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Reading Our Relations in the Past and the Future:
A Métis Reading of Wahkohtowin in katherena vermette's *A Girl Called Echo* (2017–2021)

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Abstract
This paper explores Métis author katherena vermette's graphic novel collection, *A Girl Called Echo* (2017–2021) for the ways in which it presents Wahkohtowin-centred storytelling. Engaging with Métis history and Métis-specific theory of Wahkohtowin, this reading of vermette's text draws connections between ancestral history, resurgent action, and futurity. It examines the protagonist's journey to connect with her ancestors, grow in her connections with her present-day relations, and consider her roles as a descendant of the past and an ancestor of the future. Through an exploration of these relationships, this paper argues for a Wahkohtowin-centred reading of Métis literatures.
Key words: Métis literature, Wahkohtowin, katherena vermette, Relational reading, Ancestors and descendants, Métis futurity

Introduction
The term "relational reading" has recently emerged up in a multitude of disciplines, including early childhood education (Magnusson, 2021), 19th-century literature (Schaffer, 2023), and new approaches to religious studies (Dusold, 2024). These practices of relational reading are centred in the connections that can be developed through a collective or shared reading of the same text; that is, these approaches are concerned with how to learn more from reading by reading alongside other readers rather than reading alone (Dusold, 2024) or how reading together is a good way to make friends (Magnusson, 2021). I have been haunted, in a friendly way, by the idea of relational reading for some time now, but in a different way than I have found others writing about it. I am less interested in how reading alongside others may support us and more interested in how reading, writing, and otherwise engaging with our stories builds and renews our relations with all our kin: past, present, and future. I consider relational reading to be upholding a Métis Wahkohtowin worldview, which centres our kinship structures in how we relate to ourselves, others, our more-than-human relations, our spiritual relations, our past and future relations, and our ancestral knowledges. To dive into this conceptualization of relational

reading, I consider katherena vermette's recent graphic novels to explore how the relationships portrayed demonstrate the value and role of Wahkohtowin in Métis kinscapes. This analysis of vermette's narrative considers the role of Wahkohtowin in storytelling to bring together our past, present, and future. By reading through the relationships of this text, I demonstrate and assert the value of reading our past in gathering the medicine we need for our present and future, in a continual expression of Wahkohtowin.

In addition to poetry, novels, short stories, katherena vermette has written a series of four graphic novels, collectively called *A Girl Called Echo* (2017–2021); she self-identifies on her website as Red River Métis (Michif) from Treaty 1 territory (vermette, 2025). Supported with illustrations by Scott B. Henderson and colour by Donovan Yaciuk, vermette tells the story of Echo, a young Métis girl coming of age in contemporary inner-city Winnipeg who goes back in time to experience key points in Métis history alongside her ancestors. *A Girl Called Echo* is organized into four novels, each of which focuses on a different key period in Métis history: *Pemmican Wars* (2017), *Red River Resistance* (2018), *Northwest Resistance* (2020), and *Road Allowance Era* (2021). Echo's is a story about how Métis relate to our past, present, and future. From a Wahkohtowin worldview, our relations are not confined to temporal distinctions; they transcend time. A Wahkohtowin-centred reading of *A Girl Called Echo* considers key plot points to establish the responsibilities and obligations of kinship, past, present, and future. This approach to reading our stories and histories honours traditions of visiting among Métis, especially with our ancestors. Additionally, reading about history as a visiting opportunity with our ancestors reveals how these ancestral relations support our present-day selves, how we have the ability to seek guidance from our ancestors, and how we are responsible as descendants to both our ancestors and our future descendants. This paper investigates how vermette's narrative centres Wahkohtowin to describe how descendants experience their relations to their ancestors and therein prepare to be good ancestors in their turn. My reading of vermette's text emphasizes relational reading as a practical expression of Wahkohtowin that speaks to our relations across time.

I come to write this piece as both a member of the Métis nation and a literary scholar. I come from mixed Red River Métis and German Mennonite settler ancestry. With ancestral connections to the Red River settlement and the Meadow Lake Métis community on my father's side, I was born in Winnipeg on Treaty 1 territory. My Métis family names are Swain, Breland, Dauphinais, and Grant. When I was young, my family moved to British Columbia, where I grew up in the Okanagan on the unceded territory of the Syilx and I am now a visitor on Lekwungen territory. My interest in vermette's graphic novels comes from my own experience reading them and connecting to moments of relationality in Echo's story: experiences connecting with her ancestors and vermette's renderings of significant periods in Métis history. I am further interested in how relationality and futurity work together to inform practical renewal actions in my research and personal reading activities. This is something I am coming to understand as a Wahkohtowin-centred approach to literary studies. I am also keenly interested in the role of Indigenous stories of the past in creating decolonial futures. Indigenous Futurism literatures are stories that imagine Indigenous life beyond colonial realities, whether historically or in the future. The Métis writer Chelsea Vowel speaks to the connections between the past and future when she asserts the importance of "uncovering Black/Indigenous presence in the past, then asserting our existence in the present and into the future" as an important approach to "making better futures" (2022, p. 18). I want to further examine these relationships between our futures and our pasts. Reading for and with my relations when learning my Métis history brings together Wahkohtowin and futurity.

When encountering vermette's *A Girl Called Echo,* I felt I was reading a clear transcendence of linear time through Wahkohtowin.

Wahkohtowin and Métis Identity

My approach to vermette's text is guided by my understanding of relational reading as informed by the concept of Wahkohtowin. I have come to know Wahkohtowin as a Métis word and focus my comments in a Métis context but also acknowledge that it also lives in Cree cultures and contexts. Though it is often directly translated as "kinship" in English, in practice Wahkohtowin means the interconnectedness of all our relations and our inherent responsibilities to honour and care for all our relations. Maria Campbell, the author of *Halfbreed*, once described Wahkohtowin as "the honouring and respecting" of all the relations of creation (2007, p. 5). Métis historian Brenda Macdougall defines Wahkohtowin as the interrelatedness of all things, "human and non-human, living and dead, physical and spiritual" (2010, p. 3). Additionally, Cree-Métis writer and librarian Jessie Loyer describes Wahkohtowin as "the importance of understanding relationships" as inherently inscribed with "responsibility and accountability" (2018, pp. 150–151). A Métis literary scholar, Matthew Tétreault, adds that Wahkohtowin "situates individuals in a complex web of relations and kin" (2022, p. 59). Finally, Nicki Ferland, a Two-Spirit Red River Métis Sundancer, defines Wahkohtowin as "how we are related to, and relate to, the natural world, other spiritual beings, our past and future ancestors as well as ancestral knowledges" (2024, p. 186). Evidently, there are multiple definitions of Wahkohtowin. Ferland's definition resonates with me because it speaks to my experiences connecting to my Métis ancestors and envisioning how my descendants will relate to me. When Macdougall speaks of relations between the living and dead, I add the not-yet living to honour our accountability to our future relations. We are connected to our futures through our descendants and our intentions with which we imbue our work in the present. This is especially true when thinking about our histories. We restore and regenerate the wisdom of our past not only for us, but for our Métis futures. The ethos behind Vowel's *Buffalo is the New Buffalo* "asserts that we can and must do the work to repair our kinscapes, basing our work in wâhkôtowin [another spelling of Wahkohtowin] to restore our reciprocal obligations to our human and nonhuman kin" (2022, p. 21). Therefore, Wahkohtowin is both a worldview and a continual practice that seeks to honour and uphold our obligations to our myriad relations past, present, and future.

For the scope of this paper, I am particularly interested in how Wahkohtowin speaks to the kinship networks between ancestors and their descendants in vermette's collection of graphic novels. Echo travels back in time to 1814, 1869, 1885, and 1940 to visit her ancestors across the Prairies. In each visiting period, Echo observes her ancestors during pivotal events in Métis history. She befriends her ancestors, speaks with them, learns from them, and mourns with them in times of struggle. In the second installment, Echo is referred to as "mon amie" (vermette, 2018, p. 20) by a young man named Benjamin, who she discovers at the end of the third installment to be her grandmother's great-grandfather (vermette, 2020, p. 44). In the beginning of the third novel, *Northwest Resistance,* Echo meets Josephine, Benjamin's daughter, who also refers to Echo as "mon amie," and is re-introduced to Benjamin, now as Josephine's father and not the young man she met in the previous installment focusing on the Red River Resistance (vermette, 2020, p. 6). In these encounters, though written from Echo's perspective meeting her ancestors, Benjamin and Josephine are also meeting their descendant. There is a clear

progression of relationships spanning time and space which evokes a sense of being and belonging across generations of relations, simultaneously looking both forward and back through our kinship relations.

While my focus for this conversation is Wahkohtowin as understood through Métis culture and history, there are diverging definitions of Métisness that must be addressed here. As Métis readers will know, there are strong contentions in how our communities and peoplehood are recognized and understood. These divides come from struggles for recognition that confuse the definition of Métis. Jennifer Adese, a Métis studies scholar, explains the issue well in that being Métis is not a form of racial mixedness of Indigenous and European settler ancestry; rather, it is "a broad, meaningful, and very deep set of kindship ties, shared family and social (hi)stories, and shared geographic relations" (2016, p. 57). For the purposes of this paper, this definition of Métis is significant because it speaks to how we are understood through our relations across time and space. Warren Cariou, a Métis scholar and author from Meadow Lake, said in a 2015 interview that "part of Métis identity is that it's always a negotiation" (Hanson, 2020, p. 70). We negotiate between our Indigenous heritage and our European one, our historical identities and our contemporary ones. Louis Riel tells us that we must honour all of our heritages (Hanson, 2020, p. 70). We come from unions of newcomers and First Nations, making us a post-contact Indigenous people. This is an immensely complicated state of being in this settler-colonial state that is Canada. This negotiating work is further reflected in vermette's text as Echo struggles to reconcile her Métis history with her contemporary experience in high school.

A Note on the Role of Time Travel

The novel cycle vermette has created offers a blend of historical fiction mixed with a time traveling twist that suggests science fiction. That said, it's important for me to consider the uniquely Métis qualities of the story and how that might inform the genre classification for this work. In an earlier work of fiction, vermette speaks directly about time in a Métis context: "A storyteller once told me our languages never had a sense of time, that past and present and future happened all at once" (2016, p. 244). I am reminded of how Vowel describes Métis futurism as an envisionment of "potential futures rooted in [Métis] history, community and worldview" that offers "alternatives to prescribed colonial roles for Indigenous peoples in the past, the present, and the near and far future" (2022, p. 19). There are inherent links to how stories about the past live in relation with present and future narratives. *A Girl Called Echo* is an example of how potential futures are always in conversation with the past. This work places the present as the future to the past. Furthermore, a cyclical sense of time is inherent to Indigenous worldviews and Wahkohtowin. A circular sense of relationality structures vermette's work, exploring how the ancestor-descendant relationship transcends time. Time travel in these stories serves to bring home to readers the relationality inherent in Métis stories, which stretches across time and informs our obligations to both our ancestors and our descendants. A member of the Muscowpetung First Nation in Saskatchewan, Blair Stonechild reflects on the process of telling our ancestors' stories, based on what his Mosôm told him: "We have to capture back the stories of the old people before we lose them all" (2016, p. 6). The past lives in the present through our stories. During the four time periods in the 19th and 20th centuries in *A Girl Called Echo*, Métis ways of life were forced to change, often profoundly and painfully, due to colonization; vermette writes graphic novels that travel through time to share Métis experiences of fighting to exist and to maintain themselves throughout colonial Western expansion. She positions contemporary Métis people as a continuation of those efforts.

A Girl Called Echo vehemently asserts that at times of great struggle, Métis persisted, and through our relations, "we will always have a future" (vermette, 2021, p. 39). Thinking of contemporary Métis people as the future of those who fought through the periods of resistance described in the collection comes with a sense of responsibility to those ancestors, something fundamental to Wahkohtowin as a Métis way of life. One of vermette's characters communicates the joy of this responsibility, referencing how Indigenous peoples today are still surviving genocide: "that pretty much makes us superheroes, don't you think?" (vermette, 2021, p. 23). The fact that these stories are conveyed as graphic novels further signals to readers a similarity with comic book superheroes. Scholars have long argued that Indigenous peoples having been surviving our apocalypse for centuries now (Stonechild, 2023). Stonechild describes the height of colonial activity as a period that is both "romanticized as part of the Enlightenment and Age of Reason" and more realistically as "the unfettered trammelling of the Indigenous world" (2023, p. 43). Such a "trammelling" constitutes an apocalyptic level of change to Indigenous ways of life. In the context of vermette's narrative, Echo's present day is the post-apocalyptic future of her ancestors' time on earth. Thus, readers of these books receive both a post-apocalyptic narrative about Métis survival and a framing of that survival as an act of heroism, even super-heroism. Hence, vermette's narrative engages with time travel, superheroes, and a post-apocalyptic setting, seeming to signal many tropes of the science fiction genre, but is deeply rooted in Métis worldviews that makes this work a contribution to Métis Futurism that both honours our ancestors and inspires our futures, just as Wahkohtowin teaches us.

A Girl Called Echo

In the text, readers are introduced to Echo, a teenage girl who is learning about Métis history in school and then finds herself traveling through time to visit among Métis people during significant periods in Métis history. Through these experiences, readers learn about Métis history alongside Echo as she meets Métis whose lives were forever changed by the events and conflicts of these times. Below is an exploration of how this collection of graphic novels centres Wahkohtowin in contemporary Métis lives learning about the past. Furthermore, the relationships portrayed therein—namely, between Echo and her ancestors, Echo and her mother, and Benjamin and his descendant—demonstrate the complex web of relationships across time that impose responsibilities on all parties, accounting for a Métis-specific form of relational reading that engages the futurity of Wahkohtowin in our stories of the past.

Echo Meets Her Ancestors

Over the course of Echo's travels through time, she encounters multiple Métis peoples. The first installment of the collection focuses on the Pemmican Wars, a period of violent conflict between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company that greatly affected Métis economic activities between the years 1812 and 1821. At the start of the text, Echo travels back to 1814 and witnesses a bison hunting party traveling through the prairies to gather resources for winter and trade purposes (vermette, 2017, pp. 2–8). There, she meets a young Métis woman named Marie who introduces Echo to her family's hunting camp and the activities preformed there that include making pemmican, tanning bison hides in preparation for winter, and sharing in music and dancing to celebrate this time with the bison on the land (vermette, 2017, pp. 21–26). Though Echo does not yet know this, she has just met an ancestor. This installment in the collections ends when Echo, having returned to her own time period of contemporary Winnipeg, visits her mother in a medical institution. They talk about their shared Métis identity, and the

relatable topics Echo is learning in school (vermette, 2017, pp. 41–44). Echo's relationship with her mother is an important inclusion in the story, as it speaks to how our ancestral relationships support our present-day kinships, a point on which I elaborate in the next section.

The next installment focuses on the Red River Resistance, a time when Métis living around the Red River formed the Provisional Government of Assiniboia to resist the supposed sale of their lands to Canada by the Hudson's Bay Company. This installment begins with Echo in her history class; when she lets her focus drift, she finds herself on a farm in the Red River Settlement in 1869 (vermette, 2018, p. 6). She observes an initial altercation between the Métis and Canadian land surveyors in which Métis leader Louis Riel accuses the surveyors of trespassing on Métis land, to which the surveyors respond that the land belongs to the Crown and Dominion of Canada, which purchased it from the Hudson's Bay Company (vermette, 2018, pp. 7–13). Throughout this exchange, Echo meets Benjamin, a boy around her age who helps her onto his horse to escape the confrontation with the surveyors (vermette, 2018, p. 9). Again, although Echo does not yet know it, she is meeting, spending time with, and learning from her ancestor. Over the course of this installment, when Echo is experiencing the past, she is often accompanying Benjamin wherever he goes, learning about the land, about the settlement, and about how Métis fought for their rights against expanding Canadian land acquisitions under the claims of purchase from the Hudson's Bay Company. By the end of the installment, Riel has fled to the United States to escape capture from the invading Canadian military force that takes command of Upper Fort Garry. By this time in 1870, the Wolseley expedition terrorizes Métis and Indigenous residents, forcing many to flee west (vermette, 2018, pp. 43–44). For Echo, who is learning about these events for the first time through a combination of high school history education and her experiences time traveling to meet her ancestors, these painful episodes have significant resonance for her as she builds relationships with displaced Métis warriors of the Red River Resistance. These are not merely dates in a history book; these are people she has learned from, been helped by, and for whom she continues to care deeply.

In the third installment of vermette's collection, through Echo's school class and her time traveling episodes, readers learn about the Northwest Resistance, a response to the changing landscape of the Western territories following the Red River Resistance. As colonial over-hunting threatened the extinction of the bison, Prairie First Nations and Métis people faced an end to their traditional ways of life and encountered further conflict with the Canadian government (vermette, 2020, p. 45). In 1884, Louis Riel returned from exile and joined the Métis community in Batoche to once again fight for Indigenous land rights (vermette, 2020, p. 45). Through her time travels, Echo witnesses a Métis community gathering in March 1885 where she meets the young woman Josephine (vermette, 2020, p. 6). Welcomed to the gathering by Josephine, Echo listens as the Métis discuss Riel's petitions to Ottawa, their alliances with the Sioux and Cree First Nations, and their plan to rally behind Riel to stand against Canadian armed intervention (2020, pp. 8–13). Josephine then introduces Echo to her father, Benjamin, who is the same boy she got to know during the Red River Resistance but who is now a middle-aged man with children Echo's age (2020, p. 14). Echo is once again surprised to re-encounter Benjamin, who has aged significantly since their last encounter, which from Echo's perspective traveling through time is only a few days earlier.

This installment continues to tell the story of the Northwest Resistance, which spanned multiple battles fought in partnership between the Métis and Sioux and Cree First Nations in the area against Canadian forces, until the Battle of Batoche and surrender of Louis Riel in May, 1885 (vermette, 2020, pp. 32-42). Throughout this installment, present-day Echo also

experiences the return home of her mother. While the medical institution she had been in is not specified, Echo's mother is now back home. At the end of her latest time traveling episode, Echo returns to the modern day, where she finds her mother has some family history to share with her (2020, p. 43). She has found some pictures of their ancestors and a family tree (2020, pp. 43–44). Looking at these family treasures, Echo finally understands that the people she is meeting throughout history—Marie, Benjamin, and Josephine—are *her* direct ancestors. The text leaves readers with this revelation and notes, "to be continued …" (2020, p. 44). Now, it is evident that while Echo has been learning about Métis history through her time traveling experiences, Echo is also meeting her ancestors. Most important, she is learning about her family's place in historical events through her relations with her ancestors.

This plot development is a literal, direct way of seeking guidance from our relations, something we do in a variety of ways when centring Wahkohtowin in our daily lives. Cherokee scholar Jeff Ganohalidoh Corntassel explains the concept of everyday acts of renewal as the foundations of resurgence (2012). I see Métis renewal in our daily conversations, sharing foods and recipes, telling our stories, and being in relation with our lands, all going hand in hand with renewal of our relations with our ancestors and our descendants. Wahkohtowin is essential to Métis resurgence. We practice this through acts of everyday renewal in how we engage with one another, with our family stories, and with the lands and waterways that hold our histories. *A Girl Called Echo* acknowledges this reality for Métis people and offers an explicit example of this practice, bringing Wahkohtowin into literary reality through the mechanism of time travel. Echo's journey with her ancestors in the past supports her reconnection with her Métis heritage. She learns about the land she lives on in Winnipeg and the ways of the Métis people across time. It is through building relationships with her ancestors that readers watch Echo grow tremendously over the course of these stories, going from a moody teenager in *Pemmican Wars* to a connected and invested young person in *Road Allowance Era*. Echo's learning through a Wahkohtowin worldview also helps her connect to friends at school (vermette, 2021, pp. 21–22), restore her relationships at home with her mother (pp. 23–24), and identify her purpose and hope after graduating high school (p. 43). In her relating Wahkohtowin through history, vermette offers a gift for readers to consider what it would be to learn about their history from their ancestors. And though vermette's text offers this idea literally, this can be and is practiced through a Wahkohtowin approach to reading our people's history.

Helps with Present Relations

In a summer 2015 interview with Métis scholar Aubrey Jean Hanson, vermette reflects on what interested her in writing in the first place and on how her writing has evolved. She shares how it was reading *In Search of April Raintree* (1983) by Beatrice Culleton Mosionier that inspired her to shift towards writing about explicitly Indigenous topics and by extension her own Indigenous story (Hanson, 2020, pp. 54–57). In this reflection, vermette notes that Mosionier "isn't playing into an aesthetic. She's not playing with metaphors. She's telling a story. It's a life story" (Hanson, 2020, p. 57). She continues to reflect on how life stories reveal themselves through our introductions as Indigenous peoples, showing new relations who we are by telling them where and who we come from. This is an explicit practice for Métis in which we share our family names in our introductions. Our introductions carry stories in our family names through which we can relate to each other, to Métis lands, and to events. Meditation on life stories permeates vermette's *A Girl Called Echo*: that it is who and where we come from that makes us who we are. Echo's journey into the past is vital to her character's growth in the present and into

the future. It is through getting to know her ancestors that she becomes stronger in her sense of self, her school environment, and her home life.

The novel cycle highlights the importance of how Métis youth learn about our histories in school settings and clearly signals the important of a Wahkohtowin worldview in those learning experiences. More specifically, Echo's sense of understanding herself is tied to how she learns about her ancestors. Her knowledge of these significant Métis historical events may have been very different had she not experienced them through her ancestors. For example, the episodes featured during her time traveling experiences, the Red River Resistance and the Northwest Resistance, are commonly framed as rebellions in Canadian history. Though Echo's history teacher does use the term "resist" regarding the Métis' actions (2020, p. 23), in my experience as a young Métis person, Canadian public school education taught these events as rebellions. I wonder what my experience might have been if I had learned about this history through my relations instead of colonial institutions. The difference between a rebellion and a resistance is hyper-significant to public understandings of Canadian history relative to Métis communities and for Métis youth, especially in learning the stories of their ancestors. That the Métis "rebelled" suggests their presumed inclusion under the authority of the Canadian state in the first place. That was simply not the case, which is why framing these events as "resistances" is so important. It identifies Métis sovereignty and nationhood prior to Canada's westward expansion. Likewise, our sense of peoplehood and Métis identity is intricately connected to these events. Therefore, when we can learn about our ancestors' experiences through our relations, which is a living expression of Wahkohtowin, we are engaging with our nationhood through our Métis worldview. Echo's traveling through time to visit with her ancestors is a literal extension of learning through relation with ancestors throughout time and offers Echo a significant learning experience that is specific to who she is and supports her sense of self through her relations.

Learning through time traveling with her ancestors also creates opportunities for Echo to grow in her school environment. In the fourth installment, Echo's history teacher presents a lesson about the road allowance era that the Métis endured after Louis Riel's execution in 1885, during which Métis were frequently pushed off land to make way for Canadian settlements. A significant example featured in vermette's work is the Métis community of Ste. Madeleine, which was located southwest of Binscarth, Manitoba, and was displaced by the Government of Canada in 1937 as part of the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act, in which the land was taken from the Métis community and repurposed as pastures for cattle grazing (vermette, 2021, p. 46). Echo, who is learning about her Métis culture and ancestry directly from her relations, feels immense pain for her family history (2021, p. 22). Another Métis student in the class, with whom Echo is making friends, says that there is "pain, yeah, but also awesomeness, our cultures are amazing. We get that too" (2021, p. 22). This experience drives home the reality of Echo's experience of present-day events referring to the past trauma of her ancestors and creates very real distress in her, nodding to the ways in which Indigenous students are at risk in classrooms when learning about living Indigenous histories of which they and their families may have been part. This scene also brings into focus the bonds we share when we talk about our cultures, layering another opportunity for building relationships as we engage with our stories in community.

Echo's time traveling experiences are loosely tied to her history lessons at her Winnipeg high school. That means that when Echo returns from visiting with a rebuilding Métis community in Ste. Madeleine, only to learn in class the next day that Ste. Madeleine was burned down to forcibly remove Métis—whom the Canadian government considered squatters— from the land, Echo is closely emotionally tied to the people and place from visiting the day before

(2021, p. 31). During this lesson, Echo flashes back to the past to experiencing the violent attack on the community. For Echo, this was not just a history lesson. She was learning about the harm done to her family, her ancestors, and her community. The past informs our experience of the present. Jessie Loyer writes about this issue, about the potential violence experienced by Indigenous students when learning and researching Indigenous topics that may relate to their intergenerational trauma. Loyer's research argues for the need for a Wahkohtowin-centred approach to teaching these histories and topics as a way of mitigating harm (2018, pp. 150–152). Wahkohtowin in this case speaks to the relationships educators have with students and their accountability to those relations. It is vital that we learn through our relations, but this also demands additional emotional labour when our classrooms engage in the challenges of our pasts. Therefore, in both literature and in learning, Wahkohtowin centres our relationships in discussions, supporting our good engagement with our histories and acknowledging our ongoing relationships with periods of struggle in the past.

Another present-day relationship in Echo's time traveling experiences support is Echo's reconnection with her mother, who at the beginning of Echo's journey is staying in some kind of medical care facility (2017). Echo's mother returns home at the beginning of *Northwest Resistance*, (2020, pp. 4–5), which is how she is there to teach Echo about her ancestors (2020, pp. 43–44). Though this reconnection could be read as a subplot, it is vitally connected to Echo's time traveling experiences and growing relationships with her ancestors. It is only through her mother's coming home and sharing what she knows of their family that Echo realizes that those she is meeting in the past are actually her ancestors. This speaks to the experience of disjunction that some Indigenous youth may feel trying to connect with their heritage if they do not have living relations to support them. Our relations to families, aunties and uncles, Elders, and knowledge keepers are vital to our understanding of our ancestral relations. In my own experiences, I feel a kind of rematriation when I visit with my family about our Métis ancestry. There are many stories that once were better left unsaid; now, we must engage with our relatives to learn about our family ties to the past and to the present.

Echo Controls when She Visits Her Ancestors

The last installment in the novel cycle opens with Echo learning more about her ancestors through photographs and stories from her mother (2021, pp. 1-3). Holding onto her family tree, Echo wants to go back to visit Josephine; she suddenly finds herself in 1885 among a Métis group traveling to Regina to support Louis Riel as is about to face trial (2021, pp: 4–6). Josephine welcomes Echo back like an old friend (2021, p. 5). This is the first instance when Echo travels back in time because of her own intentions. She now *knows* she is returning to her ancestors and finds herself yearning for her relations. Echo journeys with Josephine through these painful moments. As readers may know from history, Louis Riel was found guilty of treason and hanged for his actions as a leader of the Métis and the Northwest Resistance. Then, when scrip, a system of land distribution meant to satisfy the land claims of Métis peoples after they were displaced from their traditional territories, was not honoured by the Canadian government, Métis once again had to rebuild. Though Echo must return home to her own time, she promises to return (2021, p. 18). This gives Echo a sense of control over her time traveling experiences (2021, p. 19). She is learning that she has access to her ancestors when she wants or needs to visit with them.

Later that evening, Echo looks at a photo of one of her ancestors and, closing her eyes and holding the photo to her heart, says, "I want to go there" (vermette, 2021, p. 25–26);

suddenly, she *is* there with Benjamin, who is now the old man in the photo. Benjamin catches Echo up on what has passed since she saw him last, including Josephine's marriage and the sorry state of Métis land claims (2021, pp. 27–28). Echo tells Benjamin that she is his great-great-great-great-granddaughter and that she knew his grandmother, Marie, whom Echo met during the Pemmican Wars (2021, p. 28). This conversation between Echo and Benjamin brings into focus how readers are witnessing a meeting of ancestors and descendants, each with their own relations to one another that are part of renewing their collective family story.

While Echo is discovering her ability to control traveling to her relations, she realizes she can choose to access her history and ancestors whenever she wants to go back. The last installment opens with Echo successfully attempting to return to her ancestors; she says, "I . . . I came back. I wanted to. And I did" (2021, pp. 4–5). The significance here is that Echo's relations are always there for her, and through her own intentions in her relationships, she has the power to draw herself to them. Loyer describes Wahkohtowin as a framework of responsibility and accountability to our kin (2018, p. 145). Through this worldview, readers see Echo connecting with her mother, who shares more relations in the form of a family tree filled with the names of those Echo has met in different periods in history. It is through these renewed relations that Echo is able to seek her ancestors and is accountable to them beyond temporal constraints. Through her journey to connect with her ancestors, she also finds that she grows in her relations to others in her own time period, including her family and friends at school. Additionally, the ability to call on her time traveling abilities at will comes only from a Wahkohtowin worldview, one that brings with it the knowledge of learning about her ancestors. Later, Echo experiences a crisis of doubt, questioning the meaning of her travels through time (vermette, 2021, pp. 28–29). It is her ancestor Benjamin who answers: "You are our relative. We are inside you, are we not? […] In your blood. It's something we call blood memory, bone memory. It is powerful medicine. All we have is in you" (2021, p. 29). Echo responds through her experience of hardship in her time travels; "All you've been through. All your sorrow." (2021, p. 29). Benjamin corrects her, "All our strength too" (2021, p. 29). This points to why Echo is seeking her ancestors: because they are related throughout time, the good and the bad and are stronger together. They are accountable to one another and bear responsibilities for their shared relations.

In Relation as Descendants

While the narrative follows Echo's perspective on events, it can be easy to see her as the present visiting the past: Echo as the contemporary visiting her ancestors. But in considering the text from another character's point of view, such as Benjamin's, readers can see that Echo is also a descendant coming to visit Benjamin's present from the future. Benjamin's perspective throughout this narrative is helpful for viewing all of the past, present, and future as related experiences. Though vermette crafts Echo as the protagonist, a close reading of Benjamin's relationship with Echo from his perspective contributes to the relational nature of this reading and the centrality of Wahkohtowin in Métis Futurism narratives of the past. Echo's present is Benjamin's future, so Benjamin knows his descendant throughout his life. He meets her when he is a young man during the Red River Resistance (vermette, 2018). By the third novel, he comes across his daughter making friends with Echo (2020, p.14), who has not aged even though Benjamin is now an adult with a teenage daughter. Later still, he is an old man who re-encounters Echo when he is struggling to find a place to live during the road allowance era (2021, pp. 28–35). Benjamin meets his descendant at three different stages of his life, watches his daughter make friends with her, and is ultimately saved by her when Echo encourages

Benjamin to leave Ste. Madeleine after the RCMP come to destroy it in 1939. Knowing his descendant has a profound impact on Benjamin's life. The centrality of Wahkohtowin serves this narrative to help us hear both past and future relations and to imagine and understand ourselves in those roles.

It was no accident that vermette named her protagonist Echo, for she is an echo of her ancestors. She is part of them, and it is through learning about her ancestors that she grows and strengthens as a person in the present. This combination of past as present and present as future is further evident in Echo's mother, who provides her with family stories for the last half of the collection. These informal lessons with her mother continue until the end of the *Road Allowance Era*, when she is reassuring Echo about the state of Métis rights and culture (2021, pp. 41–42). Echo's mother says that things are getting "better with each generation," to which Echo responds that she does not know how to make them better (vermette, 2021, p. 42). This line resonates deeply among we Métis youth searching for ways forward that honour our past. There are many Métis who have experienced disconnection from their heritage due to ongoing colonialism that made it safer for our ancestors to hide those parts of ourselves. Reconnection is an uphill battle and sometimes requires fighting for what we do not yet know about ourselves and our families. Reconnecting to our histories and communities is an act of Métis resurgence, and through a Wahkohtowin worldview reading of our ancestors, we carry the teachings from our ancestors with us for our future descendants.

When looking to the future, we all want to make things better, and youth especially can feel a tremendous weight to be the bringers of that future. Echo's mother reminds her at this moment that she is not alone in her efforts. When Echo expresses defeat over the task of Métis resurgence, her mother replies, "You'll figure it out. You have the strength of all your ancestors behind you. You can do anything" (2021, p. 42). At this point in the text, Echo knows her ancestors. She knows what they have survived and how they have fought for her. She has their stories and spirits with her. Their future is her present, and they are supporting her dreaming into the future for all their descendants yet to come. At the end of Echo's last visit to the past, her ancestor Josephine tells her to "Go home and be the future" (2021, p. 39).

The last time Echo travels back in time, she sees that her ancestors have returned to Winnipeg in 1940 to look for land and jobs, only to find discrimination and rejection (vermette, 2021, pp. 36–37). Echo reconnects with Josephine, who is now married. In the face of Echo's despair at learning how history has treated her people, Josephine says, "We are the free people, mon amie, we built this place and we will always be here. No matter what they have done to us, we're still here. We know we will survive" (2021, p. 38). In this panel of the novel, readers shift to hear Josephine's perspective more than Echo's for a moment: as being visited by her descendant. In returning to the past, Echo has given Josephine hope. This is the importance of Wahkohtowin in our stories about our people. We are connected through the past and the future. Wahkohtowin helps us honor our ancestors in the past, fills us with strength to be their future, and grounds us as a rooted connection to the past for our descendants to come.

Conclusion

A Girl Called Echo exemplifies the importance of Wahkohtowin in Métis stories and practices. I see this in the ways Echo builds relationships with her ancestors that help inform her present. I also see Wahkohtowin in how the story offers a reminder that we as descendants are accountable to our ancestors because we are their future; their stories, struggles, and hopes live on in us, just as we are accountable to our future relations, who will continue who we are as a

People and a Nation in our future. Engaging with our histories through our relations is Wahkohtowin in action and a source of Métis resurgence; it renews our everyday connections to and enactment of our Indigenous identities through our present and future relations. The narrative seeks to explore a meeting between ancestors and descendants that expresses a sense of futurity that moves through past, present, and future relations. Echo's journeys to the past and her meetings with her ancestors support her in building connections at school and at home, with a powerfully grounded sense of herself, who she is, and where she comes from. Her own growing understanding that she can access her ancestors is an empowering development in her story of connection with her heritage. And when Echo learns that she is the future to her ancestors' present, she begins to understand how her actions in her present are also the future her ancestors fought for and will be a strengthening experience to which her descendants will one day return. Echo's time traveling experiences are Wahkohtowin in practice and offer guidance to all Métis readers about reading our relations through history and into the future.

Biography

Stephanie Erickson is Red River Métis from Treaty 1 territory, currently working on her PhD at the University of Victoria on Lekwungen territory. She has ancestral ties to the Meadow Lake area as well as Southern Manitoba. Her family names are Harriott, Swain, Breland, Grant, and Dauphinais. She has a BA in Creative Writing from UBC and an MA in Gender and Social Justice from McMaster University. Her current research focuses on Indigenous Futurism narratives and everyday actions of reconciliation on Northern Turtle Island. Stephanie is currently working on course development for teaching Indigenous Literatures in post-secondary intuitions. She is a Michif language learner and prioritizes renewing her Métis culture and kindship ties at every opportunity.

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