

SOVEREIGNTY AND SEX:  
HOLISTIC REPRESENTATIONS OF LOVE AND IDENTITY IN THE POETRY  
OF GREGORY SCOFIELD

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Master of Arts

in

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by

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Amy Mari Stevenson, candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in English, has presented a thesis titled, ***Sovereignty and Sex: Holistic Representations of Love and Identity in the Poetry of Gregory Scofield***, in an oral examination held on August 7, 2007. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the erotic poetry of Gregory Scofield. As a two-spirited and Métis writer, Scofield writes poetry that challenges academics to consider non-heteronormative and anti-colonial methods of poetic analysis. Scofield's poems demonstrate that reclamation of the colonized body is inherently political, exemplifying the "sovereign erotic" concept that combines sexual pleasure and political resistance. This combination highlights the Indigenous worldview of perpetual cyclicity as well as the falsity of didactic colonial expressions such as good and bad. Even Scofield's most elegiac poems epitomize the medicine wheel concept, combining expressions of joy and rejuvenation while commenting on the consequences of oppression within contemporary gay social life.

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## DEDICATION

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## INTRODUCTION

Since his first publication in 1993, Gregory Scofield has written poetry that celebrates and reclaims Indigenous gay, or two-spirit, identities. Scofield is part of a growing group of Indigenous writers who celebrate love and sexuality as spiritually embedded expressions. Qwo-Li Driskill describes Scofield's voice as a "sovereign erotic" ("Call Me Brother" 228) that departs from mainstream society's perceptions of both heterosexual and queer romantic literature. His work celebrates Indigenous two-spiritedness as inherently sacred. Inherent to the reclamation of traditional identity within contemporary writing is the notion that two-spirit literature exists outside of established literary genres such as the queer genre. Thus, while contemporary queer theory has been established by literary scholars such as Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Indigenous literature has established an important role in North American literary studies, queer Indigenous literature as a distinct mode has yet to be explored. Because queer theory does not adequately address Scofield's two-spirit writing specifically, it needs to be positioned outside of established theoretical frameworks in order to avoid further marginalization. Scofield's work is an example of a newly defined mode of "Indigenous Queer" that actively decolonizes Indigenous expressions of love and sexuality. Because the works of modern Indigenous writers like Scofield require new methods of analysis, they are often forced to negotiate a precarious balancing of culture and identity.

Balancing the demands of the scholarly academy and the cultural traditions of the past is a unique challenge for Indigenous writers and scholars.



Reclamation<sup>i</sup> of the sovereign erotic entails undoing traditional academic knowledge and remembering the value of First languages and storytelling. Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains the necessity of “recovering our own stories of the past” and goes on to say, “this is inextricably bound to a recovery of our language and epistemological foundations. It is also about reconciling and reprioritizing what is really important about the past with what is important about the present” (39). The issue of reprioritization leaves Scofield and other two-spirit writers vulnerable to critical attack since they are forced to continually renegotiate allegiance and purpose. Indigenous writers in general share this same precariousness due to a shared history of oppression and cultural responsibility. Craig Womack explains this struggle:

Any tribal poet, himself or herself, is a queer, anomalous creature. The tribal poet finds himself or herself writing stuff read by non-Indians yet trying to write for his or her tribe, having to engage in the business of selling books through agents and publishers yet striving for cultural integrity, often living away from home yet retaining one’s primary landscape in imagination and memory and transforming it into art, preserving one’s culture for future generations yet trying not to give away anything one’s community believes should not be shared, and on and on it goes. (244)

This conflict is evident in Scofield’s politically charged “Not Too Polite Poetics” (Native Canadiana 59-60), which explores the role of modern Indigenous writers: like all First Nations writers

I must adhere to ethnic demands  
make my poet's entrance  
wrapped in a Pendelton blanket  
sunburst geometric design  
maybe a Navajo ring or two  
to give me the authentic look  
a ghost dance shirt  
might come in handy  
reflecting history bullets. (26-35)

Scofield highlights the perpetual Eurocentrism within academia that makes it difficult for scholars to assess Indigenous writing in a way that demonstrates cultural respect. Those with an interest in understanding the complexities of Indigenous works face obvious challenges since Indigenous writers themselves struggle to effectively "live in both worlds" as Womack describes. Scofield's poetry works towards this balance and plurality. Through celebrating the body and its sensuality, his poetry offers renewed methods of looking at literature that do not conform to the traditional didactic methods of analysis; rather, his writing requires the reader to envision intersecting modes and means of self identification. As Driskill states, "Scofield's poetry cannot simply be seen as 'Native,' 'Queer,' 'urban,' 'Canadian,' or any other words one might want to use to describe it. His work must be understood within the complexities of overlapping identities" ("Call Me" 223). Because his works and the works of other Indigenous writers push the boundaries of mainstream analysis, they remain

underrepresented within academia. Métis writers specifically negotiate a perpetual plurality as Jennifer Andrews articulates: “the discursive strategies used by Métis authors to create and sustain positions of ‘in-between-ness’ remain under-theorized” (6). Scofield writes from a double marginalized position as both two-spirit and Métis, and both of these identifying characteristics disrupt the Eurocentric Christian model.

While Scofield utilizes poetic language that is both sexually and politically charged in order to celebrate culture and love, it is difficult to find a theoretical framework that adequately addresses such writing as anything other than deviant from the preferred Christian model<sup>ii</sup>. Beth Brant comments on the theological fear of so-called sexual deviation: “A people who despise sex must also despise their god. Why else do they attempt to make both over in an image that fits a white-male thesis? Why else do they make a vast chasm between god and sex?” (10) Indeed, Scofield’s poetry celebrates the interconnectedness of sex and spirituality, making his work inherently different from conventional poetry.

The need to position this contemporary writing within the rigid confines of outdated theoretical frameworks, as the following excerpt from Michael Holmes’ review of Native Canadiana demonstrates, should be dismissed in order to fully celebrate the cultures from which it originates.

Despite the bizarre “Cultural Studies 101” textbookishness of the title and some of the bafflingly conservative notes to First Nations words and phrases (the gloss of *Âyahkwêw* or two-spirited reads “loosely translated as a person who has both male and female

spirits” without any mention of its socio-political significance as a possible synonym for queer), Scofield’s collection presents many gritty yet sensitive meditations on urban life. (28)

Scofield provides translations for Cree words he uses throughout Native Canadiana and effectively avoids linguistic and cultural exclusivity. Such translation allows mainstream readers access to his writing; yet Holmes mocks this effort as excessively elementary. He then ironically attacks Scofield’s translation of the word “âyahkwêw” because it does not cater to mainstream readers enough. The notion that Scofield’s translations should be critically attacked because they do not conform to non-Indigenous discourse is, of course, problematic. A misguided critique such as this only perpetuates Eurocentrism and assimilation within academia and society at large and proves the necessity of sovereign Indigenous writing.

Even those critics who attempt to analyze Scofield’s works in a more accurate way can perpetuate hegemony which results in inappropriate ranking schemes. For example, Shelley Stigter argues in her article “The Dialectics and Dialogics of Code-Switching in the Poetry of Gregory Scofield and Louise Halfe,” that the use of both English and Cree in Scofield’s and Halfe’s poetry functions to cross cultural boundaries. While this initial point is accurate, Stigter uses language that perpetuates the other-ing of Indigenous literatures. She says:

The dialectic insinuates an oppositional division in which one culture presumes authority over the other, usually the hegemonic over the minority. Since both cultures are represented through the

Cree and English languages, this suggests dialogue: but without some knowledge of each language and culture, these literatures are reduced to dialectical binaries. (50)

While Stigter's suggestion that readers with a more thorough knowledge of both cultures are better equipped to interpret these literatures is relevant, a significant flaw in Stigter's wording is the use of the word "reduced." Literatures themselves are never reduced. Stigter imposes a western theoretical understanding upon these works and assumes that their value is diminished because they do not conform to the expectations of western literary analysis. Because Scofield makes bridging the conceptual gap between the Cree and English worlds feasible for members of both linguistic communities, he effectively positions traditional writing within a contemporary framework and provides the foundation for a more inclusive academic understanding. If Stigter's reader fails to fully contemplate and understand the subtle nuances of the poet's language (an expectation in the study of all literary works), the fault lies with the investigative neglect of the reader not with the writing itself. Though Scofield's writing pushes the boundaries of accepted norms it is not therefore inferior to those works that stay within conventional restrictions. Such stagnant ideology points to the necessity of further academic study of two-spirit literature to address issues of limited conceptual frameworks and terminology. For example, the term "two-spirit" effectively disrupts the compartmentalized stagnancy of one fixed identity, yet it also suggests a limited duality that can be problematic.

Coined in 1990 at a gathering of two-spirit peoples in Winnipeg, the term two-spirit refers to both gay males and lesbian females as well as anyone who lives outside of mainstream gender roles (Jacobs 5). In contrast to the rampant homophobia that exists in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous circles today, many traditional two-spirits were revered for their spiritual enlightenment and played important roles within their communities. As Jim Elledge explains,

many tribes created societal roles for the two-spirit which allotted them a significant and respected place in the tribe. It is obvious, then, that many Native Americans were not threatened by gender variance as their European counterparts were (and are), but saw the two-spirits as individuals with special talents which they offered the tribe for its continued existence, its prosperity, and its safety.

For those nations with two-spirit deities, the status of two-spirit men and women seems to have often been honored among the communities, including the role of medicine men and women. (xviii)

Thus, the social role of two-spirit people reflected their spiritual importance.

Many two-spirit people were celebrated due to belief in their sacred blood. Cree elder, Fine-day, explains past practices of naming two-spirit people amongst the Plains Cree: "we called him *a-yahkwew* still for that's what he was. He had another name, *oskas-ewis*, Clawed-woman. He wanted to be called *pxecuwiskwew*, because Thunder is a name for a man and *iskwew* is a woman's name; half and half just like he was" (Mandelbaum, par 36). While two-spirit identities have been an important part of Indigenous societies for centuries under

culturally specific names – for example, the Lakota and Dakota use the word “winkte” (Brown 23) - two-spirit literature is a largely unexplored genre. This under-representation of two-spirit literature and criticism can be attributed to traditional Indigenous societies’ utilization of oral storytelling to pass narrative throughout generations rather than books. During the historical periods when Indigenous people began documenting story through writing, colonial worldviews had severely condemned alternative gender lifestyles and forced two-spirit people into suppressing their sexual identities or adopting homophobia. Thus, two-spirit literature is a very new tradition that needs critical attention from today’s academics.

Nevertheless, the term “two-spirit” can be problematic since it reduces many sexual identities into one limiting term. Such reduction of identity combined with the precarious challenge of balancing tradition and contemporary culture makes poetical analysis somewhat difficult. However, inaccurate terminology to address Indigenous culture is a long-standing historical reality. Initially, the term two-spirit was coined, at least partially, in reaction to the highly offensive term “berdache.” The anthropological term “berdache” was used by the Spanish who frequently murdered and tortured two-spirit people. Brian Joseph Gilley explains how the Spanish justified violent colonization through godly hatred of gender variance:

The Spanish were the most appalled by the acceptance of same-sex relations among the Native peoples they encountered. Indeed, “sodomy” and “transvestitism” among indigenous populations

became a central reason to justify the conquest of North America. By contrasting Native licentiousness against their own virtuous Catholicism, the Spanish convinced themselves of the divine nature of their violence against Native peoples and the gender different.

(13)

Today, the term “berdache” is extremely offensive and in no way accurately articulates gender difference. Gilley explains, however, that while the newer term “two-spirit” is more accurate in comparison, it lacks national specificity:

Two-Spirit is intended to be a multitribal identity; however, it is also used to reference a tradition that is no longer publicly acknowledged in Indian communities. We must keep in mind that most Indian communities in North America no longer have social roles for multiple genders. I was often reminded that the decline in public roles paralleled the decline in Native language use, and as a result, the words for multiple genders are no longer part of the public discourse. (33)

While Scofield’s works actively reclaim a dwindling two-spirit tradition, it should be noted that traditional nations had their own names for two-spirit people which did not pigeonhole individuals into limiting sexual roles. Further, the roles of contemporary two-spirit people have been significantly altered or obliterated due to various forces including Christianization during colonization and internal intolerance.



Because gender was an important aspect of First Nations traditions, the differing roles of two-spirit people were traditionally influenced by their national belonging. For a contemporary Métis poet like Scofield, who demonstrates the elusiveness of self identification, the term two-spirit can be just as problematic as the term gay or homosexual. Today, gender is a slippery concept that is largely inapplicable outside of traditional ceremony. The lack of adequate terminology to identify Métis people who experience non-heterosexual love thrusts Scofield's poetry into the liminal spaces of meaning. Inadequate vocabulary does not mean, however, that those poems dealing with love and sex are androgynous in nature – androgyny being yet another term that does not adequately address the cultural and spiritual significance of Scofield's writing. What sets his poetry apart from queer works is the emphasis on cultural belonging and the complex fusion of European and First Nations traditions. Many of Scofield's works utilize the term two-spirit as the closest qualifier of culturally celebrated gender variance. Such negotiation with language reflects the perpetual balancing of tradition, modernization, Indigenous worldviews, non-Indigenous influence and self acceptance in Scofield's works.

All of these concepts typify the decolonization process, which is of central importance to today's Indigenous scholars and writers. In celebration of gay, lesbian, transgender, and alternative gender roles, Scofield's works exemplify the decolonization process within contemporary literature. The effects of colonization continue to be catastrophic to modern Indigenous societies. Therefore, political necessity dictates that Indigenous peoples reclaim lost or dying traditions,

including those that pertain to the body and sexual expression. The act of decolonization is a perpetual struggle that Linda Tuhiwai Smith describes in her book Decolonizing Methodologies:

Indigenous peoples as an international group have had to challenge, understand and have a shared language for talking about the history, the sociology, the psychology and the politics of imperialism and colonialism as an epic story telling of huge devastation, painful struggle and persistent survival. (19)

Scofield's works exemplify this political struggle and survival as he reclaims Indigenous traditions within a contemporary literary framework.

Today, the notion of a sacred sexuality is an active reclamation and decolonization process since many contemporary Indigenous societies have been immersed in European theological understandings, which dictate that homosexuality is an immoral perversion. The reclamation of sovereign expressions of love and sexuality in Indigenous communities is especially urgent considering the oppression and destruction caused by past colonization processes and current assimilationist policies. Robert Allen Warrior summarizes the words of well-known theorist Vine Deloria as he discusses reclamation of tradition as a highly politicized process:

[Deloria] contended, the affirmation of tradition provides the necessary raising of consciousness among those who have been taught that the ways of their ancestors were barbaric, pagan, and uncivilized. Second, tradition provides the critical constructive

material upon which a community rebuilds itself. Within this process, though, Deloria points out that tradition cannot be placed upon an idolatrous pedestal. Further, the changes that centuries of oppression have wrought upon those traditions must be taken into consideration in finding the wisest path toward a sovereign future.

(95)

Integral to achieving such sovereignty is the reclamation of tradition and the simultaneous consideration of tradition's place within the trans-cultural realities of today. This process entails dismissing the mythical and fabricated versions of the "real Indian" as identified in some anthropological works. Deloria explains:

The massive volume of useless knowledge produced by anthropologists attempting to capture real Indians in a network of theories has contributed substantially to the invisibility of Indian people today .... Not even Indians can relate themselves to this type of creature who, to anthropologists, is the "real" Indian.

Indians begin to feel that they are merely shadows of a mythical super-Indian. (81-82)

Today's acts of traditional reclamation, then, necessitate balance through which traditional stories and knowledge can be accessible to all people inside and outside of academia. Scofield's work exemplifies such accessibility as he is a modern mixed blood writer who depicts both the sacred and the harsh realities of two-spirit life and sex. His mixture of Cree and English maintains cultural tradition and simultaneously positions modern Indigenous writing within a new

and stimulating mode.

To explore how Scofield's poetry functions in reclaiming the two-spirit tradition, it is useful to consider how his work fits within the current canon of work and the already existing theoretical foundation. Building upon the foundational works of philosopher Jacques Derrida, queer theory breaks apart the binary oppositions between heterosexual/homosexual as well as male/female gender categories. Such deconstruction in Scofield's writing creates a blurring of boundaries offering renewed explorations of sexual desire, gender identity, and Indigenous culture. The relationship between Indigenous writing and queer theory offers the opportunity for active decolonization of racist stereotypes. Just as decolonization functions to disrupt and question the status quo distribution of power, so too does queer theory, as William Turner explains:

Queer theory is political in its insistence that the unqueer reading of identity – the perpetuation of the idea that individuals somehow “naturally” fit into purely empirical identity categories – serves to distribute power among persons. Further, the persons who benefit from this distribution of power remain committed to their unqueer reading of identity as much or more because of the power benefits as because of any rational or logical force behind that reading. (32)

Scofield's poetry comments on the hegemonic unqueer perspective and breaks it apart with a celebration of culture and love. Indeed, the commingling of both decolonization theory and queer theory is apt to address Scofield's work as it relates to marginalization. In Thunder Through My Veins, for example, Scofield

faces racism from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people as he searches for cultural belonging and eventually finds his Métis identity. He also struggles against homophobia as he eventually accepts his sexuality. As a Métis man, Scofield not only exists in the in-between or liminal spaces of identity, he is part of a uniquely-defined culture. Further, his sexuality places him outside accepted gender roles, yet, to some, his sexuality is a sacred social station. In both instances, Scofield's struggles function to decentre unrealistic social conventions and prejudices as his own self-acceptance reveals the falsity and narrowness of status quo social roles. Consequently, his poetry provokes critical analysis of hegemonic discourse and highlights concepts of plurality and overlapping identities, which bring into question the notion of strict essentiality.

Indeed, adherence to a *non*-essentialized model is very useful in breaking down stereotypes. For example, feminism teaches us to reject the notion of an essential womanliness or manliness, and queer theory shows the falsity of heteronormativity and its inherent homophobia. The dichotomies of man/woman and hetero/homo leave no space for those who do not fit neatly into such categorization. As William Tierney points out, it is foolish to assume that humanity is solely composed of such limiting sexual identities: "The philosophical assumption that we can develop a world where we are all alike is at worst intellectually flawed and at best, boring" (53). Liminal conceptual spaces offer renewed possibility for free thinking and revolutionary change as we begin to question the validity of social convention. The non-essential model of meaning reveals the dangers of normative thinking of all kinds. In Scofield's poetry, a non-

essentialized theoretical framework helps to reveal liminal sexual and ethnic identities. Such identities are both abstract and tangible. Sexual expression is not limited to a strict hetero or homo “gaze”<sup>1</sup> that simply ends in gratification but is more an expression of love through the physical body; and Métis identity necessitates a complex balancing of both First Nation and European cultures. In discussing the writing of Scofield and Marilyn Dumont, Andrews further articulates these poets’ rejection of absolute norms in favour of varying forms of knowing and understanding:

These writers, by opening up spaces of “in-between-ness,” articulate and legitimize a variety of positions and allegiances.

Through irony, the two poets enact the concept of locatedness as process rather than product, and emphasize both the individual and communal dimensions of these endeavours. (14)

Such liminal process does not discredit those who strongly identify as heterosexual or homosexual nor those who strongly identify with their ethnic background; such identifications are important and ensure the survival of culture. Liminality is merely a means of recognition that sexuality and culture are complex concepts that cannot be neatly compartmentalized – indeed attempts at such compartmentalization can account for today’s rampant homophobia and ongoing racism.

The points of intersecting identities in Scofield’s works are both the liminal spaces of alternativity as well as the commingling of essential self identifiers.

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<sup>1</sup>Laura Mulvey’s “male gaze” concept asserts that women are often visually depicted for the purpose of male sexual desire. I use this term as a means of describing sexual objectification, which is not exclusive to heterosexual desire.

Just as adhering to dichotomous and one-dimensional concepts of identity is limiting and false, the dismissal of any inherent or essentially sacred concept is equally dangerous. Such dismissal threatens to obliterate centuries of culture and tradition. Spirituality entails at least some form of essentialism and purpose. Spirituality in Scofield's poetry is not based on the dogmatic theology of European religions; rather it is rooted in his Aboriginal traditions of ancestors and earth. Such spirituality does not fit neatly into the European patriarchal model of spiritual/sinner or believer/heathen. Therefore, while the concept of liminality becomes useful in undoing dichotomous convention, acknowledgement of spiritual relevance within this conceptual space is necessary in addressing the works of Indigenous writers like Scofield.

Queer and gender theories rarely touch on the concept of spirituality, a primary importance within Indigenous cultures. If gender theory reveals the falsity of gendered roles, conventional sexual expression, and the notion of essentialized identities and concepts, where does the notion of an inherent spirituality fit in, and indeed can it fit? How can we undo our conventional knowing while still maintaining a sense of spiritual determination? As Beth Brant explains in her politically charged essay *Physical Prayers*, queerness and spirituality can be interrelated, and indeed within Indigenous cultures, they must be:

I will not make distinctions between sexuality and spirituality. To separate would mean to place these two words in competition with

each other – to rate them in acquiescence to white-European thought, to deny the power of sex/spirit to my life, my work. (9)

Aboriginal spiritualities are autonomous belief systems that do not find their value in comparison with the European mode of spirituality but exist as their own belief systems. Outside of the religious discourse of the colonizers, these spiritualities need not be identified within a strictly liminal space; they simply *are*.

Consequently, sacred sexuality need not be one of a stagnant dichotomy but must simply *be* amongst a plethora of tradition and cultural identity. Thus when reading Scofield's works, it makes little sense to stagnate at the seemingly incompatibility of queer theory's non-essentialized model and essentialized sexuality since to do so would be to further perpetuate the functioning of dichotomous knowledge which has proven to be culturally destructive and conceptually limiting.

However, queer and decolonization theories can function, to a point, in breaking down norms of knowledge and actively reclaiming the sacredness of the stolen body. As Qwo-Li Driskill explains: "I have not only been removed from my homelands, I have also been removed from my erotic self and continue a journey back to my first homeland: the body" ("Stolen" 53). For this reason, the body is a site of resistance that is both political and spiritual. In celebrating the body through sexual expressions of love, poets are inherently activists who deem the colonizers irrelevant. Such political activism challenges mainstream academics to find inclusive methods of analysis that do not dismiss Indigenous writing based on its non-adherence to European genre and theory. Scofield's sovereignty of



the body and sensuality within this open conceptual framework is not a rigid compartmentalization but a belief in an intangible wisdom of earth and spirit that induces both reverence and laughter.

Chapter One explores the highly politicized function of Indigenous writers. Scofield addresses love, sex, and gender through political and spiritual language revealing the conceptual "sovereign erotic". Through close reading of Scofield's poems, this chapter looks at the body as an autonomous site of political resistance and spiritual significance. Liminality and essentialization commingle to reveal the body as a profound conveyor of love and culture.

Building upon the notion of the body as spiritually and culturally significant, Chapter Two uses the medicine wheel concept to show how Scofield's poetry reveals the essential interconnectedness of the mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects of all things. This chapter emphasizes the significance of poetic metaphor since, following the medicine wheel principles, the abstract conceptual and the tangible physical are inherently interconnected.

Chapter Three explores the sexually charged elegiac poems in Singing Home the Bones. These poems show how the sexual body exudes the mourning process for both the living and the dead. Scofield reveals the profound nature of love as the speaker's sexual recollections of living lovers serve as a pre-mourning process that lament loss before it occurs. He also portrays the tragic nature of homosocial marginalization through elegiac poems that portray the processional, ritualistic, and commemorative characteristics of contemporary gay social life.

## CHAPTER ONE: GREGORY SCOFIELD'S SOVEREIGN EROTIC

Sovereign eroticism involves cultural meaning and spirituality conveyed through corporeality. Because “we were stolen from our bodies” (Driskill, “Stolen” 50), Indigenous writers such as kateri akiwenzie-damm, Paula Gunn Allen, Beth Brant, and Chrystos write the body and situate the “sovereign erotic” within Indigenous Queer literature. This writing fuses eroticism and political commentary, as Sophie Mayer points out: “Not despite, but because of, a bloody and oppressed history, Indigenous writers speak up/from their sexuality, determined to bring pleasure into the political arena and beyond” (par. 11). Accordingly, Scofield’s sexually charged language implies processes of decolonization; his poetry celebrates the sexual body as a sovereign site of spirituality and reveals how the body is inherently linked to concepts of place and humour, as well as gender and sexuality.

The political implications of Indigenous eroticism are based on the belief that the body comes into being with a particular spiritual purpose. The notion of an inherent sexuality is evident in the ceremonious language of “Âyahkwêw’s Lodge” (Native Canadiana 66-67). This poem celebrates the sacredness of two-spirit identities and in doing so, asserts sovereignty of the body. The function of the body in this context does not involve sexual acts but rather portrays the spiritually determined nature of sexuality in general:

In the blood  
 a twinning spirit was seen.  
 The water

was marked by thunder.

Âyahkwêw<sup>2</sup> prepared the rattle,

placing inside

the child's umbilical cord.

At dawn, the time of prayer

they brought the child

to our lodge to be named –

and so we named him twice,

*Mistatim-awâsis /*

He Who Calls *Piyesiwak-iskwêw*<sup>3</sup>. (17-29)

The physical space of the lodge suggests a sense of shelter and safety. The baby's two-spirit identity is thus firmly linked to place and its inherent sense of home and belonging. Within this space, "blood / from the sacred woman's belly" (14-15) determines sexuality, revealing the mutual importance of physicality and spirituality. This spiritual significance of place sets Scofield's poetry apart from mainstream queer work. Queer scholar William Haver, for example, posits: "place exists only insofar as it happens and only in its happening; place is neither a ground for what is called an event, nor does it survive its happening. A park, an alley, an empty warehouse, are queer only in the queer sexual happenings that happen" (18). In contrast to this mainstream concept of space as irrelevant, Scofield depicts space as inherently sacred with and without human habitation.

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<sup>2</sup>Scofield's English translation is: "loosely translated as a person who has both male and female spirits; also known as Two-Spirited." Native Canadiana 67.

<sup>3</sup>Scofield's English translations are: "Horse-child and Thunder-woman." Native Canadiana 67.

Further, Scofield's two-spirit spaces need not be characterized by sexual activity in order to achieve meaning as Haven suggests.

The separation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous belief in metaphorical space points to a fundamentally different way of perceiving the world. Paula Gunn Allen explains: "traditional American Indian literature is not similar to Western literature because the basic assumptions about the universe and, therefore, the basic reality experienced by tribal peoples and by Western peoples are not the same, even at the level of folklore" (51). Rather than denouncing the influences of culture as problematic, Scofield's two-spirit literature illuminates the integral role of cultural meaning within identity formation and literary analysis. As Qwo-Li Driskill articulates, his attention to cultural significance works to decolonize and heal: "By speaking from a Cree Two-Spirit context, Scofield resists Two-Spirit invisibility that lumps us together with white Gay identities and he honors traditions that are often silenced and/or hidden" ("Call Me" 226). Thus, by connecting the concepts of blood, prayer, and place, Scofield demonstrates the characteristics of the newly emerging Indigenous Queer mode.

Sexuality that is rooted in space and natural landscape within Indigenous queer writing reveals the importance of metaphor as an integral aspect of Canadian Indigenous works. Canadian writers in general are undeniably influenced by the expanse of land that typifies the Canadian experience. This connection to space and land provides Canadian writers with rich metaphorical associations. Daphne Marlatt's Steveston, for example, foregrounds the British Columbian canning town Steveston as the collection's central character. The

landscape of Steveston embodies the experience of its inhabitants. Susanna Egan points out how Marlatt's self-reflective voice interconnects the poet to her subject: "the invisible cycles of female experience are repeated in the cycles of the land, the ocean, the delta, and the river" (103). Marlatt's landscape body takes on the characteristics of its surroundings in heightened sexual anticipation:

We've come to generations, generation, Steveston,  
 at the heart: our death is gathering (salmon) just offshore, as,  
 back there in this ghostly place we have (somehow) entered  
 (where?)  
 you turn & rise, gently, into me. (74)

Through remembrance, natural phenomena mimic the growing sexual arousal of Marlatt's speaker. Like Scofield, Marlatt connects memory to sexual exhilaration in celebration of place. Predominant physicality deems the separation between the abstract and the real irrelevant. Conceptual thought stems from concrete human experience; thus abstraction and physicality share reciprocal meaning. This association between conceptual genesis and the physically tangible mirrors the ceremonial theories of Gunn Allen's "Sacred Hoop": "The symbolism in American Indian ceremonial literature, then, is not symbolic in the usual sense; that is, the four mountains in the Mountain Chant do not stand for something else. They are those exact mountains perceived psychically, as it were, or mystically" (62). Thus, the notion of the real physical world as catalyst for metaphorical perceptions such as love and loss is a literary trope that connects the writing of Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors. Nevertheless, allusions to

place within non-Indigenous Canadian writing must always suggest a home elsewhere. For example, even as Marlatt's speaker is erotically connected to her physical surroundings, there remains a sense of discovering place "we have somehow entered." The migratory suggestions of such a line reflect the Canadian history of immigration and settlement. In contrast, Indigenous writing highlights a long-standing ancestral relationship to the land. Consequently, Scofield's erotic earth imagery functions as a political and spiritual reclamation of land. Further, Scofield shows how the use of landscape metaphor within Indigenous writing is consistently ceremonial and thus set apart from other Canadian writing.

Indeed, Scofield's depictions of the erotic sexual body are rooted in place. The speaker of "Earth and Textures" (Love Medicine and One Song 19-20), for example, uses figurative language to give his lover's body earthly characteristics. Because Indigenous spiritualities are rooted in nature, the body takes on sacred meaning. Portraying the erotic earth body, the speaker says:

îh îh  
 she is the earth lodge  
 opening her arms,  
 softly calling,  
 pî-pîhtâkwey, pî-pîhtâkwey.  
 îh îh  
 she is pîhtwawikamik  
 where I come

to cry the dry stone  
 from my throat.<sup>4</sup> (1-10)

The woman here is the metaphorical “earth lodge”; thus the speaker is metaphorically rooted in her physical place as he attains sexual gratification. Such space is both seductive and nurturing since the image of the woman’s outstretched arms suggests the acts of embracing and comforting. Her soft “calling” then is both soothing speech and the sexual evocation of her lover. This figurative language clearly denotes the autonomy of the body as an inherently sacred place. Scofield shows how the body’s sexual acts are celebrations of place and its spiritual significances; therefore, the erotic orgasm is a spiritual gift. The speaker’s throat cries are both spiritual prayer and sexual release. Indeed, part of such prayer is the simultaneously tangible and elusive connection between place and spirituality. In his essay “Prairie Poetry and Metaphors of Plain/s Space,” Laurie Ricou discusses the importance of spatial metaphor: “Metaphor is the crucial subject, because it is the most profound human means of making connections, of relating to space, of finding intersections” (110). Scofield’s erotic “earth lodge” exemplifies this intersection of meaning through highlighting the ceremonious commingling of space and cultural significance. The physical space in which the speaker of “Earth and Textures” *comes* exudes sensuality and spirituality. In Wisdom Sits in Places, Keith Basso explains how place produces communal occasions: “places and their meanings are continually woven into the fabric of social life, anchoring it to features of the landscape and

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<sup>4</sup>Scofield’s translations are: “look look, come in come in, the sacred lodge where the pipe is smoked.” Love Medicine 20.

blanketing it with layers of significance that few can fail to appreciate" (110).

Scofield shows this connection between space and sexual expression, which is not categorically carnal or divinely idealized, but demonstrates the body as an autonomous site of spirituality.

Similarly, "Prayer for the House" (Singing Home the Bones 72-73) connects love and space as inextricably intertwined. Domestic physical space houses the lovers' emotions, as evident when the speaker departs from home: "kinanâskomitin good house / but now the walls, the rooms / must give back our lovemaking"<sup>5</sup> (6-8). The speaker's desire to retrieve emotion from the house demonstrates how place is an essential aspect to love. As the speaker implies a loss of love through the walls' retention of emotion, the lingering history inherent to place becomes evident. The body and the space it inhabits share a reciprocal spiritual relationship. This cyclical interaction is evident in both the celebration and mourning for love as the speaker says: "the bones of us / have risen for the last / in our beds. êy-hey"<sup>6</sup> (29-31). Here, the figurative bones of the lovers imply death while the rising bodies connote rejuvenation of life. Place plays an all encompassing role in the lovers' intimate lives as it is both celebratory and mournful. The lovers therefore maintain a reciprocal connection to their past domestic space.

Domesticity is also situated amongst images of nature and the sacred in "I Want" (Native Canadiana 91-92). Scofield's domesticity is luxuriously sensuous as he begins the poem: "I want / to celebrate, celebrate men / the way a bee /

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<sup>5</sup>Scofield's translation is: "I give thanks." Singing 72.

<sup>6</sup>Scofield's translation is: "an exclamation of heaviness." Singing 73.



celebrates pollen" (1-4). This highly suggestive natural metaphor mimics the motion of phallic penetration and a reciprocal giving and taking through sexual exhilaration. This image is both homoerotic and not, as the caesura between "celebrate" and "celebrate" suggests a duality of meaning; celebration is a non-specific joy as well as a specifically homosexual desire. Scofield thus simultaneously honours and rejects the role of gendered identity. The political implications of this duality point to an honouring of same-sex domesticity while acknowledging homosexual union as no more or less a cause of celebration than heterosexual relationships. The speaker's suggested desire, or "want", points to a disheartening realization that such casual domesticity is a rarity in a predominately heterosexual society. Despite such political awareness, his longing for domestic complacency continues as he couples eroticism with the tactile sensations of the tedious domestic realm:

I want  
 duel ceremonies;  
 one to celebrate  
 bad hair, bad breath,  
 bad moods, bad food,  
 bad jokes, bad days  
 the other celebrating  
 baseball caps, Scope,  
 anti-depressants, take-out,  
 Cable TV, the unmade bed. (18-27)

Scofield highlights the “bad” aspects of his “partnership” (13) which in fact comprise the domesticity that he honours, and enable the speaker “to be comfortable enough / in my bones” (14-15). This ironical use of the word “bad” decentres the dichotomy of bad/good to reveal the limiting and false implications of such concepts. The speaker’s use of duality does not perpetuate contradictory meaning - as may first be suggested by the use of “duel” - but expresses an inherent balance of experience in love and domesticity. His desire to celebrate both “bad hair” and “baseball caps,” for example, does not favour one over the other but reveals a holistic characteristic of the entire domestic realm – one in which gender is irrelevant.

Indeed, the sexuality rooted in space and natural landscape within Scofield’s poetics reveals the irrelevance of gender adherence. As the speaker of Scofield’s “Five Images” (Love Medicine 28-29) uses metaphor to portray his lover’s body as a landscape being explored by an insect, gender is not a consideration:

Under his arms, my mouth’s  
 buzzing firefly  
 hovers and lands  
 the wet swamp grass  
 heavy with dew, releasing  
 the muskeg’s secret scent  
 so he bends, breaks  
 beneath tongue tracks,

so the ducks  
fly up  
circle his nipples, pink /  
purple as the summer lilies  
afloat  
with tiny-eared frogs  
straining to hear  
my moon's midnight song. (1-16)

Place-type characteristics such as “swamp,” “muskeg,” and “tongue tracks” situate the body as its own erotic site; therefore, the body is its own place of spiritual connectedness. Further, the body as sovereign site cannot fit tidily into a regimented gender. “His nipples” are sites of erotic exploration and gratification, not sites of social dictation that affect dress or interpersonal behaviours.

Similarly, “my moon” takes on many connotations, including the Indigenous belief in the cyclical nature of life and death, woman’s monthly menstrual cycle, and the ongoing rise and fall of a man’s erection. With the many suggestions of this line, prescribed gender becomes less and less important and the body, either male or female, takes priority. The alliterative m and s sounds in this passage mimic the “song” of orgasm, which is brought on by the exploration and celebration of the pheromonal “swamp grass.” While the irrelevance of gender performativity coincides with the concepts of queer theory, Scofield’s poetry demands more than a queer perspective. The inherently political implications of dismissing gender conventions in this case entail both spirituality and sovereignty. These

notions are uniquely Indigenous and based on centuries of colonization and racism and therefore demand a more specific political awareness than queer theory elucidates.

Indeed, Scofield provides a more culturally-specific critique of adherence to gender performance and homophobia in “Buck and Run” (Native Canadiana 78-80), which uses irony to comment on the Indigenous gay man’s shame of sexual identity. Scofield combines harsh political commentary and sexual playfulness as the speaker says:

Whoever knows my big buck taste  
 Knows I follow their trail  
 Strictly for sport  
 To see  
 If what they say is true  
 You can’t keep  
 A colonized buck down.  
 (though I’ve never had problems  
 keeping them up). (1-9)

Scofield portrays natural imagery in a humorous light while commenting on the homophobia perpetuated by colonization. Because of such homophobia, the “colonized buck” either disregards his own sexuality or engages in sexual activity “in the dark” (30). The hunting metaphor is a humorous portrayal of sexual pursuit that also reveals the relationship between oppression and confused gender performativity. The “colonized buck” is akin to the ashamed Indigenous

gay man, for whom gender becomes a threatening and sinister consideration. In her discussion of the sovereign erotic, Driskill aptly addresses the intermingling of natural images in their relation to oppressive colonization of the body: "A Sovereign Erotic is a return to and/or continuance of the complex realities of gender and sexuality that are ever-present in both the human and more-than-human world, but erased and hidden by colonial cultures" ("Stolen" 56-57). Scofield highlights colonial oppression as the speaker treats the seduction process as a sport. Such language is at once playful and tragic since gender and the sexual experience are horrifically influenced by cultural genocide.

This commingling of eroticism and anti-colonial commentary is also seen in "Song for Dean," (Native Canadiana 93-94) which actively questions the functioning of sex and gender. Scofield again uses irony to show how homophobia can devastate the sacredness of sex and love:

Dean,  
 if ever there is love  
 between men  
 I wish your eyes  
 endless moons, my hands  
 the ocean  
 in which you drown. (94)

The speaker's use of the word "if" highlights the devastating power of heteronormativity as he questions the validity of his own loving relationships. Such questioning demonstrates that homophobia is not strictly an oppressive

tendency by the colonizers but is also problematic within contemporary Indigenous societies themselves. Similarly, while there is much evidence revealing the sacred roles of many two-spirit people of the past, there is no evidence that every traditional nation held special places of honour for their two-spirit citizens. Therefore, while Scofield's poetry speaks back to the colonizers in an effective demonstration of decolonization and reclamation, it also speaks back to his own community and Indigenous communities at large about internal hatred. He explains in Thunder Through My Veins: "I've come to realize that my years of confusion and struggle, like most gay people's, are rooted in society's disapproval and fear of homosexuality which cultivates, as it has done for generations, internalized homophobia and self-hatred" (83). Thus, as the speaker depicts a sacred sexual encounter through landscape metaphor, sensuous poetics are interwoven with political commentary on the devastation of sexual oppression.

While Scofield exposes oppressive heteronormativity in poems like "Song for Dean," his playful tone also reveals the humour in oppressive situations. The speaker, of course, recognizes that there is in fact "love between men" whether or not such love is socially sanctioned. The word "if" then not only connotes struggle for identity and social oppression but is also an ironic comment on the absurdity of dismissing same-sex love as non-existent or unreal. In her essay "Irony Métis Style," Jennifer Andrews explains how such irony works within Indigenous writing:

Irony offers a powerful tool for critiquing dominant discourses by exposing the discontinuity between an author's stated intentions and the manner in which the spoken and written word may be interpreted and reconfigured, depending upon the discursive community in which it circulates. It enables Native Americans to register their frustrations, assert their survival, expose "oppressive hegemonic ideologies" and affirm life in the face of objective troubles. (10)

The heavily political implications of "if," then, are coupled with the irony that the poet alludes to. Scofield explains the role of humour within Indigenous culture: "For Native people, humour has always been an important part of our culture, a way to see our own idiosyncrasies and the foolishness of others. It is inherent in our stories and legends, entwined in the very fabric of our lives and traditions" (Thunder 67). Through the political implications of ironical wording, Scofield reveals that love and sensuality between men are sacred physical expressions evident in the orgasmic "ocean" of the speaker's hands.

Scofield's poetry reclaims the body in sovereign expressions of love and sex and provides new theoretical frameworks that do not limit Indigenous writing to stagnate ideologies but open up dialogue within the Indigenous and world community. Commingling sensuality, politics, and the sacred, Scofield conveys harsh societal commentary while revealing the sacredness of physical union. His politics are rooted in tradition and spiritual significance much like Luanne Armstrong's cultural principles as she reflects on her own contributions as a two-

spirit woman: "I am all over the map, my own map, where each piece fits, where borders shift and change but the ground itself is ancient; where I am rooted, where I have grown from, and where I return" (226). Scofield's poetry speaks from this ancient ground and celebrates the tangible and elusive sensuality of the body as its own erotic site.



## CHAPTER TWO: THE MEDICINE WHEEL CONCEPT IN GREGORY SCOFIELD'S POETRY

In accordance with the cyclical Indigenous worldview, Scofield's depictions of the sexual body point to an interconnectedness of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual characteristics of eroticism. Throughout Love Medicine and One Song: Sâkihtowin-Maskihkiy Êkwa Pêyak-Nikamowin and The Gathering: Stones for the Medicine Wheel, Scofield uses the medicine wheel concept to exemplify the interconnectedness of human experience and natural phenomena. His portrayals of the body as landscape position the autonomous individual within the collective through a sense of worldly belonging and significance. This sense of collectivity does not negate sovereign eroticism as discussed in Chapter One but further shows the power of the body to effect change at a communal level. As Scofield attributes earthly and animalistic characteristics to the sexual body, he reveals a ceremonious interconnectedness and celebration of all things. Scofield's portrayals of the body as landscape in both Love Medicine and One Song and The Gathering exemplify the medicine wheel concept by connecting sex and love to notions of ceremony, place, memory and nationhood.

Scofield portrays the human body as landscape, revealing the connection between sexual expression and the natural world. In "Wâstêpakâwi-pîsim (September – The Autumn Moon)" (Love Medicine 71-72), for example, sexual arousal is synonymous with plant growth and animal movement: "Last night / you bloomed to my touch, / called the birds together / with only a whisper" (8-11).

Sexual expression holds significant spiritual power as the blooming of the lover's penis, vagina, or mouth connotes the power of utterance and nuance to affect changes in nature. Paula Gunn Allen explains how vocalization functions to position the individual as a part of the larger world community: "through the sacred power of utterance they seek to shape and mold, to direct and determine, the forces that surround and govern human life and the related lives of all things" (51). Thus the lover's "whisper" is both a sexual exhalation and a vocalization of worldly belonging.

The spiritual connection between sex and nature reflects the Indigenous belief in all acts as forms of medicine. Scofield states in his introduction to Love Medicine and One Song: "Among many First Nations people, love and the old-time medicines are very much a part of our spiritual reality and existence" (11). The teachings of elders is an important part of Scofield's writing and his speakers' thought processes as evident in "Whispers and Thoughts" (Love Medicine 96), which equates feelings of love to natural phenomena:

The old people say  
 it's all medicine.  
 Even this whisper cast up  
 from heart's mould,  
 my one hundred  
 white butterflies  
 as real as kisses  
 blown one hundred times. (1-8)

The visual and tactile imagery of this passage highlights the inherent cyclicity of intimacy – an interaction that possesses the characteristics of both life and death. “Heart’s mould” as replica of the physical human heart connotes intense feelings of love which can be related to the heart shape symbol associated with romance. Conversely, a mould-ridden heart invokes darkness and disease yet simultaneously connotes new life since mould is organic matter which sustains life. Therefore, the essential nature of love and sexual expression is one that relies on nature’s cyclical progression; without earth matter, love is irrelevant and vice versa. Love and sex are powerful forces, then, that allow the lover to assert his volition, which affects all other things. The imagined “butterflies” and physical “kisses” of the poem are equally important as the lines between metaphor and reality are inherently vague. Because imagination functions to connect the spiritual self to the physical, symbolism here positions the speaker’s experience within a holistic context. This liminality between the real and the seemingly intangible houses the medicines that the old people speak of, as all sentiments – spoken and unspoken – affect each other.

Similarly, the speaker of “Sâkipakawi-pîsim (May – The Budding Moon)” (Love Medicine 63-64) perceives the act of sex as spiritual ceremony:

Amid the deepest green,  
 the quaking leaves, spruce boughs  
 green willow and damp moss  
 we make our altar  
 and give our naked selves. (4-8)

The speaker connects the biological aspect of lovemaking to ceremony as the lovers create their conceptual altar and their own volition establishes the sacredness of their sexual act. Such conceptuality fuses the characteristics of the human body and its natural surroundings as the environment mimics the experiences of the lovers' bodies. The verb "quake" describes both human and non-human states; thus the quaking leaves are synonymous with the orgasm of the naked lovers. Within this holistic interpretation driven by the medicine wheel concept, the lovers *are* the willow and moss; their surroundings are those natural phenomena perceived spiritually.

"More Rainberries (The Hand Game)" (Love Medicine 33-34) uses sensual euphemism to highlight the prominent tactile sensations of traditional Cree ceremony. Scofield's obvious references to Cree traditions enable readers to understand the poem's Indigenous cultural significance and its nuances of sexual activity. The title, for example, establishes the allusion to the traditional Hand Game<sup>7</sup> – a popular game within the "powwow trail." While the features of the Hand Game are not common knowledge among all groups of people, Scofield guides the reader in their understanding of the poem. As the speaker harmonizes tactile sensations, the erotic nature of the Hand Game becomes clear:

The softest, deepest warmth

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<sup>7</sup>"The playing piece consists of two bones or wooden cylinders. One is marked with a cord or a ring of bark, the other is left plain. The object is to find the unmarked piece; the other is to add confusion to the game. To further confuse and taunt the opposition, lively songs are sung by the hiding team. The singers beat an accompanying rhythm to their songs on a log placed before the team."  
"Messekuche Kunek (The Handgame)."

between his shoulders  
 is where my lips  
 take momentary rest, where  
 breathing becomes ritual  
 transcends into ceremony  
 pushing the song up and out  
 of his skin  
 so lowly he sings  
 rainberries form and glisten,  
 finding my tongue. (1-11)

As Scofield relates the traditional hand game to the act of sex, the hand game takes on highly sexual connotations that portray the players as elusive lovers. The game “transcends into ceremony” and invokes sexual arousal through the phallic images of the glistening rainberries and tongue; the lover sings the song of orgasm as he experiences the speaker’s oral stimulation. The physicality of sex is ceremoniously celebrated as the alliterative rhythm of the poem mimics song and orgasm. At the end of the poem, the lover releases his “deepest warmth” which is playfully both ejaculate and emotive response.

Highlighting the sacred connection between place and sex, the speaker of “Ceremonies” (Love Medicine 91-92) gives the body place-type characteristics:

I heat the stones  
 between your legs,  
 my mouth,

the lodge where you come

to sweat. (1-5)

Again, playfully and seductively, the speaker relates sex to traditional ceremony.

Indeed, it is fitting that the speaker relates sex to the sweat lodge since this traditional ceremony is particularly physical. Scofield emphasizes the nurturing nature of sexual encounters as he relates the mouth to the sweat lodge.

Because the sweat lodge is a space in which people pray and release negativity, the speaker expresses a desire to nurture and cleanse his lover through oral stimulation. This renewal process is similar to the metaphorical association between the sweat lodge and the womb that highlights the sweat lodge as a cleansing space. Thus as the lover “comes” to the touch of the speaker’s healing mouth, he reaches both sexual gratification and spiritual fulfillment. Scofield again shows that spirituality and sensuality are synonymous.

Similarly, Scofield shows how remembrance of physical intimacy is just as spiritually meaningful as physicality itself. “Pawâcakinâsîs-pîsim (December – The Frost Exploding Moon)” (Love Medicine 78-79) shows the vividness of sensual memory and its spiritual significance. The speaker portrays memory as an invasion of his body:

I remember that love  
galloped in on the backs of horses,  
kicked up dust in my heart,  
their drumming hooves  
carrying you, the dreamrider,

the four corners of the earth  
 tied together  
 in a sacred bundle. (18-25)

Here, the memory of love is not a mere abstract of an intangible emotion; rather, memory takes on physical attributes that represent sacred traditions and beliefs. As the dreamrider invades the speaker's body he brings with him representations of the medicine wheel through the notion of "the four corners." The remembered lover represents all love and all emotion. Remembrance positions the speaker within a cultural and worldly relevance rather than a private mourning for lost love. Such worldly positioning reflects the importance of collectivity within Indigenous culture as Gunn Allen points out: "The purpose of traditional American Indian literature is never simply pure self-expression. The 'private soul at any public wall' is a concept alien to American Indian thought. The tribes do not celebrate the individual's ability to feel emotion, for they assume that all people are able to do so" (51). Remembrance of love in Scofield's poetry is thus a means of cultural survival and significance.

Indeed, Scofield portrays memory of intimacy as a powerful force that can affect physical change to the environment. In "Autumn's Oath" (Love Medicine 85-86), for example, the speaker's body exudes the emotive power of mourning and consequently embodies the changing seasons. Tactile sensations are mixed to show the interconnectedness of natural phenomena and human emotion:

If never  
 the leaves change

or fall,  
the wind speaks up,  
sweeps your name  
beneath the door  
or spider crawls  
bringing my last breath  
I will have inhaled you  
the colours of spring,  
tasted summer  
in my lungs. (1-12)

The physicality of the speaker's lost love is accentuated as his inhalations indicate reliance on his lost lover for sustenance of life as well as a housing or possession of his lover's body. Through the act of inhaling, the speaker not only feels breath but also experiences taste and colour. Simultaneously, the loss of his lover indicates death and mourning as the speaker takes in his "last breath." Loss functions as a form of celebration since the speaker references the act of breathing and thus living, as well as those seasons associated with rejuvenation and beginnings. Loss, then, does not function as a polar opposite to the act of being found; loss is cause for celebration of the lived experience. As the speaker's body houses memory, mourning is as much a form of celebration as is newness. The commingling of seemingly opposite emotions is of course not as simplistic as binary definition or even irony, but rather the juxtaposition of conflicting emotions and sensations further demonstrates the circular nature of



Scotfield's worldview. Nonetheless, consideration of how irony functions is useful in understanding the above quotation. Discussing the complexities of irony in "Irony Métis Style: Reading the Poetry of Marilyn Dumont and Gregory Scotfield," Jennifer Andrews writes:

Irony relies on the perception of incongruities and can demand that readers interact with and participate in the construction of new meanings ... this ongoing negotiation of juxtapositions is a significant part of rediscovering what constitutes Métis identity, in all of its diverse forms. (27)

This "construction of new meanings" illuminates the integral role of liminal conceptual space within Scotfield's poetry. The change of seasons in "Autumn's Oath" is not merely a linear progression of abundance and consequent loss, but a cyclical waxing and waning of emotion and life.

Indeed, the loss of memory reflects the fluctuating and therefore delicate nature of intimate relationships. Moments of romantic disruption are represented through poetic discordance and visual images in "Letter to Dean" (The Gathering 58-59):

The dreams fragment too easily,  
break up  
like sheets of ice, melting  
into a vast river  
to the unknown. (1-5)

Here, memories of love are referred to as “dreams” revealing the elusive and illusory nature of love. The cacophonous sounds of the hard consonants in the first line parallel the disjointed recollections of the speaker’s lost love. Yet just as the metaphorical scattered pieces of ice melt into one body of water, the speaker’s memories function as a whole experience of love and mourning. This cyclicity is embodied in the layout and nationhood concepts of Scofield’s first poetry collection The Gathering: Stones for the Medicine Wheel.

Through examining the dynamics of relationships, this collection links the medicine wheel to notions of self and nationhood. Considering the holistic nature of the medicine wheel as poetic device, The Gathering ironically portrays the disjointed attempt at articulating self identity and nationhood. Simultaneously, however, it shows how such disjointedness functions to create holistic representations of self and cultural belonging. While individual poems are fragmented reflections on the poet’s struggle to establish cultural membership and on the Métis nation’s experiences with exile, they form a cohesive collection which exemplifies the modern Métis experience with identity formation. These contradictory forces show how fragmentation eventually creates holistic circularity, both conceptually and poetically. Indeed, the fusion of elusive and identifiable meaning is exemplary of the medicine wheel concept and other Indigenous figures. For example, the first poem of the collection highlights the coyote – a prominent trickster figure in Cree culture<sup>8</sup>. The following lines from

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<sup>8</sup>“Raven, Coyote, and other trickster figures are both creators and destroyers; they shape and mold the world, but they also put constraints upon it by creating death, sickness, pain, as well as culture and institutions” (Champagne 181).

“Dreams in Neon Coyote Tricks” (21) are especially relevant to the overall layout of The Gathering:

Coyote’s up to tricks again

Works his keemoothch<sup>9</sup> way

In dreams

Chase me backwards laughing. (1-4)

Key words such as “backwards” and “laughing” not only function to exemplify the characteristics of coyote, as well as to capture the chaotic nature of dreams, but also explain the otherwise confusing layout of the collection. In traditional interpretations of the medicine wheel, all life begins in the east – the direction associated with Spring and the physical body. It is initially jarring and “backwards,” then, that Scofield sections the book into the four directions and begins the first cluster of poems in the west, which is associated with Autumn and emotion. Such re-ordered fragmentation pushes cultural boundaries by disrupting conventional associations. Yet such disruption is, in fact, integral to literary continuity. The trickster functions to highlight and question cultural ideas that must always exist in a state of flux, as Gerald Vizenor points out:

The trickster .... is a comic and communal sign, a discourse in a narrative with no hope or tragic promises. The trickster is neither the “whole truth” nor an isolated hypotragic transvaluation of primitivism. The trickster is as aggressive as those who imagine

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Though Wîsahkêcâhk is the definitive trickster in Cree stories, coyote is also a prevalent character since First nations often shared ceremonies and story-telling (Peers 153).

<sup>9</sup>Scofield’s translation is: “sly, or sneaky.” The Gathering 91.

the narrative, but the trickster bears no evil or malice in narrative voices. Malice and evil would silence the comic holotropes; there would be no concordance in the discourse. Neither the narrator, the characters, nor the audience would share the narrative event. (12-13)

Use of the word “chase” in “Dreams in Neon (Coyote Tricks)” connotes childlike playfulness that invites the reader to share in a comedic narrative event that chases meaning. This reference to coyote reveals the elusive nature of articulating self and cultural identities. While Scofield’s use of the medicine wheel trope emphasizes holistic cohesion, his trickster figure shows how disruption is a fundamental aspect of such cyclicity.

For example, the introductory story, “Black Bear’s Grandson” (12-18), prefaces the notion that life is a perpetual attempt at cohesiveness and formation of meaning. The physical act of gathering stones, as the title of the collection implies, parallels the conceptual gathering of consciousness within the story. Catherine Rainwater explains: “Scofield’s authorial persona ‘gather[s] stones’ on a medicine path away from self-destruction” (142). Demonstrating personal experience as a consistent struggle to move from frenzy to balance, Black Bear explains the meaning of the stones: “They come from the Great Medicine Wheel in the sky, and all things are equal within its sacred circle. The circle is our total universe. Everything except the Two-Leggeds are harmonious within it” (18). This unharmonious human experience is represented in Scofield’s deviance from traditional direction associations and throughout individual poems in The

Gathering. However, Rainwater further articulates the cohesive discontinuity of the collection: “Each autobiographical poem recalls a part of the speaker’s life and represents a piece of a shattered self drawn together toward wholeness within the meaningful pattern set by Black Bear for his ‘Grandson.’” (143) Through this “meaningful pattern,” Scofield’s narrators work towards self acceptance and cultural belonging.

The notion of life cyclicity is evident in the final poem of The Gathering. Highlighting intergenerational relationships, “The Spirits Have Begun Working” (88) emphasizes human fragility and the need for perpetual “healing.” Through euphonious language, the speaker expresses vulnerability and desire for belonging:

an old woman was soothing me in Cree I  
cried in her lap she kept singing singing  
an old man gave me four eagle feathers four  
songs four stories then painted my face  
divided in two. (11-15)

Through such suffering, generational cyclicity is evident in the old man and old woman caring for the speaker who takes on child-like characteristics. The use of the s sound mimics the song of lullaby and the old woman’s lap implies maternal nurturing. The old man also offers nurturing through the form of traditional teachings which use the sacred number four of the medicine wheel. The revered old people of Indigenous culture offer the speaker their guidance within conventional gendered roles. While Scofield’s poetry at times deems gender

irrelevant, this honouring of traditional gender roles reveals a holistic duality to two-spirit identity. The speaker's painted face "divided in two" has both the male and female spirit, and as he works to position his own conceptual stones into wholeness, these two parts work together in healing his "too human" existence.

The need for healing in Scofield's poems is catalyzed by his speakers' perpetual desire for nurturing and closeness as evident in "Snag Poem" (The Gathering 56). The loneliness inherent in the human condition becomes apparent as the speaker envisions an intimate relationship with a stranger. Addressing the "dark lover" (2) from across the room, the speaker says:

say would you be satisfied just snuggling close  
 would suit me just fine to blow this beer joint  
 so just keep lookin' sweetie  
 we'll jump the moon  
 kiss the stars  
 one big smile will do it. (5-10)

The speaker playfully associates physical attraction to cosmic forces. Within this moment of brief flirtation, it is not clear if the "dark lover" reciprocates or even recognizes the speaker's attraction since the speaker awaits the acknowledgement of "one big smile". Despite the unreliable speaker, Scofield shows the sacredness of all interaction; even commonplace encounters connote "the moon" and "the stars" in cosmic significance.

Whether inspired by the physical and conceptual representations of the medicine wheel or "a sacred place within" (Love Medicine 12), Scofield's works

exemplify the medicine wheel concept, which celebrates the interconnectedness of human experience and natural phenomenon. By revealing the inherent relationship of sex and love to notions of ceremony, place, memory and identity, his poetry celebrates the autonomous and collective spirits of all things.

### CHAPTER THREE: THE EROTIC ELEGY IN GREGORY SCOFIELD'S SINGING HOME THE BONES

Gregory Scofield's Singing Home the Bones explores the themes of loss and mourning as forms of love and intimacy. In moments of profound loss and lamentation, Scofield's speaker experiences intense feelings of love and connectedness. This use of death-provoked narrative illuminates the relationships between the sovereign erotic and medicine wheel concepts discussed in the previous two chapters. Chapter One explores how Scofield depicts the body as its own erotic site that exudes sexuality as a form of political resistance. Chapter Two looks at how this sovereign body is spiritually linked to place and culture as Scofield utilizes the medicine wheel trope to reveal the interconnectedness of all things. Chapter Three elaborates on the cyclicity of human existence and the celebratory nature of sex and place within the mourning process. The elegiac tropes in Singing Home the Bones portray loss and mourning as both celebratory and tragic. These highly sexual poems reveal the perpetual presence of mourning within intimate relationships much like Derrida's "Aphorism Countertime," which asserts that love between two people necessitates acknowledgement of each other's deaths. Scofield's lamenting eroticism is positioned within his Aboriginal culture; accordingly, many of these poems grieve the tragic nature of his Métis ancestry and traditions. As Sara Jamieson notes, Scofield utilizes the death theme to explore both sexual and cultural identity in his earlier "urban rez" poems: "Scofield is burdened by a pervasive tendency to conflate not only gay identity but also Native identity with



death-driven narratives” (53). Indeed, the elegiac poems of Singing Home the Bones often use Cree narrative to depict the sexual body as a site of mourning for both living and absent lovers. Ironically, the single sexual body becomes the site of intense feelings of loving union. Scofield portrays the tragic nature of love and homosocial marginalization through elegiac poems that portray the processional, ritualistic, and commemorative characteristics of contemporary gay social life.

As the title of the collection suggests, Scofield uses the bone motif throughout Singing Home the Bones to foreground death and dying by emphasizing the fragility and eventual decay of the body. In the first part of the collection, “Conversations with the Dead,” this decay represents both the resilience and oppression of Scofield’s Métis history as he combines images of bones with historical images of the fur trade. “Women Who Forgot the Taste of Limes” (10-11) highlights the physicality of remembrance as the speaker relates different bones of his ancestors’ bodies to moments of Métis history: “If I take ki-tôkanikan, ni-châpan<sup>10</sup>, / place on them a pack to bear / will they know the weight of furs” (13-15). Reference to the fur-trade highlights the integral role of Métis people in Canadian history as well as the discrimination inflicted upon the Métis nation. Such depictions of oppression and violence due to colonization function as tributes to Scofield’s Métis heritage. While “Women Who Forgot the Taste of Limes” celebrates the strength and survival of Métis history, poems such as this also serve as elegiac lamentations for past injustices and loss of culture. The elegies of this collection are thus simultaneously celebratory and mournful.

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<sup>10</sup>Scofield’s translations are: “your hipbone, my ancestor.” Singing 10.

Indeed, some of the most elegiac poems of this collection are those in “Conversations with the Living.” Such acknowledgement of death amongst the living is part of a newly emerging trend in the writings of contemporary gay poets. For example, Paul Monette addresses the devastating force of AIDS infection within the homosexual community in Love Alone: Eighteen Elegies for Rog. As Lloyd Edward Kermode explains, the ritualistic tone of Monette’s writing functions as tribute to the dying and the dead: “The enclosure that these poems construct might, after all, be comforting, even at its most violent and angry and desperate. The poems are consoling in their dedication, attention to detail, ritual, and ceremony; and most of all they comprise a piece of work that suspends one’s life for the time that it is being read” (237). Thus, while Scofield’s lamentations are uniquely Métis in language and tone, he also joins a larger writing community that pushes the boundaries of conventional elegiac form<sup>11</sup> to foreground death amongst the living. Indeed, the sexually charged poems of Singing Home the Bones lament absent lovers in the language of mourning, which at times, takes on violent connotations.

The use of ritualistic and ceremonious language expresses traditional elegiac conventions in the last poem of “Conversations with the Missing,” “I Don’t Know My Body Without You” (68-70). The speaker gives himself place-type characteristics that foreground place and natural imagery much like the

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<sup>11</sup>“In the course of the seventeenth century ... the term elegy began to be limited to its present usage: a formal and sustained lament in verse for the death of a particular person, usually ending in a consolation” (Abrams, M.H. 49-50).

conventional pastoral elegiac form<sup>12</sup>. As the speaker envisions his body as a church site, which he longs for his lover to inhabit, the masturbatory process becomes a form of ritualistic mourning for the absent lover:

on this island torn naked by rain,  
 fondled by days of rain,  
 a spectacle of never-ending guilt  
 like the church across the street,  
 its voyeuristic steeple  
 rising and rising. (7-12)

The absence of the lover compels the speaker to be “torn naked” in sexual longing and lamentation. The guilt associated with his fondling reveals the speaker’s conflicted emotions as he resists the absence of his lover through remembrance yet feels shame for experiencing solitary sexual pleasure. Such memory work manifests as the masturbatory process which, through its memorial characteristics, becomes ceremonious. This ceremonial theme is heightened by the image of the church steeple across the street which mimics the speaker’s growing erection. Rather than finding Christian consolation through these conventional elegiac images, however, Scofield’s speaker remains in an inconsolatory pre-mourning process for the living. Christian ceremonial images, then, function to remind the speaker not of divine salvation but of secular suffering and perpetual longing for fulfillment.

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<sup>12</sup>“An important subspecies of the elegy is the pastoral elegy, which represents both the mourner and the one he mourns – who is usually also a poet – as shepherds (the Latin work for shepherd is ‘pastor’)” (Abrams 50).

By associating his sexual lamentation with structured ritual, the speaker attempts to make sense of mourning's disarray:

really what I want  
 is for you to come, come singing  
 and I want  
 to be your pulpit, your hymn book,  
 the steam organ  
 you've come to play. (17-22)

Repetition of the word "come" parallels the speaker's increasing sexual climax and his emotional evocation of the absent lover. Both of these processes highlight human desire for the unattainable. The speaker's desire to embody the objects of ceremony shows an attempt to dehumanize himself in order to lessen his suffering and signifies a need to order his feelings of loss. Simultaneously, this association with objects points to a desperate desire for intimacy with the absent lover for which the speaker is willing to objectify himself in order to feel closeness. This elusive longing is both romantic and tragic since it is not entirely clear whether the absent lover intends to reunite with the lamenting speaker. The ending of the poem suggests the impossibility of structuring mourning to the point of consolation since the speaker still "wants" and therefore remains in a state of perpetual mourning:

I want you to come,  
 come singing.  
 and I want, sweet angel,

to finally come

home. (41-45)

Such highly romantic language suggests an overwhelming sense of dependence on the absent lover for happiness. Since the speaker is left to lament through sexual physicality, he achieves both ejaculation and a profound sense of loss reminiscent of the Renaissance "la petite mort" or "little death" connoting orgasm. By combining the Judeo-Christian symbol of "angel" and the notion of "home" the speaker suggests his own death and ascent to heaven or other spiritual resting place. This fixation on death is further evident as the speaker mentions his lover's "faraway bones" in stanza six and shows an acknowledgement of the absentee's eventual death made even more mournful by sexual and emotional attachment. Through such images of longing, Scofield shows how death-driven sexual experiences ultimately celebrate love and life.

This reference to death amongst the living suggests the Derridean notions of love and its inherent mourning. Derrida's essay "Aphorism Countertime" depicts the existential crisis of longing and loss in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. Derrida contends that birth signifies the beginnings of desire and naming signifies death. Accordingly, Derrida asserts that the pledge of love necessarily implies mourning: "Right from the pledge which binds together two desires, each is already in mourning for the other, entrusts death to the other as well: if you die before me, I will keep you, if I die before you, you will carry me in yourself, one will keep the other, will already have kept the other from the first declaration" (422). This binding desire is evident in the pre-mourning allusions of Scofield's

Singing Home the Bones; its speaker mourns his lovers despite their being alive. At the same time, he mourns lost relationships and his own death before it occurs.

The notion of mourning the undead is foregrounded in the departure poem "Prayer for the House" (72-73). The language of solemnity in the title suggests a ritualistic and elegiac tribute, which is manifested throughout the poem. Feelings of both celebration and loss are apparent as the speaker begins:

â –haw, kinanâskomitin good house  
 we are leaving, anohc  
 the bones of us  
 have risen for the last  
 in our beds.<sup>13</sup> (1-4)

The speaker mourns the space that holds experiences of love and intimacy. Scofield uses repetition throughout the poem to stress intense feelings of loss. For example, repetition of the line "we are leaving" in the first, third and penultimate stanzas, situates the speaker within the physical space of departure and heightens his awareness of loss. This heightened awareness of finality and ending is also apparent with the twice repeated line "the bones of us / have risen for the last" in stanzas one and eight. Ultimately, the speaker of "Prayer for the House" reaches a somewhat hesitant consolation. He makes an impossible attempt at retrieving the experiences that the house holds as he tells the house to "give back our lovemaking" (8) and to "give back our dancing" (20). This

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<sup>13</sup>Scofield's translations are: "an invocation, I give thanks, today." Singing 72.

attempt at retrieving and maintaining memory is both celebratory and tragic since remembrance must always imply lamentation of the past and the inaccessible space of the house. Despite such hesitance, Scofield portrays a sense of resolution as the speaker ends the prayer:

âstam ekwa  
 we are leaving, anohc  
 we are leaving.  
 â-haw, ekosi.<sup>14</sup> (32-35)

Although the use of repetition makes clear the speaker's difficulty with departing from his domestic space, there is a sense of finality and perhaps, acceptance, with the closing consolatory sentiment of the prayer. Indeed, such reiteration is reminiscent of traditional Cree songs, which have few words with many, often symbolic, repetitions.<sup>15</sup> Hesitant departure again reminds the reader that all human experience is shaped by place and human interaction with physical surroundings.

"Waiting For Your Phone Call" (80-81), however, does not achieve such consolation as the speaker laments unrequited love. Situating such lamentation amongst pastoral imagery, the speaker begins:

My heart is the colour of a plum  
 before falling from the tree.  
 You, bone-stealer

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<sup>14</sup>Scofield's translations are: "come now, and, today, an invocation, now I am done." Singing 72-73.

<sup>15</sup>Episkew, Jo-Ann, personal correspondence, 10 June 2007.

are everything I want,  
 nothing I need. (1-5)

The rich colour of the plum is associated with the speaker's emotional "heart," revealing the connection between the physical and emotional manifestations of intimacy. This image of ripeness suggests a romantic pastoral setting. Yet this image is juxtaposed with reference to the "bone-stealer" lover which suggests the speaker's complete loss of identity in his overwhelming feelings of love. Both the skeletal sustenance of life and the simultaneous reminder of bodily fragility and decay capsulated in the notion of bones is taken, or stolen, by the absent lover who consequently maintains emotional power over the speaker. As he mourns his own loss of self, the speaker reveals his emotional dependence on the lover and establishes a pre-mourning theme.

Indeed, the mourning process is expressed through highly sexual physicality. The traditional pastoral-elegiac trope suggests ripeness and heightened physical awareness that prompts sexual longing, while the extremity of this setting also suggests stagnancy associated with death:

The elms outside the window  
 are still, still  
 and the streets sag from all this heat.  
 Tonight, there will be mouths  
 gliding over nipples, moving  
 like water beetles down down. (6-11)



Here, the stillness of the trees suggests the motionlessness associated with death. The word “still” also suggests the suspension and lagging of time as the speaker mournfully anticipates the arrival of his lover. This anticipatory moment heightens the painful longing and disappointment of lamentation, which is symbolized in the dismal setting of the poem. The sagging streets show a seemingly impossible distortion of environment just as the speaker perceives separation from his lover. Within this longing sadness, the speaker anticipates sexual intimacy in a sexual manifestation of lamentation. The lover’s mouth moves downward in much the same way as the dead body is buried. This motion of descent also highlights the emotional act of suppressing or burying emotion and highlights the speaker’s longing as a form of denial. The speaker convinces himself of his lover’s return and believes his lover reciprocally mourns him. Thus, part of the speaker’s mourning process is denial of separation and the need to convince himself of loving reciprocity. Such denial is evident in the repeated word “surely” in the last stanza:

But here, I’m counting every last bone.

And surely you are there,

holding the phone as one would hold

a dying baby.

Surely. (26-30)

The horrific image of the dying baby functions as a grotesque depiction of tenderness. Despite such fatal perversion, this disturbing image highlights the speaker’s desperation for mutual mourning. The attempt to convince himself of

reciprocal longing shows the functioning of denial in the speaker's mourning process. Scofield reveals the infinite lack of consolation in loss.

The impossibility of consolation through mourning points to an inability of Scofield's speaker to function autonomously. Judith Butler theorizes the absence of self-identity during the grieving process:

When we lose certain people, or when we are dispossessed from a place, or a community, we may simply feel that we are undergoing something temporary, that mourning will be over and some restoration of prior order will be achieved. But maybe when we undergo what we do, something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us. It is not as if an "I" exists independently over here and then simply loses a "you" over there, especially if the attachment to "you" is part of what composes who "I" am. If I lose you, under these conditions, then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who "am" I, without you? When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do. On one level, I think I have lost "you" only to discover that "I" have gone missing as well. At another level, perhaps what I have lost "in" you, that for which I have no ready vocabulary, is a relationality that is composed neither exclusively of myself nor you,

but is to be conceived as *the tie* by which those terms are differentiated and related. (22)

Indeed, as Scofield's speaker loses "the tie" to his lover, he remains in a state of disbelief and distortion. Without his object of desire, the speaker of "Waiting For Your Phone Call" stagnates in a transformative grieving process and therefore imagines a horrifying reciprocal longing.

Such *in-consolation* is evident in "The Return" (82-83), which depicts violent longing and desire for possession. The speaker's death-like characteristics reflect his emotional demise as he eventually takes on inhuman qualities:

All of me is heated marrow.  
 Three whole nights  
 my breath has come in spurts  
 and my eyes, having shut down,  
 saw only the moon  
 you sang. (1-6)

Much like the "smouldering" and "blissful kindling" in "Waiting For Your Phone Call," the threat of burning bones suggests destruction of the body and its emotive responses. "Heated marrow" suggests an intense sexual passion that extends beyond the bodily tissue into the metaphorical and literal core of being while simultaneously suggesting the post-funeral process of cremation. The speaker's intense lamentation therefore foreshadows his own mental demise as he believes he can no longer breathe or see.

He is destroyed by the powerful fixation on sexual intimacy as he reflects on his lover's orgasm or moon song. In his half human state, he allows himself to be possessed by his lover: "The smell you left / on my skin was a marker" (7-8). With the arrival of his lover, he assumes a submissive state where time is irreverently dismissed:

The hands of the clock  
 are neglected children  
 crying out the hours. But I say,  
*Let them cry! Let them ring*  
*in the ears of the dead.* (17-21)

The horrific image of neglected children is similar to the dying baby image in "Waiting For Your Phonecall." Rather than reaching consolation through the arrival of the mourned, the speaker experiences distorted and violent consequences of intense desire and longing. While the speaker seems to shed his death-like characteristics by the end of the poem, he is rejuvenated by violently possessing his lover. Scofield suggests a perpetual dying process inherent within sexual and romantic relationships:

Three whole nights  
 I've felt the marrow of my bones  
 congeal like Wihtikîw.  
 I've eaten you, peyakwâw,  
 nîswâw, nîstwâw.  
 But now I'm hungry,

pîmîciso, boy!  
 while the moon looks away,  
 dimming the coal of my lips.<sup>16</sup> (22-30)

The congealing bones of the speaker suggest a corpse-like state. Rather than reaching happiness through reuniting with his lover, the speaker perceives the lover as an object of consumption. By exploring masturbatory and intercourse forms of longing, Scofield shows how finality and consolation can never be achieved. Attaining one's object of desire in this case is more tragic and violent than the preceding longing and lamentation. While the speaker's desire seems to be carnally satisfied, it is only due to the suggested violent possessing of his lover. The quasi-consolation of the last line, in fact, suggests darkness and death.

Similarly, "To Answer Some Things (For My Nicimos)" (84-85) highlights the inherent violence within some intimate relationships. Love and place, in this lamenting context, become stagnant and threatening:

It's not that I don't love you,  
 ê -hey, ê-hey  
 tapwe, ki-sâhkitin, ki-sâhkitin!  
 or the constant funeral of our ending  
 that keeps me in this house,  
 eating from the bowl  
 of chokecherries

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<sup>16</sup>Scofield's translations are: "legendary eater of humans, the cannibal; once, twice, three times over, come eat." Singing 83.

you've put before me, the bowl  
of your steaming bones  
I've cracked to the marrow.<sup>17</sup> (21-30)

The speaker's awareness of ending is not a sentimental longing, rather it suggests a history of domestic abuse. The speaker and his absent lover share reciprocal violence towards each other as the offered chokecherries<sup>18</sup> are both tempting and chemically poisonous and the celebrated bones imply violent death. The image of chokecherries poignantly symbolizes the simultaneity of sexual longing and violence since they offer both bodily nutrition and the possibility of fatal poisoning. The act of consumption also suggests a relationship based on submission and superiority. Scofield suggests a devastating relationship dynamic in which the lover's seemingly sweet actions are in fact violent and potentially fatal. Scofield reveals the hidden connotations of even gentle forms of address such as "nicimos" by suggesting a longstanding history of domestic abuse.

This notion of hidden or suppressed violence in situations that otherwise seem joyous is apparent in the collection's most marked commentary on gender performance and sexual exploitation. "The Dancer" (94-100) portrays the dismal ritualistic characteristics of drag queen performance. Rather than enacting a satirical critique of gender performance much like Judith Butler's phantasmical

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<sup>17</sup>Scofield translations are: "it is true, I love you, I love you!" Singing 85.

<sup>18</sup>"[Chokecherry] leaves, which are particularly toxic when stressed or wilted, as well as the bark from chokecherries and wild cherries are cyanide producing. Death in horses can occur literally in minutes after the horse has ingested the leaves" (Lamm).

heterosexual<sup>19</sup>, “The Dancer” portrays the exploitive nature of exaggerated gender identities. While the dancer takes on idolatrous characteristics as a symbol of homosexual perfection, he is also used by his spectators for violent validation:

he is  
 getting paid  
 to make the drag queens feel  
 like real women, getting paid  
 to be their spank-spank boy,  
 the roughneck quarterback  
 running them past the goal line  
 of snickering small towns,  
 fathers who just wouldn't understand.  
 but see                    he is  
 all muscle, his perfect ass swinging.  
 he is our golden trumpet,  
 our rainbow flag anthem. (61-73)

Utilizing an anthem-induced processional trope that highlights emotional instability, Scofield shows how a lack of identity is woven into the social dynamics of contemporary gay social life. The dancer encompasses the audience's every emotion and is momentarily made responsible for all oppression and sadness inflicted upon them. As the speaker continuously associates the dancer with

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<sup>19</sup>Butler contends that heterosexual identity is continuously performed in order to establish itself as the original: “gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original” (“Imitation and Gender Insubordination” 378).

angelic characteristics, he points to the control of the “man upstairs” in an obvious reference to godly influence. Since this controlling figure is associated with exploitation and rampant drug use, Scofield provides harsh commentary of Christian belief systems that perpetuate power and fear within the gay community. Thus this ceremonious portrayal of gay social life has elegiac connotations that emphasize the deathly characteristics of the living and mock the legitimacy of idolatrous ritual and godly afterlife. Scofield makes numerous Christian references throughout the poem that critique the role of Christianity within gay culture. For example, he gives the dancer Jesus Christ-type characteristics in order to show the sacrificial role of the exploited:

we are falling  
 at his feet, longing  
 to take each biblical toe  
 into our mouths, praying  
 to be his incubus-tongued angel. (21-26)

By associating the dancer with the image of the Christian cross, Scofield highlights the inherent violence and perpetual dying process within gay culture, and all cultures in general. He also hints at the Christian colonization process as the dancer’s Aboriginal heritage is neglected and his audience dehumanizes him:

his own  
 aching bones,  
 half-breed and kicking.  
 yet later, swallowed by



the empty mouths of our beds,  
 we will think of him.  
 we will make him pay.  
 he will be our second-hand doll  
 and we will use him  
 for free, as if  
 he meant nothing. (101-111)

This final line functions on many levels. It is a harsh political commentary on exploitation within gay culture; it connotes the conditions of Jesus' death as he is left to die. As well, this line is a humorous reference to the Shakespearean "nothing"<sup>20</sup>. Indeed, this crude reference to female genitalia implies that the dancer successfully portrays himself as a woman and therefore accomplishes his performance task. Scofield portrays a sinister reciprocity of exploitation as the performer and the performed use each other for violent gratifications that ultimately diminish culture and community. The processional qualities of the dancer's performance suggest funeral and death. Thus, Scofield highlights the inherent death within the living, especially in the marginalized gay community.

Throughout Singing Home the Bones, the sexual body laments absent lovers and dismal social circumstances. The ritualistic and ceremonious characteristics of these sexual lamentations foreground death and dying as integral aspects to sexual and cultural remembrance. Through highlighting the

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<sup>20</sup>Shakespeare and other Renaissance writers use the term "nothing" as slang for vagina. The term "thing" denotes penis. For example: Shakespeare, William, Romeo and Juliet ed. Dympha Callaghan (Boston: Bedford) 2003. 1.4.95-104.

elegiac characteristics of the living, Scofield shows an inherent cyclicity to the human experience in which sex and love celebrate both life and death.

## AFTERWORD

A “real Indian”, Vine Deloria Jr. contends, is a falsehood: “Indians begin to feel that they are merely shadows of a mythical super-Indian” (82). In trying to assume the role of a “real Indian” in today’s contemporary society, poets like Gregory Scofield are thrust into a perpetual negotiation of tribal, cultural, social, historical, critical, theoretical, colonial, postcolonial, and political forces. As theorists continue to categorize and label Indigenous identities into packaged samplings of consumable culture, Indigenous people continue to be other-ed and placed within a mythical reality that is at once unattainable and devastating. Gregory Scofield’s poetry defies such categories and presents the complex juxtaposition of traditional and modern pedagogies. He unapologetically asserts his sexuality and its complex nuances of Indigenous distinctiveness.

Scofield’s ability to connect images of landscape and sex offers renewed ways of viewing the body and its sensuality. His writing transforms pools of semen on a lover’s stomach into lakes of calm water amidst endless landscape. It portrays sexual exhalation as the release of inhibition and a renewal of sexual sacredness. Yet with every expression of love, humour, ejaculation, and teasing, Scofield also faces criticism for simply writing the celebration of sexuality. When considering the provocative nature of Scofield’s words and his ability to poetically portray his rich Métis history, his simultaneous rumination on colonial oppression also provokes political contemplation.

Indeed, the conceptual work of queer theory and the writings of strong Aboriginal women like Beth Brant and Paula Gunn Allen, make it impossible to

ignore the level of ignorance this country demonstrates. How is it that government has the power to decide who has the legal right to wed whom? Though we now live in a place where men can marry men and women can marry women, it was never the government's decision. Such governmental interference continues its prevalence amongst Aboriginal history in this country. These are the issues that Scofield raises through his portrayals of love, sex, space, and lamentation.

Scofield's poetic voice illustrates the role of Canadian law in oppressing Aboriginal people, most horrifically so in implementing the residential school system to "civilize the Indians." A people who were not ashamed of their sexual desires and bodily functions were suddenly and forcefully beaten into shame in "the name of God." The Scofields of that time were stripped of their voice and their right to express love and intimacy in the ways that honoured their identities. Today, Scofield and other Indigenous writers who dare to write their sexuality without apology are forced into the precarious negotiation of shedding colonial mind trips and honouring traditions that have shifted due to oppression and the passing of time. What remains the same despite colonial devastation is the sexual expression of love and desire and even simple carnal impulse. Reclamation does not need to be based on strict guidelines of tribal organization, falsified notions of a romantic past, or documented history produced by anthropologists who dealt with their own internal oppression. Reclamation of the sovereign erotic is simply an acknowledgement that sex between members of the same biological genitalia has always been a reality. Sovereignty of self and

one's own sexual longings are all that is required to reclaim the "sovereign erotic."

Readers who are inclined to dismiss Scofield's work as not Aboriginal/Cree/Jewish/European/gay/bisexual/two-spirit enough, miss out on the quintessential expression of modern Indigenous identities. Scofield's juxtapositions of meanings and his endless play on words typify what it is to exist in the colonized Americas. Such colonial space houses intense mourning for the past as well as celebration for the legacy of ancestors and their descendants.

Even the most heart-wrenching lamentation within Scofield's writing highlights an inherent cyclicity to all experience that necessitates joy and release; for instance, ejaculation is at once violent and cleansing. Didactic methods of analysis are utterly pointless and boring when reading these contemporary expressions of culture and erotica. When reading Scofield, he demands that you let go of preconception and accept your body's own erotic sovereignty.

*"Perhaps even one day, perhaps soon, we will come to respect and embrace each other's differences and find the strength humanity needs in order to carry on"*

*(Thunder Through My Veins 176).*

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## NOTES

Though use of the word "two-spirit" is a modern construction, the existence of two-spirit, or alternative gender, people is a historical reality. As Walter Williams argues, "We cannot assume that berdaches were completely absent from any Native American culture, and we need to question statements that suggest its nonexistence" (4). Today, the term berdache is not used due to its highly offensive connotations. Problems arising from inadequate terminology point to the need for further research about same-sex relationships within Indigenous societies. For example, Sabine Lang points out that "anthropologists took up the topic of 'berdache' gingerly and treated it as briefly as possible. This is especially true of the *Anthropological Records* publication series" (21). However, Lang goes on to point out that there are some relevant sources of information that document gender variation:

There exist numerous references to gender role change in the ethnographic and historical sources. However, in terms of providing detailed information, and especially details concerning the cultural contexts of the 'berdache' institution, the sources are very inconsistent and are often limited to 'stock' aspects. Exemplary exceptions are Parsons' (1916) investigation of the Zuni Ihamana; Grinnell's (1962) study of the Cheyenne heemaneh'; D.G. Mandelbaum's (1940) work on the Plains Cree; Landes' work on the Santee Dakota (1968) and the Prairie Potawatomi (1970); Denig's (1961) report on the Crow bate; Williams' (1986) interviews with Oglala Lakota winkte; Stevenson (1904); Schaeffer (1965); Devereux (1937); Hill (1935), and Osgood (1958) (23).

Despite the variance in terminology when discussing two-spirit identities (one example is Scofield's use of the Cree "Åyahkwêw"), two-spirit people have always existed within Indigenous communities.

"Beth Brant explains the prevalence of Christianity within the colonization process in her essay "Physical Prayers: Spirituality and Sexuality":

The church and the state have long worked as consorts in the colonization of Aboriginal peoples. With the guns came the Bible. With the Bible came the whiskey. With the whiskey came addiction and government over our affairs. With the government came the reserves, and loathing of all that was natural. With loathing came the unnatural; the internalization of all they told us about ourselves. And the beliefs hold fast in some. There are Christian Indians, and there are homophobic Indians (13).

Lester Brown also explores the dominant role of Christianity amidst the European peoples settling in North America:

Many of the newcomers to this hemisphere were from religious groups (Weeks, 1988). These clerics, of various kinds, and their strict followers very charitably proceeded to try to salvage the souls of American Indians. Although a number of behaviors bothered them, American Indian sexual practices proved to be most disturbing to their sensibilities (Roscoe 1992). (It is important to remember how "puritanical" in nature were the Europeans of that time. Their reactions are understandable given their context, even though the aims, means and results of their actions are questionable in hindsight)" (7).