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Native American Gothic as Third Space: Stephen Graham Jones' The Only Good Indians

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Abstract: The intention of the article is to examine Stephen Graham Jones' most recent novel *The Only Good Indians* (2020) from combined ecogothic and postcolonial perspectives. The central concept informing the analyses is that of Third Space, as formulated by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture,* and adapted by the spatial turn critic, Edward W. Soja in *Thirdspace*. Marking the onto-epistemological condition of in-betweenness, openness and ambivalent cultural identities, Third Space will be employed here to interrogate hybrid interspaces and generic dislocations in Jones' new novel. As will be argued, Jones rewrites the Gothic slasher with a view of unsettling the inherited paradigms of thought, identity and representation. The writer reclaims the conventions and tropes of the genre, such as supernatural figures and events, the return of the repressed past, delayed revenge, and excessive acts of violence, and fuses them with the Native American settings, temporalities, tropes of spirituality and modes of storytelling. Jones' novel, as we would like to propose, undermines any claims of a coherent identity and turns the Gothic mode into Third Space, characterized by an excess of ambiguous signification and revealing entangled ontological, ethnic, ecological and cross-cultural locations of horror.

Keywords: Native American Gothic, Third Space, ecogothic, postcolonial criticism, Stephen Graham Jones

Introduction: The Objectives and the Method

The Gothic has always occupied an ambivalent, subversive and interstitial position vis-à-vis dominant cultural practices. Resembling "a Frankenstein's monster, assembled out of the bits and pieces of the past," as observed by Maggie Kilgour in *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (4)*,* the genre has often included considerations of destabilized identities and heteroglot discourses, be it familial, individual, ethnic, sexual or political. The most recent reconceptualizations of the Gothic mode through various theoretical lenses, including those of postcolonial, New Historicist, feminist, postfeminist, ethnic, ecocritical, affective and queer studies, have demonstrated the unwaning appeal and productivity of gothic tropes for addressing the complex problems of contemporaneity and for mirroring various social and political anxieties. In the chapter on queer American Gothic, Ardel Haefele-Thomas aptly observes that "the Gothic genre, which often embraces intersecting identities… has served as a safe space to investigate deeper cultural chasms" (115). A good example could be Gayatri Spivak's influential essay "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (1985), which reveals the colonial imaginaries in *Jane Eyre* and *Frankenstein*, or Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's seminal *Between*

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Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (1985), which offers insights into the relationship between the Gothic and homoeroticism. Theresa Goddu in her New Historicist rereading of the American canon argues that "the horrors of history are also articulated through gothic discourse" (Goddu 2). The Gothic "othering" and penchant for abject spaces and beings, the critic contends, makes visible "the cultural contradictions that undermine the nation's claim to purity and equality" (Goddu 10). More recently, in the edited collection *Ecogothic* (2013), Andrew Smith and William Hughes have argued for a revisionary look on the American Gothic from an ecological perspective, showing its inherent entanglements with environmental concerns and ambivalent representations of the human as well as more-than-human matter.

The revisionist gaze has also turned towards ethnic adaptations of the mode. The idea of Native American Gothic, which is crucial for our inquiry is at least problematic, as argued by Michelle Burnham in her provocatively titled essay "Is There an Indigenous Gothic?," since we tend to think of the Gothic as the product of a certain historical moment—the counter-narrative emerged in response to the rational philosophies of the Western Enlightenment. The founding Gothic novels, the critic notes, "seem as far away from Native American cultural and literary forms as do the conventional Gothic settings and figures those early novels inaugurate—including decaying castles, labyrinthine cities, and aristocratic villains" (Burnham 225). Indeed, if we see it in this narrow historical framework, as "invariably described as a European form that contains a European response to Europe's own past," the natural answer to the question "is there an Indigenous Gothic?," would have to be "no" (Burnham 225). However, literary tradition is a dynamic and open site, with new developments, trends and sensibilities ever arriving and pushing against the old ones. The Gothic, as an inherently mobile, hybrid and pliable form, has been adapted and revised by many traditions, including Non-Western ones. In Burnham's apt words, "Native American Gothic joins a variety of nations, ethnicities, regions, and communities that have likewise adopted but also transformed the genre and its conventions—including French Gothic, Scottish Gothic, Canadian Gothic, African American Gothic, Feminist Gothic, and Southern Gothic" (226).

Exploring the tropes of spectrality in Anna Lee Walter's *Ghost Singer,* Angela Schoch/Davidson calls for new paradigms for the study of the Indigenous Gothic:

> The study of the Indigenous Gothic requires an acknowledgement of the challenges presented by hybridity and an understanding that spiritual and epistemological differences produce texts that do not conform with traditionally identified gothic structures. However, the gothic thrives in liminal spaces; the gothic text often dramatises dissention within the self through conflicts between external forces. (158)

Burnham further complicates the field by drawing our attention to the processes of cross-fertilization and rejecting the reductionist considerations of mere influence and adaptation. The critic explores the overlapping tropologies of Gothic and Native American storytelling, such as ghosts, witches, tricksters, haunted burial grounds, unforgiving nature and shapeshifting, pointing to the indigenous writers' long-time "engagement with strategies, effects, and sensations that can be identified as Gothic"

(230). However, Native American adaptations of the mode are often employed to "write back" to the colonial representations of the American Indian, problematizing the long history of US imperialism, white violence, dehumanization and racial oppression (Burnham 227). An example of an anti-colonial Native American Gothic could be Sherman Alexie's novel *Indian Killer* in which the writer re-inhabits and reverses the familiar Gothic conventions to represent the psychological and affective results of colonial terror. Alexie fuses the Indian sources and tropes of the supernatural with the Western Gothic conventions to probe the imperialist sources of cultural trauma. Similar strategies integrating diverse spiritualities and cultural imaginaries can be found, among others, in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach,* Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* and *Tracks,* and Anna Lee Walters's *Ghost Singer.*

Such processes of cross-fertilization and transformation of Gothic and Native American sensibilities are in the center of the following inquiry. Perceived as a dynamic and highly absorptive form, the Gothic will be thus treated as an interrogatory mode rather than a fixed genre, creating interspaces and critical prisms for the exploration of the darkening cultural, social, and ecological vistas. The intention of this article is thus to tap into the current critical interrogations of the Gothic genre and, following major postcolonial critics and the philosophers of the spatial turn, to discuss its Native American variety as an instance of a liminal and ultimately transgressive "Third Space" whose function is to mediate between indigenous and Euro-American imaginaries of horror. The primary text which has inspired this interrogation is *The Only Good Indians* (2020)—the recent novel by a Blackfeet writer Stephen Graham Jones. Resisting easy categorizations, the novel's complex form calls for a more sustained theoretical interrogation, and our hope is to contribute to the growing critical reception of Jones' work.

Jones is the author of several novels and is very well known for his transgressive and irreverent generic mash-ups which unsettle cultural identities, expectations and boundaries and which often involve engagement with formulaic genres such as detective thriller (*Not for Nothing*), gothic novel (*Mongrels*), horror short stories (*After the People Lights Have Gone Off*), neo-noir novel (*All the Beautiful Sinners*), borderland thriller (*Seven Spanish Angels*), zombie horror (*Zombie Bake Off*), and a graphic novel with elements of film script and musical (*Demon Theory*). This transgeneric and post-ethnic dimension of his fiction is addressed in the 2016 collection *The Fictions of Stephen Graham Jones* edited by Billy J. Stratton, the only book-length study of the writer and a valuable introduction to his work. The essays which have paved the way for our own inquiry include also Jodi A. Byrd's "Red Dead Conventions: American Indian Transgeneric Fictions," which focuses on Jones' novel *Fast Red Road,* Billy J. Stratton's "Reservation Hero is a Hero Forever," and Robert A. Lee's "Native Postmodern? Remediating History in the Fiction of Stephen Graham Jones and D. N. Birschfield," all of which interrogate Jones' aesthetic versatility, audacious detournements of popular formulas and his eclectic literary backgrounds.

Stratton's insightful collection contains Jones' artistic manifesto, titled "Letter to a Just-Starting-Out Indian Writer—And Maybe to Myself," which postulates a new Native American Renaissance. As argued by Jones, the new opening in Native American literature should derive its force from rejecting rigid ethnic labels, along with

commodified perceptions of the indigenous traditions, and overly predictable aesthetic identifications:

> Go on, get out there, traffic in the genres typically denied to Indians. That we're not allowed to do fantasy or science fiction and the rest, it's both stereotyping us and it's primitivizing our writing: it's saying we can't play in the branches that come off literature with a capital L—we can't go out on the branches because our literature is still 'formative,' it's still in its infancy. (Jones, "Letter" xii)

Jones is clearly against the cultural stereotype of the "picturesque Indian"—reduced to an empty silhouette on a T-shirt, a liminal and somewhat "ancient" "elf," adorned with the ceremonial headdress and haunting the disappearing woods, until he "fade[s] into that sunset looming behind [him]" (xi-xii). Instead, he encourages young indigenous writers to pierce the illusory and constructed imperative of authenticity and "[s]neak down the road, jump the fence," "mess up" and "don't ask for forgiveness" (xiii). This urge to "mess up" pertains clearly to the creative use of genre fiction, leading Jones to the inherently messy, disjunctive and transgressive spaces of the Gothic.

"When the audience or the market or the critics refer to you as an 'American Indian writer,' this is an attempt to dismiss you, to preserve you on a shelf, to prepare you for display," Jones warns his fellow writers ("A Letter" xiii). In the provocatively titled *The Only Good Indians,* which is the text under scrutiny here, the writer works to avoid this fate, as he himself "jumps the fence" and constructs an intricate and highly disturbing ecogothic narrative, fueled by the plot paradigms and conventions of the Gothic slasher. The novel wallows in scenes of violence, excessive bloodshed, grotesque plot turns and abject and sadistic horror, leaving the reader in a permanent state of shock and growing disbelief. As we shall argue, Jones probes the subversive potential of the Gothic mode by fusing it with Native American traditions, worldviews, and discourses. Both traditions make up the active memory of the text whose unique forces lies in the recombinant, citational and adaptive strategies. The result of his experiment is a highly ambivalent and discontinuous "Third Space" which carries the ghostly "inscriptions and articulations of culture's *hybridity*" (Bhabha 38) and works to complicate and transform the meanings of cultural memory and cultural difference.

Given the formal complexity of the novel, the methodology informing the following study will be also appropriately hybrid and based on three interrelated critical paradigms: 1) the generic, related to the genre of the Gothic and its postmodern varieties; 2) the ecocritical—in particular, the ecogothic critical perspective which foregrounds nature as a contested site and sees the human efforts to control it as a dystopian project haunted by the prospects of self-destruction (Smith and Hughes 1-3); 3) and the postcolonial, useful for the analyses of intercultural spaces, ethnic othering and mimicry.

Terminology: Third Space and Thirding

"A particular problem in postcolonial communities," as noted by Margaret Noodin in *Bawaajimo* (2014), an in-depth study of Anishinaabe language and literature, "is the duality of existing always either as an untranslated identity or as an assimilated translation of oneself" (xx). Those untranslatable identities are well captured by the

postcolonial concept of Third Space, central for our interrogation of Jones' work. It has been adapted primarily from Homi K. Bhabha's influential considerations of cultural hybridity in *The Location of Culture*. However, our study is also indebted to Edward W. Soja's rethinking of the term in relation to the shifting conceptions of space. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha defines postcolonial imaginaries as a "transit space," "the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new sites of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining idea of the society itself" (1). *Third space* relates thus to an open, intercultural "space of translation" which "eludes the politics of polarity" (Bhabha 39), unsettles the inherited discourses, subjectivities as well as historical narratives and creates a dynamic site of hybridity and transcultural negotiations. Seen by Bhabha as a new heterogenous emergence that has the power of a radical cultural critique (25), "Third Space of enunciation"

> makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past kept alive in the national tradition of the People. (36)

Significantly for our own adaptation of the term, Bhabha sees Third Space as "unrepresentable in itself" and yet capable of providing "discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity" (37). Within this dynamic interstitial space, "even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (37). The unrepresentability as well as the interventionist, resisting nature of Third Space, as formulated by the philosopher, resonates with the revisionist uses of the Gothic mode, as will be exemplified in our study of Jones' novel.

As mentioned above, our analyses will be informed also by the spatial turn criticism that is heavily indebted to postcolonial concepts. Following Bhabha, cultural theorist Edward W. Soja develops a similar critical category in *Thirdspace* (1996). Soja proposes an unhyphenated term "Thirdspace" and a derivative notion of "thirding" to mark a transdisciplinary mode of interpretation and thinking, "radically combinatorial and open" in its premise (4). Thirdspace allows for a recognition of the inseparability of the spatial, historical, and the social (3), undoing the inherited frameworks and confines, to forge new critical sensibilities. "Thirding," in Soja's scheme is an active interventionist practice which "introjects a critical spatial imagination" into restrictive binary dualisms of the historical and social imaginations (Soja 3). Soja's modification of the term emphasizes its modal aspect which further binds it with the Gothic mode.

Building on the above approaches, we will focus on three aspects of Stephen Graham Jones' revisionary "thirding" of the Gothic mode. The first is space itself—we shall examine the ecogothic nature of the haunted landscape—here the Blackfeet reservation which features very prominently in Jones' novel and is the seed of the dramatically violent plot and the subsequent supernatural hauntings. The second element will be an arch-gothic convention of repetition and return—here exemplified

by the subversive uses of various rituals, including hunting, ritualistic cleansing, and basketball. The last element will bring into focus the ontological and cultural hybridity of the female antagonist—Elk Head Woman—whose shapeshifting abilities and uncanny apparitionings straddle the boundaries between the real and the unreal, the human and the animal, reinforcing ecogothic and native realist concerns of the narrative. Jones, as we shall evidence in the close reading of the selected passages, braids and integrates various strands of gothic and horror genres, culture and of American history, to ask questions about the limits of representation, of nature, and of identity. The strategies of "thirding" are his ways of a productive unsettling of generic and onto-epistemological boundaries. The resulting nonlinear identities, dislocations and affective ecologies produce a deep sense of discomfort, denying us any sense of closure and epistemological certainty.

"It Came From the Res": Reservation and its Ecogothic Specters

Already in his first collection of short stories, Jones hints at the "thirdness" of his aesthetic and existential positioning, seeing his identity as "a parallel universe, an alternate dimension whose first foot falling is heard on the road I did not take" (Jones, "One Another" 363). Although, as argued by Stratton, all his stories "emerge out of and draw significance from just such a Native understanding of the world, articulating a consciousness inextricably informed by his ancestry, travels, and experiences" (Stratton, "Come for the Icing" 11), the quotation resonates with a peculiar sense of dislocation and creates an image of the universe with an unknown origin and equally ghostly futurity, "an alternate dimension" poised uncertainly between the possible and the impossible, between the beginning and the end. The haunting sound of the invisible "first foot" seems to evoke the indigenist belief in all creatures' inseparable connection to the land as the centre of being; and yet, the phantom acousticity of the trope implies the trauma of the Blackfeet tribal past, haunted by the historical dispossession and fragmentation—the past that is forever intertwined with the present.[2]

The novel's settings most certainly emerge from Jones' attachment to the climate, the changing seasons, and the animal world of the Blackfeet reservation—the land circumscribed by colonial cartographies, portioned off, and misused for its natural resources. The Blackfeet peoples are themselves presented as survivors; e.g. Lewis, one of four male protagonists, reflects on the spectral character of the present, speaking of "the few ancestors who made it through raids and plagues, massacres and genocide, diabetes and all the wobbly-tired cars the rest of America was done with" (Jones, *Only* 45). Unsurprisingly, winter is the dominant season in Jones' narrative, and one cannot

2 The trope can be also read as Jones' conversation with what Renee Bergland described as "the discourses of Indian spectrality," popular in Western representations of Native Americans especially in the nineteenth century (5). Citing Bergland in her essay "Indigenous Alterations," A. E. Schoch/Davidson defines it as "a form of literary annihilation whereby American indigenous inhabitants were presumed already dead and gone" (144). What is especially relevant to our study, Schoch/Davidson further proposes that the ghosting of the Indigenous peoples was linked to the Western conceptions of time "its linear orientation as one way that Indigenous peoples are denied a future and banished from the present; this view of time also supports the separation of the individual from surrounding communities and the environment" (151).

but think of its symbolic ecological resonance as the darkest and death-haunted seasons and nature's crypt: "Past where the road ducks down to the right there's just snow and snow and more snow, though," one of the characters, named Denorah, observes, "and the shimmer of the lake where her dad told her one of his running buddies died, way back" (295). As implied in this quotation and further reflections of Denorah, it is not an empty container; on the contrary, it reveals a larger ecosystem, full of communications, in which humans are deeply enmeshed. Be it "[e]lk tracks in the snow," the squirrels that "chattering about" impending danger, or "the blanket of stars spread out around" the protagonists (Jones, *Only* 196, 68), the weather and landscape are not a mere backdrop but an important agent—an uncanny co-participant and ecogothic antagonist in Jones' plot. It communicates its ghostly messages in various ways, freezing up time and bodies, forcing upon the characters a recognition of their entanglements and mortality, and rendering porous the boundaries between the human and animal world.

The images of disconnectedness, frozen life, and the arrested future takes us to the darkening reality of the Blackfeet reservation—the circumscribed landscape-turned-trap—which is an important spatial figure in *The Only Good Indians*. The gothic tropologies tie in well with the progressing and intertwined loss of natural balance and identity—the wound that never heals—caused by the US land politics and the resultant territorial, cultural and spiritual fragmentation. Using the term ecogothic to conceptualize mankind's multilevel abuses against the environment, Dawn Keetley and Matthew Sivils aptly argue that "ecogothic imagination… taps into the murder and displacement of indigenous peoples" and that "injustices play out upon a natural world that is likewise victimized" (11). Jones' narrative takes up that issue, but it combines the ecogothic lens with the perspective of Native Americans.

The main plot revolves around the fate of four male protagonists—Ricky, Gabe, Lewis, and Cassidy—all members of the Blackfeet tribe, who decimated a big herd of elks, mercilessly killing a pregnant cow. The massacre took place out of the hunting season, thus violating the tribal law and triggering nature's spectacular revenge executed by an animal-human ghost of the shot mother elk. The meticulous, excessively gory and deadly hunt of Elk Head Woman for the perpetrators of the crime—the "four boogeymen" of the Duck Lake (Jones, *Only* 31), as they are now known in the tribe—constitutes the core of the dramatic plot. The hunt culminates symbolically on a Thanksgiving Day, which also resonates with the long history of dispossession for all indigenous tribes.

Significantly, Jones opens the narrative with the memories of Ricky, who has left the reservation to bury his guilt and shame caused by the hunting trip turned bad, but who is also followed by the memories of his land, the tribal past and his longing for the abandoned kinfolks. Ricky remembers the "family plot behind East Glacier," the picture book "about Heads-Smashed-In or whatever it was called—the buffalo jump, where the old time Blackfeet ran herd off the cliff" (3) and regrets his absence at the funeral of his little brother Cheeto, who "overdosed in some living room" (2). "It was just a running reminder how shit the reservation was, how boring, how nothing" (1)—this deprecating rant exposes the growing alienation of the protagonist from his homeland and cultural heritage. The disastrous hunt contributed to this feeling as the men wanted to prove themselves as "those kinds of Indians" who can "bring meat to

the whole tribe," "to show everybody in Browning that this is the way it's done, but then the big wet snow had come in and everything had gone pretty much straight to hell" (4). The imperative of "being those kinds of Indians," always "on display," has a detrimental effect on the hunters—tied to their hunting prowess, their ethnic self-worth and masculine identities are threatened by the increasing alienation from their roots, and thus must be reaffirmed through rituals of excessive violence and death.

This interplay of connection and separation is visible also in Gabe's strong emotional attachment to various spaces on the reservation. His daughter Denorah remembers that her dad had "a story for every place on the reservation.… If not someone he used to run with in high school, then a coulee where he popped a blacktail once, a ridge where he found a little pyramid of brass shells for a buffalo gun, a place he once saw a badger humping it across the grass, an eagle divebombing it like it thought this was the biggest prairie dog ever" (Jones, *Only* 295). The nostalgically inflected "used to" marks the split between the somewhat idyllic has-been, where everything had its place, and the postlapsarian present, the time after the elk massacre, which lends a spectral aura to the characters' guilt-ridden memories. The spectrality is enhanced by Gabe's persistent silence about the fatal hunting trip and his friend's death at the lake. "To talk about what actually happened might get him in Death's crosshairs, the way he thinks," Denorah worries further on, adding: "But still, her dad's got to *think* of that dead friend still, doesn't he, even if he won't talk about him out loud?" (296).

"What actually happened" is revealed gradually, in scraps and flashes of memory as the four hunters try to forget the event, but the phantom elk mother inevitably rematerializes in various guises and forms, feeding on the perpetrators' sense of guilt. Through shifting focalizations that take us also inside Elk Head Woman's mind, we keep reliving and reviving the horror: "an elk mother, cornered, will slash with her hooves and tear her mouth and even offer the hope of her own hamstrings, and if none of that works, she'll rise again years and years later, because it's never over, it's always just beginning again" (Jones, *Only* 159). As argued by Jennifer Schell in her insightful essay "Ecogothic Extinction Fiction," "the specters of extinct and endangered animals serve, much like the ghosts of more traditional gothic fiction, as haunting indicators of the unredeemed vanity, avarice, and wastefulness of humanity" (178). In Jones' narrative, the memory of the massacre lives in the wounded and abused nature: "knowledge of this day lodged in the herd, got passed down like what headlights meant, like how those blocks of salt aren't for elk tongues in the daytime" (158). Jones endows animal nature with a transversal memory and agency that embraces the entire species threatened by extinction. The use of the proleptic temporality, repetition, and present tense is "a moment of freezing," a temporal contraction—"an excess [of death and negative sublime] that cannot be transcended"—so characteristic of horror narratives (Botting 69). In the above passage, it creates a peculiar ecogothic chronotope which resonates also, albeit subversively, with the Native American concept of great mythic cycles—here the imbalance caused by violence against nature disrupts the spiritual harmony and unity, turning the cyclical return into a tightening loop for the transgressors, a loop of destiny from which there is no escape. The nightmarish image of the elk mother "rising and rising again," years and years later, becomes thus a disturbing spatiotemporal symbol of the inseparable human and environmental trauma.

Ghosting the Game and the Revenant EcoOther: The Role of Ritual and Doubling

Allan Lloyd-Smith observes that the gothic "is about the return of the past, of the repressed and denied, the buried secret that subverts and corrodes the present" (16). Similarly Julian Wolfreys and Ruth Robbins propose that "the promise of the gothic was—and still is—a promise of a certain return, a cyclical revenance" (xii). One of the central Gothic tropes employed by Jones is that of doubling—itself bound up to the tension between return and repetition. Symbolizing the split consciousness, "the shadow self" or the repressed antagonistic other, double points at once to the limits and possible proliferations of identity. Double is a figure of self-knowledge and self-doubt, questioning our belief in the clear boundaries between the subject and the object. In Native American tropology, as observed by Gerald Vizenor, return is "a metaphor of motion, survivance, and native sovereignty" (Vizenor, "Authored Animals 672). Doubling and return feature prominently in Jones' revision of the Gothic mode, and, characteristically for the genre, they are the driving forces of the entire plot. The temporal frame for the main event is Thanksgiving—itself an ironic date for the Blackfeet and other tribes, explicitly evoking the specters of the colonial violence and Anglo-European mythologies of settlement which covered up the indigenous people's displacement. The structure of the narrative is also repetitive—after the fatal error, the four hunters become the hunted, one by one confronting their nemesis and shadow—the revenant ghost of Elk Head Woman that tracks them down and kills the last of them on another Thanksgiving Day, exactly ten years after the massacre. However, Jones complicates the trope as he pushes it beyond the concept of the identity split. The double for the writer is not a simple rupture of the self but a continuous interplay between separation and fusion, presence and absence, with the boundaries between the performing bodies, identities and actions constantly blurred.

The most important "return" in which doubling creates the unclear entanglements and hybridizations that can be categorized as the revisionary Third Space is the climactic basketball duel between Elk Head Woman, here disguised in the body of Lewis' murdered friend Shaney, and Gabe's daughter, Denorah. The match is indicative of an unresolvable tangle of life and death, of the present and the past, as the mother elk is after Gabe's own offspring, whose life is about to be cut short as that of the animal on the day of the Thanksgiving massacre. It is preceded, however, by an important ritual of bodily and spiritual cleansing involving three male protagonists—two remaining participants of the elk massacre—Gabe and Cassidy, and a young boy named Nathan, who is a son of the tribal cop, Victor. Engaging with the indigenous ritual whose function is to reestablish the broken relations with the transcendent powers, Jones uses the liminal positioning of Gothic tropes in the ambiguous zones between the holy and the unholy, between faith and incredulity, the real and the visionary. During the episode titled "Three Little Indians," ironically referencing racist nursery rhyme from 1864, the actions of the established ceremony become disrupted by the anarchistic powers of the uncanny, confusing and threatening the meanings of conventionalized rites and their original spiritual intents. Instead of reassurance, purification and renewal, Jones exposes a vacuum of belief, a condition of separation and division from the mythological harmony of all beings that leads to the protagonists'

tragic downfall. The structural principle of this part is also significant—it is a relentless and suspenseful countdown which in Gothic narratives implies that something is amiss with time and signals the inevitability of punishment and death.

This ancient ritual is taking place in a sweat lodge—the "holy place" for Blackfeet tribes, and, as Gabe believes, "the safest place in the Indian world" (223). In the sweat lodge scene, Jones employs the unsettling elements of grotesque and dark humor, reversing and "thirding" the ritual of purification and spiritual restoration with a spectacular blood bath and excessive horror as Elk Head Woman tracks down and violently disposes of her killers. According to the Plains peoples' tradition, the smoke and purifying steam of the sweat lodge relate to breath and are considered sources of vitality and life (Harrod 74). The participants of the arduous ceremony, involving fasting, smoking and dancing, sing songs to Sun, Moon and the Morning Star, gathering symbolically the transcendental powers of the sky, earth as well as all living creatures to ask them for protection, health, prosperity and happiness (Harrod 87). The ceremony is often enacted in moments of crisis, with the intention to re-establish the lost kinship with basic structures of being.

Jones engages with this powerful theme of renewal; however, given his irreverent juggling of forms and tropes, he endows it with the grotesque sense of humor—another instance of "thirding" in his work that disrupts the readerly expectations concerning the ceremonial culture. "A sweat was never a ritual, was always an ordeal" (Jones, *Only* 232), Cassidy observes, realizing his own estrangement from the spiritual dimension of the practice. Explaining the meaning of the sweat to the young Nathan, Gabe compares the purification to a dishwasher: "We're the dishes. It steams us up spick-and-span" (217). The swerves from the original ritual are numerous—the sleeping bags instead of hide, drumbeats from the car sound system, and beer instead of water for the post-sweat "rehydration"—all indicative of the hollowness of the underperformed transcendence. The purgation of threatening ghosts and a sense of closure and fixity that the ritual promises turn out to be illusions and become another trap. The men's superficial and half-hearted attempts at restoring wholeness and the boundaries of control in their lives will be frustrated by the counter-ritual of abject horror, the methodical and equally grotesque carnage performed by the Elk Head Woman, trapped in her own rage:

> Neither of these last two know you're in the world at all. That day in the snow they shot you, to them it's just another day, another hunt. That's why it has to be like this. You could have taken them at any point over the last day, day and a half, but that's not even close to what they deserve. They need to feel what you felt. Their whole world has to be torn from their belly, shoved into a shallow hole. (Jones, *Only* 262)

Indeed, this is what follows as the revenant ghost unleashes the full power of her revenge, turning the "safest space in the world" into a gory and grotesque nightmare. The most poignant moment in the scene is the Elk Head Woman's blackmail forcing Gabe to shoot himself with his own gun, which implies that man's excessive desire is the instrument of his own self-destruction.

The second ritual mentioned above—and the climactic mock-epic battle—is the duel between Gabe's daughter, Denorah, and the elk ghost. The match is an important

"return" in which doubling creates the unclear entanglements and hybridizations. It is also a tour de force of Jones' strategies of "thirding," as the game itself quickly turns into a site of multiple transgressions.

Basketball is a very significant theme in *The Only Good Indians* and it deserves a closer attention both as a popular American sport and a form of ritual. As we would like to propose, the repetition, shadowing and doubling which are integral to the game are translated by Jones into a Gothic trope of "thirding." Examining the significance of sports in the works of Sherman Alexie, Stephen Graham Jones and James Welch, Billy J. Stratton stresses "the complex meaning of basketball in Native American society" and its link to the communal identities and traditional paradigms of storytelling ("Reservation Hero" 44). As "ambivalent embodiments of the historic tragedies and the accumulated experiences of trauma and loss," the basketball players become ambiguous signifiers that "resist Western conceptions of individual achievement and success in favor of Native American conceptions of community and cultural survivance" (Stratton, "Reservation Hero" 44). The basketball stars are also often treated as "savior figures" representing and carrying the burden of tribal dreams and aspirations (Stratton, "Reservation Hero" 46).

In "New Warriors, New Legends: Basketball in Three Native American Works of Fiction," Peter Donahue similarly points to the role of basketball on Native American reservations. However, unlike Stratton, who interrogates basketball's relation to loss, trauma and pan-Indian identity, Donahue pays special attention to the ways basketball and indigenous traditions hybridize. The author provides alternative Indian origin stories of the game and gives examples from contemporary American literature in which basketball is informed by Native American traditions and beliefs. As a result of cultural hybridization, basketball is no longer a game with firmly established roots but turns into a transcultural activity whose ethnic provenance cannot be easily categorized. Thus, the sport opens up an in-between, liminal space where different cultures collide and intertwine. Referencing the fictions by James Welch and Sherman Alexie, Donahue recognizes several features that characterize the so-called Indian basketball. He stresses its various functions within indigenous cultures which include strengthening tribal bonds, fighting racism and transmitting Native American spiritual values.

As persuasively argued by the critic, Indian basketball strengthens bonds within the reservation. An example could be Sherman Alexies' short story collection *Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993), where the characters retell the story of Silas Sirius, a Native American basketball player, who made one famous move during an insignificant game and thus became a local hero. Contrary to the "statistics-crazed Americans" (47), as the author comments, Indian basketball values quality and loyalty to the tribal group. The lack of loyalty is punished accordingly. In *The Indian Lawyer* (1990) by James Welch, a story of Sylvester Yellow Calf, shows that, as long as he plays for the reservation, he is lauded and maintains good relationships with his tribe. However, the more he seeks individual success at college, the further he distances himself from his Native American fellows. The game can thus become a tool of stigmatization and alienation.

Indian basketball is also a potential tool of resistance against racism and oppression. Donahue cites the scene of a basketball match from Alexie's *Reservation Blues* (1995) which is a fight between two reservation Indians, Samuel Builds-the-Fire

and Lester FallsApart, fully devoted to their indigenous heritage, and Tribal Police Officers, who are notorious for police brutality towards Native Americans despite belonging to the reservation themselves. The basketball match is the protagonists' means of revenge–away to punish not only the police officers who oppressed them but all those who abused their indigenous roots and, in fact, were perceived as traitors. The dynamic, aggressive moves here may embody not only a competition on the court but imply a literal fight whose aim is revenge and victory also outside the court. Similarly in Stephen Graham Jones' earlier novel *The Bird Is Gone: A Manifesto* (2003), the game turns into "an act of Native survivance," a struggle against "the sense of loss and hopelessness," counteracting social inequity, and the dominant narratives of the vanishing Indian as belonging to "an extensive history of losing" (Stratton, "Reservation Hero" 51).

Finally, Indian basketball is deeply spiritual. Stratton observes that rez-ball heroes often become "compelling agents of healing and restoration, pride and community, self-worth and source of legends" ("Reservation Hero" 55). Donahue discusses religious subtexts that refer both to Christianity and to Native American beliefs, with the emphasis on the latter. The game has redemptive powers, creating its own saviors and rituals. *Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* features images of a ball making a sound like an Indian drum or the sweat of the players making it rain on the whole reservation. Indian players are also often represented as contemporary saviors. The example could be Junior, one of the characters from Lone Ranger, who says: "I mean, if basketball would have been around, I'm sure Jesus Christ would've been the best point guard in Nazareth" (Alexie, *Lone* 52). It is evident that Indian basketball bears spiritual associations and strongly ritualises the game using various religions as a point of reference.

Jones' narrative in *The Only Good Indians* certainly taps into those rich contexts and intercultural uses of the game. Basketball is mentioned several times during the course of his novel. In fact, the majority of characters either play basketball or support their family members in their sports careers. Lewis plays it both with his wife Peta and with his workmate Shaney in their free time. Gable's daughter, Denorah, is a professional player at a college. Though basketball is a recurring theme throughout the book, the most prominent instance is the final game of twenty one between Denorah and Elk Head Woman, here disguised as Lewis' work colleague Shaney, who uses the competition to avenge her own death.

The basketball match between Denorah and Shaney straddles the ground between Indian and Gothic conventions and thus becomes an in-between and undefinable space where multiple realities intertwine. As for the indigenous elements present in the scene, both Denorah and Shaney are rooted in the reservation tradition, the former through her father Gabe, and the latter because of her supernatural shapeshifting abilities and uncertain ontological status as the hybrid animal-human being. Denorah believes that her opponent belongs to the Crows and so the game evolves into the intertribal match between the Blackfeet and the Crow, even though Shaney is an elk in disguise: "Shaney has her by six inches, she [Denorah] guesses. But tall girls are never the ball handlers, at least not in small schools—not in reservation schools" (Jones, *Only* 301). Being a professional player, Denorah represents a more schoolbook and regulated style, whereas Shaney's moves are more unruly and wild and

thus closer to the indigenous tradition of basketball. A mockery question "What do y'all play up here? Big on the fundamentals, all that boring-ass stuff" (301) not only serves as a means to undermine the opponent's morale, but also to juxtapose professional and reservational basketball styles. Denorah at last starts to abandon her rigid moves, as shown in the following passage: "Denorah uses the toe of her right shoe to flip it up to her hands, a move Coach would be all over—hands, hands, basketball players use *hands*" (308), the duel becomes an act of liberation and return to one's own heritage, as if the real game was where the end justifies the means.

The uncertain ontology of the supernatural hybrid embodied by Shaney links the basketball scene into the larger Native American Gothic framework of the narrative. The creature is both human and animal, and, at the same time, neither of them fully. While exhibiting great knowledge of the game and acting like a human player, she plays so wildly and fiercely that Denorah cannot but acknowledge the rival's superhuman strength: "She flips over fast, onto her palms and toes, and then she rolls her shoulders slow, her hair all around her face, and screams for longer than her lungs should have air for" (Jones, *Only* 312). Both Shaney's behavior and physical appearance belie her ambiguous trickster nature. Denorah at some point notices her rival's yellowy eyes, "with hazel striations radiating out from the deep black hole of a pupil" (312). Her liminal, zombie-like and shapeshifting form is best demonstrated in the climactic moment of the match when, in the atmosphere of excessive violence, she transforms into Elk Head Woman with a "nightmare face" (314), as if a reversed centaur figure, with the human body and head of an elk. Her dubious ontological state, linking the past and the present, the animal and the human, and indigenous sand Western cultures, vividly demonstrate Jones' strategies of thirding.

As mentioned before, the return of the repressed past, often in the form of revenge, is inherent to the Gothic plot and so it is present in the basketball scene. Significantly, the duel begins in the chapter called "Thanksgiving Classic"—the ironic name given to the fatal hunting trip which took place exactly ten years before the duel. To make the link even more obvious, Shaney refers to Denorah as "a calf" (Jones, *Only* 313) and encapsulates her encounter with Denorah's father in the following words: "We met ten years ago. He had a gun. I didn't" (313). Adamant about winning the game, Shaney asks Denorah "So this is what's most important to you, right?" (305). There is no doubt that the game is a duel to the death and that the victory for the elk is the *sine qua non* of a fulfilled revenge. The basketball court becomes thus a battlefront that enables the oppressed nature to take its vengeance on human species and it is where the fight gains the ecogothic hue.

The Elk-Woman in the Attic: The Trickster and More-than-Human Worlds

In *Manifest Manners,* Gerard Vizenor thus describes the role of the trickster in Native American cultures:

> The trickster is reason and mediation in stories, the original translator of tribal encounters; the name is an intimation of transformation, men to women, animals to birds, and more.... Tricksters are the translation of creation; the trickster creates the tribe in stories and pronounces the moment of remembrance as the

> trace of liberation. The animals laughed, birds cried, and there were worried hearts over the everlasting humor that would liberate the human mind in trickster stories. Trickster stories are the translation of liberation, and the shimmer of imagination is the liberation of the last trickster stories. (15)

The trickster "does not die; he comes back to life in new guises, new narratives" (Larry Gross, "Bimaadiziwin" 28). "Better than the real, much better than the flesh and blood" (Vizenor, *Postindian* 59), tricksters are "characters capable of understanding passion, pain, and longing while at the same time transcending human limits. They are as likely to turn into rabbits as they are to make love to the wind.... They are real enough to be present on earth and yet are able to walk with the dead" (Johnston 151). This transformational and affective power of the trickster undoubtedly informs Jones' reinterpretation of the Gothic figure of the revenant female ghost. Elk Head Woman can indeed be read as a Gothic trickster figure capable of mediating between spiritual and physical spaces and transcending animal-human boundaries. "Better than the real," she is a feisty and strong creature that overflows with life energies, as shown in the basketball duel, but at the same walks with and on behalf of the dead. In *Acknowledgements*, Jones gives us yet another important source of the revenant ghost:

> And I'd be lying if I didn't also cite the seventh episode of season one of *Masters of Horror*, 'Deer Woman' by John Landis. I really liked how that woman kicked whoever needed kicking in that story. I want that for all Indian women. I also want them all to live, too, please. Some of them are my sisters, and all of them are my cousins, my aunts. (Jones, *Only* 351)

If trickster is a figure of healing, of liberation, of myth and memory, as Vizenor defines it (*Postindian* 59), Jones' Gothic engagement with it gains a similarly complex dimension. His words "I want them all to live" articulate the trauma of the vanishing indigenous women—often victims of violence, racism, forced prostitution, rape, and abuse. Elk Head Woman, herself born out of violence, returns to give back the stories of the victimized women, to bring their difficult pasts and forgotten voices into view, and thus make them live again, in a new guise, in a new powerful and mythical narrative.

In *Sacred Hoop*, Paula Gunn Allen demonstrates that in the tribal past Native American women were not perceived as a weaker sex, but seen as "powerful, socially, physically, and metaphysically" (48). However, the centuries of cultural dislocations and dispossessions have changed that perception and today their situation is different: "Most Indian women I know are in the same bicultural bind: we vacillate between being dependent and strong, self-reliant and powerless, strongly motivated and hopelessly insecure," trying to deal "with two hopelessly opposed cultural definitions of women" (Gunn 49). Using the trickster human-animal ghost that reverses the relation between the active male hunter and the passive female prey, Jones taps into the earlier transformational energies. Louise Erdrich, who is named by Jones, as one of his inspirations, reflects on the transgressive female agency in her poetry arguing that it can take "the form of becoming an animal" that is "a symbolic transformation, the moment a woman allows herself to act out of her own power" (Bruchac 82).

The strong animal characteristics, the "monstrous" elements of Elk Head Woman, belong both to the indigenous cosmologies and the abjective tropologies of the Western Gothic. In his essay "Authored Animals: Creature Tropes in Native American Fiction," Gerald Vizenor formulates a category of "the authored animals"—"the species of imagination"—which belong to reality of fiction and exist in language (668-71). They are often "tropes of human severance" ("Authored Animals" 671), showing the alienation of the human from the animal consciousness. Significantly, the authored animals in Native American fiction, as proposed by Vizenor, "are connected to the environment, not to the similes of human consciousness" and thus escape "the human horizon of existential reason" ("Authored Animals" 665). Emerging from the shared imagination of native realism and the Gothic, the uncanny Elk Head Woman partakes of that connection, but she is also endowed with the powers of transcendence which upset ontological rules and destabilize the perimeters of anthropomorphizing metaphors. Harrod notes that the belief that the Elk had power over women" was a "prominent element in Blackfeet consciousness" (121). Jones engages with that belief by turning the female body into an ecogothic transversum—Elk Head Woman's final chase after Denorah shows their deep interconnection—where their bodies and minds become one in the Gothic chronotope of return.

To show the initial severance between the human and animal ontologies, however, Jones uses tropes of abjection, typical for the Gothic transgressive subjectivities. In *Powers of Horror,* Julia Kristeva describes the abject as an unassimilable ontology, close yet distant: "There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated" (1). Jones' spectral trickster embodies the same unassimilable condition—articulated, to borrow from Kristeva again, "by negation and its modalities, transgression, denial, and repudiation" (6). Existing as a smell, "motion," the "idea of *some*thing" (Jones, *Only* 227), the abject is what "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 3-4). Elk Head Woman, being the abject other, the uncanny, hybrid animal-human phantom, is constructed in each episode through an interplay of the familiar and the strange, the material and the supernatural, in accordance with American Indian thought where "life has twin manifestations that are mutually interchangeable and where "all creatures are relatives (and in tribal systems relationship is central)" (Gunn Allen 246). Significant for the female revenge plot seems the gory on-site "dressing" of the young elk mother, which Lewis himself insists on performing just after the massacre. The memory of it haunts the character and, at the same time, it nourishes the return of the elk ghost:

> To do it right, he hacked a thick branch from the brush, split her sternum with just the knife—she wasn't even old enough to need the saw—then cracked the pelvis like prying a butterfly's wings apart, jammed the branch of her ruptured guts, the last little bit of her lungs, he even crawled in like a kid with his first elk, scooping and pushing, and when he finally rolled out, dislodging the branch. (Jones, *Only* 85)

The incredible violence of the scene and the abject as well as voyeuristic emphasis on the splitting and prying apart of the elk's intimate parts is an enactment of rape against nature but, above all, it is a projection of violence and abuse directed at indigenous women. By connecting all women characters in the narrative through the figure of Elk Head Woman, Jones indicates that such gendered violence, rooted in the colonial exploitation of the land, has enduring effects across generations—the transgression results in a lost balance and reciprocity of ecological life. As the damage to the psyche and the spirit, the trauma lasts, re-inhabits bodies and minds, and destroys not only individual subjectivities but threatens the wellness of the entire tribal communities.

Significantly, in Lewis's episode the center of the haunting becomes the backyard and well-lit living room—the familiar and protective everyday spaces turned spectral by the act of violence. Being followed by apparitions of Elk Head Woman in the spaces and people around him, the increasingly paranoiac protagonist ponders over the ontological uncertainty of the ghost: "Of *course* an elk can't 'inhabit' a person. That person would fall over onto all fours and probably instantly panic. Unless she's like that shadow he saw in the living room. Woman body, elk head, non horns" (96). Working methodically "to tear down [Lewis]'s own life" (Jones, *Only* 114-115), the elk unsettles the familiar so that every woman around the protagonist, including his own wife, Peta, and his coworker and friend, Shaney, becomes the incarnation of the zombie elk:

> The dots he's trying and trying not to let connect in his head are that Peta showed up *on* the reservation, didn't she?' And it was the exact summer *after* the Thanksgiving Classic, when he was all busy flipping the whole place off with both hands, denying it his sacred presence from here on out.… As for the case against Peta, or for her *not* being Peta, it doesn't help that she's a vegetarian, either (Jones, *Only* 101).

Shaney, "who is pretty much superhuman," and Peta, who "can run and run," and Gabe's daughter, Denorah, who almost outwits and outruns Elk Head Woman in the climactic chase, are all imbued with the powers of the revenant specter. Examining the system of values in Blackfeet and Crow cultures, Harrod observes that "in some cases animal forms mediate powers to humans that are associated with their specific characteristics (speed, vision, cunning)" (87). In the final scene, in which Elk Head Woman chases Denorah until they reach the original site of the massacre, now the graveyard filled with the elk bones, the girl and the creature exhibit equal physical prowess and stamina, as if they have overcome the severance of the human and the animal. While the massacre uncannily rematerializes as an embodied re-memory in the final turn of the plot, the two female bodies and minds become one, experiencing the same feeling of cold, exhaustion, and menace but also the same mixture of affects:

> Just—your anger, your hate, it was coursing through you so hot, and you got lost in it, and—.
>
> Denorah looks up that long hill, into the winking scope and dead eye of her new dad, and then she looks to Elk Head Woman, to the calf, and she sees now that both her fathers have stood at the top of this slope behind a rifle, and the elk have *always* been down here, and it can stop… it *has* to stop, the old man telling this in the star lodge says to the children sitting all around him. It *has* to

> stop, he says, brushing his stubby braids out of the way, and the Girl, she knows this, she can feel it. She can see her real dad dead in that burned-down sweat lodge, the back of his head gone, but she can also see him up the slope ten years ago, shooting into a herd of elk that weren't his to shoot at, and she hates that he's dead, she loved him, she *is* him in every way that counts. (Jones, *Only* 347, original emphasis)

The psychic and ecological wounds are overlapping in this narrative—they can heal only if the characters overcome the fragmentation of transversal ecologies, memories and time—in the chronotopic re-turn of the dead, the girl, the elk and the hunter become one gaze linked to personal and collective terrors. Soja defines Thirdspace as an "all-inclusive simultaneity" which "opens endless worlds to explore, and, at the same time, presents daunting challenges" (57). The synchronized interlocking visions and temporalities in the narrative's climactic moment create such Thirdspace, where the painful history of loss can be replayed, embraced and rewritten. The re-memory takes on the shape of the elk mother and her calf, now protected by Denorah's own exhausted and vulnerable body, as the girl places herself between the hunter and the animals to prevent the repetition of the bloody carnage: "what she does is slide forward on her bloody knees; placing her small body between that rifle and the elk that killed her dad" (348). The last view of the elk family is thus reshaped, replacing the bloody shooting with the image of a harmonious lifeworld: "An elk cow stands up from the snow and lowers her face to her calf, licks its face until it wobbles up, finds its feet, and that's the last anyone ever sees of those two, walking off into the grass, mother and calf, the herd out there waiting to fold them back in, walk with them through the seasons" (349). Denorah's ultimate decision to shield the mother and her calf with her own body against the armed rescue of her stepfather is a revisionist gesture of solidarity with the vulnerable animal, a gesture through which her father's initial transgression against more-than-human nature can be redeemed. In this moment of identification with the irrational, "the uncanny assault on the sense of self" (Wolfreys xvi) embodied by the trickster elk, turns into a deeper understanding of the sources of the Native American fragmented subjectivity. The ending is thus a hopeful one—the animals, or their ghosts, are freed of human desire and violence, to walk together "through the seasons." Denorah's empathetic backward glance and sacrificial gesture, her spiritual reconciliation with her biological father, as well as her non-predatory and respectful sportsmanship in a competition against the Crow basketball team in the narrative closure counteract the Gothic story of revenge and carnage, carrying a new chronotopic promise that "[i]t's not the end of the trail…, it never was the end of the trail / It's the beginning" (Jones, *Only* 349).

Conclusion

"In drawing distinctions and marking difference," Jodi A. Byrd contends, "genre demarcates what does and not does belong and what it does and does not belong to. It embraces and refuses, includes and excludes all for the sake of producing a recognizable form of attachment and then interpretation. Genre, in other words, colonizes texts" (345). Referencing such Indigenous authors as Leslie Marmon Silko, A. A. Carr, Drew

Hayden Taylor, Gerald Vizenor and Stephen Graham Jones, the critic observes further on that "the literatures that American Indian authors produce disrupt and resist the narrative strategies of colonial imaginings by transforming the modes of interpretation and revealing the structures of dominance by turning generic conventions against affiliations" (Byrd 346). As argued by Julian Wolfreys, "[t]he gothic, as a body of fiction, is always already excessive, grotesque, overspilling its own boundaries and limits" (xi). In *The Only Good Indians,* Graham Jones explores that complex deconstructive nature of the genre as he conflates the imaginative spaces of the Gothic with the topographies, chronotopes and mythologies of the Blackfeet tradition. His creative braiding and fusion of tropes works to unseal generic and aesthetic boundaries, revealing shared complexities and transgressive potential of "thirding" in Native American and Western ecogothic imaginaries. Through the spatial trope of the haunted reservation, the uncanny figure of zombie elk-cum-female trickster, and his plots and figures of doubling, ritual and return, the writer invites us to rethink the artificial boundaries between human and animal consciousness. Imbued with an indigenous ecological sensibility, the novel asks us also to acknowledge the landscape and nature as sentient biosemiotic agents, haunted and capable of haunting, and of speaking and fighting back against environmental injustice. The ecogothic spatiotemporalities, reaching back and forth into the past, and cross-cultural tropologies of horror employed in the novel address the issue of environmental trauma as an integral part of the indigenous histories of dispossession and loss. Native American Gothic offers thus a productive opening up of the spatial and sociohistorical imagination, enabling creative explorations of composite cultural legacies, porous genres and transversal identities.

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