

# “Magic Moments”: Temporal Modelling and the Call for Responsibility in Lee Maracle’s *Daughters are Forever*

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Marilyn thought it interesting that Elsie spoke in the present whether the event she was referring to was in the past or present. Maybe it was for Elsie the difference between active and inactive.

— *Daughters are Forever* (215)

**T**HIS ESSAY’S ENGAGEMENT with Lee Maracle’s *Daughters are Forever* is motivated by my curiosity about how literary representations of historical events, particularly their configurations of time, work to compose and communicate their own distinct conceptualizations of history and temporality. The historical and temporal models offered by a text provide a conceptual map or philosophical schema that can inform a careful, deliberately empathetic engagement with the worlds and perspectives of — and beyond — the reading experience. Beliefs about time and history substantially influence cultural politics — or the ways in which we understand our relationships to others (whether these others are times, places, or people). For this reason, attending to alternate temporal and historical models offers the possibility that readers will rethink their relationships with, and responsibilities toward, events, situations, and people beyond the scope of their own direct experiences.

Unlike many novels, which present their ideas about time tentatively and implicitly, *Daughters are Forever* is direct and self-conscious about its conceptualizations of time and history. For example, much of its plot centres on the struggle of the protagonist, Marilyn, with the repeated “gapping” that sees her losing her grip on events in her present and undergoing vivid memories and journeys through moments in her past. She spends much of the book musing on the nature and function of time and experiencing the slippery borders between past and present. Events from the past sometimes “repeat” and directly affect charac-

ters living a hundred years or more after a first occurrence. Memory-based experience plays a key role in the narrative's "present," and dead ancestors appear to Marilyn to pass along words of advice or guide her through places from her past that she needs to revisit on the path to personal healing and maturity. In the world of this novel, the past is an active figure in the present, and this active presence is an explicit and central tenet. The novel lays out its historical and temporal models in plain sight, offering them for our consideration and possible edification.

Marilyn is a Salish woman whose own experience of having her child apprehended motivates her social work with other Indigenous women whose children have been or might soon be seized by the Children's Aid Society. Her reflections on her client Elsie's manner of speaking, which I have used as my epigraph, reveal her own growing awareness that, in many ways, the past can be a stronger presence and exert more influence than the actions and interactions of a person's daily life. To live in ways that "open her up to her own pathways" (*Daughters* 242), Marilyn must reckon with her individual and cultural pasts — including a cultural history of European colonialism and genocide; a childhood of abuse at the hands of her stepfather; and her struggles as an adult with an often absent, neglectful husband, with alcohol abuse, and with her own violence toward her daughters. She must put her learning and experiences to use in creating the future she desires. Hers is not a solo journey: many others — including ancestors, community, and most pressingly her daughters — are also crucial to the process. As the novel's title indicates, this is a multi-generational effort involving figures from the time before she was born and also affecting those who will follow.

This process is not an easy one for Marilyn, and she is profoundly perturbed by the interactions and events that enable her to start to heal, particularly by her visions and movements into the past, which are orchestrated and prompted by Westwind. This gapping, so named because it creates gaps in her experience of the present, takes her deeply into and across moments from her past; each moment is experienced viscerally and acutely, and particularly at first, Marilyn feels that she has "lost her capacity to differentiate between past and current time" (64). While my reading of this novel's temporal model celebrates its potential to create links between past and present, and thus to possibly spur ethical action on the part of readers, it is important to note that these slippages and gappings are not experienced with pleasure or hope

by Marilyn. Indeed, she is disoriented and troubled by them and seeks desperately to cling to the certainty and solidity that measured time can offer. As the narrator explains, “Time is a critical illusion. . . . The separation of moments in time defines sanity. Marilyn searched about for a way to locate herself somewhere in time. She needed time’s clarity and differentiation but it eluded her” (64). Early in the novel, Marilyn’s emergence from one of these breaks with linear temporality is a relief, helping to break a “bitter, destructive cycle going on inside her” (65). Witnessing Elsie’s daughter’s death play out inside a case file photo, she calls “to no one” to “spare me, I’m hallucinating” (44); she has no belief in a being upon whom to call and knows no other name for what she is experiencing.

Indeed, part of what Maracle’s text critiques is Western psychiatry’s attempts to dismiss or discount experiences that do not fall easily into conventional Western categories of real/unreal, sane/insane. As Sylvie Vranckx rightly notes, “In *Daughters*, Marilyn is too terrified to delve into the meaning of her visions, as the only instrument that ‘her Western education’ has provided her to understand her experience is the vocabulary of hallucinations and psychosis” (41). Later on, submerged in layered moments of childhood abuse and her own violence toward her daughters, she again pleads to be released, saying that she “can’t afford another breakdown” (111). It is significant that Maracle’s text does not ask readers to decide whether its protagonist’s strange experiences are manifestations of mental illness or important insights: from the outset of the novel, the omniscient narrator shows us that this is Marilyn’s reality and that there are greater forces at work in bringing her these thoughts, words, and experiences. Her personal struggles are a legitimate and important part of a bigger cultural and cosmic picture of continuous suffering, remembering, and healing. Crucially, this novel is not — or not only — a *Bildungsroman* depicting an individual’s quest or journey to maturity: for Marilyn, and I would argue for most people, healing can never be an isolated, personal process. For Indigenous people, one can argue that “healing requires personal and family cleansing of unresolved grief, loss, historical trauma, shame, and fear” (Labun and Emblen 209). This is why Marilyn’s daughters, ancestors, friends, and memories are all part of her healing process.

Perhaps the biggest strength of this text’s articulation of temporality is that it draws upon a tradition of thought that has been developed and

articulated independent of the Euro-Canadian philosophies that have shaped dominant ideas about time, history, and social responsibility. Drawing on a rich tradition of Indigenous cosmology to articulate her ways of seeing and being enables Maracle to offer sustained, nuanced historical and temporal models for consideration. Marilyn is Salish, and it seems that the creation story that opens the text, as well as the winds and other forces that work with her throughout it, find their roots in Salish tradition and myth. Maracle's longstanding commitment to cultural activism in Indigenous communities and to re-telling traditional myths (see Cooper) gives her a large range of conceptual tools with which to work.

It is stimulating and heartening to read the novel's matter-of-fact expositions on time's function as "a critical illusion" (64, 141), as well as its descriptions of the ways in which memory, figures from the past, and spiritual forces can act upon a person by grasping or releasing her thoughts (see 17, 44, 109-11). Many of the concepts laid out in the text can be heartily integrated as I seek literary criticism and pedagogical theory that ethically reconceptualize humans' relationship to the past and responsibility to the present and future. At the same time, I am keenly aware of the danger of engaging in uncritical, ignorant celebration of the text without giving Maracle's ideas the due respect of careful listening and active engagement, particularly given the "outsider" context from which I am reading.

In her work on reconstructing Indigenous women's identities, Kim Anderson describes many non-Indigenous critics' approaches to Indigenous literature as enacting "a modern-day colonial process," involving acts of cultural appropriation and of "eating the Other" (44). Even when motivations are committedly anti-oppressive, non-Indigenous critics' work is often compromised. Daniel Coleman describes the challenges of what he calls "epistemological cross-talk" as often being rooted in ignorance, some of it necessary:

For there are domains of spiritual knowledge and ceremonial practice that Indigenous peoples do not wish to expose to the inquiries of non-Indigenous academics, and this means that epistemological cross-talk of the sort I am venturing here must remain inevitably partial and limited. Nonetheless, I argue that partial and limited perspectives, even if not fully elaborated or explainable,

serve the crucial function of loosening the strangle-hold of Euro-Enlightenment's cognitive imperialism. ("Melancholia, Historical" 6)

Similarly, Anderson is careful to leave room for non-Indigenous readers' respectful engagement with Indigenous texts, but she asks readers to "resist the temptation to 'claim' the text, and that they be open to new interpretations, paradigms and meanings" (51). Having established the terms of the relationship she seeks with readers, she agrees that "from here, we can move together through this book" (51). I am struck by these approaches to reading and criticism: Coleman's frank acknowledgment of the boundaries of a critic's interpretive capacity, and Anderson's posture of mutuality and cooperation, urge us to read attentively and respond judiciously. Readers would do well to approach all texts from such a position: my reflections on *Daughters are Forever* are offered in this spirit.

### Reading *Daughters are Forever*

As I have suggested above, *Daughters Are Forever* is not, contrary to its publisher's cover copy, simply the story of "a woman's rediscovery of self." Marilyn's personal struggle and self-discovery are not isolated from the world around her: her problems are shown to have grown from her broader cultural history, and her own life overlaps a great deal with those of other Indigenous women living in her time. Further, her life is deeply interwoven with the many forms of life that make up the world around her: the winds whisper in her ear to nudge her toward certain desired actions, and the sky people drop specific memories to her in an effort to spur necessary insights. The natural world is an integral force in the novel's plot, and the plot is concerned not only with Marilyn's fate but also with that of her ancestors and contemporaries. Through connection and embeddedness in a broader living world, Marilyn eventually comes into her healing. As Jeannette Armstrong explains in her foreword to *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel*,

the telling of the Native sojourn through the quagmire of Canada's colonialist past is an extremely important document to Canadian literature. In particular the telling of our lives, the back-tracking . . . is perhaps a more important exercise than we Native people readily appreciate. . . . In the movement of the

life story of Bobbi Lee, what unfolds is the story of many natives during those times. There were real conditions that shaped people like Lee. (15)

While Armstrong is writing about an autobiographical work, her arguments about the importance of backtracking through Indigenous stories and the impossibility of disentangling a personal narrative from a cultural, communal one also apply to Maracle's fictional work. Daniel Coleman has argued that this novel is not only — or mostly — the story of an individual human's journey, but he goes in a different direction than I do here, arguing that, "although Marilyn is the human protagonist of this novel, the primary agent here is actually non-human — Westwind, whose essential principles are movement, erotic energy, and creative transformation" ("Melancholia, Historical" 23). This argument is intriguing and I do not disagree with it; however, due to this essay's concern with humans' experiences of time, I will focus mainly on Marilyn and other human characters, across generations.

It is significant that the novel opens with a creation story. We hear of Westwind's growing passion for sky woman's daughter and of their mutual play, which culminates with Westwind planting "seeds of future" in star-nation daughter's womb and in the birth of humankind and varied plant life from this union (*Daughters* 12-13). The story includes a description of traditional values and ways of living, stories of the early times and the rich, successful development of human culture, and a vivid description of the trauma and brutality of European colonization and genocide. Reaching back before there were humans on Turtle Island, this story is necessary contextualization for Marilyn's personal narrative. Her name, however, is only mentioned once in this section. While the book is "about" her, she cannot be known (or know herself) apart from the stories of those who came before her. While villages are being slaughtered, and the earth echoes the faltering voices of the women slain by the newcomers, the narrator tells us that "this song invaded Marilyn's dreams" (17).

In the temporal and spiritual world of this text, a character can hear voices that were silenced well before she was born, and historic events are narrated in the same tense as present-day dreaming. Past, present and future are intertwined in the novel's rendering of Indigenous cosmology, one in which temporal boundaries become increasingly perme-

able and unstable, offering readers the opportunity to rethink their own understandings of, and relationships to, historic and ongoing injustices.

### The Active Past, or Blood Memory

One way of understanding Marilyn's preoccupation with, or rather her occupation by, her forebears' history is through the concept of "blood memory." Anderson explains, "Many Native cultures teach that we carry the memories of our ancestors in our physical being. As such, we are immediately connected to those who have gone before us. We live with the trauma that has plagued the previous generations. We know their laughter, but also their sorrows" (24-25). In the novel's first section we learn that early Islanders maintain balance through a set of complex agreements with other beings and that this balance is maintained through stories and teachings passed along as a form of bodily memory. "Women were born awake" (*Daughters* 14) in that they came into life already carrying knowledge and memories inherited from previous generations. Their bodies housed "the memories of their star-nation mother's moment with Westwind. In their blood coursed traces of old agreements" (14). This blood memory is more than intellectual knowledge, affecting also their physical responses and actions. When faced with danger, the descendants of the sole survivor of the colonial genocide are filled with "a rigid, pain-filled stillness [that] replace[s] the body's natural desire to move" (19). Like Marilyn's early attempts to deflect memory, this defensive response also functions destructively, inhibiting responses "that might cause them to grieve, then move on to that magical creative space of change" (23).

Later in the text, Marilyn's own blood memory enables her growth, as she realizes that her attempts to explain her abuse of her daughters are insufficient. She comes to the understanding that, having acted in ways that defied traditional cultural values, she has therefore also violated her own beliefs. "Belief is old," our narrator tells us, "coded into the memory of every cell. Tribal consciousness, lineage memory, old beginnings were pushing up at the new layers inside Marilyn" (140). The idea that her tribal values are an integral part of her psyche, even when they go unrecognized, speaks to the influence of her past, whether known or unknown. The image of these old beliefs pushing up and sprouting into Marilyn's consciousness demonstrates the potential of cultural legacy to endure, even through violence and genocide, and to sustain the lives of

later generations. In this very important sense, the past has never passed but is always a part of the present emotional and cultural environment. The presence of the past has tangible, material consequences for present and future.

This passage also brilliantly demonstrates the kind of negotiations between past and present, tradition and change that Maracle so adeptly navigates. Tribal memory, says our narrator, is coded into Marilyn, and others, at the cellular level: in this statement, the relatively new language and concepts of genetics and cellular biology are put to use to explain a cultural belief that far predates contemporary science. The new is integrated with the old: culture adapts to stay alive. It is imperative, as Maracle aptly asserts, that traditional ways are not forgotten or abandoned, and she works concertedly to sustain the cultural knowledge that colonizers “expropriated and consigned to deadwood leaves in libraries” (*I am Woman* 92). At the same time, though, these beliefs and this culture cannot be expected to remain stagnant while the rest of the world changes. Paula Gunn Allen describes this important blend of tradition and adaptation:

We [most tribal Americans] define ourselves; we identify with our communities and our traditions. They are both, for the most part, at least a thousand years old. One does not discard them as readily as one might a used pair of shoes. . . . Our communities may reflect their modern existence; communities do that — adjust themselves to the situation. Were they to fail in that adjustment, no one would be left to tell the tale. (17)

Maracle herself has sharp words for those who would attempt to keep Indigenous culture frozen in time. She comments that “Humans are constantly reinventing themselves, but First Nations people have been less entitled than everyone else to reinvent ourselves. . . . We’re always being pressed to be authentic aboriginal people. But put on a bustle if you’re going to talk to me like that” (“Interview”). Maracle’s humorous tone does not dull her sharp critique of racist hypocrisy, and she goes on in a more serious vein to point out that to clutch stubbornly at tradition without leaving room for change is to defy traditional teachings. “In fact,” she explains, “in our origin story, we’re to gather new stories and create new stories. So our creation story calls on us to constantly transform. I think that’s who we are” (“Interview”).



### The Experience of Time

The sustained efforts of colonial politics and education to kill off cultural memory, traditional knowledge, and the social structures that might nurture them have ongoing implications for contemporary Indigenous people. Anderson notes, “I think many of us feel insecure because we lack the knowledge that was ripped away from our ancestors. We have internalized the belief that we are ‘less’ Native because we can’t measure up to some kind of quintessential ‘Native experience’” (26). This observation holds true for Maracle’s characters. When Marilyn asks Elsie what nation she is from, Elsie simply answers, “I’m Indian” (*Daughters* 217). When pressed, Elsie reveals that she is Ojibway, but knows nothing about “Ojibway ways, traditions, cultures, songs” (217). Marilyn recognizes that Elsie is “unidentified from within” and that this lack of identity is a main reason for the young woman’s inability to value herself, to participate fully in her own life.

Viewed in terms of temporality, this pressure on Indigenous people to live a stagnant, externally imposed identity, and the often violent, deliberate unmooring from their cultural pasts, have the same result. Both seek to prevent Indigenous people from actively experiencing and contributing to the passage of time. Both seek to unmoor them from their locations in the unfolding of history and the creation of the future. Having previously critiqued models of linear, measured time as constructs with negative, stultifying effects on people’s lived experience, my reading of *Daughters are Forever* has opened me to the idea that a personally meaningful relationship with time can be crucial to the healthy unfolding of a life. Marilyn, for example, needs a way to separate moments in order to learn from them.

The text offers another helpful example of the importance of being located in time in its description of the drifting lives of the male descendants of the victims of colonial genocide. These men have no referent by which to define their being and meaning: “They plant seeds but don’t bother to watch them grow” (*Daughters* 24) and they drift heavily and without purpose. The effect of their trauma, guilt, and shame is heightened by the loss of a location in time, and their lack of direction and sense of purpose or self is directly linked to it as well: “Their world has lost its future. Cut off from considering their past, they list in the momentary context of the present” (24). Rather than living their lives, these men are passing them: they see time as a burden to bear and as

something to endure. The imagery Maracle uses for these Indigenous men's emptied lives is stark and striking:

They mark time. Time is the enemy of the dispirited. Those who dare not make use of it mark time for death, for murder. These men wander aimlessly, killing time in small pieces. They bellow ominously from barstools, party houses and booze cans in every impoverished urban centre. They float from one woman to another, leaking manhood into wombs. (25)

It is crucial to note that, in this passage, the men's disassociation from lived time is linked to their mistreatment of women and the decline of life-giving family and community structures. When one's past and heritage are unknown, and current time is the enemy, it can be difficult not to turn on oneself and those nearby. The absence of a sense of time, and of one's location in the movement of time, can be catastrophic. The experience of time is not some abstract philosophical concern, but rather a tangible element of reality with immediate, far-reaching consequences for the individual and the human family. Vine Deloria, Jr. also ascribes great importance to the experience of time, seeing it as central to processes of self-knowing and maturation: "Part of the experience of life is the passage of time, the fact of personal growth, and the understanding of oneself produced by reflective memory processes" (*Spirit and Reason* 53). To intervene in a person's or a culture's movement in time is to arrest the journeys of development and discovery of which life should consist.

But let me not over-emphasize temporality without acknowledging the importance of the spatial. Indeed, Deloria emphasizes the centrality of place and context to Indigenous spiritualities, epistemologies, and cultural identities. While Western cultures and religions emphasize progress, linearity, and movement forward in time, Indigenous ones, he explains, tend to put great emphasis on place:

The vast majority of Indian tribal religions, therefore, have a sacred centre at a particular place, be it a river, a mountain, a plateau, valley, or other natural feature. This centre allows the people to look out along the four dimensions and locate their lands, to relate all historical events within the confines of this particular land, and to accept responsibility for it. (*God Is Red* 66)

Here, then, time and its telling are rooted in a particular place and are meaningful because they are located there. Read with this understanding, Maracle's description of life in "every impoverished urban centre" is a significant critique of the effects of geographic — and thus spiritual — displacement for Indigenous people. The problem is more than the change from traditional to contemporary ways of living — a formulation that privileges the kind of teleological linearity I have been critiquing. It has to do, as well, with place as it is connected to time and history. As the Stó:lō Nation's website explains, "We take our name Stó:lō from the word we give the river. We are river people. It is from the river and surrounding land that our cultural traditions are derived" ("Historical Background"). The Fraser valley is thus "the context that gives the Sto:lo their identity, their traditions and stories, and their history" (Labun and Emblen 208), and a relationship with their traditional lands is central to the Stó:lōs' sense of spiritual and physical well-being. Drawing on a series of interviews with members of the community, Labun and Emblen explain that "recognizable physical landmarks and sacred places are part of the Sto:lo identity. Traditions and stories, along with physical landmarks, give the Sto:lo a sense of balance and continuity" (213).

In *Daughters are Forever*, movement away from place can also rupture people's connection to their cultural history, so that urban living here is an interruption of, or an obstacle to, their experience of being located in time. Time and space are not opposed as binaries, nor are they treated as distinct quantities, but rather they exist in relationship.

At two points, the narrator, focalized in Marilyn's musings and dreamlike thought flows, describes time as "a critical illusion" that plays a crucial role in maintaining order and balance in the world. This illusion "demarcates the difference between the physical and the spiritual world, between sanity and insanity, between life and death, consciousness and coma" (141). Time is a crucial element of a person's consciousness, and "the separation of moments in time defines sanity" (64). Throughout the text, Marilyn struggles to maintain her ability to wield this illusion, to keep a grip on time: she senses that her "gapping" is a threat to her mental stability, her interpersonal interactions, and her professional standing. When Marilyn describes time as a critical illusion, she does not mean that time does not exist or that events do not unfold in relation to other events. Rather, I understand her to mean that

any given measure of time is a construct, a tool used to help humans organize their activities, memories, and understandings of the world. Interestingly, Marilyn struggles because she wants to keep moments separate and maintain an orderly sense of the sequences of events. She wants to keep her footing in what one might call “external” time, the linear chronological time of the world around her. In the midst of her spiritual journey and the temporal movements it necessitates, this is an impossible, frustrating task. If the merging of temporal planes and the inconsistencies of her experience and memory were self-evidently normal, expected elements of her daily life, she would not be experiencing any anxiety or shame about them. While temporality is experienced individually and psychologically, culturally constructed ways of ordering and regulating time play a strong role in shaping individuals’ responses to their temporal experiences. One wonders how she would have reacted to the memories, winds, and figures that enter her life if she had already been familiar with the ideas about community and temporality that animate this text.

Deloria shares Marilyn’s recognition that the quantification of time can be a productive way of creating or understanding broader meanings of one’s actions and experiences. His explanation of the principle of the “seven generations” provides an example of a positive implementation of the “critical illusion” of organized temporality. For both Deloria and Maracle, the experience of time enables change, growth, memory, reflection, and learning. This experience of time need not — and in fact, likely will not — comply with Western conventions of linear, progressive time, and will instead often play out like Marilyn’s experiences do (immersion in past events, vivid trips into imagination and memory, even visions playing out in the photographs inside a client’s file). Thus, experiences and behaviours that Western psychiatric medicine would dismiss as hallucinatory or delusional are shown to be, rather, profound moments offering the gift of insight. Sylvie Vranckx notes that Marilyn’s flashbacks, the voices she hears, and her generally unsettled state coincide with what Ernie Crey calls being “Indian sick” (63). Crey’s description is elucidating, offering a productive alternative to seeing Marilyn as insane rather than as a person undergoing transition:

In our [Stó:lô] society, when you are ill or feeling discomfort, you are described as being “Indian sick,” which means that spiritual

forces are at work in your life. In order to understand these forces, you must return to spiritual teachers. The elders believe the voices and spirits that non-medical experts might diagnose as a profound mental illness are in fact an expression of the cultural estrangement so many of us have suffered. (Fournier and Crey 44)

More recently, some researchers have argued that spirit sickness is “brought on by the interaction between alienation from aboriginal culture and Westernizing influences” (Labun and Emblen 209). While this argument presents a very historically limited understanding of a phenomenon with roots reaching far beyond European contact, it offers a helpful reminder of the negative links between colonization and Native physical and emotional health.

Describing the beliefs of what he calls “traditional American Indians,” Donald Fixico explains that, “because the true reality of Indian people is a tandem of physical and metaphysical realities, native thinkers have encountered visions and spirits on a regular basis as a part of life” (70). He goes on to liken this element of Indigenous peoples’ metaphysical lives to “the dreams of individuals of the Western society, who sometimes find answers to questions that could not be answered by their conscious minds” (70). In an essay discussing the notion of “spirit,” Maracle offers the following observations, which sound very similar to the ideas she would advance years later in *Daughters are Forever*:

“I hear my grandmothers speak” is one remark which brings either howls of laughter or nervous looks of scepticism from the faces of most atheists and even Christians. Psychiatry is predicated on dispelling the delusions of patients who hear voices. The victims of voices are guided by the notion that hearing voices is connected to insanity or religious fervour. (*I am Woman* 113-14)

Indeed, Marilyn struggles concertedly to “get a grip on reality” and to assure herself, as she faces vision after vision, that “this isn’t happening” (*Daughters* 42). I think this struggle arises at least in part because she is caught in a battle between competing, and in many ways incompatible, world views. Raised and educated in twentieth-century Canada, with her specialized education and her seeming detachment from extended family and community, she has either forgotten or not yet learned her ancestors’ traditional ways of relating to the metaphysical or spiritual world. A “fundamental premise” of Indigenous thought, Deloria con-

tends, is that when facing confusing experiences or anomalies, “we cannot ‘misexperience’ anything; we can only misinterpret what we experience” (45-46). Over the course of the text, Marilyn moves from misinterpreting her dreams and encounters as unreal and hallucinatory toward an understanding that they provide glimpses of important insight. The reflection on and confrontation with the past that Marilyn undertakes help her work toward maturity as Deloria defines it: “a reflective situation” that represents, for Indigenous people, “the ultimate goal of all human existence” (*Spirit and Reason* 13).

Thus, in clear contrast to trauma theorists’ reliance on psychiatry to explain the intrusions of past upon present, *Daughters are Forever* explains them as part of a broader set of relationships among human, spirit, and natural worlds and as simply part of the normal workings of time. What Marilyn’s Western education can only label as insanity is, in fact, what happens when cosmic forces come together to guide her healing. Maracle’s descriptions of this process are not only illuminating but also breathtakingly beautiful:

Magic moments peel themselves from the mind like children’s stickers. They can sometimes unglue memories and stop them from traveling in the normal direction of the mind. These moments fall from the sky, like people that cross your path when you are desperate for them. Sky people watch humans. They alone own time. They collect it in balls of starlight. Every now and then they toss it to a human they believe needs to catch something. Stuck humans are desperate. Starlight draws attention to locked memories that keep humans stuck. (*Daughters* 109)

This passage suggests that all moments in time are present and available to sky people to be shared with humans as necessary. To them, at least, the past is not unreachable or unknowable. The image of rolling time into balls implies a pliability, suggesting that time can be easily manipulated so that seemingly discrete moments fuse to each other in a kind of momentary simultaneity. This happens for Marilyn at several points as she is overtaken by the memories that often layer themselves around her. For example, she witnesses her adult self chasing down a hallway after her frightened daughters, then place and time abruptly shift and she is “running down a highway, terrified, chasing her stepfather’s car” as he taunts her and refuses to let her into the car and drive her home from school (110-11). As this is unfolding, she hears her phone ring “from

beneath the sound of her memory” and struggles to “break the grip of this moment” and move to answer the phone in her present-day home (111). She is in two places and two moments at once, and for a while the pull of the remembered moment is stronger than that of the present. To her “splitting mind,” the “person rocking in the easy chair felt like herself, rocking in the bush next to fern and cedar. She surrendered to movement, to the rocking, to the sweet smell of bush” (112). There is no impermeable distinction between memory and reality, past and present: they mingle and touch each other, and Marilyn must contend with both if she is to find a way to live in fullness. This is temporal simultaneity with multiple layers and a clear, explicit purpose.

This “purpose” has to do with the processes of personal healing and maturation I have discussed above, and it is also tied to broader cultural and historical relationships. Reflecting on her work to develop a process of self-definition for Indigenous women, Anderson remarks, “What is distinctly Aboriginal is the way in which past, present and future are understood to be inextricably connected” (15). This temporal model is an important element of Indigenous movements for social change, and Indigenous “definition and self-determination as individuals and as nations involves calling on the past to define the future” (15-16). As demonstrated by Maracle’s description of aimless, uprooted men, our experiences and conceptualizations of time cannot be divorced from our understandings of and behaviour toward our community: one influences the other. As moments in time coexist and interact in an Indigenous world view, so, too, do living beings occupy positions of mutual implication and responsibility toward each other and their shared world. Deloria explains that the “Old Indians” system of science ultimately sought “to find the proper road along which, for the duration of a person’s life, individuals were supposed to walk. This colorful image of the road suggests that the universe is a moral universe” (*Spirit and Reason* 46). He explains that since there is “content to every action, behavior, and belief,” there is a “corresponding responsibility of every entity to enjoy life, fulfill itself, and increase in wisdom and the spiritual development of personality” (46). In a moral universe, our actions have implications and influence well beyond our immediate surroundings; further, and for this reason, personal development is never only a selfish act. As Marilyn tells her daughters, revealing her decision to seek help

dealing with the trauma of her past, “It isn’t just about me. It’s all of us. I want to mend the bridges between all of us” (*Daughters* 245).

### Responsibility, Reading, and Temporality

*Daughters are Forever* is full of reflections on the meaning of responsibility. Across diverse contexts — facing up to her failure to give her daughters the love and nurturing they deserved; working to help her clients learn the skills that will enable them to maintain custody of their children; and making speeches urging Indigenous men that “We, the women of First Nations, need you men on our side of the line” (197) — Marilyn is constantly pondering the nature of her own responsibility and trying to instill a sense of responsibility in others, with the ultimate goal of reinvigorating a healthy, decolonized Indigenous culture. Her relationship to the concept of responsibility is complex and inconsistent. In her personal life, she has abdicated responsibility for years and is just now coming to admit her accountability and work toward making amends, but at the same time, we learn from her travel journal that she has a long history of energetic and passionate political activism, driven by her conviction that “dependence has to be the worst condition you can force on a human being” (146). The text acknowledges the difficulty of always living responsibly and the ways in which factors like personal experience, tribal memory, and cultural history all work to complicate an easy, morally sound path through life. Importantly, though, understanding these challenges does not excuse anyone from the obligation to work to “find the proper road,” as Deloria would say.

In Toronto to give a talk about “Indian feminine sociology” and custody of Indigenous children, Marilyn lies awake on her friend Gerri’s couch immersed, as she so often is, in memories of her childhood sufferings and those she later inflicted on her daughters. She struggles to “reach some sort of plan to change the condition she had created for her daughters,” recognizing and urgently knowing that “some sort of accounting had to happen” (140). Marilyn finally makes the painful admission that since she created the condition, she is responsible for changing it; she tells herself that “as the mother, she was responsible for establishing the atmosphere, the spirit, the nurturing with which her children were raised” (141).

Marilyn’s heavy thinking shifts course as she asks herself “*What the hell does responsible mean, anyway?*” (141). Marilyn turns to the diction-



ary to help her decipher the nuances of the word. “Responsible,” she reflects, “ability to respond appropriately. Defensiveness and guilt would help no one. They were inappropriate responses” (141). This understanding gives her clarity of mind and the hope that she can find helpful ways to respond to the problems she has helped to create. After having reached this resolution, she feels confident that “everything is fixable” and falls into a peaceful, restful sleep (141).

This passage can also be fruitfully read with regard to the relationships between readers and challenging texts. Faced with a novel that describes in painful detail the process and ongoing aftermath of colonization, and given Marilyn’s explicit calls for change, readers would be hard pressed not to even briefly wonder about their relationships to this history. I would contend that Marilyn’s reflections — while apparently focused on the importance of acting responsibly toward her past actions and their effects in the present — also offer a critique of passive or defensive readings of this novel. Here, then, Maracle could be challenging her readers to seek appropriate ways to respond to the stories and histories they encounter in this text, and to avoid the easy pitfalls of defensiveness and guilt in favour of more active, change-seeking responses. Indeed, Anderson carries out a nearly identical reading of the word “responsibility” and calls for respectful and careful responses by her readers to her text. She cites Kimberley Blaeser as the source of the concept of “reader response-ability” and links the concept to traditional storytelling practices “where it is assumed that the listener has as much a part in the creation of the story as the teller. In this way, the listener also carries responsibility for the knowledge that is created” (49). “What is your ability to respond to literature written by (and about) Native women?” Anderson asks readers. “What will you do with the knowledge you have gained?” (49).

I will return shortly to oral storytelling but first want to turn briefly to the issue of a reader or listener’s posture and attitude when engaging with story and text. Donald Fixico identifies what he sees as a fundamental difference between conventional linear Western world views and traditional Indigenous thought: “The linear mind looks for cause and effect, and the Indian mind seeks to comprehend relationships” (8). Maracle also emphasizes the centrality of interrelationship to Indigenous thought. She explains that “the object of study from a Salish perspective is to discover another being in itself and for itself with the purpose of

engaging it in a future relationship that is mutually beneficial” (“Some Words”). While many read for other, pernicious reasons — to establish knowledge that will enable them to control others, or in search of a sense of superiority — my ideal readers would come to texts with a different set of motivations in mind. Part of reading, and living, responsibly, is to prioritize the establishment and maintenance of fair and respectful relationships with others. To conceptualize the reading relationship in this way is to acknowledge it as an implicitly and inherently political engagement, and to agree to engage in it as such.

Fixico’s discussion of traditional storytelling helpfully links the concepts of responsibility and time, as I have been attempting to do. He describes the role and process of storytelling:

Listening as a part of oral tradition is essential for understanding relationships and their multiple meanings. Elders tell stories in the oral tradition of tribes, where it was equally important to listen to the story as well as tell the story. Both storyteller and listener engage in reviving an experience of the past that becomes alive again, thereby transcending time from the past to the present. Both tenses of time blur, becoming one and the same. (5)

I have already discussed the ways in which time blurs within *Daughters are Forever*, but Fixico raises another intriguing question about how time works during the reading process itself. I would argue that his comments about time’s blending during the storytelling process can also be applied to readers’ encounters with texts. To read about an event is, *in a sense*, to witness its unfolding. When a story is told well, as this one is, and when we engage it from a position of openness and deliberate empathy, it comes alive and happens as we read it. Gloria Anzaldúa articulates this concept as she reflects on her own writing, stating, “My ‘stories’ are acts encapsulated in time, ‘enacted’ every time they are spoken aloud or read silently. I like to think of them as performances and not as inert and ‘dead’ objects (as the aesthetics of Western culture think of art works)” (67). Maracle’s frank admission that her explicit purpose in writing is to assert the lived and tangible suffering that colonization has brought to Indigenous people also makes it impossible to shrug off the more brutal parts of her novel as artistic exaggeration or “just fiction.”

Maracle knows, and Marilyn repeats, that “there is power in naming” (65, 199): in this text, Maracle is “naming” contemporary (post?) colonial Canada as she sees it, and refusing to let squeamish or ignorant

readers off the hook. She offers an uncompromising and frank portrayal of some ugly truths, motivated by her belief that before we can move toward change, people have to know and speak their truth. She is aware that many readers will feel uncomfortable, attacked, or upset by her shining a cold light on Canada's harsh historical and contemporary realities, but she frankly states that her concern is not to protect readers' feelings but to motivate change: "Truth is, I don't care about Canadian guilt, but I am concerned about the transformation of Canada" ("Some Words").

Jo-Ann Episkenew also believes that the frank telling of these often brutal personal and cultural histories is a necessary and deeply political act, with implications for personal and communal health, and with the potential to create real political change. She states, "Like the stories of the oral tradition, contemporary Indigenous literature serves a socio-pedagogical function as well as an aesthetic one" (193). Indigenous accounts of the process and ongoing effects of colonization, she argues, will challenge "prevailing mythology about the formation of the settler-state" and ultimately promote "social justice for Indigenous people, perhaps more effectively than political rhetoric" (193).

And so I turn once more to listen to Maracle's story. Marilyn's second night at Gerri's house is less peaceful than her first. She dreams of a ride through directionless tunnels on a train filled with familiar but unknown, unclear faces. She wakes from the dream and is trying to grasp at its meanings when her great-grandmother interrupts her, saying, "Meaning is so important, but expression is more important," and urging Marilyn to release her thoughts in words, to "speak, and speak from your essential self, your most ridiculous self, but speak — always remember to give wind-voice to being." Having finished delivering this message, Ta'ah sits quietly on Marilyn's bed, "waiting for some kind of response" (172). Marilyn is stunned. She contemplates the scene: it is dark, but she sees Ta'ah sitting on her bed and fiddling with Gerri's nail clippers. Her great-grandmother is dead, but she is right there, speaking to Marilyn. Marilyn tries in vain to rationalize what she is experiencing: "I know . . . I'm still dreaming. I dreamt I woke up and found you here, Ta'ah" (172-73). Unsurprisingly, Ta'ah gets the last word. "Doesn't matter," she retorts. "Still have to think about what I said" (173).

This simple statement carries a lot of weight for Marilyn, who knows she does have to think about her great-grandmother's insight in order to

continue to grow. It is also laden with meaning for me, as I contemplate the workings of time and think about the question of readers' responsibility. The fact is, whether or not I "believe" in Ta'ah's presence in Marilyn's room, or that the past is still happening somewhere, I have now experienced both as truth through reading about them. Having heard Maracle's message about the ongoing impact of colonization and having read about Marsha's suffering and her big, pleading eyes, I cannot "unknow" them. After Morag allows her Sunday school teacher to read her poem in Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*, she is struck by the solemn realization that "there is no way she can unshow it" (92). Similarly, having told her story, Maracle cannot call it back, and her readers cannot unread it either. As Thomas King repeatedly insists in his CBC Massey lectures, "Take [this] story. It's yours. Do with it what you will. . . . But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now" (29, 60, 89, 119, 151, 167).

The task from here, for those of us who accept it, is to find ways to become what Anderson might call "response-able" readers. To my mind, this entails being historically informed, future-minded, and committed to change-making in the present. To enliven the hope I share with Episkenew about literature's potential to contribute to struggles for social justice, we need to seek appropriate responses to what we have witnessed through Maracle's text. Once we have closed the book, how might we begin to live differently, having heard its stories? How might Maracle's temporal model, her ideas about time and history, influence our decisions as we go about our lives from here? How might our daily habits or our ways of thinking change in response to a transformed understanding of our relationship to different levels of time, spirit, and life?

Part of the answer to this question of appropriate response lies in the ways we read and listen in the first place. Reading from a posture of humility, openness, and deliberate empathy might open us to new learning and to new kinds of conversations. But this is a labour-intensive and often challenging way of engaging with texts and with our shared world. There is a slowness to this practice, particularly for those of us whose literary and academic upbringings have been characterized by what Marie Battiste calls "cognitive imperialism" — a "form of cognitive manipulation used to discredit other kinds of knowledge bases and

values” that “seeks to validate one source of knowledge and empower it through public education” (280). Still, it is work that must be done if we are to find ways to enliven literary studies as a site of productive and potentially change-making crosstalk that might help us to build “better relations . . . between Canadians (immigrants and Canadian-born alike) and indigenous peoples on Turtle Island” (Coleman, “Between” 69). If readers are willing to listen and to learn, if we are humble and frank about our ignorance and our mistakes, and if we consistently and insistently ground our work in broader struggles against colonization, then perhaps we might find ways to work — across times and cultures — for a more just world.

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