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"i am / virus to the system": Indigiqueer Abjection and the Queering of Language in Joshua Whitehead's *full-metal indigiqueer* and *Jonny Appleseed*

Arianne Des Rochers

Introduction: Queerness, Indigeneity, and the Settler Colonial Nation-State

At the forefront of contemporary "Indigiqueer" literary expression in North America stands Joshua Whitehead, who in fact contributed greatly to the popularization of the term with the publication of his first poetry collection, *full-metal indigiqueer*, in 2017. Whitehead's collection and his subsequent novel, *Jonny Appleseed* (2018), are populated by narrators and characters who embody Indigenous queerness and queer Indigeneity — in other words, what it means to be both Indigenous and queer within the framework of a settler colonial nation-state. In an interview with Rosanna Deerchild, Whitehead defined the term Indigiqueer as the braiding of two worlds, of two ways of being, and used the image of a Venn diagram to illustrate the often conflicting implications of being both queer and Indigenous. According to him, current dominant articulations of Indigenous authenticity and identity do not make room for queerness, and dominant articulations of queer identity are centred on white, cis, gay men (see Whitehead, "Poet").

While significant work has been done to "queer" Indigenous studies and to "Indigenize" queer theory (see Driskill et al., *Queer*; Justice et al.), younger Indigiqueer writers still emphasize the disconnect between dominant articulations of queerness and Indigeneity, within and outside of academia. Billy-Ray Belcourt, for instance, states that queer Natives have no institutional home and asks how a "turn to interdisciplinarity obfuscate[s] Native Studies' hetero- and cisnormative foundations" (Belcourt, "Can"). Leanne Betasamosake Simpson has also written at length on the topic of heteropatriarchal domination within

Indigenous communities and ceremonies, most notably in *As We Have Always Done*, where she suggests that narrow and singular interpretations of Indigenous knowledge systems have led to the marginalization of queerness within Indigenous thinking as well as "'tradition' steeped in dogma, exclusion, erasure, and violence" of queer bodies and practices (129-30). In Whitehead's work, both identities are often presented as being mutually exclusive in terms of the ways in which they are performed publicly, and as Jonny, the narrator and protagonist of *Jonny Appleseed*, plainly states: "Hell, I played straight on the rez in order to be NDN and here [in Winnipeg] I played white in order to be queer" (44). In the interview mentioned above, Whitehead observed that, throughout his life, his queerness has led to "situations of isolation, of fear and sometimes even removal from certain [Indigenous] spaces — bingo halls, or sometimes family dinners or even from ceremony and tradition itself" (Whitehead, "Poet"). As is the case with all heteronormative spaces and communities, the queer body is excluded and cast out, securing the boundaries of these spaces and communities as their constitutive outside (Butler xiii).

This exclusion, as many Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars have argued, is of course a result of the settler colonial project, which relies on the "violent reordering of Native genders and sexualities" (Justice et al. 20). For Audra Simpson, for instance, recognizing that the Canadian colonial project is not only raced but also gendered is key: "The state that I seek to name has a character, it has a male character, it is more than likely white, or aspiring to an unmarked center of whiteness, and definitely heteropatriarchal" ("State"). Bethany Schneider, describing the work of Andrea Smith and Scott Lauria Morgensen, notes that the "'civilization' imposed by settler ideologies on Native cultures is explicitly bound up in heteronormative structures of family and labor" (Justice et al. 15). Simpson, Smith, and Morgensen thus contend that settler heteronormative structures are a central component of Indigenous dispossession. Gendered violence and race-based violence — anti-Indigenous racism, assimilation policies, cultural genocide, etc. — are revealed as two sides of the same coin, as different but related manifestations of the same settler, colonial, heterosexual, monolingual nation-state project. It is in that sense that Daniel Heath Justice suggests that "Native and queer studies have, together and separately, worked to theorize and defend various kinds of diversity as well as individual and collective self-representation in the face of totalizing state legalities and

ideologies" (Justice et al. 5-6). This article thus looks at Whitehead's Indigiqueer expression for its "potential to disrupt colonial projects and to rebalance Indigenous communities" (Driskill et al., Introduction 18), in relation to queer genders and sexualities as well as to non-normative linguistic forms and practices.

Whitehead invests queer abjection in his writing not only by including the queer body in his narratives but also by putting it at the forefront in all its abject and raw aspects. He also works with another kind of abjection, that of the racialized Indigenous body, which undergoes a similar exclusion and dehumanization under the racial hierarchy underlying the Canadian white-settler state. And so, rather than making queerness and Indigeneity palatable to straight and non-Indigenous audiences by toning them down, Whitehead revels in negative stereotypes — poverty, addiction, trauma, disease, and so on — and turns them on their heads by embracing them, in line with Lee Edelman's suggestion that "rather than rejecting, with liberal discourse, this ascription of negativity to the queer, we might, as I argue, do better to consider accepting and even embracing it" (4). To show that "Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous folx are not a 'was'" (*Jonny* 221), Whitehead creates an Indigiqueer poetics that is profoundly invested in both queer and Indigenous abjection, in the sense that it embraces the queer and Indigenous experiences that have been and are being excluded from dominant articulations of Indigeneity and queerness, respectively — a process of exclusion on which these dominant articulations depend to retain their presumed sovereignty, through a sought opposition to what they are *not* (see Bataille 217-21). Whitehead thus writes from and about this intersectional space of queerness and Indigeneity in order to make space in his writing for the Indigiqueer identity he himself embodies. In both *full-metal indigiqueer* and *Jonny Appleseed*, the abject parts of Indigiqueer life are presented in a highly positive, playful, and unabashed fashion, from teenage masturbation to dreams of bestiality and hardcore anal sex, suggesting that the abject is a space of resilience and playfulness where one can thrive and that the "reterritorialization" of terms and practices that have been used to abjectify certain groups can become a "site of resistance, the possibility of an enabling social and political resignification" (Butler 176). I suggest that by foregrounding both the queer abject and the linguistic abject in his writing, Whitehead participates in the making of decolonial worlds "outside dominant logics and narratives of 'nation'" (Driskill et al., Introduction 19), considering

that these logics and narratives are largely heterosexual and monolingual in the context of the Canadian nation-state.

This article looks at certain passages and scenes in *full-metal indigiqueer* and *Jonny Appleseed* that play explicitly and thematically with the notion of Indigiqueer abjection, first on sexual grounds. It then looks closely at the types of languages and registers these books mobilize, particularly in sections where Indigiqueer abjection appears. Standard English, for Whitehead, seems unsuited to express the abject, be it queer or Indigenous. Indeed, he usually resorts to several different linguistic registers — Prairie slang, online vernacular, Ojibway and Cree, and so on — to describe queer sex and decolonial intimacy. Analyzing Whitehead's linguistic choices in the light of his dwelling in Indigiqueer abjection suggests that, much like heteronormative notions of sex and gender, the notion of language as system (e.g., English) is constituted by and depends on an outside that it actively rejects for its own sake, creating illegitimate bodies, languages, and accents in its wake. Seen in this light, what is usually known as multilingual writing can be conceived of as a kind of writing that disrupts the sovereignty of the so-called English linguistic system by infusing it with abjectified and othered elements, operating a similar "reterritorialization" of the linguistic and cultural abject. Indeed, while queer performativity helps with "resignifying the abjection of homosexuality into defiance and legitimacy" (Butler xxviii), my reading of Whitehead suggests that so-called multilingual writing can work in the same way with regards to minoritized and delegitimized languages and vernaculars in the Canadian linguistic order. Whitehead's writing, both in content through his mobilization of the queer abject and in form through the mobilization of the linguistic abject, thus challenges the structuralist idea of language qua system, in other words of language as self-contained and airtight body. Language, in *full-metal indigiqueer* and *Jonny Appleseed*, presents itself much like the queer body: porous, transgressive, and drawing its power from the abject.

Urine, Blood, Semen, Feces: The Lexicon of Abjection in *full-metal indigiqueer* and *Jonny Appleseed*

Simply put, the abject is what causes disgust or repulsion. Abjection is, in the physiological sense, a fundamental and inevitable human reaction that serves a specific biological purpose: to avoid getting poisoned or

contracting a disease through the contact with bacteria, dirt, decomposition, and so on, in other words to avoid the threat of death. In *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, Julia Kristeva observes:

> À l'opposé de ce qui entre dans la bouche et nourrit, ce qui sort du corps, de ses pores et de ses orifices, marque l'infinitude du corps propre et suscite l'abjection. Les matières fécales signifient, en quelque sorte, ce qui n'arrête pas de se séparer d'un corps en état de perte permanente pour devenir autonome, distinct des mélanges, altérations et pourritures qui le traversent. C'est au prix de cette perte seulement que le corps devient propre. (126-27)

Anything that is rejected by and from the body represents that which is dirty, toxic, or undesirable and whose expulsion guarantees that the body, or the subject, remains discrete, clean, and proper (Kristeva 65). The problem with abjection is when it is conflated discursively with homosexuality or racial otherness, in other words when it is used as a discursive tool to exclude people within a certain social order. Kristeva, as Georges Bataille before her and Judith Butler after her, indeed links social and political exclusion to this elementary physiological reaction, as abjection in the social realm happens when certain bodies or practices are excluded from normative categories of identity — and thus from a more or less delimited social body — and denied legitimacy through their discursive association with toxicity, dirtiness, obscenity, and so forth: "L'excrément et ses équivalents (pourriture, infection, maladie, cadavre, etc.) *représentent le danger venu de l'extérieur de l'identité* : le moi menacé par du non-moi, la société menacée par son dehors, la vie par la mort" (Kristeva 86; emphasis added). In *full-metal indigiqueer* and *Jonny Appleseed*, Whitehead explores the abject in its most elementary forms, by calling upon urine, blood, semen, and feces throughout his narratives to explore situations of social exclusion and humiliation. Not one to shy away from bodily fluids and waste, he rather embraces these elementary abject forms, first in *full-metal indigiqueer* where he creates a kind of infectious cyber character who counterattacks colonialism by infecting its structures, and later in *Jonny Appleseed*, where bodily fluids play a more affective and tender role in the context of radical and decolonial intimacy and (self-)love.

full-metal is full of references to bodily fluids and waste, to disease and death, always in relation to its avatar-protagonist, Zoa: from "mucosa jiggling jello" (31) to "cells diseased with germ" (31), "pre-

historic carcass / lizards, beasts, ndn bones / oozing from the wounds" (34), "black blood money / organic fleshy cheques," (34), and "our latest bowel movement" (38), abjection proliferates, Zoa having clearly been wounded and diseased by the heteropatriarchal and capitalist structure of settler colonialism that requires the death and disappearance of Indigenous and queer people in order to secure its sovereignty (see A. Simpson, "State"). But abjection is also being embraced, both as a predetermined condition and as a potential weapon. Indeed, there is a kind of pride in being abject and infectious that emanates from the collection; for instance, in "The Fa — [Ted] Queene, An Ipic P.M." — a poem alluding to Edmund Spenser's Early Modern epic — Zoa states, in a somewhat erudite language reminiscent of Early Modern English, usually associated with European, canonical authors: "i am the indigenous bogeyman / you should fear me / i am the most lothsom, filthie, foule / & full of vile disdaine" (44). Later in the collection, Zoa claims, almost as if posing a challenge: "i am toxic and disease / kiss me & catch a cold of shame" (76). In *full-metal*, Zoa, in all their Indigeneity and queerness, is a "virus to the system" (35) of colonialism, representing all that is abject (i.e., unabashedly queer and Indigenous) and producing it "as a troubling return, not only as an *imaginary* contestation that effects a failure in the workings of [colonialism's] inevitable law, but as an enabling disruption" (Butler xxx). Even when the abject appears in other characters, Zoa seems to welcome it:

> you vomit in your mouth
> bols colours it blue
> spit it out into a redsolocup
> i think: its kind of pretty
> tell you: "kiss me anyways"
> i dont really care
> the acid in your mouth
> match the words in mine (84)

Here, Zoa seeks others like them, creating through queer sex and intimacy an army of abject beings. In *full-metal indigiqueer*, the abject is the weapon par excellence for fighting colonialism, infecting it with what it constantly rejects, with its own waste, thus making it impossible for it to stay orderly and proper: "this ndn too, fights back / semtex semen syntax" (34). Here, the juxtaposition of an explosive device, sperm, and language represents the different ways in which Zoa fights back —

direct action, queer performativity, and poetics/cultural resurgence — all of which are disruptive to the "exclusionary matrix" of colonialism (Butler xiii).

In *Jonny Appleseed*, the abject is mobilized in a radically different way; here, we have a different protagonist, Jonny, who is less invested in fighting colonialism and more interested in finding decolonial intimacies and connections that will allow him to love and to be loved. Here, in contrast to the weaponization of the abject in *full-metal*, the abject becomes something to care for, to love. At the end of the novel, Jonny has an internal conversation with his deceased grandmother, in which he imagines her saying, "*humility is just a humiliation you loved so much it transformed*" (216), and in the acknowledgements at the end of the book, Whitehead shares something he has learned while writing the book: "If we animate our pain, it becomes something we can make love to" (221). The abject — imposed from the outside and causing humiliation, pain, and trauma — is nevertheless something we can learn to love. Nowhere is this more eloquently illustrated than in the golden shower scene in chapter 23, where Jonny goes on his first catfish date with Tias, who will go on to become his best friend and lover. On their way back home, Jonny and Tias are met by Logan and his gang of bullies, who start calling the two young friends "faggots" and "gayboys," telling them they have "H-I-V and A-I-D," associating them with a life-threatening virus contracted through blood (92). Then, in an act of ultimate abjection, the bullies urinate on Jonny: "And then each boy pulled out their floppy penises and urinated all over me. My clothes were soaked and my hair was shiny with piss" (92). They prompt Tias to do the same, and he complies, in order to not abject or exclude himself:

> Tias was still crouching behind me, his eyes closed. Logan and his posse, waiting for Tias to join in on their golden shower, crossed their arms and waited. One of Logan's friends slapped his fist against his palm. Tias opened his eyes and I held his gaze as he slowly stood up. His hands were shaking as he slowly undid his zipper. I closed my eyes and nodded. The warmth of his urine splashing on my shirt startled me. When I opened my eyes, he was crying. His limp penis hung and the last few drops of piss leaked from his fingers. His eyes were sunk deep in his head and his arms were wrapped around his waist. His entire body read regret, but even then, I thought, no boy has ever looked so goddamned precious. (92-93)

Here, Whitehead represents queer abjection and social exclusion through urine, one of the most elementary abject forms; Logan and the others associate Jonny with piss, covering him in abjection and stripping him of his dignity and his humanity. But while this scene is certainly tainted with humiliation, pain, and trauma, it is also filled with hope and beauty, and Jonny decides to embrace it, as he nods explicitly and agrees to Tias urinating on him. In the end, in spite of the troubling and humiliating nature of this moment, Jonny focuses on its silver linings: the startling and reassuring warmth of Tias's urine and the fact that "even then, . . . no boy has ever looked so goddamned precious."

In *Jonny Appleseed*, abjection is simply a fact of life for the protagonist: "Our bodies were made of cells that were braided together, and particles of blood, semen, and shit that leaked and oozed out from us — bits of discharge that were both living and dying" (182). The novel is more about caring for those abjectified parts and experiences than it is about revolting against the "exclusionary matrix" that requires and produces the domain of abject beings in which he finds himself. For Jonny, urine, semen, and blood are sources of both pain and joy, and he is interested in finding pleasure and solace in his abjectified body and experiences. For instance, in the fourth grade, he goes to a Halloween dance at school dressed as Minnie Mouse and dances with another boy. When he gets home, his infuriated stepfather, Roger, beats Jonny with his belt: "The sound of his leather belt slapping against the bare skin of my ass crackled throughout the house. . . . My flesh reddened and began to split. Roger had broken the skin and I could feel a tiny dabble of blood trickling between my cheeks" (173). When Jonny finally runs to his room, he inspects the marks on his buttocks in the mirror: "They were tender and throbbing. It hurt, but I had to admit, a part of me was excited too" (173). He takes off his pants and lies down on the carpet, on his stomach, and masturbates for the first time, experimenting with the sensations his body can produce and feel. Roger's mean streak symbolizes the act of queer abjection, but it is also and necessarily through this act that Jonny discovers his queerness. Symbols of abjection — urine, blood, semen — are associated throughout the book with scenes of exclusion and humiliation that nonetheless always end on a hopeful note, on the opening of new possibilities: "That's sometimes the strangest thing about pain, that sites of trauma, when dressed after the gash, can become sites of pleasure" (179). *Jonny Appleseed* is precisely about dressing one's wounds by accepting them, embracing them, performing

them, and narrating them. While Zoa's mobilization of the abject can be seen as a project of transgression against colonial structures, Jonny's imperative is, above all, in the border zone of the abject, *survivance* (see Vizenor 1).

Skin as Melting and Porous Barrier

Skin is usually conceived as being the physical border of the modern subject. According to Kristeva, it is constructed as the boundary between the inside and the outside of the body/self; it is the "frontière du corps propre" and the "enveloppe garante de l'intégrité corporelle" (120). As she observes, however, skin is a fragile container, and once it is punctured, invisible, or stretched, it does not guarantee the integrity of the self/proper/clean ("propre"), as it cedes to the dejection of its content — blood or otherwise (65). Skin — and any other boundary that is constructed or imagined — is never air tight, thus the subject can only keep its supposed integrity by associating anything that exits the body with abjection (126). Split skin and open wounds proliferate in both *full-metal* and *Jonny Appleseed*: where Zoa narrates "neck splayed like an open wound / cock lacerates my throat" (*full-metal* 39), Jonny describes "boils and skin tags and all things that look diseased but pass as a normal NDN aesthetic" (55) or tells about that one time when Tias's father cut his nails to the point of bleeding because they had put on nail polish, cutting "layers of nail and skin" (76). The bleeding and tearing apart of skin in Whitehead's works suggests its vulnerability, and its inability both to retain the contents of the Indigiqueer body/self and to protect it from outside, identity-threatening elements. In *full-metal*, Zoa states, "my skin, its melting / . . . my skin / melting welding melding" (34) before saying, pages later, "the external is my mangled internal" (89). The boundary between inside and outside melts away, and supposedly distinct identities — man and woman, queer and Indigenous, human and animal, etc. — are welded together, as the difference between the external and the internal becomes harder to recognize, establish, and maintain. When Jonny is a teenager, a tick gets stuck in his navel, and he lets it live there for a few days, imagining he is carrying a baby watermelon seed. When he shows it to his mother and his stepfather, the latter takes it out:

> Roger carefully inserted the tweezers inside and clasped them tightly on the tick. It hurt us both — I could feel the parts of my

> belly button where my skin had begun to fuse with the tick; my innards felt like a slick, wet olive. Roger then bore down on the tweezers and finally yanked the tick from my belly. I gasped in pain and grasped the couch as blood shot out from the hole, oozed down my navel, and soaked into my underwear. (178)

This excerpt describes the fusion of skin with a tick, a blood-eating parasite that can cause human death. What this suggests is that skin as porous boundary not only rejects the body's abject waste and fluids but also can let parasitic, toxic things in. As this excerpt shows, however, Jonny cultivates a tender, welcoming approach to such threats to the boundaries of his own self, even feeling a sense of loss and regret once the tick is taken out of him. In *Jonny Appleseed*, skin is a space of exchange, interaction, and intimacy, rather than a boundary that separates bodies and things.

Speaking of skin as a space of exchange, in chapter 17, Jonny dreams of maskwa (bear). In this scene, the welding and blending of entities, bodies, and land happens through intercourse between Jonny and maskwa. In his dream, Jonny is walking around naked in the mountains and witnesses the land around him, the animals, and the flowers, which are all "horny as fuck" (69). When he sees a set of bear prints on the ground, he pours tobacco on them: "I am on all fours to fit my hands into the prints as I push the tobacco down farther — down as deep as I can, into the breast of askîy. As I push, twigs and little stones cut my hands, and blood pools into the mud, seeps into my lacerations. I taste soil in my mouth" (69-70). Jonny's blood mixes with the mud, which seeps into him in return, to the point where he tastes the land in his mouth without having swallowed any. Then, maskwa takes Jonny from behind: "He places his paws on top of my hands, they feel like the bottom of my mom's mocs. Then his claws press into the tips of my fingers, piercing them, blood and foam leaking out from my fingertips" (70). The scene ends with Jonny ejaculating in the mud and the bear licking Jonny's tears from his eyes. Jonny is filled with the land and the land is filled with him; the boundaries between himself, maskwa, and the land become porous as his skin is ripped open, as well as through the act of sexual intercourse.

Of course, this scene features one of the most abject crimes according to biblical law: zoophilia (Kristeva 122). According to Kristeva, sexual contact with another species or another group is prohibited because hybridization represents a radical threat for the formation and delimita-

tion of sexual identities. This is tied to the logical conception of impurity that Kristeva observes in the biblical text and that leads to "mélange, effacement des différences, menace de l'identité" (120). By desiring maskwa and having sex with him, Jonny wanders in both homosexual and animal territory, territories often associated with the abject. Rather than run away or fight against maskwa, Jonny embraces the erasing of differences and the "threat to his identity" that this encounter poses. This is also consistent with the association of Indigenous characters with animals throughout the novel. In fact, Whitehead often zoomorphizes Jonny and other characters, mostly through analogies — "he tasted like the salty skin of a pickerel" (161), "we sounded like a pack of rez dogs" (127), "his shout sounding more like the pitiful welp of a dog licking its wounds after a fight" (98), "he moved like a brutish bison" (112), and so on. In *Jonny Appleseed*, Indigeneity is at times conflated with animality, which suggests an embracing of the relationality and deep connection between the category "human" and animals. As Leanne Betasamosake Simpson argues, "Our bodies are not just informed by but *created* and *maintained* by relationships of deep reciprocity [with the land, the animals, etc.]" (182; emphasis added). The abject, in the form here of the animal and bestiality, is once again embraced, desired even, in the recognition of a relationality that questions the rigidity and boundedness of identity and subjectivity.

The maskwa scene, then, suggests a profound entanglement of several identities — a human body, an animal, and the surrounding land. This short chapter is full of references to the abject, on the one hand via anal and interspecific sex and on the other through the leaking and mingling of fluids between several bodies and things. Jonny's body lets its contents out and the land's and maskwa's contents in, through its open orifices and ripped skin, thus challenging its corporal integrity. The constitutive outside is let in, welcomed even; skin is melting, and the boundaries of the self are blurred and transformed in the process.

The Linguistic Abject in Whitehead's Indigiqueer Poetics

The previous discussion showed that the discursive category of the abject is mobilized 1) in *full-metal indigiqueer* as an act of refusal and transgression against the system that produces it to cast it out, 2) in *Jonny Appleseed* as something one can learn to care for, accept, and love despite its rejection by social and discursive forces, and 3) fundamentally as a

boundary-threatening gesture. I want to suggest now that the presence of languages and registers other than "standard English" in these texts can be seen to function in much the same way. If abjection is the sense of horror or discomfort that one feels when experiencing a breakdown in the presumed distinction between what is self and what is other, it follows that the mobilization of "other" or minoritized languages in a predominantly English text — keeping in mind the monolingual logics of Canadian literary industries and institutions (see Lennon) — can also be seen as a threat to the fixed entity that we believe to be the English language, at the very least an indication that its purported boundaries and limits are porous. After all, the notion of English (or any imperial, normative, standardized language) also takes the form of a "regulatory ideal" (Foucault, qtd. in Butler xi) that relies on an exclusionary matrix not unlike that of the category of sex that Butler deconstructs so aptly. In Canada, Eve Haque and Donna Patrick have shown that language policies have been used "as a way to address state concerns with national unity and control, producing forms of racial exclusion and maintaining a white-settler nation," and that these policies are intended to manage racial difference through "processes of erasure, forced assimilation and exclusion through the technology of language" (27). It is a well-known fact, for instance, that the residential schooling system, established in the 1870s, served the assimilationist agenda of eradicating Indigenous languages and instilling the use by Indigenous children of "civilizing" English and French languages through techniques that included the punishment of Indigenous children for speaking their home language (Haque and Patrick 29, 37). The processes through which a dominant and normative language such as English establishes and maintains itself in a settler colonial context (i.e., through the active suppression of certain elements it produces as other) thus resemble the ways in which queer bodies have been "foreclosed or banished from the proper domain of 'sex'" (Butler xxx). Indeed, Monica Heller and Bonnie McElhinny have shown that

> the shape of the nation goes beyond the association of bodies and territories through shared bounded languages. The form of the language is also important. The most obvious domain has to do with whether linguistic material is understood to properly belong inside a linguistic boundary or on the outside. Most frequently, attention is paid to lexical material (words) in what is now a long

> tradition of purism. . . . These policing efforts can also extend to prosody, phonology, morphology, and syntax. (106)

I argue that in Whitehead's works, different languages and registers operate in similar ways to his mobilization of queer abject forms: as a virus-like force that counters what excludes it in the first place by infecting it — in the context of Canadian colonialism, which is not over but ongoing (see Coulthard) — and as something that needs to be cared for in the context of cultural resurgence and of Indigenous *survivance*.

The language of *full-metal indigiqueer* is striking from the start, its table of contents filled with cryptic titles such as "e/espywithmylittle(i)," "a[u] cla[i]r the l[own]e," "kundera has the answers for nostos-algos ndns," and "douwanttoknowwhatmakestheredmenred[questionmark]" (n. pag.). Deliberately opaque, the collection contains several passages written in what approximates computer language, like this one: "fa:: :: :: ::lcon:: : :: :: ::video: :: :: :::: :downloadingpleasuresoftware: :: :: :: :::: :: : :: ::: : :: : :: :: : : ::reconciled:: ::: ::vi:::::deo:::::::in::::stallation:::: ::com: :: ::: :: plete[me]:: : :: ::: :" (39). Here, colons insert themselves between and within words, dissecting language through their infectious proliferation. This creates a strange rhythm that bears little resemblance to the way one would speak or even read normally, at the same time as it demands a considerable effort to put the syllables back together to create words and meaning. Elsewhere, a similar effect of unreadability is created through the absence of spaces ("wheniscoffthemaamstompsherfootandmymanagerwalksoverakswhatswrongmaamtellshimthatiamrudebeyondbelief" [29]), the substitution of numbers for certain letters ("n4m3: a w0rd or s3t of wor4s b1 wh1ch a p3rs0n, 4nimal, 10lace, or th1n5 is kn03n, 4ddr3s5ed, 01, r3ferr3d to" [21]), and the absence of apostrophes ("shes" [49], "youll" [54], "id" [89]). All of the examples listed here would generally be recognized as being written in English, but it is a diseased, infected English, a kind of English that is not "proper." In *full-metal*, numbers (from long series taken out of grocery receipts and bank card transactions to individual numbers functioning randomly as letters), the unusual use of punctuation (be it the use of several colons, the absence of apostrophes and/or spaces, or the lexical transcription of punctuation signs such as "[period]" and "[questionmark]" throughout the collection), and unusual spellings ("cuzzin" [42], "ndn" [54], etc.) create a language that is both recognizable and unrecognizable as "English." The following excerpt, which again alludes to Spenser, provides a good example of all these devices at play simultaneously:

peyak[period]

1 am the red crosse knight
patr0n of true ho11nesse
thank you: :: spenser: :::
for m0u1ng me to western sh[or]e
whom to auenge, you ask[questionmark]
una had from far compeld
i am here to reuenge (43)

Here, the underlying structure of English qua system is disturbed and infected by numbers, a series of colons, brackets, obsolete spellings, and a Cree word. Normative linguistic institutions such as dictionaries and grammars tend to expel, reject, and deny old spellings and lexical items from languages it constructs as other in space or in time, meaning that what is considered "inside" a language at a given time can come to belong "outside" the same language over time. Importantly, what the infected English of *full-metal* suggests is that the "outside" of English "is not an absolute 'outside' [nor] an ontological thereness that exceeds or counters the boundaries of discourse; as a constitutive 'outside,' it is that which can only be thought — when it can — in relation to that discourse, at and as its most tenuous borders" (Butler xvii). By bringing numbers, "other languages," obsolete spellings, and so forth on the page, Whitehead confronts the idea of the English language qua linguistic system with both its purported inside and its "constitutive outside," thus making its constructed nature visible. The result is a challenging one for any reader, as it is not easily packaged into a readable and recognizable, monolingual whole. By injecting excluded items into the "English" poems and by making meaning out of and from the border zone of what we know as English, the language of *full-metal* blurs the distinction between English and its constitutive outside, thus disturbing its system, its order, and its presumed sovereignty as a linguistic body.

At the same time, Indigenous languages and certain vernaculars are mobilized in undoubtedly affective ways in *Jonny Appleseed*. The first-person narration is written in a highly oral and vernacular prose that is often undistinguishable from the dialogues. The novel is written mostly in what most would consider English, though it is a profoundly subjective and embodied English — characterized at times by a "rez accent," other times by drag queen slang, Snapchat and Grindr expressions, etc. — but Indigenous languages, namely Ojibway and Cree,

make several appearances. Throughout the novel, Cree words hold particularly affective connotations: they are used mostly to refer to loved ones, such as Jonny's kokum, mushom, and nikâwiy, and the Cree word for "I love you," "kisâkihitin," appears twelve times in total. Whitehead also uses Cree for emotionally charged dialogues between Jonny and his best friend and lover, Tias; the last words they exchange after they break up are "'Kihtwâm?' he asked. 'Ekosi,' I replied," ekosi meaning "goodbye forever" or "adieu" (187). Most, if not all, instances of Cree in the novel signal tenderness, love, and care, as if Jonny is trying to find spaces for decolonial love and intimacy outside of the rigid and oppressive grammar of English, the imposed, colonial language. The most striking presence of Indigenous languages, however, takes place during the maskwa scene described earlier, which is filled with both Cree and Ojibway sentences:

> The song of the round dance grows louder in my ears, unaltered by the tongue that scrapes and cleans me — wabanonong manidoo owaabamaan anishinaabek. I can't help but cry — I don't understand the words but my tendons do, my bones react and jig in the skin. The beat doubles, rabbit and beaver thwack in conversation. I feel something hard press against the small of my back — zhaawanong manidoo owaabamaan anishinaabek. . . . As he leaves, the music fades, my heart-drum-beat lulls to a slow pace, my body relaxes, lets loose its fluids. Kâkike, he huffs, kisâkihitin kâkike. (71)

That both Ojibway and Cree have such a significant presence in this specific scene is no coincidence. In Jonny's dream, both languages, long suppressed, resurface, operating a return of what has been cast out by the colonial logics of monolingualism. The superposition of Ojibway and Cree specifically with the boundary-threatening abject of the scene suggests that Jonny has a similar relationship to Indigenous languages as he does to his queerness; both his queerness and Indigeneity are marginalized, excluded, and abjectified, and both intersect in his dream through the figure of maskwa. "I don't understand the words but my tendons do," says Jonny. The marked presence of Ojibway in this excerpt is thus more symbolic than it is signifying; it represents something that has been actively abjectified and suppressed by "residential schooling and other assimilationist policies [that] have played a major role in the 'un-learning' of indigenous language and culture" (Haque and Patrick

37) and that is now being brought back as part of a broader movement of Indigenous cultural resurgence. In this chapter, the idea is not so much to comprehend or make sense out of these linguistic elements as to create space for them, to welcome their opacity, and to let them flourish on their own. The scene is one of linguistic encounter, of languages touching each other, a scene that, much like the queer body in Whitehead's works, "can acquire political import insofar as it exposes the fiction of self-contained language-systems (historically sedimented as national and colonial), undoes them and repurposes them as constitutively interdependent, vulnerable, constantly interpenetrated" (Basile 28).

The Linguistic Abject or the Queering of Language

I suggest that the use of non-English elements — Cree and Ojibway words as well as slang, numbers, and other disruptive writing devices — in Whitehead's works can be conceived as the linguistic and cultural equivalent to queer abjection, not in relation to a heterosexual exclusionary matrix but to a colonial and cultural one that centres normative English as the legitimate, civilized language and that affirms its sovereignty and power through the exclusion of "other" languages and registers. The linguistic "abject" that appears in both *full-metal indigiqueer* and *Jonny Appleseed* can thus be seen as the formal, linguistic corollary to the themes and symbols of queer abjection that fill these two books. It figures as a troubling return caused by the refusal "to respect the heavily policed boundaries among languages that so many missionaries, administrators, teachers, linguists, and anthropologists have devoted so much work to producing [and] a similar refusal to respect the conventions of standardized language" (Heller and McElhinny 21). If the abjectified queer body is one that transgresses the heteronormative order, then the language Whitehead offers us can be seen as a queered language, one that challenges the linguistic order and its normative regime, with hierarchical categories such as "English" and "French" and boundaries that consolidate them. Whitehead's two main approaches to both the queer and the linguistic abject, its weaponization in the fight against colonialism and its preservation and survival through care and love, bear a striking resemblance to Butler's discussion of the need to refigure the queer outside:

> The task is to refigure this necessary "outside" as a future horizon, one in which the violence of exclusion is perpetually in the process of being overcome. *But of equal importance is the preservation of the outside*, the site where discourse meets its limits, where the opacity of what is not included in a given regime of truth acts as a disruptive site of linguistic impropriety and unrepresentability, illuminating the violent and contingent boundaries of that normative regime precisely through the inability of that regime to represent that which might pose a fundamental threat to its continuity. (25; emphasis added)

But while queerness and Indigeneity have a lot in common as structural positions constructed along specific axes of differentiation, they cannot be so easily equated. If queerness is defined solely by heteronormativity, Indigeneity is not defined solely by the Canadian nation-state. Simply put, Indigenous *peoples* existed before the arrival of Europeans, whereas queerness did not exist before the emergence of heteronormativity. To put it differently, if "the identity of Canadians is tied to the identity of Indigenous people in this country" (Maracle 22), the opposite is not entirely true. As an ethnic and racialized category, Indigeneity is indeed constructed differentially according to a certain racial and social order (in opposition to other identities such as settler, immigrant, white, and Black), but Indigeneity, for Indigenous peoples themselves, is also a set of practices, a set of "ways of being in the world" (Justice xix), that exist independently of the social order that depends on their ongoing oppression and displacement. Daniel Heath Justice has discussed the problematic nature of ethnic categories for Indigenous peoples: "contemporary identity in Canada . . . is figured in one's ethnic heritage and 'blood' rather than in one's obligations to kin and place" (58). Drawing on the work of Ella Cara Deloria, he asserts that to be Indigenous is rather to engage in learned practices that are the result of a complex and deliberate but entirely learnable process of intergenerational education and exchange. For him, Indigenous writers such as Whitehead tell stories "to rebuild, reassert, reclaim, and reestablish connections and relationships that return us to ourselves, our lands, and our communities" (65).

There is thus a refusal to engage with or respond to the colonial order altogether, a refusal that allows for "resurgent practices of cultural self-recognition and empowerment" to take place somewhat outside of it (Coulthard 23). Scholars such as Glen Sean Coulthard, Audra Simpson (*Mohawk*), Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Lee Maracle, and

Daniel Heath Justice are in fact less interested in moving the Indigenous ethnic category up the ladder of the Canadian social order than in returning to "self-determination and change from within rather than recognition from the outside" (L. Simpson 22). In this context, then, perhaps Indigeneity does not rest as easily in the abject as queerness does. Structurally, the Indigenous abject does challenge and threaten the Canadian social and linguistic order, but from within, Indigeneity is not defined according to this order and thus cannot be abject. "Indigenous abjection," while very real in a social and material sense considering the domination, both historical and present, of the Canadian government, only holds up insofar as we take the standpoint of the colonial order. Hence, Whitehead's maskwa scene goes beyond the abject, resembling a healing ceremony (the offering of tobacco, the drumbeat of a round dance song) for Jonny, who has "hurt [his] Cree" (71). What this means is that from a certain point of view, the maskwa scene can be viewed as abject, but from a different angle, it can represent a spiritual and cultural act of resurgence from within, a set of practices — communion with the land, relationality with nature, learning new languages, and so on — that define Indigeneity as anything but abject.

In that case, the queer and the Indigenous "abjects" can also be read as something other than abject, since they refuse to participate in the dualism of the normative and the abject. Whereas in *full-metal* the linguistic abject is mobilized in direct response to the linguistic structures and order of colonialism (by "infecting" colonial English), in *Jonny Appleseed* linguistic fragmentation and non-normativity point rather to a decolonial otherwise outside of, or parallel to, a monolingual and hegemonic configuration of language. The result created by the use of non-normative writing devices is one that is illegible (or abject), but only to a public that reads it with a monolingual and colonial lens that seeks transparency, clarity, and legibility. As Billy-Ray Belcourt puts it, "One of the most vital modalities of decolonial life is that of remaining unaddressable to a settler public" (*History* 96). In turn, the space that emerges out of this refusal to address a settler public and to be understood by that settler public is a space that addresses and thus creates a different kind of public. Belcourt adds: "Our indecipherability turns out to be material for a commune of rebellion" (107).

In another piece, Belcourt reflects on the inclusion of queerness within Indigenous studies: "My concern is not with being included in Native Studies — as if being included was all that we wanted —

but with epistemologies that build worlds that can't hold all of us" ("Other"). What Whitehead's Indigiqueer poetics does is precisely that: it builds a world that can hold both queerness and Indigeneity, not through exhaustive representability but through its permissiveness, its flexibility, and its openness to the abject, including, and perhaps most importantly, on the grounds of language.

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