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A Structure, Not an Event: Colonial Continuity, Biopower, and the Critical Dystopia in Louise Erdrich's Future Home of the Living God

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Abstract— *This article reads Louise Erdrich's Future Home of the Living God (2017) as a critical dystopia whose speculative premise a planetary evolutionary reversal that renders human reproduction precarious, functions not as a warning about an approaching future but as a defamiliarization of a present already shaped by colonial reproductive violence. Drawing on Darko Suvin's concept of the novum and Tom Moylan's account of the critical dystopia, the article argues that the novel's central formal innovation lies in the uneven distribution of cognitive estrangement across its characters: what registers as unprecedented catastrophe for the settler world is recognisable, even continuous, for Cedar Hawk Songmaker's Ojibwe birth community on the reservation. This asymmetry is read through Kyle Powys Whyte's argument that Indigenous peoples experience ecological crisis as a sequel to already-experienced colonial apocalypse and Patrick Wolfe's formulation of settler colonialism as a structure rather than an event. The article then examines the novel's state apparatus, the Stillwater Birthing Centre, its wall of photographed dead women, the sedation at the moment of birth as an instantiation of Foucauldian biopower and Achille Mbembe's necropolitics, situating the novel's reproductive violence within the documented history of IHS sterilisation campaigns and the analysis of reproductive coercion as a technology of colonial elimination developed by Andrea Smith and Dorothy Roberts. Finally, the article reads the two registers in which the novel sustains its utopian horizon: the reservation community's survivance practices, understood through Gerald Vizenor, and Cedar's journal itself, which performs survivance through the act of writing relationship across an unresolvable uncertainty. The article argues that the novel's refusal of narrative closure is a political argument about the limits of reassurance and the durability of testimony.*

Keywords— ***Louise Erdrich, Future Home of the Living God, critical dystopia, settler colonialism, biopower, necropolitics, Indigenous survivance, reproductive violence, cognitive estrangement, Native American literature, speculative fiction, novum***

Introduction

When Cedar Hawk Songmaker begins writing the journal that constitutes Louise Erdrich's Future Home of the Living God (2017), she frames her project with a telling historical analogy: "there have always been letters and diaries written in times of tumult and discovered later, and my thought is that I could be writing one of those" (3). The analogy is casual, but its implications are not. For Cedar to write as though her account will be discovered later is to assume, however tentatively, that she will not survive to hand it over herself and it is to invest the act of writing with a function that exceeds documentation. The journal is a form of address across an uncertain future; its completion, by the time it reaches the reader, already signals that the voice survived even if the body's fate remains unresolved.

That the journal exists at all is the novel's first and most persistent argument. Cedar is twenty-six, Ojibwe by birth and adopted into a white liberal Minneapolis family, four months pregnant and recently reconnected with her Ojibwe birth family on the reservation when she begins writing. The speculative premise that organises her world, an evolutionary reversal in which organisms across the planet begin reverting to earlier biological forms, rendering human reproduction increasingly precarious, has already drawn the attention of a theocratic state apparatus. By the novel's third section, Cedar is detained in the Stillwater Birthing Centre, writing in fragments, watching the photographs of dead women accumulate on the dining room wall. Her final entries are dated and then undated, growing sparse: "December. Extremely weak. But still here. January. They say my heart is damaged. February. My dear son. I know you're going to read this someday" (233). Whether Cedar survived beyond those entries, the novel declines to say. That we hold the completed journal in our hands is the only answer the novel provides, and it is a precisely calibrated one.

This article reads Future Home of the Living God as a critical dystopia in Tom Moylan's sense and as a deployment of what Darko Suvin calls the novum, the totalising speculative element around which the narrative world reorganises in a way that is formally specific to its historical and political moment. The evolutionary reversal that this study argues, does not function as a warning about a future that might arrive but as a defamiliarization of a present that is already here: specifically, the ongoing reproductive violence directed at Indigenous women through settler colonial structures. The novel's central formal innovation is that its novum produces cognitive estrangement unevenly. For Cedar's white liberal adoptive family and for the settler state apparatus, the evolutionary crisis is genuinely unprecedented. For Cedar's Ojibwe birth family on the reservation, it is recognisable, one more shape of catastrophe in a history already shaped by catastrophic loss. Reading the novel through Suvin, Moylan, Kyle Powys Whyte's Indigenous environmental thought, and Andrea Smith's analysis of reproductive control as a technology of colonial elimination, this study argues that the utopian horizon the novel sustains through Cedar's journal-keeping and the reservation community's survivance is grounded not in generic optimism but in the specific resources of a community that has been surviving versions of this crisis for a very long time.

Darko Suvin's account of science fiction as "the literature of cognitive estrangement" rests on the concept of the novum: "a totalizing phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author's and implied reader's norm of reality" that determines "the whole narrative logic" of the SF text (Metamorphoses 63-64). The novum, for Suvin, is neither decoration nor mere plot mechanism. It is the organising principle of an alternative reality that is "simultaneously perceived as not impossible within the cognitive norms of the author's epoch", strange enough to defamiliarize, grounded enough to remain legible as a rational extrapolation (7-8). Its ultimate function, Suvin insists, is diagnostic: significant SF is "a specifically roundabout way of commenting on the author's collective context," an estrangement not from the present but into a position from which the present becomes newly visible (84). Grace Dillon has extended this framework in her work on Indigenous speculative fiction, arguing that Native futurisms deploy estrangement not to imagine what might come but to make visible what settler normalcy has always obscured (Walking the Clouds 2).

The evolutionary reversal in Future Home of the Living God meets Suvin's criteria precisely. It is totalising, it reorganises food supply, governance, medical practice, and the social meaning of pregnancy itself. It is cognitively grounded, positioned as biological rather than supernatural event, something that the scientific frameworks of Erdrich's moment can accommodate as a conceivable if extreme possibility. And it points backwards, not forwards: its function is to make visible, through the estranging distance of speculation, a structure of reproductive violence that the liberal present has rendered largely invisible.

Where Suvin's account becomes complicated by this particular application is in its assumption of a normative reader who encounters the novum as genuinely strange. Suvin writes from within a tradition that presupposes cognitive estrangement as a universal experience, the reader encounters the strange new element and is thereby forced to see the familiar world differently. Erdrich disrupts this assumption structurally, by placing at the centre of her narrative a protagonist whose community does not encounter the crisis as a rupture in expected order. The evolutionary reversal is new. What it enables is the seizure of women's bodies by the state in the name of demographic emergency, is not, and Cedar's Ojibwe birth family has the evidence to say so.

The novel encodes this asymmetry in its title. Driving north to the reservation for the first time, Cedar passes a sign planted in a bare fallow field: "Future Home of the Living God" (20). She photographs it and keeps driving, absorbing it as one of many ominous portents of the coming crisis. The sign is the novel's title, and Erdrich's choice of it is pointed: what reads, from Cedar's initially settler-positioned perspective, as a marker of apocalyptic futurity sits on land that the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887 had already stripped from Indigenous communal ownership. The "future home"

is built on the site of a prior dispossession. What appears as crisis for one community is, for another, continuous with a history that has not ended.

This asymmetry reaches its fullest elaboration in Part Three, when Cedar has taken refuge on the reservation and witnesses Eddy address the tribal community about land reclamation. He presents a colour-coded map, yellow for non-Indian ownership, green for state forest, a considerably smaller patch of purple for tribal land and explains, with the measured calm of someone who has been thinking about this for a very long time, that the tribe is reclaiming what was taken. The lake-home owners have already fled back to Minneapolis; their summer properties are being reassigned to homeless and substandard-housing tribal members through a lottery system. "Let us bow our heads and pray for their plight," Eddy says (188). The dry irony is not incidental to his political authority but constitutive of it. As Little Mary shades in the newly reclaimed parcels with a purple marker, Cedar watches the old people in the room weep silently. The land reclamation is not a revolutionary rupture. It is a return and the community has the institutional memory and organisational infrastructure to carry it out because it has been surviving versions of crisis for generations.

Kyle Powys Whyte has argued that for Indigenous peoples, ecological and climate catastrophe is best understood not as unprecedented future disruption but as a sequel to the colonial apocalypse already experienced: a continuation of a structural condition rather than the inauguration of a new one ("Indigenous Climate Change Studies" 157). Erdrich's novel enacts this argument through its formal structure. The crisis that produces paralysis in Cedar's liberal adoptive parents Glen and Sera fall into a kind of suspended helplessness, worrying and waiting for news is one that Cedar's Ojibwe family has, in different configurations, been sustaining itself through for a very long time. Eddy growing seedlings in casino aisles, setting up runner-based communication networks, converting cash reserves into food production infrastructure: these are not improvisations born of emergency but the application of capacities built across generations of surviving emergency. "We're gonna be self-sufficient, like the old days," he says (199). The old days, in this context, are not remote or romantic. They are institutional memory available for practical use.

The state apparatus that emerges in response to the evolutionary reversal operates through what Michel Foucault identifies as biopower: the management of populations as biological resources, exercised not through overt repression alone but through the institutional performance of care (History of Sexuality 135-159). The Stillwater Birthing Centre, where Cedar is eventually detained, is a precise instantiation of this logic. Women are housed in comfortable cells, fed adequately, tended to by medical staff, and made up by a professional makeup artist named Miguel, who photographs each arrival against a backdrop painted with a halo of radiant light. The photographs are then arranged on the dining room wall. Cedar forces herself to look: "The women in the photographs are alert, smiling, hopeful, perfectly made up ... I step closer to read their names. Lily-Ann. Idris. Janella. Senchal. Megan. Vendra. Beneath each name are two dates. Birth. Death. And below that a line that says: She served the future" (222-223). The first and second dates are birth and death. Every woman on the wall is dead.

The wall is the novel's most concentrated image of what Achille Mbembe calls necropolitics: the state's arrogation of the power to determine who may live and who must die, exercised here through an apparatus that simultaneously depends upon and discards the women whose reproductive capacity it needs ("Necropolitics" 11-12). Cedar's birth scene enacts this logic at the level of individual experience. After a passage of extraordinary intensity labour described in terms of oceanic spiritual force, thousands of spirits admitted to the room, the women's communal song audible between contractions, the novel delivers its sharpest sentence: "The sting of the needle stole my consciousness. As I slipped away, someone pried apart your fist and I felt you lifted from my arms" (232-233). Cedar's body was required for what it could produce. The moment the birth concluded, her usefulness to the state did too. She is sedated, separated, and left in a cell to wait for her next forced pregnancy.

What the novel will not allow readers to treat as unprecedented, and this is where its argument is most politically specific, is the underlying logic of this violence. Cedar's own existence embodies its history. She was adopted into the Songmaker family in apparent violation of the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, a law passed because Indigenous children were being removed from their families and communities at catastrophic rates, their kinship networks administratively dismantled. When Cedar raises the ICWA, Glen and Sera go quiet and look away (12). The law that should have governed her adoption was set aside, as such laws frequently were. In the novel's dystopian present, the intensified targeting of pregnant Indigenous women does not represent the invention of a new form of violence but the acceleration of a structural one.

Andrea Smith's analysis of reproductive control as a pillar of anti-Indigenous racism provides the historical framework that the novel draws on without stating explicitly. For Smith, the suppression of Indigenous reproductive life through sterilisation campaigns, child removal, detention,

functions as a technology of elimination within the broader logic of settler colonialism: Indigenous populations must be reduced, absorbed, or made to disappear so that settler claims to land can be secured (Conquest 7-9). The Indian Health Service sterilisation campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s, which sterilised between twenty-five and fifty percent of Indigenous women of childbearing age, many without informed consent, are the most documented instance of this logic in operation (Lawrence 400). Dorothy Roberts has situated this history within the broader pattern of reproductive coercion directed at women of colour in the United States, and Angela Davis has traced the ideological continuities between the eugenics movement and the racialised administration of reproductive medicine in the twentieth century (Roberts, Killing the Black Body 90; Davis, Women, Race, and Class 215). Patrick Wolfe's formulation captures the structural continuity: settler colonialism is "a structure, not an event" ("Settler Colonialism" 388). It does not conclude with the frontier; it adapts. In Erdrich's novel, evolutionary crisis provides the latest emergency justification for renewing assault on Indigenous sovereignty and reproductive autonomy. The state does not invent new violence. It gives existing violence a new rationale.

Tom Moylan's concept of the critical dystopia distinguishes texts that sustain what he calls a utopian horizon space of resistance and alternative possibility within nightmarish conditions from classic dystopias that present systems of total control without remainder (Scraps 196). Moylan developed this argument across two major studies, and his earlier Demand the Impossible had already laid the groundwork for understanding how utopian fiction holds open the possibility of transformation even when institutional conditions foreclose it (Demand the Impossible 10). The distinction is formal as well as political: classic dystopias tend toward closure, their endings confirming the dominance of the system that has been described. Critical dystopias refuse this confirmation. They hold open, however precariously, a space where something other than the dominant order persists and from which the conditions of that order can be assessed.

Future Home of the Living God sustains its utopian horizon in two registers that are formally inseparable. The first is the journal. Cedar writes to her child across an uncertainty she cannot resolve, creating relationship on the page regardless of whether that relationship can be sustained in the world. The fact that the journal exists as a completed text and that we receive it is itself the utopian horizon: Cedar's voice persists beyond the conditions of its production, bearing witness even when bodies may not endure. Gerald Vizenor's concept of survivance, which he distinguishes from mere survival as an active and ongoing refusal of narratives of defeat and disappearance, illuminates what Cedar's journal-keeping constitutes (Manifest Manners 4-5). Writing is what Cedar does while the state does what it does to her. It is not compensatory but generative: it produces something that outlasts the conditions that sought to contain her.

The second register is the reservation community. The utopian horizon in this novel is not abstract hope but the concrete survivance practices of a community that has been sustaining itself through colonial catastrophe for generations such as Eddy's land reclamation strategy, Sweetie's woodstove warmth, Grandma's ancient patience, the militia's wolf-howl communication code. These are not decorative elements of a subplot. They constitute an alternative order that the novel places in explicit opposition to the state's necropolitical logic. Where the state values women's bodies as reproductive resources and discards the women themselves, the reservation community sustains the claim that Eddy makes directly to Cedar: "Our women are sacred to us" (200). The difference is not rhetorical. It is organisational, institutional, and built from a history the state cannot appropriate.

Moylan theorised the critical dystopia primarily through texts of the 1980s and 1990s, a period defined by the closing down of progressive political alternatives under neoliberal restructuring. The conditions that generated Erdrich's novel are historically distinct but structurally continuous with what Moylan describes: the same foreclosure of utopian possibility, the same targeting of reproductive autonomy as a site of political contest, the same need for literary forms that can hold open a space of resistance without pretending that resistance is easy or guaranteed. What the critical dystopia provides, in Moylan's account, is a form adequate to this historical pressure: one that can represent the reality of oppressive conditions while insisting that they are not the only reality, that something else persists within them and beyond them.

Chapter One, "The Novum and Its Uneven Work," develops the formal argument about cognitive estrangement in detail, tracing Cedar's arc from a settler-positioned encounter with the evolutionary crisis to her gradual recognition of it through the lens of Indigenous continuity. The chapter attends in particular to the scenes on the reservation in Part Three, reading Eddy's land reclamation, the community's adaptive infrastructure, and Cedar's reconnection with Ojibwe heritage as formal enactments of this article's central claim.

Chapter Two, "Biopower, Necropolitics, and the Machinery of Reproductive Control," examines the state apparatus of the novel through Foucault's biopower and Mbembe's necropolitics, situating its operations within the longer colonial history of reproductive violence against Indigenous

women that Smith and Wolfe provide frameworks for understanding. The chapter reads the Stillwater Birthing Centre, the hospital scenes, and the birth scene as the novel's sustained engagement with a logic of domination that the evolutionary crisis has not created but merely made newly legible.

Chapter Three, "Critical Dystopia and the Utopian Horizon," takes up Moylan's framework and Vizenor's concept of survivance to read the novel's sites of resistance-Cedar's journal, the reservation community, and the formally ambiguous ending. The chapter argues that the utopian horizon this novel sustains is grounded in Indigenous survivance practice rather than generic optimism, and that this grounding is what distinguishes it from the predominantly white feminist dystopian tradition with which it is most often associated, a tradition whose central concerns, from Atwood's Handmaid's Tale to Piercy's Woman on the Edge of Time, have been shaped by settler assumptions that Future Home of the Living God does not share (Atwood 311; Piercy 37).

The decision not to resolve this question is itself an argument about the limits of narrative reassurance, about the form of resistance the journal represents, and about what it means to write to a future you cannot see from inside a present that is still happening.

The Novum and Its Uneven Work

Cedar Hawk Songmaker does not know what to call what is happening. "Our world is running backward," she writes in her first journal entry. "Or forward. Or maybe sideways, in a way as yet ungrasped" (3). The uncertainty in that sentence, the refusal to commit to any single direction of change, is not a narrative weakness but a formal choice. Erdrich opens the novel from within a crisis that has not yet acquired the language to describe itself, and Cedar's inability to name what is occurring places the reader in exactly the same position: disoriented, unable to apply existing frameworks, forced to think again about what is actually being described.

This is cognitive estrangement in Darko Suvin's sense. For Suvin, science fiction works by introducing what he calls a novum, "a totalizing phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author's and implied reader's norm of reality" that determines "the whole narrative logic" of the text (Metamorphoses 63-64). The novum is not merely a spectacular premise; it reorganises everything, making familiar social arrangements suddenly visible as contingent rather than inevitable. In Future Home of the Living God, the evolutionary reversal is that novum. By the time Cedar is writing, organisms across the planet are reverting to earlier biological forms, human reproduction is becoming increasingly precarious, and the state apparatus is reorganising itself around the management of pregnant women as a demographic resource. The reversal touches everything: food supply, governance, medicine, kinship, the meaning of Cedar's own body.

What makes Erdrich's deployment of the novum formally distinctive and what this chapter argues is the novel's central innovation is that the evolutionary reversal does not produce the same estrangement for all of the novel's characters. Suvin's account presupposes a normative reader who encounters the novum as genuinely strange, and is thereby forced to see the familiar world differently. Erdrich makes the subject position of that reader a variable. For Cedar's white liberal adoptive family, for Phil, for the institutional apparatus of the Church of the New Constitution, the evolutionary crisis is genuinely unprecedented. For Cedar's Ojibwe birth family on the reservation, it is recognisable, one more shape of catastrophe in a history already shaped by catastrophic loss. The novum, in other words, estranges differently depending on who you are. It is this asymmetry that the chapter traces across the novel's three parts.

Cedar occupies an unusual position within this asymmetry. Born Ojibwe, adopted into a white liberal Minneapolis family, reconnecting with her birth family only in the months before the novel begins, she enters the crisis from two directions simultaneously. Her initial response to the evolutionary reversal is disorientation, fear, a desperate effort to maintain routine and order which aligns her with the settler world she was raised in. Part I is filled with the texture of this effort: the rigid daily schedule she maintains in hiding, the importance of having clean hair, the precision with which she aligns objects in the apartment to keep dread at bay. "I have constructed a minute order in my day that I follow to the letter — not just as best I can, but no matter what" (101). This is a recognisably settler-liberal response to catastrophe: individual discipline, domestic order, the management of anxiety through routine.

Against this, the novel places Cedar's Ojibwe birth family, introduced in Part I as awkward and unpromising, and developed across Part III as the novel's alternative centre of gravity. Sweetie with her shoelace-chewing and her pearl earrings and her frank acknowledgement of past stupidity. Eddy with his Superpumper franchise and his endless memoir and his fox-like political intelligence. Little Mary moving from Goth-Lolita to Overheated Preppie with her purple political eyeliner. Grandma, over a hundred years old, snatching the oatmeal spoon back and feeding herself. These are not romantic indigenes in the sense Vizenor critiques, the static, melancholic figures that settler culture has preferred to actual Indigenous people with actual political claims (Manifest Manners 4). Jace Weaver has

argued that Native literature is distinguished precisely by its communitism, its orientation toward community and collective survival rather than the individualism of the Western literary tradition (That the People Might Live 43). Erdrich's Potts family embodies this orientation. They are specific, idiosyncratic, sometimes exasperating people and they are people who, when crisis arrives, already know what to do.

The novel encodes Cedar's double position in its title. Driving north to the reservation for the first time, Cedar passes "a sign planted in a bare field: Future Home of the Living God" (20). She photographs it and keeps driving, absorbing it as one of many ominous portents. The novel takes its title from this sign, and Erdrich's choice is pointed. What reads, from Cedar's initially settler-positioned perspective, as an image of apocalyptic futurity sits on land that the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887 stripped from Indigenous communal ownership. Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford Lytle documented the scale of this dispossession: between 1887 and 1934, Indigenous land holdings in the United States were reduced by approximately ninety million acres through the allotment mechanism and subsequent sales (American Indians, American Justice 9). The "future home" is built on the site of a prior dispossession. What appears as crisis for one community is, from another vantage, continuous with a history that has not yet ended.

Cedar's arc across the novel is a movement between these two positions, not a simple conversion from one to the other, but a gradual recognition that the frameworks she inherited from the Songmakers are insufficient for what she is living through, and that her Ojibwe birth family possesses resources she has not yet learned to see. Kyle Powys Whyte has argued that for Indigenous peoples, ecological and climate catastrophe is not unprecedented disruption but a sequel to the colonial apocalypse already experienced: the latest iteration of a structural condition rather than the inauguration of a new one ("Indigenous Climate Change Studies" 157). Cedar's narrative enacts this argument. The evolutionary crisis shocks her settler-raised self; her Ojibwe family recognises its shape.

Part I establishes Cedar as a character whose initial encounter with the crisis is shaped primarily by the frameworks she absorbed from the Songmakers. Her response is individual rather than collective, domestic rather than political, oriented toward personal survival rather than community resilience. She hides, maintains routine, tries to keep Phil happy, contacts her birth family only because the pregnancy has made it urgent. Her Ojibwe identity, at this point in the narrative, is something she carries as knowledge rather than practice, she knows she is Ojibwe in the same way she knows the Indian Child Welfare Act should have prevented her adoption: as a fact about herself that has not yet become a resource. Mark Rifkin's account of settler temporality is illuminating here: the liberal state manages Indigenous presence by placing Indigenous peoples in a different temporal register, acknowledging their history while treating their political claims as belonging to a past that has already concluded (Settler Common Sense 5). Cedar occupies exactly this position in Part I, her Indigeneity is historical fact, not present practice.

Even her relationship with Catholicism in Part I is individualising rather than communal. She practices the rosary alone, prays to Kateri Tekakwitha in private, edits Zeal as a solo intellectual project. The institutional dimension of her faith, the parish community she originally joined to find connection, is absent from the novel's crisis landscape. What remains is Cedar with her beads and her books and her daily schedule, trying to hold a small world together in an apartment while the larger world reorganises around her.

Part I also introduces Eddy, but only at the margins, a midnight visitor with Cup Noodles and an escape plan that Phil talks Cedar out of taking. The scene is instructive. Eddy arrives having already walked six miles to avoid drawing attention to Cedar's house; he has already helped Glen and Sera across the Canadian border; he already has contacts and a boat and a plan. He is not improvising. He is applying capacities built for exactly this kind of contingency. But Cedar, at this point in the narrative, is too embedded in Phil's framework, wait, prepare, acquire camping gear, to recognise what Eddy is offering. "The desperation chokes me," she writes. "I want to walk from this house. I want to disappear" (110). She is right, and she knows she is right, and she still cannot move. Part I ends with Cedar's capture.

Part II is set almost entirely within the state's institutional apparatus, Fairview Riverside Hospital, then Stillwater Birthing Centre, and it performs a different kind of cognitive estrangement than Part I. Where Part I estranges through the premise of evolutionary reversal, Part II estranges through the institutional management of that premise: the vitamins that produce enforced contentment, the nurses who perform warmth while enacting surveillance, the wall of photographs that memorialises women the institution has killed. Cedar's experience in Part II is one of gradually learning to see an apparatus that presents itself as care.

The process begins with Bernice, the woman who comes to collect Cedar from her apartment. "She wore jeans, Keds, and a raspberry cotton tunic sweater. She wore a few pieces of clean, contemporary, tasteful gold jewelry, and she carried a covered basket" (112). Cedar knows immediately that something is wrong and also cannot resist the

combination of niceness and competence that Bernice embodies. "Nice people paralyze me," she admits. "Dark-skinned people who are nice, especially" (112). The self-aware irony here is exact: Cedar recognises that her liberalism has been weaponised against her, that the state has learned to send people who look like the kind of people she is trained to trust. Bernice holds Cedar's hand as they walk to the car and says: "Don't be afraid. Your baby will be beautiful" (115). Cedar thinks: "Either she is a very good person and incredibly deluded, or else she is completely evil" (115). Both possibilities are held in suspension. The novel refuses to resolve them.

This is the institutional logic that Michel Foucault identifies as biopower: the management of populations through the performance of care, the administration of bodies in the name of collective welfare (History of Sexuality 135-159). The hospital presents itself as a service to Cedar rather than a constraint on her. Her room is clean, the food is initially good, the nurses beam cheerfully. The drug in the vitamins produces what Cedar describes as "the most intensely comfortable feeling of peace and order", she is, briefly, grateful (116). Only when she stops taking the vitamins does the institution become visible as what it is. The room is drab, the food is rotten, the nurses' warmth is calculated. The apparatus was always the same; the drug simply prevented her from seeing it.

Orielee is the novel's most precise study of how this apparatus recruits ordinary people. She is not a villain. She is a nurse who starches her scrubs, who talks about her daughter's pregnancy with genuine sentiment, who brings Cedar's books back out of something close to kindness. She has simply internalised a set of rules, never articulated, never posted, running underneath the institution's official discourse, that allow her to be complicit in what the institution does without fully registering it as complicity. "I keep asking her," Cedar writes. "It seems they are an unspoken set of rules that some people have been living by for years, and others haven't" (129). The rules are not coercive in any simple sense. They are ambient, habitual, the sediment of what has always been acceptable. Orielee talks too much, and this eventually becomes fatal to her, she tells Cedar things she should not have told her, and Cedar uses them. But the excess of talk is not malice or rebellion; it is the overflow of someone who has not fully thought through what she is participating in.

Against the institution's performed warmth, the novel places Agnes Starr and Spider Nun — Cedar's two hospital roommates, both of whom resist in different registers. Agnes is spectacular and doomed: she attacks the nurses with an IV stand, reaches the stairway door, and is taken down in the lobby. Her resistance is real and it fails. Spider Nun is quieter and more durable: she unravels her blankets by night, builds a rope of braided yarn, recruits Cedar into the project. Their collaboration is wordless, grounded in shared practical knowledge. The Ojibwe finger-weaving technique that Cedar recognises in Spider Nun's method, "Grandma Mary Virginia's trick. An Ojibwe method of creating fancy sashes, wall hangings, belts, tumplines, and ropes" (128), is the novel's first explicit connection between the skills Cedar is learning to inherit and the possibility of survival. The rope they braid is the means of escape. The knowledge that made it comes from before the crisis.

Part III, set primarily on the reservation after Cedar's escape from the hospital, is where the novel's argument about the uneven operation of the novum becomes fully explicit. Cedar arrives at her birth family's house having already changed: the experience of the institutional apparatus has stripped away the settler-liberal frameworks that organised her response in Part I, and she is now learning to see from a different position. The reservation community does not encounter the evolutionary crisis as a rupture. They encounter it as an occasion for doing what they have always done.

The land reclamation meeting is the scene that most directly dramatises this. Eddy stands before a colour-coded map, yellow for non-Indian ownership, green for state forest, purple for tribal land, and explains, with the calm of someone who has been planning this for a long time, that the community is reclaiming what was taken under the Dawes Act. The lake-home owners have fled; the lottery system is already distributing the vacated properties to homeless and substandard-housing tribal members. "Let us bow our heads and pray for their plight," Eddy says (188). The dry irony is the key to his authority: this is not a man performing strength for his community. This is a man who finds the situation, in some genuine sense, amusing, because he has been thinking about treaty rights and land reclamation for a very long time and the crisis has simply given him the opening he needed. When Little Mary finishes shading in the reclaimed parcels and the old people in the room begin to weep silently, the weeping is not grief but recognition. The land is coming back.

The reservation's adaptive infrastructure in Part III is similarly not improvised but continuous with practices developed across generations of surviving emergency. Eddy has converted casino reserves into food production, established runner-based communication networks, organised a militia from veterans, and set up communal barter markets operating under truce. Sweetie fires up a vintage radio and makes oatmeal cakes on the old woodstove, which has moved from decorative object to central heating source. Grandma provides continuity across

time that no one else in the novel can offer, she has survived versions of crisis that predate everyone else's memory. "We're gonna be self-sufficient, like the old days," Eddy says (199). The old days are institutional memory, not nostalgia. They are the record of what worked before, available for practical use now.

Cedar's reconnection with this community across Part III is not presented as a sentimental homecoming. It is awkward, complicated, and ongoing. She cannot speak Ojibwe. She did not grow up with the community's practices. She refers to herself, at various points, as deculturated. But the novel does not require Cedar to become fully Ojibwe in order for her reconnection to matter. What matters is that she gains access to frameworks for understanding her situation that the Songmaker household never provided, frameworks that predate the evolutionary reversal and will, the novel suggests, persist beyond it. When Eddy teaches her to shoot, she refuses. "Look at me, Eddy. I am filled with new life. I'm not shooting anything or killing anyone" (201). He accepts this. The community does not require Cedar to be someone she is not. It requires, more modestly, that she stay.

What changes across Part III is Cedar's relationship to the journal itself. In Parts I and II, the journal is primarily a record, of events, of fears, of the daily discipline of keeping herself together. In Part III it begins to become something else: a form of address that anticipates its own future reading, that writes toward a child Cedar is not certain she will raise. Gerald Vizenor's concept of survivance, which he distinguishes from mere survival as an active and ongoing refusal of narratives of defeat and disappearance, names what this shift constitutes (Manifest Manners 4-5). Cedar is not simply documenting. She is asserting, through the act of writing, a relationship that the state cannot take from her even when it takes everything else. The journal is what she makes with the resources she has, in the time she has, for the person who will need it.

Suvin insists that the novum's ultimate function is not spectacular but diagnostic: significant SF is "a specifically roundabout way of commenting on the author's collective context," providing "a better vantage point from which to comprehend the human relations around the author" (84). The evolutionary reversal in Future Home of the Living God performs exactly this function. By defamiliarizing the management of reproduction through speculative displacement, the novel makes visible a structure of reproductive violence that the contemporary liberal present has rendered nearly invisible, and it does so by showing that this structure is not new. The evolutionary crisis provides the state with emergency justification for doing what, as Chapter Two will argue, it has always found ways to do to Indigenous women's bodies: treat them as resources to be managed rather than persons to be protected.

The novum, in this reading, is not a warning about a future that might arrive. It is a revelation about a present that is already here, rendered legible by the estranging distance of speculation. Cedar's gradual shift across the novel's three parts — from settler-positioned shock to something closer to Indigenous recognition — is the formal vehicle through which this revelation occurs. By the time she writes her final entries from Stillwater, Cedar is not experiencing the crisis for the first time. She is recognising it from inside a history she has spent the whole novel learning to inhabit.

Biopower, Necropolitics, and the Machinery of Reproductive Control

Bernice does not look like a state agent. She wears Keds and a raspberry cotton tunic sweater and carries a covered basket and taps lightly on Cedar's door before opening it. Her gun is under a checkered napkin. Cedar goes with her without a struggle, not because she is naive about what is happening, but because, as she admits, "nice people paralyze me. Dark-skinned people who are nice, especially" (112). The self-awareness in that sentence is exact: Cedar recognises in real time that her liberalism is being used against her, that the state has dispatched someone who looks like the kind of person she is trained to trust. Bernice holds her hand as they walk to the car. At the hospital, she says: "Don't be afraid. Your baby will be beautiful" (115).

Cedar's response to this is the novel's first and clearest statement of its biopolitical argument: "Either she is a very good person and incredibly deluded, or else she is completely evil" (115). The novel refuses to resolve the question, Bernice disappears after delivering Cedar, because the resolution is beside the point. Biopower, as Michel Foucault theorises it in The History of Sexuality, does not require evil agents. It operates through the diffusion of control across ordinary institutional life, through the recruitment of care workers, administrators, and enforcers who participate in the management of bodies in the name of collective welfare without experiencing themselves as doing anything wrong (135-159). Bernice's warm manner is not a mask concealing cruelty underneath. It is the form that the apparatus takes when it is working correctly.

Future Home of the Living God is, among other things, a sustained anatomy of how biopower operates through people who consider themselves decent. The nurses who beam cheerfully at Cedar while monitoring her; Orielee, who brings back Cedar's confiscated books out of genuine sentiment and then searches the room for contraband on an unscheduled day; the makeup artist Miguel at Stillwater, who tells each woman she is beautiful and divine before

photographing her for the wall. None of these characters are straightforwardly villainous. They are people working within an institutional framework that has normalised the management of women's bodies as its purpose, and who have either not thought through or have suppressed the knowledge of what that management produces. This chapter examines the apparatus these characters populate — its mechanisms, its rhetoric, and the specific historical logic it inherits and extends.

The first thing the hospital does to Cedar is make her comfortable. Her room has "evenly painted golden walls, three photographs of dewy flowers" and "heavy, white, starched cotton" sheets (116). The food is good. She feels "the most intensely comfortable feeling of peace and order" and describes the ward as being "like a five-star hotel" (116). Tia's former roommate Agnes Starr tells her to hide the vitamin in her cheek rather than swallow it: "Once the nurse leaves, go take a pee and flush it" (116). Cedar has already taken hers. It takes three days without the drug for the room to become visible as what it is, the paint stained, the food rotten, the photographs saccharine, the nurses' warmth calculated.

The vitamin is the novel's most precise figure for how biopower works on individual bodies. Foucault's account of disciplinary power in Discipline and Punish distinguishes between sovereign power, which operates through spectacular violence and coercion, and disciplinary power, which operates by producing docile bodies through routine, observation, and normalisation (135-169). Saidiya Hartman's analysis of the coercive pleasures of slave governance offers a parallel framework: Hartman shows how the performance of consent and enjoyment was manufactured within systems of coercion, making visible how thoroughly power can penetrate the inner life of its subjects (Scenes of Subjection 23). The hospital exercises both, but it is the latter that is most insidious precisely because it is hardest to name. Cedar can see the locked doors and the guards; she cannot, while medicated, see the drug producing her own contentment. The apparatus works best when its subjects experience compliance as desire. Cedar wants to stay in the hospital. She feels she belongs there. It is only when she stops taking the vitamin that she recognises how that feeling was manufactured.

The vitamin sequence is also where the novel most directly addresses the question of informed consent. Cedar is not told what is in the supplement, is not asked whether she wants it, is not offered an alternative. The institution simply administers it and monitors the results. The IHS sterilisation campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s which Jane Lawrence documents as sterilising between twenty-five and fifty percent of Indigenous women of childbearing age, frequently without informed consent, sometimes with consent obtained while women were in active labour operated through a structurally similar logic: the state determined what was medically appropriate for Indigenous women's bodies and administered it regardless of expressed preference (400). The evolutionary crisis provides the novel's state apparatus with a new emergency justification for an old practice of administering Indigenous women's bodies without consent. Cedar's vitamin is not an invention. It is an intensification.

Among the hospital's staff, Orielee is the novel's most carefully drawn study of complicity. She starches her scrubs. She shows Cedar a photograph of her granddaughter with genuine pride. She retrieves Cedar's confiscated books because Cedar has told her they are religious and she cannot quite bring herself to refuse a religious request. She is, by most available measures, a kind person and she is also someone who takes hair samples and nail clippings and cheek swabs from the women in her care, packages them into labelled envelopes for researchers she refers to vaguely as "them," and draws blood from Spider Nun twice daily even when Cedar points out that the quantity is making her visibly weak. "I could lose my job substituting blood," Orielee says, "and sometimes they do check" (137). She acknowledges that some of the blood she collects is never even used, that it goes to waste, but she collects it anyway. The job is the job.

Orielee tells Cedar, without apparent irony, that there are rules which some people have simply been living by and others have not, and that those who have not are now outsiders. She cannot describe the rules, because they are "an unspoken set of rules" that have solidified into habit (129). This is precisely the mechanism that Hannah Arendt identifies in her account of the banality of evil: the capacity of ordinary people to participate in systems of harm not through sadism or ideological commitment but through the routinisation of compliance, the transformation of policy into procedure, the substitution of institutional role for moral agency (Eichmann in Jerusalem 287-288). Orielee is not a sadist. She is a person who has internalised the institutional framework so thoroughly that she experiences her own compliance as competence. When she laughs on her way out of the room, the cold, mirthless little gurgle that Cedar has learned not to trust, she is not gloating. She is simply confirming that she has done her job.

Against Orielee, the novel places Jessie: the nurse who is not a nurse but an OB-GYN posing as one in order to smuggle women out of the facility. Jessie appears to Cedar initially as "the Dweeb", pale, chinless, unnoticeable, the kind of person who blends into institutional furniture (121). Her un-remarkability is her cover. She passes information

through Cedar in tiny notes, coordinates escapes, takes extraordinary personal risks, and does all of this with the restraint of someone who understands that the slightest visible deviation will end everything. The contrast between Orielee and Jessie is not simply a contrast between complicity and resistance. It is a contrast between two forms of institutional legibility: Orielee's warmth, which the institution has trained and depends upon, and Jessie's apparent blandness, which the institution has overlooked. Both are performances. One serves the apparatus; the other dismantles it from inside.

The wall of photographs in the Stillwater dining room is the novel's most concentrated image of what Achille Mbembe calls necropolitics: the state's arrogation of the power to determine who may live and who must die, exercised not through spectacular violence but through the administration of populations whose deaths are made structurally necessary and individually invisible ("Necropolitics" 11-12). Miguel, the makeup artist, prepares each woman on arrival, combs her hair, applies eyeshadow, positions her against a backdrop painted with a halo of radiant light. "Let all the beauty inside of you rush to the surface," he says (221). The photographs are then arranged on the dining room wall. Cedar is warned by a heavily pregnant redheaded woman not to approach it; when she eventually forces herself to look, she finds names beneath each portrait, two dates, and a line that reads: "She served the future" (223).

The first date is birth. The second is death. Every woman on the wall is dead. The wall performs a specific kind of ideological work that Lee Edelman's concept of reproductive futurism helps to name. For Edelman, contemporary political discourse across the ideological spectrum converges on the figure of the Child as the ground of social investment, the future child whose wellbeing justifies present sacrifice and whose existence gives collective life its purpose (No Future 2-3). The state in Erdrich's novel weaponizes this logic directly: the women on the wall "served the future," their deaths reframed as contribution rather than cost, their individual lives subordinated to the demographic imperative that the evolutionary crisis has made newly urgent. The institution's rhetoric is entirely oriented around this futurism, Mother's television broadcasts celebrate the women for their willingness to bear the burden of species survival, their deaths absorbed into a narrative of heroic service. Cedar's mordant observation that nobody gets out of Stillwater in nine months, "Nobody gets out of here at all" cuts directly against this rhetoric (224). The women are not serving the future. They are being used by the present.

What the wall makes visible, once Cedar reads it clearly, is the gap between the institution's self-presentation and its actual function. The photographs produce an illusion of individuation, each woman named, each portrait distinct while the format that surrounds the photographs erases that individuation entirely. The women become interchangeable instances of a category: gestational resource, martyr, instrument of species continuance. Their faces survive; their persons do not. This is precisely the structure of necropolitical management that Mbembe describes in his reading of colonial plantation economies: the subject is recognised as human enough to be named and mourned, but is simultaneously reduced to the function her body performs for the dominant order ("Necropolitics" 21). The wall mourns and instrumentalises in the same gesture.

Before Cedar reaches Stillwater, she witnesses something that the novel places in deliberate proximity to the wall: Tia Jackson's labour and delivery in the cave beneath St. Paul. Tia's baby is born alive and dies within minutes. Sera cannot revive it. The scene is prolonged and harrowing, Tia in active labour for hours, in genuine physical extremity, in a cave with no medical equipment beyond what Sera has carried in a roller bag and the novel does not soften it. What follows the baby's death is stranger and, in some ways, more disturbing: Cedar wakes in the night to find rats systematically removing the placenta and bloody materials from the cave, and destroys them methodically with her mother's Frye boots. She wraps the dead baby in her own child's blue and yellow flannel blanket. She does not record what Sera does with the body.

The scene establishes several things that become structurally important for reading what happens at Stillwater. First, it establishes that the risks the novel's state apparatus claims to be managing, precarious deliveries, infant mortality are real. Tia's baby does not survive, and it is not clear that it would have survived even with full medical resources. Second, it establishes that these risks fall unevenly. Tia is Black, and Cedar observes that the state has been more aggressively targeting women like Tia, rounded up on minor pretexts, inserted into a system that takes their reproductive capacity and discards the women themselves. Dorothy Roberts has argued that the history of reproductive coercion in the United States is organised precisely around this racialised calculus, with Black and Indigenous women bearing a disproportionate burden of policies that claim to serve public health while actually managing and reducing populations the state deems expendable (Killing the Black Body 6-7). Third, it establishes the emotional and relational context from which Cedar subsequently reads the wall. She has held Tia's dead child. When she reads the name Estrella and sees that Estrella is on the wall, she does not need the novel to tell her what this means.

Andrea Smith's analysis of reproductive violence as a pillar of settler colonial logic is directly relevant here. For Smith, the assault on Indigenous reproductive life through sterilisation, child removal, detention, and the systematic undermining of Indigenous kinship structures is not incidental to settler colonialism but constitutive of it: the elimination of Indigenous reproductive futures secures settler claims to land and forecloses the demographic recovery that would make Indigenous political claims more pressing (Conquest 7-9). The novel extends this analysis to a racialised hierarchy of reproductive disposability in which Indigenous and Black women are most aggressively targeted, most systematically processed, and least likely to be among the survivors the institution produces. Cedar's survival into the later stages of the novel is, in part, a function of the resistances she has inherited and developed — the rope braided from Ojibwe finger-weaving technique, Jessie's covert support, Eddy's network. Tia's survival after her baby's death is, by a grim irony, a function of no longer being reproductively useful to the state. Without a baby, she can walk out.

Cedar's delivery at Stillwater is the novel's most formally ambitious passage. She describes it in terms of oceanic spiritual force, thousands of spirits admitted to the room, the women's communal song heard between contractions, the plants that have been growing through the facility's floors and walls now rising around her in a kind of wild witness. The passage draws on Hildegard of Bingen, on the Ojibwe songs Eddy has been teaching, on the Catholic mystical tradition Cedar has practised throughout the novel. Paula Gunn Allen argued that the sacred dimensions of Indigenous women's reproductive experience have been systematically suppressed by both colonial administration and Western medical discourse; the novel's birth scene reclaims that sacred dimension within the very institution built to expropriate it (The Sacred Hoop 28). It is, deliberately, both ecstatic and entirely physical. Cedar is in her body and beyond it simultaneously. The baby arrives.

Then: "The sting of the needle stole my consciousness. As I slipped away, someone pried apart your fist and I felt you lifted from my arms" (232-233).

The sentence does the work that the entire apparatus has been building toward. Cedar's body was required for what it could produce. The moment the birth concluded, her usefulness to the state concluded with it. She is sedated before she can hold her child, before she can register gender or weight or the particular quality of the cry, before she can establish the relational fact of motherhood that might complicate the institution's subsequent decisions about the child. The needle is not punishment or cruelty in any simple sense. It is the logical endpoint of a system that has always treated Cedar's body as the means and her child as the object. Once the object is produced, the means is set aside.

Patrick Wolfe's formulation of settler colonialism as a structure rather than an event ongoing, adaptive, finding new justifications in each historical moment, is the framework within which this ending belongs ("Settler Colonialism" 388). Cedar's body has been managed, her child taken, her voice reduced to fragmentary late entries from a cell where she awaits her next forced pregnancy. The evolutionary crisis did not invent this logic. It provided the emergency that allowed the logic to be applied more openly, more systematically, and with less pretence of consent than was previously available. The IHS sterilisation campaigns required administrative subterfuge and, eventually, legal challenge. The Church of the New Constitution requires neither. It has a wall for its dead, a makeup artist for their portraits, and a phrase, "She served the future", that converts necropolitics into sacrifice.

What Cedar's journal preserves, against this, is the record of what the apparatus could not fully contain: her voice, her address to her child, her account of the people who helped her and the people who did not and the people who were simply doing their jobs. The journal is not a counter-institution. It is something smaller and more durable, a form of testimony that the sedation could not prevent because Cedar wrote it before the needle arrived. Chapter Three examines what the novel does with this testimony and with the broader survivance resources that Cedar has been accumulating across the narrative: the reservation community, the Ojibwe practices embedded in the rope and the songs and Grandma's patience, and the utopian horizon that Moylan's critical dystopia framework helps to name.

Critical Dystopia and the Utopian Horizon

In his account of the critical dystopia, Tom Moylan argues that the genre's defining formal feature is its refusal to surrender to its own darkness. Where the classic dystopia moves toward closure, the system confirmed, resistance crushed, the reader left with the horror intact and absolute, the critical dystopia "borrow[s] the dystopian form while maintaining the utopian impulse" (Scraps 196). It does not pretend that oppressive conditions are less than they are. It insists, within those conditions, on the persistence of something else: spaces of refusal, alternative practices, the ongoing possibility of a world organised differently. That something else is not guaranteed survival. It is what Moylan calls, borrowing from Ernst Bloch, the principle of hope, not optimism, which requires a favourable prediction of outcomes, but the conviction that the existing order does not exhaust the possible (Scraps 10-11).

Future Home of the Living God sustains its utopian horizon in two registers that this chapter reads in sequence. The first

is the reservation community, Eddy's land reclamation, Sweetie's domestic practices, Grandma's stories, the community's institutional memory and adaptive infrastructure, all of which constitute what Gerald Vizenor calls survivance: the active, ongoing refusal of narratives of defeat and disappearance that Indigenous communities have maintained across generations of colonial assault (Manifest Manners 4-5). The second is Cedar's journal itself, which is not simply a record of what happened but a form of address that creates relationship across an uncertain future, asserting narrative sovereignty when physical sovereignty has been taken. These two registers are related: the journal is possible because Cedar has learned, across the novel, to inhabit frameworks for resistance that the reservation community carries. Survivance is not only what Eddy's community practices. It is what Cedar's writing performs.

Eddy's statement that the reservation is going to "be self-sufficient, like the old days" is easy to misread as nostalgia (199). It is not. The old days, in this context, are not a romantic past to be mourned but a body of practical knowledge to be applied. When the evolutionary crisis removes the infrastructural supports that settler society depends upon reliable electricity, supply chains, digital communication, institutional medicine, the reservation community does not improvise from nothing. It reaches for capacities that were developed when settler infrastructure was either unavailable or actively denied, and that have been maintained across the decades of their apparent superfluity.

The novel is specific about what these capacities are. Sweetie fires up the old woodstove, which had been standing decoratively in the corner of the kitchen, and begins making oatmeal cakes with bacon grease. The stove moves from ornament to centre of the household in a single action. Eddy converts the casino's grow-lighted aisles to seedling production, sources medicinal marijuana through Indigenous trade networks, organises food production on the scale of a collective farm. The communication network runs through runners stationed at eight points on the reservation, reciting news twice daily on the pattern of traditional town criers. The militia combines military veterans with community members and coordinates through a wolf-howl code that Cedar finds enchanting until Eddy translates it: drones at the casino, go inside. The code is beautiful and functional simultaneously. This is not coincidental. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson has argued that Indigenous resurgence practices characteristically integrate the aesthetic and the practical, the ceremonial and the political, because land-based knowledge does not separate these dimensions in the way that Western institutional frameworks do (As We Have Always Done 22). It is a feature of survivance practices that they often carry aesthetic as well as practical dimensions, the finger-weaving technique that Spider Nun uses to braid the escape rope is both an Ojibwe art form and, in the hospital, a survival technology.

Kyle Powys Whyte's argument that Indigenous communities experience ecological crisis as a sequel to already-experienced colonial catastrophe is formally enacted in the novel through the contrast between how the Songmakers and the Potts respond to the same conditions ("Indigenous Climate Change Studies" 157). Glen and Sera oscillate between anxious preparation and paralysis. They accumulate camping gear, maintain their assets, hope for news of Glen's contacts in Canada. When Cedar last hears from them with any regularity, they have crossed the border and are hoping to be found by the right people. Their response is individual, reactive, dependent on networks they cannot fully control. The Potts response is collective, proactive, and grounded in structures the community already maintains. Eddy does not build the land reclamation strategy in response to the crisis. The crisis gives him the opening to implement a strategy he has been developing for a long time, one that draws on treaty knowledge, legal precedent, and the community's existing political organisation. Nick Estes has argued that Indigenous resistance is best understood not as a series of reactive responses to colonial pressure but as a continuous tradition of political organisation that carries forward across generations, adapting to new conditions without abandoning its foundational claims (Our History Is the Future 15). The Dawes Act parcels were always unjust. The crisis simply removes the white lake-home owners who were occupying them.

Of all the reservation characters, it is Grandma, Mary Potts the Very Senior, possibly over a hundred years old, alert and sharp-eyed in her wheelchair, who most directly embodies what survivance means as a temporal practice. She exists in the novel as a living archive: her body spans a historical period that the other characters can only know at second hand, her stories carry knowledge of what preceded the colonial reorganisation of reservation life, and her presence provides a form of continuity that nothing institutional can replicate or replace.

The story she tells Cedar after Cedar discovers that Glen is her biological father is the novel's most extended piece of embedded narrative: the Fat Man's Race, the blue devil, the dreamed knife, Cuthbert's death at the finish line. On the surface it is a story about romantic betrayal and its consequences. Underneath, it is a story about the power of what is dreamed and imagined to shape what is real, the knife Cedar's grandmother dreams into existence beneath her pillow is found between the dead man's ribs. It is also a

story about how Grandma came to build the life she actually built: not the life she planned, but the one that followed from the wreckage of planning. Fifty-seven years with a man who hated blue. Eight children, twenty adopted. Wild rice and deer from the back porch. Corn and potatoes dug every fall.

The story works on Cedar in the way that Grandma's stories seem designed to work: as oblique preparation rather than direct instruction. Cedar does not know why Grandma is telling her this story until she has sat with it and realised that it was a warning about men who appear as angels and are not, Cuthbert's fatal vanity, the blue devil's deception, and now, by extension, Phil. The story gives Cedar a framework for understanding what Phil has just done and what he is about to propose, without naming Phil directly. This is pedagogy as survivance: knowledge transmitted not as abstract principle but as narrative that the recipient must interpret, in time, in relation to their own situation. Grandma's stories are not entertainment. They are the long view, made available to those who can receive it.

The long view is also what Grandma provides simply by existing. She is, as Cedar notes, possibly over a hundred, she has survived versions of crisis that no one else in the novel can remember. Her age is not sentimentalised. She snatches the oatmeal spoon from Sweetie's hand and feeds herself. She wheels herself incrementally across the carpet to join conversations, buzzing and wheezing. She is occasionally maddening. But her presence in every scene she appears in is a form of argument: that the community has been here before, in some configuration, that it survived, that survival is not a matter of luck or exceptional individual heroism but of the practices and relationships and stories that a community carries across time and passes forward.

Cedar writes her journal to her child across an uncertainty she cannot resolve. She does not know, as she writes, whether the child will survive, whether she will survive, whether the journal will reach its intended reader or be confiscated and destroyed. She writes anyway. The act of writing is not contingent on favourable conditions. It continues through the hospital, through the cave, through the mail truck, through the Superpumper's storage room, through Stillwater's cinder-block cell. Cedar writes wherever she is, with whatever she has — a pen, a flashlight, a half-inch slash of light through a truck's siding. The journal does not wait for safety. It is what Cedar does while she is unsafe.

Vizenor's concept of survivance distinguishes mere survival, passive endurance, bare persistence from the active ongoing refusal of "dominance, tragedy, and victimry" that he identifies as Indigenous survivance (Manifest Manners 4). The distinction is crucial for reading Cedar's journal. A novel that simply documented Cedar's suffering and ultimate defeat would be a tragedy in Vizenor's sense: it would confirm the dominant narrative about Indigenous women's disposability, the inevitability of their losses, the structural impossibility of their resistance. Cedar's journal does something different. It asserts, in the act of its own production, that Cedar's perspective on events is worth preserving; that her relationship with her child is real regardless of whether the state permits it; that what she has seen and thought and felt has a claim on the future that the apparatus cannot adjudicate. The journal is not a record of Cedar's survival. It is evidence of her refusal to accept the terms on which the state would define her.

This is why the journal's address to the unborn child, sustained across the entire novel, from the first entry to the last fragmentary ones from Stillwater matters formally as well as emotionally. Cedar is creating, on the page, the relationship that the state is systematically working to prevent. The institution at Stillwater sedates women at the moment of birth and removes their children before the mothers fully regain consciousness. Its entire apparatus is designed to sever the maternal bond before it can be consolidated. Cedar's journal predates the birth by nine months. By the time the needle arrives, the relationship is already nine months old, already embedded in hundreds of pages of address. The state can take the child from Cedar's arms. It cannot take the journal from the child.

Michel de Certeau's distinction between strategies and tactics is useful here. Strategies, for de Certeau, are the operations of institutions that possess a "place", a position of power from which they can manage space, time, and the movements of others (The Practice of Everyday Life xix). Tactics are the operations of those who lack such a place, who must work "within the enemy's field of vision" using whatever opportunities arise, turning the dominant order's own resources to unexpected purposes (37). Cedar's journal is a tactic in de Certeau's sense: it uses the materials the institution provides such as paper, a notebook, the heating duct as hiding place to create something the institution does not intend and cannot fully control. Leslie Marmon Silko observed that storytelling in Indigenous traditions carries this same quality of working with available materials to assert the continuity of the self across conditions designed to fragment it; the act of narration is itself a form of resistance (Ceremony 2). Kim TallBear's work on Indigenous identity and data sovereignty is similarly relevant: TallBear argues that the act of narrating one's own experience and genealogy constitutes a form of political assertion against the state's claim to define who Indigenous people are and what their bodies signify (Native American DNA 183). The journal is not an escape from the apparatus. It is a form of movement within it, producing something that

the apparatus cannot see or manage because it looks, from outside, simply like a pregnant woman writing.

The novel's final entries are dated and then undated, growing sparse as Cedar's physical condition deteriorates after the birth. "December. Extremely weak. But still here. January. They say my heart is damaged. February. My dear son. I know you're going to read this someday" (233). Whether Cedar survived beyond February, the novel declines to say. Whether her child survived, was raised, eventually found and read the journal — all of this is withheld. The novel ends without resolution, and Moylan's account of the critical dystopia helps to explain why this formal choice is not a failure of nerve but a political argument.

Classic dystopias tend toward closure precisely because closure confirms the system's totality: the horror is complete; the reader is sealed inside it. Critical dystopias refuse this closure because closure would be a lie, the existing order does not exhaust the possible, and a narrative form that implies otherwise has already conceded too much. What the novel's open ending preserves is the fact that Cedar's story does not have a determined outcome. The apparatus has enormous power. It does not have all the power. Eddy's community is still on the reservation. Jessie has been helping women out of facilities. Shawn's recycling network is still running. Glen is somewhere in Canada with contacts. The resistance that has sustained Cedar through the novel has not been eliminated; it has simply moved beyond the boundaries of what Cedar can see from her cell.

The journal's survival is the ending's central fact. We hold it. That Cedar's voice reaches us, that the child eventually read it, as the February entry addresses, is the utopian horizon the novel offers, and it is specifically not a guarantee of physical survival or political victory. It is something narrower and more durable: the persistence of a relationship, a voice, a form of testimony that the apparatus could not prevent because Cedar produced it before the needle arrived. Vizenor writes of survivance as the stories that "cannot be separated from the consciousness of survivance", not accounts of triumph but the ongoing production of presence that refuses the conclusion of defeat (Manifest Manners 15). Cedar's journal is exactly this. It does not claim that she survived. It proves that she was here, and thought, and addressed her child, and kept writing.

The novel's final image is not Cedar in her cell but the last snow: Sera describing the last winter that was genuinely cold, the last time it snowed the way snow used to snow, Cedar at eight years old pelting her parents with snowballs in a yard filling with white. The memory belongs to Cedar's Songmaker childhood, not to her Ojibwe family. But it is offered to her son as a form of inheritance — this is what the world was like in the before, this is what was lost, this is what you will need to know about in order to understand what has happened and why it matters. Memory as transmission: the same structure that Grandma's stories enact, the same impulse that drives Cedar's journal. The utopian horizon in Future Home of the Living God is not a vision of political victory or ecological restoration. It is the conviction that what has been loved and known and written down is worth passing forward, even across an uncertainty that cannot be resolved.

CONCLUSION

The novel's last question is addressed to Cedar's son. "Where will you be, my darling, the last time it snows on earth?" (235). It is formally a question about climate, the memory Cedar has just recorded is of the last true snowfall, the day she was eight years old, the day she threw snow at her parents on a lawn filling with white. But it is also a question about survival and inheritance, about whether the child exists in a future that can still receive what Cedar is transmitting. The question is not answered. The novel ends.

This article has argued that this refusal of resolution is itself the argument, that Future Home of the Living God's most significant formal choice is its insistence on remaining open at precisely the point where closure would provide relief. Cedar does not know, as she writes in February from her Stillwater cell, whether her son survived the birth, whether Jessie managed to secure him, whether the journal will reach him. The reader does not know either. What the February entries establish is that Cedar is still writing: still addressing her child, still transmitting what she knows, still performing the act of relation that the state has tried to prevent. The journal exists. Someone eventually read it. The question of what they inherited is, what world they inhabit, what became of the reservation community, whether the evolutionary crisis continued, belongs to a future the novel refuses to colonise with false certainty.

The three analytical frameworks this article has deployed across its chapters are not equivalently applicable to all parts of the novel, and it is worth being precise about what each one illuminates and where it reaches its limit. Suvin's novum provides the most structurally comprehensive account of the novel's speculative premise: the evolutionary reversal meets all of his criteria for a significant novum totalising, cognitively grounded, diagnostically oriented toward the author's present and the central argument this article has made about the novum's uneven operation adds something that Suvin's framework does not anticipate. Carl Freedman's extension of Suvin argues that the cognition produced by science fiction is always shaped by the reader's historical position (Critical Theory and Science Fiction 18),

and this is precisely what Erdrich exploits: the evolutionary reversal produces different cognition depending on whether the reader is positioned within settler normalcy or Indigenous continuity. The estrangement produced by the evolutionary reversal is not universal. It falls asymmetrically across the novel's characters in a pattern that reproduces the asymmetry of colonial violence: what is catastrophically new for the settler world is recognisably continuous with existing conditions for the Ojibwe community. This revision of Suvin through Whyte and Wolfe is the theoretical core of Chapter One, and it generates the interpretive lens through which the subsequent chapters read the hospital apparatus and the reservation community.

The biopower and necropolitics framework of Chapter Two is the most historically dense of the three, and the one most directly grounded in the novel's textual evidence. The wall of photographs at Stillwater, "She served the future" beneath each woman's birth and death dates is the novel's most concentrated single image, and it rewards sustained analytical attention because it performs ideological work that is not immediately legible. The wall mourns and instrumentalises in a single gesture, producing what looks like memorialisation while actually enacting the erasure of the individual person behind the institutional category. Reading the wall through Mbembe's necropolitics and connecting it to the historical record of IHS sterilisation campaigns establishes the continuity the novel is insisting upon: the evolutionary crisis did not invent the reproductive management of Indigenous women. It removed the administrative subterfuge that previously made it deniable.

The Moylan framework of Chapter Three is the most formally oriented of the three, and it addresses questions the first two chapters set up but cannot answer: what sustains the novel's refusal of despair, and whether that refusal is earned rather than merely asserted. The answer this article has offered is that the utopian horizon in Future Home of the Living God is not a projection of better futures but a documentation of existing alternative practices, Eddy's land reclamation, Sweetie's woodstove, Grandma's stories, Cedar's journal carries the capacity for different forms of social organisation within the conditions of the present. The distinction matters because it separates the novel's hopefulness from wishful thinking. Cedar does not survive because she imagines a better world. She survives, as long as she survives, because she has learned to inhabit and transmit the practices of a community that has been maintaining its survivance across generations.

The novel refuses several things that dystopian fiction often provides, and naming these refusals clarifies what kind of achievement Future Home of the Living God represents. It refuses the hero plot. Cedar does not lead a resistance movement, does not organise a breakout from Stillwater at scale, does not confront Mother in a climactic encounter. Her resistance is individual and collaborative in small combinations with Spider Nun in the hospital, with Tia in the cave, with Jessie at both facilities and it produces her own partial freedom rather than systemic change. The state apparatus is still operating when the journal ends. The field of white crosses outside the Stillwater yard is still filling.

It refuses the conversion narrative. Cedar does not fully become Ojibwe. She does not achieve fluency in Ojibwe, does not perform the ceremonies she has only partially learned, does not shed the Songmaker identity that was imposed on her through adoption. What she achieves is more modest and more durable: access to frameworks for understanding her situation that the Songmakers never provided, and a set of practices like writing, making, maintaining relationships, connects her to the community carrying those frameworks. The novel does not require Cedar to resolve her dual identity in order for her reconnection to matter. The ambivalence is structural. She is both, and will be both, and the novel's argument does not depend on her choosing.

It refuses the comfort of Eddy's survival as a given. Eddy's land reclamation strategy is brilliant and his community's adaptive capacity is genuine, but the novel does not confirm that the reservation escapes the crisis intact. After Cedar's capture at the Kateri vigil, the reservation community drops out of the narrative. The field of white crosses is visible from Stillwater's exercise yard. What has happened to the people Cedar loves is not told. The utopian horizon is sustained, but it is not guaranteed. Moylan's account of the critical dystopia is precise on this point, and the novel honours the distinction.

Eddy's chapter in his memoir, passed to Cedar in pieces throughout the novel, is titled "Cured by the Apocalypse", the evolutionary crisis, he writes, has relieved his depression, because the sheer strangeness and scale of what is happening gives him a reason to stay alive and watch. The pebbles that cut his feet on the path to the tree where he had planned to hang himself are geological specimens of immense age, Precambrian hematite, basaltic lava three and a half billion years old, a rounded agate he thinks would make a beautiful necklace for Sweetie and he stops to examine each one. The rope is flung away. The little rocks, he writes, "want him on earth" (229).

The passage is the novel's most direct statement of what survivance looks like at the level of individual consciousness: not triumph or resolution, but the arrest of despair by the specific gravity of the particular world. The pebbles are not symbols. They are what they are, old stone,

strayed from the Mesabi Range, cut by lake water into a shape that fits the palm. Their beauty is real and local and available, even on the path to the tree. Eddy's turn back from that path is not a conversion or a cure. It is a moment of attention that the world makes possible.

Cedar's final memory; the last snowfall, the eight-year-old pelting her parents, whiteness filling the air, is the novel's equivalent gesture. She is recording what the world was like before, for a child who will need to know it. The memory belongs to her Songmaker childhood, to Glen and Sera and a lawn in Minneapolis, not to the reservation or the Ojibwe practices she has been learning to inhabit. It is offered without qualification: this is what was loved, this is what was lost, this is what I am giving you. The question that closes the novel, "Where will you be, my darling, the last time it snows on earth?", does not ask whether the son has survived. It asks where he will be: a question that presupposes his existence, his movement in a world, his capacity to be somewhere when something happens. The question is not pessimistic. It is an act of faith in a future the novel cannot see.

Future Home of the Living God is a novel about what gets passed forward across conditions of catastrophe. The journal is passed forward. Grandma's stories are passed forward. The knowledge encoded in the finger-weaving technique, in the wolf-howl code, in the old woodstove's continued functionality, in the land reclamation maps, all of this is passed forward, embedded in practices that the crisis cannot render obsolete because they predate the conditions the crisis produces. This is what the novel means by the utopian horizon: not the vision of a world already improved, but the insistence that what has been known and loved and carefully transmitted has a claim on whatever world comes next. Cedar writes her son into existence across two hundred pages before she holds him. The state takes him from her arms. The journal remains.

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