"The Song I am Singing": Gregory Scofield's Interweavings of Métis, Gay and Jewish Selfhoods

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In his/her essay, "Call Me Brother: Two-Spiritness, the Erotic, and Mixedblood Identity as Sites of Sovereignty and Resistance in Gregory Scofield's Poetry," mixed blood Cherokee and Two-Spirit writer Qwo-Li Driskill proclaims that Scofield is

> a poet whose words we need. He is a writer who gives us back our tongues, who dislodges our silences and turns them into sites of resistances … Scofield writes us weapons and shields, weaves us blankets. (222)

Driskill's description of Scofield's work is certainly fitting, especially given Scofield's work as an oppositional force against the dominant society's sometimes one-dimensional view of both Métis people and of gay men. But the metaphor of weaving may be more appropriately applied to a Métis sash, taking into account Scofield's Métis ancestry. Of course, it is traditional to give blankets to someone who performs exemplary service to his or her community, and Scofield has certainly given to the Métis community with his writing. Considering his earlier desire to be Cree rather than Métis because of the negative portrayals of Métis, a sash is a more appropriate metaphor to celebrate Scofield's writing and his acceptance of his Métis heritage. However, while sashes appear tightly woven, there are gaps between threads, creating spaces for multiple ideas, and more importantly in Scofield's case, for multiple identities to shape themselves. Because he is described as a gay poet and as a Métis poet, the recent discovery of Scofield's father's Jewish ancestry adds to the seeming fragmentation of Scofield's identity. In a world filled with niches — academic and marketing — how does Scofield negotiate these complex gaps and inter-weavings between and within identities? This paper will begin

to traverse the warp and weft of Scofield's identities to discover how he entwines these disparate selfhoods in his work.

Moreover, as Scofield considers himself to be a community worker because community is "the biggest place I come from when I am writing" (Foster and Ruprai 46), we can expand beyond the idea of selfhood to encompass how Scofield reflects the communities of which he is a part through his writing. Scofield's identities range from the hard-fought security of his Métis identity to the process of coming out as a gay man, especially in the Native community where homophobia is an unfortunate reality, to his unexpected discovery of his Jewish ancestry with its attendant anxieties over being accepted by the Jewish community. However, Scofield asserts that he does not want to be seen as a gay poet, a Métis poet or a Jewish poet but rather "as myself" and also that "boxes are too convenient."[1] This is why the metaphor of weaving is apt for his work. It is impossible to limit Scofield's work to the simple descriptors "Métis," "gay," or "Jewish." As Driskill stresses, Scofield's "work cannot be seen as 'Native,' 'Queer,' 'urban,' 'Canadian' or any of the other words one might want to use to describe it within the complexities of overlapping identities" ("Call" 223). Scofield's identities overlap and are braided together; however, his backgrounds are not without their contradictions and tensions, the exploration of which will give a more complex reading of his work. Investigating how Scofield came to accept his Métis heritage will provide one of the threads through which his identities intertwine.

As mentioned previously, Scofield has grappled with his Métis heritage. However, it must be noted that his ways of dealing with his initial shame of being Métis is highly personal and is reflected in his award winning writing. Scofield learned in school that Louis Riel was crazy and a traitor to his country while Scofield envied First Nations for their colourful costumes and their supposedly stoic appearance, exemplified by a staged Edward S. Curtis photograph. Of course, as a child Scofield internalized the settler's views of "Indianness," and it would take this light-skinned, blue-eyed man many years to accept his Métis heritage. His Aunty Georgina, a Métis woman who adopted Scofield as a child in the Native way, realized soon after meeting him that he was Métis, "an *Awp-pee-tow-koosan*" (*Thunder* 42). Scofield, however, who saw himself as "a great chief like Sitting Bull and Red Cloud " (42), decided that Aunty Georgina must be wrong and that he and his Mother are "Nay-he-yow-wuk — Crees! After all, we [Scofield and Aunty Georgina] spoke Cree,

did beadwork and used Indian medicines"(65). Scofield was determined to be Cree and not Métis; as a teenager; he became a pow wow dancer and drummer.

Scofield is highly aware of the historical and familial reasons for his reticence to self-identify as Métis. He insists that the denial of Métis history in his family is political:

> It is a political story. The whole history of my family. The whole history of denial. The whole history of Métis people. That's all about politics and it's all about histories of shame. Histories of denial. Histories of poverty and coming out of a disadvantaged environment. The shame of my grandfather. The denial of my grandfather of being Native. That all comes from a political history. If people were afforded the opportunity and the human right of being allowed to be who they were, then maybe things would have been different. (Richards)

For him, as for many other Métis, the demoralization and the oppression of Métis people in the aftermath of the 1885 Resistance led to a denial of Métis ancestry. Some of those who could pass for white did so in the face of overwhelming racism; this included Scofield's grandfather. Scofield uses his gift of writing to examine Métis struggles with living between white and Native cultures.

In his early poem "Between Sides," he describes the insecurity of being neither First Nations nor white:

> my skin defies either race I am neither Scottish
> or Cree
>
> So why these disgusted stares?
> I speak the language
> Eat my bannock with lard
>
> I am not without history Halfbreed labour built
> this country defending my blood has become a
> life-long occupation
>
> White people have their own ideas
> How a real Indian should look
> In the city or on the screen
>
> I've already worked past that came back to the
> circle my way is not the Indian way or white way
>
> I move in-between

> Careful not to shame either side. (*Gathering* 81)

Scofield claims to have moved beyond worrying about what a Métis should look like as he has come back to the circle symbolizing the joining of two cultures. He weaves a distinct Métis story that occupies an inte-gral place in Canadian history. In addition, the gaps on the page of this poem are a visual representation of being in-between, as the reader literally sees the gaps in Canadian history that the Métis should occupy. But Scofield ends the poem on a note of tension. He still feels the need to be "careful not to shame either side" (81). It wasn't be until his early twenties, with a trip to Batoche, that Scofield learned to accept his Métis heritage. As he became more secure in his Métis ancestry, his poems became more grounded in Métis history and culture.

In his memoir, *Thunder Through My Veins: Memories of a Métis Childhood*, Scofield writes that he finally learned to take pride in being Métis when a First Nations Elder and friend takes him to *Back to Batoche Days,* an annual Métis gathering that features Métis arts like jigging and fiddling:

> A surprising new feeling had awoken within me. I looked around … and saw *my* people.
>
> As we left Batoche I felt my heart sink into the very landscape, my spirit joining those of our ancestors in the empty ravines and coulees. I had searched for a land of belonging and now I had found it. The importance I had once placed on being Cree — a true and pure Indian — seemed to disappear with the sinking sun. Suddenly the colour of my eyes, hair, and skin seemed to *belong* to me, perfectly matching the prairie landscape that held such a dignified history. (166)

In his introduction to *Thunder Through My Veins*, he asserts,

> I speak for no one community, although my heartland, my ancestral and spiritual homeland, is among the scrub poplar and wolf willow rustling along the banks of the South Saskatchewan River, the fiddle as it echoes through the empty coulees of Batoche — the very place where my ancestors fought to keep our nation alive. (xvi)

In his poem "1986," he tells the same story of being taken to Batoche. As his friend is a Cree woman, she uses Cree to tell him, "Greg, *pekiwe*" (*Native Canadiana* 28), meaning "Greg come home," as a way of accepting his Métis heritage. She knows that Scofield will only respond to Cree, and that if she tried to tell him in English about visiting Batoche, the young man

who wanted to be a full breed and not a halfbreed, would reject her.

By embracing his Métis heritage, Scofield is free to weave a Métis version of Canadian history and to help Métis people find their voice, as shown especially in his poem "Policy of the Dispossessed." According to Driskill, Scofield "helps mend Métis communities and continues Métis traditions of rebellion"[2] by telling his story ("Call" 232). Scofield precedes the poem with quotations from two government documents. The first is Section 31 of the 1870 Manitoba Act, written shortly after Louis Riel and his provisional government advocated the founding of Manitoba. It refers to Métis scrip in which "one million four hundred thousand acres" were to be given "to the benefit of the families of halfbreed residents … towards the extinguishments of the Indian entitlement to lands in the Province" (*Native Candiana* 53). As Scofield notes in his poem:

> In that part of the land
> *all public lands*
> were sold or snatched up by speculators
> or shifty dealers in Métis scrip.
> There are some deceptions left unmentioned.
> The children's scrip, for example, in which
> land was granted and sweet-talked
> for chocolate bars or candy. (54)

While Canadian history tries to leave unspoken the deceptions made upon Métis people, especially children, Scofield demands they be mentioned.

Scofield further accentuates the duplicity of the Canadian government showing that in 1885, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald contradicted himself by asserting that "the phrase 'the extinguishments of the Indian title' was an incorrect one, because the halfbreed did not allow themselves to be Indians. If they are Indians, they go with the tribe; if they are halfbreeds, they are white" (53). Moreover, by italicizing government policy in words like "*all public lands,*" "*Canada*," and *"our homeland*," Scofield highlights the hollowness of these words for Métis people. For him, memory and history cannot be separated: "My great-grandmother's people / refused to be pushed out- / even after the first Resistance of 1869" (53).

Scofield illustrates how the Métis were dispossessed of their land and their culture by having to meld into the white world. They "wiped away any trace of their dark language" (54). But he excavates the past to act out Métis survivance in a very physical way:

> I went back and dug in the prairie soil.
> There among the buffalo bones and memories
> an ancient language sprang from the earth
> and wet my parched tongue.
> In that part of the country
> we were always *katipâmsôchik* -
> and our displaced history
> is as solid as every railroad tie
> pounded into place, linking
> each stolen province. (55)

The Métis called themselves *katipâmsôchik*, which Scofield translates as "the people who own themselves" (55), and he reclaims this term for them. But Scofield is recclaiming *katipâmsôchik* as a term of strength as solid as the Canadian Pacific Railway that displaced the Métis. While official history may have displaced his people, he replaces official Canadian history with a Métis history that is as solid "as every railroad tie / pounded into place" (55). In addition, the stolen land retains its memories and "an ancient language" springs from the earth to "wet" his "parched tongue" (55). The land gives back to Scofield the Cree language, which he uses to subvert the dominant language and culture and which is also an integral part of his activism and of his work.

Scofield sees himself as an educator:

> When I first began writing I wrote out of a very political sense of identity. I felt in a way I wasn't only developing a career as a writer /poet, it was like I was given an opportunity to rewrite history a little bit … It was about educating. It was about being given the opportunity to educate people who maybe had been indoctrinated with the same historical b.s. that I had been raised on about Louis Riel and who the Métis people were. (Foster 45-46)

He also educates people about the realities of being a gay man and interweaves his experiences with Cree Métis traditions. Certainly being a gay Métis man further complicates Scofield's life. As Driskill notes, there

> are few out Two-Spirit male poets publishing volumes of poetry. There are few out Two-Spirit male poets being published at all. This makes Scofield's work all the more precious and necessary for a movement of decolonization and mending." ("Call" 222)

Scofield felt that "being gay had somehow destroyed my place in the Native community. I feared my writing would be seen as less credible if

I 'came out'" (*Thunder* 189). Because of homophobia within the Native community, an outfall of the residential school system and of Christianity, Scofield was petrified that the Vancouver Native community would find out he was gay. Until fairly recently, Scofield tried to keep his Métis heritage and his gay identity separate. But now he is renowned as one of Canada's first Native writers to address the erotic — especially between men — in his work and to weave it with his Métis heritage, particularly with the prairie landscape.

It is understandable that Scofield was reluctant to come out completely. As a Native youth worker in Vancouver's drug- and alcohol-riddled Downtown Eastside, he worked with youths and adults, observing "many of them were Native and had come from remote communities across Canada" (*Thunder 191*). He realized that he writes autobiographical poems in which he

> subconsciously … hoped to challenge the Native community, to bring about awareness, perhaps even an understanding of the hate and homophobia within our own circles. All too often I had heard stories of people dying of AIDS whose families and communities had disowned them, leaving them alone to die in the cities. (*Thunder* 192)

Gay Muskogee writer Craig Womack believes that Native gays and lesbians may be less visible than their white counterparts because

> the way that the queer Indian, even more than contemporary Indian culture, defies the stereotypes of the stoic warrior, the nature-loving mystic, the vanishing American … I would speculate that a queer Indian presence *fundamentally* challenges the American mythos about Indians in a manner the public will not accept. (279-80)

While Womack certainly has a valid point, Scofield focuses on the existence of homophobia *within* the Native community. Moreover, Scofield wants his work to help gay Native youth.

> We [gay men now in their thirties] didn't have the opportunities to learn about courting and about respect and all of these things that heterosexual youth had the opportunity to do. So it's my hope that youth that are struggling with that background will be able to pick out this book [*Thunder Through My Veins*] in their school library — and whether they're Native or not Native and whether they just relate to the whole sexual identity issues and looking for that, they can find something out of the book and they can say, 'I'm OK.' (Richards)

Scofield's third book of poetry, *Love Medicine and One Song / Sâkihtowin-Maskihkiy êkwa Pêyak-Nikamowin*, published in 1997, is one of the first collections of erotica written by a Native writer in Canada. That *Love Medicine and One Song* was published so recently further emphasizes the taboo nature of Native erotica, but it must be mentioned that various Native people are reclaiming their erotic selves, as exemplified by Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm's (Anishinaabe) anthology *Without Reservation: Indigenous Erotica*, which includes two poems by Scofield.

Scofield, as Drew Hayden Taylor (Anishinaabe) observes in an article on Native erotica, "has been pushing the boundaries of erotic writing for years" (39). In "Erotica, Indigenous Style," Akiwenzie-Damm rightly asserts, "Indigenous erotica is political. … for better or for worse, because of the societies surrounding us, it is, like everything we do, political" (143). Driskill sees the sovereign erotic as a way of describing, "tribally specific and traditional understandings of our bodies, sexualities, genders, terms employed in the formations of identities, or other non-legal contexts" ("Stolen" 62), which certainly applies to Scofield. Scofield explains that while writing *Love Medicine*, his "every dream and desire in relation to love came to life, and for the first time I connected to the unspeakable longing I carried within … my most significant experiences of love — love between men — seemed to find a natural voice" (*Thunder*195). In particular, writing these poems enabled him to "finally … break down the walls of my own internalized homophobia, set free at last the voice of my own spirit" (*Thunder* 196). Taylor echoes Womack by remarking, "nowhere was the distortion of sexual understanding better illustrated than through the homophobia that grips many of our communities today. At one time, Two-Spirited people were often given places of privilege, like Medicine people. Their contributions were honoured, not reviled" (38). Scofield now feels empowered to address his sexuality from a place of freedom and greater self-acceptance. He brings together his Métis heritage and his homosexuality by setting his erotic poetry in the prairie landscape that inspired him to embrace his Métis ancestry, a site of great healing for him.

In an early poem "*Âyahkwêw's Lodge*," Scofield translates the Cree word as "loosely translated as a person who has both male and female spirits; also known as Two-Spirited" (*Native Canadiana* 66). Anguksuar [Richard LaFortune; Yup'ik] explains that there is a difference between the terms Two-Spirit and gay. The term Two-Spirit shows that all people come from men and women; however "some individuals may manifest both

qualities more completely than others. In no way does the term determine genital activity. It does determine the qualities that define a person's role and spiritual gifts" (221). While Womack notes that Two-Spirited is a pan-tribal term because every nation has its word for gays and lesbians (301), Scofield's use of the Cree word shows how an *ayahkwêw* was an honoured medicine person for the Cree because of his/her two-spirited nature. However, it should be noted that Scofield refers to himself as a gay man and not as Two-Spirited out of respect for the sacred aspects of the traditional roles of third gender Native people. He believes that he has not been trained in these sacred aspects and therefore has no right to be called Two-Spirited, a stance that doesn't always make Scofield popular with Two-Spirited people. Still, he does explore the realities of being a gay Métis man and how to counteract the stereotypes that he encounters, particularly in his poems "Buck & Run" and "Snake Dog."

In "Buck & Run," he humorously addresses the problems of being a gay Métis man with its attendant stereotypes by posing as a Métis hunter stalking white men. Scofield savages the white lovers that he hunts: "If what they say is true / You can't keep / A colonized buck down" (*Native Canadiana* 78). The proud Métis hunter boasts in an aside, "(though I've never had problems / keeping them up)" (78). He deflates the egos of "conceited bucks" by putting the

> Indigenous moves on them
> I always keep to the lingo
> They understand
> Hey pretty buck,
> Wanna come to my tee-pee
> And lie on some soft fur?
> (you'd be surprised
> how many develop a fur allergy
> after it's over). (78)

But in the last stanza he confesses,

> When it comes to delicacies
> I prefer
> The real bannock & jam type.
> Okay with me
> If they leave a few crumbs,
> I won't buck & run. (80)

Instead of feeling the need to eat bannock First Nations style with lard,

as in "Between Sides," Scofield wants a lover who eats his bannock Métis style with jam. He addresses both sides of his Métis heritage — Native and white — in "Buck & Run" and its following poem "Snake Dog."

There are differences in the poems Scofield writes for Native and for non-Native audiences. Whereas "Buck & Run" is written for a white audience, "Snake-Dog" addresses a Native audience. He uses "Red English" to poke fun at an overeager lover who want "to jump in da sack, his hands / wants to rattle me around" (*Native Canadiana* 81). The persistent lover is a source of both ridicule and of desire; while Scofield may make fun of his potential lover, he still notices him, even if he is a big *skonak*, a female dog or a sexually promiscuous person (81). Scofield knows exactly what "dat one" thinks,

> I'm s'posed to crawl over
> says hey
> you gots a great *kinepik* [snake] smile
> how about slitherin' back
> to my pad. (81)

He then lists what is necessary for a successful seduction,

> I wants flute music, horses
> a darn good dose
> of dat love medicine. (81).

As in "Buck & Run," Scofield carves a space for himself as a gay Métis man who does not accept white or Native stereotypes. By using Cree terms to highlight the clumsiness of the man pursuing him, Scofield uses Cree Métis specificities to state his desire, albeit with tongue firmly in cheek. In contrast, the poems from *Love Medicine* are grounded in the prairie landscape, making these poems come from a more assured place. As Scofield accepts his homosexuality, his poems become more self-confident.

In "Offerings," he brings together the land and the body in an intoxicating weaving of gay Native erotica:

> I lie over him
> a sacred mountain
> where black bear
> paws the earth, sniffs
> for songs
>
> I move over him
> like prairie wind,

my hands
scented summer rain
the storm a distant rumbling
…
I drink from moonlit pools,
sing with frogs
so always
sweet water
runs from my mouth
and becomes poetry. (*Love Medicine* 36)

Scofield posits the body, especially the male body, as a sacred space. According to Herman Michell (Cree),

> when "Cree people share their stories about their traditions, they convey the spiritual connections they feel to the special places from which they come through their language. Their stories are a sacred expression of spirit that is physically manifested in the land." (REF.?)

But Scofield goes one step farther by linking Cree traditions with his homosexuality. The male body is fertile, a site of poetic and sexual inspiration and is also free of gender bias as this fertility feminizes the male body. Love between men is no longer a source for anxiety but a cause for celebration, a space for Scofield to celebrate his sexuality. Driskill declares,

> Scofield's poems are not for consumption by a dominant culture. They go against the grain of the concepts that colonized America. The fact that he links sex between two men to his sacred traditions as a Native person certainly rocks the boats of Native people buying into homophobia and puritanical notions. ("Call" 230)

Driskill perceptively sees how Scofield's asserts a sovereign erotic by "centring himself in Native ways of knowing" ("Call" 229). Importantly, Driskill refers to homophobia within both Native and non-Native communities. In spite of homophobia, Scofield is now freed to use his homosexuality as a positive site for writing poetry. Frog, the Cree keeper of stories, remembers Scofield's passionate encounter and makes sure that poetry will run from Scofield's mouth like "sweet water" (36).

In his poem "Prayers for Nightmares (Chasing out the Crows)," Scofield writes specifically about his current partner and links together his own childhood traumas with his difficulty in allowing his partner to help in Scofield's healing. "Prayers" is a ceremony to

name
the breaking skin, a song
for the crows
who've travelled the map
of memory, who've flapped
their wings
deep in the blood (112).

He wants to release the crows that carry his memories in order to free himself from these harmful memories. However, it is debatable whether these recollections can ever really be set free; they are "deep in the blood" and are a part of the poet. Scofield goes on to list some of the ceremonies:

vanishing-mother ceremony, yelling ceremony, falling-down-drunk ceremony, striking-the-child ceremony … the names-of-men ceremony, who held knives to my throat
and promised
love. (112)

By hyphenating the names of the ceremonies, Scofield mimics the way Native names are translated into English, placing the ceremonies firmly within a Native context and history, especially the history of colonization. As well, he highlights his own strength in acknowledging and overcoming many of the obstacles he names. While these ceremonies are certainly devastating, by naming them Scofield can control his own history, but can never fully escape his history. Nightmares and darkness are a way to communicate with his partner who has the complicated task of crawling backwards in the house of darkness to find him. The crows of memory are a fearful but necessary part of Scofield's life and of his writing. They enable him to sing to light his lover's way,

a prayer
to guide him
where I walk in my sleep.
This is a song for his eyes
to know sundown
the language of crows
I speak. (113)

and let him and his partner work on Scofield's healing together. This is a big step for the man who felt men were dangerous to love and a testimony

to the healing power of his writing. "Prayers" shows how much Scofield has changed from the sly Métis hunter of "Buck & Run." Now he describes the complexities of being in a long-term relationship.

Gregory Scofield's latest poetry collection, *Singing Home the Bones*, contains self-described conversations with the dead, with the living, and with the missing. While the book includes a Cree prayer song to reclaim the lost names of his maternal Cree ancestors who lost their Cree names when they married Hudson's Bay factors, Scofield also addresses his struggles with his Jewish ancestry in "The Unorthodox Funeral of Ron Miller." Approximately a year ago, he discovered that his father Ron Miller, who died in 1998 and abandoned Scofield when he was a baby, was Jewish. In an October 31, 2005 interview with CBC Radio's Shelagh Rogers, Scofield chronicles how he found information about his father from the Winnipeg Police Department because Miller "had been in trouble when he was younger." Scofield now has an indelible tie to Winnipeg through both his father's and mother's ancestry. In addition to being a seminal place in Métis history, Winnipeg also has a large Jewish community.

In "The Unorthodox Funeral of Ron Miller," Scofield observes the rituals of Jewish mourning, albeit in an imaginary fashion as he was not present at his father's funeral. His way of observing Jewish ritual is unconventional and personal. In the Jewish tradition, burial takes place as soon as possible, in most cases within a day after a death. After the funeral, the family enters a seven-day period of deep mourning called *Shi'va*, where the family may not indulge in self-adornment like shaving or wearing new clothes (*Encyclopaedia* 807). As Scofield mentions in his poem, mirrors are covered during *Shi'va* and mourners sit on low stools (*Judaism 101*). Scofield asks his father's forgiveness because

> it's been more than seven days
> I have seen the image of you
> my own puzzle-piece face
> unfinished in the mirror. (50-51)

Scofield entwines connects not being at his father's funeral with his inability to recognize his father's features within his own. He also mentions the Jewish rituals of washing and cleaning the body and burying it in a simple pine box showing that all are equal in death. Scofield acknowledges that he tried to ignore the reality of his father as he "closed the lid to my heart, thirty-nine years" (50). He metaphorically engages in the ritual of mourning for his father in order to "sing home his bones."

"The Unorthodox Funeral of Ron Miller" contains the Mourner's Kaddish, a prayer praising God that is to be recited for eleven months after the funeral and every *yahzreit* or anniversary of the person's death (Ehrlich 105). According to Scofield, the Kaddish is a prayer of celebration of God's plan rather than a prayer of mourning (49). Echoing his rewriting of Métis representations, Scofield changes the traditions of Jewish mourning and of the Kaddish by intermingling ritual with his personal story. Instead of having the Kaddish recited by ten men as a minyan or congregation, he asks his readers to serve as his congregation with the implicit understanding that this will include readers of different ages, genders and sexual orientations, which is highly unconventional. He observes the Jewish rituals of mourning which traditionally last a year but stretches them over thirty-nine years, the length of his own life:

> I have washed and cleaned
> your body, thirty-nine years
> I've wrapped you
> in white linen, thirty-nine years. (50)

He also quotes from the traditional mourning Kaddish in this poem, "magnified and Sanctified / be God's Great Name in the World." Similar to the Cree prayer song, Scofield reclaims his ancestors and rewrites both history and tradition. He uses a Kaddish at the end of the poem that is in the traditional Aramaic sung by the Yemeni Jew Ofra Haza but is not the actual mourning Kaddish. He notes,

> although the song is not the actual prayer of Kaddish … Ofra's beautiful voice was the inspiration for this poem; much love to her for finding me, and for touching my soul. (108).

Scofield again both honours and updates traditions to reflect the realties of his different selfhoods; he weaves together the ancient and the contemporary.

But how does he weave his newfound Judaism with his Métis heritage and with being gay? As he himself admits,

> according to Jewish law, if I was really adherent to that law, then I wouldn't consider myself a Jew,[3] however, halechically [*Sic*], you inherit your mother's nation and you inherit your father's tribe. And for me in this place in time, I'm very happy with my nationhood being Métis, and very happy with my tribe, my tribalism, being Jewish. ("Poet Reinvented")

Neither does he follow Orthodox Jewish views on homosexuality. The *Encyclopedia of Judaism* bluntly states, "Judaism condemns homosexuality as an immoral act characterized in the Torah as an abomination" (872). Of course, Judaism is not a monolithic religion and Tracey R. Rich's online resource *Judaism 101* states,

> it is homosexual acts that are forbidden, not homosexual orientation. Judaism focuses on a person's actions rather than a person's desire. A man's desire to have sex with another man is not a sin, so long as he does not act upon that desire.

Reform Judaism, a progressive denomination of Judaism, is the largest movement in North America and is "committed to the full participation of gays and lesbians in synagogue life as well as society at large. ("Reform Judaism") Given Scofield's assertion that boxes are too convenient, it is not surprising that he does no't follow the Orthodox version of Judaism. He disagrees with the idea of homosexuality as a sin or an abomination, no matter which religion makes this claim.

Accordingly, Scofield considers himself a cultural Jew who observes Jewish holidays:

> Not to say that I'm not exploring things within Judaism and incorporating them into my life — the high holidays for example — being able to incorporate these things into my life and for me that gives me a connection to other Jewish people in the world, which is very powerful for me, which is the same as far as being able to attend ceremonies like the sweat lodge and different things which connect me on a different level to my First Nations ancestry. ("Poet reinvented")

He sees the spiritual qualities of both his Jewish and Métis heritages. As he explains:

> There were very spiritual things were happening that were leading me to this discovery, not only to the discovery of my dad, the discovery of my paternal ancestry and my paternal history. For example, one afternoon, lo and behold, in our backyard, I found a dreidel, which had been made obviously by kids and this dreidel had just blown in the backyard. There are four Hebrew letters that are written on the dreidel and the translation of those letters is "A Great Miracle Has Happened Here." […]Once again, I believe the ancestors, the grandmothers and the grandfathers, the bubbies and zaydes were leading me. (Rogers)

Scofield sees the discovery of the dreidel as a sign that his father is Jewish, a sign that turns out to be true. He also has deep connections to Cree spirituality, as he recounts in *Thunder Through My Veins*. He shares a vision he had in which Grandfather Black Bear

> stood up on his hind legs, and looked deeply into my eyes, and I felt him say to my heart, *Grandson, you have nothing to fear. Your heart is good and you have much work to do* … I awoke with a sacred song in my head … I have been given Bear Medicine — healing medicine — and I honour this medicine by writing. I believe this is what Grandfather Black Bear meant when he said, *You have much work to do.* (109-10)

While Scofield's vision and work originally applied to his Cree Métis ancestry, his work now extends to sharing his experiences as a gay man and as a Jew. He is sensitive to the traditions and histories of his heritages while making them highly personal. He performs the delicate process of weaving his disparate identities together by writing to "be himself." In so doing, Scofield, in Driskill's words, "gives back our tongues" ("Call" 22) and weaves a sash of strength and beauty.

Notes

[1] From my notes at Scofield's reading at the Emanu-El Synagogue in Victoria, March 22, 2006

[2] Resistance, rather than Rebellion, is the term preferred by most Métis.

[3] According to Halakhah or Jewish law, Jewish ancestry is carried through the mother. As Scofield's father was Jewish, Scofield is not considered Jewish. However, not all Jews follow this law.

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