

Revolution Night in Canada: Hockey and Theatre in Tomson Highway's *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*

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This article reconsiders the place of hockey within Tomson Highway's play *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, ultimately arguing that the re-evaluative, adaptive, and transformative power enacted at the textual level when the Cree/Anishnaabe women of Wasaychigan Hill take up a Western, male sport mirrors the power reclaimed through the performance of the play itself. Moreover, as a sport that has been adopted and adapted by First Nations communities, hockey provides an ideal reflection of what Highway is doing with Euro-Canadian dramatic conventions, on a micro-scale, and with colonial traditions and powers, on a macro-scale. Just as the female hockey players force spectators to reconsider what hockey means, so too does Highway force his audience to reconsider what constitutes theatre, and, in so doing, reflect on how they distinguish between First Nations and European culture.

Dans cet article, Langston et Chaulk repensent la place qu'occupe le hockey dans la pièce *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* de Tomson Highway. Ces derniers font valoir, en fin d'analyse, que le pouvoir de réévaluation, d'adaptation et de transformation, représenté sur le plan textuel par l'appropriation que font les femmes cri/anishnaabe de Wasaychigan Hill d'un sport occidental et masculin, reflète le pouvoir de réappropriation que constitue la performance de la pièce. Puisque ce sport a été adopté et adapté par les communautés des Premières Nations, le hockey est un reflet idéal de ce que fait Highway à micro-échelle aux conventions théâtrales euro-canadiennes et, à macro-échelle, aux traditions et aux pouvoirs coloniaux. À l'instar de ces joueuses de hockey qui poussent le spectateur à repenser ce que signifie le hockey, Highway oblige son public à repenser ce qu'est le théâtre et, par conséquent, ce qui distingue la culture des Premières Nations et la culture européenne.



In his recent novel *Indian Horse*, Anishnaabe writer Richard Wagamese tells the story of a gifted Native hockey player, Saul, who is forced to navigate the racism of the world outside his community of Manitouwadge. Stopping for food on the way home from a game with a non-Native team, Saul's team, the Moose, is attacked by a group of white men in the local restaurant—men who are angry that “skins” are playing hockey. Saul reflects, “The white people thought it was their game. They thought it was their world” (136). Wagamese is here tying together the desire to own and dominate the game of hockey with the overarching compulsion to conquer and claim space, cultures, histories, and so on. First Nations hockey players, then, act as a challenge to lingering colonial ideologies.

Tomson Highway makes a similar suggestion in his play *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*. On the level of plot, the challenge appears as a number of women in the reservation community of Wasaychigan Hill decide that they want to play and compete in hockey, thereby disrupting already unstable gender roles. On an extra-textual level, the play resists colonial power through its use and abuse of European theatrical conventions, a disruption that speaks to the potentially adaptive nature of culture. *Dry Lips* begins with the announcement that the female members of the Wasaychigan community have decided to take up hockey. The male characters, for the most part, do not react positively and feel emasculated by this change. Centring on the men of the community—in fact, there are no female actors in the play, only Nanabush, the Trickster, who takes on the guise of various women in the community—the play not only tells the story of the men’s eventual adjustment to the women’s hockey league but also explores the sources of their general feelings of impotence and anger.

With hockey interwoven throughout, Highway tells the story of Dickie Bird Halked’s birth in a bar, of Big Joey’s debilitating experience at Wounded Knee, and of Spooky Lacroix’s reformation from alcoholism to fervent Christianity. Highway connects these memories with the present-time world of the reserve, where the audience witnesses Dickie Bird Halked rape Nanabush (in the guise of Patsy, one of the female community members) while Big Joey looks on. Later the audience also sees Simon Starblanket, the advocate for returning to traditional ways, react violently to his fiancée’s rape, going after Dickie Bird Halked with a gun. Despite its horrific events, the end of the play bespeaks hope for the future, as we learn that Zachary, a community member who hopes to bring some degree of economic stability to the reserve by opening a bakery, has dreamt the whole thing. In the final scene, we see Zachary awoken from this dream and turn towards his baby, laughing and speaking to him in Ojibwe.

Dry Lips is one of the most celebrated and widely analyzed Canadian indigenous plays. Critics such as Jerry Wasserman, Armand Garnet Ruffo, Rubelise da Cunha, and Anne Nothof argue that *Dry Lips* is challenging, subversive, and healing. However, despite the wealth of scholarship on *Dry Lips*, few studies have acknowledged the role of hockey in the play’s structure and argument. Where hockey is discussed (such as in Susan Billingham’s response to the play), it is seen as existing in tension with the overarching stance of resistance because it becomes a marker of tradition, patriarchy, and Western or colonial power. In this article, we would like to reconsider the place of hockey within *Dry Lips*, ultimately arguing that in Highway’s play, hockey, and the hockey arena serve as an analogy for theatre, and more specifically for *Dry Lips* itself. That is, the re-evaluative, adaptive, and transformative power enacted at the textual level when the Cree/Anishnaabe women of Wasaychigan Hill take up a Western, male sport mirrors the power reclaimed through the performance of the play itself. Moreover, as a sport that has been adopted and adapted by First Nations communities, hockey provides an ideal reflection of what Highway is doing with Euro-Canadian dramatic conventions, on a micro-scale, and with colonial traditions and powers, on a macro-scale. Early in the play, Pierre St. Pierre applies the term “revolution” to describe the women taking up hockey: “The revolution. Right here in Wasaychigan Hill” (54). This article proposes that the revolution at the level of plot extends outward and works analogically with the text itself. If hockey is revolutionary within the world of the play, the play is revolutionary within the world at large.

In *Dry Lips*, the female First Nations hockey team creates a kind of double jeopardy for “the socio-political order”—first, by inverting gender roles, and, second, by challenging the oppression of First Nations people by playing a “national” sport in their own way. The hockey playing reflects the larger practice of First Nations theatre, which also threatens the colonizer’s conventions and traditions by displaying their adaptability and permeability. This notion of “revolution” is thus connected with the cross-cultural hybridity that post-colonial theatre enacts in general. The political intervention occurs through the re-adoption of pre-colonial/indigenous performance and through the revisioning of colonial literary conventions—a sort of cross-contamination of theatrical traditions (Crow 11). Christopher Balme connects this “syncretism” with theatre’s power to decolonize, “because it utilizes the performance forms of both European and indigenous cultures in a creative recombination of their respective elements, without slavish adherence to one tradition or the other” (2). Writ large, such a process has been analyzed by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) and by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994), who describe this cultural melding with the term “hybridity.” Just as the female hockey players force spectators to reconsider what hockey means, so too does Highway force his audience to reconsider what constitutes theatre, and, in so doing, how they distinguish between First Nations and European culture. Highway sees this need to reconsider as the only way forward, both for colonizers and colonized:

I think that every society is constantly in a state of change, of transformation, of metamorphoses. I think it is very important that it continue to be so to prevent the stagnation of our imaginations, our spirits, our soul [...]. What I really find fascinating about the future of my life, the life of my people, the life of my fellow Canadians is the searching for this new voice, this new identity, this new tradition, this magical transformation that potentially is quite magnificent. It is the combination of the best of both worlds ... combining them and coming up with something new. (“Interview” 353-54)

Through the analogy of hockey, Highway proposes a revolution that is not merely resistance to colonialism but, rather, a suggestion of a kind of cultural hybridity, wherein no one—Native, non-Native, woman, man—would “own the game” or the world. To explore how hockey works politically and dramaturgically within *Dry Lips*, we will begin with a brief exploration of First Nations theatre in Canada and its connection to the Trickster tradition, before moving on to discuss Highway’s set design, his foregrounding of hockey in the plot, and some of the connections between hockey and First Nations history as well as hockey and theatre. Returning to the play, we will devote the remainder of the essay to demonstrate through close textual analysis how hockey comes to stand for the theatre as a potentially revolutionary space of cultural hybridity.

First Nations Theatre and Trickster

Susan Crean, a board member of the seminal Native theatre group Native Earth Performing Arts and herself a writer on Canadian cultural figures, claims that First Nations theatre “embraces cultural hybridity in a way that gives new meaning to the Canadian idea of the multicultural.” Other scholars have noted a similar trend in First Nations theatre. Robert

Nunn explains in his article, “Hybridity and Mimicry in the Plays of Drew Hayden Taylor,” that “[t]he institution of theatre itself, however marginal it may appear to the dominant culture, is an integral part of it. To write plays, then, is to appear to work within the dominant culture” (95). As Monique Mojica contends, First Nations theatre plays with the conventions and tools of European theatre to create its own decolonizing productions (qtd. in Nunn 97). To trace the development of First Nations theatre is not our task here, but it is worth pointing out, as Nunn does, that it contains a sort of back and forth, or co-contamination, with European/non-Native theatre, resulting in a sort of hybrid, playful craft that speaks to and is foregrounded in the Trickster tradition. While a number of white critics, mistakenly, interpret the presence of Trickster or other Native traditions as “proof of . . . authenticity” (Filewod 367), such traditions are often meant to flout Western dramatic conventions and subvert any fixed definitions of indigeneity. As Simona Achitei argues, Indigenous theatre reflects a larger investment in a constant, continuous redefinition of Native identity, creating “a process of intercultural negotiation between cast and audience that challenges and transforms static perceptions” (118).

Such a notion of transformation is entangled with the Trickster tradition of narrative, a tradition that not only includes a Trickster figure but also toys with the reader’s expectations and comfort levels. Highway’s play, in other words, both contains a Trickster and acts as a Trickster itself, confronting the audience with chaos and the unfamiliar and discomfiting. Within *Dry Lips*, the Trickster figure is Nanabush, and she appears both to relieve dramatic tension and to provoke action from the male characters. For instance, at times, Nanabush appears as one of the hockey playing women and pushes the men to recollect uncomfortable memories, such as Dickie Bird Halked’s birth; directly after Simon’s death, she appears as an old man (perhaps God given the reference to the white beard and white clouds) dressed in drag sitting on a toilet (117). In First Nations beliefs, the Trickster figure “represents the spinning confusion that takes us out of our fixed certainties and thus opens us up to new learning” (Eagle 286). Not only does Trickster bring the chaos that pulls away western epistemological frameworks and “undercuts authoritative accounts of the past and present” (Davidson 26); this figure also enables a space for creation, for newness. If, as Monique Mojica argues, Trickster “represents constant change, transformation, moving on” (qtd. in Nunn 98), the presence of Trickster within the narrative signals a disruption of familiar and comfortable conventions that challenges readers to rethink their expectations and consider alternative approaches.

Of course, the history of First Nations drama features a reinvigoration of the Trickster figure as s/he was blended with the European clowning tradition (Nunn 98-100)—it is a history of “appropriation and counter-appropriation” (100) perfectly suited to the Trickster narrative. Trickster (also often configured as Coyote) has a key role within indigenous drama, as Mojica and Ric Knowles explain in the introduction to their anthology of Native drama in Canada:

First Nations artists [. . .] know that in all theatre there’s a healing that takes place on the stage, in the audience, and between the stage and the audience, a healing that is part of the mutability of Coyote, part of the humor, and part of the ritual. But when you call upon Coyote through ritual, when you call upon ancestors, someone’s going to show up. It becomes neces-

sary to create a space, a container that tells the spirits that it's play, in order to respect and protect the culture and the people who are embodying the spiritual elements of that culture. That container is theatre. (v)

Highway's play, in particular, reflects this notion of theatre as a container for the chaos, humour, and healing that Trickster brings. In *Dry Lips*, Nanabush deconstructs, and thereby helps, the community to reconstruct its identity and its sense of unity. Since all of the women are also Nanabush in disguise (one actor plays Nanabush, who, in turn, takes on the persona of all the women), the female hockey players are Trickster embodied, and their presence aligns with Trickster's aims to trouble and transform. At an extra-textual level, the presence of Nanabush transforms not just non-Native theatre, but the non-Native worldview by introducing this other mode of perception. As such, Highway's Nanabush is another instance of hybridity within the play, the same hybridity that is reflected in the adoption of hockey by female players. Through the Trickster character and narrative, Highway challenges European colonial imperialism. The colonial culture is reinvented, opened up to transformation by a figure who symbolizes that very thing, just as hockey, at the level of plot, is adopted and adapted by figures who do not traditionally have access to it.

Highway's Set and Staging

This conceptual analogy of the Trickster narrative as vehicle for transformation is further reflected in the physical construction of the set as laid out by Highway in the stage directions. We are told in Highway's 'Production Notes' that the set is composed of two levels: the lower, "which [is] the domain of the 'real' Wasaychigan Hill. . ." and the upper, which is "the realm of Nanabush" as well as becoming "the 'bleachers' area for the hockey arena scenes" (8-9). The double level serves several important functions: first, it informs the audience that there will be two levels of meaning (the level of plot and a sort of meta- or extra-textual meaning); second, it stands as a metaphor for the existence of and interplay between two cultures and languages; and finally, significant for our argument, it suggests that what is happening on the lower level—the everyday lives of the characters—is somehow indicative of, or tied in with a greater thematic concern. As Balme explains, "the spatial semantics of *Dry Lips* are structured around ideas of mixture and overlap" (268). In fact, drawing on the language of hockey, Balme argues that Highway's play occurs in "an arena of cultural embattlement" that also demonstrates how theatre contains the possibility of transforming such embattlement into "cultural exchange" (268).

In the scenes where the women play hockey, Highway disrupts traditional western (i.e. proscenium) theatre (whereby the audience sits apart and slightly elevated from the stage) by positioning the bleachers directly in front of the audience, where the play's *players*—a complex homonym not missed by Highway—sit to watch the game. During both of the arena scenes, the sounds of a women's hockey game accompany the action of the male characters as they look out over the audience/arena. While the female hockey players remain unseen to the audience, we hear both the sounds of pucks hitting the boards and the women shouting at the same time as we see the men screaming at them from the bleachers and Big Joey broadcasting the game. Through sound effects and stage directions that call for the characters to sit as though

“looking out over the audience,” as if the audience were the *action* of the hockey game, Highway transforms the theatre space into the arena itself (65).

This inclusion of the audience is typical of decolonising theatre, which, as Helen Gilbert contends, often replaces the European spatial conventions of a distantiated/detached audience in favour of constructions that create audience engagement (157). Consequently, the set design encourages the audience to feel as if they are important to the play’s action, participants in a revolutionary process that challenges gender binaries and colonial monopolies. The action thus moves between the auditorium and the stage, implicating the audience in the cultural redefinition that the Wailerettes represent. Highway’s imagined audience likely includes Natives and non-Natives, but he invites both groups to embrace cultural hybridity as expressed through the (unseen) female characters’ appropriation of hockey for their own ends.

From the very beginning of the play, Highway draws a clear parallel between the impact of hockey within the world of the play and the impact of the play on the audience. In fact, the first speech heard is the hockey commentary on CBC’s *Hockey Night in Canada*, which Nanabush, initiates:

She turns the appliance on with one last bump of her voluptuous hips. “Hockey Night in Canada” comes on. The sound of this hockey game is on only slightly, so that we hear it as background “music” all the way through the coming scene [. . .]. The only light left onstage is that coming from the television screen. (Highway 16)

The scene that follows is one of domestic or private conflict between Big Joey and Zachary over their wives and their disparate community projects: Zachary wants to start a bakery, Big Joey a radio station. The hockey program emanating from the television offers a fore-shadowing backdrop that pitches these characters and the fictional community of Wasaychigan Hill into a larger Canadian context that will not only be familiar for many non-Native Canadian audiences but may also provoke feelings of national affiliation. The seemingly casual presence of *Hockey Night in Canada* suggests to the varied audience that Big Joey’s household is not so different from non-Native households across the country, in that it participates in such an iconic Canadian activity. It further suggests that the private or community interests of the plays’ native characters should be seen as part of a national conversation, one that cannot be easily dismissed as a domestic squabble.

The background noise of *Hockey Night in Canada* can also point to the harsher aspects of the cultural blend that refers the audience back to Canada’s oppressive colonial history and the project of assimilation. When Pierre St. Pierre enters the scene with the express purpose of relaying the news that the women of the reserve are forming a hockey team, Creature makes a joke because Pierre didn’t knock before entering: “Chris’sakes, knock. You’re walkin’ into a civilized house” (26). The connection we are meant to draw is a complex one. *Hockey Night in Canada* is associated with the idea of the “civilized house” where it is being viewed, a house that we could align with the House of Parliament or the notion of the nation as an exclusive, self-contained, “civilized” space. Pierre disrupts this civilized space with news that challenges both the rules of the nation and the rules of hockey. Within the first moments of the play, hockey is already an access point to larger issues. When Pierre announces that he is going to referee the women’s hockey game, which the women organize

because “[a]in’t nobody on the face of this earth’s gonna tell [them] women’s got no business playin’ hockey,” the scene’s “music” acquires new, more local significance: hockey as resistance in Wasaychigan Hill (29). Finally, having the sound of a hockey game as “background music” dissolves this discourse within the scene, which is the first motion of Highway’s deliberate conflation of the hockey arena and the physical theatre space.

Sports, Theatre, Colonization, and Decolonization

In recent years, theatre critics and performance studies scholars have explored the connection between sports and theatre/performance. In June 2013, the Canadian Association for Theatre Research held a panel at their annual conference on sports and performance theory. As the panel chair, Peter Kuling, states in his call for papers: “Professional sports provide a complicated forum of performance strategies regulating skill, ability, desire, performance, participation, and celebrity; all of these ‘appearances’ exist as part of the history of the sporting event.” In other words, sporting events are seen as performances in their own right, which exist in real world arenas; however, while the stage world is imagined, sporting events take place in real-time and with tangible effects. Reading theatre through the lens of professional sports thus offers new possibilities for thinking about performance, audience experience, and socio-political impact. Scholars such as Dennis Kennedy, Sarah S. Montgomery, and Michael D. Robinson argue that theatre and sporting events are both performances that affect spectators on intellectual, emotional, and even physical levels. Highway’s play draws together these two types of performance in order to demonstrate how each is culturally inflected and, therefore, contains and demands ideological and political engagement.

Of course, for a long time now, playwrights have been drawing these connections and exploring the ideological role and roots of theatre and sports. Peter Terson’s seminal soccer play *ZiggerZagger* (1967) examines the struggles of the British working-class and their desire for upward mobility through a group of football hooligans who found little chance for escape. David Storey’s *The Changing Room* (1971) also features a group of British working-class men whose celebrations or disappointments on the rugby field become reflective of their menial and monotonous lives as well as providing an escape from them. More recently, John Godber’s series of rugby plays, including *Up ‘n’ Under* (Parts I and II) and *Muddy Cows*, considers the potential role of women within the male dominated sports world. *Muddy Cows* is particularly interesting in its focus on a group of female rugby players whose locker room discussions explore their sexuality and the misogyny or, at the least, chauvinism they face as female athletes. As with Highway’s female hockey players, Godber seems to be pointing to the inversion of power dynamics that occurs when women take on male roles and how such an inversion holds both a threat and a promise to the larger society. Overall, these plays are sites of political resistance, a space where systemic oppression and societal institutions can be held up for analysis and even challenged. Highway’s play participates in this tradition; however, as discussed above, as a First Nations theatre piece its political investments are unique, and its blending of theatrical or performance traditions means its manner of presenting resistance departs from those of previous European models.

The history of hockey is itself one of resistance. In a mid-nineteenth century effort to construct a Canadian national identity, George Beers, a “romantic nationalist,” rejected

imported games like cricket and proposed that the First Nations game of baggataway was the perfect sport-analogy for expressing what it meant to endure Canadian harshness. A sport “filled with speed, violence and skill,” baggataway appealed to Beers’s masculinist ideals (Robidoux “Imagining” 212, 214). In an 1867 *Montreal Gazette* article called “The National Game,” Beers writes, “just as we claim as Canadian the rivers and lakes and land once owned exclusively by Indians, so we now claim their field game as the national field game of our dominion” (qtd. in Robidoux “Imagining” 215). The appropriation of baggataway (and its renaming as lacrosse) is therefore an unapologetic act of colonial appropriation. Later, however, lacrosse became a modern sport with deliberate work-week schedules that disallowed working class participation; it was gentrified (216-7). In response, working class Canadians turned to hockey, which “resembled lacrosse in design and in the manner it was played” and served as an even better symbol of Canadian resilience as it is played on a “frozen landscape.”

By the 1920s, hockey had become Canada’s national sport (Robidoux *Imagining* 218). Born out of colonizers’ exclusive appropriation of a First Nations game, the catalyst behind hockey’s growing importance over time has largely been the desire for a distinctly Canadian national identity. As a key component of nationalism, we can also understand hockey as not merely an act of appropriation but as a colonizing force, another assimilatory measure. Sports historians and sociologists have documented this use of sport “as part of imperialist conquest” (Robidoux, *Stickhandling* 4); Robidoux explains that “the playing field becomes a source of instruction for the newly colonized to assume qualities and customs of the empire” (4). In early twentieth-century Canada, hockey “effectively engag[ed] First Nations peoples in dominant cultural practices” (4).

What complicates this seemingly straightforward narrative of appropriation and manipulation by a colonizing force is the gradual movement of First Nations players back into major league hockey. The entrance of First Nations players into the NHL was precipitated in part by their own hockey leagues, hockey leagues that sprung up in reserve communities in the face of their exclusion from town leagues. The first Native member of the NHL was Fred Sasakamoose, who joined the Chicago Blackhawks as early as 1953. Since then a number of Aboriginal players such as Jordan Tootoo, Gino Odjick, and Jonathan Cheechoo have made enormous contributions to the sport by opening spaces for future Aboriginal athletes. Their movements back and forth across the Canada-USA border are also eerily reminiscent of their ancestors’ movements through their land before imperialism separated the tribes with a national border. Further, as Robidoux argues, rather than simply an instance of assimilation, the First Nations approach to the game reflects their own cultural heritage and values, alongside those of the European colonizer: hockey is “a key site of cultural enunciation, not cultural capitulation” (*Stickhandling* 5). In First Nations communities, hockey is used in conjunction with the medicine wheel as a mode of communal healing; community-based hockey tournaments similarly provide opportunities for community gathering, not unlike a pow wow (67). These hockey tournaments and games become fodder for storytelling, providing enough drama and humour to create narrative (79).

Hockey in the Play

When one considers hockey's history in relation to *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, the Wasy Wailerettes' aggressive playing becomes an explicit reappropriation, a taking-back, of the game. As Pierre St. Pierre, the man elected to be the referee for the women's games, puts it: "They kinda wanna play it their own way" (31). In this respect, Highway frames hockey as a vehicle of resistance against the patriarchal and colonial systems that oppress First Nations women. Robidoux notes that the modernization of sport has a moral purpose in that it eliminates the "undesirable qualities of traditional] play—[. . .] behaviours such as violence, public disorder, and mass rowdiness—thus controlling behaviour to ensure a compliant and nonvolatile populace" (211).

One of the most uncomfortable and striking qualities of the women's hockey in *Dry Lips* is its violence; the players get hurt, and the first game even ends with a deliberate injury. Dickie Bird's mother, Black Lady Halked, deliberately aims and shoots the puck at her captain Gazelle Nataways. This aggression disrupts the regulating, standardizing forces that attempt to contain the people and their "undesirable" ways; moreover, it marks the determined reclaiming of hockey by First Nations people. At the same time, the fact that the puck goes down the front of Gazelle's low-cut hockey jersey signals the play and humour at the root of the Trickster tradition, a humour that is frequently present in the adaptation or decolonization of imperial conventions in First Nations literature. Humour is a vital part of the Trickster tradition as it is often used as a mode of revelation and transformation; laughing at something both exposes it and lessens its power as well as eases the potential pain of cultural change. By calling for the hockey puck to disappear between Gazelle's breasts, Highway may also be pointing to the potential for those marked as different or Other (e.g. a First Nations woman) to disrupt the rules and game-playing of colonial forces.

The puck's reappearance later in the play allows the game to continue—after the rape of Patsy and the death of Simon. Significantly, it is yet another act of violence—Hera's attack on Gazelle—that restores the puck. Highway again may be highlighting the importance of disruption and conflict in the act of decolonization, though also pointing to humour when Pierre relates how "that's when 'the particular puck' finally came squishin' out of them considerable Nataways bosoms" (121). Humour here (and elsewhere in the play) relieves the tension caused by violent conflict; it allows the audience to laugh rather than mourn, and there is the sense that laughter is a more productive place than sorrow. During the second hockey game, Highway foregrounds this notion of mixing or melding both in terms of emotional responses and in terms of cultural iconography by having Dickie Bird "chanting and stomping his foot" while "[b]its and pieces of Nanabush/Gazelle Nataways' 'strip music' and Kitty Well's 'It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels' begin to weave in and out of this 'sound collage,' a collage which now has a definite 'pounding' rhythm to it" (125). A collage of cultural references, both Native and non-Native, accompany the unseen hockey game, underlining its role as a site of intercultural blending.

The (re)appropriation of hockey by the women of Wasaychigan Hill signals not just a key shift within the community of the play; it also acts as a metaphor for the adoption and adaptation of non-Native theatre traditions by First Nations peoples. In writing for a Native and non-Native audience, Highway addresses those who both suffered from and were

complicit in the longstanding systems of oppression. In his essay on the reception and production of Highway's play, Alan Filewod details one concern about complicit audiences and aboriginal theatre:

The problem of white reception of aboriginal theatre is a problem in the dialectics of decolonization and reinscribed colonization, in which voices of the cultural affirmation and resistance are received by white critics as a testament of authentic and unmediated reality, which, in critical response, disallows the agency of resistance itself. (364)

Filewod argues that it is tempting for non-Native audiences to interpret Native plays as representations of authentic Nativeness, especially when encountering the stark differences between their cultures. However, with *Dry Lips*, Highway seems aware of these temptations and attempts to derail their possibilities; just as the Wailerettes recode the game of hockey for their own purposes in order to provide for a better fit for themselves, Highway employs the Trickster, Nanabush, to disrupt conventional Western play aesthetics. His/her surreal shapeshifting appearances and the inexplicable actions that come with his/her appearance—e.g. sitting on a “giant luminescent puck” shot by a “giant luminescent hockey stick [that] comes seemingly out of nowhere”—undermine the grim solemnity of the situations upon which they are superimposed (Highway 76). Highway works to disable the dramatic mechanisms that may lead white audiences to believe what they just saw is a self-contained, stable testament of True Nativeness that they may understand, pack away, and leave in the theatre. The elusiveness of *Dry Lips*' meaning increases the need for the audience to contemplate the play—including the severe violence—for a time afterward. By this, the audience feels their complicity.

And with complicity comes implication and responsibility. The audience must feel discomfort while the characters of Pierre, Zachary, and Spooky look and point at them from the bleachers as if the audience is challenging the structures of society. By conflating the revolutionary space of the hockey arena with the theatre auditorium, Highway sends his audiences away with the message that they are the people capable of revolution; of course, the reception of this revolutionary message depends on the constitution of the audience. Presumably a non-Native audience will respond in a different way to the play's political themes than a Native one. Yet in stressing the parallel between hockey and theatre, Highway challenges all audiences to see the revolutionary potential of art outside the comfortable space of the theatrical environment.

Such a far-reaching potential is underlined in the play through the trajectory of the growth of Native women's hockey teams and games, which by the play's conclusion have inspired a national movement. When the news of the game first spreads, Pierre—the only male allowed access to their off-stage, hockey-related activity—assures the other men that “them women from right here on this reserve, they're playin' hockey and nothin' [. . .] is gonna stop 'em” (48). After the play's first game, Pierre tells Zachary that “Rosy Kakapetum says it's a cryin' shame the WasyWailerettes is the only team that's not in the Ontario Hockey League [. . .] The OHL. Indian women's OHL” (88). This is the moment when it is revealed that the women of the Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve's choice to take up hockey sticks is not an isolated event but part of a greater movement that (at this point in the play) represents

the Ontario-wide rewriting of established league structures by First Nations women. Finally, after it is revealed that there is an Indian Women's NHL, Pierre announces that the revolution has snowballed onto a pan-national stage:

Hallelujah! Have you heard the news? [. . .] All the Indian women in the world is playin' hockey now! World Hockey League, they call themselves. Aboriginal women's WHL [. . .] It's like a burnin', ragin', blindin' fever out there. Them Cree women in Saskatchewan, them Blood women in Alberta, them Yakima, them Heidis out in the middle of your Specific Ocean, them Kickapoo, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Chipewyan, Choctaw, Chippewa, Wichita, Kiowa down in Oklahoma, them Seminole, Navajo, Onondaga, Tuscarora, Winnebago [. . .] they're turnin' the whole world topsy-turkey right before our very eyes and the Prime Minister's a-shittin' grape juice. (108-09)

Over the course of several scenes, the audience witnesses a localized reconfiguration of gender expectations become aligned with a global movement of colonized peoples, a revolution that troubles the existing, oppressive power structures, including the Canadian government. If hockey serves as an analogy for the potential effects of First Nations theatre and art, then Highway's objectives are clearly outlined here: a small movement of resistance grows in scale and eventually turns the "whole world topsy-turkey." Although clearly a movement led by First Nations women would be distinct from one led by non-Native peoples, Highway suggests that all groups must participate in the disruption and improvement of the system.

At the level of plot, this inversion of the world revolves around the disruption of gender roles that results when the women of Wasaychigan Hill decide to play the male-dominated sport of hockey. The audience first learns of the Wasy Wailerettes at the same time as Big Joey and Creature, and the characters' reactions are important: Big Joey dismisses the team as unbelievable "crap" and Creature asks, "shouldn't we stop them?" (Highway 24, 25). When Spooky learns of the movement, he responds by saying, "[t]hank the Lord the end of the world is coming this year!", and later claims that this female hockey is "THE sign" of that apocalypse (55, 71). The most consistent reaction throughout the male community is surprise; upon hearing the word "revolution," Spooky first concludes that the Chief or the priest is behind it, and then that it must involve the American military finally attacking Canada. Through his characters' extreme reactions, Highway comments on how change is frequently seen as an attack and met with defensiveness (54). However, the surprise is layered with disdain brought about by what Filewod argues is the confrontation of "their political impotence as first the women of the reserve, then all the aboriginal women of the world invade the men's domain and form a hockey league" (364). Further, because the audience learns of the women's plans only as the men do, the play positions the audience to compare their reactions with those of the community's men, who are themselves facets of the patriarchy the women are resisting. Through such identifications, Highway urges the audience to feel sympathetic towards both the women and the concept of social change.

In constructing the women's hockey movement, Highway does not simply toss the women into the existing structures of a sport traditionally played by men, but into one that, since its creation and through its later appropriation by settlers, showcases the most stoic,

courageous, and physically dominant examples of that culture's masculine ideal (Robidoux, "Imagining" 220). The Wasy Wailerettes disrupt this ideal by revising certain rules and aspects of the game; as Pierre notes, "[the women] kinda wanna play it their own way" (Highway 31). For example, Gazelle Nataways trims her jersey "in the chest area," modifying the usual uniform to accentuate her breasts (68). Here, femininity is analogous with the potential for change in First Nations communities; indeed, part of Highway's project is to carefully show that appropriation does not necessarily force the disappearance of the acting subject within the appropriated structures, that there can be agency and visibility in a kind of intercultural hybridity. Through the hockey-art parallel, Highway seems to be saying that if First Nations people create socially conscious art and uncompromisingly bring it into the Western domain, they can produce something new. He emphasizes the political potential of this uncompromising difference through the hockey players' sexuality. In fact, an unofficial requirement for women playing on the Wasy Wailerettes team is their biological status as mothers or mothers-to-be: "they're all pregnant, them women, or have piles and piles of babies" (47). In this respect, the players amplify rather than diminish their femininity through the appropriation of hockey. What marks them as Other, as different, is celebrated within the hockey arena. If we follow the analogy through, Highway appears to be emphasizing the political potential of the Native as Other within the realm of performance/theatre.

A number of critics have taken issue with this foregrounding of the feminine in the play, perceiving it as a reaffirmation of the very misogyny the hockey revolution appears to undercut. Susan Billingham argues that *Dry Lips* is replete with the destabilization of gender roles, hockey being the most obvious example. However, the fact that membership on the team is contingent on either being pregnant or having had children renders female empowerment dependent on female fertility and biology. Billingham, therefore, worries that the "feminine principle being invoked [by Highway] contains a potentially conservative dimension [. . .] and does nothing to disturb conventional gender categories" (371). I wonder, though, if taking into consideration the potential parallel between theatre and hockey, we might also read the emphasis on female fertility in metaphorical terms. Perhaps what Highway is suggesting here is not actual childbirth but rather the possibility of creation. In other words, access to membership in the revolution depends on the ability to create or produce, not literal children but works of art, such as theatre. As with Trickster, then, change comes with the ability to disrupt and to create.

Billingham also takes issue with the team's name, arguing that the term "wailing," due to its negative connotations of mourning or the uncanny, lends a "sinister undercurrent" to this evocation of "power" (372). Looking at the play, however, it is clear that wailing is linked to disruption of the colonial status quo, particularly in the ever-shifting, defamiliarizing figure of Nanabush. In Act I, beneath Simon Starblanket's recounting of a visionary dream, the sound of wailing can be heard. The stage directions describe the wailing as "wolves howling or women wailing, we are not sure at first. And whether this sound comes from somewhere deep in the forest, from the full moon or where, we are not certain" (44). The wailing, then, is an aural interruption that cannot be fixed; its origins are untraceable, unknowable. The wailing is also accompanied by "the sound of rocks hitting boards, or the sides of houses, echoing, as in a vast empty chamber" (44)—the wailing, in other words, leads to a soundscape

that evokes a fast-moving hockey game. Finally, Nanabush appears and begins to wail, but the sound is complicated when Nanabush's voice is joined by "other wailing voices," including that of Simon. This moment of communal wailing underlines the potential of wailing to express, or give voice to, the inexpressible. Wailing is a wordless cry taken up by the community, and adopted by the female hockey players to mark their own participation in the disruption—a kind of concretizing of the abstract sound of wailing.

The hockey games also create a space for communication through the Cree commentary that Big Joey provides for the male characters and the audience. Big Joey's half-Cree commentary, which he believes "[is] one sure way [for his people] to get some pride [. . .] and dignity back," underscores the political potential of First Nations languages (Highway 23). The revolution on the ice makes its way into the male commentary by way of linguistic re-appropriation. Highway does not translate the Cree for the benefit of the theatre audience. Rather, in refusing to make the language familiar to the non-Native audience, he argues for the strength and autonomy of First Nations culture and art, allowing those who speak Cree unique access to this brief section of the play. Through Big Joey's commentary, Highway further suggests that contemporary First Nations theatre can be a site of linguistic empowerment and hybridity. Important for any notion of cultural hybridity is that of code-switching. As Gilbert explains, the theatre gives post-colonial writers a chance to interrupt the homogeneity of colonial speech with their own linguistic voices, creating a heterogeneous cultural space:

Post-colonial stages are particularly resonant spaces from which to articulate linguistic resistance to imperialism. [. . .] Now determined to interrupt the transmission of 'correct' English in favour of local languages, regional variants, shifting registers, and indigenous accents (among many other forms of linguistic communication), post-colonial playwrights have concentrated on speaking in voices less inflected by imperialism. [. . .] The staging of various extant indigenous languages [. . .] help[s] to destabilise colonial authority and provide other means of communication. (166)

These moments of empowerment highlight hockey's positive impact on the people of Wasaychigan Hill at large, in its appropriated and adapted form. Over the course of the play, hockey becomes equated with life and, moreover, a revival in the community. After the rape of Patsy Pegahmagahbow, an event traumatic to the characters as well as the audience given its violent nature and unapologetic staging, Pierre breaks down and cannot decide whether to find Dickie Bird or to continue searching for the lost puck. He expresses the difficulty of separating the drive for life from the drive for hockey: "The puck. No. Dickie Bird. No. Hockey. No. His life. No. Hockey. No. Life. Hockey. Life. Hockey. Life . . ." (103). The alternation of "hockey" and "life" continues, and when Pierre appears in the following scene, he is still repeating the words in this way. This conjunction of the two words suggests that, in the Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve, hockey has come to stand for a struggle for life, and not only the quality of life in their reserve, but also the life of their traditions and heritage.

The rape that precedes this union of hockey and life outside the rink is one of the most pivotal scenes in the play and points to a number of key thematics. Throughout the play, the characters of Patsy and her fiancé, Simon Starblanket, have been encouraging the other char-

acters to return to their traditional medicines, cultural practices, and beliefs. Patsy's rape, which is followed by Simon's death, underlines the oppressive force of colonialism that First Nations people face any time they challenge the status quo. The rape complicates the straightforward trajectory of the women's resistance to patriarchy by showing the violence that often meets such resistance. Simon's death widens that notion of a violent reaction to cultural resistance by suggesting that any wholesale return to tradition is untenable, allowing Highway to open the way for a cultural middle ground. Following Patsy's rape, Highway shows Pierre moving from a divisive and negative linguistic framework—"No. Hockey. No. Life"—into an apparent understanding that both options can coexist in an almost symbiotic manner. In so doing, the playwright points to a potential solution to the seemingly inescapable cycle of trauma and violence. The fact that the two words – hockey, life – come together only after an apparent struggle stresses the importance of such struggle to cultural revisioning and revitalization.

By representing the Western hockey arena as the location where tradition and community coexist most explicitly and loudly, Highway further highlights the necessity of cultural blending in the life of the individual characters and the community. During the games, Simon "sings as he stomps to the rhythm of a pow-wow drum" and chants in Cree, bringing tradition into an arena where an arguably re-appropriated sport is being played. The arena thereby becomes a space that straddles both tradition and Western influence, a space claimed by tradition from such influence. However, as a testament to the difficulty of such a merger, Dickie Bird breaks down, caught between two opposing sacred symbols: the pow-wow bustle and the crucifix (66). The Wasaychigan Hill hockey rink is a space where post-contact influence and the pain of oppression are not denied. Instead, theatre, like the women's hockey in *Dry Lips*, can be an arena where First Nations culture and Western influence conflict and, ultimately, combine to make something representative of particular contemporary conditions.

The semblance of harmony and healing glimpsed at the end of *Dry Lips* offers no resolution. Big Joey broadcasts over his approved radio station, and Zachary appears with a pie, suggesting that he also is moving forward with his plans for a bakery, first articulated at the beginning of the play; but neither of these initiatives have clear ends. Once established, they continue to serve the community, and Zachary, like Joey, believes that his initiative "[can] do a lot for the Indian People" (45). The formerly stalled community projects are underway and hockey is being played, but the death of Simon and the rape of Patsy Pegahmagahbow complicate this harmony, hanging in the air as trauma.

Yet while the characters suffer in *Dry Lips*, such suffering doesn't paralyze the community. Patsy addresses her own circumstances, sending "love" from the Sudbury General Hospital along with a request "that the first goal scored by the Wasy Wailerettes be dedicated to the memory of Simon Starblanket" (123). Patsy's dedication suggests that hockey is a healing force that allows her to emerge from her trauma and resist occupying the paralyzed victim position. Patsy's courage and the connection between hockey and healing becomes even more significant when considering the parallel that has been analyzed throughout this essay. Like Patsy's optimism in the face of great pain and loss, Highway argues that theatre can be a healing and progressive force in First Nations culture. As hockey works to heal the fictional Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve, contemporary First Nations theatre works to destroy the

notion that First Nations people are incapable of decolonization from where they are today. Highway argues that such theatre, like the women's hockey league, is capable of stoking pride, community, reform, and the reclamation of tradition, and not only for Canada's First Nations, but for colonized peoples around the world. The audience, sharing the same conceptual space as the hockey arena, is encouraged to recognize that *Dry Lips* is a call for action—a cue, an arrow, and not a victory. This is why Highway refuses to end the play with a clear resolution. There is community, but it is damaged. There is a sense of healing, but it is unfinished. Hera, a woman, is teaching Zachary how to speak his traditional language, but he is still making mistakes. There is hockey, and league hockey never ends: games follow games, seasons follow seasons, years follow years. There is the audience. There is momentum.

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