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Narrative Ethics and the Politics of Storytelling in Contemporary Indigenous Literature

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ABSTRACT

In present-day Indigenous literature, the process of storytelling is becoming more and more prominent as a technique of resistance, cultural reclamation, and ethical participation. This research is concerned with the overlap between narrative ethics and the politics of storytelling in this literary sector, which is a severe void in the knowledge of how Indigenous stories both form and challenge mainstream cultural and ethical systems. The problem of the research is the othering of Indigenous epistemologies and the necessity to re-evaluate ethical paradigms in respect to the Indigenous narrative forms. The main aim of the research is to examine how Indigenous writers use the storytelling not just as a literary tool but as an ethical and political gesture that decolonizes the discourse, reaffirms the cultural identity, and mediates the communal memory. The hypothesis of the study is that narrative forms in Indigenous literature can have two functions: the expression of ethical stances based on relational ontologies and the claim of political sovereignty based on the control of the narratives. Using a qualitative approach, which relies on literary analysis, the research focuses on a number of modern Indigenous works belonging to various cultural environments. It uses the concept of narrative theory, postcolonial criticism, and Indigenous methodology to unravel the role of storytelling in these works as an ethical and political tool. The results will probable show that Indigenous stories challenge the Eurocentric

	<p>and linear principles of storytelling, placing ethical consideration in the middle of community history, lived trauma, and repairing justice. The use of storytelling has been presented not as representation but as an agent of ethical discourse and agent of sociopolitical change. The research arrives at the conclusion that the ideas of narrative ethics in Indigenous literature cannot be discussed outside the politics of voice, land, and memory. By forcing readers to rethink the matter of ethical responsibility in the light of Indigenous thinking, these stories make crucial interventions in literary theory, cultural studies and de-colonial practice.</p>
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Introduction

Over the past few decades, Indigenous literature has become a vital area of reconceptualizing hegemonic epistemologies, cultural theories, and paradigms of ethical reading in the global literature. At the center of this arrival is the elevation of storytelling as not only a cultural practice, but an effective form of resistance, reclamation and ethical interaction (Justice, 2018; King, 2023). With the growing tendency among scholars to question the role of literature in the work of colonialism and cultural survivance, Indigenous stories demand a reevaluation of the roles that storytelling plays in forming memory, identity, and political determination. The present study locates itself within this rich and growing field of inquiry, asking how contemporary Indigenous writers are enlisting the storytelling as a literary and ethical-political activity. Through analyses of narrative ethics and politics of storytelling in Indigenous texts, the research addresses a critical gap in the current literature, which consists of absence of accounts that fully incorporate Indigenous epistemologies into ethical literary analysis and sociopolitical criticism.

The academic study of Indigenous narrative has tended to either concentrate on its role as a form of cultural continuity or its formal features, including its oral performance, mythic organization, and cyclical time (Vizenor, 2021; Archibald, 2008). As Indigenous narratives are not merely preservational or representational, as increasingly analysed, these analyses form their basis. On the contrary, they are deeply political actions that challenge colonial speech, declare independence and define ethical relations based on relational worlds (Simpson, 2017; Rifkin, 2020). The process of storytelling, in turn, can be viewed as the process of decolonization not just because it helps to renew the cultural memory but because it resists Eurocentric literary standards and moral categories. Following the argument advanced by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017), the Indigenous stories are sites of theorizing, which produce Indigenous knowledge and systems of governance in their turn. Thus, analyzing storytelling through the lens of narrative ethics opens new interpretive pathways that align literary form with lived sociopolitical struggle. Despite the increasing attention to Indigenous literature within decolonial and postcolonial studies, the ethical dimensions of storytelling remain under-theorized. Much of literary ethics continues to be shaped by Western philosophical traditions, particularly Levinasian alterity Nussbaum's moral sentiments, or Booth's ethical criticism (Zamir, 2020). While these approaches offer important insights, they often universalize ethics in ways that obscure Indigenous-specific ontologies and cosmologies. The imposition of Eurocentric ethical paradigms risks marginalizing Indigenous ways of knowing that emphasize reciprocity, responsibility, and collective memory (Watts, 2013; Todd, 2021). Based on this it can be argued

in this study that reevaluating the concept of narrative ethics is needed through the lens of Indigenous narrative which prioritizes the concept of relationality, historical trauma, and community healing. The research problem, then, consists in the lack of an adequate engagement with how Indigenous storytelling does not only tell but enacts ethical critique and political intervention. Although literature books like *The Truth About Stories* by Thomas King (2023) and *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* by Daniel Heath Justice (2018) have highlighted the position of storytelling in Indigenous world-building, little literature has been done to incorporate this understanding into longer studies of narrative ethics. The significance of storytelling in the negotiations of cultural identity, claim to sovereignty, and struggle against epistemic violence should be investigated further using modern texts that venture into various Indigenous realities and situations. This disparity is especially acute in light of the persistent problem of settler colonialism cultural appropriation and neoliberal multiculturalism that still frames the Indigenous literature reception and creation (Coulthard, 2014; Ahenakew, 2016). This paper answers these gaps by examining the ways through which storytelling in modern Indigenous literature serves both as an ethical discourse and as a political act. It relies on a qualitative approach based on literary analysis to explore a selected list of Indigenous texts that represent the diversity of cultural and geopolitical contexts. An interdisciplinary approach that builds on narrative theory, postcolonial criticism, and Indigenous research methods will have the research uncover how these narratives help establish alternative paradigms of ethics based on Indigenous relational epistemologies. This would involve making Indigenous ethics the primary focus, without treating them as additions to the Western theory, but as sovereign knowledge systems that require equal critique. Further, the study interferes with the wider arguments on literary representation, ethical criticism, and decolonial praxis. In doing so it aligns with scholars who call for a paradigm shift in literary studies one that not only includes Indigenous voices but reconfigures critical frameworks to be accountable to them (Goeman, 2023; Grande, 2022). The ethical implications of storytelling are not limited to the stories told but extend to the responsibilities of readers, critics, and institutions. Indigenous narratives challenge the field to reconsider the politics of voice, land, and memory in both content and form. According to Dylan Robinson (2020), listening otherwise is a moral requirement when working with Indigenous art and literature, resistant to extractive modes of reading and based on recognition of Indigenous sovereignty in the aesthetic reception. Therefore, the central research aim of this study is to analyze how contemporary Indigenous authors utilize storytelling not merely as a literary technique but as a dual-pronged ethical and political practice. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions: In what ways do Indigenous narratives articulate ethical positions grounded in relational worldviews? How do they disrupt colonial narrative structures and assert political sovereignty through narrative control? And how does storytelling function as a site of ethical reflection cultural negotiation and restorative justice in contemporary Indigenous literature? By addressing these questions, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the ethics of storytelling in Indigenous contexts and offers vital insights into how literature can function as a vehicle for social transformation. It invites scholars, readers, and educators to engage more critically and ethically with Indigenous texts, not as artifacts of cultural difference but as dynamic agents of epistemological and ethical innovation. In so doing, the research aligns itself with a decolonial vision of literary scholarship that foregrounds Indigenous agency affirms cultural specificity and resists the universalizing tendencies of dominant critical paradigms.

Research Objectives

This study investigates how storytelling in contemporary Indigenous literature operates as both an ethical discourse and a political practice. Grounded in Indigenous epistemologies and narrative ethics, the research challenges Eurocentric literary paradigms and centers Indigenous worldviews that emphasize relationality, memory and sovereignty.

The study is guided by the following two objectives:

1. To examine how Indigenous storytelling functions as an ethical practice grounded in relational worldviews, exploring how narrative forms convey communal memory, moral responsibility, and restorative justice within Indigenous literature.
2. To analyze how contemporary Indigenous authors utilize storytelling as a political act of resistance and cultural reclamation, focusing on how narrative strategies disrupt colonial frameworks, assert narrative sovereignty, and articulate Indigenous identity and agency.

Research Questions

The present study seeks to explore how Indigenous storytelling operates at the intersection of ethics and politics in contemporary literature. While much scholarship has addressed the cultural significance of Indigenous narratives fewer studies have examined the ways in which these stories function as deliberate interventions into dominant moral frameworks and colonial discourse. To address this gap, the study formulates two guiding research questions that reflect its dual focus on ethical inquiry and political resistance within Indigenous literary traditions.

1. How do contemporary Indigenous authors employ storytelling as an ethical practice grounded in relational worldviews, communal memory, and Indigenous epistemologies?

This question aims to uncover how Indigenous narratives articulate moral responsibility not through universalist principles, but through culturally specific understandings of kinship, reciprocity and memory. It considers how storytelling is used to reflect and perform ethical relations within Indigenous communities.

2. In what ways does storytelling in Indigenous literature function as a political tool to resist colonial narratives, assert cultural sovereignty and reclaim Indigenous identity?

This question focuses on the political potency of storytelling examining how narrative control becomes an act of resistance, and how literary texts assert Indigenous agency in the face of historical and ongoing colonization.

Through these questions, the study aims to add to more complex appreciation of Indigenous narration as an area of ethical consideration and a tool of political intervention. It makes some arguments about the necessity of coming to terms with Indigenous literature, on Indigenous terms, with recognition of the sovereignty of Indigenous epistemologies and the decolonizing potential of story in cultural resurgence and decolonial action.

Literature Review

1. Introduction to Narrative Ethics and Indigenous Storytelling

In recent years narrative ethics, a theoretical approach that explores moral aspects in narratives and the practice of storytelling, has gained currency due to its capacity to overcome the opposition between ethics and literary form. Narrative ethics is based on the contributions of such theorists as Martha Nussbaum (1990), Paul Ricoeur (1992), and Arthur Frank (2010), among others, who view storytelling as a means not only of representation, but of moral inquiry, relational understanding and political contestation. Within Indigenous literature, in particular, narrative ethics is an emerging powerful way of understanding the role of stories as a place and tool of ethical resistance, cultural survival and de-colonial praxis.

Indigenous narrative practice has a very specific epistemological and ontological framework which is focused on relationality, land, memory and oral tradition. Indigenous stories, as Linda

Tuhiwai Smith (2012) makes an argument, are not merely communication tools as they carry a system of knowledge that has been deliberately sidelined by colonial institutions. The intersections between narrative ethics and Indigenous storytelling therefore require a methodological turn that departs with Eurocentric frames of morality and instead follows Indigenous ontologies that situate ethics as part of a relationship to people, place, and the past.

The used literature review is focused on synthesizing the key theoretical, conceptual and empirical contributions to the field of study of narrative ethics and Indigenous storytelling in modern literature. It is a critical evaluation of the major debates -it identifies gaps in the literature and maps the changing boundaries of this dynamic interdisciplinary field.

2. Decolonial Thought and Indigenous Epistemologies

The discussion of Indigenous epistemologies in the literature is impossible to rethink outside of the greater de-colonial trends in literary research. The pioneer theorists, including Walter D. Mignolo (2011), Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017), and Eve Tuck & K. Wayne Yang (2012), have pointed to the fact that decolonization cannot be approached as a metaphor, but instead requires a deep re-grounding of Indigenous knowledge, land-based ontologies, and practices of storytelling. According to these scholars, narrative is a form of resistance, the resistance that asserted Indigenous sovereignty and disoriented the coloniality of knowledge.

The contemporary Indigenous literature is therefore the place where the colonial and settler narratives are not only challenged, but undermined by the ethical acts of remembering, reclaiming and refusing. Another example is Simpson (2017), who illustrates how Nishnaabeg narratives provide radical alternatives to Western epistemology and places Alt-Western epistemologies of resurgence practices at the forefront, which are ethical and relational. Likewise the articles of Glen Coulthard (2014) in *Red Skin, White Masks* explore the expressions of Indigenous resistance that are expressed or produced culturally and in many cases against the state narratives of reconciliation.

With such contributions in mind, the ethical aspect of Indigenous storytelling cannot be severed of political sovereignty or cultural reclamation. Rather it should be conceived of as one component of a larger battles against epistemic violence and settler colonial logics that strive to delegitimize Indigenous modes of knowing and being. There is a growing scholarly demand to ensure that ethical obligation to be with Indigenous narratives is not as cultural artifacts, but as breathing, living, performing theory, memory and futurity (Million, 2013).

3. Narrative Structures, Ethics, and Communal Memory

Indigenous literature can feature narrative forms that do not correspond to the Western literary canon, choosing instead to follow a cyclical, non-linear, multi-vocal narrative that reflect the oral storytelling tradition. The implications of this to narrative ethics are huge especially in the manner in which communal memory and moral responsibility are situated within such forms. Theorists like Thomas King (2003), Craig Womack (1999) and Cheryl Suzack (2010) have considered how Indigenous writers use story to not only reflect but to perform the sorts of communal ethics based on reciprocity kinship and historical responsibility.

These narratives do not exist as stand alone tales but rather exist within a web of intergenerational memory and community knowledge. According to King, *The Truth About Stories* (2003), stories are all we are, ethically speaking, and so, ethical being is formed or shaped through the telling of stories. This understanding contradicts Western individualism because it emphasizes the collectivist picture of moral accountability in Indigenous imaginations. Ethics of storytelling in this sense is relational and always place-based, temporal and tied to particular people.

Moreover, recent Indigenous writers, such as Eden Robinson, Richard Wagamese, and Louise Erdrich, build the plotlines focusing on the resilience of trauma and relational ethics. However, these authors go beyond presenting ethical dilemmas; they actually put storytelling as a process of repairing the damages a generation or a fractured identity. The literature emphasizes repeatedly that narrative ethics in Indigenous writing is not theoretical but historical and embodied practice that involves the remembrance of the communities.

4. Storytelling as Political Resistance and Cultural Reclamation

The comprehension of storytelling as the means of political opposition and cultural repossession is one of the major themes in the current literature, too. Such authors as Audra Simpson (2014), Jodi Byrd (2011) and Joanne Barker (2017) discuss the potential of Indigenous storytelling to intervene in the prevailing colonial narratives aimed to erase or assimilate Indigenous peoples and their identities. Sovereignty is claimed in these texts through the power of the narrative control that recontextualizes Indigenous people not as the subjects of the past but as producers of memory and futurity. Indigenous literature is thus deeply political not only in its themes but in its form and intent. Through storytelling, Indigenous authors reassert control over representation, history, and identity. Byrd (2011) describes this as a "transit of empire" where Indigenous narratives chart alternative routes of understanding outside colonial temporality and spatiality. Storytelling becomes an act of refusal a refusal to be contained within colonial archives or defined by settler legal-political frameworks. Moreover, this literature emphasizes the role of storytelling in cultural continuity. The transmission of language, custom, and historical consciousness through stories allows for the re-activation of traditional knowledge in contemporary settings. In doing so Indigenous narratives often blend old and new, oral and written, creating hybrid forms that resist easy categorization while upholding cultural integrity. This hybridization itself is an ethical-political act as it challenges rigid notions of authenticity imposed by external evaluative frameworks (Vizenor, 2008).

5. Ethical Paradigms and Critique of Eurocentric Norms

A significant strand of the literature critiques the Eurocentric assumptions embedded within dominant ethical paradigms. The western narrative theory has a tendency to favor the concepts of individual autonomy, linear progression, moral resolution, which are not resonant with the Indigenous notions of interdependence, circular temporality, and relational accountability (Justice, 2018). In that vein, researchers promote the decolonization of narrative ethics in which Indigenous paradigms are at the center instead of Indigenous narratives being forced into the Western paradigm. This criticism proves especially relevant when it comes to the trauma and justice discourse. Whereas trauma may be understood in Western literature as an individual and psychological breach, Indigenous narrative is placing trauma in a wider collective and historical context and is associated with colonial violence land dispossession, and cultural genocide. To that end, ethical storytelling in Indigenous texts, therefore, means witnessing to these histories, and providing restorative justice through narrative resurgence (Anderson, 2011). Critics like Michelle Balaev (2014) have demanded a pluralistic conception of trauma narratives and how they have identified that Indigenous forms of healing and testimony do not adhere to dominant psychoanalytic or therapeutic paradigms. Indigenous ethics in this case, involves a survival action called survivance by Gerald Vizenor (1994), which means survival and resistance in the act of storytelling. The literature continually demonstrates that the Eurocentric narrative norms are inadequate in the complexity resilience and ethical aspects of Indigenous storytelling practices.

6. Methodological Innovations and Indigenous Literary Criticism

Recent works on Indigenous literary criticism have quiescently focused on methodological innovation, beginning with Indigenous knowledge systems. Instead of using external theoretical frameworks, researchers within the Indigenous studies propose research methods and interpretive frameworks that are produced within the Indigenous communities. That has resulted in the emergence of Indigenous literary sovereignty as a methodological position and a political necessity (Womack, 2008; Justice, 2018). According to the principles of indigenous research methodologies developed by scholars such as Shawn Wilson (2008) and Margaret Kovach (2009), there is a relational accountability, storytelling as inquiry and ethical participation with community protocols. These methods criticize the extractivist nature of the traditional literary analysis and invite a more ethical and mutual relationship between the researcher and the Indigenous stories they use. Moreover, there has been a growing interest in land-based criticism, which interprets Indigenous texts through their relationship to place, ecology, and territory. This perspective aligns with the ethical dimensions of Indigenous storytelling that situate narratives within specific geographies and cosmologies. Literature becomes a form of land-based pedagogy teaching ethics through the stories of rivers, animals and ancestors (Goeman, 2013). These methodological shifts mark a significant departure from universalizing literary theories and signal a commitment to ethical and epistemological pluralism.

7. Gaps, Trends, and Future Directions

Despite the growing body of literature, several gaps remain in the study of narrative ethics in Indigenous literature. One notable absence is the lack of intersectional analysis that considers how gender, sexuality, disability and queerness interact with Indigenous ethics of storytelling. While some scholars have begun addressing these intersections (Driskill, 2010; Barker, 2017), much of the field remains centered on a homogenized Indigenous subject overlooking the diverse lived experiences and identities within Indigenous communities. There is also a need for more engagement with global Indigenous literatures outside of North America. While much of the scholarship focuses on Native American, First Nations, and Métis texts, Indigenous authors from Oceania, Latin America, and Africa also contribute to the conversation on narrative ethics and decolonial storytelling. Comparative work across regions could enrich the theoretical landscape and offer trans-Indigenous perspectives on ethics, memory, and sovereignty (Smith, Maxwell, & Kukutai, 2021). Finally, as digital storytelling platforms gain prominence, scholars must consider how narrative ethics translates into digital spaces. Indigenous digital storytelling raises new ethical questions about access ownership and representation particularly in relation to community control and cultural protocols (TallBear, 2022). With a changing field, researchers have to be mindful of these new forms as well as staying true to the ethical obligations that Indigenous storytelling cultures follow.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

The research design of this study is qualitative (and more precisely interpretive literary analysis). This investigation is best suited to a qualitative method because the latter provides an opportunity to conduct a thorough study of narrative forms, ethical models, and sociopolitical roles that Indigenous storytelling incorporates. Since quantitative approaches use numerical data, the qualitative paradigm helps to get a contextual and subtle grasp of the symbolic cultural, and ethical meanings expressed in Indigenous literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The design is especially applicable in studies based on decolonial and Indigenous research methodologies that do not embrace positivist research but instead utilize relational, dialogic, and

meaning-based approaches to research (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). By this qualitative lens the study will seek to interpret not just the content of stories but their formal, ethical and political aspects, and thus Indigenous voices and epistemologies are foregrounded throughout. It is focused on the ways storytelling can be an ethical-political action and how literary texts may be the places of resistance, remembering, and recovery.

2. Population and Sampling Method

The study is based on a purposive selection of modern Indigenous literary works by writers of various cultural and geopolitical backgrounds, such as but not confined to First Nations, Native American, and M In this context, the study is based on a purposive selection of current Indigenous literary works by writers of various cultural and geopolitical backgrounds, including but not restricted to First Nations, Native American and M in North America. The criterion of selection consisted of how each text addressing the themes of storytelling, ethics, cultural identity, and de-colonial resistance. The academic databases, lists of literary awards (e.g., Indigenous Voices Awards, American Indian Youth Literature Award) and bibliographies of important scholarly works in the field were used to identify texts (Justice, 2018; Simpson, 2017). Six major texts were chosen in all, representing the various types of narrative such as novels, short stories and texts that straddle the oral tradition. These are books by the likes of Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Eden Robinson, Richard Wagamese, and Louise Erdrich. Such a sampling method aligns with the qualitative literary research in which the goal is not generalizability but rather depth and analytical richness of understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). The chosen readings represent a wide range of Indigenous narrative practices and ethical issues that allow the research to formulate bases of understanding the narrative ethics and political actions.

3. Data Collection Methods

Given the literary focus of the research, textual analysis serves as the primary method of data collection. Each selected text was read iteratively and systematically with particular attention to the narrative structures, thematic content, character development, intertextuality, and ethical engagements. In alignment with Indigenous research principles, the study also incorporates document analysis of secondary sources such as author interviews speeches, and critical essays where available. These documents offer insight into the author's intent cultural positioning and epistemological grounding, thus deepening the ethical interpretation of their narratives. Analytical memos were maintained throughout the reading and analysis process to track emerging patterns, ethical motifs, and theoretical intersections. Where possible, Indigenous scholarly commentaries and community-based interpretations of the selected texts were consulted, ensuring epistemic plurality and minimizing the imposition of external interpretive frameworks (Smith, 2012; TallBear, 2022).

4. Data Analysis Procedures

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis a method that identifies, analyzes, and interprets patterns of meaning across a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach was guided by both deductive codes derived from narrative ethics theory and Indigenous epistemologies (e.g., relationality, sovereignty, memory, justice) and inductive codes that emerged organically from the texts during close reading.

Themes were organized into analytic categories corresponding to the study's core research questions:

- How narrative structures articulate ethical positions;
- How stories resist and disrupt colonial discourse;

- How storytelling performs sociopolitical and communal functions.
In addition to thematic coding, the study utilized principles of Indigenous literary criticism (Justice, 2018; Womack, 2008), which emphasizes cultural specificity, narrative sovereignty, and accountability to Indigenous worldviews. Rather than applying universalist models of ethics or storytelling, this approach centers the unique ethical and ontological frameworks embedded in each text, allowing for a contextual and reciprocal analysis.

5. Ethical Considerations

Given the study's engagement with Indigenous texts, methodologies, and knowledge systems, ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. Although the study does not involve human participants, it follows culturally responsive and de-colonial research ethics that prioritize respect, relational accountability, and non-extractive scholarship (Wilson, 2008; Smith, 2012). The respectful treatment of authorship and community context was inspired by bringing to the fore the positionalities and the declared intentions of Indigenous authors. In cases where they were available, the study used author statements, interviews or community based interpretations so that the textual meanings were not dissociated with their cultural contexts. Indigenous scholarly humility and epistemic justice were practiced through the references and considerations of Indigenous voices and scholars throughout all the research processes. The study purposefully avoids tokenizing Indigenous literature as the case studies but rather approaches each story as a sovereign and ethical addition to the universal literary theory. The research will observe common ethical research guidelines like proper citation of literature, openness in research procedures, and safeguarding of cultural information through not making random interpretations of sacred or restricted materials. There was no use of any proprietary or community specific oral knowledge in the absence of publicly available documentation or without suitable permissions. Such an approach to research represents a deliberate consideration of the compatibility of qualitative literary analysis and Indigenous theoretics of knowledge. Through the application of purposive sampling, thematic analysis, and culturally-based ethics the study provides an interpretive method which pays respect to the integrity of Indigenous story telling and adds to the academic discourse on the subject of narrative ethics cultural memory and de-colonial resistance. Methodology Here, the approach emphasizes that Indigenous literature is a discipline, but also an ethic of listening, a critically responsible responsiveness, and an accountability of relationships.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is based on the close readings of 6 purposively chosen Indigenous literary texts which are read through the dual prism of narrative ethics and political storytelling. The emergent themes in this section are arranged by way of comparative matrices and thematic mapping concentrating on how the texts in this collection affirm ethical paradigms based on relational worldviews and how they practice political resistance via storytelling performances. The analysis answers the research objectives and questions directly.

Table 1. Ethical Themes Across Selected Indigenous Texts

Text	Relational Worldviews	Communal Memory	Trauma & Healing	Moral Responsibility
<i>Monkey Beach</i> (Robinson)	Kinship with non-human life	Intergenerational trauma	Death of family members	Responsibility to ancestors
<i>Indian Horse</i> (Wagamese)	Relationality in sport and spirit	Residential school	Alcoholism and memory	Reconciliation through truth

		experiences		
<i>The Round House</i> (Erdrich)	Clan-based justice	Community silence & resistance	Sexual violence & silence	Ethical listening, seeking justice
<i>This Accident of Being Lost</i> (Simpson)	Interpersonal reciprocity	Fragmented personal histories	Colonial fatigue	Decolonial refusal as ethical stance
<i>Ceremony</i> (Silko)	Land-based healing	WWII & cultural dislocation	PTSD & storytelling	Memory as moral restoration
<i>Night Watchman</i> (Erdrich)	Ethical resistance to termination policies	Activist family histories	Labor exploitation	Storytelling as vigilance

Ethical values in all of the six texts are incorporated within the systems of relations where the needs of kinship, land, and memory of the group take precedence over individualist morality. Trauma is not attended to as individual pain but a collective affliction that is healed with narrative, hence the connection between ethics and memory and repair.

Table 2. Narrative Structures and Disruption of Eurocentric Forms

Text	Narrative Form	Non-Linear Temporalities	Oral/Aural Integration	Disruption of Colonial Logic
<i>Ceremony</i>	Circular, mythic structure	Yes	Laguna Pueblo storytelling	Blurs myth/history binaries
<i>This Accident of Being Lost</i>	Fragmented, poetic vignettes	Yes	First-person, conversational	Resists interpretive closure
<i>The Round House</i>	Legal thriller frame	Minimal	Interspersed with Indigenous law	Reframes justice from within
<i>Monkey Beach</i>	Mystery/memoir hybrid	Yes	Embedded Haisla knowledge	Intertwines myth and realism
<i>Indian Horse</i>	Linear narrative with memory breaks	Some	Oral storytelling as rehabilitation	Challenges sports and nation myths
<i>Night Watchman</i>	Historical fiction	Some	Speech rhythms of activism	Politicizes archival records

The decolonizing strategy of indigenous texts is to use non-linear or cyclical narratives and hybrid narrative forms that resist colonial principles of progress closure and objectivity. These forms bring to the fore Indigenous epistemologies in which memory, land and spirit are in conversation with one another across time.

Table 3. Storytelling as Political Resistance and Reclamation

Text	Colonial Structure Challenged	Form of Resistance	Assertion of Sovereignty
<i>Indian Horse</i>	Residential school system	Naming and remembering	Reclaiming personal narrative
<i>The Round House</i>	Legal erasure of Indigenous women	Legal and cultural narration	Indigenous-centered justice
<i>Night Watchman</i>	U.S. Termination Bill	Protest and labor organizing	Activist storytelling
<i>Monkey Beach</i>	Environmental degradation	Spiritual renewal	Connection to land spirits
<i>Ceremony</i>	War trauma + settler displacement	Ceremony and mythic healing	Story as ritualized resurgence
<i>This Accident of Being Lost</i>	Commodification of Indigeneity	Satirical subversion	Refusal of Western literary expectations

The texts respectively oppose a different colonial institution of either a legal, educational, or economic nature and employ the narrative as a statement of Native sovereignty. The resistance is structural and symbolic and re-contextualizes Indigenous voices as independent actors in the narration of their lived and inherited experience.

Table 4. Modes of Ethical Relationality and Epistemology

Mode	Description	Textual Example	Ethical Impact
Land Relationality	Land as sentient, ancestral	<i>Ceremony</i>	Ethics grounded in land-care
Kinship Ethics	Reciprocal obligations to family/community	<i>Monkey Beach</i>	Accountability through memory
Refusal & Silence	Withholding narrative as resistance	<i>This Accident of Being Lost</i>	Ethical resistance to extraction
Reparative Justice	Story as witnessing & healing	<i>Indian Horse</i>	Reclaiming truth, restoring dignity
Legal Counter-Narrative	Rewriting law from within	<i>The Round House</i>	Asserting narrative justice

Ethical conducts are not universal but are situated in Indigenous knowledge systems. Ethics is performed as the love of land, safeguarding of the family memory rejection of the colonial modes of reading and cultural justice.

Table 5. Thematic Clustering of Ethical-Political Dimensions

Theme	Sub-Themes	Representative Texts
Restorative Storytelling	Healing, truth-telling, memory repair	<i>Indian Horse, Ceremony</i>
Narrative Sovereignty	Reclaiming voice, rejecting settler gaze	<i>This Accident of Being Lost, Monkey Beach</i>

Collective Trauma	Intergenerational memory, violence	<i>The Round House, Night Watchman</i>
Indigenous Futurity	Resistance as hope, storytelling for survival	<i>Night Watchman, This Accident...</i>
Land-based Ethics	Sacred ecologies, spatial memory	<i>Ceremony, Monkey Beach</i>

The presence of common themes in texts shows that the narrative Indigenous literature is inherently restorative and future-centered. It takes care of past injustices not just to testify, but to mend and speculate on Indigenous futures by way of ethically robust narrative activities.

Summary and Interpretation

The thematic analysis of the six modern Indigenous literature texts proves that storytelling in Indigenous literature functions as the dynamic arena of ethical investigation and political action. Both texts braids narrative forms that enact Indigenous forms of knowing, focused on relationality, collective memory, and land-based forms of knowing. These narratives do not simply represent moral issues they enact ethics by form, content and cultural background. Cyclical narrative forms, non-linear temporality, and polyvocal narration are some of the ways with the help of which Indigenous authors break the dominant literary and moral paradigms and substitute them with the culturally definite ways of moral reasoning based on kinship, responsibility, and interdependence. One important discovery throughout the chosen texts is the primary position of the trauma and recovery. Individual suffering is placed in the wider context of community and historical perspective in the narratives in which storytelling can be seen as a healing process. An example is Indian Horse and Ceremony that present a compelling depiction of a storytelling that functions as memory repair, personal and community healing, and identity reconstruction following colonial violence. The stories are opposed to the privatization of trauma that pervades much Western literature, and in which healing is conceptualized as a relational and intergenerational process. The moral emphasis in this situation is not just to portray trauma but testimonial repair dignity and remember the ancient knowledge systems. The texts also perform political resistance by storytelling, which is the ability to affirm what may be referred to as narrative sovereignty. Through This Accident of Being Lost and The Round House, works that explicitly deny the settler gaze and Eurocentric conceptions of plot, coherence, and resolution are offered. Their opposition is thematic as well as formal characterized by fragmentation, silence, satire or rejection thus contesting extractive reading practices and Indigenous agency once again. Such narrative decisions are ethics of refusal: a strategic withholding that comments upon colonial demands of visibility and intelligibility. Storytelling serves also as cultural reclaiming and futurity tool. The Night Watchman is one of the texts highlighting the political power of story to combat erasure, defend sovereignty, and sow activism. These stories do not remain enveloped in the past but are highly futuristic and provide counter-histories and moral guides to survival and revival. They build what the scholars call the Indigenous futurity and envision the social worlds grounded in the traditional knowledge but adapted to the modern realities. Importantly, the ethical paradigms incorporated in these writings are not universalist but deeply rooted in Indigenous way of being and knowing. Moral responsibility grows out of relations to land, family, community and spirit rather than out of abstract ideals. The ethical work of the reader, then, is not to derive moral messages but to respond and relate respectfully to Indigenous forms of narrating, values and epistemologies.

To sum up, the data analysis confirms the main hypothesis of the research that storytelling in Indigenous literature is a bilateral practice of moral articulation and political claim. The stories discussed here are not just the representation of Indigenous realities they perform them. They make us reconsider not only the substance of literature but the forms and morals with which the literature is created perceived and educated. They are therefore crucial contributions to decolonial theory, literary ethics and cultural resistance.

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to learn how the concept of storytelling in modern Indigenous literature plays the role of an ethical discourse and a political action at the same time. The results of the close textual analysis of six different works by Indigenous authors confirm the hypothesis of the study: storytelling in the analyzed texts does not only represent but performs the relational ethics and establishes the narrative sovereignty as a response to the continuing colonial systems.

Interpreting the Findings in Relation to Literature

This analysis shows that Indigenous narrative always incorporates ethical principles that operate within the framework of relationality, land-based kinship knowledge and story memory. The findings corroborate and build on the efforts of such theorists as Leanne Simpson (2017) and Daniel Heath Justice (2018), who suggest that Indigenous narratives are not merely cultural manifestations but rather venues of theorizing and ethical governance. Unlike the prevailing Eurocentric paradigms which in most cases are lineal, autonomic and universal in their moral thinking Indigenous accounts challenge such prevailing norms with cyclical formation, silence and non-linearity in their temporal aspects. This is also in line with what Vizenor (1994) calls survivance where the stories functions as an act of presence, resistance and renewal. The political and ethical ambivalence of storytelling comes out most forcefully in the way that the texts address trauma and healing. Instead of trauma being portrayed as a personal disjuncture, the narratives place it in the intergenerational and community-wide scope, which confirms the statements by Million (2013) that Indigenous healing is community-based and somatic. Indian Horse and Ceremony, for instance, portray storytelling as a restorative act one that confronts colonial violence while simultaneously mending cultural and personal fractures. This confirms earlier scholarly claims that Indigenous narrative ethics are inseparable from community, memory and futurity (Archibald, 2008; Anderson, 2011). Moreover, the study reveals that narrative sovereignty control over the means and modes of storytelling is an act of political resistance. Works like *This Accident of Being Lost* resist both form and content expectations imposed by settler literary traditions. This echoes Jodi Byrd's (2011) "transit of empire" where Indigenous texts forge paths that diverge from colonial temporality and aesthetics. The deliberate refusal of closure, coherence or exposition becomes itself an ethical stance a refusal to be decoded or contained by Western frameworks.

Significance in the Context of Research Objectives

The findings respond directly to the study's research objectives by illustrating how storytelling in Indigenous literature operates within and articulates relational worldviews. Authors integrate narrative elements oral traditions, land epistemologies spiritual motifs to affirm ethical frameworks that resist abstraction and center accountability to community and place. This confirms the first research aim as it demonstrates that the ethical storytelling is performed in the framework of the memory work, mutual debts, and reparative justice. At the same time, the second aim to examine storytelling as the political act finds its solid confirmation in the textual evidence. Storytelling is a way of resisting the colonial erasure and re-inscribes the Indigenous presence, law, and sovereignty into the literary landscape. The Night Watchman and The Round

House are texts that show how the process of storytelling can turn into a kind of political watchdog that guards shared pasts and repossesses justice by means of Indigenous-based narrative logics.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

In Theoretical, the paper is part of the decolonization of literary ethics, as it questions the hegemony of Western theories of this field like Levinasian alterity or Nussbaumian moral sentiment. It helps to move to the Indigenous narrative ethics that relies on rationality, memory and land. This requires a more context-specific pluralistic approach to literary theory a theory that is sensitive to the diversity of knowledge and rejects the universalization of morals. In practical terms these results have implications regarding literary pedagogy critical reception and publishing practices. An encounter with Indigenous texts requires not only inclusion but a sense of ethical responsibility, which, as stated by Dylan Robinson (2020), is listening otherwise. The teachers, academics, and readers have to question the frameworks of their interpretation, deferring to Indigenous sovereignty as a production of meaning, and avoiding extractive readings that steal rather than relate. Furthermore, the study's emphasis on narrative sovereignty has resonance in policy and cultural production spheres, particularly in debates over intellectual property data sovereignty and representation. It reinforces the need for ethical protocols that respect Indigenous knowledge systems not just in literature but in archives, education, and media.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The analysis focuses primarily on North American Indigenous texts, which narrows the scope of its comparative and global relevance. The reliance on textual analysis also means that interpretations are mediated through the researcher's positionality despite efforts to remain accountable to Indigenous methodologies and scholars.

Additionally, while the study attends to gender and intergenerational trauma, it does not fully engage with the intersectionality of queerness disability or global Indigeneity critical dimensions that deserve greater attention in future work.

Future Research Directions

Building on this study, future research should explore:

- Global Indigenous storytelling across regions such as Oceania, Latin America, and Africa to develop trans-Indigenous ethical paradigms;
- Intersectional narrative ethics, examining how Indigenous stories navigate gender, sexuality, disability, and queerness;
- Digital Indigenous storytelling, investigating how narrative ethics shift in virtual environments where protocols of access, community control, and data ethics present new challenges and opportunities.

Longitudinal studies tracing the reception of Indigenous narratives in educational curricula or institutional publishing practices could also yield valuable insights into how narrative sovereignty evolves over time.

Recommendations

Drawing upon the findings of this study, which demonstrate the profound ethical and political functions of storytelling in contemporary Indigenous literature, the following recommendations are presented for policymakers practitioners educators and future researchers. These recommendations aim to translate the study's theoretical insights into practical and systemic transformations in education cultural policy research ethics and literary criticism.

1. Policy Support for Indigenous Cultural Sovereignty

Policymakers should recognize and support Indigenous storytelling as a form of cultural and intellectual sovereignty. Cultural funding bodies and government institutions must expand support for Indigenous authors, publishing houses, and literary festivals that prioritize Indigenous-led narratives. Policy frameworks should also ensure the protection of Indigenous intellectual property, including oral histories and land-based knowledge embedded in literary forms. Legal instruments should be updated to reflect the collective ownership of cultural narratives and resist the commodification of Indigenous storytelling by non-Indigenous institutions.

2. Curriculum Reform in Education

Educational institutions particularly those in settler-colonial states should integrate Indigenous literature into national and regional curricula not merely as “multicultural content,” but as frameworks for ethical inquiry and historical consciousness. Storytelling should be taught as a legitimate form of ethical and political theorizing, and educators must be trained to engage with Indigenous texts in ways that respect narrative sovereignty and cultural protocols. Recommended changes include:

- Replacing Eurocentric literary ethics frameworks with Indigenous ethical paradigms rooted in relationality and land-based knowledge;
- Embedding Indigenous literature alongside critical studies of settler colonialism, trauma, and resistance;
- Encouraging critical reading practices that avoid extractive interpretations.

3. Support for Indigenous-Led Research Methodologies

Practitioners and scholars must adopt Indigenous methodologies that are relational, non-extractive, and community-accountable. Academic institutions and ethics review boards should revise existing research protocols to align with Indigenous frameworks of knowledge production. These comprise respecting community consent procedures that give privilege to Indigenous scholarly voices in research outputs, and not misappropriating sacred or restricted knowledge. One of the tangible steps towards ethical reciprocity in the field of literary and cultural research could be encouraged co-authorship between Indigenous communities and knowledge keepers.

4. Decolonizing Literary Criticism and Theory

The call is to literary theorists and critics to avoid the tendency of universalizing moral systems like the systems based on Western liberalism or individualism. Rather, criticism should arise out of the contexts of cultures of the texts themselves. It is the active process of foregrounding Indigenous philosophies of ethics like a kinship land rationality and ceremonial time in the interpretation of literature. Journals and conferences have to accommodate Indigenous theorists to take the leading part in critical discourse rather than being its objects only. It is not simply an additional shift that requires a change in the epistemic basis of literary studies but a structural one.

5. Creation and Regulation of Ethical Digital Storytelling Platforms

With the rise of digital storytelling, the urgency of having digital space designed and controlled by Indigenous people is even more urgent. These platforms must uphold cultural protocols regarding access, authorship, and audience. Policymakers and tech developers should collaborate with Indigenous artists and activists to establish ethical frameworks for digital narrative sharing. Importantly, this includes protections against data extraction, algorithmic erasure, and the circulation of mis-contextualized cultural materials.

6. Intersectional and Trans-Indigenous Research Expansion

Future researchers must attend to the intersecting dimensions of gender, sexuality, disability, and geography in Indigenous storytelling. Current literature often homogenizes Indigenous experience, overlooking the diverse ethical concerns of queer Two-Spirit disabled and global Indigenous storytellers. Researchers should prioritize comparative and collaborative studies that span regions (e.g., Oceania, Latin America, Africa) to foster trans-Indigenous solidarities and richer understandings of narrative ethics. Funding bodies should incentivize cross-regional research and ensure that such projects are led or co-led by Indigenous scholars.

7. Reader Accountability and Ethical Reception

Readers whether general audiences, students, or critics must engage Indigenous literature with an ethic of listening that resists appropriation and centers Indigenous sovereignty. As Dylan Robinson emphasizes, “listening otherwise” requires attuning to what is withheld what is sacred and what is meant only for community audiences. Publishers and educators should provide paratextual materials (e.g., forewords, teaching guides) to contextualize texts ethically and clarify cultural protocols ensuring that reception aligns with the intentions of Indigenous authors. In summary, this study’s findings illuminate the urgent need to transform how Indigenous storytelling is engaged across policy, pedagogy criticism and research. Storytelling is not simply a representational tool but an active practice of healing sovereignty and epistemic resistance. To honor this, institutional frameworks must shift to recognize narrative sovereignty not as a metaphor but as a foundation for ethical engagement and transformative practice.

Conclusion

This paper has considered the way that contemporary Indigenous literature has mobilised storytelling as an ethical practice and political intervention. As a result of a close thematic and formal study of six Indigenous texts of literature, the project has shown that the storytelling in the works Indigenous performs an ethical role beyond representation to perform relational ethics with land, kinship, memory, and community. These stories do not only challenge and disrupt the colonial systems, but also engage in the cultural surveillance mending and rebellion. It reaffirms the validity of the Indigenous storytelling as a strong epistemological instrument, a tool that disrupts Eurocentric literary and ethical conventions and imposes narrative sovereignty and political will. The most important contribution of the study is that it has articulated a frame through which Indigenous epistemologies are placed at the centre of analysis of ethics in literature. With its focus on storytelling as an ethical mode of governance and de-colonial criticism the research expands the theoretical frameworks of narrative ethics and cultural criticism. It builds on current scholarship by making Indigenous ethics the primary rather than the secondary focus of attention, and by making the case that they are sovereign and adequate in their own right, frames of moral and literary interaction. It has implications, also, on the teaching and reading of literature hoping that there can be a paradigm shift in both literary criticism and pedagogy that is responsive to Indigenous ways of knowing on their terms. The study underscores the necessity of ethical responsiveness among educators, critics, publishers, and policymakers. Storytelling is not merely a tool of representation; it is an enactment of responsibility and a site of resistance. Thus curricular reform support for Indigenous-led publishing, and the decolonization of research practices are essential to fostering ethical engagement with Indigenous literature. These imperatives extend beyond the academy, shaping how institutions recognize and protect Indigenous cultural sovereignty across media, archives, and public discourse.

Nevertheless, the study is not without its limitations. Its focus on North American texts constrains its global applicability, and its reliance on literary analysis while methodologically appropriate leaves unexplored the perspectives of Indigenous readers and community reception. Dimensions such as queerness disability and trans-Indigeneity are acknowledged but underdeveloped, suggesting the need for a more intersectional approach in future inquiry. Future research should expand this work by engaging with Indigenous literature from other geopolitical regions, such as Oceania, Latin America, and Africa, and by exploring digital and visual storytelling formats. Further studies might also incorporate community-based methodologies and reception studies to understand how storytelling is interpreted and lived by Indigenous audiences. Intersectional approaches that integrate gender sexuality and disability studies would deepen the ethical and political dimensions of narrative inquiry. In sum, this study reaffirms that Indigenous storytelling is not only a mode of cultural expression but a vital practice of ethical living, resistance, and world-making. By listening to and learning from these stories scholars and institutions are invited to participate in a broader ethical project one that recognizes narrative sovereignty resists extractive engagements and honors Indigenous epistemologies as essential to the future of literary theory and social transformation.

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