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Romantic Histories

"*The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change."[1] Offered in the course of her criticism of a predominantly middle-class, white feminism's neglect of racial, financial, sexual, and age differences among women, Audre Lorde's influential *cri de coeur* proposes that working and thinking through dominant cultural languages and traditions risks reproducing rather than disrupting the institutions in which those forms are cultivated. There is an appealing rhetorical power in the statement and it is often quoted approvingly.[2] However, two-spirit Cree painter and performance artist Kent Monkman (b. 1965) would appear to disagree.[3] For it is precisely with

My thanks to Kent Monkman and the curators at Kent Monkman Studio, especially Sadie MacDonald, for their assistance.

1. Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 112. Original emphasis.

2. As I cannot possibly adduce every relevant instance, I offer a small but representative sampling of texts in which Lorde's position is cited approvingly. See, for instance, Lucia Albino Gilbert, "'The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House,'" *Feminism & Psychology* 8, no. 1 (1998): 77–83; Sara Koopman, "Imperialism within: can the master's tools bring down empire?" *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 7, no. 2 (2008): 283–307; and Stephanie Holt, Carolina Överlien, and John Devaney, ed., *Responding to Domestic Violence: Emerging Challenges for Policy, Practice and Research in Europe* (London: Jessica Kingsley publishers, 2018). There are also instances in which Lorde's claim is nuanced or modified. See, for instance, Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon, ed., *Not Only the Master's Tools: African American Studies in Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2015).

3. Kent Monkman is a member of Fisher River Cree Nation. He is the third child of his Anglo-Canadian mother, Rilla Unger, and his Cree father, Everet Monkman. Monkman's Cree-speaking paternal great-grandmother, Caroline Everette, lived with him and his family until she died, when Monkman was 10 years old. His family also practiced Christianity, which Monkman would experience as a

the master's tools—even, in some cases, the Old Masters' tools—that Monkman crafts his challenge to the status quo. Monkman's work adopts and repurposes visual elements and motifs from European art history; his canvases are intensely citational and range across both canonical and obscure works from many periods. This eclectic collecting is, however, bound within crisp thematic limits. While figures from wildly different periods, styles, mediums, and subjects may be invited by Monkman to share a common space, the juxtapositions are gathered into answerable form by conceptual focus. Much like collage, Monkman's works are delicate wholes fashioned from parts that remain conspicuously dissonant. Thus, for Monkman, addressing both the legacy of colonial violence and ongoing social and political marginalization faced by Indigenous people is best approached not by rejecting but by reinhabiting the history of European art. As Monkman himself says of the works comprising his recent Great Hall Commission at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, "I wanted to paint Indigenous experience, both historical and contemporary, and authorize them into the canon of art history and this genre of painting [i.e. history painting]."[4]

generally oppressive force. Indeed, this conflict with Christian morality informs early visual works such as *When He Cometh*, *Shall We Gather at the River*, and *Oh For A Thousand Tongues* (c. 2001) in which he superimposes "syllabics taken from his parents' Cree hymn book" overtop of "ghostly, homoerotic images of men wrestling." Shirley Madill, *Kent Monkman, Life and Work* (Toronto: Art Canada Institute, 2022), 10. While Monkman would soon move away from abstraction to more representational forms of visual art, he continued to explore his sexuality, eventually identifying as two-spirit. In 2004, this aspect of his identity became part of his art with the birth of his alter-ego "Miss Chief Eagle Testicle," who presents as a glamorous Indigenous woman and appears regularly in paintings, films, and performance pieces thereafter. Monkman has enjoyed considerable success nationally and internationally. He has held residences at many provincial, national, and private galleries and his work has been purchased by the National Gallery of Canada, the Montreal Museum of Fine Art, and collectors David Furnish and Elton John. His website (www.kentmonkman.com) offers the following rundown of his exhibitions, performances, and installations:

Monkman's painting and installation works have been exhibited at institutions such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal; Musée d'artcontemporain de Montréal; The National Gallery of Canada; The Royal Ontario Museum; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art; Hayward Gallery; Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art; Musée d'art Contemporain de Rochechouart; Maison Rouge; Philbrook Museum of Art; Palais de Tokyo; and the Hood Museum at Dartmouth College. He has created site-specific performances at The Metropolitan Museum of Art; The Royal Ontario Museum; Compton Verney, Warwickshire; and The Denver Art Museum. Monkman has had two nationally touring solo exhibitions, Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience (2017–2020), and The Triumph of Mischief (2007–2010).

For a complete biography that includes discussion of Monkman's various residencies and shows, key developments in his methods and themes, and growing national and international reputation, see Madill, *Kent Monkman, Life and Work*.

4. Monkman, interview by Jami C. Powell, "Inside Kent Monkman's Studio," in *Revision and Resistance: mistikôsiwak (Wooden Boat People) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (Toronto: Art Canada Institute, 2020), 38.

Monkman's art is deeply invested in European and Euro-American art. Moreover, as this paper will argue, his treatment of history is informed by Romantic historiographical practices that complicate the concept of emotional, epistemological, and perspectival distance. The first half of this paper explores Romantic historiography and its distinct epistemological and affective registers. The second half of the paper focuses on a sample of Monkman's landscape and history paintings that draw on major Romantic works and, in so doing, bring the resources of Romantic historical thinking to bear on questions of European-Indigenous relations and possibilities for the future. However, Monkman's worldview and approach to history is also profoundly shaped by an Indigenous, and more specifically Cree, worldview. What is such a worldview and what is the place of history therein? History as formulated by Indigenous communities traditionally took the form of oral storytelling. As Neil McLeod explains, "Cree narrative memory starts with the living memory of our elders and storytellers, and their stories of connections to various places and events in the landscape. In this manner, the Cree treaty narratives become the basis from which the *nêhiyawak* [Cree] can argue for their rights and place in Canada. They are also a way of understanding our collective worldview, epistemology, and our place in the world."[5] The past is narrated, in other words, from a decidedly embodied and personal point of view, turning around testimony and anecdotes.

Narrative memory might, moreover, incorporate allegorical elements, and yet to call it fiction would be misleading. Instead, this form of historiography deploys imagination—in describing, say, the transformation of animals into features of the landscape—even as it aims to produce an accurate record of the past. Accuracy, however, is not achieved through disinterestedness but through a gathering of multiple points of view, or multiple witness accounts. Indigenous experience is, thus, always at the heart of Indigenous history. If that might seem to suggest a relatively narrow focus, it is crucial to recognize that the Indigenous worldview is profoundly relational. As Susan A. Miller explains, there are in Indigenous historiography "four defining . . . concepts: Indigenousness, sovereignty, colonization, and decolonization."[6] "Indigenousness" names a worldview in which "people are seen as families or communities rather than individuals."[7] This, in turn, informs Indigenous research practices that stress "the communality of knowledge," "relational accountability," "reciprocity,"

5. McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory: From Treaties to Contemporary Times* (Saskatoon, CA: Purich Publishing, 2007), 33.

6. Miller, "Native Historians Write Back: The Indigenous Paradigm in American Indian Historiography," *Wicazo Sa Review* 24, no. 1 (2009): 27.

7. Miller, "Native Historians," 27.

and "holism."[8] One consequence of this is that Indigenous historiography, though rooted in specific, embodied people, is always also collective cultural history and even natural history: the earth and the community's relationship to it is central to Indigenous thought and, consequently, to those forms of thought focused on history.

If western, Enlightenment history emphasizes cause-and-effect relationships within a chronological frame, in contrast "Indigenous people tend to envision their collective memory in terms of space rather than time."[9] Rick Hill expands on this point: "I think Indigenous knowledge is rooted deeply in many generations of experience in place, wherever that place is around the world. And in many ways this is why I think Indigenous knowledge derives its core understandings from what it considers to be earth knowledge—that the earth holds the knowledge, rock holds the knowledge, the trees, because it [the earth] has witnessed all of those generations."[10] As explored in the second half of this essay, Monkman's composition of large-scale landscape paintings is thus continuous with his interest in history and history painting. As Monkman remarks, "the site of the conflict between Europeans and Aboriginals has been the land."[11] As such, his experimentation with both the Group of Seven painters and the Hudson River School "is about presenting another perspective; I've been going back and reclaiming the landscape from these European paintings, inserting lost narratives, the histories that have been obliterated and the absent mythologies."[12] In this respect, Monkman embodies an Indigenous approach to history in which land claims—both legal and aesthetic—are fundamental to re-composing history. Indeed, for June Scudeler, Monkman's art makes "an imaginative land claim for indigenous communities and for his Swampy Cree ancestors."[13] Because "Cree collective memory is anchored in places and landscapes," Monkman's dramatic intervention into landscape goes to the heart of Indigenous historical self-understanding.[14]

Beyond his practice of representing history in spatial and graphic terms, Monkman also engages with at least two specific, Indigenous

8. Alex Wilson, "N'tacinowin inna nah': Our Coming In Stories," *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme* 26, no. 3–4 (2008): 194.

9. McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory*, 6.

10. Hill, interview by Daniel Coleman, "Rick Hill: What is Indigenous knowledge?" McMaster University, 2013, video recording, 03:06. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZ6gvd-HaP8&ab_channel=DifferentKnowings.

11. Monkman, interview by Mike Hoolbroom, "Kent Monkman: Miss Chief," *Practical Dreamers: Conversations with Movie Artists* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2008), 47.

12. Monkman, in *Practical Dreamers*, 47.

13. Scudeler, "'Indians on Top': Kent Monkman's Sovereign Erotics," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 39, no. 4 (2015): 30.

14. McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory*, 19.

historiographical forms. One form is the winter count. Winter counts are calendars composed by various plains Indians in which each year is represented by a small sketch. This work is performed by a dedicated member of the community, the so-called count keeper. These mnemonic devices developed in the late eighteenth century and represent the partial adoption of western, inscriptive practices.[15] Monkman features one specific count, that composed by a keeper called Lone Dog, in his 2006 painting, *Trappers of Men*.[16] On another occasion, Monkman notes that "prophecies from Ojibwa culture and other nations say we are living in the time of the seventh fire, a time of renewal."[17] According to one Ojibway tradition, history has eight parts. This is recorded by Edward Benton-Banai in *The Mishomis Book*: *The Voice of the Ojibway*.[18] In this account, history has distinct stages; yet, people living in one stage might revive aspects of past stages in order to overcome spiritual alienation and cultural damage. However, reclamation of traditional practices and knowledges does not entail regression. There is no claim that history is a flat circle. In fact, the penultimate stage, "the Seventh Fire," illuminates not a single but rather a bifurcated future that could result in either "an eternal fire of peace, love, brotherhood and sisterhood" or "much suffering and death."[19] In this way, it may not be accurate to call this an eschatological prophecy since the nature of the final "fire" remains undetermined.

The larger point here is that Monkman is clearly influenced by a variety of forces when it comes to understanding and representing history. The Indigenous and art-historical forces are generally apparent.[20] What is less obvious is the formative role that Romanticism has played in his *oeuvre*. That is, while Romantic landscapes and history paintings are central to several of his major works, Romanticism is often confused with an ideological nostalgia

15. See Candice S. Greene and Russell Thornton, eds., *The Year the Stars Fell: Lakota Winter Counts at the Smithsonian* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

16. See Chris Bundock, "New Romantic Painting and the Image of History," *European Romantic Review* 34, no. 3 (2023): 341–48.

17. Monkman, in *Practical Dreamers*, 50.

18. Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book*: *The Voice of the Ojibway* (St. Paul, MN: Red School House Publishers, 1988).

19. Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book*, 93.

20. "I am familiar with 19th-century painting—it is imprinted as part of our collective consciousness—but I cannot claim to possess an encyclopedic knowledge of it. But Kent Monkman does." David Liss, "Kent Monkman: Miss Chief's Return. Subverting the canon through sublime landscapes and saucy performances," *Canadian Art* 15 (September 2005): n.pag. As another commentator remarks, Monkman "seems to have an endless supply of artistic tricks up his sleeve, but one of the most devastating is that of turning European imagery against itself. Even in his use of light, colours and tones he is playing havoc with the conventions of how we should imagine images." John Ralston Saul, "Learning to See Yourself," in *The Four Continents* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2017), 13.

that reiterates the sentiments of Keats's Grecian Urn: a voice that asserts "beauty is truth" and then prohibits any further reflection on the subject. This is a caricature of Romanticism, and one invited by Monkman himself:

> In Denver, I created a performance called the *Casualties of Modernity* in which Miss Chief Eagle Testickle [Monkman's alter ego] visits the modern wing of the museum, kind of like Princess Diana would visit hospitals. She's a philanthropist that comes to touch and shake hands with the sick and ailing, in this case the sick and dying art movements. She's led on a tour by a doctor of fine arts (an actor I hired to be a doctor). He introduces Romanticism, played by a male model painted to look like marble, who is rolled out on a gurney. Miss Chief ogles this perfect male physique and comments on the tragedy of his demise.[21]

Romanticism is lovely—but dead. Commentators have piled onto this dismal diagnosis, claiming that "[m]uch of Monkman's humor is aimed at the history of representation and at romanticism in particular."[22] Part of the reason that Romanticism is targeted likely stems from its role in the invention of the "noble savage" stereotype. Even if intended to cast Indigenous peoples in a somewhat flattering light, the "noble savage" flattened and caricatured its subjects, as when Adam Smith imagines that the "American savage" has "contempt for life and death," a natural stoicism that stems from a crude, unrefined sensibility.[23] Indeed, for many, "the idealized savage of Rousseau's *Social Contract*" was brought to life by Indigenous North Americans.[24] "In the perspective of the Scottish Enlightenment," for instance, "the American Indians were much more than curiosities living at the periphery of the empire: they were living windows on Europeans' past."[25] The Romantic imagination awakens to find its dreams of a naïve, primitive existence miraculously realized, though this, in turn, mythologizes actual Indigenous people and casts them into prehistorical limbo. Thus, in

21. Monkman, quoted in Julie Nagam and Kerry Swanson, "Decolonial Interventions in Performance and New Media Art: In Conversation with Cheryl L'Hirondelle and Kent Monkman," *Canadian Theater Review* 159 (Summer 2014): 33.

22. Kate Morris and Linda Morris, "Camping Out with Miss Chief: Kent Monkman's Ironic Journey," *Studies in American Humor* 6, no. 2 (2020): 268.

23. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 339.

24. Troy Bickham, *Savages Within the Empire: Representations of American Indians in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 17.

25. Bickham, *Savages Within the Empire*, 171. See also Geoffrey Symcox, "The Wild Man's Return: The Enclosed Vision of Rousseau's *Discourses*," in *The Wild Man Within: An Image in Western Thought from the Renaissance to Romanticism*, ed. Edward Dudley and Maximillian E. Novak (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972).

Tim Fulford's words, Indigenous peoples were "idealised as noble rustics" only to be "located in a vanished past or placed on the verge of death."[26] Indigenous people are frozen like the figures on Keats's aforementioned Urn, or zombified like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner.

Actual, living Indigenous people disappear from view behind the impressive but mute images of their ancestors. This happens quite literally in, for instance, George Catlin's series of portraits of Mandan warrior Chiefs produced in the 1830s. Catlin's figures are certainly impressive: they don ceremonial clothing, striking face and body paint, and elaborate jewelry composed in part of bright feathers. They are also uniformly dour and threatening. In a series of paintings produced in 2008, Monkman recasts these figures in an attempt to represent aspects of life and personality obscured by Catlin's interest in producing what he thought of as traditional images. Compare, for instance, Catlin's "Pa-rís-ka-roó-pa, Two Crows, a Chief" (1832) with Monkman's "Two Crows, A Band Chief with Tinselled Buck No. 7, 429" (2008).

Figure 1. George Catlin, *Pa-rís-ka-róo-pa, Two Crows, a Band Chief*, 1832, oil on canvas, 29 x 24 in. (73.7 x 60.9 cm), Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.164.

26. Fulford, *Romantic Indians: Native Americans, British Literature, and Transatlantic Culture 1756–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 30.

Figure 2. Kent Monkman, *Two Crows, A Band Chief with Tinselled Buck No. 7, 429*, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 30 in. x 24 in. Image reproduced courtesy of the artist.

In Monkman's versions, "[e]ach figure is paired with a chalky, ghostlike sketch of a lounging 'dandy'" representing qualities of personality and especially of gender hybridity deliberately ignored by Catlin in his pursuit of a stoic and idealized "Romantic Indian."[27] By reimagining and supplementing these portraits Monkman interrupts the tidy division of Indigenous identity observed by Thomas King: "dead Indians are dignified, noble, silent, suitably garbed. And dead. Live Indians are invisible, unruly, disappointing. And breathing. One is a romantic reminder of a heroic but fictional past. The other is simply an unpleasant, contemporary surprise."[28] Monkman's recomposition of these portraits reveals the vitality mummified in Catlin's "heroic" images.

27. Madill, *Kent Monkman*, 61. See Kate Flint, "The Romantic Indian," in *The Transatlantic Indian: 1776–1930* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

28. Thomas King, *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 66.

If Romanticism is responsible for the murderous aestheticization of Indigenous peoples, it is no wonder that Monkman should, in his own way, excoriate the movement. However, identifying Romanticism with this particular sort of misrepresentation elides Monkman's more profound investment in the spirit of the Romantic age. For if Romanticism is culpable for fictionalizing Indigenous life, it is also the period in which resources for reimagining history are forged. This is because it is the period in which the very concept of history undergoes a major transformation. As Stephen Bann argues, "the Romantic period was . . . the stage at which history became self-conscious."[29] One effect of this new self-consciousness was an expansion of potential subjects for historical study; another effect was the complication of history writing's ultimate aims; and yet another effect was a proliferation of expressive forms that attempted to answer to the expansion of content and refinement of purpose. These transformations might be illustrated by recalling Monkman's desire, noted earlier, "to paint Indigenous experience, both historical and contemporary." That Indigenous history, or any history, should be construed in terms of "experience"—or that history should take the lived experience of individuals as its main concern—may strike contemporary readers as obvious. In fact, though, it is an innovation of Romantic historiography. As Mark Salber Phillips notes, the eighteenth and nineteenth century witnessed an unprecedented widening of topics available to historical treatment. This "enlarged context" of history writing meant "there was an inevitable displacement of the older narrative within the broadly drawn horizons of a new history that took society, not politics, as its definition. As a result, political and military events, once the whole frame of humanist historiography, now figured as simply one theme in a multiplicity of plots."[30] This "enlargement" was driven at least in part by readers' desires—cultivated by the psychological complexity of another genre taking shape simultaneously, the novel—for intimate stories, or for narratives that searched below the surface of major events to take account of motive forces. "For the first time," Phillips argues, "evocation became an important goal of historical narrative, and sympathetic identification came to be seen as one of the pleasures of historical reading."[31] If "classical historiography, as well as its early modern humanist revival, was predicated on a sharply drawn separation between public and private concerns," Romantic history, developing the Enlightenment fascination

29. Bann, *Romanticism and the Rise of History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 11.

30. Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740–1820* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4.

31. Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, xii

with sympathy, sought to see into the private, intimate lives of other people in other times and places.[32]

This interest in historicizing nontraditional subjects brings historiography into conflict with itself. As Lionel Gossman remarks, "the devoted, patronising, and not always disinterested attention the Western anthropologist bestowed on those alien, 'prehistorical' peoples who were widely believed to represent the original condition from which the 'historical' peoples of Europe had raised themselves was by no means foreign to the Romantic historian."[33] If Romanticism presides over the expansion of what can be historicized, it also must face the prospect that, like anthropological representation, historical representation imposes its own codes of intelligibility on subjects foreign to those same codes. In this respect, history sets for itself a task in which its very success (i.e. exposing what history has overlooked, marginalized, or repressed) might nevertheless amount to a failure if the phenomena at issue are distorted in order to conform with accepted modes of conceptualization. Yet, while history's widened remit poses challenges for representation, it also affords opportunities. As the Romantic transformation of history writing suggests, historiography is an elastic mode of expression that is regularly reinvented to suit changing needs. In Christopher Hill's words, "history has to be rewritten in every generation, because although the past does not change, the present does; each generation asks new questions of the past and finds new areas of sympathy as it re-lives different aspects of the experiences of its predecessors."[34] Far from contaminating the past with modern concerns, Hill's comment suggests that history as such exists only in the tension between the present and the past, that there could be no genre we call "history" without an interested present. This is why for E. H. Carr there is a crucial difference between mere facts and historical facts: the latter represent the selective promotion of a subset of the former, that promotion guided by the most intense pressures of the present.[35] The historian must become Victor Frankenstein: to conjure into life what Godwin calls "the mere skeleton of history" the historian selects—does not invent but does choose—those facts from the charnel house of bygone times best suited to the story in demand, and then stitches over these parts a narrative skin that unifies even if it cannot always beautify.[36]

32. Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, 16.

33. Gossman, *Between History and Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 283.

34. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1972), 15.

35. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Penguin, 1990).

36. William Godwin, "Essay Of History and Romance," in *The Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, vol. 5, ed. Mark Philip, Pamela Clemit,

A crucial strategy in Monkman's Romantic recomposition of history is his innovative management of what Phillips calls "historical distance" and the action of "redistancing." In its simplest sense, "historical distance refers to the growing clarity that comes with the passage of time," the notion that we gain insight into historical events when we are at least partially disinvested from them.[37] However, this operation is complicated by the way that our felt proximity to the past is altered not simply by time's passage but also by structural, rhetorical, and affective dimensions of historical writing. Hence, "historical distance in the full sense . . . refers to the sense of temporality constructed by every historical account as it positions its readers in relation to the past. Distance includes political as well as emotional engagement (or disengagement) and is the consequence of ideological choices, as well as formal and aesthetic ones."[38] Historical distance, in other words, is a way to describe various levels and kinds of investments that texts and readers make in the past—investments that are shaped by a range of variables that go beyond mere chronological difference.

Thus if Enlightenment historiography privileges intellectual abstraction and affective alienation from historical objects in conformity with prevailing values of disinterestedness and objectivity, "the Romantic period is rife with statements that indicate the desire for a new sense of proximity in historical writing"[39]—an attitude that also aligns with the broader Indigenous emphasis on the storyteller's personal investment in

Martin Fitzpatrick, and William St. Clair (New York: Routledge, 1993), 297. Samuel Johnson's comments on long-form fiction that would become known as the novel testify nicely to the continuity between history and fiction writing in the eighteenth century: "The chief advantage which these fictions have over real life is, that their authors are at liberty, tho' not to invent, yet to select objects, and to cull from the mass of mankind, those individuals upon which the attention ought most to be employ'd; as a diamond, though it cannot be made, may be polished by art, and placed in such a situation, as to display that lustre which before was buried among common stones" (31). What Johnson says here of the "new writing" of his day describes also how historians might operate. Johnson, *Rambler* 1, no. 4 (Saturday March 31, 1750) (London: printed for J. Payne and J. Bouquet, 1752): 28–35.

37. Phillips, *On Historical Distance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 1.

38. Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, 26.

39. Phillips, "Relocating Inwardness: Historical Distance and the Transition from Enlightenment to Romantic Historiography," *PMLA* 118, no. 3 (2003): 448. Witness the charge of excessive irony aimed at Enlightenment historians by William Godwin: "Read on the one hand Thucydides and Livy, and on the other Hume and Voltaire and Robertson. When we admire the personages of the former, we simply enter into the feelings with which these authors recorded them. The latter neither experience such emotions nor excite them." "Essay Of History and Romance," 296. Whether this assessment is fair is another matter entirely and one

the past and function as a living, feeling conduit.[40] Take for instance Hugh Blair, writing in the 1780s, who argues that it is not enough for a historian to be "perspicuous, distinct, and grave," he must also "render his narration interesting."[41] "General facts make a slight impression on the mind," he continues; hence "it is by means of circumstances and particulars properly chosen, that narration becomes interesting and affecting to the Reader. These give life, body, and colouring to the recital of facts, and enable us to behold them as present, and passing before our eyes. It is this employment of circumstances, in Narration" he concludes, "that is properly termed Historical Painting."[42] For Blair, successful histories will bring the past before the reader's eye in especially striking and moving ways. This invites an emotional commitment that revives the past in the present, as it were shortening the distance between then and now. Formal, stylistic, and aesthetic decisions are at least as important for the historian, then, as the collection of data, as it is by these means that she or he can modulate sympathetic transposition. As Phillips remarks, precisely these kinds of "sentimentalist judgments . . . were a common feature of historical criticism in this period."[43]

Such judgments proliferate across a range of genres, from history, to fiction, to historical fiction. In fact, as Thomas Babington Macaulay notices, the boundaries between these genres blur when novelists make the sensuous evocation of the past their business:

> To make the past present, to bring the distant near,—to place us in the society of a great man, or on the eminence which overlooks the field of a mighty battle, to invest with the reality of human flesh and blood beings whom we are too much inclined to consider as personified qualities in an allegory, to call up our ancestors before us with all their peculiarities of language, manners, and garb, to show us over their houses, to seat us at their tables, to rummage their old-fashioned wardrobes, to explain the uses of their ponderous

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that Phillips addresses in several places. See Phillips, "Relocating Inwardness," 436–37, and *On Historical Distance*, 62.

40. Cree historian storytellers do "not believe they ha[ve] power over the narrative, or [own] it; rather, they [believe] they [are] conduits, that there [is] a balance between the individual and tradition." McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory*, 16.

41. Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles lettres* (Dublin: printed for Messrs. Whitestone, Colles, et al. in Dublin, 1783), 3:59. Blair's lecture titled "Historical Writing," published in the third volume of his *Lectures*, features in both Phillips's *Society and Sentiment* and John Barrell's *The Political Theory of Painting from Renyolds to Hazlitt: The Body of the Public.* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1986).

42. Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, 3:60.

43. Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, 42.

> furniture,—these parts of the duty which properly belongs to the historian have been appropriated by the historical novelist.[44]

Walter Scott, the preeminent "historical novelist" of the period, dramatizes this very action in a short story, "My Aunt Margaret's Mirror" (1829), in which a conjurer—who stands for the historian—transforms a mirror from a device of plain mimesis into a scrying mirror that brings the past, present, and perhaps even the future into vivid resolution:

> The master then placed himself between the two ladies, and, pointing to the mirror, took each by the hand, but without speaking a syllable. . . . Suddenly the surface assumed a new and singular appearance. It no longer simply reflected the objects placed before it, but, as if it had self-contained scenery of its own, objects began to appear within it, at first in a disorderly, indistinct, and miscellaneous manner, like form arranging itself out of chaos; at length, in distinct and defined shape and symmetry.[45]

Scott's text suggests that the historian is and ought to be a magician of sorts who sees through but not with the mirror of reflection, who goes beyond surfaces to identify the true shape of the past and bring it into arresting focus.[46] William Godwin—an author of both non-fictional history as well as historical novels—holds a similar view, as evidenced by his warning that "[h]e who would study the history of nations abstracted from individuals whose passions and peculiarities are interesting to our minds, will find it a dry and frigid science."[47] As these examples attest, "nineteenth-century historical thought, responding to romantic and historicist influences, privileged the idea of reenactment of past experience. This understanding of history, which constituted both a philosophical and a literary ideal, favored proximity over detachment, evocation over irony."[48] In this respect, Romantic historiography closely parallels Cree historiographical sensibilities, too:

> Cree narrative memory is more than simply storytelling. A skilled story-teller strings narratives together to suit a particular audience.

44. Macaulay, review of Henry Hallam's *The Constitutional History of England, from the Accession of Henry VII. to the Death of George II. (1827)*, *The Edinburgh Review* 95 (September 1828): 97.

45. Scott, "My Aunt Margaret's Mirror," in *The Keepsake for 1829*, ed. Frederic Mansel Reynolds and Paula R. Feldman (Peterborough, CA: Broadview Press, 2006), 32–33.

46. Jules Michelet prefers similar language, describing history as an act of "resurrection." See Fritz Stern, *Varieties of History* (New York: Random House, 1972), 117.

47. Godwin, "Essay of History and Romance," 292.

48. Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, 62.

> Some details may be downplayed or accentuated, depending on what the occasion calls for. As the storyteller weaves his tale, there are elements of description and analysis: the storyteller describes events and experiences, but also analyses this experience. The stories are reflected upon and critically examined, and they are brought to life by being integrated into the experience of the storyteller and the audience.[49]

The attitudes of Romantic and Cree historians alike stand in contrast to "[t]he Enlightenment historian [who] tells his tale under the same conditions as the eighteenth-century novelist, and, like him, engages the reader with him as ironic spectator of the historical scene or tableau."[50]

While irony is indeed one means by which to create distance from a subject, Romantic literature warps this particular mechanism and its distancing power in several ways. Monkman's exhibition created in response to the 150-year anniversary, in 2017, of Canadian Confederation, is titled *Shame and Prejudice* and the allusion is deliberate: "Framing the exhibition with a narrative inspired in part by Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*," notes Monkman, "Miss Chief's social climbing and liaisons with the powerful colonizers, despite her trickster flaws, are negotiated with the well-being of her family and community in mind."[51] This casts Miss Chief as the plucky Elizabeth Bennett and, just as we might wince with Lizzie at her family's conduct at Mr. Bingley's Netherfield ball or share her mortification upon receiving Mr. Collins's proposal, so Miss Chief is often positioned to attract and focus the audiences's sympathetic reaction. However, much of the enjoyment of Austen's work stems from her deft manipulation of irony. For it is precisely through irony that the narrator of *Pride and Prejudice* gains the reader's trust. The famous opening line in which the narrator ventriloquizes and parodies Mrs. Bennet is, as everyone knows, carefully calibrated to invite readers to share the speaker's gentle raillery and in this way generates intimacy rather than alienation.

Beyond the expansion of the genre of history to include what was traditionally other, and beyond the shifting aspirations of history to penetrate surfaces and see into the life of things, Romantic history's most important legacy for Monkman's work is an orientation to history that marries sincerity and irony. While these may seem like polar opposite attitudes, or "distances" that cancel each other out, it is the strange simultaneity of both attitudes that characterizes Monkman's work. Indeed, this tension

49. McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory*, 7–8.

50. Gossman, *Between History and Literature*, 243.

51. Monkman, "Introduction," in *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience* (Toronto: Black Dog Press, 2020), 20.

motivates the action of "redistancing," or the oscillation between the desire for intimate identification with past experiences and the desire for abstraction and a more cerebral vantage point. Redistancing thus names the prismatic shifting of historical perspectives that is set into motion with special intensity when, in Romanticism, historical thought becomes especially fascinated with sympathy, thus making an investment in historical proximity that relativizes Enlightenment distanciation. The second part of this paper focuses on canvases that illustrate how Monkman incorporates the irresolvable play between detail and whole that involves not only historical redistancing in Phillips's sense of that term but a redistancing in literal and corporeal terms. Monkman's canvases move the viewer around the room and invite different kinds of historical investments when viewed at different scales and from, literally, different angles.

"taking different positions"

At the beginning of the third volume of *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth visits Mr. Darcy's estate with her aunt and uncle. While touring the house, her attitude toward Mr. Darcy begins to transform:

> The housekeeper came. . . . They followed her into the dining-parlour. It was a large, well-proportioned room, handsomely fitted up. Elizabeth, after slightly surveying it, went to a window to enjoy its prospect. The hill, crowned with wood, from which they had descended, receiving increased abruptness from the distance, was a beautiful object. Every disposition of the ground was good; and she looked on the whole scene, the river, the trees scattered on its banks, and the winding of the valley, as far as she could trace it, with delight. As they passed into the other rooms, these objects were taking different positions; but from every window there were beauties to be seen.[52]

Elizabeth's opinion of Darcy shifts with her physical movement through Pemberley. This movement reveals new prospects in both figurative and literal terms. Figuratively, Elizabeth reevaluates her initial assessment of Darcy's personality. Literally, she's seeing the landscape from new and different angles. The scene suggests that the figurative and the literal are, however, not just parallel registers but intertwined. The landscape metamorphoses, each change producing the mild surprise characteristic of the picturesque. And just as the picturesque performs a "rather bourgeois taming of the sublime" and a "manipulation of flux into form, infinity into frame," so does this experience go some way to taming

52. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Vivian Jones (London: Penguin, 1996), 236.

Elizabeth's rebelliousness.[53] Elizabeth sees Darcy in a new light; she also sees herself differently: "at that moment she felt, that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!"[54] The picturesque psychosomatically aligns Elizabeth with Darcy which, as Anna Laetitia Barbauld suggests, is a crucial step in overcoming prejudice. An individual in society necessarily occupies one's own singular position, "and [therefore] his views of things are contracted or extended according to his position in society: as no two individuals can have the same horizon, so neither can any two have the same associations; and different associations will produce different opinions, as necessarily as, by the laws of perspective, different distances will produce different appearances of visual objects."[55] Elizabeth is reoriented and begins to see the world from Darcy's lofty point of view.

It is difficult to imagine that the import of this episode should be lost on the creator of *Shame and Prejudice*. For it is precisely the picturesque landscapes of painters such as A. B. Durand (1796–1886), Thomas Cole (1801–48), Albert Bierstadt (1830–1902), and Frederic Edwin Church (1826–1900) that Monkman reimagines and redistances. Across a series of canvases Monkman repopulates these iconic American landscapes—landscapes from which Indigenous people were evacuated in an effort to turn them (the landscapes) into vehicles for aesthetic experiences such as the picturesque and to serve a broader colonial agenda by imagining the continent as *terra nullius*.[56] Even when Indigenous people are not totally erased from these works, colonial artists "were depicting native people as static cultures, frozen in time and unable to move forward."[57] Indeed, the apparent realism of these paintings works to disguise an ideological attempt to align and simplify multiple viewpoints. What has been said of Scottish picturesque landscapes may be said about its American cousin: "Scotland's nineteenth-century picturesque and sublime landscapes of wildness (think Landseer's *Monarch of the Glen*, 1851) were a fiction in their own right—a story created out of environmental censorship and fake authenticity. Those landscapes had not been devoid of human settlement and community activity for millennia,

53. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 75.

54. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 235.

55. Barbauld, "On Prejudice," in *The Works of Anna Lætitia Barbauld* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1825), 2:326.

56. See Karen Martin and Booran Mirraboopa, "Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing: A Theoretical Framework and Methods for Indigenous and Indigenist Re-Search," *Journal of Australian Studies* 27, no. 76 (2003): 203–14.

57. Monkman, "Altering Sight: Ideas in Motion," in *Art in Motion: Native American Explorations of Time, Place, and Thought*, ed. John P. Lukavic and Laura Caruso (Denver: Denver Art Museum, 2016), 16.

until the clearances."[58] In paintings such as *Empathy for the Less Fortunate* (2011), *Pity* (2013), *Iron Horse* (2015), *The Daddies* (2016), and many others, Monkman exposes this sleight of hand. Indeed, in *Clouds in the Canyon* (2008), Monkman presents Thomas Moran (1837–1926) in the midst of composing one of his quintessential images of the Grand Canyon.

Figure 3. Kent Monkman, *Clouds in the Canyon*, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 62 in. x 84 in. Image courtesy of the artist.

A close look at his painting in progress reveals that he ignores the Indigenous figures—unmissable in their vivid boots and feathers and parasols—posing only a few feet in front of him. It is the place, not the people (or at least not the people in their modern form, clashing as they do with the picturesque prospect), that is crucial for the visual invention of America.

However, Monkman's reoccupation of these and other images of the Hudson River School is not an effort at historical reauthentication or historical recovery in any simple sense. Rather, he joins his own, fantastical versions of Indigenous peoples with a motley assortment of figures gathered from across the history of European art. In works such as *Trappers of Men* (2006) and *The Triumph of Miss Chief* (2007), the result is a kind of transhistorical Bacchanalia.

58. Susan Oliver, "Reading Walter Scott in the Anthropocene," in *Walter Scott at 250: Looking Forward*, ed. Caroline McCracken-Flesher and Matthew Wickman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 173.

Figure 4. Kent Monkman, *The Triumph of Mischief*, 2007. Acrylic on canvas, 84 in. x 132 in. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada. Image courtesy of the artist.

For instance, in the latter work Picasso's Demoiselles d'Avignon cavort with Paul Kane's masked dancers, Rubenesque cherubs, satyrs, Indigenous warriors, explorers, Picasso himself, and dandies of various sorts—recreating something like the raucous world of William Drummond Stuart.[59] This is all set within Albert Bierstadt's *Looking up the Yosemite Valley* (1865–67). *Triumph* epitomizes Jack Halberstam's assessment of Monkman's *oeuvre*: "Monkman's paintings . . . represent a wild aesthetic, cacophonous and straining the boundaries of genre and history."[60] Indeed, one way to understand this straining of boundaries is to consider his work as an experiment in painted collage.[61] Collage is the practice of sticking or gluing together different visual materials. While Pablo Picasso and George Braque are usually credited with introducing the practice into the art world, it also draws on the middle-class Victorian pastime of "scrapwork" or "découpage."[62] Though Monkman does not actually glue materials together, he does refer to his own work as the product of a "mash-up."[63] As

59. See William Benemann, *Men in Eden: William Drummond Stewart and Same-Sex Desire in the Rocky Mountain Fur Trade* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2012).

60. Halberstam, *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 71.

61. Peter Blake describes some of his own works as "painted collages" in *Peter Blake: About Collage*, ed. Lewis Biggs, Dawn Ades, Peter Blake, and Natalie Rudd (London: Tate, 2000), 19.

62. Patrick Elliott, "Peter Blake & Collage," in *Peter Blake: Collage*, ed. Clare Preston (London: Waddington Custot and Thames & Hudson, 2021), 13.

63. Monkman, "Altering Sight," 30.

assemblages that combine material not only from different places but from different times—in *Triumph*, Renaissance, Romantic, and Modernist citations cohabitate in an "accumulation of temporalities"—Monkman's images become museums in which history is rearranged and repurposed.[64] Hence, as Richard W. Hill keenly observes, Monkman's scenic "disjunctions constitute a fundamental challenge to the modern notion of time . . . . He is therefore doing much more than correcting or retelling colonial narratives, 'from a point of view that has not been recorded in the official histories.' He is telling us also that history is not simply our 'other'—an elsewhere to re-narrate, a story to correct—but rather, constantly both continuous and discontinuous with our present."[65] History, as realized with special force in Romanticism, is always both discovery and invention, both of the past and of the present, and in this way a living and evolving expression of present needs.[66]

The collage quality of Monkman's work invites an oscillation between the microscopic and the macroscopic. As we move physically closer to the busy canvas, specific details become legible. This legibility comes at the expense, however, of the larger expanse. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in the course of describing how we orient ourselves in the world, dilates on this choreography of the viewer:

> For each object, just as for each painting in an art gallery, there is an optimal distance from which it asks to be seen—an orientation through which it presents more of itself—beneath or beyond which we merely have a confused perception due to excess or lack. Hence, we tend toward the maximum of visibility and we seek, just as when using a microscope, a better focus point, which is obtained through a certain equilibrium between the interior and the exterior horizons.[67]

We drift around before paintings just as Elizabeth does at Pemberley. However, where her vision approaches "a certain equilibrium"—the spot in which her differences with Darcy resolve into a picture of their possible life

64. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 160.

65. Hill, "Kent Monkman's Constitutional Amendments: Time and Uncanny Objects," in *Interpellations: Three Essays on Kent Monkman*, ed. Michéle Thériault (Montréal: Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery, 2012), 52.

66. As Koselleck argues in *Futures Past*, the perspectival nature of historiography has been understood since Romanticism: "If place, time and person should alter, then new works would emerge, even if they dealt with the same object, or appeared to do so" (129). Indeed, with the introduction of perspectivism, "the expressions 'point of view,' 'position,' and 'standpoint' . . . rapidly gained acceptance" in historical writing, such that "temporal relativity now joined the spacial relativity of historical statement" (138).

67. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012), 315–16.

together—Monkman's images eschew such balance. To experience the picturesque softening of the sublime in a work such as *The Triumph of Miss Chief*, for instance, the audience must retreat to such a distance that figures in the foreground are reduced to a colorful blur—a problem articulated also by Bierstadt's nineteenth-century audiences.[68] By the same token, when we step close enough to discern individuals, we effectively crop out the Yosemite Valley. Additionally, and crucially, attending to specific detail also attenuates the sense of irony or parody that strikes viewers of the broader scene. This is because the sense of irony depends on awareness of the fanciful and often absurd juxtapositions of elements, and not least the juxtaposition of these elements with the setting itself which is best viewed from afar. As we move physically closer, however, to observe individuals and small groups, these juxtapositions fade into a hazy peripheral vision. And once isolated, many of these details tell a different emotional story—sometimes a story of pain or of fear or of loss. Sometimes, though less often, a story of bliss. In other words, physical and affective movement is closely correlated: gallery space and historical distance flex reciprocally. In emotional terms, it means that if a wide-angle view invites ironic distanciation from the work and the histories it assembles, tight focus invites sincere association or even sympathetic identification. It is not simply, then, that Monkman is performing a burlesque of history painting or working exclusively in the ironic mode. It is also the sincerity of the form—which, as critics of history painting have long complained, can curdle into melodrama—on which Monkman seeks to capitalize.[69]

While Monkman's reimagined landscapes demonstrate the influence of a Romantic historiography in their complex management of affective distance and (un)canny anachronism, these forces are ramified in those works that most self-consciously perform the representation of history. Monkman's interest in the grand form of history painting can be dated with some precision. In 2011, during a visit to the Museo del Prado, Madrid, Monkman says he was deeply moved by Antonio Gisbert's *Execution of Torrijos and his Companions on the Beach at Málaga* (1887–88). "Never had a painting," he writes, "reached across the

68. See Spencer Wigmore on how Bierstadt's works "tested the limits of gallery space" (93) and in so doing made distance—both aesthetic and political—into a thematic concern. The viewing demands made by Bierstadt's large canvases might comment, for instance, on complications surrounding "the technological transmission and delivery of messages between sites of natural resource extraction in the American West and financial centers in the American Northeast and London" (102). Indeed, just as "the large-size of Bierstadt's pictures operates in tension with an impulse to examine individual details" (127), so do Monkman's canvases maintain and construe that tension in conceptually meaningful ways. Spencer Wigmore, "Albert Bierstadt and the Speculative Terrain of American Landscape Painting, 1866–1877" (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 2020).

69. James Barry complains of the tendency in historical painting to become repetitious and "hackneyed," as the same events or situations are routinely "executed over and over again" with only trivial variations. Barry, *An account of a series of pictures, in the great room of the Society of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, at the Adelphi* (London: printed for the author, by William Adlard; and sold by T. Cadell; and J. Walter, 1783/84), 22.

centuries to pull me into the emotional core of a lived experience with such intensity."[70] This episode inspires an expansion of Monkman's *oeuvre* to the genre of historical painting. For his 2018 painting, *Miss Chief's Wet Dream* Monkman draws on two important Romantic paintings in the monumental style, Eugene Delacroix's *Christ on the Sea of Galilee* (1854) and Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* (1818–19).

Figure 5. Kent Monkman, *Miss Chief's Wet Dream*, 2018. Acrylic on canvas, 144 in x 288 in. Collection of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. Image reproduced courtesy of the artist.

Figure 6. Théodore *Géricault, The Raft of the Medusa,* 1818–19. Oil on canvas, 490 × 716 cm (16 ft 1 in × 23 ft 6 in). Louvre, Paris. Photo (C) RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Michel Urtado. Image reproduced courtesy of the Musée du Louvre.

70. Monkman, "Introduction," 16.

Monkman's *Dream* borrows especially from the emotional and political force of the latter work but swaps the characters involved to tell a story about the Indigenous experience of contact with Europeans. That experience is profoundly damaging. Indeed, the scene depicted echoes the Ojibway prophecy of the "fourth fire":

> You will know the future of our people by the face the Light-skinned Race wears. If they come wearing the face of nee-kon'-nis-i-win' (brotherhood), then there will come a time of wonderful change for generations to come. . . . But [b]eware if the Light-skinned Race comes wearing the face of ni-boo-win' (death). You must be careful because the face of brotherhood and the face of death look very much alike. If they come carrying a weapon . . . beware. If they come in suffering . . . they could fool you. Their hearts may be filled with greed for the riches of this land. If they are indeed your brothers, let them prove it. Do not accept them in total trust.[71]

Yet the painting also suggests that there is an Indigenous future and that that future is forged not through re-isolation but a more profound development of settler and Indigenous relations that intensifies rather than limits interaction. The image echos, in its own visual language, the words of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: "getting to the truth was hard, but getting to reconciliation will be harder."[72]

According to one influential seventeenth-century definition, "*History-Painting* is an Assembling of many Figures in one Piece, to Represent any Action of Life, whether True or Fabulous, accompanied with all its Ornaments of *Land-skip* and *Perspective*."[73] As was consistent with broader cultural norms of the period, the history of history painting could straddle the division between fiction (Fabulous) and non-fiction (True). This was possible because history's function was primarily moral instruction, which lowered the importance of mimetic accuracy. It is on account of its didacticism that history painting, additionally, enjoyed its place atop the hierarchy of visual forms. In the words of John Barrell, "the rules for painting history were closely modelled on the rules for the writing of epic: heroic history-painting, indeed, was often described as 'epic' painting, though later in the [eighteenth] century the term came to be applied to a particular branch of the genre . . . The function [of epic painting] was to

71. Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book*, 90.

72. Murray Sinclair, Wilton Littlechild, and Marie Wilson, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Ottawa, CA: Government of Canada, 2015), iv.

73. William Aglionby, *Painting Illustrated in Three Dialogues* (London: John Gain, 1685), n.pag.

'encourage publick Virtue and public Spirit.'"[74] Or, as Cynthia Ellen Roman puts it, history painting is an "elevated narrative art depicting exemplary heroes and events meant to summon a civic polity."[75] The genre was not primarily mimetic but rhetorical; it "addressed the spectator as the active citizen of a 'civil State or Public,' and attempted not only to instruct him in the virtues necessary to that identity, but to 'inflame,' to persuade him to exercise them."[76] This work sought to be emotionally provocative—to be moving—in a way that would spur an immediate but also lasting response. Monkman's works in this mode exert a similar social and ethical force, what Phillips calls a "summoning power," by calling his audience to respond not just to the colonial conflicts of bygone generations but to the ongoing reality of these conflicts, many of which are subjects of his paintings in this grand mode—for instance, Indigenous experiences of poverty, conflicts with law enforcement and heightened incarceration rates, environmental degradation and especially water protection, the epidemic of murdered and missing Indigenous women, and the intergenerational effects of residential schools.[77] Monkman capitalizes on the emotional and political potentiality of history painting even as he reimagines who or what might be promoted into this rarefied genre. As Charlene Villaseñor Black and Tim Barringer remark, Monkman offers a "coruscating Indigenous critique of the project of European colonialism, its cultural institutions, and the forms of art integral to it" and in several instances does so "through a witty inversion of the machinery of history painting—the genre held in academic theory to represent the zenith of Western art, a visual lingua franca of the European imperial elite over centuries."[78]

Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* is not only an exemplary instance of the genre of history painting but in its choice of subject and details of execution tells a story about colonialism, imperialism, human depravity, and—vitally—hope that provides Monkman with many of the elements necessary for his own translation of the work into *Miss Chief's Wet Dream*. Géricault's painting takes as its subject the shipwreck of the French frigate Medusa. In 1816, the ship foundered off the coast of Mauritania on its way, following the restoration of the Bourbons, to reestablish French control of Senegal. As Christine Riding explains, the disaster was attributed to "the incompetence of the captain, Hugues de Chaumareys, appointed to his post on the grounds

74. Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*, 19.

75. Roman, "James Gillray's *The Death of the Great Wolf* and the Satiric Alternative to History Painting," in *What Was History Painting and What is it Now?*, ed. Mark Salber Philips and Jordan Bear (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2019), 90.

76. Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*, 23.

77. Phillips, *On Historical Distance*, 85.

78. Black and Barringer, "Decolonizing Art and Empire," *The Art Bulletin* 104, no. 1 (2022): 7.

that he was an aristocrat and pro-Bourbon in his political sympathies."[79] Of the 150 passengers set adrift on the raft, just fifteen survived the two horrific weeks preceding rescue. Early audiences were unsettled by the painting, not least for how it challenged genre conventions. As Riding notes, Géricault's decision to treat shipwreck "on a monumental scale was criticised by some because, to quote the *Annales du Musée*, large-scale paintings were then 'reserved for the representation of events of general interest, such as national celebration, a great victory, or one of those instances of sublime self-sacrifice that are the glory of religion and of patriotism.'"[80] *Raft of the Medusa*, in ways that parallel the broader Romantic expansion of historical subjects and forms, is aesthetically revolutionary for centralizing not patriotic celebration or even tragic self-sacrifice but rather the abject horrors that spring, ultimately, from imperialism.

Géricault's *Raft* also manipulates distance. On the one hand, the subject of shipwreck, especially when presented on such an intimate scale, "encourages the spectator to imagine 'pain and danger,' and 'self-preservation,' 'without being actually in such circumstances' in ways that were 'suited to the sublime.'"[81] On the other hand, by extending the raft beyond the front edge of the canvas and hanging the painting unusually low at the Paris Salon of 1819, Géricault also "sought to confuse, even problematise" the distance between spectator and spectacle.[82] If mediation and distance from terror is necessary to produce the sublime effect, Géricault creates an optical illusion in which that distance seems to collapse. The result is a genuine nausea and vertigo indicative not of an aesthetic experience but of moral implication. For the painting is not merely an allegory for France itself following the Restoration—a regressive, foundering "ship of state." More than this, as Klaus Berger and Diane Chalmers Johnson put it, "Géricault forced a confrontation through this painting—a confrontation of the people of France wi[t]h the depiction of a black man as not only an equal, but perhaps a superior being."[83]

Indeed race is, literally and figuratively, elevated in the painting, generating yet another set of potentialities for Monkman. That is, while most of the bodies depicted in *Raft* are pale and slack, it is from this mass of

79. Riding, "Shipwreck in French and British Visual Art, 1700–1842: Vernet, Northcote, Géricault and Turner," in *Shipwreck in Art and Literature: Images and Interpretations from Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Carl Thompson (London: Routledge, 2014), 123.

80. Riding, "Visual Art," 124.

81. Riding, "Shipwreck, Self-preservation and the Sublime," in *The Art of the Sublime*, ed. Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (London: Tate Research Publication, January 2013), n.p.

82. Riding, "Sublime," n.p.

83. Berger and Johnson, "Art as Confrontation: The Black Man in the Work of Géricault," *The Massachusetts Review* 10, no. 2 (1969): 309.

human suffering that a Black man is propelled, his trajectory mirroring the waves that surround them. Against the whitecaps, a Black hand flourishes a scrap of cloth. The appeal is made on behalf not just of Black people, of course, but all the survivors. Escape from a brutal death hinges on him. Putting salvation in the hands of this person of color may be Géricault's way to force his audience to register a number of unresolved consequences of the Revolution. As Berger and Johnson muse, "wasn't the question of the black man's rights part of the democratic ideal of the Revolution? Hadn't Napoleon himself—for all his lapses—once sent out a decree prohibiting the loathsome slave trade? Weren't all the countries of Europe at that very moment embroiled in debate over the morality of slavery itself?"[84] This may well be true; and yet, the emphasis on Black oppression seems slightly to miss the tone of the painting. There is no evidence that this man is or was a slave. And the stress here is less on his suffering than his vitality: he "surges forward, invigorated by hope, inscribed with life."[85] Where others sink in resignation, stumble in partial paralysis, or look on passively, there is no doubt that the hero of this epic scene is Black. Yet this very promotion of Blackness may be more vexed than it seems. As Albert Alhadeff notes, throughout his *oeuvre* we can see Géricault "imposing on black frames classical tropes, ideals that whites since antiquity believed were their exclusive province, their defining hallmark."[86] For Thomas Crow, the Black man in *Raft* offers a perfect example of this: "the isolated torso and arm [of the hailer] might be for all the world a damaged hollow ancient bronze . . . as eloquent as the great *Belvedere Torso* in stone."[87] But how do we take this? Is it a heartening assertion that Black bodies are not only attractive but, fundamentally, human? Or, does it perpetuate the notion that to be human is to be, in some sense, white?

Monkman's *Dream* does not answer these questions so much as pose them afresh, and in another key. The canvas, in imagining European-Indigenous contact as a single, freighted moment, becomes allegorical, but without becoming ahistorical. Rather, allegory sanctions Monkman's gathering together of figures from across actual history to invent the moment Satan cannot find, the precise temporal-historical instant that gives history painting its dramatic energy and from which the work itself is forged. For one thing Monkman evidently learns not only from Géricault but also Delacroix is the importance of temporal concentration or compaction. As Peter Brooks notes, Delacroix "always claimed that painting was superior to literature and

84. Berger and Johnson, "Art as Confrontation," 305.

85. Alhadeff, *Théodore Géricault, Painting Black Bodies: Confrontations and Contradictions* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 15.

86. Alhadeff, *Painting Black Bodies*, 6.

87. Crow, *Restoration: The Fall of Napoleon in the Course of European Art, 1812–1820* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 187.

to music because of its atemporality, its 'instantaneity of effect.'"[88] Indeed, history painting as such performs an operation to which "ekprasis appears the symmetrical opposite": rather than generating a protracted narrative out of a static image, the painting acts as "a kind of temporal synecdoche [for the larger historical narrative]: a part which eminently stands for the whole."[89] Rather than "reverse ekprasis" or "temporal synecdoche," we might call what Brooks here describes a spot of time. The seed-like quality of these moments of an intensified past is most pronounced in the early, 1799 version of the *The Prelude* where such moments retain a "fructifying virtue" despite years of dormancy.[90] While such spots contain multitudes, this content is massively compressed into the shape of, say, "A girl who bore a pitcher on her head / And seemed with difficult steps to force her way / Against the blowing wind" or the tableau of "The single sheep, and the one blasted tree, / And the bleak music of that old stone wall."[91] In *Dream*, Monkman concentrates some four-hundred years of European-Indigenous history into a moment as fleeting and precarious as those chosen by both Wordsworth and Géricault.

As Monkman has himself remarked, *Dream* is also inspired by the "Two Row Wampum of 1613, a treaty agreement between the Haudenosaunee people and Dutch settlers."[92] Again, this speaks to the work's investment in history and history painting by anchoring itself, at least notionally, in a single, pregnant instant. Yet, the apparent singularity of this moment is immediately displaced in several ways. First, as Jon Parmenter has detailed, there exists significant scholarly disagreement surrounding the history of the Two Row Belt agreement: while "contemporary Haudenosaunee oral tradition identifies the original elaboration of *kaswentha* relations between Iroquois nations and Europeans with a circa 1613 agreement negotiated between Mohawks and a Dutch trader named Jacob Eelckens at Tawagonshi . . . non-Native historians of the Haudenosaunee have been at considerable pains since 1985 to dismiss the idea of *kaswentha* and/or the Two Row Belt as legitimate historical phenomena."[93] The latter group of historians find the documentary and empirical evidence for the agreement to be scanty and,

88. Brooks, *History Painting and Narrative: Delacroix's 'Moments'* (Oxford: Legenda, 1998), 15.

89. Brooks, *History Painting*, 15.

90. William Wordsworth, *The Two-Part Prelude of 1799*, in *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), 1:290.

91. Wordsworth, 1:317–20, 1:363–64.

92. Nic Meloney, "Kent Monkman's 'Miss Chief's Wet Dream' finds a home in Halifax," *CBC News* (November 1, 2018): https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/kent-monkman-miss-chiefs-wet-dream-halifax-1.4888186.

93. Parmenter, "The Meaning of *Kaswentha* and the Two Row Wampum Belt in Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) History: Can Indigenous Oral Tradition be Reconciled with the Documentary Record?" *Journal of Early American History* 3, no. 1 (2013): 84, 86.

where available, inauthentic. Additionally, they discount oral tradition as fundamentally unreliable. The conflict neatly underscores Miller's observation that "the use of traditional narratives as historical source matter is one of the most contested issues between Indigenous and American historians."[94]

Second, audiences cannot ignore the fact that this signal event is represented through a cast of figures extracted from different points in European history and art history, lending the whole work a meta- and trans-historical quality. Aside from those already noted, we see visual citations of Delacroix's "Liberty Leading the People" (1830), Paul Kane's "Medicine Mask Dance" (1848–56), and Bill Reid's sculpture *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii, the Black Canoe* (1986). Further, the raft is populated by a range of real and imagined Europeans spanning a period of at least two thousand years: a medieval plague doctor reclines near a seventeenth-century Puritan who sits between Marie Antoinette (1755–93) and Queen Victoria (1819–1901); a Roman soldier supports Christ while a Viking attends to the sail and a conquistador appeals to the members of the canoe; a centaur aims his crossbow while a Minotaur—a sort of literalization of John Bull—grips his rifle. Laura Brandon, including this work in her recent survey *War Art in Canada: A Critical History*, suggests it expresses "[t]he defining national story of a thousand-year conflict fought entirely on Canadian soil."[95]

Yet if *Dream* relates a history of colonial violence, it also reimagines relations between Europeans and Indigenous peoples and explores new social and affective landscapes. This reimagining begins with those two most obvious allusions, already mentioned, to Delacroix's *Christ on the Sea of Galilee* and Géricault's *Raft*, in which the emphasis lands on survival and rescue rather than death and destruction. *Dream*, too, is a painting of survival and rescue, suggesting that there is hope for an Indigenous future, a future in which Indigenous culture might flourish and rediscover its own ways of being in the world and with others. Yet, in typical fashion, Monkman explores this optimism through a complex reversal of power relations. Just as he does in an important earlier work, *Study for Artist and Model* (2003)—and just as Géricault does by placing salvation in the hands of a victim of white, European prejudice—Monkman inverts the expected relationship between Indigenous and European people. For the raft in *Dream* is not crewed by downtrodden Indigenous people but bedraggled Europeans. This represents the historical aggressors as weak, vulnerable, and—as suggested by their grey-green skin—diseased.[96] It is Europe that needs aid and the powerful,

94. Miller, "Native Historians," 30.

95. Brandon, *War Art in Canada: A Critical History* (Toronto: Art Canada Institute, 2021), 64.

96. This peculiar coloring also alludes to Géricault's *Raft*: "Géricault created his view of death and decomposition primarily by giving the diseased, moribund flesh a wan, grey-green and yellowish colouring. Accordingly, what was most unsettling was

self-sufficient Indigenous community has responded to their hail. The irony at this moment becomes especially pointed: Europeans are figured as refugees braving the English channel, reversing polarities of the contemporary refugee crisis in which England (to focus on only one European nation and one aspect of the crisis) polices the waterways to intercept flimsy vessels overfilled with desperate asylum seekers and aims, wherever possible, to exile those who survive the crossing.[97] Could it be that the invasive Europeans of *Dream* have been betrayed by their own incompetent captains? Are they wasted by their own mind-forged manacles?

Crucially, in this counter-factual history Miss Chief does not simply shove the raft away. This is not a fantasy of bluntly reversing power but a vision in which that power is displaced through the emphasis on mutual vulnerability. Hence, though fear and anger does form part of the affective spectrum, most Indigenous figures respond differently. Some, like the rowers, appear wary, skeptical, or relatively indifferent toward the raft—but they are not actively hostile. Others, such as the medicine man hanging over the side, make an explicit overture, despite strong protest, to share a peace pipe. And still others, such as the young child and her mother sat furthest back in the canoe, exhibit more complex expressions. The child's wide, bright eyes are lifted to the image of Delacroix's Liberty; her lips are slightly parted, as if in a state of quiet awe. She gently turns her mother's head, trying to share with her what might be a budding enthusiasm, a Romantic attraction to ideas of freedom. Her mother's face is a mask of apprehension. To the innocence of her child, the mother contrasts experience. The mother senses every risk that assisting the distressed crew entails—every risk of following Liberty, too—because the consequences are not simply for her to live but also for her child. What happens in this moment will shape the future. Yet, despite this atmosphere of trepidation, the scene is designed to make a case for Europe. For many of the Indigenous figures in the canoe, the raft seems to be a thing worth saving or, at the very least, they cannot deny that it might be right to do so. This ambivalence parallels Monkman's own artistic vision, in which European art remains, for him, a vital resource for addressing Indigenous experience in the present and future, where the "master's tools" might be actually necessary for envisioning new futures in a world where Indigenous and non-Indigenous lives are irrevocably joined together and must confront shared existential threats, as the turbulent, rising ocean in *Dream* suggests. Instead of a fantasy

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the juxtaposition of masterfully modelled nudes and a cadaverous flesh tone." Gregor Wedekind, "Counteracting Forces of Existence: Théodore Géricault's Tragic Realism," in *Géricault: Images of Life and Death*, ed. Gregor Wedekind and Max Hollein (Frankfurt and Munich, DE: Verlag, 2014), 81.

97. See "UK to send asylum seekers to Rwanda under controversial new deal," *Al Jazeera* 14 April 2022 and Alex Therrien, "Migrant tragedy is biggest loss of life in Channel," *BBC* 25 November 2021.

of dominating the dominator, *Dream* imagines a redistribution of the risks and rewards that follow from cultural contact, inviting new alliances in the effort to navigate the troubled seas of a common present.

"Images have a privileged role," says Bann, "in constructing individual and social identity: historical images are thus especially important in assessing how profoundly the rise of history in the nineteenth century marked the popular consciousness of the Western world."[98] Monkman demonstrates a deep investment in "historical images," valuing them for many of the same reasons they also mattered to Romantic artists and to a Romantic public interested in histories that had yet to be told, histories of people, places, and things not normally afforded space in official canons. Géricault's *Raft*, for instance, in its decision to center attention on the nameless victims of imperialism, demonstrates some of the radical, Romantic democratization of a traditionally exclusive genre. *Raft* also marries the cerebral (social and political critique) with the affective (sympathy with suffering), effectively redistancing the whole genre by bringing viewers into startling proximity to the gruesome realities of imperialism. Monkman's *Dream* taps into these same resources. But the management of distance is complex. Monkman's ironic reversal of power, for instance, does not simply alienate. In placing "Europe" on Géricault's *Raft*, Monkman invites a strange sort of sympathy with figures that embody colonialism, disease, and cultural annihilation. Monkman's irony is sympathetically capacious, and we witness figures—who have every right bluntly to reject the appeals of this rotting crew—express, to varying degrees, genuine concern and real interest. If Europe is Frankenstein's Creature—a clumsy assemblage of corpses left to fend for itself in a hostile environment—the Indigenous people in Monkman's canoe have come to their aid. Indeed, if Monkman makes Europe into a grave, he plays (the) Victor, pilfering from the filthy but still vital stores to compose and animate a history that answers to the most pressing contemporary needs of a world in which we all must either sink or swim.

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98. Bann, *Rise of History*, 61.

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