

PIMITAMON: CONCEPTUALIZING A NEW CANADIAN NORTH THROUGH THE GRAPHIC NARRATIVES OF JEFF LEMIRE

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Abstract

In *Essex County*, in *Secret Path* (his collaboration with Gord Downie), in *Roughneck*, and in his creation of the indigenous Canadian superhero Equinox for *Justice League United: Canada*, Jeff Lemire highlights a vision of the Canadian ‘north’ as transformative space. In Lemire’s hands, ‘the north’ is where Chanie Wenjack’s historical reality (*Secret Path*), Derek and Beth Ouelette’s personal demons (*Roughneck*), and Miyyahbin Marten’s life as an ordinary indigenous teen in Moose Factory, Ontario (*Justice League United Volume 1: Justice League Canada*) all undergo a transformation which speaks to shifting perceptions of identity, responsibility, and belonging in Canada. The north becomes a site where Lemire (and Lemire’s readers) directly confront how even a deliberate act of intended reconciliation between settler-colonial and indigenous peoples can effectively colonize the space in which it occurs. All three works, in different ways, deploy rhetorical strategies to minimize the ‘collateral damage’ that is probably unavoidable, and even perhaps necessary, in the articulation of the kind of anticolonial dialogue toward which Lemire’s work is oriented.

Keywords: *Jeff Lemire; Canada; Rhetoric; Crossroads; Indigenous studies; Settler-colonial studies*

Daniel Chartier tells us that ‘The imaginary of North [...] refers to a series of figures, colours, elements and characteristics conveyed by narratives, novels, poems, films, paintings and advertising which [...] have forged a rich complex network of symbolic meanings’ (2007, 35). We pick up his list of genres and media and add one more in this essay: the comic book. Nicole Pissowotzki writes that Canadian accounts typically treat the north as ‘an imaginary zone: a frontier, a wilderness, and empty “space” which, seen from southern Canada, is white, blank’ (2009, 81), defined by what Urban Wråkberg called ‘the sublime experience of nature’ (2007, 196). As historian Elena Baldassarri (2017) puts it, ‘In Western culture the North is not just a matter of geography but a place where humans are forged and strengthened’ – in the popular imagination, in the contest between human and nature. Graphic novelist Jeff Lemire’s vision of the Canadian north touches these features of the broader genre, but creates something new. Lemire reconfigures the north as a different site of tragedy, struggle, and of fantasy.

Jeff Lemire: Comics, Canadian literature, and reconciliation through the arts

Jeff Lemire is one of Canada's most-celebrated artists working in the medium of comics and graphic novels. As both writer and as illustrator, his oeuvre crosses a wide range of genre boundaries, from mainstream superhero comics to science fiction and horror to a magic realism proceeding from a closely observed sense of daily life. In collaboration with a number of international illustrators, he has written for established DC and Marvel series including Green Arrow, Justice League, Hawkeye, and X-Men, and has pursued multiple creator-owned series across genres, including the dystopian science-fiction series *Sweet Tooth* (2009-2012), 'revisionist' superhero comics such as *Descender* (2015-2018) and *Black Hammer* (2016-2017), the magic-realist series *Royal City* (2017-2018), and, most recently, the *Gideon Falls* horror series (2018-), to name but a few.

Lemire's emergent status as a major figure in Canadian literature has come through his graphic novels, most notably in works such as *Essex County* (2009), *The Nobody* (2009), and *The Underwater Welder* (2012). In *Essex County* and *The Underwater Welder* in particular, Lemire's subtle, magic-realism-inflected exploration of rural and working-class life in Canada has been compared to the fiction of Nobel-prize winner Alice Munro (MacDonald 2017), with whom he shares roots in south-western Ontario. *Essex County* was the first graphic novel to make the shortlist in the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's battle-of-the-books Canada Reads competition in 2011, and although it didn't win (some panellists being uncomfortable that it had 'too few words' in it (Reid 2016), it was named one the '40 Essential Canadian Books of the Decade' and, notably, won the Canada Reads People's Choice award for 2011 (Reid 2016).

The publication of *Justice League United Volume 1: Justice League Canada* in 2015, *Secret Path* in 2016, and *Roughneck* in 2017 marked a significant new alignment of factors in the focus of Lemire's work. Occurring in the wake of Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's release of its final *Report* with its 94 Calls to Action 'to redress the legacy of the residential schools [for indigenous children] and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation' (TRC Vol 6, 223), Lemire's attention to indigenous identity in the realm of Canadian popular culture was timely. *Secret Path* was embraced as a work which 'could be the tipping point for the changing of the conversation about Canada's residential school history' and which, as Ry Moran, Director of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation put it, brought 'a lot more people to this conversation now [...] we had a lot of people show up at the TRC events. But we never somehow really got mainstream Canada showing up somehow' (CBC 2016). While Gord Downie was formally recognized for his contributions to the Reconciliation process at an Assembly of First Nations ceremony in December 2016, Lemire has taken a low-key approach to the role his work might play in that process; in a 2014 interview, prior to the release of *JLU*, indigenous scholar Waaseyaa'sin Christine Sy asked if the storyline would reflect 'the realities of indigenous peoples', to which Lemire replied that, while his *JLU* 'would be something hopefully young people would enjoy and can hopefully educate them a little bit about Cree culture', he was conscious that

I'm not Aboriginal or from the area and as good as my intentions are, I can never create an authentic story. My hope, my real hope, is that maybe one of these kids I talk to or give copies to or talk about comics with, in ten or fifteen years from now, will end up making their own comics and telling their own stories. That will be the real victory of the project. (Sy 2014)

As we demonstrate later in this paper, Lemire's attitude towards the play of identities and narratives across cultural boundaries in the comics genre aligns with the respect for 'opacity' which Édouard Glissant in *Poetics of Relation* (1997) saw as foundational to a healthy diversity in cultural discourse.

Lemire's north is not northern Canada as the people of Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, or Yukon would define it. Nor is it 'cottage country' as people in Southern Ontario's Golden Horseshoe mean when they speak of 'going up North' (cf. Grace 2002, 264–265; Kulchyski 2004, n.p). Lemire himself is from Canada's southernmost region, the region of south-western Ontario that has manifested itself in Canadian literature in Robertson Davies's Deptford trilogy and throughout Alice Munro's fiction (an acknowledged influence on Lemire discussed in MacDonald 2017). Katie Mullins has noted connections between Lemire's aesthetic and the subgenre of Canadian literature known as Southern Ontario Gothic, suggesting a 'southern-ness' as context for thinking about the north. It is tempting to cast Lemire's north simply as a foil to the deeply rooted Euro-Canadian culture of his home region, the cultural psyche of which he has explored in probing detail in *Essex County* (2008-2009) in particular.

We start our essay with *Essex County* but resist those temptations and go further, to find in Lemire's work a tragic history, a contemporary struggle, and a future fantasy for the Canadian north as the crossroads where indigenous and settler-colonial cultures meet.

The transformative space of the Canadian north: 'The Essex County Boxing Club'

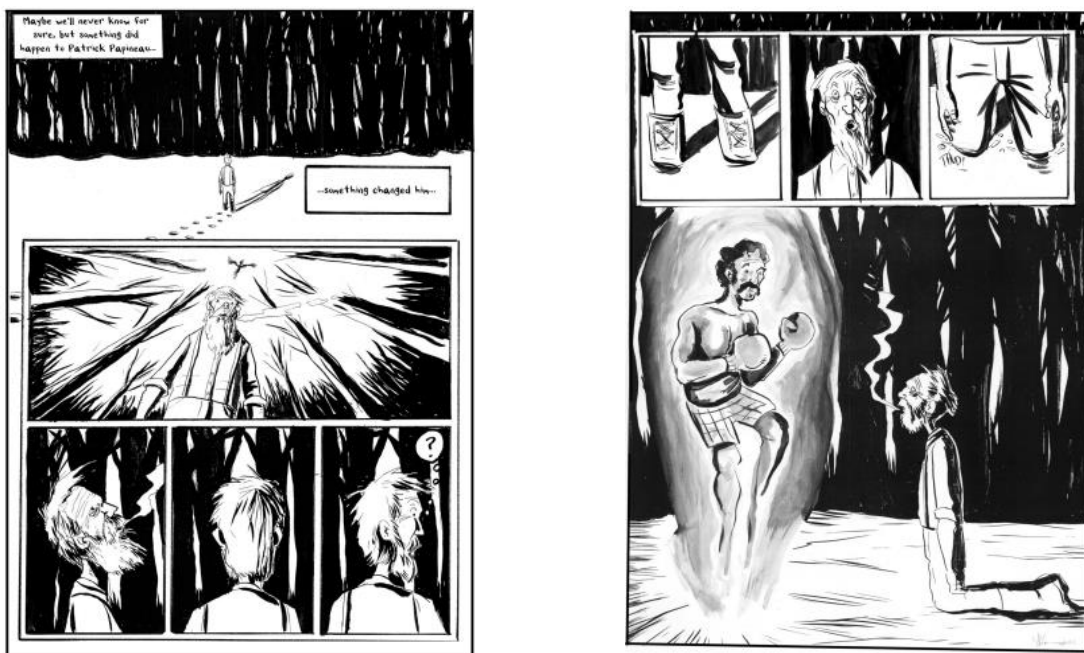
Essex County is the most popular of the texts in which Lemire begins his exploration of a new Canadian north. That work's multigenerational saga of rural life is a powerful articulation of the mythopoeic impulse in Canadian literature as people raised and educated in Canada in the 1970s and 1980s would have experienced it. Lemire's characters (who are, like him, English speakers with French names) live out their bittersweet, and sometimes violent, experience of settler communities trying to put down roots in the spaces to which history has brought them. Native but not indigenous, French Canadian but not Francophone, English speaking but not British, North American but not American, Lemire's rural Canadians inhabit a liminal space. Where the old, often colonial narratives of the Canadian north emphasized 'the end of the world, devoid of reference points, enveloped in mist and fog' (Chartier 2007, 47), the residents of Essex County exist in a north of cultural mist and fog, devoid of reference points for the construction of Canadian identity.

Lemire's initial account of his new Canadian north in *Essex County* has resonated deeply; the 2011 collected edition won the Alex Award for young adult literature and two awards in the comics industry (the Doug Wright Award, and the Joe Shuster

Award). The book's selection as one of *Canada Reads* The Essential Canadian Novels of the Decade in 2011 demonstrates the depth of its resonance.

'The Essex County Boxing Club', one of the short graphic narratives included in the collected edition of *Essex County*, cracks open the north as a transformative space. After the accidental death of Ted Diemer, his friend and cofounder of the eponymous club, a traumatized Patrick Papineau undergoes a transformation:

No one really knows what happened to Punchin' Patty for the next five years. The common belief is that he moved up north away from everything and everyone. Maybe we'll never know for sure, but something did happen to Patrick Papineau ... something changed him. (Lemire 2011, 468–469)



We are shown a bearded, haggard-looking Patrick stark against a backdrop of skeletal trees.¹ More significantly, as we shall see, a bird passes overhead, specifically the crow who recurs as a visual motif throughout the different narratives of *Essex County*.² The next panel shows the spirit of a younger Ted Diemer appearing before Patrick who drops to his knees in the snow. On the next page, we learn that 'In the fall of 1995, Papineau rolled back into town, with a new wife and seemingly a new lease on life' (Lemire 2011, 471), from whence he goes on to rejuvenate the Essex County Boxing Club, which found 'its niche, not as a big time glitzy show, but as what it was always

¹ The visual language of *Essex County* foreshadows *Secret Path* and *Roughneck*, including the crow and the trees as visual motifs. Note that in this article, the authors use images in accordance with fair use principles for criticism of copyright law.

² The crow becomes a visual motif of Lemire's work, appearing in *Secret Path*, *Roughneck* and corporate works like his three-volume set of stories about *Moon Knight* published by Marvel Comics.

meant to be, a local treasure' (ibid.). Patrick Papineau goes north and undergoes a transformation.

There is little that is revolutionary in this short story; it fits within the genre Urban Wråkberg (2007) identifies as the trip north for a sublime experience that transforms the self. And yet this small episode points to concerns and tropes which Lemire develops as he recrafts a vision of a new Canadian north.

Jeff Lemire recrafts a north for a postcolonial Canada

In this essay for this special issue of *Nordlit*, we trace a line through Lemire's narratives which return to the landscapes and social situations seen as integral to Canadian identity. In returning, Lemire offers an alternative to traditional narratives that construct northern identity in Romantic nationalist and colonial terms.

Lemire's work speaks to the moment where a fairly traditional Canadian mainstream settler culture is brought into a confrontation between two powerful visions of history, one being a *heroic narrative* which bestows identity through continuity with the acts of 'pioneer' ancestors who 'claimed' the land and built a country on it, and the other a *tragic narrative* which sees the heroic narrative in light of the space and people it has damaged and displaced. Margaret Atwood's poem, 'Backdrop Addresses Cowboy', encapsulates the tension between these two narratives: 'I am the space you desecrate / as you pass through' (Atwood 1976, 71). Lemire's comics attempt to manifest and negotiate that tension as he rewrites the experience of the north for contemporary Canadian life.³

In *Essex County*, in *Secret Path*, in his graphic novel *Roughneck*, and in his creation of the indigenous Canadian superhero Equinox for *Justice League United Volume 1: Justice League Canada (JLU)*, Lemire highlights a vision of the Canadian north as transformative space. In Lemire's hands, 'the north' is where Chanie Wenjack's historical reality (*Secret Path*), Derek and Beth Ouelette's personal demons (*Roughneck*), and Miiyahbin Marten's life as an ordinary indigenous teen in Moose Factory, Ontario (*Justice League United: Canada*) all undergo a transformation which speaks to shifting perceptions of identity, responsibility, and belonging in Canada. The north becomes a site where Lemire has to directly confront how even a deliberate act of intended reconciliation can effectively colonize the space in which it occurs. All three works, in different ways, deploy rhetorical strategies to minimize the 'collateral damage' that is probably unavoidable, and even perhaps necessary, in the articulation of the kind of anticolonial dialogue toward which Lemire's work is oriented.

To make our point, we make four moves. First, we identify a conceptual north across several of Lemire's works. We use the imaginary place name 'Pimitamon' from Lemire's *Roughneck* as a shorthand for Lemire's new Canadian north – where Pimitamon is the Anglicization of a Cree word for 'crossroads.' We propose crossroads as a governing metaphor for understanding how Lemire's work constructs the north.

³ Readers of *Nordlit* will recall the attention given to Sweden and Norway (Hazell 2004; Halvorsen 2004) as they endured sociocultural processes like the Canadian attempts at Truth and Reconciliation.

Second, we see the crossroads at work in Lemire's historical writing: in *Secret Path*, the Canadian readers of settler-colonial origins are placed at a crossroads in responding to the trauma of the residential schools policy. In *Roughneck*, the same readers are at the crossroads with First Nations people today. And in *JLU*, the readers are placed at the crossroads of a colonial fantasy of superheroes and indigenous traditions.

Across these three genres, the north is transformed from a barren land of cold and snow. The north becomes a contact zone, a place where Canadians move past what Jack Granatstein (2008) calls the 'Canadian multicultural fantasy' toward an authentic engagement with each other and with our shared traumatic history.

Pimitamon: The imaginary north, a crossroads in the real Canada

Prior discussions of the imaginary Canadian north have focused on frozen wastelands. At the same time, discussions of the literal Canadian north have centred on Quebec and Montreal as the region demonstrating both 'winterity' and 'nordicity' (Hamelin 1975).



Lemire's new Canadian north, expressed in the fictional town of Pimitamon, is within the reach, the experience, of every Canadian. In this section of our essay, we will outline Lemire's strategy for embedding the fictional town of Pimitamon amid the geographic realities of Ontario. Then, we will look at the ways Lemire embeds Pimitamon in the linguistic and cultural history of the region as a contact zone between settler-colonial and indigenous peoples. The end result is the creation of a new space, a new north, as a crossroads that we will trace across Lemire's works.

First, the geography of Lemire's writings embeds the imaginary in the real. Essex County can be found on a map and its grid of named townships appears in Lemire's text (2011, 121). The historical Chanie Wenjack, the central character in *Secret Path*, escaped from Cecilia Jeffery Residential School in Kenora in north-western Ontario, heading east along the CNR (Canadian National Railway) tracks, hoping to make his way northeast to his home of Ogoki Post. The distance between Kenora and Ogoki forms the western border of these narratives. Pimitamon itself, as indicated in the highway signs that appear in the narrative, is at least 250 km south of Fort Albany on James Bay, and within driving distance of Timmins, ON, as indicated by the arrival of a minor-league hockey team from that city. The line from Fort Albany to Timmins, passing through Moose Factory, where Miiyahbin 'Mii' Marten (of *JLU*) lives, forms the eastern boundary of Lemire's north. Timmins is the southernmost northern community to which the texts refer, with Toronto appearing to be the next logical stop for the characters who leave home, although Derek Ouelette's hockey career takes him as far as New York.

The ambiguity of Pimitamon's relative location, along with the relatively undefined southern boundary of the fictional territory, allows readers to draw the town into their

own particular north, and their own experience of north. Lemire's visual depiction of the town will resonate with anyone familiar with the small communities found along any of Ontario's highways running north-south or east-west, north of Lakes Superior and Huron.

Lemire's north, then, is not the north of Inuit musician and novelist Tanya Tagaq's *Split Tooth* (2018) or Tlicho novelist Richard Van Camp's *The Lesser Blessed* (1996). By virtue of its simultaneous ambiguity and proximity to the most populous regions of Canada, it is accessible to Canadians outside the zones of 'winterity' and 'nordicity' that typify scholarly considerations of the north. By definition, Lemire's north is a place that southern Canadian readers can seek out and define for themselves.

Second, Lemire embeds Pimitamon in the complex linguistic and cultural history of the region. The territory in which Lemire's fictional Northern Ontario community is located is home to several groups of Algonkian-speaking First Nations people: their languages are Anishnaabemowin (Ojibway), Oji-Cree (sometimes called Severn River Ojibway), Swampy Cree, and Moose Cree. The indigenous place name for a fictional Ontario town is metonymic for all the North American place names whose meaning is lost on the settler population, an untold story.

Pimitamon does have a meaning, however, which is relevant to the story that Lemire is telling. In the Plains Cree language, *pimitamon* means 'crossroads' (cf. Wolvengrey 2001, 183). While Plains, Moose, and Swampy Cree are all dialects of the same language, they are not identical, and the use of a Plains Cree term where no Moose or Swampy Cree equivalent can be attested is problematic. This incongruity of dialect and territory is indexical to all the ways in which the diversity of indigenous languages and cultures remains a closed book to non-indigenous North Americans. Settlers live at a crossroads whose history they do not understand.

While a search through a variety of print and online dictionaries of Moose Cree and Swampy Cree will not turn up that precise term, it can be reconstructed in Moose Cree. The *Moose Cree Talking Dictionary* (http://www.talkingdictionary.org/moose_cree), published online by the Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages, offers the particle *pimic*, meaning 'crosswise', and the construction *itamon*, meaning 'it (path, road) runs thither'. One can possibly take Pimitamon as an Anglicization of *pimicitamon*, the sounds subjugated to English phonology as in the case of so many indigenous place names.

Interestingly, the *Moose Cree Talking Dictionary* also lists, as its primary meaning for *itamon*, 'it is fixed, installed, or stuck thus', a term which also exists in Plains Cree meaning 'it hangs thus' (Wolvengrey 2001, 41). The tension between the image of one path or road running across another, and the idea of something being fixed, stuck, or hanging, crystallizes the experience of people in Lemire's north, whether settler or indigenous.

Writing about northern spaces, Sylvia Bowerbank tells us that 'we need to develop a multi-layered sense of place as co-created by generations of diverse people that have inhabited, and still inhabit' a place (1998, 76). In giving us Pimitamon, Lemire gives us a place of multiple layers, multiple histories, that as Bowerbank says are central to our understanding of the north. Though Pimitamon is named only in *Roughneck*, we believe

that the north Lemire creates across his works is of a piece, an intellectual whole: in *Roughneck*, *Secret Path*, *Justice League United*, and more, Lemire's north is a crossroads of multiple histories. We will now trace the spirit of Pimitamon across these three works.

***Secret Path*: The trauma of the residential schools that runs through Pimitamon**

Taken as a concept, Pimitamon, embracing the whole semantic range of the term and its components, is a key, a portal, a point of entry into Lemire's north. The term is a touchstone for the Canadian consciousness that first appears in *Essex County*, and which Lemire and Gord Downie actively pursue as a rhetorical strategy in *Secret Path*. On the back cover of *Secret Path*, Downie categorically states that Canada is 'not the country that we think we are' and that Canadians will only be able to 'truly call ourselves "Canada"' when they confront the legacy of colonialism and engage in good faith with the reconciliation process.

Gord Downie began *Secret Path* as ten poems/songs, having been introduced to Chanie Wenjack's story through Ian Adams's 1967 account in the Canadian magazine *Maclean's*. In winter 2014, Jeff Lemire illustrated Chanie's story as told in Downie's poems.⁴

Adams tells us that 'Charlie Wenjack was an Ojibway Indian attending Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School in Kenora, Ont' (1967, n.p.). From the first, we see the colonial conditions under which that story was written visible in the name reported: Chanie's teachers called him 'Charlie,' an Anglicization of his name which was preserved in this account of his death. As Downie described it, 'Chanie was a young boy who died on October 22, 1966 walking the railroad tracks, trying to escape from the Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School to walk home' (Downie, 'Statement' 2016, n.p.).

⁴ Gord Downie, lead singer and songwriter for the popular Canadian band The Tragically Hip, wrote the texts as lyrics for the songs which featured on the album and in the film versions of *Secret Path*.



Children often fled the schools: ‘The day that Wenjack and his friends left, nine other children also escaped from Cecilia Jeffrey’ (Carley 2016). But Wenjack was not only going toward home; he was fleeing from abuse: ‘Wenjack’s sister, Pearl (Wenjack) Achneepineskum believes that he may have run away because he was sexually assaulted. Many students were sexually and physically abused at residential schools’ (Carley 2016). Chanie was the only one to die that day; across the history of the residential school system, he was one of thousands to die. Of the 150,000 aboriginal children in the residential schools, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) has documented the deaths of over 6,000 students in its *Final Report* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2016).

The facts of Wenjack’s story are not unique, but the story has become uniquely powerful. Adams said that ‘[i]t is unlikely that Charlie ever understood why he had to go to school and why it had to be such a long way from home. It is even doubtful if his father really understood either’ (1967, n.p.). The TRC noted that an indigenous child in the residential school system was more likely to die than a Canadian soldier in World War II. But a soldier understands why he is dying. Wenjack died only because he wanted to go home.

Wenjack lived his short life at the crossroads between Canadians of settler-colonial origins and Canada’s indigenous peoples, as Lemire and Downie portray it in *Secret Path*. Lemire’s works are filled with image after image of roads, hydro lines, and furrowed fields running off to a vanishing point. In *Secret Path*, the railway tracks along which Chanie walks away from the residential school, towards home, are both tied down and fixed, and yet also emblematic of movement. The image of parallel lines,

running infinitely yet never meeting, similarly speak to the isolation of individuals, communities, and cultures in Lemire's worldview.

The railway in *Secret Path* is the path of progress described by popular Canadian folksinger Gordon Lightfoot in his centennial anthem 'Canadian Railroad Trilogy' as an 'iron road running from the sea to the sea' to facilitate the efforts of those who 'built the



mines, the mills, and the factories / For the good of us all' (Lightfoot 1967); however, the railway is also the sheer distance that lies between Chanie and his home, and between an indigenous past and a colonial present.

Pimitamon, as a place of crossroads, is where Chanie Wenjack will remain fixed on that endless railway track unless the reader acknowledges the tragedy, not just of a lost

boy, but of a system that, in the name of an ideal, alienated that boy from his home and from himself. Chanie's crossroads offers contemporary Canadians of settler-colonial origins a choice between wilful ignorance, perpetuation of misunderstanding, and miscommunication, or reconciliation. Coming to terms with the story will let Chanie be something other than a ghost, and will let his story become a prime mover in the reconciliation process. Being 'haunted' by Chanie Wenjack and all the victims of the Indian Residential Schools becomes the rhetorical exigence, 'an imperfection, marked by urgency, remediable by discourse' as Lloyd Bitzer would term it (1968, 6), that *Secret Path* is intended to address.



When the raven flies away at the end of *Secret Path*, leaving Chanie's body untouched in the vastness of the northern landscape, we can read Lemire and Downie striving not to be seen to exploit or 'feed on' Chanie's tragedy. Instead, they exhort that the broad view of national identity in Canada must include Chanie's tragedy.

***Roughneck*: Finding personal identity at the crossroads of indigenous and settler-colonial Canada**

As the primary setting of *Roughneck*, the town of Pimitamon can serve as the central panel of Lemire's triptych of narratives on the north as crossroads in the Canadian imagination. Where *Secret Path* pushes contemporary Canadians into engagement with the troubled history between the Canadian government and First Nations, *Roughneck* pushes contemporary Canadians into engagement with First Nations peoples today.

The 'roughneck' of the book's title, Derek Ouelette, is a hockey player whose glory days are behind him. His career ended after a fight on the ice, and he returned to the

northern town where he grew up.⁵ Derek drinks too much and solves every problem with his fists. His estranged sister Beth flees her abusive boyfriend by returning to Pimitamon, seeking shelter with her family. She is pregnant and so seeking a new start. Derek and Beth Ouelette represent a composite portrait of individuals at a crossroads in their lives: male and female, enforcer and victim, settler and indigenous, they have both been through a pattern of escape and return, and find themselves virtually trapped in ‘the Pit’, as the locals call the town, in a kind of holding pattern where their actions, destructive and in Derek’s case often violent, only underscore their status as fixed at that crossroads. Their regime of alcohol and drug abuse points to death as one likely escape, but Beth is pregnant, and so life is also an option.



Perhaps in choosing life, the two run away, and hide, in a hunting camp in the woods – their own experience of the north which reconnects them to their Cree heritage. They spend time with Al, a Cree man from the Fort Albany reserve where Derek and Beth’s mother also came from. Lemire draws Al, bespectacled and sporting a baseball cap, in a manner reminiscent of Chanie’s father in *Secret Path*, a wiry, somewhat unkempt figure with kindly features. Al quietly supports Derek when he’s off the rails and sleeping on the floor at the rink, and when Beth relapses into drug abuse, Al takes Derek and Beth to stay at his trapline cabin. He informs Beth that her grandmother and other family members are still in Fort Albany, and, at the end, he and Beth are last seen heading north, in an image whose elegiac tone recalls the raven’s flight at the end of *Secret Path*.

In presenting Al as the Ouelette’s guide to take them out of ‘the Pit’, and past the crossroads symbolized in the town’s name where they have been psychologically and emotionally trapped, ‘stuck’, Lemire must negotiate some hazardous rhetorical territory, if he is not simply to cast the character as the Romantic stereotype of the ‘wise old Indian living on the land’, a kind of Canadian equivalent of the trope of the ‘magic negro’ as mystical spiritual guide to in American popular culture (Ikard 2017, 10–11). Al has nothing of the mystic about him; he has traditional skills, which Lemire displays when he shows Al skinning an animal caught on the trapline, and when he takes Derek hunting, the spray of blood when the bullet strikes the deer, which echoes the spray we see whenever Derek hits someone, serves to de-Romanticize these skills.

⁵ Derek Ouelette has much in common with Jimmy Lebeuf of *Essex County*. The authors are still working through whether this is a shorthand for a broader Canadian cultural commentary, or just a trope that grounds Lemire’s work in Canada, as discussed in Jacobs and Paziuk 2016

Lemire creates Al primarily as a witness; he has no authority to make anyone do anything, and he is never depicted as making anyone do anything, but merely offers options, often in hedged terms like ‘You might wanna ...’ or ‘What if you ...’ In one of the text’s lighter moments, he responds to Derek’s complaint about a lack of coffee on the trapline by saying, ‘No coffee. *Real Indians* drink tea in the bush.’ When Derek comes back with, ‘But I’m only half-Indian’, Ray responds, ‘So only have half a cup’ (2017, n.p.). Lemire does not invest Al with any further indigenous motifs in his speech or behaviour beyond a restrained manner and a quiet sense of humour. Al is neither stoic nor otherworldly, but serves as a signpost that Derek and Beth can either read or choose to ignore. Derek appears to have spent years ignoring this message, but when we see Al and Beth driving past the highway sign pointing to Fort Albany, we understand his influence although we are not shown the result for Beth.

Derek’s decision to ‘let it go’ at the end, when he lets Wade beat him until the police arrive to arrest him,



represents a choice to walk away from the crossroads as the Pit. It is unclear whether Derek survives the attack; he does not accompany Beth and Al north. In his final appearance, he walks into the forest around Al’s camp, in the company of the stray dog who, rather like the crow in *Essex County* and the raven in *Secret Path*, has been observing him from the

periphery. It has been suggested on social media (cf. ‘Roughneck by Jeff Lenore (sic) [Maybe Spoilers]’) that, in this scene, when Derek walks, his boots don’t make the scuffing sound that has been one of his characteristics throughout the book, and readers disagree about whether this change means that he is no longer a physical being, or simply that he has learned to ‘walk lightly on the earth’. While the two options represent complementary tragic and comic resolutions to Derek’s story, the latter risks introducing a level of benevolent stereotyping into the depiction of Derek embracing his indigenous side. The ambiguity about Derek’s state can be seen as a strategy to resist this reading, and it is somewhat enhanced by the final word of the text. When Al says to Beth that they are ‘almost there’, she smiles and replies ‘almost’. The word hangs in the air as Derek and the dog walk into the forest, and in the final panel Al’s truck passes the sign indicating that they are 230 km from Fort Albany. The idea of heading north, and nearing a destination while still having a distance to go, suggests a reticence on Lemire’s part to portray the conclusion of the story, to introduce any new fixity into the experience.

We learn to negotiate the crossroads of Pimitamon through the narrative of *Roughneck*. As readers, we are, perhaps, the visitors (snowmobile tourists, members of

visiting junior hockey teams) who come to gawk at Derek as a ruined NHL player, and who come away with a bloodied face for their/our pains. We are also the kindly woman in the Husky restaurant who both tries to help Beth and who is bullied into tipping off her abusive boyfriend Wade about her whereabouts, and we are the two indifferently sexist men whom Beth advises to ‘fuck off’ outside the restaurant. In *Roughneck*, the audience as rubbernecker at a train wreck is a more pointed commentary on the settler-colonial Canadian audience than we saw in *Secret Path*. Lemire implicitly reproaches the Canadian audience in particular for falling into the role of bystander while ‘the just society’ that former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau encouraged us to be back in the 20th century goes off the rails.

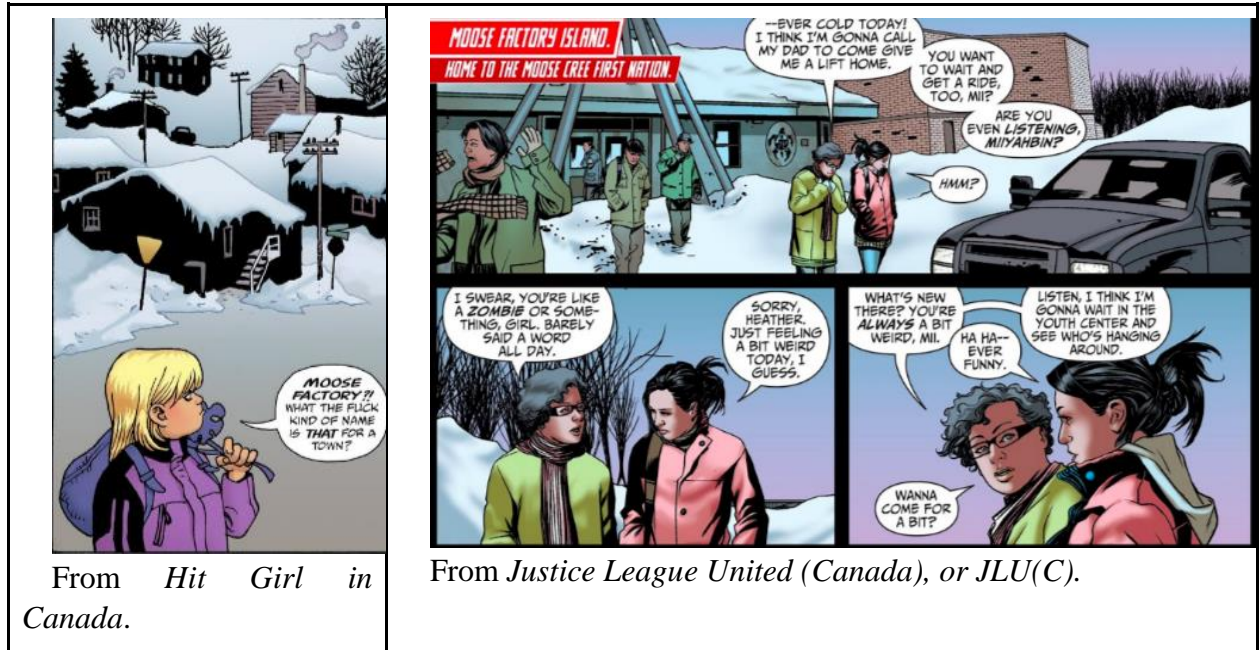
Beyond the critique, we can learn from Derek and Beth’s example. If we see hope for the characters to be reconciled with the world and with themselves, we remain conscious of the need for effort to be made, to stay on the path. Derek walking into the forest with the dog exists at a considerable remove from Chanie Wenjack running into the forest with the other boys, and Al and Beth driving along the highway offers an alternative to Chanie walking alone along the railway line. We can follow their example, and negotiate the borderlands, the contact zone, between settler-colonial Canada and First Nations Canada in new and better ways.

Justice League United Volume 1: Crossroads in Superheroic Fantasy

Our third and final example of Lemire’s north as a crossroads or contact zone moves us as far away from the trauma of *Secret Path* as possible, by entering the genre of heroic fantasy. Yet even in a world of capes and alien invasions, Lemire remains grounded in the real. In our discussion of Pimitamon as an imaginary space embedded in a real geography, we located Lemire’s new Canadian north by reference to real place names and landmarks. One of those places, Moose Factory, also called Moosonee, is located in an isolated part of Northern Ontario and appears in multiple Lemire works – including books he has written freelance for other publishers who retain the copyright ownership of the work. This area is home to the Moose Cree First Nation, and it is the area of Ontario that ‘Hit Girl’ visits in the *Hit Girl in Canada* graphic novel.⁶ It is also the place where Lemire creates a new member of the Justice League,⁷ depicted in the images below.

⁶ Hit Girl is a character in the *Kick Ass* universe of comic characters. These characters have appeared in two major motion pictures, for example, and are owned by their creator, Mark Millar.

⁷ The *Justice League* is a trademark of DC Comics; characters created within the pages of this series remain property of Warner Brothers.



Lemire's northern aesthetic appears in *JLU*, which is drawn by British artist Mike McKone. When we first meet Miiyahbin 'Mii' Marten coming out of school in Moosonee, Ontario, the street scenes are not unlike Pimitamon (a few low-slung, nondescript buildings, a church on the right-hand side of the street), and they feature a couple of indigenous motifs outside the school (a symbolic lodge shape, a turtle crest). The encircling wall of black forest and an emphasis on hydro lines and receding lines of streetlamps recall *Essex County* as well as Pimitamon. Moosonee aligns with Lemire's own northern and Canadian communities, locating Mii's daily life on a continuum shared by the characters in *Roughneck* and in *Essex County*.

Moose Factory exists in the real world; it also coexists with the terrain where superheroes find evidence of an alien incursion. These bleak northern landscapes, centring on the aliens' Zeta Bunker, which represents a 'real-world' alien invasion of the north, are in their turn consubstantial with conventional DC Comics settings like Superman's Arctic Fortress of Solitude. The text thus situates Lemire's creation of the indigenous super-heroine Equinox at the intersection of two of his own artistic worlds, the world of the superhero comic tradition and the world of his Canadian-centred exploration of family and community. The north is, for Mii Marten (who would become the superheroine Equinox) a crossroads, a border space.

In the *JLU* story, Mii discovers that a single word, shouted ('Keewatin'), will transform her into Equinox, a superheroine. Within the larger story of an interplanetary battle between the Justice League and an interstellar invasion, Mii discovers that as she has the power of 'The Seven,' the seven pillars of Cree life – love, humility, bravery, truth, respect, wisdom, and honesty – that she learned from her grandmother. Equinox can use these powers to fight the 'Whitago' (a monstrous figure related to that which settlers distorted into fictions about the 'wendigo'). The Whitago manifests the power of dominion, control, aggression, deception, greed, selfishness, and fear. As Equinox

defeats the Whitago, she realizes that the monster manifested itself by controlling her father.

Lemire's creation of Mii as the first indigenous Canadian superhero opens up a whole new front in his work's effort to engage with issues of indigenous representation in popular culture. Lemire uses the corporate-controlled, spandex-centric comics medium as a platform for his exploration of the reconciliation process in Canadian culture.

In 2017, Lemire spoke to David Friend of the *Canadian Press* about his limitations as a writer in the spaces shared with indigenous peoples. While writing *Roughneck*, he grappled with being a white storyteller portraying indigenous characters.

'In no way was I ever intending to create a piece of work that would represent a community, speak for a community or indigenous people,' he says.

'That would be very wrongheaded in my point of view, especially as a white guy. I have no business telling their stories (...)

'Obviously I'm not from there so I'll always be an outsider,' he says. 'But by doing that I learned a lot more.' (Friend 2017, n.p.)

Despite his outsider status, Lemire does create, in *JLU*, an indigenous Canadian character – following interaction with the Moose Cree First Nation. In the supplementary materials accompanying *JLU*, he expands on his experience in the Cree communities around James Bay, sharing images of superheroes created by students from the region. Lemire writes:

Early in the process of writing *JLU*, I decided to set the book, and its eclectic cast, in an isolated part of Northern Ontario called Moosonee/Moose Factory. This area is home to the Moose Cree First Nation, and I wanted to create a new character that would represent all the grace, humour, resilience and courage of the Cree people I've had the pleasure of coming to know.

I've made two trips to the area so far and in addition to marathon snowmobile trips, helicopter rides, and my first taste of Moose stew (don't tell Animal Man!), I've spent time in a number of schools, talking to kids about comics and sharing my story with them. And in turn the kids shared some of their stories, their art and their amazing stories with me... (Lemire and McKone 2017)

This passage discloses Lemire's footing in this situation; we know where he has been, how often, and what he has done while visiting the north. He emphasizes his status as a southern visitor.⁸ Lemire presents his experience among the Moose Cree as personally transformative.

⁸ Lemire's establishment of ethos is informed by two significant contextual factors: Lemire, as an individual and as a Canadian writer addressing indigenous realities, would be aware of both. On one hand, Lemire does *not* lay claim to Gord Downie's activist legacy, positioning his work somewhat differently from how it appeared in *Secret Path*. On the other hand, he also takes a clear stance that distinguishes his ethos from that of controversial Canadian novelist Joseph Boyden, who, around the same time, was fighting charges in the Canadian cultural community of having passed himself off

Lemire has also stated that part of his inspiration to visit northern communities, prior to creating Mii/Equinox, came from the example of the late Shannen Koostachin, a Cree teen from Attiwaspiskat on James Bay. Koostachin gained national media attention as an activist and advocate for education in her community, in the face of government inaction, prior to her untimely death at age 15 in a car accident in 2010 (CBC News 2013).⁹

His credentials thus carefully managed, and with the blessing of the community, Lemire created Mii, an act which he has consistently presented as intended to set an example for indigenous comics artists to build upon in their own way. However, the project still confronted him with a number of problems to negotiate if Mii/Equinox was not going to be stuck in her own ‘Pit’, or at her own crossroads, as a kind of token figure, burdened with stereotypes, and no way forward.

Lemire points to an awareness that his Canadian superhero, indigenous or not, risks being seen as a kind of novelty; he acknowledges the incongruity of Canadian stereotypes with the superhero context. For example, Animal Man makes fun of Canadian professor Adam Strange’s accent (“‘Aboot’ a week ago?”), and towards the end of the volume, Animal Man asks ‘But what are we? Are we the new Justice League of America?’ When Green Arrow responds, ‘We’re in Canada, dummy’, Animal Man replies, ‘Justice League Canada? Come on, man. That would be RIDICULOUS.’ This incongruity between Canadian identity and the superhero context provides an oblique opportunity to acknowledge the potential problem of a First Nations superhero and to locate it in a broader context within Canadian discourse.

Some of the large questions that hang over what Lemire can do to keep Equinox from appearing as a token, or manifestation of benevolent racism, involve how to handle the character’s cultural resonances, the character’s visual representation, and, still more importantly, how Lemire uses Cree language and metaphysics in defining the character.

At the level of cultural traditions: Mii is a hereditary superhero; she follows her father and grandmother in being one of the Midayos. As her grandmother says, in revealing their powers,

We are the Protectors of this land, Miiyahbin. **Our land.** We are the **Midayos.** We always have been ... The Seven Grandfathers have always guided us, Miiyahbin. You learned about them in school. All of our children do ... The seven pillars of Cree life: **Love, Humility, Bravery, Truth, Respect, Wisdom and Honesty.** And it’s with these seven virtues that our grandfathers empower us to protect our people ... all people.

misleadingly as an indigenous writer, when his connection to First Nations communities is actually tenuous at best (cf. Andrew-Gee 2017, n.p.). Lemire seeks a third path for his own ethos.

⁹ In an interview with Waaseyaa’sin Christine Sy, Lemire clarified that while he found Shannen Koostachin’s story inspiring, he did not in any way base Mii on the details of Shannen’s life; he states, ‘I would never presume to appropriate a story that is so real and then turn it into a cartoon, especially without her parents’, her family’s, awareness or approval’ (Sy 2014).



Her grandmother explains how the Midayos oppose the contrary forces, ‘**Dominion, Control, Aggression, Deception, Greed, Selfishness, and Fear.** These dark pillars came to be embodied by a terrible force ... the monster you have seen, **The Whitago.**’

Mii is thus established within an indigenous tradition centred on protecting the land which is identified specifically with Cree territory, but which also includes a responsibility to protect all people. As a Canadian, Lemire would be aware of the significance of listing Dominion as the first of the evil forces that the Midayos oppose, given that Canadian nationhood was initially constituted as the Dominion of Canada. All of the horrors that the world unleashed on Chanie Wenjack are symptomatic of Canada’s dominion over indigenous peoples and their territories. Equinox resists those horrors.

The Whitago (variously known in other Algonkian traditions as Wiitiko, Windigo, and Wendigo, among others) as it appears in *JLU* is a variation on a central figure in Algonkian tradition (cf. Smallman 2014). Often portrayed as a cannibal spirit, associated with famine, the Whitago’s ethical dimensions also embrace greed, antisocial behaviour, and addiction as symptoms of the condition of indigenous cultures under colonialism, and is associated with the negative influence of Euro-Canadian society in general (cf. Rasevych 2002, 3). Mii’s grandmother acknowledges a range of receptions for the tradition when she tries to put off the revelation by telling Mii ‘You know that’s just a story’, and her friend Heather describes them as ‘our bogeymen’.

The way that the Whitago transforms in the narrative from a child's story to a cosmic threat, and the deployment of traditional Cree knowledge against it, provides an insight into Lemire's strategy to accommodate traditional belief in his story without appearing to reduce an entire worldview to a 'superpower' like X-ray vision or the ability to fly. Mii's abilities are revealed in a meta-narrative that contrasts different ways of looking at those powers, Cree, Canadian, and Superhero, so as to avoid seeing Equinox simply as a Cree Supergirl with some beadwork on her costume.

At the level of visual representations: Mii's costume, when she fully manifests as Equinox, witnesses careful management. While the costume, which closely resembles that of her grandmother when transformed, involves a form-fitting bodysuit and 'superhero' cape (which sometimes resembles dragonfly or wasp wings), Mike McKone's design holds back from the overt sexualization of the depiction of heroines like Supergirl. The cape conceals a bit more than it reveals, as does a long apron-like front panel reminiscent of a breechcloth; otherwise there is little in the design that is implicitly or uniquely Cree; on another character it would probably look more like something that Thor's Asgardian compatriots wear in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The costume differs from the appearance of the other Midayos;¹⁰ it appears as a kind of crossroads of the superhero and indigenous Canadian traditions.



At the level of language: Lemire uses language to both root Equinox within Cree traditions and place her at the centre of the crossroads with colonial culture. The 'superhero name' that Lemire chooses for his indigenous protagonist has no clear equivalent in Cree or Anishnaabe dialects. The idea of an equinox as a balance of day and night seems appropriate to the position which Miiyahbin will assume. Her given name, like Lemire's other uses of indigenous language, can only be interpreted on the basis of analogies, in this case, with the Plains Cree term miyopayiwīn, a term which suggests good luck, welfare, prosperity, and a good heart (cf. Wolvengrey 2001, 110).

It is tempting to assume that Lemire deliberately complicates the interpretation of indigenous names and words to indicate to the non-indigenous reader that cultural knowledge requires effort, and that not every concept in English or in Cree is readily translatable. The impossibility of such translation is a characteristic of the crossroads.

At the end of *JLU*, Mii is poised to bridge multiple worlds: Cree, Canadian, the world of the Justice League, and the realm of the Midayos. The injunction to 'protect our people ... all people' speaks to this bridging process, and mitigates against a depiction of the Midayos simply as an alternative Justice League. The crossroads at which Mii

¹⁰ It is worth noting that in one of Lemire's own drawings which accompanies the text, the same costume appears on a version of Mii who strongly resembles Beth Ouelette.

stands (childhood versus adulthood, the mundane world versus the ‘super’ realm, Moosonee versus larger national/Canadian, North American, and cosmic communities) involves looking for how the values she derives from her Cree background can translate into the other realms in which she participates, rather than merely being transposed into them. And we, as readers, are invited to occupy the crossroads alongside her.

Diversity and the ‘poetics of relation’ in *JLU*

Lemire’s handling of the cultural politics of introducing indigenous elements into a ‘mainstream’ superhero narrative offers an interesting case study in the late Édouard Glissant’s ‘poetics of relation’. Glissant’s understanding of *métissage* as ‘generally speaking, the meeting and synthesis of two differences’ (1997, 34), and of creolization as ‘a limitless *métissage*, its elements diffracted and its consequences unforeseeable’ (ibid.) are immediately applicable to Lemire’s project in *JLU*, where narratives of both Canadian and specifically Cree identity represent challenges to the established culture of the superhero comics genre. Mii Marten’s emergence as Equinox and the Canadian context in which it happens speak to a different kind of culture in *JLU* than one might encounter in conventional superhero comics.

Glissant insists on the recognition of what he terms *opacity* in the interaction of cultures, where the transparency of a writer’s motivation in approaching Otherness is informed by a recognition of that Otherness as resistant to the writer’s grasp, especially in the context of colonial and post-colonial discourse. When opacity is confronted directly, as part of the project of narrating Otherness, the writer may be seen to proceed with his/her perception of the interaction, while at the same time recognizing the Other’s implicit agency and capacity to resist appropriation. As Glissant puts it,

The power to experience the shock of elsewhere is what distinguishes the poet. Diversity, the quantifiable totality of every possible difference, is the motor driving universal energy, and it must be safeguarded from assimilations, from fashions passively accepted as the norm, and from standardized customs. (Glissant 1997, 29–30)

Lemire’s problematic, or rather, problematized use of Cree language and other markers of indigenous identity closely resemble Glissant’s principle of opacity and its role in the *métissage* of narratives. As we have suggested, Lemire’s deployment of Cree vocabulary can be demonstrated to point to problems and choices in translation, thus participating in an opacity which requires readers seeking to understand the cultural references to make a meaningful effort. At the same time, Lemire’s deferral of the meaning of terms such as Mii’s name and her *keewahtin* invocation beyond the reach of easy dictionary searches is at once a kind of guarantor of respect for the opacity of Cree culture and a way of putting the issue of cultural appropriation on the table in plain sight. In doing so, Lemire’s practice participates fully in the kind of conversation to which Glissant invites creators and critics alike.

It is not impossible to approach *JLU* as an American-style superhero narrative with a superficial Canadian ‘Northern Wilderness’ setting where conventional acts of cultural

appropriation of tokens of indigenous identity occur in conformity with stereotyping. The uninformed reader who knows or cares little about the cultural politics of indigenous-settler relations won't be unduly challenged by the text, and those readers for whom a non-indigenous author creating an indigenous character is a non-starter will either take or leave Lemire's overt engagement with appropriation. However, both attitudes effectively sidestep the interest of *JLU* as a cultural and rhetorical artefact, which lies in its capacity to enact key elements of Glissant's poetics.

In *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant approaches cultural development in what he calls creolized societies (especially in the Caribbean) in terms of what he calls *tout-monde*, *écho-monde*, and *chaos-monde*. His English-language translator Betsy Wing has discussed the untranslatable character of these terms (cf. Glissant xiv-xv); Ulrich Looock (2012) characterizes them as follows: as *tout-monde* (the world in its entirety), *écho-monde* (the world of things resonating with one another), and *chaos-monde* (a world that cannot be systematized); attention to these overlapping and interlocking 'worlds' is the basis of Relation as an 'open' and generative approach to cultural interaction and evolution, which he associates with a desirable state of diversity in culture. Glissant opposes these concepts to 'the whole principle of generalization' where

The self's opacity for the other is insurmountable, and, consequently, no matter how opaque the other is for oneself (no myth ever provides for the legitimacy of the other), it will always be a question of reducing this other to the transparency experienced by oneself. Either the other is assimilated, or it is annihilated. (Glissant 1997, 49)

To resist the imposition of a mythology or narrow ideology through generalization, Glissant argues for a

poetics of Relation [which] remains forever conjectural and presupposes no ideological stability [...] A poetics that is latent, open, multilingual in intention, directly in contact with everything possible. Theoretician thought, focused on the basic and fundamental, and allying these with what is true, shies away from these uncertain paths (Glissant 1997, 32).

In *JLU*, Lemire clearly shuns Glissant's 'theoretician thought', and strikes out on the 'uncertain paths' of initiating a fresh dialogue between genres and cultures. In his text, the reader simultaneously engages with the *tout-monde* of the superhero comic as a genre in popular culture, the 'resonating' *écho-monde* peculiar to *JLU* with its dissonant 'mainstream', Canadian, and indigenous elements, and the *chaos-monde* embracing a disregard for orthodoxy in terms of genre, content, and theoretical convention in confronting assumptions about identity and appropriation.

Conclusion: Keewahtin and the power of naming loss, desolation, and hurt

As we conclude this essay, we want to avoid a facile hope that we can decide to recognize Chanie, to do the work of reflection engaged by Derek and Beth, to leap into

battle alongside Equinox, and undo the legacy of colonial violence. Lemire would not let us, and a final dive into Lemire's use of language will make this clear.

In *JLU*, Lemire makes no effort to depict his indigenous protagonist, her family, and her friends as speaking Cree, beyond having Mii address her grandmother as *Gohkum*. The term *Midayos* is Anglicized in its plural form; it derives from Cree and Anishnaabe terms related to traditional religion and medicine (the Moose Cree Talking Dictionary translates *mitew* as *conjuror*), and its usage in *JLU* casts the role of the traditional shaman in a larger conflict with the seven vices.

The most significant linguistic feature in *JLU*, however, is the word which Mii and her grandmother use to transform into their Midayo personae. At a glance, the cry 'Keewahtin!' seems to evoke the Cree *kîwêtin*, which variously translates as *north wind*, *the north wind blows*, and generally as *north*. The district of Keewatin, a historic name for the northern district that ran up the western shores of northern James Bay and Hudson's Bay, once an administrative district of the Northwest Territories, locates the term in this context.

However, the unambiguous pronunciation *Keewahtin* is at odds with the Cree word. One might accuse Lemire of not doing his homework (and indeed, the Cree terms he uses do not follow any of the standard orthographies, probably for the convenience of the mainstream reader), until one investigates the meaning of *keewahtin* itself, or rather *kîwâtan*. Just as *Pimitamon* can be found in Plains Cree to mean 'crossroads', *kîwâtan* in the Plains dialect means 'it is a lonely, desolate area' (Wolvengrey 2001, 76). The term is cognate with *kîwâtis*, 'an orphan, bereaved person' (Wolvengrey 2001, 76), which occurs in Moose Cree as *kîwašišân* (Talking Dictionary). The terms derive from roots suggesting *lonely*, *forsaken*, or *abandoned* (cf. LeClaire and Cardinal 1998, 40).

Rather than channelling the 'power of the north', as we might expect a Canadian superhero to do, following Romantic nationalist conventions in Canadian culture, Mii manifests as Equinox by invoking the desolation that the Midayos are called to remedy, whether in terms of a damaged physical environment, or in terms of being orphaned, literally and/or figuratively, like Mii herself, like Beth and Derek, like Chanie. An invocation that summons a remedy by stating the trauma in need of healing is in keeping with the kind of ethos that readers might expect Lemire to uphold, given his work on *Secret Path* and in *Roughneck*. A superpower in the context of decolonization begins with being witness to the problem, and given that denial is an explicit exigence in *Secret Path* and an implicit one in *Roughneck*, to have the newly minted Equinox utter a cry of desolation to summon ancestral powers seems highly appropriate.

Birkwood tells us that the north, far from being an empty space of sublime beauty, is tainted by a legacy of colonial incursion: 'Historical events and the painful legacy of colonization in Canada do not allow (authors like Lemire) to indulge readers by giving them a happy ending' (2008, 36). Mii, Chanie Wenjack, and Derek and Beth Ouelette all must bear witness to the damage in their worlds before they can find the strength, or the help, to initiate change. As we, the readers, occupy Pimitamon (Lemire's world, the crossroads we share with Lemire's characters), we are called, first, to name and recognize the hurt, before we move toward healing.

Lemire's new Canadian north becomes an act of seeing and being, where an imagined north, rather than being an empty space on the map, becomes instead a generative space where tension, hurt, and trauma are to be embraced rather than erased, so that the healing of all the divides between indigenous and settler-colonial people can begin.

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