

SHITLESS FAMILY LOVE: DELEUZO-GUATTARIAN CREATIVE AFFILIATIONS IN EDEN ROBINSON'S BLOOD SPORTS

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Abstract / Résumé

Eden Robinson's 2006 novel *Blood Sports* is a fractured, episodic narrative about former drug addicts, Downtown East Vancouver poverty, family drama, and gang violence. Coming ten years after *Monkey Beach*, a novel that received significant popular and critical attention, *Blood Sports* presents literary critics with a riddle: where does a First Nations authored novel, about non-Aboriginal people, fit? Should the critical reading of this novel ask whom the novel benefits? Should the novel necessarily be read as a potentially radical text, either aesthetically or socially? In this essay the Deleuzo-Guattarian theory of "minoritarian literature" as a revolutionary art form supports a reading of how *Blood Sports* subverts literary and social norms by telling a compassionate and frightening family story.

Le roman *Blood Sports*, publié en 2006 par Eden Robinson, est un récit fracturé et épisodique au sujet de deux anciens toxicomanes, de la pauvreté dans le quartier est du centre-ville de Vancouver, d'un drame familial et de la violence des gangs de rue. Publié dix ans après *Monkey Beach*, un roman qui a bénéficié d'une grande attention populaire et critique, *Blood Sports* propose une énigme aux critiques littéraires : où se situe un roman écrit par une Autochtone qui parle des non-Autochtones? Est-ce que la lecture critique du roman devrait demander à qui il profite? Est-ce que le roman devrait être lu nécessairement comme un texte radical, que ce soit sur le plan esthétique ou social? Dans l'article, la théorie de Deleuze et Guattari de la « littérature mineure », considérée comme une forme artistique révolutionnaire, soutient une lecture de *Blood Sports* où le roman subvertit les normes littéraires et sociales en racontant une histoire de famille compassionnelle et effrayante.

We were both scared shitless because we didn't think we were good enough for you, Mel. But we wanted you. You were the biggest risk we ever took. You were the only good thing to come out of a lot of bad. (10)

-- Eden Robinson, *Blood Sports*

Published in 1996, Eden Robinson's short story collection *Traplins* was received well by critics, who hailed her as a promising young and new writer. Most reviews attributed Robinson's writing skills to the University of British Columbia creative writing program she attended. The stories—violent, intense, and fast-paced, with White, Native and ethnically unidentified characters—were not critically read as autobiographical. In 2000 Robinson's novel *Monkey Beach* was published to even greater acclaim and nominated for both the 2000 Giller Prize and the 2000 Governor General's Award. Set in a Haisla village near Kitimaat, British Columbia, the novel weaves Haisla and Heiltsuk traditional narratives with the story of a family facing a series of tragedies. Critical response to *Monkey Beach* has focused on the themes of contemporary/traditional hybridity, linguistic haunting, and the subversive potential of First Nations mythology. In 2005 Robinson released the novel *Blood Sports*, a fractured, episodic narrative about former drug addicts, Downtown East Vancouver (DTES) poverty, and gang¹ violence. So far, critical response to *Blood Sports* has been tentative and largely apolitical. The novel has had popular success, reaching number two in the Canadian bestseller's list in January 2006 (Maclean's). In a 2006 CBC interview about *Blood Sports* Robinson describes herself as an urban, contemporary author, interested in violent mystery writing, citing Edgar Allan Poe and Stephen King as early literary influences. While all Robinson's writing bears dark currents, *Blood Sports*, most notably differs in terms of the urban setting, the non-Native characters, and the sheer volume of relentlessly brutal scenes of torture and murder.

In notes at the end of *Blood Sports*, Robinson tells readers that she "made the whole thing up" (279). She adds that the novel "is not autobiographical or based on anyone [she] know[s]"; rather, it is "a dark fantasy" (279). These remarks seem to pre-empt an overly political or biographical reading of the novel. While Robinson's established literary position as a First Nations writer is too significant to be ignored, it may be narrowly disingenuous to expect all of Robinson's (or any Indigenous artist's) texts to speak to First Nations issues. Still, should Robinson's Haisla – Heiltsuk identity mean that all her writing comments on Canadian Aboriginal Literature, or on First Nations nationalism? *Blood Sports* presents literary critics with a canonical and political riddle; where does

this novel fit, should it fit anywhere, and should its canonical dissonance be attributed radical significance?

Kristina Fagan and Sam McKegney, in "Circling the Question of Nationalism in Native Canadian Literature and its Study," have met these questions with care, asking how to read "Native writers and storytellers whose works are not an easy fit with the nationalist perspective" (31-42). They look at *Blood Sports* alongside Janice Weaver's, Craig S. Womack's and Robert Warrior's 2006 critical study, *American Indian Literary Nationalism*. Fagan and McKegney maintain that Robinson's novel, about "a young, epileptic non-Native man and his sadistic older cousin in Vancouver's Downtown East Side" is a "*radical*" departure that "refuses" categorization in the Canadian Aboriginal Literature market (31-42, italics added).

Suggesting how Robinson's latest novel radicalizes the Native Literature market in Canada, and, potentially, identity politics, Fagan and McKegney ask whether "the work of Native writers, critics and researchers, as well as non-Native people who work in the field of Native Studies" should "be led (or constrained, depending on your perspective) by beliefs about what is traditional, what is spiritually appropriate, what is politically effective, and what is beneficial" to First Nations people (32). The authors in particular are interested in how First Nations writers might feel pressured by encouragement and reward for writing in the mode of "Native Literary Nationalism" (33). *Blood Sports* "triumphantly" eludes categorization and expresses Robinson's "autonomy," therefore "constituting a symbolic victory for the creative freedom of Native writers" (36). Not an easy victory, to be sure; Robinson's drastic stylistic shift resulted in dissonance between *Blood Sports*' popular success and relative critical silence, especially in comparison to *Monkey Beach*, a novel "readily recognizable as 'Native' to readers, publishers, teachers and critics" (36).

Fagan and McKegney admit that radical "defiance" of canonical (and commercial) expectations make it unlikely that an "Indigenous literary nationalist perspective" would read *Blood Sports* as other than a "failure"; the focus on First Nations community and colonial oppression in *Monkey Beach* is entirely absent (37). Yet this very omission, and *Blood Sports*' gory, cinematic picaresque is what Fagan and McKegney admire. They rightly note that Robinson, an accepted and skilled writer, freely "defies" canonical limitations and moves between style and genre in the same ways that non-Aboriginal writers such as Margaret Atwood or Anne-Marie MacDonald do (31-47). Such aesthetic defiance might be understood as an anti-oppressive act.

Following Fagan and McKegney's careful study of how *Blood Sports*

“fits” in the Native literary genre, the questions to be answered are, first of all, whether *Blood Sports* benefits other First Nations artists. If so, is this benefit political (as well as aesthetic)? Can this novel’s revolutionary potential be understood in multiple social spheres, or is such a reading forced? And finally, in a colonized land of broken treaties and institutionalized racism, can (or should) an Aboriginal – authored novel stand as apolitical?

I would like to read *Blood Sports* as a potentially revolutionary text, beginning with Fagan and McKegney’s supposition that Robinson’s aesthetic (and publishing/literary) defiance is a political act. The novel, in content and expression, jars linguistically, telling an awkward story of a marginalized family. I am uncertain of the degree to which my radicalization of *Blood Sports* relates to Native Literary Nationalism; while I suggest affiliative connections, a Native literary (nationalist or otherwise) reading of *Blood Sports* might be better undertaken by critics better positioned to offer such a reading.

Blood Sports fits awkwardly alongside *Monkey Beach*, almost impossibly in the expected market for Canadian Aboriginal Literature, and is too literary to be classified as pulp fiction. Read as a radical text, *Blood Sports* speaks about urban, poor, marginal communities; as a fantastical crime novel it entertains, moving past characters with plot-driven speed. A theoretical framework for a radical reading must be adaptive, must embrace paradox. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari offer a practicable discussion of the revolutionary potential of literature; their text *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* asks critics to read texts that jar within genre or linguistic expectations as politically revolutionary in both form and content. They posit “minoritarian literature” subversive to (but not strictly oppositional to) hegemonic cultural discourse. This notion subverts any marginalization of non-canonical literature in favor of seeing such texts as having revolutionary potential. “Minoritarian” must not be understood as signifying a *minority* or a *minor* population in the sense of lacking geo-political or literary significance; Deleuze and Guattari use the term as a positional reference. Kafka, Deleuze’s literary model for minoritarian literature, certainly commands literary respect and a distinct international canonical position.

Deleuzo-Guattarian theory is flexible and provocative enough to generate multiple radical readings of difficult-to-place literary texts *without* denying the importance of the texts’ claims to individual and/or group identity. Deleuzian theory calls forth for a body of immanent, dynamic knowledge grounded in politics, geography and corporality. The model of transcendent theory, descending as a colonial thought-cloud over the narrated lives of others, is exactly the practice Deleuze and Guattari

set out to dismantle: their work, encouraging transversality, sharing, disruption of power, and examination of geo-political territory, should be understood as important to counter-hegemonic critical practice.

As discussed, Eden Robinson's *oeuvre* presents formidable difficulty to any reading of her work that would seek a single authentic Native perspective. A more appropriate reading might expand the understanding of perspective: the perspective of a single text may be affiliative, multiple (for example: family, class, urban, ethnic, tribal). Deleuzo-Guattarian "minoritarian" language is continuous, never pure, never a final rebellion-against or protection-of. Minoritarian signifies that which moves alongside hegemonic cultural exchange; in art and literature the minoritarian pretends to no purity, no originary position. It is a paradoxical language: it is both/and. I see this contradictory production in *Blood Sports*, both a novel about White people and a novel authored by a First Nations woman. *Blood Sports* is about a family in danger, about a child threatened by despotic capturing, about telling your way out of a cage, out of a net of crime so tight every move is violated, violating; it is at once a text about being marginal, and occasionally thriving marginally.

Blood Sports might spur readers' own class, ethnic and/or family affiliations. I am from British Columbia, I bring to it some of my affiliations: my father was a junkie, he was in prison, and he moves between Surrey and Vancouver's Downtown East Side (DTES). As much as my critical response to *Blood Sports* is about my role as an academic of the official major language, my class affiliation intersects, even potentially subverts, my critical reading. My family narrative is one I hesitate to tell, one the majoritarian language mangles with public morality (the discomfort elicited by words such as "junkie," and even the DTES). My affiliations are both/and: both hegemonic and marginal. I am comfortable, even pleased, with *Blood Sports*, especially with her unapologetic mixture of compassion and terror.

Yet my class affiliation with *Blood Sports* in no way invites me into a cultural affiliation with Robinson's First Nations novel *Monkey Beach*. Deleuzo-Guattarian theorists must be comfortable with paradox; affiliative identities may overlap and may also be distinct. Deleuze describes how (de)territorialization is the process through which positions and territories (geo-political, social and/or personal) are constantly being taken up, lost, and reclaimed by multiple populations. This is the process continually at work in what Deleuze and Guattari identify as "minor" literature, both in the narrative (the novel) and outside of it (the critical response and canonical challenge).

When I write critically about First Nations literature or First Nations history, I consider it at least partly as a major language capturing, an

inevitable imposition of my subject position. But Deleuze reminds us constantly that every telling with a desire for the minor—a love, a pain, an attraction—represents a permeation, a rupture of the major language, a place for territorialization to slow down, speed up, or dismantle. The major language (and hegemonic practice) is continuously permeated by the minor narrative; conceptual and literal territory is altered, marked. *Blood Sports* territorializes a location for the lives of the terminally poor to be other than economic fallout or grisly crime stories; while the episodic plot is crime driven, the novel's fictive territory is marked with locations in which a slower, more attentive reading of poor families permeates majoritarian language. I will look closely at some of those permeations.

Territorial locations are sites for active inter-becomings, for dynamic affiliations; *Blood Sports* multiplies rather than limits representations of marginalized populations. In the Deleuzo-Guattarian model, a minoritarian text does more than represent a population with a set of traits. The three characteristics of a Deleuzian minoritarian text are: “the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation” (18). Deleuze maintains that a minor literature is not written in a minor (in this case minor signifies non-official) language but is written in a major (hegemonic) language that is subject to “a high coefficient of deterritorialization” (16). The second characteristic, that of “political immediacy,” means that because of the “cramped” arena of minor literature, all text is understood as political (17). This does not mean that minoritarian literature is always intended as political but rather that it is usually read as such because of the immediacy of contemporaneous politics surrounding the populations it narrates. Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the “assemblage of enunciation” refers to the manner in which a minoritarian author's works are more often understood as speaking for a collective (although diverse) political cause (17). Deleuze and Guattari's comment that collectivization occurs because the minoritarian literature appears in what the major culture sees as an absence of a “literature of [minoritarian] masters” does not apply to Canadian and/or American Indigenous literature, a canon with widely recognized and respected authors (17). Still, First Nations writers in Canada are usually understood as responding to historic and contemporaneous injustice.

The first characteristic of a minoritarian text, the deterritorialization of a major (dominant culture) language, is particularly relevant to Robinson's novels. If a story is told exclusively in a minority language (for example, in Cree), if it is *de facto* kept private from the dominant culture, Deleuze and Guattari would not call it a minoritarian text. Mixed

slangs, a provocative or “inappropriate” register and a borrowed lexicon signify a minoritarian text. The minoritarian language (in *Monkey Beach*, Haisla) deterritorializes the majoritarian language; that is, it repossesses silenced cultural narratives, and with these stories, social and economic territory. Because such writing is understood by readers of the majoritarian and the minoritarian cultural affiliation, yet refuses to confirm the primacy of any language (and hence cultural affiliation), it has inherent resistance potential. This resistance does not take the form of further limiting the definition of a minority identity; rather, it relies on linguistic destabilization and affront to present a changeable, provocative cultural articulation. Minoritarian resistance fights major colonization along multiple fronts. *Blood Sports*, told in first-person epistolary, police film summary, and third-person fiction writing, is filled with creative cursing and sexualized, violent slang. Haisla words and phrases are found throughout *Monkey Beach*, as is swearing, dreamy storytelling and third-person fiction writing. Provocative language play in storytelling form and content is common to both these novels. As well, both novels represent communities excluded from hegemonic cultural discourses, and the language in the texts varies between Haisla, English, cursing first-person, police transcript and interwoven memory.

The qualities of a minor language appear not only in linguistic style, but also in storytelling form and content. For example, in *Blood Sports* Robinson tells a story about former drug addicts, about living marginally, about violence and about a kind of justice far removed from “major” justice. While drug addiction, poverty and social marginalization contribute to the dangerous DTES underworld, there is always an active relationship between the major and the minor cultures. Brutality in *Blood Sports* is minor-violence, major/minor-negotiation: it appropriates state hospital beds, state roads, and state police records for a separate despotism. “Minor” does not imply ethical superiority, inherent safety, or political transcendence, and “major” may include state care or official sanction.

Blood Sports jars stylistically, borrowing from various genres and narrative forms. The first chapter, “Aura,” takes the form of Tommy’s intimate letter to his daughter Melody; the second chapter, “First Blood,” is a terse series of police transcripts of Jeremy’s sadistic home videos, and the third chapter appears to be a conventional third-person omniscient narrative of a poor but loving urban family. Resemblance, however, is not mimicry; becoming-minor moves through affiliations, desire, immanent relations. Consider that the first blood of the novel is *not* in the chapter “First Blood,” but rather in Tommy’s account in “Aura” of Melody’s birth. Paulie and Tommy are at home, wanting a natural home

birth but end up in the hospital, a surgical tent around Paulie and Melody brought out in blood, screaming. The “natural” family, the “natural” birth and the “first” blood: in the first chapter Robinson upsets each of these schemas with context and plot. Paulie injects majoritarian, hospital birth language with the patois of drug-users in the birthing room as she breastfeeds newborn Melody: “‘Come around here, you’ve got to see this,’ Paulie said. ‘It’s like she’s mainlining.’ The nurse beside her stiffened. We’d had to disclose about Paulie being in Narcotics Anonymous. I think we freaked out some of the staff” (5). In this incident, the hospital staff are majoritarian, their language “serving as a standard measure by which to evaluate” expression and performance (Deleuze 104).

Minoritarian language does not describe an entirely new process; rather, Pauline describes the majoritarian model of health and heterosexual reproductive success (which, by giving birth in a hospital and successfully breastfeeding, she is performing) with provocative language. The model is not completely upset, but it is mocked, appropriated by a conflicting linguistic standard. In this moment, the nurses stiffen because Paulie’s form threatens their content; a perfect majoritarian moment taken and re-articulated as a minoritarian exclamation.

Such linguistic power is most capable when moving from the minor to the major, according to Deleuze and Guattari: to be “potential, creative and created, [to be] becoming,” minoritarian writing continuously shifts from model to model, does not settle on a single, capturable perspective. Tommy sexualizes Melody’s breastfeeding when he writes to Melody: “You were sucking at Paulina’s boob like there was no tomorrow, your eyes screwed tight in ecstasy” (5). The language of drugs and sex color what is an extremely affectionate narrative memory; alcohol makes an appearance when Tommy recalls that “[b]efore she left, Ella [the midwife] made sure we had a six-pack of supplement” (5). By refusing to abandon the model of a loving mother-father-child dialectic, by remaining momentarily *within* the majoritarian model while permeating it with minoritarian language, Tommy and Pauline become more autonomous. They elide mainstream denigration and even Paulie’s middle class parents, who advise Paulie to let “some nice couple adopt your kid” because “[j]unkies shouldn’t raise kids” (6). Paulie’s parents do not “come around” as Paulie hoped, but Paulie keeps her baby regardless (5). Deleuze proposes that the majoritarian system, at this moment personified by Paulie’s parents, will engage in a becoming-minoritarian. No such shift is narrated in *Blood Sports*. Readers enact this shift as they reconsider family structures and class autonomy. Academic readers especially, I suggest, have a responsibility (and a tendency) to examine their own becoming-minor (or major) as they engage with the text.

As in *Monkey Beach*, in *Blood Sports* Robinson is more interested in the story of the family that survives than accounts of majoritarian enlightenment; a refusal to linger on saving the souls of majoritarian bureaucrats is a radical omission. A more compassionate health care worker, a more insightful police officer, a generous shop owner, a more respectful White man – these figures are of no concern to a writer striving to create social solidarity for an oppressed group. Class as much as nation figures into Robinson's social and literary affiliation. In a CBC interview with Rachel Giese Robinson says that, like Stephen King novels, her stories and novels “are full of working-class people who have shitty jobs and live in small towns [...] people I would know” (Giese). Discussing why she wrote about the unglamorous side of Vancouver that “most people would rather sweep under the rug,” she answers the interviewer:

I do love Vancouver and the neighborhoods I write about and I hope that comes through. East Vancouver is my milieu. It's not foreign to me. University was strange. That was the first time I met people who'd never struggled. People who didn't know the price of a loaf of bread. I thought those people only existed on TV. (Giese)

Vancouver, perhaps as much as Kitimaat, is Robinson's cultural territory, a location in which her way of speaking, of relating, and thriving might find community. I would like to suggest, then, that reading *Monkey Beach* and *Blood Sports* as novels that share a pattern of minoritarian movement, of a kind of storytelling that destabilizes majority storytelling, can be a reading that respects Robinson's position as a recognized First Nations writer while allowing for class and urban affiliations.

In the third chapter of *Blood Sports* Robinson continues her experimentation with affective minoritarian renderings of the majoritarian family model. Linguistically less playful than the first two chapters, “Second Blood” narrates the only day of peaceful quotidian family life in the novel: Tommy and Pauline take Melody for a Sears family photo, Pauline shuffles through paint swatches for their apartment, Tommy takes Mel to the park while Pauline goes to her NA meeting. But this portrait of a family is far from mainstream: we learn that Pauline goes to NA meetings every day because she is an ex-junkie still afraid of using, Tommy makes a minimal income working stultifying night shifts at a convenience store, and Pauline's abusive alcoholic parents have refused to visit baby Melody; the domestic happiness in this chapter is a strategic counter to a socially marginal existence. At the end of the chapter Tommy comes home to find his apartment ransacked, Pauline and Melody missing, and gun-wielding kidnappers waiting for him; the family, though loving, is not safe from a threatening environment. Though the family's variation on

the nuclear family would merit disdain from majoritarian forces committed to regulating a norm, such a variation is in keeping with Deleuze and Guattari's description of the autonomous minoritarian identity. Reading the family's kidnapping as a causal result of their marginal position denigrates their autonomy; a more compassionate reading understands the kidnapping as a symbolic and real violation of their attempt to create a new variation on the nuclear family, a variation that would be—and can be—as safe as the norm.

Though their defiant creation of a new kind of nuclear family ultimately fails to hold together, it merits critical attention as a literary trope and social commentary. This kind of autonomous defiance of abjection is similar to both the "strategic abjection" Cynthia Sugars finds in some of Robinson's short stories and to Rob Appleford's discussion of the potential of cultural hybridity in *Monkey Beach*. Appleford's essay "'Close, very close, a *b'gwus* howls': The Contingency of Execution in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*" considers *Monkey Beach* in dialogue with Derrida's notion of cultural *bricolage*. Appleford reads an "intentional ambiguity" in Robinson's "constructs of identity and abjection," writing that "Robinson recognizes [...] that a hermetic, authentic Aboriginal subjecthood is unattainable" (78, 96). His reading allows for the characters of *Monkey Beach* to actively "search [...] for authentic Aboriginality," however elusive such authenticity might be (96). Both Sugars and Appleford ascribe a degree of intent to Robinson's depiction of non-essential, abject, and/or ambiguous identity; I think that in *Blood Sports*, Robinson's careful and compassionate attention to the lives of Pauline, Tommy and Melody similarly intends to posit socially-marginal (Deleuzo-Guattarian minoritarian) and individually meaningful (Deleuzo-Guattarian autonomous) identities.

Robinson's interplay of compassion and violence are addressed in Sugars' essay "Strategic Abjection: Windigo Psychosis and the 'Post-indian' Subject in Eden Robinson's 'Dogs in Winter,'" where she notes that Robinson's *Traplines* and *Monkey Beach* are "both conspicuously violent" (78). She suggests that, to a certain degree, "this preoccupation with violence represents Robinson's engagement with the effects of colonization (or colonial attitudes) on Native peoples" (78). Further, Sugars theorizes that Robinson engages in a critique of colonial violence by using "negative imagery" associated with Native people, "hunting, cannibalism, savagery, primitivism, the windigo/sasquatch" and uses these images "to strategic effect" (78). Sugars also notes that Robinson "frustrates the reader's desire" to read the novel and the short story characters "on the basis of their ethno-cultural identity" (78). The combination of taking back harmful stereotypes and refusing to clarify an ethnic iden-

tity for the reader to project these stereotypes onto is thus understood as a resistance strategy. Such a strategy of appropriating the majoritarian syntax of oppression and frustrating its continued dominance resonates with Deleuzo-Guattarian minoritarian literature.

Blood Sports abounds with recognizable profiles (stereotypes) of drug-addicts, sex-trade workers and marginally employed DTES residents. In the third chapter, "Jag," terse police video transcripts identify most of the characters as Caucasian (some prostitutes are Latino or Asian); none are Native and their suffering is not causally linked to any racial or ethnic oppression. Sugars' reading of Robinson's appropriation of violent stereotypes as literary anti-colonial resistance is thus difficult to continue in *Blood Sports*. If the novel's central protagonists were Native, or Asian, or otherwise racially unidentified, would the novel be more easily understood as a representation of "strategic abjection?" This presents a critical problem; while Sugars' reading is subtle and she is careful not to imply that "savage" fiction is most appropriate to Aboriginal resistance, it is easier to politicize the violence in *Monkey Beach* than in *Blood Sports*. The Haisla community in *Monkey Beach* can be understood as historically oppressed by colonialism; East Vancouver can be understood as an abject neighborhood in a wealthy city, but perhaps *Blood Sports* asks for a broader (yet no less politically responsible) critical examination of how to read violence and poverty in Canadian fiction, or in fiction in general, whatever the community setting. Inscribing Robinson's *oeuvre* into any particular resistance movement may no longer, with the publication of *Blood Sports*, be critically feasible.

Robinson's fiction might now be best understood as violent, graphic work that, like Deleuzo-Guattarian minoritarian writing, sets literature "in continuous variation" – variation on a theme of the struggle for identity formation in an environment of endemic violence and creative community-building. Tommy is culpable, weak, and unsuccessful – he kills two men and ends the novel estranged from his beloved family; even as he struggles to locate a position of creative autonomy for himself, Paulie, and Melody, he is territorialized by masculine, greedy, gang violence. But the variations are essential to understanding why Robinson's fiction continues to appeal; just as Tommy tries to borrow from majoritarian forms to create a new family, to re-imagine poverty and gang involvement, so Robinson borrows from majoritarian literary tropes and social stereotypes. Thus, while *Blood Sports* resembles the familial struggles in *Monkey Beach*, it also echoes pulp fiction and crime television. The variations cross paths and create unexpected genre affiliations. I do not suggest that Robinson's fiction models a superior social ethic.

Minoritarian status is neither originary nor transcendent; Deleuze and Guattari only maintain, as do I, that minoritarian literature offers generative potential by way of continual variation of (literary as well as social) norms. Newness can be positive and nutritive; it can equally be destructive and virulent.

New affiliations do not rule out malingering oppression; in the epistolary first chapter Tommy describes the difficult ride of quitting heroin or cocaine, the way that, at first, “you feel immortal, untouchable,” but then “[y]ou want to test it out, ride that dragon one last time” and that “you realize that your life is still in the crapper anyway and cleaning up hasn’t done fuck all” (7). Affiliations meet other unanticipated affiliations, and “minor” meets rather than opposes “major.” Success—successful autonomy from the majoritarian narrative that, in this case, decries that all addicts are shattered humans—comes only with the realization there can be no definitive, final identity. Craig Womack writes that, no matter how extensive a Native American person’s assimilation, racist oppression will adapt to maintain dominance because “simply being visibly identifiable as an Indian person sometimes subjects a person to racism and social stigmata, no matter how assimilated he or she might be” (41). Literature may imagine creative communities, and may benefit communities, but oppression often proves as adaptable as resistance.

In the end, Tommy is still related to Jeremy, a perverted, sadistic criminal drug addict, and Pauline and Tommy are still seen by Paulie’s parents as “junkies.” Robinson knows that endings are never final; Jeremy is the only person in the novel to promise that “[w]e all go home [...] everyone lives happily ever after” (276). In *Blood Sports*, happy endings are a delusion only expected by the delusional, paranoid and violent Jeremy. Continual variation, creative adaptation are more appropriate, more “realistic.” As Tommy steps towards his torturer to shoot and kill him, he meditates on Melody’s coming first birthday: “They had a set of pictures, the Deluxe Package, waiting for them in Wal-Mart, and were saving up to pay for it so they could give everyone a Mel picture at her first birthday party” (277). Paulie has planned for “a magician,” a “tarot card reader,” and a “psychic juggler,” all “Paulie’s friends who balanced their chakras and ate raw food to counterbalance years of using” (277). Stepping closer to his target, moments before shooting, Tommy reflects that he “enjoys” Paulie’s overplanning for the birthday party because it is “a taste of normal” (278).

Tommy’s desperation to feel “normal” as he commits a forced murder could be read as compensation, denial or repression. I would prefer to credit Tommy with incredible reserves, with seeking a “determination different from the constant,” that is, with drawing creative, affective power

from Paulie's own creative variation on their marginal existence (Deleuze 105). The dream and ghost sequences in *Monkey Beach* could be understood similarly; without ascribing either problematic imbalance or ethical transcendence to such imaginings, minoritarian deviation from a moment, a paradigm or a syntax proffers "a potential, creative and created, becoming" (Deleuze 107). The creatures and ghosts *Monkey Beach's* Lisamarie communicates with guide her through the uneven territories of trauma and adolescence. Her affiliations with her family, culture, and class overlap her affiliations with the ghost world; rather than regarding the ghosts as *otherworldly*, we can read them as *becoming* worldly, as populations infiltrating the majoritarian affiliations. The creatures Lisamarie communicates with are frightening and at times threatening. Their difference from "the constant" does not make them safe or morally sound, just as Tommy and Paulie's creative family affiliations do not, ultimately, protect them from violence.

I realize that I have not redeemed *Blood Sports* as a successfully resistant, anti-racist or anti-poverty novel; such was not my intent. By the novel's end, Tommy has killed two men. Drug addicts can be guileless victims of marginalization and/or self-centered lying perverts (Jeremy, for example). My affiliations with families living in poverty and recovering from drug addictions may lend my reading a wistful encouragement for Tommy and Paulie's happy family ending, but Deleuzo-Guattarian affiliations are more about adaptation, and less about genealogical moral triumph. There is no winner, no ultimate revolutionary reversal of minor/major status but, rather, a continual becoming marked by surges and increments in language, relationship, and creation. The minoritarian family in *Blood Sports* is remarkable for its adaptation and survival; adaptation gives Paulie, Tommy and Melody what fleeting respite from violence they find. Their baby is, they think, too great a treasure for them, they are "scared shitless" with love (10). From a life of fear of violence, from "a lot of bad," Tommy narrates, comes "the biggest risk": creation, life, and generation (10). A baby, perhaps, is the loudest, most immanent and most subversive product of any family; in *Blood Sports* the love and tenderness that follows the baby's birth permeates the novel, the reader, and, I would hope, the major culture.

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Note

1. While the groups of criminals in *Blood Sports* do not explicitly identify as gang members, the loosely affiliated drug dealers and criminals function as *de facto* gangs.

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