chapter ten, “The Legend of Naheyow.” This short chapter takes place at the mid-point of the narrative, and it is entirely devoted to a story told to Welsh by a Cree elder named “The Rump (Tapapachakonap)” (78). This story begins with an evocation of the ongoing conflict between the Blackfoot and the Cree people, and it introduces a young Cree boy, Naheyow, whose father, “Chee-poo-astotin (Pointed Cap)” was shot and killed by Blackfoot warriors (78). As a young man, Naheyow vows to avenge his father, and sets out after the Blackfoot band that had killed him. However, when he arrives at the Blackfoot encampment, he and the Blackfoot discover a mutual admiration for one another, and Naheyow ends up marrying the daughter of the Blackfoot chief. Eventually, after leading the Blackfoot in battle against the Mandan people, during which “not one of his men was wounded,” Naheyow comes to be the leader of the Blackfoot people (82). Through Naheyow’s leadership, the Blackfoot and the Cree achieve a longstanding peace and re-establish their kinship bonds with one another. Crucially, this is the only chapter in the entire work where trade

or money is not mentioned. Without commercial goods to fight over, the two perpetually warring peoples are able to come together, recognize their mutual values, and re-establish a peace that had been broken for generations.

Conclusion

This thesis began with a consideration of the conflicted position of the Métis buffalo hunter—one who sustains oneself and one's community through an unsustainable activity. This position, I've argued, is one that so uncannily mirrors our own within the affluent Western world, for we too sustain and perpetuate our societies and selves through a highly destructive economic system. Though this is the position in which Goulet and Welsh occupy during the bulk of their narratives,^{lvii} they both conclude their respective tales in an altogether different position: both men end up going blind and losing all their money. After spending the last of his savings travelling to different doctors in the hope that one of them might be able to cure his blindness, Goulet states, "not wanting to burden to anybody, I applied for entry to the Home for Incurables in Portage la Prairie ... after thirty years I'm still here" (167). Welsh too, after having lost his last successful business venture, freighting goods, to the establishment of a railway between his destinations, states: "I lost my eyesight in 1916. If I had my eyesight I could still make money. Instead, I am obliged to sit here and review in my mind the passing of the old West" (174). Both men, unable to work after going blind, live out the rest of their lives as dependents of the Canadian state: Welsh collects a pension and Goulet lives in a care facility. Despite existing within Canada, they are nonetheless framed as profoundly out of sync with the modern world that their own actions helped usher in.

To conclude my study of these works, I consider the position that Goulet and Welsh inhabit at the end of their narratives. I will begin with an examination of the efforts to assimilate the Métis into broader Canadian society after the extinction of the buffalo rendered their traditional economies no longer viable. Through doing so, I aim to demonstrate the tension between these

assimilative efforts and the characters of Goulet and Welsh at the end of their works. This will be followed by a consideration of how the subject position that Goulet and Welsh occupy at the end of their respective narratives provides a novel way of considering the human in relation to environmental crises.

St Paul des Métis

In the new society that has been made in the wake of the buffalo's extinction, Goulet and Welsh persist, not as actors effecting change in this new social order, but as relics from the past.

Considering the discourses of Indigeneity and extinction circulating in the nineteenth century, there is an implicit racism to this framing. During the nineteenth century, a portrayal of Indigenous peoples as being a race on the verge of extinction was used to justify and excuse a number of harmful policies and procedures. Influential scientists such as Charles Lyell, for example, naturalized and justified the project of settler colonialism through the discourse of extinction, arguing that the extinction of a supposedly less advanced race by a supposedly more advanced one was an immutable law of nature (Schuster 19-20). Edward Drinker Cope, who studied extinction and promoted eugenics in America, likewise held "a sharply bifurcated image of evolutionary progress wherein civilized races ascend into evolutionary perfection and the primitive fade quietly into extinction" (Schuller 145). Even today, Povinelli argues, settler states discursively frame existing Indigenous peoples in the past-tense, thus situating Indigenous practices, epistemologies, and ontologies as relics from a bygone era with little to no relevance in the modern world (172-173). Ultimately, "depictions of Indigenous people as extinct ... suggested that ... their lifeworlds ... had also vanished, to be replaced, in the teleological sequence of [h]istory, by systems within which settlers could make themselves at home"

(Luciano 24). Unable to participate in settler “civilization”—despite their own actions, to varying degrees, having helped usher it in—both Goulet and Welsh, to certain degree, embody this harmful trope.

But if we consider how discourses of extinction were used to erase Indigeneity through the assimilation of Indigenous peoples to the settler state, Goulet and Welsh represent something altogether different. Focusing on the Red River Métis specifically, we can examine how, following the extinction of the buffalo and the failed Northwest resistance of 1885, the Métis people were meant to be severed from their pasts, to experience their own cultural extinction, in order to emerge as proper subjects of the Canadian state. The St Paul des Métis Colony, a short-lived attempt at a Métis reservation owned and operated by the Catholic Church, exemplifies the desires marshalled and directions taken by those who sought to integrate the Métis population into Canadian society. While other reservations in Canada held Indian agents—government workers meant to supervise the Indigenous population on these lands—St Paul was placed under the jurisdiction of a Catholic Priest, Father Thérien, who dictated the law and organized the settlement. Though the idea for a colony like St Paul had existed since at least 1870, the “rebirth of the Métis colony idea arose in the aftermath of the 1885 Rebellion, *when the disappearance of the buffalo combined with the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) eliminated the traditional Plains Métis economy of hunting and freighting*” (Ens and Sawchuck 243-244 my emphasis). In light of these social and economic changes, the proponents of the colony “defined the Métis as a crisis-ridden people in need of reclamation,” a characterization which articulated “Métis [identity] as [a] pathology and problem” (Ens and Sawchuck 245, 240). The way to reform the Métis people, according to those who ran the colony, was to integrate them into the

economy of the settler state by teaching them “domestic economy, trades, and especially farming” (Ens and Sawchuck 245).

The leading voice advocating for the St Paul des Métis colony was Father Lacombe. Though Lacombe frequently praised the intellect and generosity of the Métis people, he argued that the “facility with which they allow themselves to be drawn into pleasures of all kind” prevented them from becoming the kind of productive and well-behaved citizens who would flourish within Canada (Lacombe qtd in Ens and Sawchuck 245). According to Lacombe, the Métis’ pursuit of pleasure resulted in “a considerable loss of time, a neglect of duties, and an inconstancy of character and lack of control, which rendered them fickle and improvident” (Ens and Sawchuck 245). Importantly, Lacombe did *not* attribute these supposed characteristics “to any *innate* flaw” in the Métis people (Ens and Sawchuck 245 my emphasis). Rather, Lacombe argued that this detrimental pursuit of pleasure originated from “the life of adventure, in which they had been brought up, [which] had not prepared them to face the new order of things brought by foreign immigration and the disparition of the buffalo” (Albert Lacombe qtd in Ens and Sawchuck 245). That is, the supposedly negative characteristics held by the Métis people were learned and passed down generationally, through activities such as the buffalo hunt.

Lacombe’s understanding of these supposed flaws in the Métis character—along with his belief in the ability to civilize them through agricultural work and Catholic ritual—aligns with a dominant nineteenth-century understanding of racial difference. Kyla Schuller argues that, prior to genetics, “a palimpsestic model of race ... in which racial status indexes the impressions that accumulate over the life span of individuals and the evolutionary time of races” was the dominant model for understanding racial difference in the Western world (12). Conceptualized as “impressibility,” this theory argued that “[r]ace *did not* name a fixed, interior quality of

individualized matter and *did not* function primarily to limit the perceived potential of some bodies” (Schuller 12 my emphasis). The theory of impressibility posited instead that repeated sensory impressions shaped the biological make up of both oneself and one’s descendants; through this process, sensory impressions were understood to shape the racial characteristics of a given population over time (Schuller 35-36).

Crucially, it was both the reception of these impressions and the *proper emotional responses* to them that determined the evolutionary paths of different human populations as they supposedly evolved into distinct races. Various races’ supposed differential “capacit[ies] to mount ... emotional response[s] to ... physical impression[s],” were understood by certain “[e]ighteenth- and nineteenth-century scientists” as “sentiment” (Schuller 36). For the aforementioned Edward Drinker Cope and other race scientists, “[s]entiment ... involve[d] the ability to make an appropriate and sympathetic reaction to an impression, rather than an impulsive and self-serving one ... racial progress stems from the ability of the civilized to control the impulses of their body through the faculty of sentiment” (Schuller 55 my emphasis). This understanding of race and evolution grounded a racial hierarchy. Beginning from a base of animality, human populations were able—with different degrees of success—to “layer by layer, [through] sensory impressions ... gradually transform animal carnality into human rationality” (Schuller 71). For Cope, and other eugenicists, it was the civilized (ie, Western European) races who were able to “transform basic impulses of pleasure or pain into a moral feeling that considers the social good, yet still ensures individual development” (Schuller 56). We can recall here, again, the episode of the prairie fire in *L’espace de Louis Goulet* that was analyzed in this work’s first chapter. While the Métis families were literally saved by local, environmental knowledge, Catholic ritual enabled the families to *respond* to the terrifying sights they took in

with a serene disposition. It was this ability of the Métis to “control the[ir] impulses” in the midst of terrifying circumstances, that demarcated them from the panicked animals who belonged to their brigade (Schuller 55, Charette 59-68).

These theories of race led to methods of assimilation predicated on the attempt to guide a given race’s developmental trajectory in a manner well-suited to the economic needs of the nation. Schuller dubs these projects:

Biophilanthropy [a project which] works via the steady accumulation of impressions that will *redirect a class or race from foreordained death and force it to persist*, as a newly proletarianized group, for the economic and moral health of the settler colonial project.
(136 my emphasis)

As we can see, these biophilathropic projects relied on discourses of death and extinction in order to realize their redemptive logic. These biophilanthropic projects—which include, in my view, the St Paul des Métis colony—were predicated on “uplifting uncivilized youth by placing them in the Christian institutions of school and home that would press new sensations into their somewhat pliable forms. In this mode of incremental life, racialized youth were gradually made to live and enter the capitalist economy” (Schuller 21). Though St Paul took in Métis families (adults and children), it is important to note that this institution was informed by a perspective, held by both the Canadian government and the Catholic Church, that “[v]iewed [the Métis] *as children*” and therefore, as impressionable (Ens and Sawchuck 243). For Lacombe, this particular education was to be realized through separating the Métis from the “life of adventure” that supposedly caused them to seek pleasure and excitement, thereby making them unsuited to the—at least in comparison to hunting buffalo—boring work of agriculture (Albert Lacombe qtd in Ens and Sawchuck 245). Much like with the residential schools in the United States that

Schuller examines, Lacombe too sought “to engrave the relentless rhythms of production and the contemplative chronology of Christian faith into the impulses of the flesh” (Schuller 162).

St Paul des Métis was predicated on turning the Métis people into Canadian citizens through severing them from their past-lifestyles and remaking them into farmers, economic subjects who would work the very land that had been seized from them and their First Nations relatives.^{lviii} However, becoming subjects of the Canadian state entailed far more than just becoming workers in the Canadian economy. As Lacombe’s assessment of the supposed flaws in the Métis character indicates, the way the Métis existed in and responded to the world—which Lacombe connected to the Indigenous practice of hunting buffalo—rendered them unfit for Canadian society. As Schuller argues, it was the persistence of Indigeneity—as a mode of being in the world—that biophilanthropic projects sought to excise from the Indigenous peoples they attempted to assimilate:

Native Youth’s sensory self-direction and resultant self-knowledge threatens the heart of the biophilanthropic project. Affectively, the Indian child must be exiled beyond the human, to experience her own death as a self-knowing subject with intimate connections to others, before she can be remade in her makers’ image.

According to its own logic, biophilanthropy reverses death, *seizing members of a primitive population marked for expiration and forcing them to live* by rending deleterious milieus out of the body layer by layer and violently imposing a new vitality on them. The first stage of this process is orchestrating the extermination of the past. (163 my emphasis)

We can see, here, the contradictory logic that was imposed onto Indigenous peoples: in order to avoid their extinction, Indigenous peoples must render themselves (culturally and historically) extinct. Indigenous people, in other words, must cease to live *as* Indigenous in order to survive as something else.

Let us return to Goulet and Welsh to see where they figure into this calculus of assimilation. Their blindness renders them unfit, in their own words, for work in the settler economy; and their inability to see also positions them as being unable to receive the sensory impressions that biophilanthropic projects would force upon them. Of course, the historical Welsh and Goulet could still hear, feel, and smell, but both men, as narrators of their respective works, make a point to note that their blindness prevents them from experiencing the contemporary world they occupy. Instead, by virtue of their blindness, they are forced to spend their lives revisiting the past. Welsh states, “[i]nstead [of working], I am obliged to sit here and review in my mind the passing of the old West” (174). While Goulet, not wanting to “burden anyone” shuts himself off in a “home for incurables” (167). From here, Goulet too demonstrates a propensity to re-live his past: “I often go off by myself, so I can be alone with people and things that disappeared long ago!” (42). Goulet and Welsh continue to exist, but they do so outside the narrative logic of assimilation; they remain within the settler state, but they are not brought into it as Subjects.

The Last Buffalo Hunters

My intention with this project is to articulate what aesthetic works can convey about subject formation (and de-formation) in relation to anthropogenic extinction events. Goulet and Welsh, at the end of their narratives, occupy the position of “*the haunting intermundia, the in-between*

status of the last” (Khalip ix emphasis in original). Regarding this position, queer theorist Jaques Khalip argues that “[t]he particularity of lastness ... dramatizes [a] kind of representation and rhetoric: If afterness is a form of fading, *lastness* ... stresses the repeatability or recoil *of an end that is neither negative nor a new beginning*—a finality that is something other than either a privation or a conclusion” (7 my emphasis). The position in which these narrators conclude their tales is not one which opens up towards a resurgent futurity. Goulet and Welsh do not exemplify the kind of the Indigenous epistemological and cultural practices that might provide us with “a *resurgent* approach to Indigenous decolonization that builds on the value and insights of our past” in order to “secure a noncolonial present and future” (Coulthard 149). Goulet and Welsh, after all, are not unproblematically connected to the formation of the settler state. But, in not being integrated into the Canadian state, they also stand as remnants of the violence of state formation. Defining themselves wholly through their past, a past of which they stand as some of its last beings—Welsh, literally being named “The Last Buffalo Hunter” in the title of his work—Goulet and Welsh “*embody lastness*” as they continue to “*endure under circumstances where enduring itself has been quenched*” (Khalip ix).

Goulet and Welsh persist as reminders of what had been, yet they still remain unable to fully become a part of what *is*. Occupying the frayed edges of Canadian civilization, not quite part of its continued perpetuation and expansion, but also not outside of or disconnected to these processes, these blind buffalo hunters stand, at the end of their narratives, as Subjects of extinction. Having lived through the extinction event which quite literally cleared the space for the Canadian state to establish itself and its preferred economic model—that of mining, agriculture, and transnational trade by railway—these men stand in for what was both *lost* and *created* through the extinction of the buffalo.

What we get from this subject position is a different way to talk and think about anthropogenic extinction. For, what is so striking about these narratives is the manner in which they differ so radically from the narratives being told about anthropogenic extinction today. We can contrast these buffalo hunting memoirs with the 2017 collection, *Extinction Studies*. This latter work is a collection of essays whose editors and contributors are academics who regularly publish books and papers on the subject of anthropogenic extinction. This is to say that this collection is representative of the current field of extinction studies as it is undertaken in the humanistic disciplines. *Extinction Studies* is a story-telling project whose aim is to create narrative “accounts grounded in and attentive to biocultural complexity, [accounts that] might reanimate and reconfigure possibilities for response and responsibility in this period of incredible loss” (Bird Rose et al 7). However valuable these narratives may be, what tends to get obfuscated by this approach is the very loss signified by an extinction event. For editor and contributor Thom Van Dooren, writing and thinking about extinction asks that “we take on the fraught work ... of weaving new stories ... Stories within stories that bring together the diversity of voices necessary to responsibly inhabit the rich patterns of interwoven inheritance that constitute our world” (207). I do recognize the validity of the statement that “that there is no singular phenomenon of extinction ... extinction is experienced, resisted, measured, enunciated, performed, and narrated in a *variety of ways*” (Bird Rose et al 2-3). However, despite the variety of experiences of extinction, I cannot help but feel that an approach which expresses extinction events through “bring[ing] together the diversity of voices necessary to inhabit ... our world” is one which too comfortably sublimates an otherwise profoundly disturbing loss into a proliferation of voices that exist in an idealized relation to one another (Van Dooren 207).

Admittedly, *Extinction Studies* is oriented towards marshalling future responses to extinction:

by *staying with* the lives and deaths of particular precious beings ... we hope to open up a place and a moment for a reflective gathering of energies *against* extinction but also *creative* of new modes of survival and fragile flourishing, of solidarity and respectful separation, new earthly webs of biocultural prosperity among the wounded and unloved, the precarious and the ruined. (Bird Rose et al 8 emphasis in original)

Bracketing the shaky logic behind the notion that reading stories can turn people into better ecological citizens^{lix}, I cannot help but read the movement towards futurity and repair as an anxious response to the very real discomfort faced by confronting our own role in perpetuating extinction events. Collection contributor James Hatley, for instance, notes that the purpose of his essay is “[n]ot simply to mourn the loss of Ōkami (a wolf native to Japan) but also *to resist* with one’s heart, with one’s mind, and with one’s soul *the very loss of this loss*, the descent into meaninglessness that extinction ... particularly anthropogenic extinction, threatens” (37 my emphasis). Though Ōkami is mourned in Hatley’s work, the loss of Ōkami, the very loss which defines it *as* an extinct creature, must be resisted rather than accepted in order to redeem extinction through meaning. In this way, the aesthetic medium of storytelling is used as an anesthetic; a way to derive a comfortable meaning from an event that is neither comfortable nor redeemable through an imposition of meaning.

In opposition to this approach, the contention of my thesis is that loss *must* be accepted and contended with when writing and thinking about extinction. This loss, as expressed in both *L’espace de Louis Goulet* and *The Last Buffalo Hunter*, is deeply unsettling and often destabilizing. And as the position both narrators occupy at the end of their works demonstrates, it

is not a loss that can be recuperated and then enfolded into some greater narrative of human progress and development. These are stories without futurity, each of which, in their own way, express the moments of self-shattering that occur both during an extinction event *and* in the recognition of one's own—or one's community's—contribution to it. Both narratives contend with the meaninglessness that erupts during extinction events—a meaninglessness which calls attention to the conflicts and contradictions inherent to us as subjects living through environmental crises. It is in attending to these texts' "descent[s] into meaninglessness that extinction ... particularly anthropogenic extinction, threatens," that these memoirs most powerfully explore and contend with living through extinction (Hatley 37). If we want to consider the subjects who are shaped through extinction events—as we all are, right now, currently being shaped regardless of whether that is acknowledged or not—we have to first accept the discomfort and non-innocence of this position by acknowledging, rather than sublimating, loss. Though all experiences of extinction will vary from one to the other, the stories of my ancestors provide a good starting point for considering the conflicted positions we now inhabit.

End Notes

ⁱ Unless otherwise indicated, I will be citing the English-language translation of *L'espace de Louis Goulet*, titled *Vanishing Spaces: The Memoirs of Louis Goulet*, translated by Ray Ellenwood. When citing this work in French, I will make a distinction between the published version of the text (*L'espace*) and the manuscript version held in the archives at the Société Historique de St. Boniface (MS).

ⁱⁱ With generous funding from The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and the Bennett Family Foundation, I was able to return to prairies during the summer of 2024 to do archival and field research for this project.

ⁱⁱⁱ Environmental historian George Colpitts notes that 1882 was the year in which the herds got too small to sustain market hunting of any kind, thereby marking an end to the buffalo hunts (*Pemmican Empire*).

^{iv} Though there is a poly-vocal aspect to the narrative voice in these texts, for the sake of clarity, I will be referring to the narrator of *L'espace de Louis Goulet* as “Goulet” and the narrator of *The Last Buffalo Hunter* as “Welsh.” However, I will be citing *L'espace de Louis Goulet* as “Charette” and *The Last Buffalo Hunter* as “Weekes,” as the transcribers of these works (Guillaume Charette and Mary Weekes) are listed as the authors of these works.

^v *Hivernant* communities were the temporary living spaces that Métis hunters, traders, and their families constructed for themselves to live out on the prairies during the winter months. These

hivernant communities allowed Métis families to remain closer to buffalo hunting territories (Hogue 28-29).

^{vi} In the English language-edition of *L'espace de Louis Goulet*, titled *Vanishing Spaces*, the collective nature of this narrative is formalized by the differences between the title of the work as it appears on the cover and the title as it appears on the book's front matter. The title on the cover is *Vanishing Spaces, Memoirs of Louis Goulet*; on the front matter, the title is *Vanishing Spaces (Memoirs of a Prairie Métis)*. This second title de-personalizes the work; in removing the name Louis Goulet and replacing it with the more free-floating signifier, "Prairie Métis," the story becomes detached from the single, historical person of Louis Goulet. The title "Prairie Métis" territorializes the memoir's subject, situating land and ecology—the *prairies*—as the essential characteristic of the subject of this work. These two titles, set against one another, prime us for understanding this text as being about land, ecology, and community, as much as about the singular, historical person of Louis Goulet. This idea is conveyed more succinctly in the French title: *L'espace de Louis Goulet*—the literal translation being the *space* of Louis Goulet. The word *space*—as opposed to the more contained "place"—denotes openness and expansiveness; something that exceeds the single subject.

^{vii} Thank you!

^{viii} One of my Métis ancestors is my great, great, great grandfather André Beauchemin. André Beauchemin was most known for being an inaugural member of the Provisional Government of 1870, alongside Louis Riel, wherein he represented the neighborhood of Saint Vital. André

would also continue to represent the district of Saint Vital as an MPP in the Canadian government afterwards. Today, however, Saint Vital is more of a “historic” Métis community than an active one. Despite our schools, parks, and street names being named after prominent Métis people, the dominant demographic of that area today is largely settler and middle-class.

^{ix} We can observe this mode of re-connection in Rivard’s research on the buffalo hunting memoirs. The concept of “oral geography” which Rivard develops includes, in its definition, “the *historical and critical analysis* of oral material—mediated through space or, more specifically, territory or landscape” (156 my emphasis). Through the concept of oral geography, Rivard yokes together both the creation of a land-based oral tradition by the buffalo hunters *and* the analysis of these traditions by contemporary scholars.

^x See: Fiola, *Returning To Ceremony*; Pigeon and Podruchny “The Mobile Village: Métis Women, Bison Brigades, and Social Order on the Nineteenth Century Plains”; Ens *Homeland To Hinterland*.

^{xi} The land that is now called “Canada” has held many different names for many different peoples. I use the term “Canada” in my work because it does demarcate a specific territorial boundary that is relevant to considering the extinction of the buffalo from the prairies and the role that various hunting parties played in this extinction event.

^{xii} An example of the reparative/reconnecting mode in Indigenous literary scholarship can be found in Ojibwe writer Heid E Erdrich’s essay “Literary Ancestry as Presence.” In this essay,

Erdrich researches nineteenth century Ojibwe writers such as “Keh-ke-wa-guo-na-ba/Peter Jones and Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh/George Copway” in order to establish a “literary genealogy” that she argues does not exist for “Ojibwe or even Native American” writers in the manner that it does for English literature (16, 15). Looking at the literary history of her people, Erdrich writes, “[a]n absence persisted ... In order to answer that absence *and fill it with signs of presence* ... we need to recognize landmark works of literature in the Ojibwe-English tradition” (15 my emphasis). Erdrich’s language in this passage demonstrates the approach to absence—“fill it with signs of presence”—that is taken up within reparative or reconnecting modes of scholarship. Through this approach, Erdrich sutures the absences within the Ojibwe literary tradition. This is crucial for her project, but for my own, it is the absence itself—in this case, the loss of the wild buffalo from the prairies and the buffalo hunting life-way—that requires attention and consideration.

^{xiii} Though I do not discount the possibility of female hunters or traders, and I recognize the extremely important roles that women held in the brigades and Métis society at large, I say “men” here because so far, I have not found any examples of female hunters or traders specifically. For research that examines the gender politics of Métis society in the nineteenth century, see: Pigeon and Podruchny, “The Mobile Village: Métis Women, Bison Brigades, and Social Order on the Nineteenth-Century Plains;” Hamon ““Recognize Us as a People and Not as Buffaloes’: Louis Riel and the Gendering of the Red River Public Sphere;” Macdougall and St-Onge “Rooted in Mobility.”

^{xiv} A few quotes that speak to this include: the buffalo brigades were “the actual foundation of *La Nation Métisse*” (31 Macdougall and St-Onge); “the year-round pursuit of buffalo ... gave a particular shape to Plains Metis communities” (17 Hogue).

^{xv} See: Schuster, *What is Extinction?* (43-69).

^{xvi} These summer hunts, and the massive amounts of pemmican they generated, were also created in response to real provisioning needs, as during the 1820s (and into the 1870s) the Red River agricultural economy failed miserably: “Poor yielding crops, frequent flooding in bottom lands along the Red and Assiniboine, grasshoppers and other scourges, early frost, and late springs all conspired against” the Red River settlement farmers (160 Colpitts). Though farming was encouraged by the HBC, the farmers themselves were still heavily reliant on the production of pemmican to maintain their livelihoods (Sprenger “The Metis Nation: Buffalo Hunting versus Agriculture in the Red River Settlement, 1810-1870”).

^{xvii} This refers to an incident in which several Métis men were arrested for trading with entities other than the Hudson’s Bay Company. The men were found guilty in court, yet the collective of armed Métis citizens standing outside the courthouse ensured that no punishment was meted out. From this point onwards, the HBC ceased attempting to enforce the laws it had set into place regarding its exclusive purchasing power of buffalo products from the Métis people (Ens and Sawchuck 54, 90-91).

^{xviii} Welsh stresses that his own brigade, for the most part, did not hunt in his wasteful manner.

He also makes the claim that “[t]he Yankees shot more buffalo for their hides than all the Indian and half-breed hunters put together. The Indians knew better. They did not want to see the buffalo gone forever” (43). Yet, considering this hunt took place in Saskatchewan, it is safe to assume that the waste he is describing in this chapter resulted from other Indigenous hunting parties. For, as I noted in the above, American settler hunting parties did not cross into Canadian territory during their hunts (Cunfer and Waiser x).

^{xix} As we can observe from the role that human communities have played, since pre-historic times, in effecting extinction events across the globe, this problem is not reducible to capitalism alone (Sale, *After Eden*; Kolbert *The Sixth Extinction*; Sweet, *Extinction and the Human*). Yet, I think we can argue that capitalism is the ultimate expression of this phenomenon. As Elizabeth Kolbert has noted, it is “change, and to be more specific, rate of change” that drives extinction events (266). With capitalism, human beings have changed the world so fast and so frequently that we are now existing amongst a mass extinction whose scale matches that of the eradication of the dinosaurs.

^{xx} Charette does say that Goulet’s truthfulness derives from him being “objective” or, in the French “impersonnel.” I wanted to note this qualifier here in order to stay faithful to a text that admittedly few people are familiar with. However, I do believe that this description of Goulet (or the narrator presented as “Louis Goulet”) as “impersonnel” is erroneous. As we will see, the narrative voice of this work is deeply passionate about what is depicted, and, more importantly,

he constantly references his own subjective point of view—particularly when emphasizing the truthfulness of the work itself.

The end of this paper concludes with an analysis of a passage from *L'espace de Louis Goulet*, which, in my estimation, is rife with irresolvable contradictions. I believe this claim of objectivity made by Charette, when matched against the narrative voice itself, stands as one of the many contradictions this work presents us with and ultimately does not resolve.

^{xxi} The difference between *âcimisowin(a)* and *âcimowin(a)* being that the former refers to stories “about oneself,” while the latter which denotes storytelling in a more general sense.

^{xxii} This manuscript is widely available today thanks to the Gabriel Dumont Institute:

<https://www.metismuseum.ca/media/document.php/03831.wisdom.papasschayo.pdf>

^{xxiii} Johnston argues that anyone studying Indigenous peoples should to learn Indigenous languages. Regarding his own tribal language, Johnston notes how, “all words have three levels of meaning” (6).

^{xxiv} Prior to recounting these stories, Goulet inscribes himself into the oral tradition by stating that he will be “spend[ing] a few minutes on some true-life examples” (8). The phrase “a few minutes” denotes an oral mode of delivery for it is only in being spoken out loud that words on a page can hold a temporality. To convey to the reader the world opened to him through oral tradition, the narrator positions himself as speaking within that same tradition. This important formal convention is returned to throughout the work.

^{xxv} I first presented this chapter as a paper at the 2024 Mawachihitotaak Métis studies symposium. The panel I was on included on Andre Nault's descendent, Dr. Derrick Nault. Dr. Nault's presentation "A Case of Mistaken Identity: Guillmette, Tromage, 'Le Roc' and the Riel Group Portrait," was a historical analysis of a famous group photograph featuring, among many others, my own great-great-great grandfather André Beauchemin. One can find Dr Nault's research on this topic in his article "A Misleading Portrait: The Provisional Government of Assiniboia and the Creation of Manitoba."

^{xxvi} In Charette's archival draft, the importance of having a Catholic kill the wendigo is stressed even further, "Le seul moyen possible c'est de la faire tuer par un catholique" (MS 1/412). The direct translation of this being: "the *only* way to get rid of a Wendigo is to have it killed by a Catholic."

^{xxvii} This is not a denial of the continued existence of Indigenous folklore or legends. I am looking at how the text rhetorically frames the loss of the conditions that sustained Métis life prior to the extinction of the buffalo.

^{xxviii} Many Métis families whose permanent residences were in "Canadian" territory went to United States territory to hunt, trade, and live temporarily. This practice became increasingly common as the buffalo herds thinned in Canadian territory and new hunting grounds needed to be sought out (Hogue, *Métis and the Medicine Line*).

^{xxix} Orange-men are a protestant organization who promoted white supremacy, advocated for the seizure of Indigenous lands, and were virulently anti-Catholic and anti-Métis. Or, as my uncle Louis describes them, “the KKK for everybody French, Catholic, and Métis.”

^{xxx} As Hogue’s work so persuasively demonstrates, Canada and the United States were heavily invested in maintaining the integrity of their borders. Mobile people, such as the Métis, were a constant threat to the divisions imposed onto the land. With Catholicism and Christianity being invested in the settler-colonial project, priests wanted the Métis (and other Indigenous groups) to remain sedentary so as to perpetuate these border divisions (*Métis and the Medicine Line*).

^{xxxi} Grasshoppers were responsible for the decimation of many harvests in the Red River Settlement between 1816 and 1870 (Sprenger, “The Métis Nation: Buffalo Hunting Versus Agriculture in the Red River Settlement, 1810-1870”).

^{xxxii} “One of the main reasons for the decimation of the buffalo herds was that cows were hunted in the spring, during the calving season. Right off, a generation ceased to exist before it was even born, dying with the slaughtered mothers. It was the quickest and surest way to wipe out a race of animals, by reducing its numbers and also its capacity to reproduce” (Charette 50).

^{xxxiii} Or, “proto-Métis,” depending on whether one considers the Victory at Frog Plains in 1816 to be the first articulation of the Métis identity.

^{xxxiv} Margeurite Bourbon is introduced to the reader in the work's shortest chapter. Despite being presented as Goulet's great love, and there are very few details about the narrator's relationship with her or even about Margeurite herself. As a result, Bourbon is more of a symbol of Catholic grace than a character in this work. Goulet introduces her as "a person whom only the prayers of a kind and tender mother could have placed in my way" (107). The only interaction Goulet recalls having with Bourbon is her mentioning to him that she was considering becoming a nun (108), but other than that, Bourbon only presents herself, in this work, as a dream or vision that appears to Goulet (along with his mother) during moments of crisis. In these visions, Bourbon and Goulet's mother are often observed praying for his safety, and he always awakes from them with a reaffirmed commitment to his Catholic faith.

^{xxxv} Goulet's statement that he is not the same person, *even today*, when he thinks about the image of Father Marchand's brains falling out of his skull ironizes the sense of safety and security he expresses regarding his Catholic faith at the end of the work. For, when confronted by this image, something like a self-rupturing occurs, shattering the sense of security enabled by his Catholic faith.

^{xxxvi} Unfortunately, the details of Goulet's work with medicine are left very vague. There is no elaboration of what this practice entailed beyond what I've quoted. It could be that Goulet learned these practices from persons who did not want the specifics of them to be widely disseminated. There is also the possibility that this practice is more of an artistic device, meant to make us consider the relationship between place, circumstance, and spirituality.

^{xxxvii} These descriptions include those of giant buffalo fossils, calling our attention to pre-historic extinction events (Charette 20).

^{xxxviii} I should perhaps be saying “Gamache and Hourie,” but that feels strange in the context of a conversation with friends and relatives.

^{xxxix} Singh uses the singular “moment” to refer to our own era of climate crisis. However, I believe the logic is applicable to the longer history of human-induced climate catastrophes.

^{xl} There are similarities between what is claimed here and what is asserted by Bilawag and Binbin. Although, I would argue that Dedibaayaanimanook’s argument places more emphasis on the land itself as the site of truth, whereas Bilawag and Binbin position truth more as an insight that arises from a relationship between various beings within a given locale. Bilawag and Binbin thus emphasize the contingency of truth more so than Dedibaayaanimanook who (at least, to my understanding) grounds the truth solidly in the land itself.

^{xli} Lowe argues that Equiano’s narrative draws out the contradictions of this ascent to subject-hood as well (62-71).

^{xlii} After Boyer’s passing in 1902, Welsh married Marguerite McDougall (née Taylor) in 1903 (Barkwell “Norbert Welsh dit Lallemand”). Though Welsh makes reference to his “wife” many times after 1903, Welsh’s marriage to Taylor is never mentioned in *The Last Buffalo Hunter*; nor is Taylor ever mentioned by name.

^{xliii} There are scenes that take place after Welsh announces his retirement which depict Welsh hunting buffalo. These later hunts, however, appear to have been done for the sake of provisioning, rather than for market purposes.

^{xliv} Though Lloyd does use the term “Primitive” at one point for this figure, he typically refers to this figure as the “Savage,” and at another point, “the Negro and the Black” (7). In other words, this identity-in-opposition to the Subject is given different names throughout colonial discourse. My use of the term Primitive, rather than Savage, which Lloyd uses more frequently, is because, following the research of Jodi Byrd, I use the term “Savage” to denote a different figure that *The Last Buffalo Hunter* also portrays. Therefore, I will be substituting the term “Primitive” for “Savage” at many points when quoting from Lloyd’s text.

^{xlv} The Cree leader Chief Starblanket was a real, historical person. I say that, in *The Last Buffalo Hunter*, the character of Chief Starblanket represents this “figure,” rather than representing the historical person of Chief Starblanket, because undoubtedly, the real Cree chief was far more complex and importantly, far more *agentic*, than this representation portrays.

^{xlvi} For example, if I were watching a film, a properly aesthetic judgement would be something like “the arrangement of the colours in this scene is beautiful,” whereas an improper judgment would be something like, “that scene with the zombie scared me.”

^{xlvi} In a literal sense, however, Welsh's assertion that Starblanket's band had "nothing at all," is not true. The Cree did have food and clothes; what they were lacking was trade goods: "tea, tobacco, and ammunition" (101). This speaks to the integral role that trade goods played. Of course, the lack of ammunition does place this band in a position of extreme precarity, showing how the little food they had left would have shortly been reduced to nothing without the exchange that follows.

^{xlvi} Starblanket referring to Welsh as "brother," touches on the somewhat ambiguous racial status of Welsh himself. Though Welsh maintains his status as a "half-breed" throughout the work, he also repeatedly categorizes himself and the Métis people as "white men." This distinction is perhaps most striking in the passage whereby he relates a conversation between a Sioux chief Ma-pa-chong and a Métis hunter named Batiste La Bombarde. Ma-pa-chong asks "how it was that the bullets fired by the Indians made such small holes in the white men, and the white men's bullets made such large holes in the Indians?" (161). To this, La Bombarde responds "because the Indians ... fired from afar. They were cowards. On the other hand, the half-breeds went up like men—the length of their guns—to the Indians. That explained the size of the bullet holes" (161). Despite this (and other) racist distinctions between Métis and First Nations peoples, the extension of nominal kinship relations flows freely between the Métis and the First Nations peoples throughout this work. Many Indigenous characters (both Métis and First Nations) who are not related by blood use terms such as uncle, nephew, niece, daughter, son, grandfather, etc, freely in reference to one another. This extension of kinship is explicitly denied and rejected by Welsh in regards to settler characters, even in the case of one white character who shares the last name and country of origin of Welsh's grandfather (84).

^{xlix} The schools where Welsh and Starblanket's children are sent are not explicitly stated as being residential schools. However, this event takes place roughly in 1880 (the year when these schools were first established); the schools are ran by the Catholic Church; and these schools do not reside on Starblanket's reservation—as evidenced by the multitude of protests made by Starblanket that the priests were asking him to “*send* his children to school” and that the priests were taking their children “away” (104 my emphasis).

^l Towards the end of the work, Welsh again proclaims to speak for Starblanket and his people. Welsh, frustrated with some RCMP officers who had mistakenly take him for one of Riel's men, states that “if I had wanted to start a rebellion, all I had to do was to sound my whistle and Starblanket and all the other Indians would come to my assistance” (166-167). Welsh again positions himself as representative *of* Starblanket and his Cree band, but in this instance, he draws upon the latent potential for violence that First Nations people represent to the settler imaginary. This image of the violent Indigenous other will be examined in the following section of this chapter.

^{li} This is another instance in which there exists something of an antagonism between historical and aesthetic analyses. A historical argument about Welsh's behaviour in this chapter (assuming that it has been verified as at least somewhat accurate) could reasonably posit that Welsh, given the conditions surrounding him, very much believed that the best way to protect his friend, Chief Starblanket, was to intervene on his behalf with state authorities who had no qualms about butchering and starving the continent's Indigenous population.

^{lii} The focus on the US enables Byrd to extend their argument to the contemporary reliance of US empire on these ideas of Indians and Indianness to characterize enemies of the state who reside outside the borders of US territory.

^{liii} It should be said that Byrd's use of the parallax gap relies upon an understanding of the Lacanian Real that is incommensurate with Lacan's formulation of the Real. For Byrd, the Real is the "discursive colonialist core" that produces these representations (30), while for Lacan, the Real is more akin to an a-signifying anterior to all signification: It cannot *be* something like colonial discourse because it cannot be anything one can represent. As Lacan puts it, "the little we know about the real shows its antinomy to all verisimilitude" (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* ix). Byrd does recognize the difference between their usage of the Real and Žižek's more Lacanian usage, as they write of the Real in Žižek's theory that: "Multiple viewing locations of the Real are created, though no single one of them is capable of discerning the Real and there is no possibility of triangulating the Real by taking into consideration all perspectives" (30).

Through their movement away from Lacan's Real, Byrd's formulation of the parallax gap proves to be immensely instructive for interrogating colonial logics through representations of the Indian.

^{liv} At this point in the work, Welsh is not yet an independent trader, but rather, is working under contract as a trader for Joseph MacKay.

^{lv} There is an exception to this rule in *The Last Buffalo Hunter*. At one point, Welsh mentions a Cree warrior named Tying Knot who led an assault on the Blackfoot. Following this, Welsh states that “[y]ears afterwards when Tying Knot became blind, he told me that his blindness was a punishment from God. He had meanwhile become a Christian. He had been too cruel, he thought, to the Indians whom he had killed. He had tortured them terribly” (67). Again, however, this process of assimilation requires a submission to a higher, colonial power (the Catholic Church), and, in an echo of Goulet’s narrative, the loss of Tying Knot’s vision—his own particular sensory apparatus.

^{lvi} This action in turn triggers a violent response from the Sioux, who “attacked the settlement. They killed all the settlers and burned the town. Everything was destroyed right down to the ground. I went through that settlement six months afterward with Bannatyne. *The trail to Saint Paul* [a major centre of trade in the Northwest] *led through it*” (Weekes 162 my emphasis).

^{lvii} Technically, Goulet was *not* a buffalo hunter or a trader, but he grew up on the buffalo hunts, thereby he and his community were sustained through this practice.

^{lviii} This project of racial uplift was abandoned when the residential school erected within St Paul des Métis colony was burned down by its students. This fire left Father Thérien, “psychologically crushed” and signaled “the beginning of the end of Lacombe’s dream to rehabilitate the destitute Métis of the west” (Ens and Sawchuck 251). This residential school was initially conceived of as a day school but was changed to a residential school at the request of some Métis parents who wanted the church “to provide food and clothing to their children [so as

to] free the parents to hunt and fish” (Ens and Sawchuck 250). This is worth noting because it reveals the different fantasies between the Métis and Church about what St Paul des Métis was meant to be. Of the Métis who migrated to this reserve, “a significant number were former plains buffalo hunters or the children of buffalo hunters” (Ens and Sawchuck 247). Surprisingly, many of these families sold or left land they owned or lived on in order to re-situate themselves within the colony (Ens and Sawchuck 247). Ens and Sawchuck explain this phenomenon through the ecology in which St Paul was situated, “a relatively unsettled area until 1904, [where] it was still possible to hunt, and there was easy access to fishing lakes and trapping areas to the north” (249). That is, these Métis families understood St Paul as a place where the Church would provide “services and material goods *in time of need*” while the families could continue their traditional lifestyles, maintaining “their distinctive hunting, trapping, freighting, and small-scale horticultural economy” (Ens and Sawchuck 249, 250 my emphasis). For many of these Métis families, Ens and Sawchuck argue, “farming was not a high priority and hence *owning land* was even less of a priority” (249 my emphasis). Rather than understanding this colony as a means to sever them from their traditional life-ways, the Métis families who migrated to St Paul saw it as a means through which the lives they had known prior to the extinction of the buffalo could persist.

^{lix} This logic is well criticized by Swarbrick and Tremblay (3-30).

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