

Racial and Gender Shifting in Gregory Scofield's *Thunder Through My Veins* (1999)

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In my paper, I explore the literary strategy of decolonizing racial and gender binaries alike through the memoir of one of Canada's best-known Metis Two-Spirit authors, Gregory Scofield, whose work interrupted the previously ruling national collective myth that excluded the voices of those Aboriginal people who have become categorised as second class citizens since Colonization. He has produced a number of books of poetry and plays that have drawn on Cree storytelling traditions. His memoir *Thunder Through My Veins* (1999) is resonant for those who have struggled to trace their roots or wrestled with their identity. By recalling his childhood difficulties as a Metis individual with an alternative gender, he has challenged the Canadian literary presentation of Metis and Two-Spirited people and has created a book of healing for both himself and also for other Metis people struggling with prejudice. In order to provide a historical, cultural, and theoretical background, I will start my analysis of Scofield's memoir by giving a brief recapitulation of the problematics of racial and gender identities, overlapping identities and life-writing as a means of healing.

The history of Canada is largely the history of the colonization of the Indigenous people. Out of the Colonization process grew the Metis, a special segment of the Aboriginal population having European and Indigenous ancestry. The earliest mixed marriages can be traced back to the first years of contact but the metis born out of these relationships did not yet have a political sense of distinctiveness (Macdougall 424). They gradually developed a unique culture and were established as a recognizable group on the prairies. With time, conflicts of their land led to wars between the Metis and the Canadian Government and eventually, the Metis Nation lost some eighty-three percent of their Red River lots through the scrip program (LaRocque www3.nfb.ca). They sank into deep poverty and quickly became the victims of racism.

The colonizers always turned to racism to rationalize oppression, and so they indoctrinated that racial differences determine cultural and individual achievements ("Understanding" 1). Racism is based on the belief that one group is innately or genetically superior to the other. It may be expressed individually and structurally, as well (LaRocque www3.nfb.ca). Person-to-person racism involves name calling, refusal of services, or personal attacks. Structural racism is embedded in Canadian

institutions, such as the British North America Act, courts, police, churches, banks, medical system, or education (LaRocque www3.nfb.ca). From the institutionalized bias for the white “civilized” in relation to the Aboriginal “savage,” a complex set of images, terminology, and legislation has set the Aboriginal people apart. Through institutionalized racism, society conditions non-Natives to acquire racist views, fear, and hatred towards Native people. Similarly, it leads the Natives to racial shame and self-rejection. Metis-ness, as part of the Canadian Aboriginality, turns into a sense of “nothingness” and therefore many deny their cultural roots. They put on metaphorical “blankets of shame” to protect themselves from the judging eyes of the society (Heikkilä blogs.helsinki.fi).

Nevertheless, with the advent of postcolonial thought on hybridity, otherness, and resistance, Canada’s First Nations, Inuit, and Metis populations became more cognizant of their detrimental conditions brought upon them by European Colonization, and engaged themselves more actively in ameliorating their daily existence from the 1970s on. The emerging Land Claims not only speak to historical injustices but also ongoing pressures and losses. All forms of protest have been initiated to salvage what is left of the Metis land and to have self-determination with respect to their identities for future generations. As a result of the emerging Metis activism, in 1982, the Canadian Supreme Court ruled that the Metis Nation was one of Canada’s Aboriginal groups, in 2003, it affirmed the Powley-test for determining who may claim Metis Aboriginal rights, and in 2016, it extended the “Indian” rights to the Metis.

Perceiving Metis identity as a unified whole, though, would be a mistake and would solidify racial boundaries. There is a growing awareness of differences of race, religion, social class, sexuality, and gender in societies. These identities overlap and are interconnected. Every individual simultaneously has overlapping identities (Deshpande 2007). The discrimination that can stem from those identities can combine to create multiple and self-reinforcing layers of disadvantages for those affected. A Metis man, like Scofield, can suffer from racism and homophobia at the same time. His identification process thus becomes troublesome and causes anxiety and low self-esteem, which can be healed through the presence of some strong female figures in his life and through writing.

We have seen that identification processes are very complex and identities are not fixed. Queer Theory, which emerged in the 1990s, recognized that complexity and unfixedness. Queer theorists like Judith Butler challenge the female/male categorical thinking and believe that the human body should not be essentialized. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s tenet claiming that white wealthy men define what is normal and what is abnormal, Butler developed the idea of gender performance. It holds that gender “acts” are learned by watching others and not through genetics. “Gender

is a repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler 25). People’s gender and sexuality expressions are very diverse and are fluid. Queer theorists have torn down all our preconceptions about gender.

The re-discovery of “Two-Spiritedness,” is also related to the theoretization of the complexity of gender. The term Two-Spirited refers to a person who has both masculine and feminine spirits and is used by Aboriginal people to describe their sexual, gender and/or spiritual identity. Originating in Winnipeg at the Third Annual Intertribal Native American/First Nations Gay and Lesbian Conference in 1990, the term Two-Spirit was chosen to distance Native people from non-Native homosexuals (Rainbow Resource Centre rainbowresourcecentre.org). Two-Spirit is an inclusive term that represents both men and women, whereas gay and lesbian already set up a division (Roscoe 111). It exemplifies the inherent relationship between sexuality and cultural identity. Alex Wilson asserts that the term “Two-Spirit” promotes the tenet that sexuality, gender, community, and spirituality are all interconnected for Indigenous Americans (334). Moreover, it has been picked by the ones it serves to identify.

While some use Two-Spirited to refer specifically to the cultural roles of individuals who embody both male and female spirits, Beaver argues that it is also applied to describe Aboriginal people who identify as lesbians, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (qtd. in Hammond 17). Scofield expands the idea of Two-Spiritedness so that the term encompasses not only gender but the essence of humans. About third and fourth gender he asks:

don’t we carry the spirits of our mother and our father, our grandmothers and grandfathers? Moreover, on a purely biological level, our gender appears to be determined by the X or Y chromosome. Then again, who really knows what sacred ceremony takes place within the womb? [...] I wondered are we all genetically built to be doo-dimers? And if so does this mean we’re all two-spirited? (Scofield “You Can Always” 160-1)

Scofield used to refer to himself as a Two-Spirit for the varied gender roles he had taken up. Now he rather considers himself gay because he developed some doubts about his eligibility for the sacred role: “Until I fully understand the gifts I’ve been given, I’m grateful for the sight of my two eyes, the ability to create with my two hands. So again, does this make me two-spirited? Perhaps. Perhaps not. [...] perhaps definition is really about interpretation” (Scofield “You Can Always” 167). In *Thunder Through My Veins*, he engages in exploring the versatile segments of his

identity as a potential two-spirited Metis man and in counteracting the sexual and racial stereotypes he encounters.

Contemplating on his sexual and gender role as well as his Metis roots, Scofield turned to the genre of memoir to heal from his emotional childhood wounds. It collects his memories to describe important moments of events that took place in his life. Many people employ a form of life writing like a memoir as they do not have a coherent story; something that makes sense and has some internal consistency to it. To construct a story of our life is to make meaning to it. To compose memory and autobiographical facts into a story helps us become who we are. Life-storytelling is an important part of self-development and so it became Scofield's best friend and confidant. He believes that writing about Metis reality is a powerful medicine since it not only educates non-Metis people, but also provides the Metis with a sense of pride in their culture (Scudeler 194). He realised the importance of books when he was looking for answers about his cultural origin and gender. Stories that were about Aboriginals or Metis, such as Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* (1964) or *The Diviners* (1974) were helpful tools in giving him the confidence to find his own voice (Richards januarymagazine.com). He believes that "the things that we do, the things that we say, the things that we create, ways of being, everything that is created under the human form I think of as medicine" (Richards januarymagazine.com). Through writing, he intends to function as a social worker who represents one small voice out of a community of powerful singers. Putting the stories of those voices together becomes an entourage of sentiments about healing (Richards januarymagazine.com). He is a keeper of stories from history and passes them down in order to keep the Metis spirit alive. He argues that "it's extremely important to view the Metis people as one of the founding peoples of Canada, and it's important for people who are immigrating to Canada to know those founding histories of this country. Everyone in Canada should know those stories and know that this history is not relegated to the past" (MacDonald 290-1).

Apart from the assistance in self- and community healing, autobiographical writing is a political act, too, which Scofield adopts to share current Metis struggles. He strives to resist the Natives and non-Natives' sometimes one-dimensional views on the Metis people's alternative gender roles, and same-sex relations. Together with Rita Joe, Basil Johnston, and Lee Maracle, he engages himself in recording his story in order to reveal the diversity of cultures and gender experiences inherent in the Native population.

Scofield's *Thunder Through My Veins*, addressing Two-Spiritedness and the discovery of his Metis roots, has earned him both a national and an international readership. It scrutinises the author's search for identity, meaning, and belonging

from early poverty-filled childhood, separation from his parents to an adolescence imbued with confusion about his Metis heritage. It illustrates the importance of nurturing in the development of a child's concept of self and the crucial role of women in sustaining Metis identity. Scofield's life as a child is filled with turmoil right from the beginning. His parents met in an unorthodox way: Scofield's Metis mother worked for a wealthy family and his Euro-Canadian father was a "big-time con man" (Scofield *Thunder* 2). She helped him get rid of a suitcase filled with counterfeit money and, in return, he rescued her from prostitution. They got married, and she became pregnant soon afterwards. To avoid raising a baby on the run, she convinced him to turn himself in and he was sentenced to two years of prison. Soon after that, she got back to her "high-school sweetheart" Tommy (Scofield *Thunder* 4), and Scofield never saw his father again. Instead, he grew up surrounded by a number of "warrior women, hearing their songs of sisterhood and survival. I grew up singing beside them, and I carry their songs to this day" (Scofield "You Can Always" 163).

A deep bond develops between Scofield and his mother. Despite her poor health, she remains caring, supportive of his ambitions, and offers unconditional love. She remains a bona fide open-minded woman who does not care about racial differences: "She was one of the most non-racist people I have ever known" (Scofield *Thunder* 58). She teaches him that it is "good to be angry, to understand the injustices done to people of colour, but also to remember that out of any struggle came determination and freedom" (Scofield *Thunder* 58). As he admits, her generosity, loyalty, patience, strong will, and resolve reduplicate themselves in his own life (Scofield *Thunder* 187). Scofield's love of literature is formulated owing to his mother's caring nurture: "she spent hours reading and playing old records for me" (Scofield *Thunder* 16). His fascination for books continues in his school's library where he spends hours poring over texts on the Canadian Aboriginals. His recognition of the healing effect of reading and writing is born then.

Another influential woman in Scofield's life is Aunt Georgie, who unfolds his Metis background:

"I tink you must be an Awp-pee-tow-koosan, like me," she concluded.

"I see it, too, in your mama."

"What's that?"

"Dat's a half-breed. Half dis and half dat."

"Half what?" I asked, afraid of the answer.

"You know, half devil and half angel," she teased. (Scofield *Thunder* 41-2)

Georgie teaches him some elemental traditional Metis female occupations, such as doing beadwork and making moccasins. Traditionally, Metis gender roles were well defined and women were equal partners in the development of their communities politically, socially, and economically (Women of the Métis Nation laa.gov.nl.ca). During the fur trade era, they worked beside men building buffalo pounds, scouting during the hunts, and skinning meat. They prepared hides, made products, and sold goods. They acted as interpreters between European fur traders and local communities paving the way for the development of the fur trade in North America. They held the role of knowledge keepers, raised children, and provided for their families (Women of the Métis Nation laa.gov.nl.ca). Today, one of the biggest challenges Metis women face is keeping the traditional knowledge alive. Georgie, being aware of the danger of loss of knowledge and recognizing the potential in Scofield to develop some traditional skills, spends a great deal of time teaching him Cree and old-time medicine. She tells him many stories about her childhood in northern Alberta and verbally adopts him as her son. Auntie instills in him that everything people do or say is considered medicine and that they need to be aware of their actions. Scofield receives a special knowledge about his Metis culture “that none of the other kids at school had” (Scofield *Thunder* 44). This makes him feel proud, helps him cherish his Metis roots, and begins his path towards Two-Spiritedness.

Because his mother becomes hospitalized for lupus, Scofield spends most of his childhood years in foster homes. While some families take good care of him, others consider it a burden to have another mouth to feed and thus neglect the young boy's basic needs. Being brought up without a safe familial background, he cannot build his identity for a long time. The steady presence of a caring mother cannot be substituted with temporary indifferent foster parents. In *Thunder Through My Veins*, we can witness how destructive it is to grow up without a strong maternal pillar behind. Scofield admits that there was a time when “My only clue to my identity was the mirror and books” (Scofield *Thunder* 65). He is dislocated repeatedly and drops out of school several times. He struggles with substance abuse, poverty, and racism; and a sense of loss, alienation, and self-hatred lead him to a sense of loneliness. Such neglect frequently contributes to Aboriginal victimization. Scofield's interpretation of the circumstances he lives under is that his father did not want him, his step-father Don hates him; his mother cannot be with him due to her poor health, and Aunt Sandra and Uncle Tim take him in only because he does not have another place to go to. He believes that his life is completely out of his control and he blames everyone for it (Scofield *Thunder* 81).

In “You Can Always Count on the Anthropologist” he admits:

My sense of masculinity, my own state of being male in the world, suffered a great deal. My fear of men was largely influenced by my mother and my aunts, an uneasy cohabitation of tyrant and loyalist, perpetrator and protector. It seemed appropriate to blame my vacant father, my abusive step-father and uncle for all the suffering. Men, or so I believed, were the epitome of everything wrong in the world. They could neither demonstrate love nor compassion, understanding nor acceptance. (163)

The discovery of his Metis roots initially generates significant discomfort in Scofield. His cultural shame goes back to his grandfather’s denial of his Metis background. His grandfather used to keep it a secret partly because of the stigma associated with being Metis, and partly to shield his daughters from discrimination. He grew up in poverty “squatting” on Crown’s Land with little to be proud of. He kept his Native background secret even from his wife. Like Scofield’s grandfather, Don also denies his Native origin. His mother was a hereditary chief from northern British Columbia, whom he disowned together with her entire family. Don gets furious when Scofield calls him an Indian and makes no attempt to hide his dislike for him anymore:

Don would march me downstairs, force me to pull my pants down, and spank me. But then he started to use belts or whatever else he could find, like coat hangers or pieces of wood. Still, when that wasn’t enough, he would hit me in the face or stomach. Sometimes he even threw me down the stairs. He would march down after me, grab me by the scruff of the neck, and shake me until I went limp. Mom knew he was getting carried away and tried to stop him, but he would hit her, too. (Scofield *Thunder* 45)

People, with this kind of attitude of hiding and denying their Aboriginal identity, are what Aunt Georgie and many Natives call “apple:” red on the outside, white on the inside. The colonial interpretation of hybridity resulted in feelings of “double consciousness” triggering psychological challenges for the “hybrid” person, who suffers from exclusion from both mainstream and Native cultures. Cree relations consider the Metis Euro-Canadian, and the Euro-Canadians refuse to accept the Metis, believing that they are “dirty breeds” (Scofield *Thunder* 170). “I felt caught between two worlds and there was no place for me in either” (Scofield *Thunder* 163). Scofield learns at school that “Louis Riel was crazy and a traitor

to the Canadian government. The Métis weren't Indians at all, but Frenchmen pretending to be Indians. They had no culture or language and nothing to be proud of. At least the Indians, no matter how ragged and poor, had an interesting culture" (Scofield *Thunder* 64).

History books have either ignored the Natives' presence or portrayed them in a rather negative way in Canadian history and thus have tremendously shaped the public perceptions of Aboriginal peoples. In *The False Traitor: Louis Riel in Canadian Culture*, Albert Braz describes two dominant representations of Riel, imagined by settler Canadians over time. The first representation of Riel villainizes him in his leadership of the rebellions (Braz 62). In *Flashback Canada* (2008), the Riel representation is situated in "Unit 2: The Development of Western Canada". A graphic timeline initiates understandings of Riel's character as the leader of the Red River Resistance of 1869-1870. Next in the visual link is the creation of the North-West Mounted Police in 1873 signified with a large image of their emblem crested with a buffalo. This visual chronology suggests that Metis Riel is a site of crime and disorder to be policed and eliminated by a moral presence.

The second representation, developed in the latter half of the 20th century, is the settler creation of Riel as a Canadian hero (Braz 63). Riel becomes aligned with the language of social justice that the Canadian narrative projects in current History curriculum, as a protector of his peoples and Metis land against the colonial injustices imposed upon them. Braz notes that in many literary discourses the shift in representation refers to Riel as a heroic symbol of Canada and its confederacy. The very notions of Canadian confederation were, according to his writings, a concept that Riel was very much opposed to. Therefore, painting Riel in this way appropriates his Metis identity and symbolizes him as a martyr in the creation of the settler Canadian state.

When Scofield finally finds out about his Metis heritage from his grandfather's sister-in law, he feels relief that the veil of mystery over his cultural background has been lifted, but he is disappointed at the same time, too, because they are not "pure" First Nations (Scofield *Thunder* 107). The demoralization of the Metis people at school leads him to the denial of his Metis ancestry and to his initial identification as Cree. In order to look "more Indian," "I dyed my hair black and spent every available minute in the sun. Thankfully, my skin had a bit of dark pigment and I was able to turn nut brown. The only thing I couldn't change was the colour of my eyes. Oh, how I hated having grey eyes" (Scofield *Thunder* 112). This metaphorical Indianness creates a commodified representation of the First Nations and thereby a false source of cultural knowledge. In "Syllogistic Mixed Blood," Owens claims that the simulation of full-bloodedness haunts the metanarrative bloodlines (93) and fixes the colonial other (99). He makes a crucial point about

the dangers of simulation in erasing real Natives by setting up kitschy histories, films, and photos of people who never existed. Another significant problem related to indigenization efforts is authenticity, discussed in depth in Thomas Fillitz and Jamie Saris's *Debating Authenticity* (2012) and Judit Á. Kádár's "Who Is Indian Enough?" (2013). "The problem of authenticity and authentication in transculturation presented by literary texts has not been given the attention it merits. [...] indigenous cultural critics only recently have started to study identity and authenticity" (Kádár 170). The desire for authenticity pervades all facets of modern life. Authenticity constitutes an important site on which tradition and modernity have been formulated. The recovery of tradition through material, social, and cultural forms has made narratives of modernity as a future-oriented enterprise imaginable. Tradition comes into being when it is imagined as a defining complement of modernity. The production of authenticity is a reformulation of cultural values impacted by globalization and contemporary transnational cultural flows. Scofield borrows the white-constructed image of the Indian and in so doing, he perpetuates the flawed representation of the Native, which contributes to the writing-off of the real Aboriginal culture (Kádár 112).

Beside the aversion to his Metis heritage, Scofield's alternative gender identification and homosexual orientation bring about further difficulties in his life. He first notices his queer interest when he has a crush on his teacher in grade seven. He has also got some sexual thoughts about other boys, which brings him to believe that something is "horribly wrong" with him. Seeing a schoolmate, Sean, being singled out and teased for being gay and soft-spoken urges him to repress his queer feelings. Heterosexual normalcy forces him to choose between tolerated gender categories and fit his life within the straight-gay dichotomy. He pushes the thoughts of boys out of his head and looks at girls the way he is "supposed to." Gender passing enables him to present himself as an "appropriate" part of cultural entity and since he strives for acceptance, he is willing to avoid certain parts of his identity. Hiding one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity from others, however, can be a confining and isolating experience. Still, many choose to remain closeted because they feel that it shields them from some of the bullying, rejection, violence, and discrimination. It gives a sense of security which makes it hard to see the toll it takes on one's mental well-being.

Scofield lives his life closeted until his first love experience during his hospitalization following his suicide attempt. He has to go to a treatment centre for disturbed youth where a youth-care worker named Michael takes advantage of Scofield's vulnerable predicament and goes on dates with him. Scofield begins to feel comfortable and more secure in Michael's presence. His mood changes for the better: he chatters, jokes and spends more time with the other residents of the

centre. His attraction to Michael makes his “incarceration” easier (Scofield *Thunder* 99) and gives him hope in life again. He feels loved and starts writing poems about his emotions. Meeting members of the gay community and discovering the regularity and naturalness of his own feelings opens up a new world for him. Although he feels liberated, the novelty of the experience scares Scofield. He gets confused about his desire for men and becomes ashamed again of his homoerotic feelings. His evolving gender identity crumbles and leaves a big void behind. Michael avoids Scofield, too, and eventually disappears. Scofield perceives his disappearance as if he had violated the position of trust, it scares him deeply, and shapes his image of gay men as predators, sexual perverts and pedophiles widely held as such by Western stereotypes (Scofield *Thunder* 104). His bitter experience with Michael deepens Scofield’s belief that being gay is an ultimate curse in life and deepens his internalized homophobia.

Scofield’s already distorted self-image is exacerbated by another destructive relationship with Kevin, whom he meets in Vancouver. Kevin is a polite and unassuming twenty-eight-year-old man, and the two are on the same wavelength immediately. They decide to move in together, and despite the financial hardships, Scofield is content with their life together. The initial pink cloud does not last long, though, as Kevin refuses to work, and they step on the slippery slope towards starvation. Kevin drinks constantly and is under the substance all the time. He exploits Scofield’s commitment to their relationship and threatens to leave him. In his despair, Scofield decides to earn some money by selling his body. At the last moment, though, he changes his mind and, instead, takes a bottle of Tylenol and swallows as many pills as he can. He attempts to commit suicide for the second time (Scofield *Thunder* 124). After taking the pills, though, he soon realises that suicide is only a quick answer to a temporary problem, and so goes to hospital. Just like Michael, Kevin, too, leaves deep emotional wounds in Scofield, who feels used again.

Although the two love affairs do not end well, they have great importance in terms of “sovereign erotics.” The concept of sovereign erotics, first articulated by Qwo-Li Dirskill in his 2011 collection of Two-Spirit literature, privileges the productive and dynamic potential of erotic pleasure. When combined with the idea of Indigenous interpretations of sovereignty, the erotic becomes a powerful and communal site of contestation. By re-inscribing individual pleasure in the pursuit of larger political and historical aims, the use of such sovereign erotics confronts the hegemonic work of settler societies to regulate Native bodies and sexualities as part of the colonial project. It goes against scientific epistemology that claims to be neutral and objective while promoting highly political agendas often aimed at the usurpation of Indigenous resources and the resulting marginalization

of Native people. While erotics certainly engages the experience of sexuality, it is also about power. In retrospect, Scofield feels shame today for trying to hide his true self as a young man and feels sorry for people still doing the same: “so many Native people and people of colour, are at the mercy of a society that condones homophobia and racism, and so many of us go through life silently accepting those stereotypes, ultimately dying spiritless and shame-ridden” (Scofield *Thunder* 74). By highlighting the struggles that alternative gendered people face regarding their self-determination, postcolonial queer literary pieces, like Scofield’s, destabilize conventions of normalcy, tradition, and power. They put forward non-normative and non-Western conceptions of race, sexuality, and gender, where gay love exists on one end, and the Other on the other end. Scofield believes that he could have been saved from the feeling of insecurity had there been someone then to assure him that being gay is as normal as being right- or left-handed (Scofield *Thunder* 175). It is pivotal to understand that difference is not a sickness or a curse. Scofield reckons that we should expose children to gay images, healthy relationships, and spirits that are now “forced to bend and conform to society’s expectations” (*Thunder* 189). We should encourage people to think about their own prejudice and support LGBTQ people. The more we know about the causes and effects of homophobia, the better we understand and the less prejudiced the world will become.

For cultural re-appropriation, Scofield receives inspiration from many Native writers whose works serve to foster healing, raise awareness, and thereby help their Native communities. Maria Campbell was one of them, whose autobiography, *Half-breed* (1973) voices the Metis perspective on history and breaks down the collective silence of the Metis. At first, Scofield does not find the book meaningful: “I threw it in my knapsack, thinking, *What could some half-breed woman possibly have to say?*” (Scofield *Thunder* 116). Only later does he understand the significance Maria’s book has for his life and essentially his career as a writer (Scofield *Thunder* 197). He hopes to offer his work to other young Metis writers in order to make them angry enough to share their own story.

In *Thunder Through my Veins*, Scofield also mentions Howard Adams’s *Prison of Grass* (1975) which focuses on retelling certain key aspects of Canadian history from a Metis vantage point (178). Like Scofield, Adams initially hated his Metis heritage, but eventually he realised that by embracing his origin and writing about Metis history from a Native perspective would enable him to confront the personal pain of Colonization rather than escape it. The falsification of the historical record for the purpose of creating a past that fits with the ideological goals of the present has been a common characteristic of revolutionary regimes seeking to legitimize themselves by portraying their actions and goals as if they were continuous with the aims of history or the venerable beliefs of the past. A number of recent authors

like Andy den Otter still seek a villain in Aboriginal people and make them accountable for current ecological challenges. Den Otter places the responsibility for the decline of the bison solely on the Metis. She writes “By the 1840s, Métis hunters had perfected the bison hunt into a productive, well-conducted, if wasteful, industry” (159).

Beside Adams, another prominent figure that influences Scofield’s work is Tomson Highway (Scofield *Thunder* 178), a Cree Canadian playwright, novelist, pianist, and one of the country’s foremost voices in Aboriginal Theatre. As a source of inspiration, Scofield acknowledges *The Rez Sisters*, the first piece of the incomplete Rez Septology, which focuses on the dreams and fears of seven female Native characters. The play mingles the sometimes dark realities of life on an Indian reserve, which fills Scofield with productive anger, an approach that he initially learned from his mother.

The last book acknowledged in Scofield’s novel (178) is Beatrice Culleton Mosionier’s *In Search of April Raintree* (1983). It is a crucial literary and political piece, since it serves two transformative functions: healing Indigenous people and advancing social justice in settler society (Episkenew *Taking* 73), two aspects that are in the heart of Scofield’s memoir, too. By documenting the suffering of Metis children, Mosionier and Scofield promote empathy and understanding among both Native communities and the larger public. They showcase many of the social problems and raise awareness to create support for social justice initiatives.

Apart from these books, a visit to Batoche, the most relevant Metis’ historic site where Metis leader Louis Riel (1844-1885) was defeated in 1885, helps Scofield finally find a place of belonging:

The importance that I had once placed on being Cree – a true and pure Indian – seemed to disappear with the sinking sun. Suddenly the colour of my eyes, hair, and skin seemed to belong to me, perfectly matching the prairie landscape that held such a dignified history. [...] Never again would I search for a place of belonging. This place, Batoche, would always be “home.” My home. (Scofield *Thunder* 166)

Scofield reconstructs and regains his Metis and community origins as well as finally learns to cherish his unique heritage:

a mixture of blood and history running through my veins. I am neither from one nation nor the other, but from a nation that has struggled to define itself in the pages of Canadian history, [...] I am neither victim nor oppressor. The choices I have made in my adult life are mine alone. I blame only myself for the shame, anger, pity, and success that I have allowed' (Scofield *Thunder* xvi).

By taking pride in his Metis heritage, Scofield recreates Canadian history from a Metis perspective and aims at healing Metis communities. Today, he feels ashamed about once trying to cover up his cultural, gender, and sexual identities. He has come to realise that “my years of confusion and struggle, like most gay people’s, are rooted in society’s disapproval and fear of homosexuality which cultivates, as it has done for generations, internalized homophobia and self-hatred” (Scofield *Thunder* 83). Finding his way into the gay community has liberated him; he can now identify with other homosexual people, share a common pride, and celebrate diversity.

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©2019 Gregory Scofield (P)2019 Penguin Random House Canada. Read & Listen. Switch between reading the Kindle book & listening to the Audible narration with Whispersync for Voice. Get the Audible audiobook for the reduced price of \$7.49 after you buy the Kindle book. Share. Thunder Through My Veins: A Memoir. The author made his own choices in a world that can be cripplingly confusing, through mental health care facilities and his struggle with his family, his sexuality, and his role in this world. It's an inspiring read, no matter what you call yourself- Indian, white, black, whatever I "smiled out loud" at his grace in embracing his Metis culture, and his desire to help all people. We struggle, but only to accept ourselves. A beautiful book. Scofield's poetry, prose, and activism center around indigenous experience, and he is an advocate for social and racial justice for indigenous communities. His books of poetry include The Gathering: Stones for the Medicine Wheel (1993), which won the BC Book Prize and the Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize; Native Canadiana / Songs from the Urban Rez (1996); Love Medicine and One Song (1997); I Knew Two Métis Women (1999); Kipocihk: Poems New and Selected (2009); Louis: The Heretic Poems (2011); and Witness, I Am (2017). Scofield is the author of the acclaimed memoir Thunder Through My Veins (1999) and was the subject of the feature-length documentary Singing Home the Bones: A Poet Becomes Himself (2007). A flood of emotions burst through his body, so powerful they knocked him forward and off the couch with a gasp. His knees and hands hit the floor hard enough to bruise, but he didn't notice. All he could feel was the mantra of joy satisfaction lust fury more that flooded his brain. They'd show up at the Dursleys and whisk him away, tell him he was loved and they'd never let him go again. Harry realized long ago that this dream was silly. His parents were six feet under, nothing left but bones and maggots crawling through their eye sockets and breeding in dirt. They were gone, had been for awhile. Now, Harry dreams of blood.