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Francesca Mussi, *Good Medicine Stories. Literary and Critical Explorations of Settler-Colonial Trauma, the Canadian TRC, and Indigenous Resurgence*, Liverpool, Liverpool U.P., 2024, pp. 232, ISBN 9781835536735

Francesca Mussi's *Good Medicine Stories. Literary and Critical Explorations of Settler-Colonial Trauma, the Canadian TRC, and Indigenous Resurgence* brilliantly tackles the complex matter concerning Indigenous peoples in Canada, and the possibility of reconciliation – with a poignant analysis of both Canadian institutions created for that aim (especially the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) and Indigenous authors' literary endeavours bearing witness to centuries of traumatic events endured by their own people. Mussi's argument mainly revolves around the cruciality of “good medicine stories” meant to contrast the “bad medicine stories”, that is, the narratives enforced by the colonisers. The latter tended to justify the colonisation of Indigenous peoples by depicting them as, say, savages or uneducated tribes who benefited from the overimposition of Western culture – while the aim of such propaganda often came down to annihilating the natives' identities, even to the extent of genocide. “Good medicine stories”, then, serve as acts of resistance to such an overwhelming afflatus: they are necessary for Indigenous communities to face intergenerational traumatic experiences, withstand further colonisation attempts and reclaim their own identities. In particular, Mussi casts light on the work of the Canadian TRC, alongside its relationship with Indigenous practices of storytelling, healing, and legal norms.

While the introductory chapter (pp. 1-46) offers a comprehensive survey of the history of settler-colonialist practices in Canada, with a focus on the Indian Residential School system, the second chapter, titled “Speaking a Truth, Telling a Story” (pp. 47-107), examines “the extent to which the TRC's core principles of truth-telling, healing, restorative justice, and reconciliation engage in productive dialogue with the settler-colonial context of Canada and, particularly, with Indigenous philosophies and epistemologies” (pp. 48-49), to use Mussi's own words. Thus, this chapter draws on the crucial relevance of storytelling within Indigenous communities, and on its implications with truth-telling and the possibility to heal the traumas caused by settler-colonial policies. What is particularly interesting about Mussi's work is her choice to focus mainly on Indigenous subjects' pronouncements and points of view. As a matter of fact, all the chapters delve into novels written by Indigenous authors that also elaborate on issues involving the TRC; of course, the decision to leave room for ‘authentic voices’ fittingly serves the book's aim of decolonising thought. As Mussi herself argues, “imagination provides room for more stories; imagination provides the

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authors with a pathway to voicing those stories that have been silenced by settler-colonial violence, but also those stories that could not find their voice properly in the testimonial process promoted by the Canadian TRC” (p. 59).

Questions of truth, storytelling and healing are, hence, discussed through the analysis of Ruby Slipperjack’s *These Are My Words: The Residential School Diary of Violet Pesbeens*, Richard Wagamese’s *Indian Horse*, and Carol Rose GoldenEagle’s *Bearskin Diary*. The first novel is instrumental in illustrating the traumatic experience linked to the Indian Residential Schools, to practices of cultural assimilation, and the (forced) loss of an Indigenous sense of identity, shedding light on the cruciality of writing (and, thus, of storytelling) as a means of resistance, of spiritual and cultural proximity to the community and to Indigenous land, while reclaiming subjectivity. Similarly, Wagamese’s *Indian Horse* helps explore intergenerational trauma, the harsh realities of the Indian Residential School system, and storytelling practices as a healing means for traumatised subjects, who could thus reconnect with their genealogical kinship through the land and their community. While Wagamese’s and Slipperjack’s novels deal with the school system (a burning topic at the core of the TRC’s agenda), GoldenEagle’s *Bearskin Diary* is concerned with the Sixties Scoop,¹ a similarly consequential dramatic event that has been generally overlooked (by the TRC as well). This again emphasises the importance of directly approaching Indigenous discourse and, at the same time, making up for the shortcomings of the TRC, as Mussi had already argued at the beginning of the chapter.

The third chapter, “Indigenous Justice Values: Relational Accountability, Balance, and Ceremony” (pp. 109-52) deals with the principle of restorative justice and the possibility for a restoration of balance, to be achieved through storytelling and the acknowledgment of accountability – an attitude shared by the TRC and traditional Indigenous ways. These themes are once again explored through Indigenous words via the investigations of Drew Hayden Taylor’s *Motorcycles & Sweetgrass* and Lee Maracle’s *Celia’s Song*. These novels succeed in illustrating the cruciality of Indigenous juridical concepts such as ‘relational accountability’, involving the ecosystem of both humans and so-called ‘more-than-humans’. One is thus confronted with the devastating effects of settler-colonial policy, usually resulting in an imbalance caused by the forced disconnection of Indigenous subjects from their land, traditional ways, and pristine sense of identity. Finally, these novels point out the possibilities for healing that can be achieved through a communal effort and practices allowing Indigenous subjects to reclaim their own values and knowledge systems. Once more, storytelling emerges in its fundamental role of bearing witness to traumatic events while paving the way for dynamics of harmonious reunion.

The fourth chapter, “Reframing Reconciliation: The Resurgence of Indigenous Understandings of Gender Identities, Roles, and Land Relations” (pp. 153-97), tackles

¹ Starting in the 1950s and developing well into the 1980s, the Sixties Scoop was a period in which child-welfare authorities in Canada were allowed to take Indigenous children away from their families and place them in foster (white) homes. Roughly twenty thousand young people were thus forcefully removed from their native environment and affective ties.

vexed questions concerning gender and the consequences of the imposition (and introjection) of heteronormative, patriarchal values by Western colonisers. This process, among other things, ended by forcibly reshaping traditional Indigenous conceptions of female individuality and gender-diverse persons. Indeed, as Mussi argues, “[g]ender is a tool of colonization” (p. 155). The analysis of such practices of racial oppression and gender discrimination is conducted through the reading of Joshua Whitehead’s *Jonny Appleseed*, which prompts us to see how discrimination policies are not to be ascribed solely to Western subjects. On the contrary, they have been internalised by Indigenous communities as well, leading to a status of all-encompassing oppression that hangs over gender-diverse Indigenous subjects, both in Western contexts (where they might be accepted or fetishised as ‘queers’, or be crushed due to their racial heritage), and in native ones, where heteronormative and patriarchal values have been subsumed.

However, according to Mussi’s interesting reading of *Jonny Appleseed*, there are possibilities for reclaiming an Indigenous gender-diverse identity, namely through the characters’ agency, erotic resurgence, and reciprocal relationship with the land, including the more-than-human world. Once again, storytelling appears to play a fundamental role in the Indigenous subjects’ healing process, allowing them to reconnect with their community and their land. Finally, Whitehead’s story crucially stresses how reconciliation does not merely pivot on the two axes represented by Indigenous subjects and the Western-informed society, but must also take place within the Indigenous communities disrupted by the superimposition of Western structures, as well as between Indigenous subjects, the land, and the more-than-human world.

The fourth chapter proceeds by delving into questions concerning Indigenous territories and jurisdiction over land through a reading of Waubgeshig Rice’s *Moon of the Crusted Snow*. This novel invites one to reflect upon the settler-colonial “energopolitics” (p. 187) encroaching on Indigenous communities, and the possibility to retrieve traditional ways of relating to the more-than-human world, i.e. by relying on mutual respect, reciprocity, and love. In the main, the texts analysed in this chapter do not directly tackle questions that garnered the TRC’s attention, but, as Mussi underlines, they signal precisely how crucial it is to take into consideration Indigenous literature so that fundamental aspects overlooked by the TRC might be unpacked. Differently put, telling “good medicine stories” would open the door to reconciliation both with Western society and, especially, within Indigenous communities.

The fifth, and final chapter, “Conclusion: A Message of Love and Reciprocity” (pp. 199-210), addresses questions concerning the current ecological crisis. To use Mussi’s words:

Colonial dispossessions of Indigenous homelands, together with the exploitation and extraction of natural resources, have produced environmental changes destroying ecosystems on which Indigenous peoples relied, thus affecting Indigenous relations to one another and to the land. (p. 200)

It is evident, then, how reconciliation with the land comes coupled with feelings of reconciliation within Indigenous communities and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous subjects. In addition to this, “[f]iction can help us in this journey, in that it does not allow us to close our eyes and pretend that we did not know” (p. 210).

Mussi's *Good Medicine Stories. Literary and Critical Explorations of Settler-Colonial Trauma, the Canadian TRC, and Indigenous Resurgence* convincingly expatiates on complex and intricately matters and offers numerous insights into the attempts and possibilities for reconciliation both within and outside Indigenous communities. What is particularly interesting about her analysis is the choice to explore these questions through the literary work of Indigenous authors, allowing one to unpack issues usually overlooked in other circuits (not least, the TRC). Moreover, the decision to investigate these themes through the voices of Indigenous subjects not only perfectly conveys the book's enactment of a 'decolonising gesture', but offers the reader the possibility to actively and consciously take action. Finally, although Francesca Mussi is an Italian scholar, the decolonial thinking endorsed in this book is never obfuscated by her Western background, thanks to her will to let Indigenous authors be heard and positioning herself as a 'learner'. As such she presents herself in the introduction to the book, and urges her readers to do the same.