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# NATIVE AMERICANS IN CHARLES DE LINT'S THE WIND IN HIS HEART

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the portrayal of Native American people and traditions in Charles de Lint's most recent novel *The Wind in His Heart* (2017). The theoretical framework for the proposed analysis will be provided by Gerald Vizenor's works dealing with the depiction of Indigenous communities in mainstream (predominantly white) culture and Marek Oziewicz's *One Earth, One People* (2008) in which the author examines the restorative power of mythopoeic fantasy. Since the works of Charles de Lint, which belong to the category of mythopoeic fantasy, implicitly argue that Indigenous spirituality may play a significant role in the process of restoration discussed by Oziewicz, the inclusion of Oziewicz's perspective will contribute to the overall assessment of de Lint's portrayal of Native people and traditions.

## Key words

*Native Americans; fantasy literature; Charles de Lint; The Wind in His Heart*

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## Introduction

Charles de Lint's latest novel, *The Wind in His Heart* (2017), contains all the fundamental elements of his previous works. The setting of the novel alternates between contemporary North American cityscapes and the mystical Otherworld (spirit world) whose wild territories the characters explore in the course of their adventures. Among those characters there are several empowered female protagonists who partake of the mysteries of the Otherworld and who are indispensable for the resolution of the main conflict. In the background of this conflict, de Lint – a socially conscious writer – depicts the concerns of individuals and groups excluded from mainstream American society for ethnic and economic reasons. The group whose concerns and traditions de Lint has recently most often addressed in his fiction are Native Americans. Given the considerable debate on J. K. Rowling's "History of Magic in North America" (available on her website *Pottermore*) – an alternative history of the USA, which was strongly criticized for its misrepresentation of Indigenous people – de Lint's treatment of Native American peoples and cultures also invites a critical evaluation since he, like Rowling, is a non-Native writer. A detailed investigation of de Lint's previous works, e.g. *Moonheart* (1984), *Svaha* (1989), and *Forests of the Heart* (2000), proved that while his early novels can also be criticized for a stereotypical and romanticized depiction of First Nations, the Canadian author has gradually moved beyond such images and developed narratives in which Native identities, traditions, and concerns not only

gain prominence, but are approached in a more sensitive manner (Łaszkiwicz 2018: 233–249). Taking into consideration the recent investigation of de Lint's works, the aim of the following paper is to further evaluate the author's portrayal of Native people in his latest work,<sup>1</sup> including his implicit suggestion that Indigenous spirituality can offer guidance and contribute to the restoration of the contemporary world. These issues will be explored in the context of Gerald Vizenor's critique of cultural simulations of Native presence and Marek Oziewicz's award-winning book *One Earth, One People* (2008), in which the author examines the transformative and restorative potential of mythopoeic fantasy fiction.

### Portrayal of Native Americans

*The Wind in His Heart*, like many of de Lint's post-2000 works, is set in the fictional desert city of Santo del Vado Viejo located in southern Arizona. Though Newford, de Lint's most renowned fictional city which marked him as a pioneer of urban fantasy, is also briefly mentioned,<sup>2</sup> it is clear that the author's imagination has been captured by desert landscapes. Yet rather than focusing on Santo del Vado Viejo, *The Wind in His Heart* is largely set on the adjacent Kikimi reservation—which is also a product of de Lint's imagination. In the brief passages dealing with the tribe's history, de Lint informs his readers that after the Kikimi were deprived of their land by the settlers, they became like Apache ghost warriors and fought until the women's council, recognizing the futility of such actions, decided to sign a treaty (Ch. 71). For a time, the Kikimi were also conflicted with local spirits (called the *ma'inawo*),<sup>3</sup> but a truce between their communities eventually led to friendship (Ch. 73).

The Kikimi are not the first purely fictional tribe in de Lint's career. The Newford novels occasionally feature members of the Kickaha tribe which de Lint based on the Algonquin language group (qtd. in Schellenberg and Switzer 2000). The creation of fictional tribes raises, of course, considerable doubts. On the one hand, critics might condemn such practices as instances of cultural appropriation, rightfully arguing that Native Americans have been romanticized, mythologized, and fictionalized often enough, and that writers should instead focus on "real" First Nations, not their fictional equivalents. Using the terminology of Gerald Vizenor, rather than produce simulations of Native presence – the Colonial and Romantic *Indians* – that only mask the absence of authentic Native people (Vizenor 1999: 84–86), contemporary writers should use their works to dismantle colonial structures and pseudo-Native identities preserved by mainstream American culture. On the other hand, critics might recognize Laurence Steven's argument that "a non-native *Canadian* repository of traditional (mythopoeic/spiritual) cultural lore out of which our writers of fantasy can fashion their worlds simply doesn't exist" (Steven 2004: 58) – this partially explains why Canadian fantasists search for inspiration in Indigenous traditions. Critics might also acknowledge de Lint's declaration (qtd. in Schellenberg and Switzer 2000) that he did not wish to incorporate a real tribe into his imaginary world for fear of misrepresenting an existing group.<sup>4</sup> Not having been raised in an Indigenous

community, de Lint might never be able to fully grasp the nuances of a particular Indigenous tradition, and any of his attempts at portraying an existing group will inevitably be threatened by misrepresentation. Under such circumstances, a non-Native writer's choice is "either to avoid Indigenous characters altogether or to resort to more fictionalized figures (which can also be successful to some degree if the author avoids romanticized stereotypes and prejudice). While the latter option is not the ideal solution, it is still a step towards changing fantasy fiction's default preference for white protagonists" (Łaszkiewicz 2018: 247). In *Race and Popular Fantasy: Habits of Whiteness* (2016), Helen Young also offers a solution to the dilemma of misrepresentation: "Considering the question of authorial identity and cultural appropriation through a semiotic lens demonstrates that the core issue is not who moves a sign from one system to another, but how it is done and to what effect. Whoever does the moving, a new significance will be produced by the new context" (2016: 161). In recognition of Young's argument, the following paper will not attempt to decide to what extent a non-Native fantasist such as de Lint can be justified for the creation of fictional Indigenous tribes. Instead, this paper will investigate the components and results of de Lint's portrayal of Native Americans. Such an investigation will allow me to determine if de Lint's latest work contributes to the dismantling of the stereotypical images prevalent in popular thought and literature.

For the purpose of my argument, I propose to divide these stereotypical images into two broader categories: the Victim and the Other. Images of victimry deprive Native Americans of agency and responsibility (Vizenor 2009: 13). As victims of colonization and the still prevalent ethnic inequality, Native Americans are depicted as intolerably oppressed by the dominant culture and, at the same time, highly dependent on it. If they are protagonists of their stories, they are often depicted as tragic figures unable to move beyond the trauma of the past and as broken individuals incapable of reclaiming their tribal lands and cultures. If they appear as secondary characters, they are relegated to the minor roles of supporters and observers. Either way, "aesthetic victimry" (Vizenor 1998: 97) is a harmful phenomenon since it casts Indigenous people as hapless Victims of social and cultural powers remaining beyond their reach. Images of otherness further diminish Indigenous autonomy. The Native American as the Other is a relic of past centuries, a noble savage whose domain is nostalgic romance, and a fantastic creature that, at best, remains at the outskirts of the civilized white society. As such, the Native American lacks both immediate presence in the contemporary world of culture and politics, and the tools to change their situation – a state which only further aggravates alienation. Arguably, de Lint's *The Wind in His Heart* avoids many of these harmful stereotypes.

*The Wind in His Heart* focuses on Indigenous people and traditions to a greater extent than any of de Lint's previous works (perhaps with the exception of *Sva-ha*). Though, as usual, the cast of characters consists of individuals from different walks of life, the Indigenous perspective clearly dominates over the entire story. Several characters belong to the Kikimi tribe, and their concerns – embedded in the dictates of their (fictional) tribal culture – become the main axis of the narrative. Consequently, the white characters find themselves engulfed by Indigenous

spirituality and involved in Indigenous affairs. By dealing with these affairs, de Lint is not only able to develop his fantastic story but also to address a range of authentic problems pertaining to life on reservations.

One of them is the younger generation's struggle to cope with life on reservations. At the beginning of the novel, readers meet Thomas Corn Eyes,<sup>5</sup> a teenager sensitive to the spirit world who does not reveal his abilities for fear of attracting the attention of the tribal shaman, Ramon Morago. The boy rejects his gift because he feels that the Kikimi should focus more on the future instead of the past (Ch. 9), and because he wishes to explore the world beyond the reservation. Yet Thomas cannot leave because his meager earnings support his family. Thus, Thomas is presented as a conflicted young man who, though he genuinely cherishes his community, feels trapped and unable to reconcile with parts of his identity. Subsequent events challenge the boy to face his fears and his heritage. In the course of the novel, Thomas visits the spirit world, willingly endangers himself to protect his tribe, and even supports Morago (Ch. 16), thus proving his commitment to the community (tribal solidarity is one of the novel's recurring themes). Moreover, the boy is instructed in Native spirituality and its perception of life and time as circular rather than linear concepts – a lesson which reflects authentic Native beliefs (Macdonald et al. 2000: 21–24). Eventually, by willingly using his powers (Ch. 56), Thomas discovers the depth of his connection to the land and its inhabitants, and this experience leads him to the rediscovery of his own identity – which is a frequent theme in Native American fiction (Morrison 1998: 263). Not surprisingly, this transformation is achieved with the help of the community and its traditional stories. Even though by the end of the novel Thomas does not forsake the idea of leaving the reservation, he inarguably makes progress on his path to self-development. Thomas' story is one of temporary alienation and eventual recovery. As the spirit of his Aunt tells him, he needs to leave the reservation because he has the wind in his heart (Ch. 41) but he will eventually return since “This red dust [the land] is in our blood” (Ch. 82). This phrase mirrors the experience of Carnel, a young protagonist of Patricia Riley's “Damping Down the Road”, who is torn between her father's respect for Indigenous traditions and her mother's attempts to escape from them. At the end of her story, Carnel recognizes her connection to the Native land:

Hearing the soft, shushing sound that the dust made, Carnel knew that by morning a fine, red film would cover everything. She inhaled long and deeply, took the red dust in, allowed it to fill her up. She tasted it on her tongue, and ground it between her teeth when she finally slept again. And that night, she dreamed she was a river, red, and rushing towards a destination that she couldn't yet see. (Riley 2008: 165)

Thomas is also rushing towards new destinations, yet the connection to his tribal identity, community, and land is there to support him on his journey and to ease his return. Arguably, though Thomas Corn Eyes is not as compelling and colorful as some of de Lint's other characters, he is an Indigenous protagonist with whom younger readers can identify since his dilemmas might reflect their own.

And since Thomas refuses to succumb to frustration and depression, his progress towards freedom and empowerment, which are grounded in the support of his community, may offer young (Native) readers some encouragement.

Another issue which de Lint addresses in *The Wind in His Heart* is the problem of the reservations' economic prosperity. De Lint's Kikimi "rez" is divided into two sides: one holds a casino run by a Native businessman, Sammy Swift Grass, and the other sees the whole enterprise as a threat to the traditional way of life. The animosity between both sides is palpable, and only events such as powwows bring temporary reconciliation (Ch. 7). Naturally, the conflict is aggravated by the fact that only some members of the tribe benefit from the casino's proceeds. By highlighting the problem of financial inequality, de Lint indirectly challenges the prevalent myth that Native-owned casinos ensure universal prosperity for their tribes. The author also ponders the possible merit of Native-owned casinos: though he acknowledges the fears of the traditionalists who argue that such business ventures might damage the people's connection to their heritage, he also suggests that the Kikimi reservation will not be able to avoid the outside world forever.

The figure of Sammy Swift Grass is a case in point. Sammy is one of the novel's antagonists since his pursuit of money has threatened the integrity of the community and even caused the death of its member, Derek Two Trees, who was killed in his animal form by white hunters that regularly visit Sammy's lodges. Since Sammy refuses to acknowledge his fault and rejects his tribe's belief in spirits (Ch. 17), de Lint makes it very easy for readers to dislike him. Yet Sammy's liminal position of a man poised between two worlds – his Native community and his white clients – eventually invites readers to reconsider their criticism of this character. It is not difficult to recognize in Sammy so many real Native Americans who try to make the best of both worlds, but in the end realize that they do not fully belong to any of them.<sup>6</sup> Sammy's office – decorated with random Native artifacts and a chief's headdress even though the Kikimi never wore them (Ch.17) – is a sign of his inability to define himself. On the one hand, the absurd decorations might indicate that Sammy started to perceive himself through the dominant culture's image of a Native man. On the other, he might have chosen such decorations in order to appeal to his clients' mental image of a "real" Indian. Of course, both reasons deserve criticism since Sammy transforms himself into a simulation of Native presence just to satisfy external expectations. Yet taking into consideration the fact that Sammy's case exemplifies a real problem for Native communities, characters such as him should not be offhandedly rejected, but sympathized with and helped. That is why de Lint allows Sammy to reconcile with his people and, at the end of the story, shows him participating in a sweat lodge ceremony to which he is reluctantly welcomed.

What is more, de Lint suggests that one day a man such as Sammy will be necessary for the survival of the Kikimi reservation. At one point, the spirit Si'tala prophesizes that soon the nearby city, Santo del Vado Viejo, might find itself in need of water available on the reservation. If that happens, the tribe's water rights and sovereign lands might be violated by the government in the name of "a greater good." It will then take people such as Sammy Swift Grass (wealthy and

well-versed in the dominant culture) to protect the community because existing treaties will not be sufficient and should not be trusted. The prophecy is a reference to the recent problem of Indigenous communities whose territories were threatened by the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL). Despite numerous protests from Native Americans and environmentalists, the pipeline was eventually constructed in 2017 under Donald Trump's presidency, and is currently in operation (Gambino 2017). While de Lint never directly refers to DAPL in his novel, when he was asked on his official *Goodreads.com* account if he is aware of the protests, he responded: "I am, indeed, and support them on social media and elsewhere. Water rights come up in the book I mentioned in my response to your last question but I haven't found a good fictional forum in which to address them more fully as of yet" ("Ask the Author"). Judging by his response, de Lint is not a writer who uses Indigenous communities as a convenient resource for his books, at the same time forgetting that they are real people with pressing problems. On the contrary, while, as a fantasist, he tries to deliver a good story, he also attempts to draw his readers' attention to social and political injustice.

Other Native characters which allow de Lint to focus on different aspects of Indigenous life include Ruben, Ramon Morago, and Abigail White Horse. Ruben, the Kikimi war leader, is a man highly protective of his people and their traditions. He is angry with Sammy not only because of Derek's death, but also because he fears that "modernization" will sever the people's connection with their land, make them subservient to white customs, and taint them with the pursuit of money (Ch. 15). Thus, Reuben voices the concerns of the more traditional side of the Kikimi reservation, and some authentic problems of real Native Americans. It is important that de Lint does not depict him as a hateful man whose only wish is to return to the past. On the contrary, Reuben has white friends and, though he understands the importance of customs, he does not idealize the past. Nevertheless, like Sammy, he has to accept the necessity of a compromise. Ramon Morago functions in the novel both as the tribe's spiritual leader and a trickster figure. De Lint presents him as a man deeply committed to his people, who not only holds their ceremonies and contacts the spirit world, but also supervises a school to ensure that Native children will have a better start in their adult life. It is noteworthy that the school has a course on Kikimi traditions and history, thus preserving Indigenous heritage (Ch. 15). Morago reveals his playful nature (his trickster side) in conversations with his long-time white friend, Steve Cole, on whom he occasionally bestows various silly "Indian" names (Ch. 5). By doing that, Morago makes fun of the dominant culture's assumption that all Native names are deeply spiritual and that a white man dealing with Indigenous people should expect to receive one as well – of course, preferably from a shaman. Abigail White Horse is a wise old woman highly respected by her tribe and local residents. She is kind and nurturing towards everyone in need, yet very firm about her people's traditions. She is also a painter who uses art to express her visions of the spirit world. Thus, she clearly exemplifies de Lint's favorite model for a positive female character: empowered and artistically gifted. Still, rather than an independent character with a role of her own, Abigail seems to function in the narrative mainly as a catalyst for the development of other protagonists.

De Lint clearly uses her to remind the characters (and, therefore, the readers) of the importance of life in a community, respect for the spirit world, and wisdom hidden in Indigenous storytelling. Since Abigail hardly undergoes any serious character-development throughout the novel, she seems more of a generic figure of a (Native) wise woman whose task it is to help and guide other characters in their personal struggles.

Nevertheless, if all of these Indigenous characters are taken into consideration, it is evident that de Lint's latest novel distances itself from the imagery of victimry and otherness, thus providing a more sensitive portrayal of First Nations than some of his earlier works. At no point in the novel are the Native protagonists deprived of agency and responsibility. On the contrary, their beliefs, choices, and dilemmas condition the development of the plot. Even the driving themes of the novel are Native-oriented: the murder of Derek Two Trees, the retrieval of his body, the conflict between the spirits Consuela and Si'tala, and the damage done to Abigail by a troubled white teenager, Sadie. Moreover, de Lint interweaves these conflicts with concerns inherent to life on reservations. Though some of these concerns are only mentioned rather than explored, it is still a noticeable progress since fantasy fiction, with its tendency to choose completely imaginary worlds for its settings, is not a medium typically concerned with such down-to-earth issues. This partial focus on life on reservations, combined with Indigenous characters who tend to their daily duties and problems, proves that the Native Americans featured in this novel, in spite of their spiritual powers, are neither fantastic Others nor romantic noble savages. Instead, they are individuals and citizens of contemporary America, whose traditions and beliefs deserve respect.

One aspect of the novel's portrayal of Native Americans that raises justified concerns is its approach to tribal ceremonies. In several cases the author provides only glimpses of these ceremonies (such as Derek's funeral), barely mentioning their sacred songs, invocations of blessings, and offerings of tobacco. Such brief descriptions suggest that either de Lint resorts to superficial images because he lacks in-depth knowledge of Native practices or that he deliberately limits himself in order not to appropriate and misrepresent authentic Native traditions. Some readers might argue that it would have been better to forsake any attempts at description, and they might praise Steve who, even when asked to participate in some ceremonies, refuses out of respect for the Kikimi (Ch. 23).<sup>7</sup> De Lint, nevertheless, allows readers to witness these ceremonies by shifting the narrative's point of view from Steve to a Native character, thus blatantly disregarding his protagonist's wish to respect the sacred and secret elements of the fictional tribal culture.

Nevertheless, it needs to be pointed out that similarly to de Lint's previous works (Łaszkiewicz 2018: 242-244) *The Wind in His Heart* does not promote Native "wannabes." At the same time, however, de Lint does not seem to perceive Native identity as something biologically conditioned. In one scene, Old Man Puma (a powerful Native spirit) claims that Sammy and his followers are no longer Kikimi because they turned away from tradition (Ch. 40). De Lint apparently suggests that being Kikimi, or Native in general, is not solely grounded in one's birth to a particular tribe but in one's conscious effort to adhere to tribal



requirements and traditions. Thus, he presents Native identity as a more fluid and inclusive concept, and this corresponds to Vizenor's "eight native theatres" of identity (1998: 88-94). These theatres, or categories, discuss several ways in which Native identity is constructed by art and society. They allow Vizenor to argue that Native identity is a concept larger than biological affiliation and the blood quantum rule imposed by the government. Though none of Vizenor's theatres corresponds directly to the argument presented by de Lint, Vizenor does introduce such categories as "native by concession," "native by creation," and "native by situations," which permit the acknowledgment of non-Indigenous people's connection to Indigenous communities under different circumstances. If inclusion on the grounds of concession, creation, and situation is possible, then it is equally justifiable to consider the exclusion of Indigenous individuals whose only connection to Native communities is their birth and physical resemblance. Vizenor does warn that appearances alone can be deceptive: "Native countenance is a simulation, a pose that is seen by others as the real score of native identities" (1998: 89). In *The Wind in His Heart* this argument is reflected by Sammy's conspicuous Native decorations.

### Indigenous spirituality as a remedy for the contemporary world?

The ways in which *The Wind in His Heart* develops the relationship between Native and non-Native characters indicate that the author perceives Indigenous spirituality as something that can offer guidance and contribute to the restoration of the contemporary (postmodern) world – an argument which can be connected to Marek Oziewicz's study of the potential present in mythopoeic fantasy. In the Introduction to *One Earth, One People* (2008), Oziewicz explains the reason behind his work by diagnosing the state of the contemporary world: the world and its inhabitants are undergoing a crucial process of transformation, in which they have to address such issues as the rise of global economy and communication, increasing nuclear threat and ecological challenges, and "disintegration of Western culture's common ground" (2008: 5). Oziewicz believes that mythopoeic fantasy, thanks to its visionary potential, can help people address these issues by showing them other modes of perception and interaction with the world (including its human and non-human inhabitants), speculating about the possible consequences of their current actions, and offering hope that the future can still be saved (2008: 5–7). The genre's speculative power can result, according to Oziewicz, "in the emergence of a new conceptual framework in which we are almost forced to envision pathways toward a peaceful future for a unified humanity" (2008: 6).

Oziewicz claims that mythopoeic fantasy is founded on the works of J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, whose fiction and literary criticism signaled the direction for its development (2008: 65). The scholar defines mythopoeic fantasy as

holistic, soul-nurturing type of narrative capable of addressing vital psychological, cultural and aesthetic needs [...]. I stress that the secondary worlds that mythopoeic fantasy employs are morally charged universes in which

human actions are meaningful and may suggest a paradigm for a creative and fulfilling life in the real world. Finally, I emphasize that the core structural marker for the genre is mythopoesis – a deliberate embedding of the story in the conventions of myth and mythmaking – which allows it to suggest a poetic and intuitive perception of reality. (Oziewicz 2008: 8)

In short, Oziewicz argues that the genre's immersion in morality and myth-making, powered by the speculative and subversive potential of its imaginary worlds, can lead to a shift in people's mindsets. This shift is conceptualized by Oziewicz as a new mythology for the unified humanity. This new mythology

will be the story for the whole human race; it will provide a sense of dynamic continuity between humanity's past and future; it will be relevant to our present knowledge, though not at the cost of intuitive, emotional, and spiritual understanding, and finally, it will expand our awareness of the interrelatedness of all existence, thus acknowledging the intimate connection of humanity with the environment. (Oziewicz 2008: 9)

Thus, Oziewicz's remedy for the contemporary world posits the recognition of humankind's heritage for its insights relevant to contemporary life, recognition of humankind's connection to the natural environment, and recognition of the sacredness of all forms of life. It also postulates the necessity of morality and mutual respect between people of various ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds (Oziewicz 2008: 85–92, 116–117). Only such conditions will ensure a proper cooperation and partnership between various communities, which will be necessary if people are to protect their shared home. In his discussion of mythopoeic fantasy, Oziewicz focuses primarily on the works of Ursula K. Le Guin, Lloyd Alexander, Madeleine L'Engle, and Orson Scott Card; he only briefly mentions Charles de Lint among other writers whose works can also be classified as mythopoeic fantasy (2008: 11).

It needs to be noted that though Oziewicz opens his book with a retelling of a Lakota story (2008: 3), he never argues that it is the task of a particular (Indigenous) community to save the contemporary world for everyone else. On the contrary, he constantly emphasizes the necessity of global cooperation and shared responsibility. Of course, readers might question both the actual viability of such an idealistic (if not downright utopian) approach and the scholar's diplomatic avoidance to accuse anyone else than "humankind" in general of the present state of events. Yet it is not the purpose of this work to evaluate the degree of Oziewicz's optimism regarding humankind's ability to foster mutually beneficial cooperation.

Though de Lint can also be criticized for his idealism (visible, for instance, in his characters' resolution of all conflicts), like Oziewicz he never claims that Indigenous communities are in any way obligated or elected to cure the contemporary world and its white inhabitants. Though many of de Lint's works correspond to Oziewicz's theories, and the Native perspective delivered in *The Wind in His Heart* seems to resonate particularly strongly with the scholar's arguments concerning

heritage, environment, interconnectedness, respect, and cooperation, de Lint does not shift the responsibility for the world's survival onto Indigenous communities. Instead, consciously or not following Oziewicz's ideas about the unified humanity, the writer indicates that recognition and inclusion of Native traditions can help in the preservation and restoration of the world – the world which belongs to everyone and is everyone's responsibility. Thus, I believe that the investigation of *The Wind in His Heart* through the prism of Oziewicz's theory will substantially complement my analysis of the novel's portrayal of Native Americans.

As far as heritage is concerned, *The Wind in His Heart* presents Native oral tradition as a repository of wisdom and a valid source of guidance in the post-modern world (i.e. Native knowledge transcends time). At several moments, the protagonists listen to Indigenous stories which are delivered because the teller believes that they can help address a problem at hand. Even if the protagonists cannot initially understand a story's relevance (for the stories often talk about spirits or events from the past), sooner or later they recognize its parallels with their own situation. Thus, Indigenous oral tradition is presented as a source of consolation, guidance, and connection between individuals. It is important to note that not only Native, but also non-Native people can partake of the restorative properties of storytelling. When Sadie, an abused white teenager, finds shelter at Abigail's house, the woman uses stories to instruct the girl about the spiritual dimension of life. Unfortunately, Sadie at first fails to recognize their value (Ch. 13). Her conversations with Abigail and Morago further prove that she possesses little knowledge of Native customs, and perhaps that is the main reason for her disrespectful behavior. After all, Sadie's abusive father has not been the best role model: while looking for his daughter, he accuses the Kikimi of kidnapping and rape, and offends them with several racist remarks. Nonetheless, in the end, when Sadie decides to repent for her own crimes, she finds the much needed consolation in one of Abigail's stories: a story about Tía Sweet Smoke's sacrifice for her granddaughter, Pela, and Pela's subsequent inability to deal with her own emotions. The story becomes Sadie's lifebuoy in times of mental distress. Sadie, like many other non-Native characters of the novel, is invited into the circle of oral tradition and offered its restorative influence.

The recognition of the importance of nature and the interconnectedness of all life is another prominent theme in the novel, and its development is similarly grounded in Indigenous understanding of one's proper relationship with the rest of the living world. It is typical for de Lint's characters to admire the natural world. Frequently, their admiration surpasses appreciation of nature for its aesthetic values, and instead they experience it as a source of the numinous (divine). Since de Lint's Otherworld/Spiritworld is seldom connected to urban landscapes, his heroes rediscover the spiritual dimension of life only if they open themselves to the wilderness. Once they do, they challenge the assumptions about humankind's central position in the world and acknowledge the connections between themselves and the rest of their surroundings – imitating Indigenous beliefs, de Lint more than once implies that everything has its proper place on the Wheel of existence.<sup>8</sup> Of course, the characters possessing “animal blood” and shape-shifting abilities experience the natural world on an entirely different

level than ordinary protagonists, blurring all boundaries further with their hybrid identity. Oziewicz argues that mythopoeic fantasy is intuitive and holistic, and this description perfectly fits de Lint's novel. *The Wind in His Heart* promotes the spiritual experience of individuals and close communities over external sciences and organizations. Also, by relying on the Indigenous appreciation for the natural world, it recognizes the interconnectedness of all life. As one of the *ma'inawo* states: "We all have our part to play on the wheel of life" (Ch. 22). Even the word *ma'inawo*, which in de Lint's fantastic dictionary is a Kikimi word for "cousin" (Ch. 2), points to the affinity between the human and non-human world. In this way, the novel corresponds to Vizenor's understanding of Native literary aesthetics as "a tricky, totemic union of animals, birds, humans and others" (2009: 14).

*The Wind in His Heart* also suggests that white people, if they are open-minded and respectful, can embrace Indigenous perspectives and spirituality without "going Native," i.e. without appropriating Native cultures. Steve Cole, a middle-aged man who found his haven in the desert but was oblivious to the vicinity of the spirit world, eventually discovers its existence. He also learns that his girlfriend, Calico, is one of the *ma'inawo*. Initially, Steve struggles with this knowledge and his own narrow-mindedness. The advice he receives from the shaman Morago is a universal one: "Don't look at this new knowledge as something that's going to mess up your life. Look at it as finding a deeper understanding of the worlds you're living in" (Ch. 5). Once Steve accepts the reality of the spirit world, he becomes ready to participate in its affairs.<sup>9</sup> Genuinely respected by the tribe and the *ma'inawo*, yet still an outsider since he never pretends to be a Kikimi nor appropriates their traditions, Steve is asked to be the arbitrator in one of the tribe's conflicts. Because he offers respect and help to everyone, he is recognized as a valuable member of the local community. Race and background can become of secondary importance. As Abigail tells Sadie: "The soul has no colour" (Ch. 24).

Steve's experience is shared by the protagonists of de Lint's other works. For instance, in "Dog Boys" (2012) Brandon, a white teenager, protects Rita Young Deer from a school bully. Because the bully enlists the help of his family (a Mexican gang), Brandon is entangled in a conflict during which he is "adopted" by the Kikimi and given the powers of a shape-shifter. Afterwards, he is welcomed by the tribe's warrior society because he acted in protection of their people. When one of the gang leaders tells Reuben, Rita's uncle, that Brandon is "Anglo," Reuben replies: "Is he? I hadn't noticed. All anyone needs to know is that he's one of my people" (2012: n.p.). In both cases de Lint suggests that mutual respect and understanding can become the foundation for successful cooperation.<sup>10</sup> It is vital to notice that though the trope of "the white man's burden" did haunt some of de Lint's earlier works, it seems that the author eventually became aware of the problem and now approaches the issue of interracial cooperation in a more sensitive manner. Consequently, in contrast to Sara and Kieran from *Moonheart* (1984) who undergo a training in Native spirituality in order to save everyone (including the tribe) from an evil being, Steve, Brandon, and others – even when they gain access to some Indigenous knowledge or powers – never pretend to be all-powerful saviors of Indigenous communities and de Lint does not cast them in such roles. These characters simply try to be decent and helpful people. And

though dealing with other communities and the spirit world is often dangerous, reconciliation proves beneficial to everyone, and such a healing experience is frequently offered by de Lint's fiction.

## Conclusions

In *Shape-Shifting: Images of Native Americans in Recent Popular Fiction* (2000), the authors argue, and rightfully so, that popular fiction exploits, marginalizes, stereotypes, and oversimplifies Native American identities and traditions (Macdonald et al. 2000: xiii). Of course, the works of Charles de Lint are also not without fault. While his early novels (e.g. *Moonheart*) gravitate towards a heavily romanticized image of First People as noble savages removed from the contemporary world, *The Wind in His Heart* can be criticized for its somewhat naive ease of solving complex social and cultural problems, implicit assumption that no one is truly evil and therefore deserves sympathy, bizarre images of the (presumably Native) spirit Gordo conveniently turning himself into cars and a helicopter, and tendency to depict Native people as generally honorable and likable (with the sole exception of Sammy but even he is redeemed by the end of the story). Still, most of these problems pertain to de Lint's fiction in general since his works seldom feature anti-heroes or lack a happy ending.

Taking everything into consideration, the portrayal of Native Americans in *The Wind in His Heart* seems to demand both criticism and praise. The novel's inclusion of a fictional tribe still raises, despite the author's best intentions, justifiable doubts about the mechanism of cultural appropriation. Moreover, its generally positive portrayal of Indigenous communities is challenged not only by the narrative problems mentioned in the paragraph above but also by such problematic issues as re-construction of Native beliefs by a non-Native author, his depiction of presumably sacred ceremonies, and his rather idealized approach to Indigenous people and traditions (and their relationship with the white protagonists).

Nonetheless, *The Wind in His Heart* is an improvement in comparison to the strongly stereotypical portrayal of Native people present not only in de Lint's previous works but also the works of other writers (e.g. Guy Guvriel Kay's *The Fionavar Tapestry* and its clichéd Indians modeled on the tribes of the Great American Plains or the overly noble warrior Ta-Kumsaw appearing in Orson Scott Card's *The Tales of Alvin Maker*). Readers acquainted with de Lint's literary career will recognize that his interest in Indigenous traditions and social problems of Native Americans is not his sudden attempt to capitalize on the concerns of an ethnic group which is gaining more public attention, but a logical course in the development of his urban fantasy fiction, signaled by his focus on the concerns of different underprivileged communities. De Lint's early stereotypical images of Native Americans (e.g. in *Moonheart*) can be partially undermined by his insistence on treating his Indigenous characters with respect. Laurence Steven argues in defense of *Moonheart* that its depiction of Native people "may not be full communion with the Native spirit of place in Canada (seeking such fullness may [...] be a largely white European prejudice anyway; the fallacy of authenticity), but it is also clearly

neither assimilation of Native to Western nor imposition of Western onto Native. It is a third thing, a relationship with a peculiarly Canadian spirit of combined inquisitiveness and tentativeness” (Steven 2004: 70) – a relationship that de Lint eventually transposes over his fictional location of Santo del Vado Viejo in Arizona.

What is more, *The Wind in His Heart* can be recognized for its insistence on the significance of Indigenous communities and their traditions for contemporary America. For de Lint, Native Americans are neither the Victim nor the Other. They are not *Indians* created by Colonial and Romantic discourse but people who reject white dominance, resist its assumptions about indigeneity, protect their autonomy, and value their traditions while also looking to the future – all of these are actions which Vizenor sees as part of the mode of survivance, i.e. active resistance to social and cultural oppression. In other words, de Lint uses his fantasy novels to create a sense of Native participation in a genre which, being dominated by white writers, has had noticeable problems with a sensitive depiction of ethnicity. De Lint’s Indigenous protagonists, who are active participants of the narrative rather than secondary figures or a cultural resource to be exploited, correspond to Vizenor’s call for the emergence of Postindians whose presence “teases the reader to see the absence, the simulation of the other, as a problem” (1999: 85). Of course, avoiding colonial simulations of Native presence is only a partial success, since postindian simulations need to be avoided as well: “The postindian simulations show the natives dressed to the traditional nines, wise and noble, always daring and inspired about nature, the weather, and their communities” (1999: 86). Respectful rendition of Indigenous communities should not succumb to exaggeration and glorification, which can be just as harmful to First Nations as the images of victimry and otherness – hence, de Lint’s well-intended idealism, visible in his portrayal of Native people and in the ease with which his characters establish successful cooperation in spite of historical injustice, should also be approached with at least a dose of skepticism.

Another potential threat is hidden in the author’s portrayal of Native traditions as a “remedy” for the contemporary world. It is evident that *The Wind in His Heart* is a mythopoeic fantasy novel which, even though it does not promote a universal shift to Indigenous spirituality, presents both the Indigenous perspective and non-human perspective of the world (which deconstructs the prevailing anthropocentrism) as genuine and beneficial. However, such an attitude might generate negative consequences in the form of people, even well-meaning ones, who will appropriate Native practices, believing in their universal accessibility and applicability. There is a fine and easily crossed line between the appreciation of another tradition and the post-colonial practice of its fetishization. Fortunately, while de Lint’s characters are encouraged to acknowledge and respect Native traditions (and perhaps even reconsider their possible relevance for their own lives), they are not forced to adopt Native traditions or praised for adopting them as a substitute for their original cultural background. Rather than insist on the universal applicability of Indigenous traditions, the writer invites his characters and readers to remain open to different sources of wisdom.

Arguably, this recognition of the traditions and different concerns of existing Native communities transforms de Lint’s works into a space of Indigenous

resistance to absence. In this way, de Lint and other fantasists (particularly those who, like the Canadian author, write in urban fantasy fiction) might contribute to the deconstruction of colonial discourses and mindsets still present in popular fiction. Summer Sutton, in her article on Indigenous science fiction novels which she contrasts with mainstream science fiction that often relies on colonial discourse, writes: “The United States’ claim to the land region of North America is a story, given power through legislative documents and imaginatively embellished through the fictional anecdote of Christopher Columbus, but a story nonetheless” (Sutton 2017: 96). Sutton argues that the truth of any story – be it even the story of North America – can be verified through other accounts, including Indigenous oral traditions and works of Indigenous writers. Likewise, the truth of the dominant perspective can be challenged also by non-Indigenous fantasists such as Charles de Lint who are ready to question their own history and culture in order to dismantle the default white perspective of the postmodern world.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Helen Young observes that “the indigenous peoples of North America have been more widely represented in mass-market popular Anglophone Fantasy fiction than those of other parts of world such as South America and Australia” (2016: 115).
- <sup>2</sup> *The Wind in His Heart* mentions, for instance, Christy Riddell who is a prominent character of many early Newford stories. Leah, one of the protagonists of *The Wind in His Heart*, eventually decides to move from Newford to Santo del Vado Viejo. Her decision can be perceived as a symbolic reflection of the author’s own mental migration to the new fictional location.
- <sup>3</sup> The *ma’inawo* are also called “little mysteries” (Ch. 64), which is a term that de Lint used in his earliest works to describe spirits inhabiting the Canadian wilderness. This shared name is one of the threads denoting the development of de Lint’s literary imagination.
- <sup>4</sup> In the afterword to *The Wind in His Heart* de Lint praises Native writers and encourages his readers to search for their works.
- <sup>5</sup> De Lint uses the character’s surname to offer an ironic comment on the relationship between Indigenous communities and the American government. Thomas informs readers that when the government insisted that everybody in his community needs a surname, his people just invented theirs by playing with white culture’s assumption that all Native names must have a spiritual origin (Ch. 1).
- <sup>6</sup> A similar problem appears in the case of Jerry Five Hawks, a Native policeman featured in *The Wind in His Heart*. When told to intervene on the reservation, Jerry is forced to take sides even though he does not really wish to. When he decides to follow the law, he is called by other members of the tribe an apple, meaning that he is red on the outside, but white on the inside (Ch. 29). The insult does not need explanation.
- <sup>7</sup> Steve is a sensible man who respects both the traditions of his friends and his own cultural background (Ch. 9). His case is an indirect advice for people who flaunt their fascination with Indigenous cultures and fail to notice how it leads to misguided appropriation.
- <sup>8</sup> Rather than a valid representation of any authentic Indigenous tradition, de Lint’s set of Indigenous beliefs is a mixture of prominent figures of Native myths (e.g. Raven, Coyote), some prevalent elements of Indigenous traditions (e.g. belief in spirits, respect for the natural world), and the author’s own imagination.

- <sup>9</sup> When faced by reality of the spirit world, Leah (the visitor from Newford) similarly struggles to accept its existence. At one point she remarks that it is even more difficult for her than for others because in contrast to Indigenous people she did not grow up surrounded by such beliefs (Ch. 74). Thus, de Lint suggests that in this respect Indigenous cultures are superior to mainstream America.
- <sup>10</sup> The characters conversations in “Dog Boys” also draw the readers’ attention to several issues concerning the relationship between the white society and the Indigenous communities. For instance, after moving to Santo del Vado Viejo, Brandon observes: “We had a wide racial mix at my old high school and I got along fine with just about everybody. But here, the Mexicans run in serious gangs and the Indians look at me like I’m supposed to constantly apologize for what my ancestors did to theirs, except my ancestors only got to North America in the fifties” (n.p.). When Rita refuses Brandon’s help, she says: “This is tribal stuff [...]. It’s not something we can talk about with outsiders” (n.p.). She also explains: “The real problem [...] is that in the eyes of the law, the only thing lower than a Mexican is an Indian. If there’s trouble, we never come off well” (n.p.). Like Thomas Corn Eyes, Rita wants to leave the reservation in search of a better life.

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