

**Métis Books Abroad:
Studying the transnational reception of
Métis literature in the US and Canada**

**by
Zoe Mix**

BMUS, University of British Columbia, 2018

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Publishing

in the
Publishing Program
Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology

© Zoe Mix 2023

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Fall 2023

Copyright in this work is held by the author. Please ensure that any reproduction or re-use is done in accordance with the relevant national copyright legislation.

Declaration of Committee

Name: Zoe Mix
Degree: Master of Publishing
Title: **Métis Books Abroad: Studying the transnational reception of Métis literature in the US and Canada**

Committee:

Suzanne Norman
Supervisor
Senior Lecturer, Publishing

Hannah McGregor
Committee Member
Associate Professor, Publishing

Rachel Noorda
Committee Member
Director of Book Publishing and Assistant Professor
of English
Portland State University

Abstract

This project report investigates the transnational journey of three bestselling Métis titles by Métis authors between Canada and the United States. I carried out a case study which included mapping each title's publishing journey, close readings and content analysis of US and Canadian publication reviews. The central question was: are Métis titles able to be commercially competitive in the US book market, and if not, what are the barriers to access? The finding was that there are indeed barriers to access for Métis titles when they enter the US. The nature of these barriers has to do with the varied history of colonization in the US and Canada, and the creation of Métis national literature counter publics in Canada. This project report also offers up suggestions for ways that publishing professionals can take these barriers to access into account to help ensure the success of Métis titles traveling transnationally.

Keywords: Indigenous publishing; Métis publishing; Transnational book publishing; Counter publics; Nationalism

Dedication

For my Grandmother, Joan Delores Smith. Thank you for crying while you listened to Puccini and showing me what it means to be moved by great stories.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my supervisor, Suzanne Norman, for always suggesting more theory, which I always knew would make my work stronger. Thank you for being ever curious and so so knowledgeable.

Thank you to my second reader, and Material Girls star, Dr. Hannah McGregor, for showing what it means to be lovingly rigorous! I am a better scholar because of you.

Thank you to Dr. Rachel Noorda, my industry reader, for your patience and guiding hand throughout this process.

Thank you to my friends, Harry and Ruth for helping me through the long months of trying to finish the darn thing.

And thank you to my parents for watching and waiting and listening to me chatter on about nationalism and counter publics. So many years of your consistent support went into me finishing this degree. I am forever grateful for you.

Table of Contents

Declaration of Committee	ii
Abstract	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Tables	viii
Introduction. Métis identity in Canada and the US	1
Defining “Métis”	2
Métis history in Canada	3
Métis history in the United States	5
Chapter 1. Defining the Terms	8
1.1. Defining “Nation”	8
1.2. Defining “national literature”	9
1.3. Publics and counter publics	9
1.4. The rise of nation through literature	11
1.5. Situating my work with Casanova, <i>The Border Crossing Books Project</i> , and Driscoll & Rehberg Sedo	12
Chapter 2. Indigenous literature in Canada, a complicated history	14
2.1. Indigenous storytelling, a brief history	14
2.2. Indigenous literature, a complicated history	14
2.3. Indigenous literature asserting Indigenous present, past, and future	15
Chapter 3. Métis literature as national literature/ counter public	16
3.1. Early Métis national literature	16
3.2. Métis national literature in <i>The Forgotten Years</i>	17
3.3. The resurgence of Métis national literature with <i>Halfbreed</i> by Maria Campbell	18
3.4. 21st century Métis national literature	18
3.5. Métis national literature as a counter public	19
3.6. How Métis national literature affects the trajectory of Canadian national literatures	19
Chapter 4. Methodologies	21
4.1. Why case studies?	21
4.2. How is “bestseller” defined?	22
4.3. The Reviews - Publications chosen in the US and Canada	22
4.4. Keywords searched for in close readings	23
4.5. BISAC / Metadata - Defining BISAC	24
Chapter 5. The case studies	26
5.1. <i>From the Ashes</i>	26
5.1.1. Synopsis	26

5.1.2.	A brief publishing history	26
5.1.3.	Awards	27
5.1.4.	Canadian reviews.....	28
5.1.5.	American reviews	29
5.1.6.	BISAC	30
5.1.7.	Takeaways.....	30
5.2.	<i>The Break</i>	30
5.2.1.	Synopsis	30
5.2.2.	A brief publishing history	31
5.2.3.	Awards	32
5.2.4.	Canadian reviews.....	32
5.2.5.	American reviews.....	33
5.2.6.	BISAC	33
5.2.7.	Takeaways.....	34
5.3.	<i>The Marrow Thieves</i>	35
5.3.1.	Synopsis	35
5.3.2.	A brief publishing history	35
5.3.3.	Awards	36
5.3.4.	Canadian reviews.....	37
5.3.5.	American reviews.....	37
5.3.6.	BISAC	38
5.3.7.	Takeaways.....	38
	Conclusion	40
	Specific to Universal.....	40
	<i>From the Ashes</i>	40
	<i>The Break</i>	41
	<i>The Marrow Thieves</i>	41
	BISAC - The future of Indigenous BISAC	42
	Bibliography	45

List of Tables

Table 1.	List of case study titles	23
Table 2.	<i>From The Ashes</i> by Jesse Thistle – Awards.....	27
Table 3.	<i>From The Ashes</i> by Jesse Thistle – US and Canadian Reviews	28
Table 4.	<i>The Break</i> by Katherena Vermette – Awards	32
Table 5.	<i>The Break</i> by Katherena Vermette – US and Canadian Reviews	32
Table 6.	<i>The Marrow Thieves</i> by Cherie Dimaline – Awards	36
Table 7.	<i>The Marrow Thieves</i> by Cherie Dimaline – US and Canadian Reviews..	37

Introduction. Métis identity in Canada and the US

In the Fall of 2022 I began research through a Mitacs Globalink Award with Dr. Rachel Noorda at Portland State University. Dr. Noorda, along with researchers Millicent Weber and Melanie Ramdarshan Bold, had been working on *The Border Crossing Books Project*, a study which examines the relationship between books and nations with the ever-shifting move towards globalization, and the reaction of conservative nationalism to these changes.¹ My research was intended to further the research of *The Border Crossing Books Project* by specifically examining how Canadian titles enter into the US book market. As a Métis woman who grew up in the United States, I am keenly aware of how little people there know about Métis identity. However, in the summer of 2022 I had noticed an increase in Métis titles on display in bookstores in the Portland and the Seattle areas. It made me wonder if there could be a surge of interest in Métis stories in the US, or if it was just something I was attuned to because of my own personal connection. And thus the central question of my research was born: Are Métis titles able to be commercially competitive in the US book market, and if not, what are the barriers to access?

This report will first give a brief history of Métis identity in both the US and Canada to help contextualize the spheres that Métis titles are entering when they are published. Chapter One defines the terms and theoretical frameworks used throughout the report. Chapter Two acknowledges that Indigenous storytelling existed long before "so-called Canada" was colonized. It also digs into why it is complicated for Indigenous literature to be put under the Eurocentric umbrella of "literature", while also balancing the fact that contemporary Indigenous literature and storytelling are important to Indigenous resistance. Chapter Three outlines the history of Métis national literature and discusses how Métis national literature functions as a counter public within the national literature of Canada. Chapter Four discusses the methodologies used in my research. Chapter Five outlines the case studies; I focused on three Métis bestsellers from the Amazon Canada Top 100 Bestsellers lists from 2016, 2017, and 2019: *The Break* by Katherena Vermette, *From the Ashes: My Story of Being Métis, Homeless, and Finding My Way* by Jesse

¹ Weber, Millicent, Melanie Ramdarshan Bold, and Rachel Noorda *International Bestsellers and the Online Reconfiguring of National Identity*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), 1.

Thistle, and *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline. It was important to study bestsellers because they straightforwardly reflect "pre-existing tastes of the mass reading public rather than breaking new artistic ground."² This is to say, bestselling titles reflect what is already roiling in the consciousness of the nation, whether it is recognized or not. And because national literature is every changing to reflect the national itself, titles that are bestsellers may also blur into the national literature canon. This matter is complicated further by the fact that Métis national literature exists in spite of the efforts of erasure by the nation-state of Canada, and the fact that Métis writers and more broadly, Indigenous writers have complicated feelings about their work being placed within the "national literature" category. I will discuss this complication further in Chapters Two and Three.

Defining "Métis"

Non-Canadian readers coming to this report may not know what "Métis" means. As Dr. Gregory Younging says in his book, *Elements of Indigenous Style*, "This term has many contexts in Canada. People who self identify as Métis do so for different reasons."³ In some uses, the term refers to a specific group of people who lived in the Red River area at the time of the Red River Resistance (1869). In other uses, "Métis" is a way that English speaking people refer to people of mixed Indigenous and non-Indigenous descent. For the purposes of this paper, I am using the former meaning of "Métis," which describes a post-contact Indigenous people of the northern plains of North America who emerged between the 1600s-1700s.⁴ Métis were the result of the intermarriage of fur traders of European descent and people of Indigenous descent in the land that is now called Canada. The Métis were a new people who developed their own customs and formed a complex web of kinship networks, cultural practices, and economic operations across the North-West, and more specifically the Red River Area. The Métis developed their own language called Michif, which is a mix of Cree and French. They were also

² Beth Driscoll and DeNel Rehberg Sedo, "The transnational reception of bestselling books between Canada and Australia," *Global Media and Communication*, 16, no. 2 (2020): 245, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1742766520921910>

³ Gregory Younging, *Elements of indigenous style a guide for writing by and about indigenous peoples*, 1st ed. (Edmonton: Brush Education, 2018), 67.

⁴ Younging, *Elements of Indigenous Style*, 67

both French speaking and English speaking, largely due to their work with the French in the fur trade in Montreal and the English with the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC).⁵

Métis history in Canada

Métis self-identity emerged in the mid-1750s in the Great Lakes region. Métis identity would further crystallize in the Red River area in 1816 when Métis fought at the Battle of Seven Oaks, which was a battle between fur trade rivals, Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company.⁶ The Red River Area was located within Rupert's Land⁷, which had been a hub of fur trading for the HBC for many years. During the 1850s the HBC's rule over Rupert's Land was challenged by Canada, Britain, and the United States. In 1869 the Government of Canada finally purchased Rupert's Land (including the Red River Colony) from the HBC for 1.5 million CAD. The purchase went forward without consulting the vast number of First Nations and Métis people living there. Soon after this decision large numbers of settlers came into that area, which dramatically changed the way of life for Métis and First Nations people on the prairies. A provisional representative government led by burgeoning Métis leader, Louis Riel, was formed to voice their concerns and discuss a way forward with the new Canadian government. The back and forth with the government led to the Red River Rebellion (1869-1870). A legal resolution came in the form of the Manitoba Act in 1870, which promised protections for Métis, including rights to scrip (a certificate entitling someone to acquire possession of a portion of land). Despite this resolution, the prospects for Métis in Manitoba were grim, and a large-scale Métis and First Nations migration westward ensued. During this time, Louis Riel was a wanted man for his involvement in the resistance and was forced into exile in the US.

The North West Resistance occurred in 1885 when Canadian troops began pressuring the Métis for the land they occupied throughout what is now known as the Saskatchewan/Alberta area. The Métis and First Nations peoples were afraid that their

⁵ Ibid, 67

⁶ Darren Préfontaine, "Métis History-Indigenous Saskatchewan Encyclopedia," University of Saskatchewan, accessed August 12, https://teaching.usask.ca/indigenoussk/import/metis_history.php#:~:text=The%20beginning%20of%20Métis%20history,other%20for%20marriage%2Ftrading%20alliances.

⁷ In modern terms, Rupert's Land comprised of northern Quebec, northern Ontario, much of the three prairie provinces, and most of southern Nunavut, as well as parts of Montana, Minnesota, and North and South Dakota.

way of life was about to change yet again. Louis Riel returned to Canada and urged all dissatisfied people in the North West to bring their case to Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald so they could assert their case for a right to life in the West. An armed mounted police force was sent to the Batoche area to quell the resistance, and thus began the first of several battles during 1885. In the end, the resistance was defeated and Louis Riel was arrested and found guilty of treason by an English speaking jury.⁸ He was hanged on November 16th, 1885. His execution was meant to send a message to any other Indigenous groups who were planning to go against the government's plans of Indigenous eradication. After Riel's death, the Métis went into hiding, covertly practicing their culture and way of life because it was not safe to do so publicly. They no longer felt safe to publicly live as Métis people. Some Métis disavowed their Métis identity and re-identified as Canadian or as American "Indians" and were isolated from their own people. Others, dispossessed of their lands, found a way to survive on Crown lands and became known as the "road allowance people." After the fall of their nation, Métis scattered all across the North American continent in search of a way to survive.⁹ In the last 50 years there has been a resurgence of Métis reclaiming their heritage with pride, which I will cover in Chapter Three.¹⁰

In Canada today, the Métis are a federally recognized Indigenous people. There have been multiple decisions that have recognized the Métis as a people, including the following sections taken from the Métis Rights page on the official Government of Canada website¹¹:

1. Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, recognizes and affirms the existing Aboriginal and treaty rights of the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada. Supreme Court decisions in a series of cases have served to clarify these rights, and have established legal tests to determine the scope and content of Aboriginal rights, and which groups hold them. Métis organizations and governments prepare, maintain and manage registries of Métis individuals claiming Section

⁸ Bob Beal and Rod McLeod, "North-West Resistance" The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2006, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/north-west-rebellion>

⁹ Pamela Sing, "Globalization, Identity and Cultural Cores: Mixed-Blood and Métis Writers in Canada and the US." *Review of International American Studies* , 6, (2013): 3

¹⁰ Unknown, "Métis Historical Timeline," Métis Nation of Ontario, accessed December 2022, <https://www.metisnation.org/culture-heritage/metis-timeline/>

¹¹ Unknown, "Métis Rights," Government of Canada, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, accessed December 2022, <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100014413/1535468629182>

35 rights under the Constitution Act. The Government of Canada is not involved in this process.”

2. On April 14, 2016, the Supreme Court declared that Métis and non-Status Indians are "Indians" for the purpose of federal Parliament's law-making jurisdiction under subsection 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867.”

Métis history in the United States

The work of tracing Métis identity through US history is not easy, because Métis people and identity have been systematically erased from US history. They were never recognized by the government, due to an intentional campaign to prevent the intermingling of Indigenous and settlers. Despite this, there is documentation that the Métis moved across what would become the US/Canada border frequently for the buffalo hunt, as well as in their work in the fur trade. In this section I will outline multiple instances of Métis living in the US during the development of the borders between the US and Canada back in the 1800s. This is by no means an exhaustive history, but rather a section to highlight that there is evidence of Métis people living in the US.

Because of their work in the fur trade, Métis people settled near many fur trading posts. There are many records of Métis living near HBC trading posts in the Pacific Northwest. The generally peaceful era of the Métis working with and living around the HBC came to an end when Americans began to overtake the land. In 1846 Great Britain and the United States agreed that Britain would cede its land claims south of the 49th parallel and west of the Continental Divide.¹² In turn, the US agreed to abandon all land claims north of the 49th Parallel. As a result, a large number of the French-Canadian and Métis employees who worked for the HBC were stuck in the Oregon Territory (modern day Oregon State and Washington State).

The historical book *Songs Upon the River: The Buried History of the French-Speaking Canadiens and Métis from the Great Lakes and the Mississippi across to the Pacific* by Robert Foxcurran, Michel Bouchard, and Sébastien Malette talks about an instance of US governmental enforcement that occurred; “the U.S. Army showed up in

¹² Robert Foxcurran, Michel Bouchard, and Sébastien Malette, *Songs Upon the River: The Buried History of the French-Speaking Canadiens and Métis from the Great Lakes and the Mississippi across to the Pacific*, (Quebec: Baraka Books, 2016), 65

1849 to ensure American hegemony over the old aboriginal and fur trading territories from the Pacific Northwest to south of the 49th parallel, policing the territory and consolidating the dwindling ‘Indian ’population onto ever smaller and more tightly besieged reservations.”¹³ In the early 1850s several thousand Americans arrived north of the Columbia River hoping to settle there. These newcomers “proceeded to develop and subpartition the land that would become Washington territory,”¹⁴ and the forced removal of 14,000 Indigenous people living on the land began. These new policies “that sought to divide the ‘civilized ’from the ‘savage’ ...would call into question the status of Métis in what would become the state of Washington.”¹⁵ This practice of dividing the settlers from the Indigenous people directly opposed the Métis way of life, who were literal descendents of an ideology of reciprocity. Métis people were forced to either join the First Nations people relegated to reservations or try their best to assimilate into the “Anglo-American communities of settlers suddenly pouring in over the Oregon Trail.”¹⁶ Despite this forced erasure, there is documentation of Métis people settling upon the shores of the Columbian River, and that “thousands of their descendants still reside there to this day.”¹⁷

There is documentation of Métis settlements all across the US, but for the sake of this report, I will highlight the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Reservation in North Dakota. Métis fled to this settlement after the fall of the Métis Nation in Canada. In the 1974 book, *History of Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa* Patrick Gourneau wrote that the majority of the band was Métis “or as they refer to themselves, “Mechifs.”¹⁸ Currently, according to the United States National Conference of State Legislatures website, the Métis people are not federally or state recognized. There are pockets of people who self identify as Métis throughout the Northern part of the country. However, Métis people are not given status or any kind of recognition, and their history is not taught in the education system. This section has made it clear that Métis people exist in the US and Canada. Because of the ways that the US government dealt with the Métis population there is a

¹³ Ibid, 86

¹⁴ Ibid, 81

¹⁵ Ibid, 81

¹⁶ Ibid, 86

¹⁷ Ibid, 86

¹⁸ Sing, “Globalization, Identity and Cultural Cores,” 6

dearth of knowledge. Whereas in Canada, Métis identity and nationhood were able to remain intact, despite being stamped out by colonial forces for centuries.

Chapter 1. Defining the Terms

To understand how Métis literature fits into the literary landscape of Canada, the terms “nation”, “national literature”, “publics” and “counter publics” must first be defined.

1.1. Defining “Nation”

Concepts of nation, nationality, and nationalism are enigmatic in nature, ever shifting in meaning depending on context. Thus, it is important to make clear the definitions I am using throughout this report. For the term “nation” I am using the definition scholar Benedict Anderson outlines in his book, *Imagined Communities*.

Anderson defines the nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”¹⁹ By “imagined” Anderson means that although all members of a nation are not able to gather at once, there is still a shared belief in its existence. Anderson uses the word “sovereign (meaning supreme power or authority)” first, to indicate the innate power of the nation, and second, because the concept of nationhood was born during the age when the Enlightenment and Revolution were subverting the legitimacy of the “divinely-ordained...dynastic realm.” Due to the term nationalism arising in relation to European history and ideologies, it is inherently tied to Euro-centric ideologies. The final part of the definition I want to highlight is Anderson’s use of the word “community”. He writes, “the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.” It is this crucial element of the imagined community that makes it possible for millions of people to have died in the name of their nations over the last two centuries.²⁰

A fundamental change occurred in Europe in the 18th century with the creation of the novel and the newspaper.²¹ These two new technologies gave rise to nationalism and came as a result of the advent of the printing press, which in the 40 years after the publication of the Gutenberg Bible at the end of the fifteenth century, had seen more than 20,000 volumes produced in Europe. By 1600, it is believed that 200,000,000

¹⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 2006), 6.

²⁰ Ibid 7

²¹ Ibid 23

volumes had been printed.²² The novel and the newspaper created imagined communities that were all engaging in reading a text, in the same language, at roughly the same time. As Anderson puts it, “the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbors, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life.”²³ Never before had the nation been so tangible.

1.2. Defining “national literature”

In *The Border Crossing Books Project*, Noorda, Weber, and Ramdarshan Bold write that “national literatures... are shaped, and reshaped, by political, economic, and social forces.” Because national literature is supposed to reflect the nation it comes from, it must be ever changing to reflect the nation as it is being reshaped. If it is not constantly changing, it “fails to capture the realities of the nation and its people” and becomes a “pastiche of literature from other nations.”²⁴ Readers are an important part of the process of national literature-making, because they construct national literature by “engaging with, and discussing, texts that are embedded with ideology/ideologies.”²⁵ What readers choose to read can either “challenge” or “reinforce” the ideologies that shape national literature.

1.3. Publics and counter publics

Much like the concept of “nation”, the rules of a public are so intuitive that they are difficult to pinpoint. In his article “Publics and Counter publics,” Michael Warner writes, “Publics have become an essential fact of the social landscape, and yet it would tax our understanding to say exactly what they are.”²⁶ Although Warner outlines the existence of three types of publics, this report is interested in the type referred to as a

²² Ibid 37

²³ Ibid 35

²⁴ Weber, Ramdarshan Bold, and Noorda *International Bestsellers and the Online Reconfiguring of National Identity*, 1.

²⁵ Ibid, 1

²⁶ Michael Warner, “Publics and counter publics,” Duke University Press , 14 (2002): 49, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1qgnqj8>

“discourse public”. A discourse public is “the kind of public that comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation.”²⁷

Discourse publics are essentially text-based because it is the very idea that texts can be read at different times in different places by “otherwise unrelated people” that allows people to “imagine a public as an entity that embraces all the users of that text, whoever they might be.”²⁸ There are seven rules for what constitutes a discourse public. First, “a public is self-organized.”²⁹ Second, “a public is a relation among strangers.”³⁰ Third, the address of public speech is both personal and impersonal.³¹ For instance, addressees may recognize the intimate feelings that the speech invokes in them, but it is important to remember that the speech is being addressed “to indefinite others.”³² Fourth, a public consists through mere attention, such as reading a book. Fifth, a public is the social space created by “the reflexive circulation of discourse”.³³ Circulation is necessary to the creation of the public because circulation is what allows people to find and engage with the discourse of a public.³⁴ Sixth, publics act historically according to the temporality of their circulation, meaning that the “sphere of activity” in the public will cease when the circulation ceases.³⁵ Seventh, “a public is poetic world-making.”³⁶ It is the language of the address that not only makes the claim that the public exists, but also says “let it have this character, speak this way, see the world this way.”³⁷

Warner then introduces another term: counter publics. He writes that although some publics present themselves as “the public” to frame themselves as the “universal discussion of the people,” counter publics make no effort to present themselves in this way. In fact, their difference is a necessary part of their identity. They “mark themselves off unmistakably from any general or dominant public.”³⁸ The members of such counter publics are not merely a subset of the public, but are marked as separate because of

²⁷ Ibid, 50

²⁸ Ibid, 51

²⁹ Ibid, 50

³⁰ Ibid, 55

³¹ Ibid, 57

³² Ibid, 60

³³ Ibid, 62

³⁴ Ibid, 64

³⁵ Ibid, 68

³⁶ Ibid, 82

³⁷ Ibid, 82

³⁸ Ibid, 84

their “conflictual relation to the dominant public.”³⁹ A counter public's awareness of its subordinate status is also key.⁴⁰ The discourses that they are marking themselves against are those of “not just a general or wider public, but a dominant one.”⁴¹ The discourses that mark a counter public would be met with hostility in dominant contexts. Warner writes that people who are part of such counter publics are “socially marked” by their being part of such a discourse.⁴²

Warner uses the example of a gay or queer counter public to illustrate that in a counter public dominant cultural norms are suspended: “no one is in the closet; the presumptive heterosexuality that constitutes the closet for individuals in ordinary speech is suspended.”⁴³ Because of the fact that this counter public addresses all members as inherently queer, its discourses, or texts, will only be able to circulate “up to a certain point, at which it is certain to meet intense resistance.”⁴⁴ There is a level of risk inherent in being a part of such a counter public. As Warner says, “one enters at one’s own risk.”⁴⁵ Counter publics also seek to be transformative spaces, rather than merely replicating the status quo.⁴⁶

1.4. The rise of nation through literature

“Nation” and “literature” have always been intertwined, because language and by extension, literature is the way in which people are able to imagine possibilities for the nation, or as Anderson would call it, the “imagined community”. The rise of the modern nation-state is closely tied to the history of publishing, and consequently, literature. In Canada, as in most nations, publishing was built up to function as an arm of the nation-state. The nation-state influenced the “circulation of books and other print material” to disseminate the ideologies of the Church and the nation. As such, “print culture has been central to the construction and dissemination of national (cultural) identities.”⁴⁷ In

³⁹ Ibid, 85

⁴⁰ Ibid, 86

⁴¹ Ibid, 86

⁴² Ibid, 86

⁴³ Ibid, 86

⁴⁴ Ibid, 87

⁴⁵ Ibid, 87

⁴⁶ Ibid, 88

⁴⁷ Weber, Ramdarshan Bold, and Noorda *International Bestsellers and the Online Reconfiguring of National Identity*, 2.

Canada the nation building project has not been as successful as its southern neighbor, the United States. This is owed, perhaps, to the fact that the “Canadian national project has always been more nakedly ideational in the attempt to compose a national narrative out of changing understandings of the past, present, and future of the peoples who inhabit the country.”⁴⁸

1.5. Situating my work with Casanova, *The Border Crossing Books Project*, and Driscoll & Rehberg Sedo

In *The World Republic of Letters*, scholar Pascale Casanova writes that the national book is produced for the literary market of its own country, respecting its commercial customs.⁴⁹ Building on this, in their paper called “The transnational reception of bestselling books between Canada and Australia,” Beth Driscoll and DeNel Rehberg Sedo posit that Casanova’s criteria for national bestsellers also applies to international bestsellers, in that they must also appeal to the national and cultural ideologies already in place in the destination country they are entering into. Driscoll and Rehberg Sedo also examine how the globalization of the publishing industry affects nationalism, particularly in Anglophone countries that exist in the cultural shadow of the US and the UK, as Canada and Australia do.⁵⁰

The Border Crossing Books Project discusses the impact that globalization and conglomeration have had on the publishing industry in the 21st century.⁵¹ While it is true that each nation both literally and ideologically constructs its own production of books, the global environment in which those titles are produced is different now than it was prior to the 21st century. This is largely because of the international reach of the internet, which goes beyond national borders and allows titles to achieve exposure to a much larger international consumer base. The internet's role became particularly important during the pandemic when bookstores had to close their bricks and mortar stores. It has, in some ways, taken up the role that local booksellers once occupied and now guides

⁴⁸ Albert Braz and Paul Morris, *National Literature in Multinational States*, 1st ed. (Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 2022), XXI

⁴⁹ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 169-170

⁵⁰ Driscoll and Rehberg Sedo, “The transnational reception of bestselling books between Canada and Australia,” 244

⁵¹ Weber, Ramdarshan Bold, and Noorda *International Bestsellers and the Online Reconfiguring of National Identity*, 2.

consumers through algorithms which use metadata to pair readers with books from around the world. As a result of all these factors, consumers are relying more heavily on metadata than ever before. Metadata is a set of data that describes and gives information about other data; it is the mechanism through which online customers are can locate the books that are right for them. However, Metadata is only useful when it is accurate.⁵² My research builds from Driscoll and Rehberg Sedo's exploration into how globalization affects titles from a smaller cultural field (Canada) entering into a larger cultural field (the US). I also draw from *The Border Crossing Books Project* in wondering if the globalization of the publishing industry makes it easier for Métis titles to enter into a foreign market (the US). Now that the literary landscape in which Métis national literature circulates has been laid out, the next chapter will cover a brief history of Indigenous literature in Canada.

⁵² Calvin Reid, "Accurate Metadata Sells Books," Publishers Weekly, 2010, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publishing-and-marketing/article/43740-accurate-metadata-sells-books.html>

Chapter 2. Indigenous literature in Canada, a complicated history

2.1. Indigenous storytelling, a brief history

In *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* Dr. Daniel Heath Justice writes, “It is important to note that literature is just one of many ways that Indigenous peoples have told and continue to tell stories.”⁵³ Indigenous storytelling existed long before settlers came to the land that is now known as Canada, and thus, writing practices should not be considered a replacement for traditional storytelling techniques, but rather an addition. Many of the methods that Indigenous peoples have employed to tell stories do not fit with the Eurocentric literary scope, which does not take into account that “these diverse textualities and interpretive traditions require particular kinds of extensive specialized training that are most often limited to specific community members with specific linguistic and cultural knowledge.”⁵⁴ It is a huge oversight to ignore the deep knowledge these techniques require.

2.2. Indigenous literature, a complicated history

Literature reflects which stories are honored and privileged by a culture. It reflects narratives that “people believe to be central to their understanding of the world and their place within it.”⁵⁵ There is an implication that literature is innately improving; “the reader of literature attains a higher rung on the social ladder than the mere absorber of printed words.”⁵⁶ Historically in Canada, Indigenous peoples have been considered to be a people of lack, not capable of creating writing that is on the level of “literature.” Literature carries cultural capital, and to suggest that a group of people don’t have the capacity to create literature, makes the presumption that those same people are uncivilized.⁵⁷ It damages a group of people when they are considered to be incapable of telling their own stories in a valuable way.

⁵³ Daniel Heath Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018), 22

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 23

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 20

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 16

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 20

For far too long stories about Indigenous peoples have been written by non-Indigenous people, and have told a story of “Indigenous deficiency,” in which Indigenous people present an inherent lack “in morals, laws, culture, restraint, language, ambition, hygiene, desire, love.”⁵⁸ These stories have been so successful that settlers can view the rates of “lower life expectancy, employment, education rates, higher rates of homelessness, substance abuse, and suicide” as evidence of Indigenous peoples “lack of human decency,” rather than the result of generations of intentional colonial violence.⁵⁹ It puts Indigenous peoples in a particular bind when they try to make their stories and lives legible to the Euro-centric powers that be, because they are trying to fit into a mold of the colonizer’s creation. They must appeal to these stipulations if they are to be granted access to the “literature” category, which is an inherently problematic and exclusionary system to begin with. As such, the act of writing is never a neutral one for Indigenous peoples. They must always be conscious of who they are writing for, who that writing appeals to, and whether they are undermining their own Indigeneity in the name of literature.⁶⁰

2.3. Indigenous literature asserting Indigenous present, past, and future

It is crucial for people to tell their own stories, because “stories abide in living cultures, and living peoples.”⁶¹ The fact that Indigenous literature exists affirms Indigenous experiences, their past, present, and futures. Indigenous literature also serves to create “ethnographic accuracy,” which combats stories that have undermined Indigenous people’s experiences. Contemporary Indigenous literature supposes an Indigenous present “in a world that so often wants to see us only as historical artifacts” frozen in the past. To write about the present is a “powerful refusal to disappear into the symbolic frontier.”⁶²

⁵⁸ Ibid, 2

⁵⁹ Ibid, 3

⁶⁰ Ibid, 22

⁶¹ Ibid, 204

⁶² Ibid, 56

Chapter 3. Métis literature as national literature/ counter public

In “Globalization, Identity, and Cultural Cores: Mixed-Blood and Métis Writers in Canada and the US” Pamela V. Sing writes, “now that Native literature is recognized and celebrated as a dynamic and increasingly robust field both in Canada and the US, the 21st century is witnessing the emergence of a contemporary Métis identity poetics.”⁶³ This is possible due to the ongoing work done by Métis writers to recuperate traditional and cultural paradigms that are specific to the Métis experience. Métis sociologist Chris Anderson writes, “Métis nationhood or peoplehood” can be seen “as a form of Benedict Anderson’s imagined communities.” While such framing is useful for my work because it utilizes such colonial ideas as “nation” and “national literature”, is it also important to recognize the inherent colonial lens therein. Métis nationhood existed prior to “settler-states, relational political designations, pre-state origins and associated historical power [which] clashed with European, state-based understandings of nationalism, particularly in relation to kinship.”⁶⁴ What constitutes a nation is different in Métis ways of knowing, and is particularly created around kinship networks.

3.1. Early Métis national literature

Early sites of Métis national literature can be traced all the way back to the work of Pierre Falcon (a well-known Métis composer of the day) and Louis Riel (Métis leader and revolutionary) during the 1800s. Both writers utilized different mediums to form their vision of the nation throughout their lives. Falcon’s famous song, “La Chanson de la Grenouillère,” celebrates the victory in the wake of the Battle of Seven Oaks (1816). Scholar Matthew Tetreault writes that this song in particular “gives expression to nascent forms of horizontal comradeship that resonate with [Benedict] Anderson’s imagined communities.”⁶⁵ Riel’s poetry fiercely asserts Métis nationhood in the face of English

⁶³ Sing, “Globalization, Identity and Cultural Cores,” 11

⁶⁴ Matthew Tetreault, “Literary Resistance: Situating a Métis National Literature,” in *National Literature in Multinational States*, 1st ed, Albert Braz and Paul Morris (Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 2022), 45

⁶⁵ Ibid, 56

Canadian colonialism, which in his late years “would increasingly turn to ethnonational symbols in his writing.”⁶⁶

3.2. Métis national literature in The Forgotten Years

The years following the defeat at Batoche and the state sanctioned execution of Louis Riel in 1885 saw the degradation of Métis nationhood. The Métis people did not cease to exist, but the years after the loss of Riel were known as The Forgotten Years. Under the weight of the settler-colonial state, the Métis nation was split further and further apart. Métis who were able to assimilate went into hiding because it was safer to do so, while others who could not assimilate were forced to settle into the cracks between Crown Land, and would come to be known as the Road Allowance People.⁶⁷

Through all of this, whispers of nationhood remained. Métis literary production survived within “small, regional publications, such as newspapers and periodicals across the Prairies.”⁶⁸ Circulation was limited, but writers and members of L’Union Nationale Métisse St-Joseph du Manitoba, continued to produce pamphlets and articles into the twentieth century. By keeping up this work, they were able to keep historical memory of the resistances alive which allowed future generations of writers to build upon it. My great-great Grandfather, Charles Sauve was the first secretary of the L’Union Nationale Métisse and produced multiple pamphlets during that time to keep Riel’s dream of the Métis Nation alive. Here is an excerpt from a letter Charles Sauve sent to long-time friend, Louis Lavalley⁶⁹ in April, 1930:

Riel said: What makes me strong is dedication without limits. I don't have the advantage of saying the same thing; but I say to his example: what encourages me, is to see that I am looked upon as a person with whom it would be better not to have relations, and so there is contempt and distance. (Source: Library Archives of the University of Calgary)

This letter illustrates how difficult it was for writers to keep Riel’s dream of the Métis nation alive, and many Métis did not want to be associated with work that could

⁶⁶ Ibid, 47

⁶⁷ Ibid, 46

⁶⁸ Ibid, 47

⁶⁹ Louis Lavalley fought in the North-West Rebellion of 1885 and, along with Charles Sauve, was sent by the Métis National Committee to bring Louis Riel’s body from Regina, Saskatchewan home to St. Boniface for burial.

potentially endanger their lives. These writers took great personal risks to produce Métis national works. Circumstances did not begin to change until after WWII when a broad effort towards Métis national identity began to take shape. It took many years of work, but finally in the 1980s the Métis National Council was created.⁷⁰

3.3. The resurgence of Métis national literature with *Halfbreed* by Maria Campbell

The pivotal moment for contemporary Métis national literature came with the 1973 publication of Maria Campbell's memoir, *Halfbreed*. Scholar Emma LaRocque writes that Campbell's memoir "inspired younger generations of Indigenous authors to re-inscribe the Canadian narrative," and challenge "dominant interpretations of Canadian history."⁷¹ This memoir was one of the first of its kind in that it was from a Métis woman's perspective, telling the true events of her experience.⁷² For once, it was not a settler-colonial account of the Métis, but a Métis person herself telling the reader what actually happened in her own words.

3.4. 21st century Métis national literature

Today, Métis writers are taking up the work of reclaiming authority over their own nation's stories. Gregory Scofield, Marilyn Dumont, Katherena Vermette, and Cherie Dimaline are just a few of the authors doing this work. They are not only telling traditional and historical Métis stories in a way that strengthens cultural roots but are also practicing cultural recovery and envisioning what "Métis nationhood might become" in the future.⁷³ It must be recognized that this restorying is occurring in "relation to more than a century of pervasive settler-colonial narratives" that "sought to erase the Métis and their Indigeneity."⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Tetreault, "Literary Resistance," 46

⁷¹ Ibid, 49

⁷² The publishers did, however, make a choice to take out a significant moment in which an RCMP officer did great harm to the author, but in 1973 it was still a feat for this book to be published at all.

⁷³ Tetreault, "Literary Resistance," 50

⁷⁴ Ibid, 59

3.5. Métis national literature as a counter public

Métis literatures have been and are a vital way of countering colonial forces of erasure and have created “a richly expansive literary tradition that engages with colonialism,” rather than being dictated by colonialism.⁷⁵ It is useful to view Métis national literature as a counter public. Métis national literature does not assert itself as the public, but rather asserts itself as a counter to Canadian national literature.

By virtue of existing, Métis national literature is a direct affront to the dominant public of Canadian national literature, which asserts its national status by claiming to speak for everyone in Canada. In the past the dominant public of Canadian national literature has made a concerted effort to ensure that Indigenous literature and Métis literature were not included. In the more recent past, the goal of Canadian colonialism has been incorporation rather than exclusion. Though this may appear to be a step forward, it is yet another way for the colonial nation-state to have total control over Indigenous people and an attempt to erase the past. Canadian literature seeks to appropriate Indigenous and Métis literature and pull it into the public of Canadian literature to make Indigeniety a part of Canadianness.

3.6. How Métis national literature affects the trajectory of Canadian national literatures

Understanding how the counter public of Métis national literature fits in relation to the dominant public of Canadian national literature is important because it contextualizes the contemporary attempt of Canadian national literature to acquire Indigenous literature under its umbrella. Although this can be seen as a sign of growth for Canada, Indigenous writers and artists have complicated feelings about this prospect. Indigenous literature and Métis national literature do not wish to be a part of the Canadian national literary canon. They have been asserting themselves as their own counter publics for a long time. Many Indigenous artists do not wish to be subsumed within the colonial institution of national literature, and for good reason. They do not wish to be a part of the national canon which has worked to undermine and subjugate them and their work for so long. This paper does not have the time or space to fully address the complexities here,

⁷⁵ Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, xix

but it is important to be aware of because Indigenous artists are making conscious choices to not be a part of the national canon. They want to maintain sovereignty over their counter publics and continue to respond to the public of Canadian national literature as these choose to. Now that I have talked about the complicated history of Indigenous national literature and Métis national literature, I will cover the methodologies I used for my own research.

Chapter 4. Methodologies

4.1. Why case studies?

For my research, I used the blueprint of the two-stage case study methodology outlined in Driscoll and Rehberg Sedo's article, "The Transnational Reception of Bestselling Books Between Canada and Australia" as well as the case study methodology used in *The Border-Crossing Books Project*. Driscoll and Rehberg Sedo aimed to focus on the "circulation and reception of bestsellers as a route to gain insights into the contemporary transnational book culture," and to understand how bestsellers are understood in their home country and destination country.⁷⁶ Because they were synthesizing responses to the texts in the form of publication reviews and online-reviews, case studies were the best methodology to investigate the circulation of books via content analysis of "print media and online reader reviews."⁷⁷ After choosing three titles for my own case studies, I analyzed how the texts traveled across the border from Canada to the US, and examined how they were discussed in the "destination market" via US reviews. I also looked at the role Book Industry Standards and Communications (BISAC) codes played in each title's success.

I chose three bestselling titles by Métis authors with Métis content published between 2016 and 2019. I selected the titles based on their presence on the Amazon.ca bestseller lists from 2016, 2017, and 2019, and the number of awards each title had received or been nominated for. Whenever a title receives an award, it impacts sales. Because I wanted the case studies to include a broad range of genres, I chose *From the Ashes: My Story of Being Métis, Homeless, and Finding my Way* by Jesse Thistle (a memoir), *The Break* by Katherena Vermette (Literary Fiction) and *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline (Young Adult). In doing so, I "demonstrated the breadth of a research design that looks beyond literary fiction."⁷⁸ This makes the research more applicable and useful for industry professionals to draw from, while providing a more holistic look into how Métis titles published in Canada translate into the US market.

⁷⁶ Driscoll and Rehberg Sedo, "The transnational reception of bestselling books between Canada and Australia," 246

⁷⁷ Ibid 244

⁷⁸ Ibid, 250

4.2. How is “bestseller” defined?

To determine if a Métis title has been successful in the US market, success itself must first be defined. In this paper I am considering three different understandings of success. In doing so, I am working to account for three varying definitions of success. Firstly, the title must have above average sales numbers in the destination country. I am defining a bestseller as anything over 1,000 books sold in the first year of publication, based on what Jane Freidman cited in the HotSheet: NPD BookScan’s Kristen McLean wrote “that roughly 66 percent of those books from the top 10 publishers sold less than 1,000 copies over 52 weeks.”⁷⁹ Sales numbers are an important measure of a book’s success, though it must be acknowledged that historically, only a small number of Indigenous titles have been published, and when they have, they received less attention from publishers than non-Indigenous books. The fact that so many Indigenous titles are bestsellers in 2022 indicates that there is a demand. Secondly, the title must receive attention from US publications in the form of reviews. Interest from publications in the form of reviews indicates that the book is getting attention and accolades. Thirdly, the title must maintain its Métis identity when it enters the US market. If the title is successful but has been made to conform to a marketing strategy which erases its Métis identity, it is not a success by the standards of this research.

4.3. The Reviews - Publications chosen in the US and Canada

Once the case study titles were decided, I began collecting reviews to analyze how each title was received in the US and Canada. From the US, I included reviews from *Publishers Weekly*, *The Times*, *The Kirkus Review*, and *New York Times*. From Canada I included reviews from *CBC*, *Quill and Quire*, *The National Post*, and the *Globe and Mail*. I chose these publication reviews because they are recognized as some of the largest, most influential publications in each country.

⁷⁹ Jane Friedman, “The Hot Sheet” September 14, 2022

Table 1. List of case study titles

Title	Author	Publication Date	Content
<i>The Break</i>	Katherena Vermette	September 17 th , 2016 by House of Anansi Press	Literary fiction, intergenerational story that follows a Métis family through the aftermath of a violent act.
<i>The Marrow Thieves</i>	Cherie Dimaline	September 1 st , 2017 by Dancing Cat Books	Young adult, Sci-fi, dystopian story that follows a group of Indigenous people through the Canadian landscape as they deal with climate disaster and being hunted by people who want to slaughter them for their bone marrow.
From the Ashes: My Story of Being Métis, Homeless, and Finding My Way	Jesse Thistle	August 6 th , 2019 by Simon & Schuster	Personal memoir about a Métis-Cree man who comes through a life of abuse, homelessness, and addiction to a better life of community and family repair.

4.4. Keywords searched for in close readings

I conducted close readings of each review to understand how each title was received in both countries. I also completed content analyses, focusing on whether reviewers mentioned the Métis identity of the authors and the Métis subject matter present in each title.

Other elements I looked for included whether the reviews talked about Métis history, systemic racism and colonialism, and the vernacular used in the review. For example, if the term “Indigenous” or “Indian” or “Native” is used, I would take that into account. For *The Break* specifically I noted whether MMIWG2S (Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2Spirit) was discussed. Whether or not the reviews included this content would expose the differences in how each country engages with Indigenous stories in a meaningful way. It would also give clues about how far along the US and Canada are in terms of reconciliation between settlers and Indigenous peoples. In addition to content analysis, I looked at US sales numbers for each title. Due to requirements from BookScan, I will not be referring specifically to those numbers, but rather giving generalized information about sales.

4.5. BISAC / Metadata - Defining BISAC

I investigated the role BISAC codes and Subject Headings played in the titles' successes. BISAC stands for "Book Industry Standards and Communications". BISAC codes are administered by the Book Industry Study Group's Subject Codes Committee. The BISAC Subject Headings List was originally created to be a standard for the US, but quickly became a standard for the US and Canada because the two publishing communities are relatively similar and intertwined. BISAC codes are nine-character alphanumeric codes that come from the industry approved list of subject descriptors called Subject Headings. The descriptors themselves consist of two to four levels. For instance, "the code for the descriptor representing general southern travel in the United States is TRV025070 and the related descriptor is 'TRAVEL / United States / South / General'".⁸⁰ The BISG has created a physical and digital system to help determine where a title should be shelved in online databases or in a physical bookstore.⁸¹ There are about 5,400 BISAC codes in total at any given time. BISAC codes are audience agnostic, meaning that they are meant to describe the material of the book and not the audience of the book.

The BISAC Subject Headings List is updated yearly, by committee members who span across the publishing industry. Proposals for subject changes from people outside of the committee are also considered and heard. Indigenous BISAC codes began to come into use between 2016-2017. Most of the work to create these Indigenous specific codes has been done by BookNet Canada; they have recognized the market need to connect with Indigenous peoples for those identities to be represented in BISAC codes. Although there are 29 Indigenous related BISAC codes, there are currently no Métis specific BISAC codes.⁸² While it can be argued, Métis Literature is included within that BISAC code, specificity is important, and there may be enough Métis literature out in the world to warrant the creation of Métis specific BISAC codes.

⁸⁰ Unknown, "BISAC subject codes" BISG, 2022, <https://bisg.org/general/custom.asp?page=BISACSubjectCodes>

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² Lauren Stewart, "Call for industry participation: 2023 Indigenous BISAC Subject Code proposals," BookNet Canada, Oct, 4, 2022, <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/2022/10/4/call-for-industry-participation-2023-indigenous-bisac-subject-code-proposals>

BISAC is a form of metadata, which helps the entire publishing industry market and sell books. A since metadata is only useful if it is specific, choosing the most descriptive and specific BISAC codes for a title is the best way to get the book discovered and into the hands of its intended audience. If metadata is more specific it will also work better with online selling spaces as the algorithms will know better how to categorize these titles. Now that the methodologies have been clearly outlined, I will delve into my case studies. There are seven segments for each title; a brief synopsis of the book, a brief publishing history of the book, awards each title received, close readings of Canadian and American publication reviews, a look at the BISAC codes, and a concluding section for takeaways.

Chapter 5. The case studies

5.1. *From the Ashes*

5.1.1. Synopsis

From the Ashes: My Story of Being Métis, Homeless, and Finding My Way is a memoir by Métis-Cree author, Jesse Thistle. The book follows Thistle's childhood through the traumatic events of being placed in the foster care system and effectively cut off from his Indigenous culture. Later, Thistle and his brothers move in with their paternal grandparents. Thistle's self-destructive behavior and drug addiction lead to him being kicked out of his grandparents' house. He travels to Vancouver and spends a decade on and off the streets as an adult. One day, Thistle realizes he has to make a change or he is going to die. The rest of the story follows Thistle in his fight for his life, and his journey finding his way back to his family and Indigenous community.

5.1.2. A brief publishing history

From the Ashes was published in Canada on August 6, 2019, by Simon and Schuster Canada. It became a national bestseller and won the Kobo Emerging Writer Prize in the non-fiction category, The Indigenous Voices Awards, and High Plains Book Award. It was also named a Globe and Mail Book of the Year, an Indigo Book of the Year, and a CBC Best Canadian Nonfiction Book of the year. In 2020 it was nominated for CBC Canada Reads.

Simultaneously, the book was published in the US on August 6, 2019. In the first year of publication, it saw very minimal success there. This title did receive attention from US publications, but it was not successful by the standards of my other two definitions. The title did not maintain its Métis-ness when it entered the US. On June 8, 2021, *From the Ashes* was rereleased with a title change. Instead of *From the Ashes: My Story of Being Métis, Homeless, and Finding My Way*, it was changed to *From the Ashes: My Story of Being Indigenous, Homeless, and Finding My Way*. Nita Pronovost, editor at Simon and Schuster Canada wrote in an email that the title change was done in consultation with the author: "the feeling in the US was that the word 'Métis' wasn't well-known the way it is here (in Canada), so they asked Jesse if he was okay with that

change, and he was.” Since the title change the book has been selling at a rate 3-5 times what it was before. Even though sales numbers were not astronomically higher, the title change made a positive difference in sales, as evidenced by the fact that the re-released title has almost outsold the original title since its release. This title did not meet the bestseller criteria of selling above average sales in the US.

5.1.3. Awards

Table 2. *From The Ashes* by Jesse Thistle – Awards

US Awards	Canadian Awards
None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CBC Canada Reads Nominee (2020) • Kobo Emerging Writer Prize Nonfiction (2020) Winner • Indigenous Voices Awards (2020) Winner • High Plains Book Awards Finalist (2020) • A Globe and Mail Book of the Year (2020) • An Indigo Book of the Year (2020) • A CBC Best Canadian Nonfiction Book of the Year (2020)

From the Ashes was nominated for CBC Canada Reads (2020) and won the Kobo Emerging Writer Prize for Nonfiction, as well as the Indigenous Voices Award. It was a finalist for the High Plains Book Awards and named a book of the year by the Globe and Mail, Indigo, and CBC.

5.1.4. Canadian reviews

Table 3. From The Ashes by Jesse Thistle – US and Canadian Reviews

Country	Review Publication	Author's Métis Identity	Story's Métis Identity	Review mentions Colonialism	Review uses term: Indigenous	Review mentions Racism
US	The Kirkus Review	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
US	Publishers Weekly	No	No	No	No	No
Canada	Quill and Quire	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 2 shows the three themes/ keywords I was looking for in my content analyses of the reviews and whether they were referred to in the US or Canada. A “yes” in the table means that the review did talk about colonialism or racism or use the term “Indigenous” in the review. A “no” in the table indicates that the review did not cover these topics or use the keyword. The only Canadian publication to review *From the Ashes* is *The Quill and Quire*, which published a review by well-known Indigenous writer, Tracey Lindberg, in July of 2019. Lindberg opens by giving a bit of historical context for who the Métis are. This review is the clearest about the colonial/racial aspect of Thistle’s story. Lindberg also uses the word “Turtle Island” in place of the word Canada, which is a term some Indigenous peoples use to refer to the lands now known as North and Central America as a way of reclaiming traditional Indigenous place-names. The term itself comes from various Indigenous people’s oral histories, which depicts the world being formed on the back of a turtle.⁸³ Lindberg rejects the view that this book is a hero’s journey (something that comes forth in the US reviews) when she writes, “[Thistle] does not appear as a hero or anti-hero, nor is his story reduced to a cautionary tale.”⁸⁴ This review depicts Thistle as a whole human, rather than reducing him to a one dimensional character in a redemption narrative.

From the Ashes was never formally reviewed by *CBC*, but because it was nominated for *CBC Canada Reads 2020*, there was an article published about the book

⁸³“ Turtle Island.” The Canadian Encyclopedia, November 6, 2018. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/turtle-island>.

⁸⁴ Tracy Lindberg, “ From the ashes: My story of being Métis, homeless, and finding my way,” *Quill and Quire*, July 29, 2019, <https://quillandquire.com/review/from-the-ashes-my-story-of-being-Métis-homeless-and-finding-my-way/>

on July 30, 2019. The article gives a brief summary of the plot, and mentions the “impact of prejudice and racism” on Thistle’s life as well as the foster care system’s role in cutting the author off from his Indigenous identity.⁸⁵ The *CBC* reported on *From the Ashes* again in an article published on October 20, 2020 called “*CBC: From the Ashes* by Jesse Thistle is the #1 bestselling Canadian print book of 2020 so far,” and notes that the title is at the top of the bestsellers list, outselling even *The Handmaid’s Tale*.⁸⁶ Even though they are not reviews, I wanted to include these instances, to illustrate how important this book has been in the sphere of Canadian publishing.

5.1.5. American reviews

For my US case studies I looked at *The Kirkus Review* and *Publishers Weekly*. The American version of *From the Ashes* was reviewed by *The Kirkus Review* on March 20, 2021. In this case, the erasure of the word “Métis” from the book’s title did not lead to erasure of Métis elements from the book review; the review begins with naming Jesse Thistle as a “Métis-Cree writer and professor.”⁸⁷ I paid particular attention to how the review framed Thistle’s story, and whether colonialism or racism were identified as playing a role in the trajectory of Thistle’s life. The review largely talked about the universality of the story but did make sure to mention in the very last paragraph “the life-altering damage that colonialism has wrought on Indigenous people everywhere...”⁸⁸ *Publishers Weekly* reviewed the American version of *From the Ashes* on April 22, 2021. This review does mention that Thistle teaches “Métis studies,” but excludes Thistle’s own Métis identity. This review does not contextualize the story in terms of colonialism or racism. In fact, this review frames the story as a universal tale of redemption, rather than a memoir of a family breaking down as a result of a long history of colonialism.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Unknown, “*From the Ashes* by Jesse Thistle,” *CBC*, July 30, 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/books/from-the-ashes-by-jesse-thistle-1.5222288>

⁸⁶ Unknown, “*From the Ashes* by Jesse Thistle is #1 bestselling Canadian print book of 2020,” *CBC*, October 20, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/books/from-the-ashes-by-jesse-thistle-is-the-1-bestselling-canadian-print-book-of-2020-so-far-1.5769381>

⁸⁷ Unknown, “*From the Ashes: My Story of Being Indigenous, Homeless, and Finding My Way*,” *Kirkus Reviews*, June 8, 2021, <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/jesse-thistle/from-the-ashes-my-story/>

⁸⁸ *Ibid*

⁸⁹ Unknown, “*From the Ashes: My story of being indigenous, homeless, and finding my way* by Jesse Thistle” *Publishers Weekly*, April 4, 2021, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/9781982182946>

5.1.6. BISAC

<i>From The Ashes: My Story of Being Métis, Homeless and Finding My Way</i>	BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY/Personal Memoirs/General/General
---	--

From The Ashes was categorized as BIOGRAPHY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY/ Personal Memoirs/General. BISAC codes remain the same if the title does not have a publisher in the destination country. An Indigenous specific BISAC code was not used. *From The Ashes* was published in 2019, which means that Indigenous BISAC codes were much more widely used by then, so I am not sure why the publishers did not use the option. However, according to the BISG website, there is only one Indigenous BISAC code in the Biography and Autobiography category; BIO028000 BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY / Cultural, Ethnic & Regional / Indigenous. The fact that the publishers chose not to use this BISAC indicates that it was either not a good fit for this title, or that they were not aware of it.

5.1.7. Takeaways

The main difference between the Canadian and US reviews was the overall framing of Thistle’s story. The Canadian review did mention racism and colonialism as being crucial factors involved in the author’s experiences. One of the US reviews framed the story as one of “redemption” and played up the universal appeal of the story rather than engaging with the colonial aspects of the story. It is interesting to note that this same review specifies that this is a Métis memoir, despite the US title change.

5.2. *The Break*

5.2.1. Synopsis

The Break by Katherena Vermette begins when Stella, a young Métis woman, looks out her kitchen window and sees a violent attack occur out on the Break (an isolated field across from her home in Winnipeg’s North End). From there, the narrative moves between members of Stella’s family who are all affected by this violence. The different perspectives form a web that tells an intimate story of a Métis family in the

throes of trauma and addiction, still trying to love one another through it all. From a larger standpoint, this is a story about intergenerational trauma, Métis legacy, violence against Indigenous women and girls, and colonial state violence.

5.2.2. A brief publishing history

The Break was published simultaneously in the US and Canada on September 17, 2016, by House of Anansi Press. It was nominated for CBC Canada Reads 2017 and won the Amazon.ca First Novel Award. It was also a finalist for the Rogers Writers Trust Fiction Prize, as well as the Governor General's Literary Award. Despite its success in Canada, when *The Break* was distributed into the US market by Publishers Group West it did rather poorly. As of October 8th, 2022, *The Break* has sold between 0-20 copies a week in the US since its release. Most of these sales have occurred in the states that border Canada. *The Break* did receive attention from one American publication, but it did not make above average sales in the US.

5.2.3. Awards

Table 4. *The Break* by Katherena Vermette – Awards

US Awards	Canadian Awards
None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CBC Canada Reads Nominee (2017) • Amazon.ca First Novel Award (2017) Winner • Burt Award for First Nations, Inuit and Métis Literature (2017) Winner • Finalist for the Rogers Writers 'Trust Fiction Prize (2016) • Finalist for the Governor General's Literary Award (2016)

The Break was nominated for CBC Canada Reads (2017), was the finalist for two major awards, and won the Amazon.ca First Novel Award as well as the Burt Award for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Literature. *The Break* did not win any awards in the US.

5.2.4. Canadian reviews

Table 5. *The Break* by Katherena Vermette – US and Canadian Reviews

Country	Review Publication	Mentions Author is Métis	Mentions Story is Métis	Review mentions Colonialism	Review mentions MMIWG	Uses term: Indigenous	Review mentions Racism
US	Publishers Weekly	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Canada	Quill and Quire	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Canada	Globe and Mail	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Canada	The National Post	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

In Canada, *The Break* was reviewed by *Quill and Quire*, *The Globe and Mail*, *The National Post*, and mentioned in an article by the *CBC*. *Quill and Quire* published a review by Candace Fertile in October of 2016. Fertile makes it clear that this is a story about systemic racism and colonialism and goes into detail about the significance of *The Break* as a geographical point for the community in the story.⁹⁰ *The Globe and Mail*

⁹⁰ Candace Fertile, “*The Break*,” *Quill and Quire*, September 21, 2016, <https://quillandquire.com/review/the-break/>

reviewed *The Break* on September 23, 2016. This review is a bit different from others in that it focuses more on the reading experience and explores how it could fit into the larger crime genre. This was surprising, as *The Break* had not been placed into the crime genre in any other reviews I read. The review states that the characters are Métis and includes statistics about how Indigenous women and girls are three times more likely to be sexually assaulted than their white counterparts, which helps to contextualize how big of a human rights issue the MMIWG2S situation in North America is.⁹¹

The National Post reviewed *The Break* on September 23rd, 2016. The opening of the review immediately dives into how important this book is in the context of racism in Canada. The reviewer writes that Vermette “puts a human face to issues that are too-often misunderstood.”⁹² The *CBC* published a basic summary of *The Break* when it was nominated for Canada Reads in 2017. Although this was not a review, it is important to include that the *CBC* gave *The Break* attention, because sales are impacted when a title is nominated for an award.⁹³

5.2.5. American reviews

Publishers Weekly was the only American publication to review *The Break*. The review was published on January 29, 2018, and gives a short summary of the plot. It mentions that the characters in the story are Métis. It also addresses that the book deals with themes of race and class, but does not mention that the author is Métis, themes of colonialism, or MMIWG2S.⁹⁴

5.2.6. BISAC

<i>The Break</i>	FICTION/ Literary/ General/ General
------------------	-------------------------------------

⁹¹ Marjorie Celona, “Review: Katherena Vermette's the break is an incredible feat of storytelling,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 23, 2016, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/book-reviews/review-katherena-vermettes-the-break-is-an-astonishing-act-of-empathy/article32021013/>

⁹² Unknown, “Every page of *The Break* hides beauty...” *The National Post*, September 23, 2016, <https://nationalpost.com/entertainment/books/book-reviews/every-page-of-the-break-hides-beauty-amid-suffering-love-winning-out-over-violence-and-hate>

⁹³ Unknown, “*The Break*- Canada Reads,” *CBC*, February 2, 2017, <https://www.cbc.ca/books/canadareads/the-break-1.3964057>

⁹⁴ Unknown, “*The Break* by Katherena Vermette” *Publishers Weekly*, January 29, 2018, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/9781487001117>

The Break was categorized as FICTION/ Literary/ General/ General. Because Métis identity is already a relatively well understood identity in mainstream culture in Canada, it is more likely that the General BISAC code did not impede the book's sale. In contrast, when the title entered the US market it was likely more difficult for booksellers to market it without knowing that it was explicitly an Indigenous story. If *The Break* had had an Indigenous specific BISAC code it could very well have helped booksellers market it properly. This, however, is a tricky statement to make, and one that some BIPOC writers disagree with. Black Sci-Fi writer, N.K. Jemisin states explicitly in her blog post, "Don't Put My Book in the African American Section" that she does not want her books to be shelved separately from general fiction. She says that by putting her books in the African-American Fiction section, separately from general fiction, publishers are indicating that her books are only of interest to "12% of the population" rather than "100% of the population".⁹⁵ She writes that this practice by the publishing industry indicates to Black writers that they should write for "universality", which "mostly just means the ability to write something that appeals to white readers, in my experience."⁹⁶ I believe nuance can be found here, that *The Break* could have been positively affected by an Indigenous BISAC code, and also that shelving it separate from General Fiction would be devastating for it. The Indigenous BISAC could be used in other ways aside from indicating where to shelve it; it would help booksellers to know that it could be featured during Indigenous History Month, for instance.

5.2.7. Takeaways

Because Métis identity and geography are not widely understood outside of Canada, *The Break* did not translate well into the US book market. *The Break* is so intimately tied with the geography of Winnipeg that it would be difficult to sell this story in another country, let alone a country that does not recognize Métis identity. It would be difficult for individual readers who do not know anything about the Métis people to pick up this book and know what to expect. Generally, the Canadian reviews of this title

⁹⁵ N.K. Jemisin, "Don't put my book in the African American section." Epiphany 2.0, May 26, 2010, <https://nkjemisin.com/2010/05/dont-put-my-book-in-the-african-american-section/>

⁹⁶ Ibid

showed a deeper level of care for the story, and its colonial implications. I do believe the General BISAC code affected this title's ability to find its proper audience in the US.

5.3. *The Marrow Thieves*

5.3.1. Synopsis

The Marrow Thieves by Cherie Dimaline is set in a dystopian future where everyone in the world except for Indigenous people have lost their ability to dream. In this future Indigenous people are hunted for their bone marrow which is then used in a serum to treat the dream-less. The story begins with Métis teenager, Frenchie and his brother, Mitch hiding from a group of “recruiters”. In the brothers' effort to escape Mitch is taken, leaving Frenchie alone. The story follows Frenchie as he travels northward and meets a group of Indigenous people also trying to find safety.

5.3.2. A brief publishing history

The Marrow Thieves was published in Canada and the US on September 1st, 2017, by Cormorant, an imprint of Dancing Cat Books. It was distributed in the US by Orca books. It was a success in both Canada and the US and was the only title of the three I studied that won two American awards: The Kirkus prize for Young Readers Literature in 2017 and the American Indian Youth Literature Award for Best Young Adult Book in 2018. In Canada, *The Marrow Thieves* won the Governor General's Literary Award (Young People's Literature - Text) in 2017 and the Sunburst Award for Young Adult in 2018. It was nominated for CBC Canada Reads in 2018.

The Marrow Thieves has outsold *The Break* and *From the Ashes* by about 35 times. This book also traveled around the US on a different scale; whereas the other two books mostly sold in the Northern part of the US, *The Marrow Thieves* has large sales numbers appearing in the upper Midwest (Montana, North Dakota, Michigan, Wisconsin), California, and Oregon. There are also pockets of high sales numbers throughout the East Coast, going as far south as South Carolina. *The Marrow Thieves* was also the only book of the three with large sales numbers in Texas (San Antonio area), New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado. This title fits all three criteria for bestseller status in both the US and Canada.

5.3.3. Awards

Table 6. *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline – Awards

US Awards	Canadian Awards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="253 407 760 474">• Kirkus Prize for Young Readers' Literature (2017)<li data-bbox="253 485 760 583">• American Indian Youth Literature Award for Best Young Adult Book (Honor Book) (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="792 407 1289 474">• Governor General's Literary Award (Young People's Literature - Text) (2017) Winner<li data-bbox="792 485 1230 518">• CBC Canada Reads Nominee (2018)<li data-bbox="792 529 1253 562">• Sunburst Award for Young Adult (2018)

The Marrow Thieves was the only title of the three to win awards in the US. In Canada it was nominated for CBC Canada Reads (2018), and won the Governor General's Literary Award, as well as the Sunburst award for Young Adult.

5.3.4. Canadian reviews

Table 7. *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline – US and Canadian Reviews

Country	Publication	Mentions Author is Métis	Mentions Author is Métis	Review mentions Colonialism	Uses term: Indigenous	Review mentions Racism
US	The Kirkus Review	No	Yes	No	No, but does use “Indian”	No
US	Times	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Canada	Quill and Quire	Yes	No	No	Yes	No

The Marrow Thieves was reviewed by writer Jessica Rose for *Quill and Quire* in September 2017. Rose notes that Dimaline is Métis but does not mention that there are Métis characters in the text. All in all, this review is more focused on the environmental aspect of the story, but never makes the connection that the story is also about the effects of colonialism and environmental racism.⁹⁷ The *Globe and Mail* did not publish a review of *The Marrow Thieves*, however in 2022 an article was published covering the fact that *The Marrow Thieves* has consistently been on the bestsellers list since it came out in 2017.⁹⁸ This indicates that *The Marrow Thieves* has done and continues to do very well in the Canadian book market.

5.3.5. American reviews

On July 2, 2017, *The Kirkus Review* published a review that generally focused on the climate disaster element. The reviewer mentions that Frenchie (the main character) is Métis. The review also uses the term “Indian” throughout, which is a term that none of the Canadian reviews used.⁹⁹ Use of the term “Indian” is frowned upon in Canada, but it is more widely used in the US. The way the term is used in this review is not an instance

⁹⁷ Jessica Rose, “The marrow thieves,” *Quill and Quire*, October 15, 2020, <https://quillandquire.com/review/the-marrow-thieves/>

⁹⁸ Sarah Laing, “Cherie Dimaline’s ‘The Marrow Thieves’ remains a constant presence on the bestseller’s list. The *Globe and Mail*,” September 22, 2022 <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books/article-cherie-dimalines-the-marrow-thieves-remains-a-constant-presence-on-the/>

⁹⁹ Unknown, “The Marrow Thieves- Review,” *The Kirkus Reviews*, July 2, 2017, <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/cherie-dimaline/the-marrow-thieves/>

of Indigenous reclamation. The *New York Times* never formally reviewed *The Marrow Thieves*, but on August 4, 2020, it is mentioned in an article titled, “We’ve Already Survived an Apocalypse’: Indigenous Writers Are Changing Sci-Fi.”¹⁰⁰ The New York Times also published an in-depth review of Dimaline’s next book, “Empire Of Wild ” later on in 2020. The reception of that title will be included in further research I plan to pursue. On August 11, 2021, The Times published a review that mentions that Dimaline is Métis. It gives a succinct plot summary and mentions the colonial history of the Americas, as well as the fact that the characters are Indigenous.¹⁰¹

5.3.6. BISAC

<i>The Marrow Thieves</i>	YOUNG ADULT FICTION/People & Places/ Indigenous/ General
---------------------------	--

The Marrow Thieves was the only book of the three to be categorized with an Indigenous BISAC code; YOUNG ADULT FICTION/People & Places/ Indigenous/ General. The BISAC code was the same in Canada and the US. It came out in 2017, which was during the first year that Indigenous BISAC codes were available for use. Categorizing *The Marrow Thieves* with an Indigenous BISAC code allowed booksellers to market it properly, and in turn, for its intended audiences to find it.

5.3.7. Takeaways

The Marrow Thieves was the only title in my case study to successfully translate into the US book market: It outsold the other two books by 35 times. It maintained its Métis-ness and received attention from three American publications. I believe there are several factors at work that went into making it a success. Firstly, it is a good book. Second, the Métis-ness of the story is not the core of the plot, so it is easier to sell to a universal audience. Perhaps due to this, the author’s Métis identity is only mentioned by one US publication (the *Times* review). Third, genre played a role in the title's ability to

¹⁰⁰ A. Alter, 'we've already survived an apocalypse': Indigenous Writers Are Changing Sci-Fi" The New York Times, August 14, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/14/books/indigenous-native-american-sci-fi-horror.html>

¹⁰¹ Judy Berman, “The Marrow Thieves,” *Time*, August 11, 2021 <https://time.com/collection-post/6084702/the-marrow-thieves/>

translate to a more mainstream American audience, in part, because YA as a category has its own ecosystem. It stands apart from the other two titles in this way. Fourth, as mentioned in the previous section, this was the only title of the three that was categorized with an Indigenous BISAC code and as a result, it was easier for the book to be marketed properly.

Conclusion

There are many factors at play that determine if a title will be successful when it enters a transnational book market. Even if the title was a success in its home country, it does not guarantee international success. When *From the Ashes*, *The Break*, and *The Marrow Thieves* traveled transnationally into the US market, they were met with barriers to access, which made it difficult for them to succeed. The nation-state of the US has successfully undermined Métis identity in the US to the point that most people do not know who the Métis people are. In Canada, Métis literature is its own established counter public with a history going back to the 1800's. When the Métis titles enter the US, they are confronted with a culture that does not recognize them, where no counter public has been able to take hold. There are other factors that affect these titles in their transnational journeys, including genre, BISAC code usage, marketing campaigns, title changes, and publication reviews, but the biggest issue is the fact that the topic of Métis identity is foreign. Because of this, it is imperative that Métis titles are shown care and consideration when they are entering into the US book market.

Specific to Universal

The three books used in my case study all have varying levels of specificity. In this context specificity is referring to the fact that some titles are more related to a particular subject than others. For instance, *From the Ashes* is the most specific, because it is a personal memoir. *The Break* is still quite specific because of how the plot is rooted in the setting of Winnipeg. *The Marrow Thieves* is the most malleable to be universalized for readers outside of Canada because of its dystopian setting.

From the Ashes

From the Ashes is a very specific story, because by nature of the genre, it depicts Thistle's own lived experience. What makes it more specific still, is the fact that Thistle is Métis. It would be difficult for a Métis memoir to translate into the US because of the lack of understanding of Métis identity. Thistle's story is one all too common to Indigenous communities who are deeply impacted by transgenerational trauma and colonialism. These are the conditions created by systematic genocide and removal of

Indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands. However, it would be more difficult for American non-Indigenous readers to relate to Thistle's story because of these elements. This could be why the American reviews tried to shoehorn *From the Ashes* into a universalized "hero's journey" rather than one depicting the result of centuries of colonial violence.

The Break

Because *The Break* is so directly intertwined with the location of "the Break" in Winnipeg, it would be difficult to sell this title as a universal story. Connection to the land is deeply important to Métis people, and this title reflects this reality. The Break is almost a character in its own right. The setting of Winnipeg whispers its history throughout the book and is a fundamental part of how the story functions, which would make it difficult to translate to a US audience. The story tackles the real systemic issue of Indigenous women experiencing violence at a rate three times more than white women in Canada, but people are much less aware of this issue in the US (even though MMIWG is a serious problem there as well).

The Marrow Thieves

The Marrow Thieves is the most universal of the three titles. It is a Young Adult Sci-Fi story that tackles the timely subject of climate change head on. It seems to me that *The Marrow Thieves* came out at just the right time; as real-life climate disasters and the ongoing pandemic are more urgent, readers want to escape into a better place, not a worse one.¹⁰² But since it came out three years before readers were hit with their very own dystopian reality they still had capacity to engage with this fictitious one. *The Marrow Thieves* is also not solely a Métis story, it has a whole cast of characters who represent different nations, which also widens its audience.

¹⁰² Rachel Deahl, "In Pandemic, Dystopian Fiction Loses its Luster for Editors," Publishers Weekly, May 15, 2020, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/83341-in-pandemic-dystopian-fiction-loses-its-luster-for-editors.html>

BISAC - The future of Indigenous BISAC

The only case study book of the three with an Indigenous specific BISAC was *The Marrow Thieves*, which was also the only title that successfully translated into the US market. Brian O’Leary, Executive Director of BISG, told me in conversation that giving a book a General BISAC code can be certain death, because there are so many books being published and if there is nothing to differentiate a title it will get lost among the fray. This gives weight to my theory that the generalized BISAC’s of *The Break* and *From the Ashes* impacted their ability to translate into the US market. The publication year of *The Break* could have had something to do with the fact that it was categorized so broadly, because Indigenous BISAC codes did not come into use until 2016-2017, so it is possible that the Indigenous BISAC codes had not yet been made available to publishers.

Researchers at BookNet Canada have done great work to implement Indigenous BISAC codes. Further expansion of this mission will lead to more Indigenous titles being recognized and more easily accessible for consumers. This work is incredibly important because of the long history of exclusion of Indigenous literature from the literary canon. The fact that all three titles were bestsellers in Canada indicates that there is a consumer base that is hungry for Indigenous stories. I believe that there is a similar consumer base in the US, but it is not yet being tapped into when it comes to Métis titles. Publishers should make sure to use Indigenous BISAC codes for Métis titles whenever possible to help get rid of any ambiguity that American booksellers may face when handling Métis titles. If metadata is more specific it will also work better with online selling spaces as the algorithms will know better how to categorize these titles. Perhaps even the implementation of a Métis specific BISAC code would be warranted in the future.

My research shows that Métis titles are only able to successfully translate into the US when they are handled with a level of care that takes into account the cultural and political barriers present. As mentioned in the introduction, Driscoll and Rehberg Rehberg Sedo posit that international and national bestsellers must reflect something that already exists in the culture they are entering for them to be successful. This means that it would be very difficult for a Métis title to succeed in a culture in which Métis identity and geography has been erased, which is why publishers need to be strategic

about how they market Métis titles. Publishers should make sure that titles and covers appeal to non-Canadian book sellers and readers. It is difficult to strike a balance between maintaining a title's Métis specificity while also being legible to a non-Canadian readership, but I believe it can be accomplished. Métis national literature's status as a counter public does not work in the same way once it leaves Canada, because in the US, Métis national literature does not, to my knowledge, exist. It is a logical next step to assume that a Métis title would need extra thought and care when it enters the US, because it does not have its own counter public to circulate within.

Although *The Marrow Thieves* did, according to my criteria, successfully translate into the US book market, this does not indicate that most Métis titles would succeed without a higher level of care and consideration for the unique barriers these titles face. *The Marrow Thieves* has multiple elements working in its favor, which makes it stand out and even transcend the barriers it faces in the US. One surprising outcome of this research was finding that publisher size does not necessarily impact a title's transnational success. The three titles in my case study had varying sizes of publishers. *From the Ashes* was published by Simon and Schuster, a large publisher; *The Break*, by House of Anansi, a midsized indie press; and *The Marrow Thieves* by a very small independent publisher called Dancing Cat Books. I thought that publisher size would have some impact on the title's reception, but that is not the case, at least in these case studies. *The Marrow Thieves* had the smallest publisher but had the best reception of the three titles in the international market. This shows that coming from a small publisher does not necessarily limit a book, and coming from a large publisher does not guarantee success.

The reception that the three titles received in the US supports my hypothesis that the US and Canada are at different places culturally when it comes to their consciousness of Métis identity and geography. Métis national literature is a counter public to Canadian national literature, although there may be a shift occurring due to Métis national literature now regularly appearing on bestsellers lists. Noorda, Weber, and Ramdarshan Bold comment on this phenomenon occurring in the US as well when they write, "The last three decades have seen a transnational shift in American literary studies, fueled by social movements (civil rights, feminism, Vietnam antiwar movement, etc.) that have changed the canon, or perceptions of with canon, and striven for gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity to be at the center of literary analysis of American

literature.”¹⁰³ Métis national literature is indeed being cast as Canadian national literature. This shift means that Métis titles are getting nominated for more national awards, but it also means that Canadian literature is trying to take over the counter public of Métis nation literature. This shift has not influenced the US, because Canada exists in its cultural shadow, and because there is no Métis counter public there.

It is important for Métis national literatures to expand beyond Canada because Métis identity does still exist in the US in various forms. Métis literature is instrumental in the process of reclaiming Métis nationhood. For Métis nationhood to ever flourish in the US, Métis national literature must be circulating. The resurgence of Métis national literature in Canada along with this study can be used as leading resources for what measures should be put in place for Métis titles to successfully translate into the US market.

¹⁰³ Weber, Ramdarshan Bold, and Noorda, *International Bestsellers and the Online Reconfiguring of National Identity*, 13

Bibliography

- Alter, Alexandra. "‘We’ve Already Survived an Apocalypse’: Indigenous Writers Are Changing Sci-Fi." *The New York Times*, August 14, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/14/books/indigenous-native-american-sci-fi-horror.html>.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso, 2016.
- Armstrong, Jeanette. "Jeanette Armstrong." Jeanette Armstrong - Indigenous Innovators. Accessed December 11, 2022. <https://indigenousinnovators.ca/innovators/arts-communications-culture/jeanette-armstrong>.
- Austen, Ian. "Canada Letter: Summer Advice from Librarians, American Friends." *The New York Times*, July 21, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/21/world/canada/summer-books-canadian-writers.html>.
- Beal, Bob, and Rod Macleod. "North-West Resistance." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, February 7, 2006. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/north-west-rebellion>.
- Berman, Judy. "The Marrow Thieves." *Time*, August 11, 2021. <https://time.com/collection-post/6084702/the-marrow-thieves/>.
- Bouchard, Michel, Robert Foxcurran, and Sébastien Malette. *Songs Upon The River: The Buried History of the French Speaking Canadiens and Métis from the Great Lakes and the Mississippi across to the Pacific*. 1st ed. Quebec: Baraka Books, 2016.
- Braz, Albert, and Paul Duncan Morris. *National Literature in Multinational States*. 1st ed. Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 2022.
- Braz, Albert, Paul Duncan Morris, and Matthew Tetreault. "Literary Resistance: Situating a Métis National Literature." Essay. In *National Literature in Multinational States* 1, 1:43–64. Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 2022.
- "The Break by Katherena Vermette | CBC Books." *CBCnews*, June 5, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/books/canadareads/the-break-by-katherena-vermette-1.3964057>.
- Casanova, Pascale, and M. B. DeBevoise. *The World Republic of Letters*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Celona, Marjorie. "Review: Katherena Vermette’s the Break Is an Incredible Feat of Storytelling." *The Globe and Mail*, September 23, 2016. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/book-reviews/review-katherena-vermettes-the-break-is-an-astonishing-act-of-empathy/article32021013/>.

- Deal, Rachel. "In Pandemic, Dystopian Fiction Loses Its Luster for Editors." *Publishers Weekly*, May 15, 2020. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/83341-in-pandemic-dystopian-fiction-loses-its-luster-for-editors.html%C2%A0>.
- Driscoll, Beth, and DeNel Rehberg Sedo. "The Transnational Reception of Bestselling Books between Canada and Australia." *Global Media and Communication* 16, no. 2 (2020): 243–58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742766520921910>.
- "Every Page of the Break Hides Beauty amid Suffering; Love Winning Out ..." *The National Post*, September 13, 2016. <https://nationalpost.com/entertainment/books/book-reviews/every-page-of-the-break-hides-beauty-amid-suffering-love-winning-out-over-violence-and-hate>.
- Fertile, Candace. "*The Break* - Quill and Quire." *Quill and Quire - Canada's magazine of book news and reviews*, September 21, 2016. <https://quillandquire.com/review/the-break/>.
- "*From the Ashes* by Jesse Thistle Is the #1 Bestselling Canadian Print Book of 2020 so Far | CBC Books." *CBCnews*, October 20, 2020. <https://www.cbc.ca/books/from-the-ashes-by-jesse-thistle-is-the-1-bestselling-canadian-print-book-of-2020-so-far-1.5769381>.
- "*From the Ashes* by Jesse Thistle | CBC Books." *CBCnews*, July 30, 2020. <https://www.cbc.ca/books/from-the-ashes-by-jesse-thistle-1.5222288>.
- "*From the Ashes: My Story of Being Indigenous, Homeless, and Finding My Way* by Jesse Thistle." *Publishers Weekly*, April 22, 2021. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/9781982182946>.
- Government of Canada; Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada; "Métis Rights." Government of Canada; Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada;, November 2, 2022. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100014413/1535468629182>.
- "An Introduction to Indigenous Literatures in Canada." *CanLit Guides*. Accessed December 11, 2022. <https://canlitguides.ca/canlit-guides-editorial-team/an-introduction-to-indigenous-literatures-in-canada/>.
- Jemisin, N.K. "Don't Put My Book in the African American Section." *n.k.jemison.com*, May 26, 2010. <https://nkjemisin.com/2010/05/dont-put-my-book-in-the-african-american-section/>.
- Justice, Daniel Heath. *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018.
- Laing, Sarah. "Cherie Dimaline's 'The Marrow Thieves' Remains a Constant Presence on the Bestseller's List." *The Globe and Mail*, September 22, 2022. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books/article-cherie-dimalines-the-marrow-thieves-remains-a-constant-presence-on-the/>.

- Lindberg, Tracey. "From the Ashes: My Story of Being Métis, Homeless, and Finding My Way - Quill and Quire." Quill and Quire - Canada's magazine of book news and reviews, July 29, 2019. <https://quillandquire.com/review/from-the-ashes-my-story-of-being-metis-homeless-and-finding-my-way/>.
- "The Marrow Thieves." Kirkus Reviews, September 1, 2017. <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/cherie-dimaline/the-marrow-thieves>.
- "Métis Historic Timeline." Métis Nation of Ontario, July 28, 2022. <https://www.metisnation.org/culture-heritage/metis-timeline/>.
- "New & Noteworthy, from Hidden Treasure to a Relic of Slavery." The New York Times, June 1, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/01/books/review/new-this-week.html>.
- "New Kids 'and YA Books: Week of March 5, 2018." PublishersWeekly.com, March 1, 2018. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-book-news/article/76183-new-kids-and-ya-books-week-of-march-5-2018.html>.
- Préfontaine, Darren R. "Métis History." Métis History - Indigenous Saskatchewan Encyclopedia | University of Saskatchewan. Accessed August 1, 2023. https://teaching.usask.ca/indigenoussk/import/metis_history.php.
- PW Staff. "Book Buzz: Indigenous Voices." PublishersWeekly.com, May 17, 2021. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/bea/article/86381-book-buzz-indigenous-voices.html>.
- Reid, Calvin. "Accurate Metadata Sells Books." PublishersWeekly.com, July 5, 2010. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publishing-and-marketing/article/43740-accurate-metadata-sells-books.html>.
- Rose, Jessica. "The Marrow Thieves - Quill and Quire." Quill and Quire - Canada's magazine of book news and reviews, October 15, 2020. <https://quillandquire.com/review/the-marrow-thieves/>.
- Sing, Pamela V. "Globalization, Identity and Cultural Cores: Mixed-Blood and Métis Writers in Canada and the US." *Review of International American Studies* 6 (2013): 215–36. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/https://www.journals.us.edu.pl/index.php/RIAS> .
- Stewart, Lauren. "Call for Industry Participation: 2023 Indigenous Bisac Subject Code Proposals." BookNet Canada, October 4, 2022. <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/2022/10/4/call-for-industry-participation-2023-indigenous-bisac-subject-code-proposals>.
- "Turtle Island." The Canadian Encyclopedia, November 6, 2018. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/turtle-island>.

Unknown. "BISAC Subject Codes." BISAC Subject Codes - Book Industry Study Group. Accessed December 11, 2022. <https://www.bisg.org/BISAC-Subject-Codes-main>.

Unknown. "Cherie Dimaline: 'My Community Is Where My Stories Come from and It's Also Where My Responsibilities Lie.'" The Globe and Mail, June 30, 2017. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/cherie-dimaline-my-community-is-where-my-stories-come-from-and-its-also-where-my-responsibilities-lie/article35509226/>.

Unknown. "*From the Ashes*." Kirkus Reviews, June 8, 2021. <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/jesse-thistle/from-the-ashes-my-story/>.

Unknown. "*The Break* by Katherena Vermette." by Katherena Vermette, January 29, 2018. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/9781487001117>.

Warner, Michael. *Publics and counterpublics*. New York, New York: Zone, 2005.

Weber, Millicent, Melanie Ramdarshan Bold, and Rachel Noorda. *International Bestsellers and the Online Reconfiguring of National Identity*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

Younging, Gregory. *Elements of indigenous style a guide for writing by and about indigenous peoples*. Edmonton, Alberta: Brush Education, 2018.