

3-1-2016

# Cannibalism in contact narratives and the evolution of the wendigo

Michelle Lietz

Follow this and additional works at: <http://commons.emich.edu/theses>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Lietz, Michelle, "Cannibalism in contact narratives and the evolution of the wendigo" (2016). *Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations*. Paper 671.

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses, and Doctoral Dissertations, and Graduate Capstone Projects at DigitalCommons@EMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@EMU. For more information, please contact [lib-ir@emich.edu](mailto:lib-ir@emich.edu).

Cannibalism in Contact Narratives and the Evolution of the Wendigo

by

Michelle Lietz

Thesis

Submitted to the Department of English Language and Literature

Eastern Michigan University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Literature

Thesis Committee:

Abby Coykendall, Ph.D., First Reader

Lori Burlingame, Ph.D., Second Reader

March 1, 2016

Ypsilanti, Michigan

## Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my kind and caring sisters, and my grounding father.

For my mother: thank you for beginning my love of words and for every time reading “one more chapter.”

And for every person who has reminded me to guard my spirit during long winters.

## Acknowledgments

I am deeply indebted to Dr. Lori Burlingame, for reading all of my papers over and over again, for always letting me take up her office hours with long talks about Alexie, Erdrich, Harjo, Silko and Ortiz, and supporting everything I've done with unwavering confidence. I am profoundly grateful to Dr. Abby Coykendall, for always filling the margins with more reading recommendations, for encouraging complex connections, and for introducing me early on to bell hooks and Homi Bhabha, and to Dr. Christine Neufeld, for urging me to cross boundaries and not be afraid of my own voice. My constant gratitude to David Boeving, Jamel Colvin, and Adam Mitts, for all the bar nights discussing literary theory, for always answering my 2 a.m. phone calls and text messages, for working through all the pieces with me, and reminding me that I have something to say. Thank you to Rebecca Thomas, for the midnight Denny's outings, for covering walls of chalkboards with me, for the surprise sticky notes and always being there with a quote from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." My sincerest gratitude to Tony Spicer for long hours of conversation in the sunshine and the deep understanding you always provide. Thank you to Tom Ulch, for all the crazy projects, crazier stories, for *Ceremony*, and letting me nap on the office couch. Miigwetch to Amber Morsaueu, for all the fire. Yokoke to Dr. Kay McGowan and Fay Givens, for encouraging me to speak my own language, and for helping me find my people and my place. Warmest thanks to Shoshana Phillips, who welcomed me unquestioningly, and provided me with a home away from home with bright smiles, warm coffee, and countless beading supplies. And thank you to Alethea Phillips, for staying awake on long drives, always trying something new, and caring deeply about so much; I can't wait to see everything you do. Finally, thank you to the entire English department at Eastern Michigan University, for years of support, encouragement, and excellent classroom discussions.

## Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between colonization and cannibalism, beginning with cannibalism as represented in colonial contact narratives. I address the tendency of the colonizers to presume cannibalism of the indigenous people with whom they come into contact, and how the assumption dictates the treatment of aboriginals by colonizing Europeans. Texts discussed in this light include *The Tempest*, *She*, *Robinson Crusoe* and the journals of Christopher Columbus. Additionally, I address the effects of colonization on the indigenous associations of cannibalism in conjunction with the evolution of the wendigo. To illustrate this evolution, I primarily draw on traditional oral stories alongside the works of Louise Erdrich and Winona LaDuke, including *Tracks*, *Four Souls*, *The Round House* and *Last Standing Woman*. To close, I demarcate the trend of American television shows to appropriate the wendigo, ascertaining a fundamental misunderstanding of indigenous cultural beliefs by American popular culture.

## Table of Contents

Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Contacting Cannibals.....	6
Chapter Two: Wendigo Origins and Evolutions.....	21
Chapter Three: In the Spirit of the Wendigo.....	41
Conclusion.....	58
Works Cited.....	60

## Introduction

Cannibalism, defined as the act of consuming the flesh or insides of another human being, has a rather long history in the canon of Western literature. The most damning characteristic of the cyclops Polyphemus in Homer's *The Odyssey* is not his giant stature or single eye, but rather his cannibalistic tendencies, later reinforced in Rick Riordan's reimagining of the Odysseus narrative in the *Percy Jackson* series when the protagonist (who is good friends with a cyclops) reacts in fear and horror in confronting the historic cannibal Polyphemus. Shakespeare explores this theme, notably in his play *Titus Andronicus*, during which the villainized queen eats her sons who are baked into her dinner, as well as within *The Tempest*, where the name of the only indigenous inhabitant of the island suggests an association with cannibalism.

Both *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe and *She* by H. Rider Haggard deal with the theme of cannibalism when contacting unknown cultures and people. These two novels provide a decent foundation to the colonial representation of cannibalism as well as the role that race and colonization play within contact narratives. Many contemporary cannibal references seem to have left the contact zones in favor of depictions of societal outcasts; however, the need to impose cannibalism onto others remains. This occurs most often in contemporary vampire novels and television shows, whose characters are hundreds of years old such as in *Interview with a Vampire* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, but also in film and television with such characters as Hannibal Lecter in *Silence of the Lambs*. Occasionally, however, television shows such as *X-Files*, *American Horror Story*, and *Supernatural* explore this motif in a marginal or episodic manner. In fact, not only does *Supernatural* explore the theme of cannibalism, it also contributes to a contemporary representation of the wendigo. It is clear that the cannibal as well as the

wendigo figure is still very prevalent in the popular imagination and within contemporary literature, but the scope and evolving portrayals of both are worthy of their own exploration, both within Native culture and Western European culture.

The wendigo is a cannibal monster from the traditional stories of many northern tribes, specifically the Anishinabe stories, and is most often associated with winter and desperate hunger. To understand how the wendigo functions, examination of the traditional stories and contemporary portrayals both by Native and non-Native authors is needed, including the ways in which the representation of the wendigo has changed in the minds of indigenous writers, primarily in the novel *Last Standing Woman* by Winona LaDuke and various works by Louise Erdrich such as *Tracks*, *Four Souls*, and *The Round House*. These novels are of particular relevance not only because they deal with the wendigo motif, but also because they address it within different time periods. *Tracks* and *Four Souls* both address the wendigo from an early 20<sup>th</sup> century understanding, while *The Round House* uses a more contemporary understanding of the figure, and *Last Standing Woman* contains a timeline of roughly a century. These representations are essential to understanding how this figure has changed within indigenous communities over the years.

Some anthropologists claim that cannibalism is one of the most frequently occurring taboos throughout the world, shared by most cultures. It seems that something grotesque and abject inheres in the act of cannibalism, although many people from various cultures have documented it particularly in times of great physical danger and desperation. There are many accounts, even in recent history, of cannibalism occurring in desperate situations, such as plane crashes or becoming stranded in the wilderness, but there are also accounts from Russian soldiers during the world wars of having to resort to cannibalism. These kinds of desperate situations are



typically involved in the origins of the wendigo in traditional stories, when starvation and desperation lead to the consumption of human flesh. Recently, however, at least in the minds of indigenous writers, it has become more of a spiritual perversion or disease, and a cultural association with whiteness and winter. Some go so far as to claim the entirety of western civilization as wendigo infected or possessed.

There are also accounts of cannibalism as a social act, such as that supposedly practiced by the indigenous Caribs in *Robinson Crusoe* as well as in the Catholic tradition of the Eucharist. Even though these accounts are hard to verify in many cases, their existence has greatly contributed to the assumption of cannibalism of many indigenous tribes during their pre-contact existence. Most notably, cannibalism is usually associated in popular traditions of Western civilizations as something abhorrent, practiced only by the uncivilized cultures and monstrous people. Blood libel, or the killing of Christian children by Jews for the use of their blood in religious rituals, was a commonly held superstition. As Jews were very often cast in the role of the “other” in Europe, blood libel proved to be an excellent means of perpetuating anti-Semitism and fear.

While these associations have seemingly always existed in the minds of Western writers and Western civilization at large, the origins of associating cannibalism with Indigenous tribes and first contact with Europeans can be traced to explorers, pirates and conquerors such as Cortez, Columbus, Drake, and Vespucci. The narratives of such men, rarely disputed in their own time, often portrayed the indigenous people with whom they came into contact as being uncivilized, barbaric, and savage and frequently spoke (or wrote) of their “blasphemous” cannibalistic practices. Examining the ways in which these representations have evolved along

with the cultures from which they come is an important aspect in understanding the historical and contemporary tensions between the colonizers and the colonized.

While postcolonial theorists have interrogated the representation of cannibalism through Western culture, there is very little scholarship documenting the relationship between these representations and the representations of cannibals in Native American culture after European contact. Well-documented effects of colonization exist in many Native American traditional stories; originally written down by missionaries, these traditional stories were changed and adapted in order to reflect a Western religious ideology, specifically with creation stories. From a Native American viewpoint, the wendigo has evolved as a means of representing colonizers and is used often to explain colonization in traditional terms as opposed to theoretical terms. As Jean Strandness points out,

A motif I have seen recurring in works by Ojibway authors is that of the encroaching European voyageurs and settlers, together with the U.S. government and military, as windigo possessed. The new arrivals “devour,” to excess (literally and figuratively) trees, minerals, animals, land, culture, and people—anything that crosses their path. (39)

Gayatri Spivak’s theorizing on narratives through postcolonial theory, specifically her treatment of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, is highly influential in supporting postcolonial theory as a viable and valid way of interpreting narratives. Claiming that the monster in the novel was a representation of Europe’s anxieties concerning colonization, she calls attention to the subconscious fear of the colonizer that the colonized will one day rise up and destroy its “master” or creator. This fear of the colonized turning against the colonizer is imperative to the conversation on the representation of cannibals from a Western European viewpoint, and the

need to portray the colonized as monstrous is addressed repeatedly in the works of Franz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, and Vine Deloria, Jr.

## Chapter One: Contacting Cannibals

As previously stated in the introduction, the act of cannibalism is an abhorrent taboo for most cultures around the world, and the practice of eating humans is older than the word cannibalism itself. Where anthropophagy was once used, “cannibal” has become the dominant terminology due to the preference of the European imagination to associate indigenous peoples with the savage, uncivilized, and monstrous. Colonizers must transform these indigenous people not only into others, but into monsters, in order to justify the theft of the land’s resources from the original inhabitants, as well as the unparalleled genocide resulting from their infiltration into the new world.

The origin of the contact narrative—most importantly the contact narrative which involves cannibals—can be traced directly through the origins of the word “cannibal” itself through the voyages of Christopher Columbus and is inextricably linked to the practices of colonization. As Peter Hulme notes in “Columbus and the Cannibals,” the first appearance of the word cannibal comes from Columbus’s own journal, from an entry dated November 23, 1492. This entry documents the moment when Columbus is approaching an island in the Caribbean, which the Natives refer to as “Bohio.” Columbus claims that the Natives became afraid when the ship began to approach this island because “in it were people who had one eye in the forehead, and others whom they called *Caníbales*, of whom they seemed to have great fear . . . because these [people] ate them and because they are a well-armed people” (Columbus 100). Such a description recalls the epic narrative adventure of Odysseus, when he first encounters the island of the Cyclops and Polyphemus, the flesh-eating monster. Columbus’s account is difficult to believe even without such mythological allusions; that he (or anyone with him) could understand a language which he had never heard before, within a month, enough to understand the Natives

speaking to him about the island is highly implausible. It may be impossible to determine what was lost in translation, but the end result remains: the word itself became appropriate to describe anyone reported to consume human flesh, while always retaining its association with the Carib people and Europe's most famous early explorer of the Americas. As Hulme notes, "it was adopted into the bosom of the European family of languages with a speed and readiness which suggests that there had always been an empty place kept warm for it" (367). The European imagination happily accepted the association between unknown peoples and the cannibals suggested in Columbus's journal, and readily applied the same associations to any indigenous groups with whom they came into contact from that point forward.

Shakespeare reinforces the association between savagery and eating the flesh of other men within *The Tempest* simply in the naming of Caliban, which, as many have pointed out, is an anagram of cannibal. Caliban is portrayed as the villainous and deformed native of the island, which Prospero and his daughter Miranda inhabit. The occupation of the island by Prospero and his enslavement of Caliban is a kind of contact narrative, played out in hostile relations between Prospero and Caliban. When Prospero first encounters Caliban, he automatically projects the European understanding of indigenous people onto Caliban, perceiving Caliban not only as deformed and beast-like, but as incompetent and barely worthy of being a slave. Although Caliban never displays any propensity for cannibalism, the relation to cannibalism is unavoidable within his name. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Caliban means "A man of degraded bestial nature"; it is a variant form of "cannibal" and is, of course, the creation of Shakespeare himself. The enslavement of Caliban by Prospero is never detailed except briefly in Prospero's defeat of Caliban's mother; his role as slave exists as a given in the play. No explanation or justification is needed for Prospero's treatment of Caliban other than his already

being on the island when Prospero arrives, having been born there. Even though Prospero does not intend to stay on the island, he must enslave Caliban in order to solidify his claim as its ruler, for even with all of his magic, Prospero is reliant on Caliban for survival. He says to his daughter Miranda, “we cannot miss him: he does make our fire, / Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices / that profit us” (311-315). This contact narrative, shadowing the central plot of the play, reflects the same hubris that granted Columbus the audacity to claim he could enslave an entire indigenous population with fifty soldiers. Prospero, who sees the plight of Caliban as a secondary concern to his own wealth, power, and social status, has colonized the island, enslaved Caliban in the process, and left Caliban as a symbol for all colonized people in the Americas. Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan note in their book *Shakespeare’s Caliban: A Cultural History* that “Caliban stands for countless victims of European imperialism and colonization,” embodying their disinheritance, exploitation, and subjugation (145). Most notably, Caliban embodies forced assimilation, the imposition of language and culture frequently experienced by colonized peoples, and the inevitable rebellion against the colonizer.

While many Shakespeare specialists deny any sympathy on Shakespeare’s part towards the colonized of the new world, such a denial oversimplifies the complicated representation of Caliban. Caliban is an unwilling slave to Prospero and delivers the beautifully defiant line, “you taught me language, and my profit on’t / Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you / For learning me your language!” (366-368). Many have interpreted this line as Caliban’s ungrateful response to the gift of language that Prospero has bestowed upon Caliban. Barbados George Lamming, for example, claims this gift of language allows Caliban to discover the self and become aware of his own possibilities, linking language acquisition to an evolved consciousness. Lamming’s analysis of Prospero teaching Caliban English is heavily critiqued by less

Eurocentric writers such as Roberto Fernandez Retamar, who points out that such an interpretation overlooks Prospero's own observance of Caliban's speech (although Prospero views it as meaningless babbling). The "Caliban as ungrateful" interpretation also assumes that Caliban had no language before the imposition of English and the arrival of Prospero, an assumption not surprisingly wholly rejected by postcolonial critics supporting decolonization. Instead, recent interpretations suggest that Caliban's words in this moment seem almost prophetic, mirroring the response of many indigenous people in the Americas after colonization in their attempts to resist forced assimilation by using the government's own language and practices against itself. Caliban's lines not only testify to the rebellious spirit of the Carib people, Columbus's first "Canibales," who valiantly resisted the European occupation, but have come to represent solidarity with and between colonized people all over the world. Retamar explicitly outlines the similarities between Caliban and the colonized people of the Americas:

Prospero invaded the islands, killed our ancestors, enslaved Caliban, and taught him his language to make himself understood. What else can Caliban do but use that same language—today he has no other—to curse him, to wish that the "red plague" would fall on him? I know no other metaphor more expressive of our cultural situation, of our reality. ... What is our history, what is our culture, if not the history and culture of Caliban? (24)

Although Retamar's assessment specifically regards the people of his homeland Cuba, it is easily applicable to most colonized territories, especially to the colonized Americas. Many indigenous populations, primarily indigenous Americans, use the language of the colonizers to rebel against colonial power structures. Just as Caliban curses Prospero using Prospero's own language, many indigenous cultures have taken to the language of law and theory to begin the work of

decolonization. Homi Bhabha uses mimicry to explain the need of the colonizers to see their language adopted by the colonized in order to solidify their power, and in “Signs Taken for Wonders” he adds,

If the effect of colonial power is seen to be the *production* of hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions, then an important change of perspective occurs. The ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority enables a form of subversion, founded on the undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention. (160)

Such rebellious use of the colonizers’ language against themselves has had many incarnations over the years, perhaps no better example being that of the early members of the American Indian Movement who gathered and occupied the island of Alcatraz in November 1969. The reoccupation of that island began with the production of a proclamation claiming rights to the island, signed “the Indians of All Tribes”:

We, the native Americans, re-claim the land known as Alcatraz Island in the name of all American Indians by right of discovery. We wish to be fair and honorable in our dealings with the Caucasian inhabitants of this land, and hereby offer the following treaty: We will purchase said Alcatraz Island for 24 dollars in glass beads and red cloth, a precedent set by the white man’s purchase of a similar island about 300 years ago. (qtd. in Allen and Smith 28)

Not only does this document mirror the language used by the colonizers claiming ownership of the land by “discovering” the Americas, but it also calls attention to the hypocrisy of that



language in conjunction with Eurocentric behaviors and selfish practices of the colonizers, who like Prospero, claim to have done well by Caliban while enslaving him. Additionally, the very act of occupying Alcatraz demonstrates Frantz Fanon's theories of anticolonial action as described in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon declares certain acts of appropriation by the colonized as inevitable and necessary to resist colonization:

This same violence will be vindicated and appropriated when, taking history into their own hands, the colonized swarm into the forbidden cities. To blow the colonial world to smithereens is henceforth a clear image within the grasp and imagination of every colonized subject. (6)

Decolonization and reclamation often requires a degree of assimilation. Acquisition of the colonizer's language is typically the most successful appropriation, and although it comes with a loss of the language of the colonized, it is necessary in order to speak back to the construction of colonial narratives. From the very beginning, Fanon says, the colonizer and the colonist have a violent relationship predicated on the notion that survival of the colonized depends upon withholding truth from the colonizers, and the colonizer's presence is validated through the creation of Eurocentric historical narratives. He concludes, "The settler makes history; his life is an epic, an odyssey" (14).

The journals of Christopher Columbus re-enact a kind of adventure-odyssey worthy of Odysseus himself, journeying through the sea of monsters, while setting a new precedent for the contact narratives to follow. Certainly *The Tempest* has clear affinity with these journals, in turn influencing later contact narratives, particularly the novels *She* by H. Rider Haggard and *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe. Both of these works have survived as lasting popular novels into the present day: *She* was named one of the greatest novels of all time and has never been out

of print, and *Robinson Crusoe* has been one of the most widely published novels, as well as the inspiration for many spinoffs and adaptations. Each is an epistolary novel written from the perspective of a European man seeking a new adventure whom a shipwreck forces into “undiscovered” territory, where contact begins. Although Shakespeare experts maintain that his works were not very popular in the eighteenth century, *Robinson Crusoe* and *She* both link to *The Tempest* if in no other way than in the overarching themes of colonialism, imperialism, and European exploration barely disguised as an adventure story. Of the two, *Robinson Crusoe* mirrors *The Tempest* most closely, due in large part to the isolation of the main character in addition to his subjugation of the inhabitants of the island. Instead of immediately seizing control of the island as Prospero does, Crusoe carefully tucks himself away for years before deciding that the only way to escape is, in his own words, “to get a savage into my possession” (Defoe 144).

The impetus of Crusoe’s realization is a dream in which a “savage” who is about to be killed by cannibals escapes and runs into Crusoe’s cave. Crusoe takes this “savage” as his servant and concludes that, with the help of someone who knows the land and territory of the cannibals, he will be able to escape the island. Upon waking from this dream, Crusoe experiences a profound disappointment yet resolves that it has shown him the way to escape. This dream becomes a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, as the conclusions that Crusoe makes from it leads him to witness Friday’s escape from his captors. As Crusoe watches Friday run towards his cave, he thinks,

And now I expected that part of my Dream was coming to pass, and that he would certainly take shelter in my Grove; but I could not depend by any means upon my

dream for the rest of it, that the other Savages would not pursue him thither, and find him there. (Defoe 146)

The scene culminates in a battle between Crusoe, Friday, and the cannibals, and upon their victory, Friday gives himself over to the service of Crusoe out of gratitude. While his prophetic dream could stand simply as a means of initiating Crusoe's escape, Hulme points out in "Robinson Crusoe and Friday" that it stands more generally as "the fulfilment of Europe's wish to secure its Caliban colonies against the danger of rebellion. Friday's gratitude was the fulfilment of that dream. But it was only a dream" (117). Robinson Crusoe's defeat of the villainous captors of the island and rescue of Friday play out like an allegory for the assimilation practices of many colonizing forces. Friday becomes Crusoe's servant in gratitude for the rescue from supposedly savage cannibals, after which Crusoe teaches Friday his language (beginning with the word "master") as well as the cultural and religious practices that Crusoe has carried with him from Europe. In recognition of saving his life, Crusoe bestows the name "Friday" upon his new servant: "and first I made him know his name should be *Friday*, which was the day I sav'd his life; I call'd him so for the memory of time; I likewise taught him to say *Master*, and then let him know, that was to be my name" (149).

Crusoe effectively assimilates and enslaves Friday, and to see Friday's grateful servitude to Crusoe as wish fulfilment of European colonization then allows the reader to see the particular occurrence of how Friday came to be with Crusoe as supportive of the sentiment popular amongst colonizers. Colonel Richard Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Boarding School, best articulates it when he explained his forced assimilation tactics in the brash catchphrase of, "kill the Indian, save the man." In essence, Colonel Pratt believed that if everything that made an Indian Indian was destroyed—especially, indigenous language and culture—and replaced with

the culture, language, and traditions of Pratt's own allegedly civilized race, that Indian would be left with something worthy of manhood. To prove his hypothesis, Pratt created boarding schools—the first in 1879—to begin his experimentations with an assembly-line process of forced assimilation. This relatively progressive view of indigenous people for the time led Pratt's defenders claim his intentions were good, so much so that his tombstone reads, "Friend and counselor to the Indian."

Crusoe undertakes this task of killing the Indian to save the man in a more literal way; by murdering the "savage cannibals" keeping Friday captive, Crusoe kills the representatives of indigenous culture with which he is most familiar (the savage cannibals), freeing Friday to become a man worthy of civilization and servitude. Friday is so grateful for this supposed liberation that he welcomes Crusoe's European culture and civilization in every respect. He calls Crusoe by the name of "master," seeming, unlike Caliban, perfectly content in his new role as slave. Just as Prospero knows that he and his daughter cannot survive on the island without the help of Caliban, Crusoe knows that he needs the help of Friday. More importantly, Crusoe justifies the murder of the "savages" and the enslavement of Friday by projecting cannibalism onto indigenous populations. In his introduction to *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, Hulme points to Crusoe's resolve to destroy the cannibals as a prime example of the way in which denial of colonial violence enters the colonial discourse, serving as "the roots of the projection of cannibalism onto the victims of that violence: denial is a facet of the proposal of cannibal stories, at least in their early forms, when legal or moral justification was being sought for campaigns of slavery or extermination" (14). Relating to Crusoe's encounter with the cannibals, Hulme further claims that cannibalism and mass murder are linked in the colonial mindset as a means of directing colonial violence onto a monstrous enemy, whose destruction is made to appear

justified in the defense of civilization and survival. Moreover, such projections situate the Europeans as the just and deserving inheritors of the land, negating any right of the original inhabitants because, after all, monsters have no rights.

H. Rider Haggard's *She* likewise begins as an adventure novel, much in the same vein as *Robinson Crusoe*. Holly and Leo set out on a journey of discovery, having been prompted by Leo's inheritance of an ancient potsherd, but are shipwrecked along the coast of Africa. During their first night in this strange wilderness, the group is viciously and unrelentingly attacked by mosquitoes, with the exception of the Arab captain, whose blood, as Holly posits, is less palatable:

For, whether they were attracted by the lantern, or by the unaccustomed smell of a white man that they had awaited for the last thousand years or so, I know not; but certainly we were attacked presently by tens of thousands of the most bloodthirsty, pertinacious, and huge mosquitoes that I ever read of or saw. In clouds they came, and pinged and buzzed and bit till we were nearly mad. (69)

In Holly's assessment of this encounter, the mosquitoes, longing for the taste of the superior white blood, appear in unparalleled numbers in an apparent celebration of his arrival. While hostile, it seems the wilderness—as emblemized by the bloodsucking mosquitoes—has always been waiting for the arrival of the white man. When the Amahagger first encounter Holly's group, Holly, Leo, and Job are saved strictly due to the color of their skin. When one amongst the Amahagger asks if Holly's group should be killed, the response of the leader, who is later identified as Billali, orders that they should not be slain: “four suns since was the word brought to me from ‘*She-who-must-be-obeyed*,’ ‘White men come; if white men come, kill them not.’ . . . Bring forth the men, and let that which they have with them be brought forth also” (76). While

Billali is simply following orders, his words carry the same undertones of wish fulfillment of Crusoe's dream; the colonizing white man is welcomed and celebrated for what he has to offer the newly contacted, uncivilized races. In his first description of the Amahagger, Holly says,

Their features were aquiline, and in many cases exceedingly handsome, the teeth being especially regular and beautiful. But notwithstanding their beauty, it struck me that, on the whole, I had never seen more evil faces. There was an aspect of cold and sullen cruelty stamped upon them that revolted me, which, indeed, in some cases was almost uncanny in its intensity. . . . I could not say why, but I know that their appearance filled me with a sick fear of which I felt ashamed. (78)

Within Holly's description lies the tacit presumption of the previously uncontacted people as cannibals, worthy of the revulsion that Holly feels, despite his recognition of their beauty, even before he discovers the reason for this feeling. (While the Amahagger are cast as uncanny and revoltingly cruel, it is not until later that Holly and his companions discover them to be cannibals.) This description is also reminiscent of Columbus's descriptions of the indigenous people whom he first encounters in the Caribbean. Upon first seeing the Tainos people on October 12, 1492, Columbus writes, "All that I saw were young men, none of them more than 30 years old, very well built, of very handsome bodies and very fine faces . . . and they are of the color of the Canary Islanders, neither black nor white" (65).

The Amahagger nonetheless differ from other indigenous people depicted in contact narratives as they embody both sides of the colonial projection—savage, uncivilized cannibals with no history to speak of, yet at the same time, gracious and accepting of the invading white men in their presence. Their lack of access to their own history and how they came to be a people leaves a perfect opportunity for the colonizer or explorer to inscribe a history upon them: they do

not know how they came to be the people whom they are, and they know nothing about the Kör culture that previously existed in the space that they occupy other than what they learn from dead bodies and ruins. The inclination of Europeans to create a history for the people whom they have colonized, or simply encountered in “new worlds,” is addressed in Nancy Armstrong’s “The Polygenetic Imagination”:

Members of tribal cultures could be either earlier, childlike versions of European humanity or a rival species lacking in salient qualities of rationality and sexual restraint characterizing modern individuals. ... [T]he same savages could belong either to a species incapable of developing into some recognizably more civilized form or to a species that had reached the limit of its development in antiquity and from there degenerated to a primitive state. (107)

The Amahagger, with their veiled cultural history, embody this perspective quite well. Holly’s commentary likening the ruins of Kör to those of Ancient Greece suggests the Amahagger’s regression from a more civilized people. The forgotten people of Kör are referred to many times as highly intelligent and possessing at least some scientific knowledge, as Holly expressly states when he encounters the statue of the goddess Truth. Upon observing this great work, Holly remarks, “it is at any rate suggestive of some scientific knowledge that these long-dead worshippers of Truth had recognized the fact that the globe is round” (Haggard 264).

Furthermore, the denigration of Amahagger as primitive cannibals provides the narrator and his companions an opportunity to critique them as savage in comparison to the superior and civilized European world. As such, the Amahagger are unfit to inherit the legacy of the people of Kör (likened to ancient Greeks), and their knowledge waits in the jungles of Africa until the deserving European race discovers it.

While the Amahaggers' descent from the people of Kör is never explicitly stated, their origins contain a few other possibilities. Considering their physical descriptions, the Amahagger are a tribe of not quite African, and certainly not European, descent, making them easily interchangeable with most colonized people—they are fully other and able to stand in for any given race that the gaze of the western colonizer may need them to embody. Holly describes them as “varied in their degree of darkness of skin, some being as black as Mahomed, and some as yellow as a Chinese,” which leaves the reader with the impression that the Amahagger are a mostly biracial group (Haggard 81). They are likely either the result of the Kör people integrating into another African tribe or descendants of Ayesha and an African tribe that she conquered. Haggard's own concern about and repulsion for the Amahaggers' racially ambiguous appearance clearly comes through the disturbed musings of Holly.

If this Eurocentric notion of miscegenation as contamination were not a factor in diminishing the Amahaggers' value, then they would have inherited the grandeur of the ancient people of Kör—instead, they are denied access not only to knowledge about those people, but to their remains and relics as well. As Shawn Malley remarks, “The Amahagger do represent a temporal/cultural level in the history of Kör, but, as a bastard race, they are but physical survivals of Kör: intellectual and cultural survival is the birthright of Holly and Leo” (286). As educated Europeans, Holly and Leo are purportedly the only characters worthy of preserving the history and knowledge of these ancient people of Kör. Consequently, the Amahagger cannot recall their own cultural history—they can merely speculate on the relics of a lost civilization in the language of their absentee ruler, tainted as that language might be by the remnants of whatever language that they spoke before contact.



Once again, the indigenous populations must be transformed into monsters in order to justify the theft of the land's resources from the original inhabitants. The defeat of the Amahagger is a clear victory for the colonizers, who bring not only people, but also religion and imperialism with them to supposedly undiscovered lands. Holly, Job, and Leo witness the savage cannibalism of the Amahagger attempting to cook Mahomed alive by placing a red-hot pot over his head. The resulting fight is detailed over a few pages as "the whole crowd of cannibals, mad with fury" came after Leo, Holly, and Job (102). They are saved only because Billali returns from receiving his new orders from *She-who-must-be-obeyed* just in time to rescue them from the hands of his own people. In Holly's discussion with Billali following this incident, there occurs a fascinating colonial role-reversal. Billali informs Holly that custom allows for strangers who enter their country to be "slain 'by the pot' and eaten" (108). Holly responds with, "That is hospitality turned upside down. In our country we entertain a stranger, and give him food to eat. Here you eat him, and are entertained" (108). Holly, as representative of the colonial mindset, cannot see how his claims contradict what most indigenous people experience upon first contact. While the Tainos were gracious and giving towards Columbus and his men, for example, he returned their hospitality by slaughtering and enslaving as many of them as he could—a feat which he boasted he could do with only fifty men due to their lack of weaponry. And yet the popular narrative still holds of Columbus as a bearer of a civilized culture encountering a race of savages.

While many theorize the portrayal of cannibals as European consumption rooted purely in economics, as both Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx discuss, such a reading simplifies the depiction of cannibalism in colonial encounters. European consumption definitely has its place in the contact narratives: Columbus's preoccupation with what he could take (plants, gold, land,

people), with the profits from the use of indigenous slaves as justification for the expense of his voyages, and with the outright genocide necessary for the colonization of the land are undeniably rooted in the consumerist tradition. However, a greed more than simply material is needed to justify the colonizers' subjugation and dehumanization of indigenous peoples.

## Chapter Two: Wendigo Origins and Evolutions

According to the traditional stories of the Anishinabek, the Manitous, or the holy beings, created the world. From what once was covered in water, the Great Mystery gave birth to a great land, carried on the back of a giant turtle. Soon, many more Manitous came from the waters and taught The People how to live, how to heal, and how to nurture a relationship with the Great Spirit as well as with themselves and each other. These Holy Beings became the source of all power and spirit in the world, and The People regard them as sacred. Of the Manitous, the most abhorrent and terrifying is the Wendigo; it is the embodiment of the worst traits of humanity in both its physical appearance as well as its temperament, a cold and bitter spirit of winter.

The Wendigo (also spelled windigo, wiindigoo, weendigo, and wetiko) is originally described in traditional stories as a grotesque giant, tall and gauntly, who carried with it the stench of death and decay. Often in these old stories, the approach of a Wendigo is preceded by shrieking winds and a cold so fierce that it would cause the trees to crack. It was said that the Wendigo's upper body would be hidden by dark snow clouds as it hunted down its prey, and when it finally caught a man, it would drink its blood and eat its flesh. As it consumed, it would grow in size and its hunger would increase; it was impossible to satisfy such a hunger. These older stories of the wendigo, the monsters of winter, served as a warning against selfishness and greed. In his book *The Manitous: The Supernatural World of the Ojibway*, Basil Johnston claims that one the wendigo's most standard traits is disregard for the suffering of others: "The pain of others means nothing to the Weendigo; all that mattered was its survival" (222). Johnston also remarks that the etymology of the word itself stems from the Anishinaabe words *ween dagoh* meaning "solely for self" (222). While the Anishinaabe gave it this name, the idea of the creature existed in some form throughout the northern tribes. In *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*,

Leslie Marmon Silko recounts a Yupik story about the consumption and bitter cold of the wendigo. It is a kind of prophecy, cautioning the inevitable destruction of the land and all its people if the spirit of the wendigo is allowed to take hold. It begins,

Inside the small cabin of logs and tundra sod, the old storyteller is mumbling the last story he will ever tell. It is the story of the hunter stalking a giant polar bear the color of blue glacier ice. It is a story that the old storyteller has been telling since the young Yupik woman began to arrange the white trader's death: "A sudden storm develops. The hunter finds himself on an ice floe offshore. Visibility is zero, and the scream of the wind blots out all sound. Quickly the hunter realizes he is being stalked, hunted by all the forces, by all the elements of the sky and earth around him. When at last the hunter's own muscles spasm and cause the jade knife to fall and shatter the ice, the hunter's death in the embrace of the giant, ice blue bear is the foretelling of the world's end." When humans have blasted and burned the last bit of life from the earth, an immeasurable freezing will descend with a darkness that obliterates the sun. (46-7)

Silko sees in this story a metaphor for the cold and reckless consumption of people who lack regard for reciprocity towards the earth. This selfish abuse of taking more than what is given causes the wendigo to consume all of life within its icy hold. The story demonstrates one of the ways that the wendigo has evolved overtime. It began as the ultimate warning for selfishness within the tribe, but has become much more. Whereas the European imagination casts the cannibal onto others as a means of justifying the exploitation of indigenous people, the wendigo differs in that in order to be seen as a representation of the white man, the wendigo itself had to change—that is, the Indigenous understanding of a cannibal monster had to evolve in order to

incorporate the idea that a man could embody such monstrosity and still remain a man. While many of these stories remained in their haunting forms, the Anishinaabe wendigo stories quickly changed to incorporate the dangers of over-indulgence and selfishness in people; it was not long before the stories evolved and changed to incorporate a greater fear—not of being eaten by the wendigo as in the old stories, but of becoming the wendigo.

There are three ways in which a person could become a wendigo, but the most common was the scarcity and starvation of harsh winters turning people into wendigos out of severe desperation and unbearable hunger. When this desperation led a person to satiate themselves on the flesh of humans, they would turn into a wendigo, unable to stop themselves from killing and consuming any and every human body that they could find. With their sudden growth and long stride, they could traverse vast acres with great speed and devastate entire villages within minutes. They no longer had control over their own impulses. When no longer finding human bodies to consume and feed their hunger, they would slowly diminish in size, become more vulnerable as they wandered in search of more people, and often die after being hunted down by a great hero, such as Nana'b'oozhoo, or someone seeking revenge. Usually, the wendigo story is told as a cautionary tale meant to remind listeners to practice moderation, to be cautious of saving enough for winter, and to give proper reverence to the Manitou.

The second way in which people become wendigos is by being cursed by another, generally without knowledge of the transformation taking place. They are instead only aware of a terrible hunger and a fierce cold, neither of which are possible to abate. Food begins to smell foul, and no matter how many blankets or warm drinks they use, they cannot rid themselves of chills. Desperation to survive less often precedes the creation of these wendigos than severe selfishness. Sometimes a person is punished for attempting to hoard food without sharing it with

others, or a person is driven to create a wendigo by their own unchecked desire for another. In one popular story retold by Basil Johnston, a man rejected by a woman creates an effigy in her likeness out of snow and ice and thereby turns her into a wendigo. She destroys her entire family and forgets her memories. The man finds her and takes her as a wife, but she is plagued with a severe sense of isolation, loneliness, and loss. In the end, she destroys herself by stepping into a blazing fire and burning herself alive. These stories are those that initially began to link isolation and loneliness with the power of the wendigo.

The third and ultimately the most enduring means of becoming a wendigo is by becoming possessed or infected with the spirit of the wendigo. Individuals who display a vulnerability to traits to which wendigo are drawn could become infected with their spirit, which would feed inside of them without their taking on the physical attributes of the wendigo. By becoming this invasive spirit, the wendigo found a means of surviving into the contemporary world.

The works of Louise Erdrich best exemplify how these stories have evolved over the years, from first contact with Europeans to now. Commonly known that the timeline in Erdrich's novels span almost the entire nineteenth century, her treatment of the wendigo across that time span is arguably the most comprehensive consideration of the various incarnations that the wendigo has taken. Erdrich's third novel *Tracks* opens in the year 1912 with Nanapush narrating. He is of the last generation to fully realize the power of the wendigo and all of its manifestations. It is a time when the traditional beliefs of the Ojibway are being challenged by governmental policies put in place for the erasure of indigenous culture, and many are leaving behind traditional ways of living. He is a trickster figure, whose name recalls the traditional stories of Nana'b'oozhoo, the character frequently credited in traditional stories as the hero who defeats the wendigo. Within these first few lines of the novel, Nanapush connects the bitterness of winter

and the dwindling numbers of the Ojibway with the disease introduced by contact with American settlers.

We started dying before the snow, and like the snow, we continued to fall. . . . But the earth is limitless and so is luck and so were our people once. Granddaughter, you are the child of the invisible, the ones who disappeared when, along with the first bitter punishments of early winter, a new sickness swept down. The consumption, it was called. (1-2)

Nanapush goes on to recount the devastation of the disease: how the tribe's numbers plummeted with widespread death, the demise of Nanapush's own family, his attempts to encourage tribes not to sign away their lands with government treaties, the introduction of western religion on the reservations, and finally his discovery of Fleur Pillager in her family's home, sick and surrounded by her own deceased family members in the late winter. Nanapush removes Fleur from her home and takes her back to his own, then later returns to bury Fleur's family. Though he offers tobacco at their graves and asks their spirits not to linger, Nanapush suspects that they do not listen to him and instead follow him home: "All the way down the trail, just beyond the edges of my sight, they flickered, thin as needles, shadows piercing shadows" (6). Nanapush believes that the influence of these restless spirits left Fleur and himself susceptible to the wendigo, describing his experience in detail:

We felt the spirits of the dead so near that at length we just stopped talking. This made it worse. Their names grew within us, swelled to the brink of our lips, forced our eyes open in the middle of the night. We were filled with the water of the drowned, cold and black, airless water that lapped against the seal of our tongues or leaked slowly from the corners of our eyes. Within us, like ice shards,

their names bobbed and shifted. Then the slivers of ice began to collect and cover us. We became so heavy, weighted down with the lead gray frost, that we could not move. Our hands lay on the table like cloudy blocks. The blood within us grew thick. We needed no food. And little warmth. Days passed, weeks, and we didn't leave the cabin for fear we'd crack our cold and fragile bodies. We had gone half windigo. (6)

This passage demonstrates the traditional practice of associating both isolation and bitter winters with the wendigo. Nanapush and Fleur are in danger of becoming wendigos not only because of their solitude, but also because of the spirits lingering close by, restless because the fear of individuals (both Nanapush and Pukwan) taking precedence over communal responsibility. Nanapush and Fleur are able to avoid completely becoming wendigos due to the interruption of their isolation by the new priest, who brings news that another Pillager—Fleur's cousin Moses—has been found alive. This visitation, as well as the news of surviving family for Fleur, diminish the hold of the wendigo spirit on both Fleur and Nanapush, who then leaves the cabin to discover that the snow has melted and the threat of starvation has passed.

This episode clearly demonstrates a lingering tie to the traditional beliefs of the wendigo—that a person could become a wendigo under such extreme and desperate circumstances. Neither Fleur nor Nanapush are truly responsible for these circumstances, and while they are able to resist the pull of becoming full wendigo, Nanapush's assessment of their danger calls attention to the traditional beliefs of the power that the Manitous hold. While this indication of the endurance of tradition is significant, perhaps more compelling is the second representation of a wendigo within the novel: the embodiment of the wendigo within the character Pauline.



Pauline, arguably the most destructive character in Erdrich's novels, is a prime example of the wendigo spirit living inside people until they become wendigo themselves although still appearing human. This most common contemporary portrayal of the wendigo is also the most dangerous as the wendigo within the person can be difficult to identify. Jean Strandness, in her article "When the Windigo Spirit Swept across the Plains ...: Ojibway Perceptions of the Settlement of the Midwest," pointing out,

Erdrich's use of ice imagery clearly suggests Pauline/Leopolda's initial windigo possession. She says, "I will add their souls to those I have numbered." In *Tracks* and later in *Love Medicine*, we see Leopolda, in the guise of a Christian martyr, increasingly windigo possessed as she becomes cold and brittle, feeding on souls.

(42)

Pauline is able to hide her wendigo spirit beneath lies and manipulation from most of the characters in the novel, except Nanapush, who is one of the few to see her for who she is. He remarks on Pauline's selfishness and deception multiple times throughout the novel. In one of his first assessments of Pauline, Nanapush says, "Because she was unnoticeable, homely if it must be said, Pauline schemed to gain attention by telling odd tales that created damage. There was some question if she wasn't afflicted, touched in the mind" (39). Nanapush reinforces this assessment of her false character not long after when he says, "As I have said, she was born a liar, and sure to die one. The practice of deception was so constant with her that it got to be a kind of truth" (53). Nanapush, as one of the oldest characters in the novel and the most traditionally minded, sees Pauline's deceitful nature and the dangers that it represents clearly. He understands lying to be an essential aspect of the wendigo; as Jack D. Forbes also suggests in *Columbus and Other Cannibals*, lying "is also almost always a factor in *wetiko* behavior, and in

fact may represent a key strand in the entire epidemiology of *wetikoism*” (43). Additionally, Forbes reinforces the growing trend within Native culture of associating whiteness and white culture with the wendigo by including Black Hawk’s well-known commentary of “How smooth must be the language of the whites, when they can make right look like wrong, and wrong look right” (43). Nanapush is conscious of Pauline’s selfishness and her unwillingness to work for the good of her people, and he is perhaps one of the few to understand her emotional isolation from them. He watches closely as the wendigo within her grows, his mistrust of her deepening to the point where he does not even trust her with his own dead body:

Sometimes, now, Pauline sat the death watch too. . . . She was the crow of the reservation, she lived off our scraps, and she knew us best because the scraps told our story. I didn’t want Pauline ever to know me in death. Not with those cold eyes, light and curious, sharp pins. I’d go off in the bush like a sick dog first, alone. (54)

Nanapush clearly associates Pauline’s behavior with the cold, desperate hunger of the wendigo through his descriptions of her as carrion. In addition to his growing mistrust, this passage demonstrates his early fear of Pauline and her limitless evil—her power to destroy everyone from Fleur, herself, and Nanapush to those of future generations whom she corrupts in her role as a nun. She is an instrument of cultural genocide, as well as actual death, capable of anything. He sees Pauline as no longer living to work with her people, but instead using them to satisfy her own strange hungers. However, Pauline’s transformation into a wendigo is gradual: while her habit of lying left her vulnerable to the wendigo, her transformation could not have been sustained without a steady diet of isolation, destruction, and death. Pauline’s metaphorical feasting on the bodies of the dead signals her further removal from her tribal community,

justified in her own mind by her embrace of western religious doctrines, a removal that strengthens the wendigo. She sees herself not as becoming wendigo, but as becoming holy, demonstrated in her own words when she “collects” her first soul. While sitting with a classmate near death, Pauline believes that she sees a tether holding the girl to life, which she severs by cutting the air between them with her fingers. As the girl dies, Pauline says,

A cool blackness lifted me, out of the room and through the door. I leapt, spun, landed along the edge of the clearing. My body rippled. . . . After that, although I kept the knowledge close, I knew I was different. I had the merciful scavenger’s heart. I became devious and holy, dangerously meek and mild. (68-69)

Pauline recognizes that she is becoming different from and a danger to her people, but she associates this danger with her deepening involvement in the church and holiness. She becomes obsessed with the need to consume the souls of the people whom she sees as removed from God because of their indulgence in the earth’s pleasures:

I was their own fate. Somewhere now, in the back of their minds, they knew that these bodies they tended and preened, got drunk, pleased and refused, fed as often as they could and relieved, these bodies to which they were devoted, all in good time came to me. (75)

Pauline is only satisfied by starving herself of all the usual ways of consumption and then consuming the bodies and souls of others. The more souls she consumes, the more wendigo she becomes. She becomes so alienated from the ways of her people and her culture that she no longer sees herself as one of them, as is best illustrated in her own vision, during which she speaks to who she claims is God:

One night of deepest cold He sat in the moonlight, on the stove, and looked down at me and smiled in the spill of His radiance and explained. He said that I was not whom I had supposed. I was an orphan and my parents had died in grace, and also, despite my deceptive features, I was not one speck of Indian but wholly white. (137)

Again emphasized is darkness, deep cold, and winter, but more importantly, Pauline's substitution of traditional indigenous ways with those of western society. She abandons her identity as Native in favor of whiteness, and in this move, she demonstrates perfectly the association between wendigo and the Western European culture of consumption. She lets the man in her vision lead her down an unfamiliar path, where she sees the souls of her people wandering. She recounts the exchange she has with this man: "“what shall I do now?” I asked. ‘I’ve brought You so many souls!’ And He said to me, gently: ‘Fetch more’” (140). The casual demand for more from the man whom she believes to be God is telling in its delineation of constant, insatiable consumption. Her willingness to let this man into her heart and soul implies the wendigo is a form of whiteness in a spiritual and cultural sense. Not long after this exchange, Pauline's assimilation and adoption of whiteness becomes clear to others. When she visits Fleur during a cold winter day and Nanapush answers the door, she so repulses him that he will not allow into the cabin. As she relates,

The cold was deep, sharp as bones, but even so he refused me entrance to the Pillager cabin. “Go, go!” he said. “”You’re more and more like the whites who never wash themselves clean!” . . . However, God makes no distinction. He would rather have a good soul that stank like a cheese than a bad soul fragranced with

rose oil and myrrh. My rank aroma was the perfume my soul exuded, devotion's air. (153)

Not only does Nanapush call attention to her obsession of being more white (and more holy) than anyone else around her, but he calls attention her odor. It is the kind of repugnant stench so repeatedly associated with the wendigo, one on which Pauline herself remarks as evidence of what she has become. Fleur attempts to help Pauline, invites her in, and gives her a bath. Pauline, in her holiness, refuses to lift a single finger to help; she simply stands there convincing herself that she is not taking pleasure in it, leaving the pregnant Fleur to work extra hard in order to help her. Shortly after Pauline's bath is complete, Fleur goes into premature labor. Pauline is unable to recall what the plant to stop the labor looks like and, in her panic, knocks over Fleur's store of food for winter while grabbing a plant at random. Such careless destruction and clear disregard for traditional medicines further demonstrates the wendigo spirit taking hold within her. Pauline is so useless that Fleur must cut her own umbilical cord following the labor. Fleur loses the life of her child and barely survives the night. It is unclear whether or not Fleur's strenuous attempts to help Pauline caused the early labor, but Pauline's selfish concern with only her own needs, abdication of communal responsibilities, and utter abandonment of traditional ways of knowing clearly contribute to the loss of Fleur's child. Pauline cannot heal and cannot help bring life into the world as a wendigo; she can only consume the souls of others as they die. Towards the end of the novel, Nanapush remarks, "The still look in Pauline's eyes made me wonder, so like a scavenger, a bird that lands only for its purpose" (189). Once again, Nanapush sees Pauline clearly, as selfish carrion and a wendigo disguised as a woman.

Pauline's last narration begins, "Christ was weak, I saw now, a tame newcomer in this country that has its own devils in the waters of boiling-over kettles. I lifted my hands to my face.

Fat gauze clubs that smelled of roast meat, an odor that has sickened me since” (192). Pauline’s disgust of the aroma of meat reinforces her unnatural appetites, and she begins to understand what kind of creature she has truly become. Even while seeing herself as greater than Christ, as something wholly new and improved, she calls attention to the older gods of the lands and the lasting memory of the Manitous. Pauline concludes her internal exploration by saying,

I knew God had no foothold or sway in this land, or no mercy for the just, or that perhaps, for all my suffering and faith, I was still insignificant. Which seemed impossible. I knew there never was a martyr like me. I was hollow unless pain filled me, empty but for the pain . . . Christ had hidden out of frailty . . . New devils require new gods. (195)

Pauline understands that she cannot name what she has become because she has outgrown what she sees as the limited power of Christ and because there is something both new and old in what she is. She is a new kind of wendigo, carrying the old dangerous evil into a new generation. Solidified in her transformation, she takes on the new name Leopolda and declares her mission to mold future generations in her own image.

Taking place shortly after the events in *Tracks*, Erdrich’s novel *Four Souls* opens with the epitaph “She threw out one soul and it came back hungry,” picking up the threat of the wendigo immediately, not with Pauline, but with a relative of hers and a great enemy of Nanapush, whose arrival Nanapush describes in explicit detail:

My life’s enemy, Shesheeb, returned to set up his house down my road. He lived yet, though I’d tried to kill him many times. Nothing is complete without its shadow. Shesheeb was the older half brother of Pauline Puyat, who’d left to pray

herself into a lean old vulture. Perhaps Shesheeb came to take her place on the reservation—otherwise I suppose we would have been too light, too sun-filled, too trusting, and floated up without our anchors of dark. (99-100)

Once again, the selfish wendigo figure appears in conjunction with snow, cold, iciness and an unnatural appetite for pain, destruction, and danger. Nanapush recognizes Shesheeb as a wendigo from long ago, who, in sharing Pauline's line, is clearly the best option to take her place when she leaves the reservation. When Nanapush and Shesheeb were both young, Shesheeb tricked him into falling through the ice after a late fall snow. Nanapush comes running when he hears Shesheeb's cry, and in his hurry to get to him, falls through the thin ice. Nanapush says, "If he'd only laughed! But he just looked at me from the other side with sly, gloating wonder" (100). This incident sticks in Nanapush's memory not because of his embarrassment, but because of Shesheeb's motives for endangering Nanapush in such a way. Shesheeb's selfish nature and hunger for destruction leave him vulnerable to the wendigo. Shesheeb's aunt, in pleading to the Manitous for spirit helpers to heal him and untangle his mind, sends him out to fast and await their instruction. Nanapush says that Shesheeb discovered cruelty that day and began to torture animals for the curious pleasure that it gave him:

Only for the manidoog to untangle, she said, or to cut. The last time she sent him out he was nearly dead once he returned. He staggered and dropped flat over on the path. It was on that trip that something happened to him we can't say, we don't know, we haven't a name for and don't want one. (100-101)

But Nanapush does know what Shesheeb has become. Perhaps his young age kept Nanapush from naming Shesheeb as a wendigo at the time. Nanapush finally admits this fact to himself

after his sister marries Shesheeb. Nanapush recalls Shesheeb laughing after striking his sister with a burning stick as the inciting moment for her eventual destruction:

The blow marked the side of my sister's lovely face with a knot of flesh that grew darker and darker, until it swallowed her. Then came the winter of our last starvation, when she disappeared. I know what happened. The truth is this: Shesheeb went windigo. That he killed and ate my sister was never proved in a whiteman's court, so he went free. But the rest of us knew. (102)

Shesheeb is a more traditional wendigo than Pauline, with his relatively quick transition during a moment of physical starvation and his abject appetite for human flesh. Shesheeb is the biggest threat to Nanapush, having decided so early on to take pleasure from causing him pain. Although Nanapush resists Shesheeb's power and influence, he cannot deny that Shesheeb's presence and effect on his life, as well as their volatile history, resemble destruction of the wendigo. However, only Nanapush remembers Shesheeb as wendigo—the more lasting destruction of the wendigo comes from Pauline. Pauline helped the wendigo take new shape so that, despite its change in form, it still lingers as a relevant and contemporary treat. Nanapush concludes the novel with the following words:

The birds are gone, and with them, on their wings, the thunder and the lightning. The skin of ice grows farther out onto the lake and the wind turns the raindrops to dust. . . . Even our bones nourish change, and even a people who lived so close to the bone and were saved for thousands of generations by a practical philosophy, even such people as we, the Anishinaabeg, can sometimes die, or change, or change and become. (209-10)



These last words from Nanapush set a prophecy in place much like the prophecy of the Yupik. Nanapush has watched his people become assimilated, witnessing the evils of colonialism and corrupting influences seep into the hearts of his people. He knows that his people will change and has seen the beginnings of their transformations in his own time. His words stand as a warning that with the embrace of this new wendigo will come further suffering and greater separation from the traditional ways of the people.

Winona LaDuke's representation of the wendigo in her novel *Last Standing Woman* demonstrates where the wendigo settled in the contemporary minds of the northern tribes: firmly in the capitalist mentality of white men. Jean Strandness, in her analysis of Erdrich's use of the wendigo, calls attention to the differences between Erdrich's portrayal of Pauline and LaDuke's use of the wendigo:

Erdrich rarely uses the term "windigo" explicitly, but in her depictions of the overwhelming physical and psychological damage to the Ojibway people resulting from the arrival of European greed, disease, and religion, Erdrich clearly implies a connection with windigo. Further, the traits of Leopolda's windigo possession, which Erdrich comprehensively details in *Tracks* and *Love Medicine*, suggest that European culture, as a whole, is windigo possessed and that this disease is contagious. (42)

Erdrich's means of portraying the wendigo through Pauline are subtle, whereas LaDuke, according to Strandness, "*repeatedly and explicitly* identifies acts of aggression by the 'white man' as windigo" (43, emphasis original). The materialistic destruction of natural resources and casual disregard for the spirit of the natural world stand as a testament to the corruption of spirit. LaDuke offers a critical analysis of how lumber companies destroy the land in order to feed their

unnatural addictions of wealth and power, and just like Erdrich, she connects the unnecessary destruction to the wendigo. Early in her novel is a retelling of a wendigo tale about a foolish hunter:

He was a fool and he died like a fool. He was a brash and boastful hunter, one to flaunt his gifts . . . he always took too much from the woods and kept too much for himself. And he spoke too loudly about the animals, at all times of the year. He boasted he would kill the cannibal, the *Wiindigoo* of Round Lake. . . . The *Wiindigoo* had power, and the *Wiindigoo* had an agreement with the lake and the *Mishinameginebig*, the Great Horned Sturgeon. No one ever saw him again. He never got to the *Wiindigoo*, never even got close. Icy fingers reached from deep within the lake and pulled him down. (8)

The inclusion of the traditional story allows the reader to understand the power of the wendigo early on in the novel and appreciate what it would mean for the lumber tycoons to be comparable to such a figure. Just as Erdrich does in *Tracks* and *Four Souls*, LaDuke focuses largely on the theft of land, in this case by the lumber industry in conjunction with tribal affairs and their early encounters with white men. LaDuke sets up a confrontation between the Anishinabek and the white loggers in the year 1915. The account begins with an old man, Namebin Minnogeeshig, taking a trip into town, wondering when and where the unchecked consumption of the lumbermen's work would end:

Namebin looked at the lumberman and did not stand. With some hesitation the foreman came forward, his eyes taking in the Indian's life and filing it in his mind. Namebin regarded the lumberman and his Indian. He remembered that there had once been a *wiindigoo*, or cannibal, at Round Lake, many winters past.

It had been long since the cannibal had been there but Namebin remembered him just the same. . . . Namebin looked again at the lumberman. “The cannibal is here again,” Namebin observed. (45-6)

This realization of the lumberman as wendigo allows Namebin to assemble his people and resist their lumberman’s attempts to cut down all of the trees. When pleading for the rights of the Anishinaabe and the wellbeing of the trees fails to yield results, Namebin gathers a group of about 50 Indians to dismantle the camp of the foreman and take over Round Lake with their rafts and canoes. LaDuke conveys this episode from the eyes of a wendigo lumberman:

He scanned the faces in the canoes—maybe fifty Indian men and women armed with Winchester rifles, sturdy in their canoes on the river and holding the shores. His eyes met those of Namebin. He winced. The Indian glared. Now, in perfect English, the Indian spoke, his voice carried swiftly across the water. “It is no use to make small talk to a cannibal,” he said, and he cocked his gun. (48)

From this moment onward, the White Earth Anishinabek bears the association of the wendigo in irresponsible, unchecked consumption of the earth’s resources for profit, specifically by white people.

This return of the wendigo, in new form, carries into Erdrich’s works as well, specifically *The Round House* and *Tracks*. The former, Erdrich’s most current novel to date, opens with a young boy named Joe narrating how he and his father pull sapling roots from the foundation of their house while waiting for his mother to return home from work. When too much time passes, they decide to look for her and drive off only to turn around as they see her driving back to the

house. When they arrive, they find her in the driveway, sitting in her car. As they pull her from the car, Joe's father

put his hands on hers and carefully pried her fingers off the steering wheel.

Cradling her elbow, he lifted her from the car and supported her as she shifted toward him, still bent in the shape of the car seat. She slumped against him, stared past me. There was vomit down the front of her dress and, soaking her skirt and soaking the gray cloth of the car seat, her dark blood. (6-7)

When they rush his mother to the hospital, they find out that she has been raped. It is her rapist who has carried the wendigo within him his entire life, a white man by the name of Linden Lark, although his identity is not revealed until halfway into the novel. Before he discovers whom his mother's attacker is, Joe spends most of his time trying to get her to feel normal again, to embrace her survival, and join the world of the living. Since her attack, she has isolated herself in her room, alone, resisting human contact and unwilling to name her attacker. She has been touched by the wendigo, and Joe does not know how to help her recover. Joe's father becomes consumed with searching for clues and possible leads as to the identity of the attacker, about which Joe comments: "My father had become convinced that somewhere within his bench briefs, memos, summaries, and decisions lay the identity of the man whose act had nearly severed my mother's spirit from her body" (45). Joe understands that the touch of the wendigo has affected his mother on a spiritual level, placing her soul in great danger, and believes that she will be healed when they discover the attacker's identity, not realizing that his mother already knows who he is. When Joe finally finds out that she withheld this knowledge, he says, "That she knew who did it was a kick in the stomach. My ribs hurt. I couldn't get my breath. I kept walking straight into the kitchen and then out the back door, into the sunshine. I took great gulps of

sunshine. It was as though I had been locked up with a raging corpse” (90). Joe’s continuous commentary about his mother’s corpse-like appearance—the way in which she has become a ghostly presence in their house, as well as her self-imposed isolation—further link her current state with the wendigo sickness. That his mother begins to heal after revealing the name of her attacker still does not satisfy Joe, and he decides that the only way to heal her completely is to destroy the monster who touched her. Joe plots to avenge his mother with his best friend Cappy, who in the end, kills the wendigo Linden himself. Cappy and Joe afterwards wonder about what they will become, and they—or Joe does anyway—seek out Linden’s sister for an explanation of how Linden came to be the monster whom Joe sees him to be. As Linda explains,

“why he did this to your mother had more to do with a man who set loose his monster. Not everybody’s got a monster, and most who do keep it locked up. But I saw the monster in my brother way back in the hospital and it made me deathly ill. I knew that someday he would let it loose. It would lurch out with part of me inside. Yes. I was part of the monster too. I gave and gave, but know what? It was still hungry. Know why? Because no matter how much it ate, it couldn’t get the thing right. There was always something it needed.” (300)

Linda, who did not grow up with Native stories, still recognizes the monster inside her brother for what it is: the same wendigo figure that has survived in the contemporary minds of Native people in the Americas.

The wendigo is ultimately associated with the possessive, unrepentant taking of land and the forced removal of indigenous people, without a single thought to the survival or wellbeing of anyone else. It is the icy cold heart of the colonizer who cannot see the Native people as worthy of anything besides eradication, decimation, and subjugation. Finally, it is the monster living

inside men, whose souls were consumed long ago, giving them unnatural power to wreak destruction on the earth and within the lives of the people around them.

### Chapter Three: In the Spirit of the Wendigo

Vine Deloria, Jr., often credited as one of the first Native American theorists, discusses the Native in terms of the American imagination in his book *God is Red*. He summarizes the depiction of Natives in film and media as follows:

Until the occupation of Wounded Knee, American Indians were stereotyped in literature and by the media. They were either a villainous warlike group that lurked in the darkness thirsting for the blood of innocent settlers or the calm, wise, dignified elder sitting on the mesa dispensing his wisdom in poetic aphorisms. Strangely, the malevolent image can be attributed to the movie caricature while the benign image comes from anthologies, pageants, and the fervent wish by non-Indians to establish some personal sense of Jungian authentication. (25)

The first representation reflects what Homi Bhabha describes in *The Location of Culture* as the objective of colonial discourse “to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish new systems of administration and instruction” (70).

As the wendigo figure evolved within indigenous cultures to represent the white man and the unrelenting greed of colonization, it became most often represented as spiritual disease or sickness of the mind. Instead of becoming wendigo in the physical sense, people can be invaded by the spirit of the wendigo and turn into a wendigo through the corruption of their spirit. Those who come into contact with this kind of wendigo are the ones who suffer the most, typically being infected by the wendigo themselves. While a spiritual evolution of the wendigo is clearly recognizable within Native American literature, it took a different path in the American mainstream consciousness and is not as clearly identified. Instead of being a contemporary and

relevant figure, the wendigo is contained within the realm of myth and legend. Typically, current portrayals of the wendigo outside of Native American literature occur in the genre of science fiction, horror and fantasy. Native cultures have been able to maintain the significance of the wendigo by allowing it to adapt to new evils in their world, but attempts to appropriate the wendigo within popular culture often dilute or wholly omit the most relevant features that indigenous cultures associate with the wendigo. When non-Natives use wendigos in a contemporary context, all that carries through is their physical monstrosity and their hunger for human flesh, as demonstrated through popular television series, including *The X-Files*, *Charmed*, and *Supernatural*.

*The X-Files* is a science fiction television series, which follows FBI agents Fox Mulder, who just wants to believe in fantastic stories and endless possibility, and Dana Scully, the skeptical agent with a medical background and a complicated faith. While the show is well known for its repeated engagement with alien conspiracy plots and a deeply embedded fear of alien colonization, Mulder and Scully also pursue what is known as a “monster of the week,” where they solve cases unrelated to the larger mythology of the series. Many episodes of this nature within the series deal with cannibalism in some way, some of which also incorporate aspects of the wendigo or associate cannibalism with indigenous cultures, beginning in the first season.

The episode “Shapes,” takes place in Montana, near an unnamed Indian reservation where a local rancher has shot and killed a Native man by the name of Joe Goodensnake. The rancher claims that he was shooting at a wolf that he suspected of attacking his cattle. Early in their investigation, Mulder and Scully learn that the rancher has been illegally moving his herd farther onto reservation lands to graze. Scully sees this legal dispute as motivation for the rancher



killing Joe Goodensnake and questions Mulder's motivation in taking the case, claiming that any FBI agent could have handled it. However, Mulder persists in treating the case as an X-file, and they continue their investigation. They make their way to the local pool hall and begin questioning the locals until an old man in the corner who recognizes them as FBI agents calls them out. The old man says to Mulder, "I was at Wounded Knee in 1973—and what I learned fighting the FBI is you don't believe in us, and we don't believe in you," to which Mulder responds with his own personal catchphrase of "I want to believe." Even though Mulder does not immediately discover the information that he needs in order to solve the case, the exchange establishes enough trust in the old Native man for him, eventually revealing to Mulder the nature of the creature for which he is searching.

At first, when Mulder says he's looking for a creature that can make human tracks in one step and animal tracks in the next, no one will tell him anything. The sister of Joe Goodensnake yells at the gathering in the bar, insisting that their superstitious fear from old legends is blinding them to the truth. She storms off without further explanation, and Mulder and Scully continue their investigation. Finally, when Scully has had enough of tagging along behind Mulder without a proper explanation of or rationale for their investigation, she makes him tell her why he took the case in the first place. He responds, "A true piece of history, Scully. The very first X-file, initiated by J. Edgar Hoover himself in 1946. A series of murders in and around the northwest. Each victim was ripped to shreds and eaten as if by a wild animal." Mulder goes on to explain that even though the phenomenon was originally documented by the FBI in 1946, it goes back even further—one hundred and fifty years further according to Mulder, citing the Lewis and Clark expedition as evidence and claiming that they wrote of Indian men who could change their shape into wolves. Scully accuses Mulder of describing lycanthropy, which she believes is

simply a mental condition characterized by extreme paranoia in which a person believes that during the full moon, they turn into a wolf. Eventually, one of the locals describes the phenomenon, saying it is “what the Algonquins call the Manitou: an evil spirit that allows a man to transform into a beast.” The man explains further that this evil spirit can travel within bloodlines and can be transferred to another if the Manitou scratches or bites a human while in wolf form.

When the rancher is killed, Mulder suspects Joe Goodensnake’s sister to be the culprit, believing revenge to be her motive. However, it is actually the rancher’s own son who kills Joe after being scratched by him when in wolf form. Having apparently been born with the condition, Joe was able to survive on a fairly normal diet of cattle, but the rancher’s son consumes the flesh of his own father after being invaded by this evil spirit. His turn to cannibalism draws on the evil of the wendigo, for which the only term ever used in the episode is “Manitou,” described simply as “an evil spirit.” This reductive yet convenient appropriation abolishes all nuance and sacredness of the Manitou by depicting it as one specific evil spirit. What remains of the wendigo in this representation—the hunger for human flesh, association with darkness, physical transformation of a human into a beast—are merely the sensational aspects of the wendigo conveniently used interchangeably with the Manitou as a whole. These characteristics are also the ones most easily recognizable in the European lore of the werewolf. All associations of creation, spirit, and beings as old as the Earth itself are left behind along with the wendigo’s own name. Mulder cites the legend as being 150 years older than the FBI, and by locating its origins in the Lewis and Clark expedition; Mulder reaffirms the colonial narrative of the savage, monstrous Native threatening the brave explorers of an unconquered land. The Manitous are, in fact, older than the European occupation of the American continent, but as their

origins are maintained in oral tradition, they are not considered legitimate in the eyes of western civilization until they appear in written form, even as legend. Most importantly, the greed at the root of the wendigo's evil is lost in the colonial appropriation: maintaining this vital aspect of the wendigo makes it much harder to deny the contemporary associations with white culture. From the indigenous perspective, the rancher in this episode is the closest character to the wendigo due to his demonstrated selfishness and disregard for the rights of others, yet, his death at the end is portrayed as an injustice instead of a victory.

Mulder leaves the Manitou behind after this episode, but a more direct link between cannibalism and indigenous tribes is made later in the series, beginning with the episode twenty-four of the second season, titled "Our Town." The episode opens with an older man (later discovered to be government health inspector George Kearns) as he follows his young lover into the woods. He soon loses track of her, finds himself surrounded by approaching fires, and is struck down by a man in a tribal mask wielding a large ax. Mulder is attracted to the case based on the witness testimony of a woman claiming that she saw fire in a field around the same time where the man was last seen. Mulder describes this fire as "foxfire" and believes that folktales as old as the nineteenth century credit these balls of fire with the disappearances of locals. "It's supposed to be the spirits of massacred Indians," Mulder says and shows Scully a video of a man in an insane asylum whose experiences with the fires in the same area so traumatized him that he went insane. "The fire demons wanted their pound of flesh ... don't let them kill you, that is no way to get to heaven," he repeats over and over again. Mulder and Scully make their way to the small town of Dudley, Arkansas where they discover that the good people of Dudley are getting sick with the same symptoms as George Kearns whose body, Mulder suspects, was disposed of at the local chicken processing plant, Chaco Chicken. Eventually, they convince the local sheriff

to drag the river, where they find bones of over twenty different people. While examining the bones, Mulder says, “Scully, I think that the good people of Dudley have been eating more than just chicken.”

Mulder goes on to explain how bones that they found are polished at both ends, suggesting that they were boiled in a pot. He mentions that similar evidence is used to support claims of cannibalism amongst the Anasazi tribe in New Mexico. When Scully accepts this theory as a legitimate means of spreading the disease, Mulder suggests that the cannibalism also explains Clair’s youthful appearance. He says, “From vampirism to Catholicism, whether literally or symbolically, the reward for eating human flesh is eternal life.” In the end, Mulder and Scully discover that eighty-seven people vanished within a two-hundred mile radius of the town over the course of fifty years, and that Chaco, who appears to be around the age of sixty, is actually ninety-seven years old. He was the only survivor of a plane crash in 1944 and spent six months with a tribe in New Guinea whose cannibalistic practices have long been suspected but never proven. What Mulder originally assumed to be vengeful spirits of massacred Indians turns out simply to be yet another greedy white man, consuming the life and flesh of others to satisfy his own desires for immortality. The suggestion that Chaco learned this cannibalistic practice from the tribe in New Guinea is never overtly stated, but it is easily inferred from the story of the plane crash as well as from the presence of the man in the tribal mask, who strikes down Chaco’s victims before they are boiled and devoured by the rest of the members of Chaco’s following. The mask and the ritualistic methods of Chaco’s cannibalism allude to indigenous roots, yet no indigenous people participate, suggesting that Chaco’s immortality is the sole surviving legacy of the tribe.

Chaco becomes a practitioner of ritual cannibalism after he spends time stranded with a tribe in New Guinea, and he consistently reiterates to his followers that they only take victims whom he considers “outsiders.” He separates himself and the followers in his town from the rest of American society and becomes a representation of the monstrous other by adopting the supposed practices of an already demonized people. The unproven assumption that indigenous tribes practice cannibalism allows for yet another misrepresentation of appropriated indigenous practices and supports the colonial paranoia of indigenous peoples corrupting the white man with their uncivilized ways. Chaco possesses the qualities of the wendigo that truly matter: insatiable greed, literal cannibalism, a capitalistic empire, and the prerogative to take the lives of others to fulfill selfish desires—all contribute to forming his wendigo identity. Further, the mass production of cannibalism is what allows Chaco to spread disease to his followers, making literal what Jack Forbes (and others) describes as the sickness of the wendigo.

The mythology of the foundations of a colonized America surface yet again in season five, episode four, titled “Detour.” Mulder and Scully become sidetracked from a teambuilding retreat by the disappearance of a pair of land surveyors in a forest said to be untouched for over a thousand years. As they are searching for the lost men, creatures that blend so well into their environment that devices registering heat signatures are required to see them, pursue Mulder and Scully. After a long night stranded in the woods keeping watch for the creatures, Scully falls into a cave. When she realizes she does not have her gun, Mulder throws his to her and jumps down into the cave as well, just as Scully kills one of the creatures with Mulder’s gun. Mulder finds a tree post with the words “Ad Noctum” carved into it just before he and Scully are rescued from the cave by a search team. When another FBI agent comes to speak to Mulder about his work in solving the case, Mulder is standing in front of a commemorative plaque, marking the 1521

expedition of Ponce de Leon looking for the fountain of youth. Mulder tells the other agent about the “Ad Noctum” carving, translating the Latin as “into darkness.” He says, “The Spanish conquistadors used to carve it on the posts they would lash the Natives to as a warning.” Mulder speculates that the creatures that they encountered were once human, perhaps Spaniards from this conquistador mission, asking, “after 450 years you don’t think they would be able to adapt perfectly to their environment?” While the other agent remains unconvinced, Mulder concludes that these creatures felt threatened by an invasion into their territory, and so they came after the men in defense. Mulder’s narrative makes the Natives appear completely eradicated as a result of the extreme violence inflicted by these Spanish conquistadors, and their homeland claimed by these Spanish colonizers who see the land as belonging entirely to them. The evolution of the Spanish conquistadors into creatures of the wilderness does not seem to rescind their claim to the land that they conquered, and Mulder does not question their motives in wanting to maintain their territory. While never explicitly stated, these creatures presumably eat the men whom they take: they store the bodies in the cave and are constantly referred to as predators seeking out weaker prey. Never named, the isolation and predation, combined with their suggested immortality and associations with colonization, easily link the creatures to the spirit of the wendigo.

Season seven, episode three, titled “Hungry,” circles back to a cannibalistic creature, never explicitly named, whose physical features resemble the wendigo. The monster appears human for most of the episode and even works as a fast food employee known as Rob. He removes his human disguise at the end, revealing a monster with hairless pale skin, black eyes, sharp teeth, and an unnatural appetite for human brains. The entire episode focuses on his growing, uncontrollable appetite, which he describes by saying, “I’ve always had these cravings

my whole life, and recently they've just become too powerful to resist." In his attempts to convince Scully that they're looking for a brain-eating humanoid creature, Mulder once again uses an indigenous tribe to set a precedent, affirming that, "There are certain tribes in New Guinea that consider brains a delicacy." He believes that the creature for whom they are searching could have a "biological imperative to eat—the hunger is always there, and it satisfies it anyway it can." The insatiable hunger, the pale dark features, as well as the isolation of the creature are reminiscent of the wendigo, but the emphasis on Rob's uncontrollable hunger and his attempts to resist it in order to remain a good person are the most suggestive of a wendigo spirit. In the end, he cannot fight the hunger, and he succumbs to his identity as monster, forcing Mulder to kill him and destroy the cannibalistic threat.

Inspired in part by *The X-Files*, the television series *Supernatural* follows brothers Sam and Dean Winchester as they investigate and hunt any and all supernatural monsters that they can find. Although many depictions of cannibalism recur within this series as well—from vampires and werewolves, to Famine itself, who feeds on all forms of human consumption—two episodes are of particular interest in relation to the contemporary representation of the Wendigo: the first, titled "Wendigo," comes early on in the series, in the second episode of the first season, and the second comes in the fourth season, episode four, titled "Metamorphosis." Both of these episodes draw on traditional Native stories of the wendigo for physical representations of a monster, aptly demonstrating American popular culture's appropriation and misunderstanding of indigenous spirituality and culture by.

In "Wendigo," Sam and Dean make their way to Colorado, led by the coordinates left in their father's journal, and end up investigating the recent disappearance of some hikers camping in the wilderness. It opens in Blackwater Ridge, Colorado, as an unseen monster attacks and

kidnaps a group of campers. Sam and Dean's investigation leads them to a man who claims to have survived an attack by the same creature as a child, fifty years earlier. He claims to have seen, "Nothing: it moved too fast to see, it hid too well. I heard it though, a roar like no man or animal I ever heard." He recalls sleeping in front of the fireplace when it unlocked the door and dragged his parents away into the woods, leaving him alive but with claw-shaped scars starting from his shoulder and moving down half of his chest. He concludes, "There's something evil in those woods—it was some form of demon." Sam and Dean decide search for the creature, accompanied into the woods by a woman, her little brother, and the professional guide whom she hires in order to search for her older brother. Once they reach the campsite of the lost hikers, they see evidence of a monstrous attack. While searching for clues, they hear a call for help coming from farther out in the woods. The group runs to investigate but finds nothing. Sam urges everyone to rush back to camp where they find that all their gear and provisions have been taken. Finally, Sam identifies the creature as a Wendigo. Dean finds Sam's suggestion hard to believe, arguing that he has never heard of a Wendigo so far west and referencing Minnesota and Northern Michigan as its usual habitat. After the evidence wins out against Dean's doubt, they are forced to explain the creature's existence to the rest of the group, which Sam convinces to take precautions by saying, "It's a damn near perfect hunter. It's smarter than you, and it's going to hunt you down and eat you alive." They create a circle out of what Dean says are Anasazi symbols for protection, claiming that the wendigo cannot cross over them. As the wendigo calls for help again, Dean cautions the group to stay put. The professional tracker's response of "inside the magic circle?" heavily laced with sarcasm and contempt, suggests that he has an easier time believing in the wendigo than in any protection that the symbols may provide.



Why the Anasazi would have symbols of protection against a wendigo is never addressed. As a southwest tribe, their familiarity with the wendigo itself is questionable, leaving the most likely explanation for this implausible characterization to be the colonial practice of substituting any indigenous culture for another wherever needed to support the appropriation. The colonial mindset rarely takes into consideration the differences between tribal cultures in the Americas, deploying the name or cultural practices of any tribe in any context without the need for further validation.

More evidence of this casual appropriation arises when Sam and Dean detail to the remaining group the origins of the wendigo, beginning with its name. Sam tells them that the term “wendigo” is a Cree Indian word that means ““evil that devours.” Dean adds, “They’re hundreds of years old—each one was once a man, sometimes an Indian, or other times a frontiersman or a miner or a hunter.” Once again, the physical transformation and indigenous origins remain in the explanation of the wendigo, but with the influence of the northern tribes reduced simply to “a Cree Indian word.” When the woman asks how a man turns into wendigo, Dean states, “Well it’s always the same. During some harsh winter, guy finds himself starving and cut off from supplies or help. Becomes a cannibal to survive, eating other members of his tribe or camp.” The woman’s younger brother likens this phenomenon to the cannibalism of the notorious Donner party as Sam uses a marginal reference to indigenous culture in order to set a precedent for contemporary cannibalism much in the way that Mulder does. He says, “Cultures all over the world believe that eating human flesh gives a person certain abilities—speed, strength, immortality.” Dean adds, “You eat enough of it, over years you become this less than human thing. You’re always hungry. . . . More than anything, the wendigo knows how to last

long winters without food.” To the woman who asks how to stop the wendigo, Dean replies, “Well, guns are useless, so are knives. Basically, we gotta torch the sucker.”

The explicit insistence of fire being the only method of destruction for a wendigo suggests a residue of the original stories absent in most other contemporary depictions of the wendigo. In traditional stories, the wendigo was always destroyed through some means of fire. As the wendigo was traditionally associated with winter, the warmth of fire was the only means of ridding the iciness and bitter cold that the wendigo carried. Further, as a purifying element and an epitome of extreme consumption itself, fire is the only force with a hunger greater than the wendigo—it can kill both a physical wendigo as well as a wendigo infection of the spirit. The young Anishinaabe girl turned wendigo was only able to destroy herself by stepping into the fire, Nana’b’oozhoo was only able to kill the wendigo by stabbing it with a sharpened stick from the fire, and Nanapush’s declaration in *Four Souls* “I am Nanapush. I am the one they call fire” links his very name to the means of destroying the wendigo (49). *Supernatural* is able to maintain the traditional means of destroying the wendigo; for in the end, Sam and Dean kill it by shooting it with a flare gun. Physically, this wendigo is tall, thin, and gray in color, lanky and hairless, with a rodent-like face and pointy ears that make it look more like the vampire Nosferatu than a traditional wendigo. Who the wendigo was while still human, before becoming a monster, is never explained within the episode, but the young boy’s casual mention of the Donner party has led fans to theorize that the wendigo in this episode was once a member of that party. The indigenous association of whiteness with wendigo (both white people and white culture), as well as the isolation and desperation of the Donner party, would support the theory of one of the members turning wendigo. Archaeologist Julie Schablitsky notes that the oral histories of the Washoe tribe recount multiple attempts of the Washoe people to help the Donner party, but these

attempts where met with hostility and gunfire. After witnessing the cannibalism of the Donner party, the Washoe avoided contacting them further out of fear for their lives. However, its lack of confirmation within the episode suggests that the origins of the wendigo do not actually matter, a stance reinforced by Sam's mistaken account of what the word wendigo means. Edward Said's writings on Orientalism support the kind of appropriated knowledge demonstrated with these wendigo representations. As Homi Bhabha summarizes in *The Location of Culture*,

For Said, the copula seems to be the point at which western rationalism preserves the boundaries of sense for itself. Of this, too, Said is aware when he hints continually at a polarity or division at the very centre of Orientalism. It is, on the one hand, a topic of learning, discovery, practice; on the other, it is the site of dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions and requirements. ... However, this site is continually under threat from diachronic forms of history and narrative, signs of instability. And, finally, this line of thinking is given a shape analogical to the dreamwork, when Said refers explicitly to a distinction between "an unconscious positivity" which he terms *latent* Orientalism, and the stated knowledges and views about the Orient which he calls *manifest* Orientalism. (71)

The ability to claim knowledge of another culture while fundamentally misunderstanding its function within the culture of origin contributes to the appropriation of the wendigo in popular culture. Although popular culture may believe the allusions to Native traditions as benevolent attempts to preserve what is commonly seen as an extinct or endangered culture, such allusions usually end up reinforcing the colonial myth of an uncivilized and savage race.

The wendigo of season one retains many of its traditional qualities, yet lacks the key element sustaining its importance in Native cultures: its insatiable greed. Instead, Dean suggests

that this wendigo has survived so long because it knows how to store and ration its meals of human flesh, lending it the ability to survive long winters with little or no food. As moderation is something about which the wendigo has always lacked understanding, this suggestion alone makes clear the misappropriation of the figure. This creature is a wendigo in name only; though similar in appearance to traditional wendigos, it lacks the substance for which the wendigo stands.

The creature in the second episode offers a more compelling representation of a wendigo due to the monster's insatiable appetite and human appearance; while not named a wendigo, it bears a striking resemblance to one. The episode opens with a man named Jack Montgomery shoveling food into his mouth as quickly as he can, asking his wife for dessert as he consumes her portions of the dinner as well as his own. An old hunter friend of their father's (named Travis) asks Sam and Dean to help with a case, so they make their way to Carthage; the next scene cuts to Jack asking his wife when dinner will be—"I'm starving," he says, his head is buried in the refrigerator. As his wife calls to him from another room, he is eating a package of raw ground beef as quickly as he can, looking up briefly, as if afraid that his wife is watching him. The camera pans out to reveal Sam and Dean parked outside of Jack's house with binoculars, watching him. When they report what they had witnessed to Travis, he explains that they are hunting what he calls "rougarou," described as

Mean, nasty little suckers—rotted teeth, wormy skin, the works. They start out human, for all intents and purpose. About age 30, they start changing—bones shift around, animal instincts kick in. But most of all, they're hungry. At first, for everything, but then for long pig. Hunger grows in till they can't fight it, till they got to take themselves a big, juicy chomp and then it happens. They transform

completely and fast. One bite's all it takes—eyes, teeth, skin all turns. No going back, either. They feed once, they're a monster forever.

“Long pig,” Sam explains, is slang for human flesh. They learn that the rougarou (or rugaru) is a genetic condition causing an insatiable appetite and physical transformation. This creature’s eventual destruction through fire links it to the wendigo rather than a traditional rougarou, which in Native legends resembles a werewolf more than anything else and reputedly has origins in French folklore, which helps explain its prominence in Metis and Creole cultures. The rougarou of legend has little affinity with the creature in *Supernatural*. Insatiable hunger is not associated with the rougarou except when conflated with the wendigo, yet it is the defining aspect of the monster into which Jack is changing.

The series *Charmed* also condenses the rougarou and the wendigo into a singular creature, providing a wendigo character so altered through appropriation that it is practically unrecognizable. The series follows sisters Pru, Phoebe, and Piper Halliwell as they battle supernatural forces of darkness with their magical powers. Season one, episode twelve, titled “The Wendigo,” follows the sisters as they track down a monstrous wendigo who turns into a werewolf-like creature all three nights of the full moon and consumes the heart of its victims. Just after this hairy werewolf-like beast attacks Piper and scratches her, a man wielding a flare gun manages to scare the creature off, saving her. He tells Piper that he has been tracking the creature ever since it killed his girlfriend. When Piper asks how he knew that it was scared of fire, he replies, “We were camping by Lake Michigan, when I grabbed a log from the fire, it freaked out and ran, but not until after it ripped the heart out of my girlfriend’s chest and ate it.” Piper then tells this man that the creature that he has been hunting is a wendigo, alleging that

Apparently it looks like a normal person during the day but then transforms at night. It survives by feeding on human hearts. The first wendigo was a mortal who, betrayed by his lover, cut out her heart and ate it. As soon as he did, his own heart turned to ice and that's how he became this monster.

The two characters theorize that part of this creature's motivation is to take love away from its victims, for it hunts those who are in relationships; the only other commonality between victims is blood type. Because she is scratched by the wendigo, Piper quickly begins to turn into one and metamorphoses entirely once the full moon rises. Piper's sisters manage to change her back by shooting the wendigo who turned her with a flare gun, destroying it. This portrayal of the wendigo has much more in common with lore relating to the werewolf than anything else. In fact, the only features of the wendigo that remain intact here, besides its name, are its vulnerability to fire and its consumption of human flesh. While the added motive of love and betrayal is understandable for a dramatic television series, the creature in the show bears no resemblance to that in the traditional stories. Where *Supernatural* at least attempts to reference the traditional origins of the wendigo, *Charmed* makes no acknowledgment of tradition at all: the fabricated origins of the wendigo in this representation erase any indigenous association, the name of the creature is taken without even an attempt to understand where it came from, and that spirit of neglect makes glaringly obvious the force of cultural appropriation. By ignoring the indigenous origins of the wendigo and fabricating a new origin, *Charmed* reinforces the colonial erasure of indigenous cultures.

The association of indigenous cultures with cannibalism in colonial-era contact narratives or eighteenth- and nineteenth-century popular novels is still in force within the contemporary imagination. Even postmodern reimaginings of monsters link indigenous cultures around the

world, and especially in the Americas, with cannibalistic practices. These television shows rarely depict cannibalistic practices explicitly; the assumptions of the characters are instead taken as fact. Further, these renditions of Native mythology and traditional storytelling are corruptions, either through a misunderstanding of their meaning or a desire to perpetuate the myth of an extinct Native culture whose only relevance remains in the unbelievable and supernatural. That these representations and appropriations of indigenous tradition and culture are perfectly acceptable in popular culture speaks to the lasting myth in America of the “vanishing race,” primarily noticeable in the constant use of the past tense when speaking of Native people and their traditions. The widely accepted fallacy that Native Americans ceased to exist with the introduction of the modern world is perhaps best demonstrated by recalling the words of Fox Mulder: “I want to believe,” he says, not in reference to aliens or monsters, but in the reference to the very existence of the Native man sitting in front of him.

## Conclusion

In examining the various representations of cannibalism by both Native and non-Native authors, a curious similarity arises: each culture has a tendency to associate cannibalism with the other. A difference exists in that for Native cultures, the wendigo is a necessary and vital figure for understanding how the sickness of colonialism has persisted over the years. The wendigo once stood as a warning to the tribal community for moderation and care, representing a threat that was not foreign yet not familiar either. It was only after experiencing the evils of colonization that the wendigo became internalized. Such greed and destruction as is wrought by the wendigo is difficult to grasp at a purely human level, and the wendigo—when portrayed within the Native narratives—embodies the traits of colonization to remind the people to guard their spirits against infectious yet devastating influences.

Both Natives and non-Natives have a propensity to cast white characters as wendigos, although the motivations are not the same. Since the Native understanding of the wendigo has evolved to represent colonization, consumerism introduced by European imperialism, and whiteness in general, casting white characters or assimilated Native characters as wendigos makes sense. As Nanapush remarks in *Four Souls*, “Along with rules, there came another affliction. Acquisition, the priest called it. Greed. There was no word in our language to describe this urge to own things we didn’t need” (76). For non-Natives, the similarity seems accidental, a consequence of the erasure of Native cultures and people instead of an acknowledgment of how the understanding of wendigo has changed. Non-Native authors still associate cannibalism with indigenous cultures as a historical means of creating a monstrous representation of the other, but it is used more often in a past tense, recalling the times when Natives *were* instead of what Natives *are*. As Fanon says, “The colonist and the colonized are old acquaintances. And



consequently, the colonist is right when he says he ‘knows’ them. It is the colonist who *fabricated and continues to fabricate* the colonized subject” (2, emphasis original). There is rarely actual contact made in these contemporary portrayals, but when there is, the Eurocentric mindset still reinforces the colonial narrative of contacting savage, uncivilized, and cannibalistic peoples. The colonizers can only see themselves as the wendigo when they believe the culture of the colonized to be a relic of the past, lost to history except for what little the colonizers themselves maintain. The tension between Natives and non-Natives representations demonstrates the same colonial tension identified by theorists such as Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak: the need for the oppressed to speak out against the oppressors yet only being able to do so in the language of oppressor, thereby reinforcing the dominance and control of the colonizer. The wendigo of contemporary Native American literature is easily accessible and written in clear English, which allows the colonizer to understand the wendigo in its contemporary form, but this understanding has yet to reach the dominant American culture. If nothing else, the evolution of the wendigo demonstrates the success of Native tribes to retain the function of the oral tradition, allowing their culture to remain relevant and valid, at least amongst each other.

## Works Cited

- Armstrong, Nancy. "The Polygenetic Imagination." Eastern Michigan University Electronic Reserves. 2 Dec 2014. Web.
- Barker, Francis, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen. "Introduction." *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. Print.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- Columbus, Christopher. *Journals and Other Documents on the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus*. Ed. Samuel Eliot Morison. New York: Heritage, 1963. Print.
- Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe*. New York: Norton, 1975. Print.
- "Detour." *The X-Files*. Writ. Chris Carter. Dir. David Nutter. Fox, 2015. Blu-ray.
- Erdrich, Louise. *Four Souls*. London: Harper Perennial, 2006. Print.
- Erdrich, Louise. *The Round House*. New York, NY: Harper, 2012. Print.
- Erdrich, Louise. *Tracks: A Novel*. New York: Henry Holt, 1988. Print.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Richard Philcox. New York: Grove, 2004. Print.
- Forbes, Jack D. *Columbus and Other Cannibals: The Wétiko Disease of Exploitation, Imperialism, and Terrorism*. New York: Seven Stories, 2008. Print.
- Haggard, H. Rider. *She: A History of Adventure*. New York: Modern Library, 2002. Print.
- "Hungry." *The X-Files*. Writ. Chris Carter. Dir. David Nutter. Fox, 2015. Blu-ray.

- Johnston, Basil. *The Manitous: The Spiritual World of the Ojibway*. New York: HarperCollins, 1995. Print.
- LaDuke, Winona. *Last Standing Woman*. Cut Bank Creek Press, 1997. Print.
- Malley, Shawn. “‘Time Hath No Power Against Identity’: Historical Continuity and Archaeological Adventure in H. Rider Haggard’s *She*.” *English Literature in Transition* 40.3 (1997): 275-297. *Project Muse*. Halle Lib., Ypsilanti, MI. 2 Dec. 2014.
- “Metamorphosis.” *Supernatural*. Writ. Eric Kripke. Warner Brothers, 2014. DVD.
- “Our Town.” *The X-Files*. Writ. Chris Carter. Dir. David Nutter. Fox, 2015. Blu-ray.
- Retamar, Roberto Fernández. “Caliban: Notes towards a Discussion of Culture in Our America.” *The Massachusetts Review* 15.1 (1974): 7-72. *JSTOR*. Web. 12 Jan. 2016.
- Schablitsky, Julie. “Letter from California: A New Look at the Donner Party.” *The Archaeological Institute of America*. 2012. *Archaeology Archive*. Web. 29 Feb. 2016.
- Shakespeare, William. “The Tempest.” *The Norton Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Andrew Gurr. New York: W.W. Norton, 1997. Print.
- “Shapes.” *The X-Files*. Writ. Chris Carter. Dir. David Nutter. Fox, 2015. Blu-ray.
- Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1996. Print.
- Smith, Paul Chaat., and Robert Allen. *Warrior. Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee*. New York: New, 1996. Print.

Strandness, Jean. "When the Windigo Spirit Swept Across the Plains...: Ojibway Perceptions of the Settlement of the Midwest." *NIidAmerica. The Yearbook of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature*. XXV (1998). Ed. David D. Anderson. East Lansing, Michigan: The Midwestern Press. (36-49).

Vaughan, Alden T., and Virginia Mason. Vaughan. *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991. Print.

"The Wendigo." *Charmed*. Writ. Constance M. Burge. Warner Brothers, 2014. DVD.

"Wendigo." *Supernatural*. Writ. Eric Kripke. Warner Brothers, 2014. DVD.

