“I Am My Own Best Medicine”: Joshua Whitehead’s *Jonny Appleseed* and Two-Spirit Resurgence

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Abstract: This article explores how Joshua Whitehead’s novel *Jonny Appleseed* discusses the complexities of being Two-Spirit on the reserve and in the city in Canada, exposes the double oppression and erasure of Two-Spiritedness, and demonstrates the possibility—and necessity—of queering the struggle for Indigenous resurgence. This article connects Two-Spirit theory with Native feminist theories (and their analyses of heteropatriarchy) and Qwo-Li Driskill’s concepts of “colonized sexuality” and a “Sovereign Erotic.” By close reading the novel and focusing on the themes of performance, erasure, shame, ceremony, and the body, this article aims to show the ways Indigeneity and queerness are interconnected and constantly re-negotiated. This article also aims to show how these links expose the underlying structural heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy in settler colonialism and Indigenous resurgence discourses. It suggests the possibility of radically revising the struggle for resurgence by centering Two-Spiritedness and understanding Two-Spirit desires and identities as inherently anti-colonial.

Joshua Whitehead’s 2018 novel *Jonny Appleseed* is a Two-Spirit coming-of-age story concerned with the intersections of identities and the complex positions these identities occupy in contemporary space and discourse. The eponymous protagonist Jonny’s identity is Two-Spirit—both queer and Indigenous—and therefore intersectional; he must renegotiate his identity in his home reserve of Peguis First Nation and the city of Winnipeg because neither space understands his existence.[1] To paraphrase Two-Spirit scholar Qwo-Li Driskill, who describes the

1 I have questioned whether I, as a non-Indigenous person, should write about the novel and about Two-Spiritedness at all. I consider it essential to always reflect on my privilege and my position in the structures of settler colonialism. I also think that Native feminist theories and Two-Spirit theories should be an essential part of any queer, feminist, or decolonial/post-colonial studies. I

discussion between Queer and Native studies as "doubleweaving"—referencing the Cherokee art of double-woven baskets as well as doubleweaving as a feature of Cherokee rhetorical theory and practice ("Doubleweaving" 73)—Two-Spirit identities can be seen as a doubleweaving of the racial "Other" and transgressive genders and/or sexualities. Because neither the reserve nor Winnipeg can fully accommodate Jonny's complex identity, he must eventually create a space for himself.

In general, Indigenous thought has regarded Indigeneity and queerness as distinct identities. As such, while Indigenous thought and action have worked to respond to settler colonialism and build discourses of Indigenous resurgence, Two-Spirit people and perspectives have largely been excluded from these discourses. The Indigenous art canon has consistently erased LGBTQ+ experiences and themes (Nixon, "I Wonder" 50), so portraying one's true lived experiences—regardless of whether they fit into the mainstream limited and limiting narrative of resurgence —both deconstructs the alienating binaries of the anti-colonial discourse of resurgence and builds an alternative, nuanced narrative of Indigeneity that *centers* Two-Spirit people.

Furthermore, even Two-Spirit authors themselves have until recently rarely focused on Two-Spiritedness in their writing. While there have always been Two-Spirit writers and other artists, their identities have not typically played a major role in their work; they have mostly represented the experience of an Indigenous person who happened to be Two-Spirit in private.[2] I view Whitehead as part of what I call a

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share Scott Lauria Morgensen's desire to "unsettle" and question the ways settler colonialism has been using sexual minorities and queer identities for its own purposes (especially to claim land) and how colonialism has been defining non-Indigenous queer identities (134). I believe that as non-Indigenous scholars, we must strive to center, in Linda Tuhiwai Smith's words, "decolonizing methodologies" in our fields. After all, *everyone* is racialized, gendered, and has a relationship with settler colonialism (Arvin et al. 9). Acknowledging this should help build alliances—to associate without presuming intimacy (Gingell 107)—that are needed to deconstruct the above-mentioned colonial power systems and to imagine alternative futures.

2 There have always been exceptions, however, and the examples of openly and outspokenly Two-Spirit writers clearly show the continuity of Two-Spirit writing. These include Paula Gunn Allen's poem "Some Like Indians Endure" (1981) or Beth Brant and her "A Long Story" (1988), the latter of which tells parallel stories of two women whose children were taken away because they were seen as "unfit mothers": one for being Indigenous, the other for being lesbian. Brant also edited a volume of Native American women's writing, *A Gathering of Spirit* (1983), which includes eleven Two-Spirit women, and she is often seen as a pioneer of Two-Spirit writing. The first anthology of Two-Spirit writers, *Living the Spirit: A Gay American Indian Anthology* (edited by Will Roscoe), was published five years later, in 1988, and to my knowledge had been the only collection specifically of Two-Spirit authors until 2011 when *Sovereign Erotics: A Collection of Two-Spirit*

'new wave' of Two-Spirit Indigenous authors who explicitly engage with the discourse of resurgence,[3] who unapologetically feature their sexual and/or gender identities as a major part of their work,[4] and who employ what Ojibwe/Dakota writer and scholar Scott Richard Lyons terms rhetorical sovereignty: "[t]he inherent right of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires [...] to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse" (449-50).

This article aims to establish the Two-Spirit protagonist of *Jonny Appleseed* as someone who defies colonial attitudes towards gender and sexuality. It also analyzes Jonny's reclamation of his Two-Spiritedness as an alternative model of resurgence that fulfills Driskill's concept of a Sovereign Erotic. First, I will summarize the key concepts I use as well as the novel. Then, I will analyze the double oppression of the protagonist's identity in the settings of the reserve and Winnipeg. After this, I will focus on Jonny's resistance against oppression and how the use of first-person narration emphasizes his agency. Through a close reading of the novel, I will present concrete examples of these practices and demonstrate that what I call Two-Spirit resurgence is essential for the protagonist in reclaiming his identity. To conclude, I will rephrase my analysis in the context of the wider debate about queer studies and propose potential areas for further research.

Concepts

To better orient the reader and make the article more accessible, I include a brief overview of the main concepts that I will use to analyze the novel. The definitions below are by no means exhaustive but will be necessary in setting up the subsequent analysis.

Literature came out (edited by Qwo-Li Driskill, Daniel Heath Justice, Deborah Miranda, and Lisa Tatonetti). Both Paula Gunn Allen and Beth Brant were included in *Living the Spirit*. As Cree/Métis scholar Kim Anderson puts it, "Beth Brant gave us Indigenous feminism and Indigenous queer theory even before we had a name for these practices" (*A Generous Spirit*, back cover).

3 Together with writers Gwen Benaway, Billy-Ray Belcourt, Lindsay Nixon, painter Kent Monkman, and many others.

4 *Jonny Appleseed* is in conversation with this "new" Two-Spirit literature, and also echoes similar depictions found elsewhere in contemporary Indigenous literature. For example, like the speaker of Belcourt's poem "Sacred," Jonny is "told to be a man and to decolonize in the same breath" (*This Wound is a World* 17).

Indigenous

In this article, I use the word Indigenous as a collective term for the original peoples of North America. *Jonny Appleseed* takes place on the Peguis First Nation in Manitoba, Canada, as well as in the city of Winnipeg. The Canadian state distinguishes between three distinct groups of Indigenous peoples: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. Similarly, the United States distinguishes between two groups of Indigenous peoples: Native Americans and Alaskan Natives.[5] The term First Nations has replaced the outdated term 'Indian' in today's Canada, but 'Indian' (or, especially online, NDN) has been continuously used and/or reclaimed by some individuals, as the book indicates. While I find the umbrella term Indigenous helpful in referring to a group of people that has experienced similarly targeted structural oppression from the colonial state, including colonial attitudes about gender and sexuality, it is important to remember that the Indigenous nations residing in Canada are diverse in terms of their histories, practices, and philosophies. Therefore, in most contexts I use the nation's name rather than the term Indigenous.

Two-Spirit

The term Two-Spirit (often shortened to 2S)—and especially its complex relationship with queerness—is essential for understanding the novel. Two-Spirit is an umbrella term for Indigenous people whose sexual or gender identities transgress the dominant Eurocentric boundaries and norms of cis- and heteronormativity. The term was coined in 1990 at a gathering of Native Queer/Two-Spirit people in Winnipeg to replace the derogatory anthropological term 'berdache,' to facilitate discussions about Two-Spirit identities in English (52), and to create "a sovereign term in the invader's tongue" (62). Like queer, Two-Spirit is an intentionally ambiguous and fluid term, "created specifically to hold, not diminish or erase, complexities" (Driskill "Stolen" 62).

While Two-Spirit is a contemporary intertribal term, many Indigenous people use terms such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or queer (LGBTQ+), and yet many others use specific tribal terms or move between terms depending on the context

5 Native Hawaiians (Kānaka Maoli) are typically counted as a single group with other Pacific Islanders for statistical and most other official purposes.

(Driskill "Doubleweaving" 72). Two-Spirit identity is not defined as a sexual or gender minority, but by qualities beyond sexuality or gender (Morgensen 134-35). It emphasizes the ceremonial or spiritual traditions of Two-Spirit people (Driskill "Doubleweaving" 72). Two-Spirit is, unlike queer, specific to Indigenous people. Various terms are, however, used in parallel in the novel, such as Two-Spirit, gay, and queer.

Double Oppression

Two-Spirit people experience double oppression as a result of their unique social positioning. They face racist discourse and discrimination against Indigenous people at large and homophobia and transphobia against Indigenous and non-Indigenous queers. Two-Spirit people embody Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's "theory in the flesh," because their "physical realities" lead to their constant and systemic othering and exclusion (23). To paraphrase Moraga and Anzaldúa,[6] Two-Spirit people are typically portrayed as racially othered in a white queer movement and as sexually othered among the people of their cultures (21). This double othering of Two-Spirit people, and the seeming separateness of their Indigenous and queer identities, is built on heteronormativity, heteropatriarchy, and heteropaternalism. These interconnected oppressive structures—enforced by settler colonialism—are, arguably, the very "logics of colonialism" itself (Finley 33).

Heteropatriarchy, Heteropaternalism, Heteronormativity

Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill, scholars in the fields of Indigeneity, ethnicity, and gender, define heteropatriarchy as "the social systems in which heterosexuality and patriarchy are perceived as normal and natural, and in which

6 At the same time, I want to acknowledge the problematic nature of Anzaldúa's views on Indigenous people elsewhere, which might render my parallel above meaningless. In her seminal work *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa, who sees the concept of hybridity, materialized in the figure of *la mestiza* and the racially hybrid world she symbolizes, as the ideal of the new and better world, writes that "some Indian cultures have no tolerance for [sexual] deviance" (18) and that people of mixed race "necessarily possess the tolerance for ambiguity" (30). In these lines, she expresses an essentialist view of tolerance or intolerance for queerness as being dependent on race and thus perpetuates the idea of Two-Spirit people as non-traditional or ahistorical, as is discussed further on in this article, and the view of Indigeneity as (at least in "some Indian cultures") irreconcilable with queerness. I am grateful to Andrea Smith's paper "The Heteronormativity of Colonialism" for bringing these passages to my attention.

other configurations are perceived as abnormal, aberrant, and abhorrent," and heteropaternalism as "the presumption that heteropatriarchal nuclear-domestic arrangements, in which the father is both center and leader/boss, should serve as the model for social arrangements of the state and its institutions" (13). Both of these concepts refer to manifestations of patriarchy that depend on heteronormativity and the assumption of binary gender. Heteronormativity is the social assumption that most relationships and sexual relations are heterosexual. Heterosexuality is thus expected and reinforced as a norm, typically through state-sanctioned measures, such as rules regarding marriage, inheritance, etc.

Compounded Colonization

In the context of settler colonialism, double oppression can also be theorized as compounded colonization. In a paper about colonial discourses on race and sexuality, anthropologist and intersectional scholar Jean E. Balestrery explains this concept as a "historical configuration of co-constituting discourses based on cultural and ideological assumptions that invidiously marked a social group with consequential, continuing effects" which is "evident through rhetorical strategies [...] that intertwine theories of racial degeneracy and sexual pathology, theories bound up in racism, homophobia, and heterosexism" (634). This double oppression is an ongoing process, as "colonial projects [such as the colonial states of Canada and the US] continually police sexual and gender lines" (Driskill "Doubleweaving" 73). While Indigenous societies did not originally build themselves around the Western gender binary and normative heterosexuality—many cultures included multiple genders and fluid identifications of gendered and sexual practices—the colonial states of Canada and the US have been enforcing such ideas since their establishment, often through violence.[7] In other words, "[Indigenous peoples'] erotic lives and identities have been colonized along with [their] homelands" (Driskill "Stolen" 52). Colonial violence historically targeted Two-Spirit individuals specifically because they did not fit Western binary categories (Smith, *Conquest* 178) and thus threatened the stability of these categories. Sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and sexual assault are all forms of colonial violence (Driskill "Stolen" 51).

7 See Mark Rifkin's book *When Did Indians Become Straight? Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty* (2011) for an in-depth analysis of these colonial processes of Two-Spirit erasure in the US.

Colonized Sexuality

This continuous colonial erasure has led to a major loss of cultural memory of Two-Spiritedness in many Indigenous societies, some of whose members claim that Two-Spiritedness cannot be reconciled with tradition[8]—the very tradition to which it once belonged. According to Chris Finley, "heteropatriarchy has become so natural in many Native communities that it is internalized and institutionalized as if it were traditional" (34). This means that in addition to the colonial oppression of Two-Spiritedness, these colonial attitudes regarding gender and sexuality have been to a large extent internalized in many Indigenous communities, which then replicate the gendered and sexual norms and discourse enforced by the dominant culture. While Kenyan scholar Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o identifies a "colonization of the mind," Driskill talks in particular about a colonized sexuality in which Indigenous people "have internalized the sexual values of dominant culture" (Driskill "Stolen" 54); colonialism thus works to silence, shame, erase, and destroy histories of sexualities and genders that do not conform to the cis- and heteronormative colonial frameworks.

Indigenous Resurgence

Understanding colonized sexuality and internalized heteropatriarchy is essential in thinking about the ways Indigenous communities have theorized resisting the colonial oppression outlined above, mainly through Indigenous resurgence. The political philosophy of resurgence argues that to become liberated, Indigenous peoples must re-assert their sovereignty by refusing the colonial settler state and its institutions (Nixon, "I Wonder" 47). This differentiates resurgence from decolonization. Resurgence seeks full sovereignty and independence from the

8 This internalized Two-Spirit erasure can be clearly seen, for example, in Dawn McKinley and Kathy Reynolds's lengthy legal battle to get their same-sex marriage recognized by the Cherokee Nation. In his 2016 opinion, which nullified the 2004 heteronormative definition of marriage on the Nation, attorney general Todd Hembree cited, among other sources, John Howard Payne who visited the Nation in the 1830s and who "describes a ceremony that bonded two people of the same sex together for life. The relationship described in some respects would seem to parallel a modern day same-sex marriage in the depth of its commitment, its permanence, and its recognition by the other members of the tribe" (Hardzinski). Driskill et al. point out that "[u]sually, tribes who are quick to adopt anti-gay marriage laws—such as the Cherokee Nation and the Navajo Nation—are Native nations that have adopted the heteropatriarchal nation-state model of the settler state" (Driskill et al. "Revolution" 213).

colonial settler state occupying Indigenous land. Decolonization, in contrast, seeks to merely reform said state through processes that do not return sovereignty to Indigenous nations. This means that striving for social change in a settler state, though necessary, is ineffective without directly engaging with the very principles and structures upon which the state was founded (Arvin et al. 16). The concept of resurgence, as notably exemplified in Taiaiake Alfred's influential book *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*, has been, however, widely criticized for excluding already marginalized groups of Indigenous peoples (LGBTQ+/Two-Spirit people, women, displaced Indigenous people, etc.) from its struggles. Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill emphasize the frequent erasure of Indigenous women from decolonial thought and action, writing that "[s]uggesting that women's issues should be left out of Native and other radical forms of nationalisms [...] or dealt with only after decolonization is achieved reflects yet another way that heteropatriarchy, heteropaternalism, and settler colonialism have so deeply shaped Indigenous communities" (15).

This article argues that Two-Spirit people suffer the same erasure and marginalization. For instance, this is seen in the common positing of the oppression of Two-Spirit people as a 'queer issue,' separate from the struggle for Indigenous sovereignty. Such a view exposes the ingrained heteropatriarchy in decolonization and resurgence movements. Cree-Métis-Salteaux writer and academic Lindsay Nixon points out that the concept of resurgence sees the resistance to the colonial state as a singular Indigenous struggle that ignores the complexities of interconnected identities such as gender, sexuality, class, location, etc. ("I Wonder" 47). Diana Brydon, a scholar of postcolonial studies, further criticizes Alfred's concept of self-determination as positing unified and cohesive Indigenous communities without space for potentially dissenting experiences or identities (67). And because resurgence assumes a sole form of oppression—oppression by the colonial nation-state—it also ignores the power differentiations *within* Indigenous communities (Nixon, "I Wonder" 47) and excludes marginalized Indigenous groups, such as LGBTQ+/Two-Spirit people, in the struggle for liberated Indigeneity.

Sovereign Erotic

Although Indigenous resurgence frequently omits or erases Two-Spirit experiences from its struggle, Two-Spirit people have been able to reclaim some part of it. For example, the Sovereign Erotic, as coined by Driskill, is a way of reclaiming, rephrasing, or "restorying" (Corntassel et al. 139) the Indigenous struggle for sexual and gender decolonization; it is "a return to and/or continuance of the complex realities of gender and sexuality that are ever-present in both the human and more-than-human world, but erased or hidden by colonial cultures" (Driskill, "Stolen" 56). Driskill sees this Two-Spirit Sovereign Erotic as a way of holistically healing from colonial violence ("Stolen" 51). I argue that the Sovereign Erotic is also a response to this colonial violence and to the Indigenous resurgence theory and practice that has internalized it.

First-person Narration

Two-Spirit literature is an important manifestation of the Sovereign Erotic because when Two-Spirit authors reflect this concept in their writing, they "participate in the process of radical, holistic decolonization" (Driskill "Stolen" 58). In other words, they refuse the norms of gender and sexuality imposed on them by both the colonial state and the members of their own communities who have internalized these norms. An important feature of Two-Spirit literature—and of literature written by authors from marginalized communities in general—is the use of first-person narration. First-person narratives powerfully affect the reader since any first-person narration is reminiscent of the autobiographical register. In contrast to third-person narratives, they provide only few narrative techniques that would signal fictivity, such as omniscience or focalization (Lanser 206). According to F. K. Stanzel's typology, the first-person narrative situation is one of a narrator (often a mature 'narrating I') who tells an autobiographical story about events happening to an earlier self, the younger 'experiencing I' ("Narrative Situations" 364). This is visible in *Jonny Appleseed*, where a large part of the text is a retrospective first-person narrative about the protagonist's childhood and growing up.

The first-person narrative has a long tradition of empowering marginalized communities, of giving voice to the silenced, as it provides access to the power of self-authorship and self-representation (Phillips 46). Research focusing on the

empowering function of first-person narrative includes, for example, the work of Africana Studies scholar Mary Phillips, who studies the first-person narratives in the letters of women in the Black Panther Party; literary and cultural scholar Viola Amato and her research on autobiography as a tool to challenge dominant narratives about intersex people; and Indigenous Governance professor Jeff Corntassel (Cherokee), who, along with his students Chaw-win-is (Nuu-chah-nulth) and T'lakwadzi (Kwakwaka'wakw), have conducted research grounded in first-person narrative that affirms the agency of residential school survivors[9] to discuss their experiences. These varied examples show first-person narrative as a form of empowerment, allowing marginalized figures to reclaim their stories by transforming the perspective of a witness to that of an active agent of resistance as well as its storyteller; in other words, a "personal testimony becomes political praxis" (Phillips 44). Since "narrative is *the* way for us to make sense of things" (Nyström 35), it is of great importance *who* is telling the story, i.e. does the position of the narrator reinforce the colonial status quo or resist it? In this way, storytelling and narration are not separate from resistance to colonial oppression; quite the opposite, as Lyackson scholar Qwul'sih'yah'maht puts it, "[t]elling these stories is a form of resistance to colonization" (Corntassel et al. 147). Through the use of the first person, the protagonist and narrator of *Jonny Appleseed* makes it clear that he is telling his own story with complete agency precisely because he is the narrator. Choosing the form of first-person narrative further highlights the previously mentioned concept of a Sovereign Erotic as it means to reclaim and restory one's own narrative.

9 Residential schools were an essential part of the colonial systems in North America. In Canada, residential schools were typically run by churches but were also—especially since the beginning of the 20th century—often operated directly by the federal government. They aimed to forcibly assimilate Indigenous children into the white settler population by geographically isolating them from their families, forbidding them to speak their native languages, and prohibiting their cultural practices and customs. While some parents voluntarily sent their children to these schools in the hope of ensuring their education, many children were forcibly removed from their families by state officials. About 150,000 children are believed to have enrolled in residential schools all over Canada between the beginning of the 19th century and 1996 when the last school closed. Several thousand students died in the schools and psychological, physical, and sexual abuse were widespread. Many survivors speak about intergenerational trauma, i.e. that the residential school experience has affected entire generations of their families (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada).

Intersections of Queerness and Indigeneity: Double Oppression

Jonny Appleseed tells the story of Jonny, a young Two-Spirit man reckoning with his life and love the week before he returns to Peguis First Nation, the Oji-Cree reserve where he was born,[10] in order to attend his stepfather's funeral. During this week, we learn about Jonny's growing up queer on the reserve, his move to Winnipeg, as well as his present life in the city. In his stories, Jonny talks about his lovers, friends, and complicated family relationships, but also his desires and dreams, all the while ironically commenting on the urban queer community and its omnipresent racism. The news about Jonny's stepfather's death at the beginning and his funeral at the end of the novel provide a frame within which the narrator can address his Two-Spirit identity and the ways colonial beliefs about what his gender and sexuality should be affect his day-to-day life.

Unlike any other character in the novel, Jonny is both gay and Indigenous and therefore faces *both* racism and homophobia. Jonny says about himself: "There was me, feeling like the only gay NDN in the whole world" (46). This feeling of alienation demonstrates the effects of double oppression and compounded colonization. While Jonny's identity does not change, the reactions to his identity —and the particular manifestations of this double oppression—do, based on his location.

Double oppression manifests differently depending on the context. On the reserve where Jonny grew up, his sexual and gender identity is ridiculed or erased. This is the working of colonized sexuality, the way the Indigenous community has largely adopted and enforced colonial values regarding gender and sexuality, and even naturalized these beliefs as 'traditional.' In the urban setting, however, it is mainly Jonny's Indigeneity that is seen as not belonging.

"Two Brown Boys Can't Fall in Love on the Rez": On the Reserve

The novel comments on stereotypical and rigid binary views of gender and sexuality throughout. Due to the ongoing process of colonization, the notion of tradition has come to exclude Two-Spirit people from their community. For instance, heteropatriarchal 'tradition' is used to exclude Jonny when he is forbidden to enter a sweat lodge for a healing ceremony because his long skirt is not considered

10 The Oji-Cree are an Indigenous nation living primarily in today's Canadian provinces of Manitoba and Ontario.

"modest" (79). Jonny realizes that the ubiquitous evocation of 'tradition' in fact makes people like him invisible, noting that "[i]t turns out that tradition is an NDN's saving grace, but it's a medicine reserved only for certain members of the reservation, and not for self-ordained Injun glitter princesses like me" (79). Most of Jonny's relatives and the other residents of Peguis can no longer see Two-Spirit people as a valuable part of their culture or everyday life. Jonny does not feel welcome for who he is on his home reserve, as it has adopted the rigid colonial binary and heteronormative code of conduct and punishes transgressions with violence or the threat of violence. Jonny says that "[he] wanted so much [...] to hate the home that squeezed the queer right out of its languages" (213), thus pointing out that Two-Spirit people are part of the community's culture and history rather than a contemporary phenomenon. However, being a "gay NDN" (46) is posited as an impossibility on the reserve: Even Jonny's friend and lover Tias denies his own homosexual desire (33), unable or unwilling to overcome the colonized sexual norms imposed on him. Jonny thus sees Peguis as "a ghost-world, a prison, a death camp," and decides to leave the reserve. This feeling of aloneness is present throughout the novel, as no one else on the reserve is openly queer.

On the reserve, only Jonny's mother and kokum[11] accept his queerness, while the male Indigenous characters of the novel, notably both Jonny's and Tias's stepfathers, perpetuate and embody queer erasure, shame, and homophobia. Jonny says, "I was afraid of men [...] The men in my life liked to pressure me to butch myself up and ridicule me for my feminine ways" (172). In some cases, however, the men's homophobia is clearly a manifestation of their own repressed queer desires, such as the boy who "only really started to hate [Jonny] after [Jonny] gave him a hand job at his birthday sleepover after a few weeks of online sexting" (56). Jonny's experience of the reserve is one of toxic masculinity[12] and a fear of sexual or gender difference, especially if such difference manifests itself as femininity. According to Jonny, "'Man up' was the mantra of my childhood and teenage years" (79). Jonny's male family members, as well as a community elder, try to change the way Jonny expresses his identity because they see feminine performance as "immodesty" (79).

11 Grandmother (Cree).

12 Toxic masculinity refers to the normative gendered performance that patriarchal society requires from individuals it assumes to be male. Toxic masculinity includes various beliefs and behaviors, such as toughness, aggression, and suppressing one's emotions. This form of masculinity is constantly reinforced, and while it is to a large extent grounded in heteronormativity and even homophobia (as not adhering to its standards is "gay" or "effeminate"), it is certainly not limited to straight men.

Jonny claims his identity is composed of "a million parts [...] that don't add up, a million parts [...] that signal immodesty" (79). The elder's refusal or inability to accept Jonny's identity as both Oji-Cree and Two-Spirit points to the internalized heteronormativity enforced by settler colonialism.

The reserve is depicted as a place where an Oji-Cree man must perform masculinity and violence against anyone who would transgress gender norms. This protection of rigid gender roles stems from the way gender is established and enforced. According to Judith Butler, it is sustained and regulated by various social means. This rigid regulatory frame is, however, understood as "natural" (Butler 33). It is in the interest of the regulatory regime of patriarchy that the constructed and enforced nature of gender is concealed under the appearance of 'naturalness,' or, as in *Jonny Appleseed*, of 'tradition.' To Jonny, it seems that being straight and masculine is required to survive on the reserve; even his cousins do not want to accept that "they share any quantum of blood with an urban NDN, Two-Spirit femmeboy" (45). After Jonny comes out on the reserve, one of these cousins threatens to beat him up if he ever came back (126). This toxic masculinity and the rigid normative division of gender roles play an important role for everyone in the community.[13]

The juxtaposition of Two-Spirit joy and homophobic violence is also apparent when Jonny and Tias first get to experience femininity in make-over and nail-painting sessions with their babysitter Ginny. They enjoy this, but Tias's stepfather punishes him for "hanging around that girly-boy" (76) by cutting his nails painfully short. From that moment, both boys are aware that pain and queer joy are two sides of the same coin, as intimately close as their bodies. Jonny's and Tias's lives are marked with pain, and it is clear that to be queer is to always expect to be punished by men. Jonny realizes this from an early age when he learns that he is attracted to men, and so the expectation of violence is always connected to his identity. He eventually moves to Winnipeg in order to escape the erasure of his identity and the violence against his body, but he discovers that the urban queer community is by no means accepting, either.

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13 They also echo, for example, in Nixon's *nîtisanâk* whose narrator recalls their parents growing up on the prairie. They emphasize that queerness is not a viable option there, i.e. outside of the major urban areas, as it is expected that any transgressions of gendered and heteronormative social norms will be punished with physical violence; as they say: "For most, *Brokeback Mountain* was just a solid love story. For folks from the prairies, gay panic is naturalized, and queer and trans death on the plains expected" (5-6).

"He Only Wanted Me to Play NDN": In Winnipeg

In Winnipeg, Jonny experiences exotification as well as violence because of his Indigeneity, even though his queer identity is more easily accepted in the city than on the reserve. Although Jonny finds a sizeable queer community in the city, he realizes that the complex relationships of queerness and Indigeneity are not limited to the reserve and neither is double oppression.

Jonny discovers that white is the standard as well as the assumption among gay men. At the same time, he experiences exotification from men who are attracted to his Two-Spirit identity but ultimately want to project their own interpretations of it onto Jonny. According to Morgensen, these non-Native narratives and assumptions about Two-Spirit individuals and experiences reflect non-Native desires (138). Jonny alludes to these white desires being built on colonialism when he says about the gay dating scene in Winnipeg that "[t]hese men are all too easy; they're all a bit voyeur and a bit voyageur. They don't want to play doctor with you so much as they want to be the Jacques Cartier of your hipbones" (151). When Jonny realizes that these "white suburban gays" (137) and "treaty chasers" (18) are not necessarily interested in him, but rather in their *idea* of him, he resorts to putting on a performance of their ideas. They eroticize Indigenous stereotypes rather than seeking authenticity; as Jonny puts it, "[he] can be an Apache NDN who scalps cowboys on the frontier, even though truthfully, [he is] Oji-Cree" (25). While this performance becomes a way to make a living "selling fantasy" (45) as a sex worker, it also ironically reminds Jonny of how he had to constantly put on a performance when living on the reserve, how "[he] played straight on the rez in order to be NDN and here [he] played white in order to be queer" (44). Being white is seen as an unmarked and normative quality of queerness while exotification and fetishization of Indigeneity is widespread. In white queer spaces, Jonny benefits from passing as white and plays the role of either a white gay man or whatever exotic Indigenous dream his Grindr clients request.

As an authentic Two-Spirit existence is impossible in the city, Jonny is always performing and transforming. Thanks to his light skin, he can transform into any role he wants, as "white is the base in every colour" (42), and he never actually comes out as Oji-Cree to the white gay men he socializes with because "[he] didn't want to have to out [himself] once again" (43). Jonny gets to constantly redefine his identity and presentation through sex work as he performs different roles for different clients, but it is also clear that the white gay men who seek Jonny's services

do not really know what being Two-Spirit means. For example, Jonny recalls a man who claims he is "straight but sort of a 'tranny chaser,'" so Jonny explains to him that "[he is] Two-Spirit, not transgender, and that tranny [is] an out-of-date word" (99-100). Clearly, this man is unfamiliar with the concept of Two-Spirit and is looking for what he perceives as exotic excitement, but only to a degree that will not discredit his own normative understanding of his sexuality.

Jonny occupies different spaces and plays different roles. There are, however, certain aspects these queer performances have in common. They are sexual and highly-gendered, and they mirror the white men's desires and sexualized assumptions about Indigeneity, like those of a Grindr client, Handstandbuck, who "works at Scotiabank, [...] prefers twinks, he says, and has a deep appreciation for 'Native Americans'" (78). Jonny is expected to behave in a specific way because of his Two-Spirit identity and feminine-coded performance and presentation. Jonny himself identifies with the feminine, saying that "[his] mind was becoming a funhouse of femininity" (116). Because of this, his clients—as well as other sexual partners—always expect him to bottom, and so he is taken aback when another Two-Spirit man asks him to top him as "no one [has] ever asked [him] that before" (189). It is clear that Jonny's Two-Spirit identity is constructed as inherently sexual, sexualized, and also gendered as feminine, which in turn is constructed as passive and penetrable, to neatly fit into the structures of heteronormative patriarchy and settler colonialism.

"Travelled South and Survived": Reclaiming Two-Spirit Stories

Jonny Appleseed shows the ways Two-Spirit people are excluded and othered by the white queer community and by Indigenous people alike. This leads to many Two-Spirit people feeling a sense of unbelonging in either community, something Jonny struggles with at the beginning of the novel. The story portrays violence against Two-Spirit people, as well as deeply internalized shame, as Jonny says that "[he] still always felt a wave a shame rush through [his] body whenever someone might associate [him] with being Two-Spirit" (131). But *Jonny Appleseed* is a story of power and resilience more than it is a story of pain. Jonny comes to find beauty and power in his queerness—in Driskill's terms, his Sovereign Erotic—through his own experience as well as through the unconditional love of his kokum, a character who provides an alternative and affirmative view on Two-Spiritedness. Jonny remembers

when he came out to her on the phone and she responded, "You's napêwiskwewisehot,[14] m'boy, Two-Spirit [...] You come down here, m'boy, and I'll tell you a story about who you are" (48). Kokum does not erase Jonny's identity, nor does she say that it is impossible in her tradition. Instead, she wants to show him that there are stories about his truth in history and in the complex tradition of storytelling. Kokum knows that being Two-Spirit *is* traditional. Jonny never makes it back to Peguis to hear that story (212), but he always remembers his kokum's love and acceptance of him and his identity. The character of kokum personifies the continuation of Indigenous tradition undamaged by colonized sexuality and a potential for revival or resurgence.

Jonny only comes back to Peguis after kokum's death, but he wants her to see his resilience as well as his staying true to himself; he says he wants her to know that "[he] think[s] [he] made it, you know, travelled south and survived," and that he hopes that "[he] ain't changed into no emblem of shame" (216). Jonny associates shame with what he feels—or rather, is made to feel—on the reserve, but unlike the previously mentioned Indigenous male characters on the reserve, he does not internalize this shame. Shame is essential for the structural erasure of Two-Spiritedness, and refusing to be ashamed of one's identity is to refuse this colonial framework of heteropatriarchy. According to Brant, "[t]o deny our sexuality is to deny our part in creation" (*Writing as Witness* 63). This means that to deny one's Two-Spiritedness is to also deny its essential role in the tradition, history, and culture of one's people; it is to internalize the anti-queer shame prescribed by settler colonialism and so "[not] recognize that our recollections and understandings of tradition have changed to reflect the truths of the dominant colony" (Bear 13). Jonny comes to either refuse this shame attached to his identity or to re-claim this supposed shame and turn it into something he can take pleasure or pride in, aligning with Driskill's concept of a Sovereign Erotic. Throughout the novel, Jonny comes to establish this Sovereign Erotic as a form of resistance to the colonized sexuality imposed on him, as well as a way to possibly heal from his previous experiences.

The Sovereign Erotic in the novel is perhaps most clearly seen in the sexual and bodily scenes. The sexual and the spiritual are understood as one rather than as opposites and the body and the bodily are frequently described using ceremonial and story-telling imagery. Jonny's and Tias's long hair come together like

14 napêw iskwêwisêhot is one of several Cree terms for a Two-Spirit person.

sweetgrass (27), and Jonny's first hook-up is—despite being white—described as "performing magic," and his lover's body is "shapeshifting," and "transforming" as it wraps around Jonny's, "blankets him," and makes him "sweat ceremonially" (17). Their sex is described as magical and ceremonial rather than as the shameful act the community considers it to be, again refusing the norms of colonized sexuality. Jonny's and Tias's bodies are often described as becoming one, as they "clasp one another like a zipper" (87) and they have to "separate [their] bodies" before Tias's girlfriend Jordan returns (136).

Similar "geographies of the body" (73) are an essential image of the novel as one's stories are written on one's body. Jonny remembers his kokum and thinks that "she is impressed on my forehead even now—that the stories in her body are written on mine" (105); kokum is one of the most important people in Jonny's life and, as mentioned above, she is also the personification of resisting colonialism through remembering the place of Two-Spiritedness in tradition and stories (48). For kokum, one's stories are kept in their feet, as she says, "[t]he feet hold in them all sorts of mysteries [...] Our footprints, they carry with them all sorts of stories" (115). The narrative is thus based in or on the body and the body becomes a site and a device for storytelling. Instead of the Two-Spirit body being a shameful and hidden part of colonized sexuality, it becomes a central point of the story, even capable of telling the story itself. While the violence against the Two-Spirit body is omnipresent, so is the body's power to turn everything that has happened to it into stories: even Tias's plush bunny, Flop, has scars to show, "[b]ut every mess on his body has a funny story behind it" (108). This ability of the body to turn violence and oppression into stories shows the possibility of reclaiming one's narrative and of resisting colonialism through self-representation and self-authorship.

It is also worth mentioning that the "awakening of [Jonny's] queer body" (174) takes place after his stepfather Roger beats him up for dancing with another boy at school. Pain and desire are intrinsically linked through the body, becoming one another, complicating the usually simple (if problematic) narrative of queer people's pain and tragedy, and showing Two-Spirit resilience instead. Jonny decides to not be defined by his pain, but also determines that "if [he] was going to feel anything, [he]'d experience both the pain and the joy—[he]'d be sullen and sexy" (201). Pain is not enough to make Jonny and Tias *not* desire one another, nor is it enough to make them despise their bodies. Physical pain is never portrayed as associated with tragedy or loss; rather, it is linked to pleasure and desire, or at least the promise of it.

The form of first-person narrative allows Jonny, the protagonist and narrator, to further reclaim and take control of his identity by telling his own story in his own way. Through this restorying, Jonny demonstrates his Two-Spiritedness as an inherently anti-colonial way of being and refuses both the colonized sexuality and heteronormative assumptions of the Indigenous resurgence discourse, instead finding his own authentic voice. In the end, Jonny understands that while there is pain in being queer and Oji-Cree—the pain of refusal and exclusion—there is also power in unapologetically telling one's own story, and that he is "[his] own best medicine" (80).

Conclusion

Jonny Appleseed addresses the complex realities of Two-Spirit people being doubly oppressed and erased by both settler society and by their own Indigenous communities. The novel is both an Oji-Cree response to a queer community interwoven with racism and settler colonialism, and a Two-Spirit response to the internalized heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy in Indigenous communities. In addition to Two-Spirit erasure in settler colonialism, *Jonny Appleseed* shows how Two-Spirit people are left out of discourses of resurgence and how their existence is seen as impossible or, at the very least, as non-traditional and non-historical. However, the novel simultaneously shows the power of Two-Spirit people, of sharing one's own stories and experiences, even if it means being vulnerable. *Jonny Appleseed* centers Two-Spirit people in the stories it tells, and it can be read, just like Whitehead's previous book *full-metal indigiqueer*, which the publisher describes as a project of resurgence for "Two-Spirit / Indigiqueer folk who have been ghosted in policy, page, tradition, and history" (Cover copy).

Jonny Appleseed shows that portraying one's true lived gendered and sexual experiences—a Sovereign Erotic—both deconstructs the alienating binaries of the anti-colonial discourse of resurgence and builds an alternative, nuanced narrative of Indigeneity that centers Two-Spirit experiences. Furthermore, *Jonny Appleseed* shows that these experiences and desires are based on restorying, self-determination, and self-empowerment, rather than on a colonial understanding of gender and sexuality imposed by others. In his own afterword to the novel, Whitehead says that he wrote the book "with the goal of showing [...] that Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous folx are not a 'was,' that we are not the ethnographic and romanticized

notations of 'revered mystic' or 'shamanic,' instead we are an *is* and a *coming*" (221), and this perspective echoes in Jonny's storytelling. He refuses to be ignored, shamed, and silenced for who he is, while he also rejects the naïve romanticization of Two-Spirit people. In his life as well as in his storytelling, Jonny manifests "the necessity of telling [his] truth, even if it isn't respectable, in a world that continually plots [his] disappearance" (Nixon, "I Wonder" 50).

While this article focused its analysis on how double oppression and colonized sexuality affect Jonny's Two-Spirit identity as well as his choices of resistance, there is vast potential for further analysis. First, I suggest rereading the novel in the wider context of queer studies because analyses of settler colonialism, or even the acknowledgment of Indigenous presence, have been frequently absent from conversations in the field. Furthermore, the role of women certainly merits an in-depth analysis of its own as the strength and resilience of Indigenous women, as well as their solidarity, are frequently discussed in the novel. While women can often also be violent, they do not view Jonny's queerness as a threat and are able to see beyond the colonial erasure of Two-Spiritedness.

Jonny Appleseed suggests that "a good story is always a healing ceremony," and that "if we animate our pain, it becomes something we can make love to" (221). The novel shows that there is undeniable power in being open about one's identity and refusing to be shamed into silence. Two-Spirit storytelling is powerful despite—or perhaps because of—the fact that it does not shy away from pain and vulnerability.

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