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ENGL 377 Reading Anglo Can film

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### Identity and Nationhood

In my creative project, I am telling a story through various media: visual art, poetry, song, and music. Each piece has been carefully thought out on how they work together. They help to highlight each other's points.

The poem explains what has happened and continues to happen to Indigenous peoples of Canada and their forced citizenship into Canadian Nationhood. I say forced because, "The modern notion of citizenship is therefore based upon the idea that a community of autonomous persons has consented to be ruled," (qtd in Ahluwalia 67). I do not think that there was ever the consent to be forced into subjectivity to others. The Indigenous people in Canada were free.

The painting goes hand in hand with the poem in that one side provides a visual aide for the poem written in English. Each small picture is portrayed in a tumbling falling maple leaf, the symbol of Canada, and each piece tells a story of what I had seen growing up in my community. The top right image is of a baby that is reaching out to someone unknown, and the child is sitting at the bottom of a beer bottle. I have seen what alcoholism has done to my family. My aunt and uncle were constantly drunk in front of their children. My cousins were almost always at my gran and grandpa's house. It was known as the safe place. The bottle had destroyed their family and they passed that pain and addiction down to their children. That is what the image of the child in the bottle signifies. Their children grew up to continue the cycle of drinking.

The next tumbling leaf has a painting of a Tombstone in it that has the caption "Rest Residential School Survivor," this symbolizes the pain of the survivors and ultimately the pain that some had passed down to their children, grandchildren, or other relatives. It also represents the idea of a hollow shell that some residential school survivors resemble after going through the amount of abuse that they had gone through at the hands of those in charge of the residential schools. I wanted to put a second tombstone in the leaf that had the caption "Intergenerational Trauma," because even in my generation and the generation after me there seems to be this hollow motion of moving through life. If I am being honest there have been moments in my life where I have felt like I am just doing motions to live. I have had the thoughts of "Why are we living if all we are doing is dying," this hollow feeling I know is because of the intergenerational trauma that I experienced in my life.

The third plunging leaf tells the story of drug addiction to fill that hollow void to escape the pain of intergenerational trauma. I left the needle out of the picture because I thought that it might put the picture over the top because I wanted people to interact with the painting and not walk away from it traumatized and unable to revisit the painting or the subject completely. This image hits close to home. I lost a cousin a few years back and it was because of drugs. When he was younger, he suffered at the hands of his dad and he did not have anybody to speak to about the trauma that he went through daily. When he got older, and as soon as he could get his hands on drugs; he started doing them. I never knew the pain that he went through because I was busy going through my pain and lucky for me, I had a cycle breaker in my family: my mom. When my cousin moved to Vancouver the drugs were more accessible to him and less expensive. He did drugs one night, and he died. People walked and drove by him thinking that he was just sleeping on the streets like it was the normal thing to do for someone like him.

These three images almost depict the complete identity that Indigenous people have borne to the world. They did not know how to cope with the pain, so they buried themselves in drugs, alcohol, and the continuance of the abuse cycle as is seen in the first little bit of Barnaby's film *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*. At the beginning of the movie, Aila's parents are seen as drunk and doing drugs, (01:16-05:47). This brings me to the notion of identity. Indigenous people, after colonization, had lost their culture, some of their language, in some cases, and their spiritual practices. Which makes it hard to put forth a strong and healthy identity, "in the aftermath of a cultural genocide that left an intergenerational blood trail that spanned centuries, brutalizing every Indian it touched, leaving them to mend their remains in an ugly, unlivable family life," (qtd in Gittings 230). Anyone who had gone through the trauma that Indigenous people have suffered would also find it difficult to present a clean and sober identity.

The song in southern Tutchone explains some of the Indigenous peoples' disconnect from the land, their culture, and spiritual practices. The practices that once made them a healthy, cohesive, and whole community. In the song it says: I'm sad. They don't have respect for the animals. I'm sad they don't have respect for the land. I'm sad. They don't respect each other. I'm sad. My flatland people have lost their way. The land won't stop crying. They don't have respect for the animals. The land won't stop crying. They don't have respect for each other. The land won't stop crying. My flatland people have lost their way. From the many stories that I had been told it seemed like my people were so close to the land that they were considered a part of it. Even though "in early immigration films such as *Wonders of Canada . . . First Nations* [are] figured as non-producers," (Gittings 9). When they had that close connection to the land like the song suggests they took care of the land and everything on it. I remember as a young child when my grandmother would take me berry picking to take only what we needed, to not waste

anything, and to have respect for the animals because the ones we eat gave their life to nourish us. These were the basic teachings that were taught to almost all young northern Indigenous children.

The other side of the painting is juxtaposed as an opposite to life under Canada. It is the envisioning of a nation before colonization. It is showing that the land was not empty but full and in use and well managed. A strong bustling community where homelessness and hunger do not exist. A community long before, "the boreal forest conservation [came] to be associated with 'white' identity," (Baldwin 428). I wanted to add the ambiguity that I have gained, as a student, regarding nationhood in Canada. I admit that I was proud to call myself Canadian despite the dysfunctions, recently though the belonging to a nation pre-colonization seems more delectable.

The harp melody was included not only to set the peaceful mood of the second half of the painting but also to add that I don't just identify as First Nation, but I am Welsh, Irish, and Scottish as well; like the First Nations they held similar beliefs in animisms and held the same reverence towards the natural world Green states "The Celts were animists: they believed that all aspects of the natural world contained spirits, divine entities with which humans could establish a rapport: animals themselves thus possessed sanctity and symbolism" (196). It was because I learned about the Celtic Druids that I was able to become proud of my First Nation side, but now I question my nationhood to Canada and strongly identify as part of the Tā'än Kwäch'än nation from the Yukon and all the responsibilities that come with it and that is what I am trying to portray through this part of the project.

## Works Cited

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