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Healing Trauma of Sexual Abuse and Rejecting Patriarchal Authority in Gail Anderson-Dargatz's *The Cure for Death by Lightning*

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Abstract

Dealing with Gail Anderson-Dargatz's *The Cure for Death by Lightning* the article aims to show that Maud's scrapbook and Beth's autobiography depict a family history of sexual violence and serve as main means of healing for both mother and daughter respectively. The article also aims to demonstrate that instead of becoming a vehicle for communication, the scrapbook detaches Beth from the female community of her mother and the spirit of her grandmother. The scrapbook thus represses its trauma and at the same time turns them into expression; it also encodes and hides a cycle of sexual abuse by male family members. The paper further aims to show that in the novel, both traumatic realism and magical realism converge in Beth's lightning arm as a technique of voicing and healing her trauma. The paper again emphasizes the role of Coyote figure behind Beth's rewriting her trauma, arguing that Beth's trauma of sexual abuse, which she cannot utter and which Maud refuses to listen to, is expressed through the Native Coyote figure where Coyote is associated with the dichotomy between female victims and male victimizers. Finally, the article connects the lesbian relationship of Beth and her Native friend, Nora, and the bodily grotesque of different female characters with female agency and independence.

Keywords: *Trauma, healing, sexual abuse, Coyote, the grotesque, and female empowerment*

Introduction

Gail Anderson-Dargatz's *The Cure for Death by Lightning* is set in terms of Beth's personal experiences of sexual violence and of WWII. The narrative sheds light on a society undergoing changes regarding economy and gender relations caused by the war. The novel focuses on the gendered and racial conflict over religious and geographical region, and keeps raising troubling questions about the status of the settler-invader in Canada. It also evokes a landscape of mountain, forest, river and bush, and emphasises the geographical and historical isolation of the region. The novel deals with the trauma of sexual abuse of Beth and her mother, Maud. Here, trauma finds expression through the scrapbook of Maud, Beth's traumatic imagination, and animals, particularly the mythological Coyote figure. It seems that it is her scrapbook and communication with her dead mother in the face of trauma that provide

consolation to Maud. Again, Beth's lightning arm is supernaturally connected with her pain of sexual violence, resistance and protection, performing what the scrapbook has done for Maud—silent witness and a defense mechanism. Beth's healing can be considered an act of imagination where she creates her own world and takes refuge there. One of Beth's ways of rewriting her trauma is through many of the animals occupying the space in the novel. Animals are metamorphosed from being abused to the symbols of healing.

Dealing with *The Cure for Death by Lightning* by Gail Anderson-Dargatz, the paper aims to demonstrate how Beth's autobiography and Maud's scrapbook both highlight a familial history of sexual abuse and act as major sources of healing for the mother and daughter, respectively. The scrapbook distances Beth from her mother's female community and her grandmother's spirit rather than serving as a medium for communication. Thus, the scrapbook encodes and conceals a cycle of sexual abuse by male family members while simultaneously repressing its trauma and transforming it into expression. The study also seeks to demonstrate how, in the book, Beth uses her lightning arm as a means of expressing and overcoming her trauma, combining elements of magical realism with traumatic realism. The paper further highlights the part the Coyote figure plays in Beth's rewriting of her trauma. It argues that Beth's trauma of sexual abuse, which she is unable to articulate and which Maud will not listen to, is communicated through the Native Coyote figure, which is linked to the division between male victimisers and female victims. Finally, the article demonstrates how the lesbian relationship of Beth and her Native friend, Nora, and the bodily grotesque of different female characters enable them to gain female agency and independence.

Magical Realism in Canadian Literature

The term magical realism has quite regularly been used by critics to many Canadian works since mid-1970s, achieving a new emphasis through postcolonial and postmodern contexts in the late 1970s and 1980s. The mode gains a different dimension in the 1990s through its internationalisation and its association with Canadian social and literary landscapes. Unlike the US critical community that showed no interest in applying the genre to mainstream American literature, Canadian critics showed a clear interest in the presence and development of a national magical realist version. Geoff Hancock clarifies that the Latin American magical realism itself might inspire the Canadian writers who are trying to find their own, authentic way of writing (11). He claims that "Canada is an invisible country in the same way that Colombia, Peru, Argentina, and Paraguay are invisible" (11). It is thus the role of magical realist authors to make the unseen reality visible, "to convince us that the marvellous is possible in a bland surface, and indeed inherent to the place" (10). Unlike in the US where magical realism might be labelled as 'ethnic', in Canada it's more like geographical. However, because of the shifting of focus from geographical context to ethnic components, magical realism as a term is now more regularly opposed mainly by members from minority communities. As Agnieszka Rzepa writes, "[M]arginalities explored in magic realist texts in Canada are now more often related to gender and sexuality, frequently in their intersection with ethnicity […] (30). Anderson-Dargatz's female-oriented magical realism is a means for women to fight patriarchal oppression and in case of Native women to resist both racial and patriarchal marginalisation.

Canadian magical realism can be characterised by its geographical location, its (post)colonial and postmodern status, and the presence of the gothic and the uncanny. The geographical immensity

along with the cultural variety and hybridity which are considered to constitute the magical realist conditions of a region or nation are also observed in Canada. Canadian magical realists have shown the tendency to connect Canadian magical realism with Canadian geography—a distinct feature for which notable Canadian critic Jeanne Delbaere-Garant suggests the term "mythic realism" (253). These active landscapes possess an intimate connection with characters and constitute the origin of the magic as a characteristic of mythic realism: a number of magical realist features of post-settler colonies "from which indigenous cultures have largely vanished, even though they remain hauntingly present in the place itself" (Delbaere-Garant 253). Magical realism has the potential to emphasise the obscure (post)colonial condition of the country. Canadian magical realist novels often share gothic location where the uncanny plays the vital role between the two. Novels such as Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees* (1996), Gail Anderson-Dargatz's *The Cure for Death by Lightning* (1996), Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (1998) and Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* (2000) are clear examples of the junction between magical realism and the gothic. Connecting magical realism with postcolonialism, Stephen Slemon opines that Canadian magical realism would form a key example of postcolonial writing where Canadian magical realist texts would "recapitulate a postcolonial account of the social and historical relations of the culture in which they are set" (Slemon 409). Slemon thus highlights magical realism's potential to resist oppression and marginalisation (409). Scrapbook and Autobiography as Principal Method of Healing.

The novel opens with the scrapbook on the page which covers the cure for death by lightning, Beth's father's cake recipes and the broken-winged butterfly. Although the scrapbook is in general a female form of writing, it goes beyond the generic border where Beth's repressed family trauma of sexual abuse is metamorphosed, partly through the butterfly with broken wing. She later uses the scrapbook as evidence to write her own story and by doing so, she sheds light on the sexual abuses narrated in her story and her mother's awareness about them. Beth explains that the scrapbook was her mother's "way of setting down the days so they wouldn't be forgotten. This story is my way. No one can tell me these events didn't happen, or that it was all a girl's fantasy. The reminders are there, in that scrapbook, and I remember them all" (Anderson-Dargatz 14). Beth's mother Maud's awareness of her trauma, which is mentioned in the scrapbook, works as a passive spectator to Beth's suffering from a series of trauma. Instead of giving Beth an access to her scrapbook, Maud basically hides it from her and thus detaches Beth from her (Maud's) female community. For Maud, it is the scrapbook and the conversation with her deceased mother which provides her with some sort of consolation and guidance during her traumatic periods. Entering the house, Beth finds Maud "sitting at the kitchen table, writing on one of the pages of her scrapbook, mumbling to [Beth's] dead grandmother" (86). By failing to protect Beth from her father's sexual desire, which is her responsibility as a mother, Maud proves herself not less despicable than John, Beth's father.

Herself being the victim of an incestuous sexual abuse, Maud fails to cope with Beth's trauma of sexual violence and isolates herself in the realm of the scrapbook and the imaginary communion with her deceased mother. Beth sadly admits that her "mother was no help, no help at all. She sat in her rocking chair, rocking and rocking, hanging on to her scrapbook, staring off at nothing. [Her] mother sat in her chair all that time, rocking, muttering, and [her] father didn't say a word about it" (Anderson-Dargatz 184-185). It is a photo of Maud with her parents that gives Beth a clue about Maud's own trauma(tisation):

> My mother wore a nurse's uniform and stood very tall over her own tiny mother. My grandmother was dressed in dark and lacy Victorian garb and looked very old and tired, but my grandfather, an engineer, looked quite dapper. He was smiling and had his hand around my mother's waist. Neither my grandmother nor my mother was smiling. … My mother became the woman of the house then, making the meals and tending her mother and looking after her two younger sisters. As my grandmother became increasingly bedridden, my mother also became her father's escort to plays and concerts. She became his favorite of the three daughters. *He bought her silk stockings*, boxes of candy, and called her dear. (26; my emphasis)

The photograph can be strong evidence of the family legacy of sexual violence, where the reference to the silk stockings is particularly significant which Maud ultimately includes in her scrapbook. Maud's father's buying stocking for her suggests that he does not see her as his daughter but rather from a sexual standpoint, considering the fact Maud's mother is bedridden and that she has to attend different events with her father. In other words, the act of buying stockings in a way sexualises the relationship between Maud and her father. Maud's scrapbook can be considered a text which hides trauma but at the same time transforms those traumatic events or memories into expression.

On the morning after her trauma of sexual abuse, Beth is awakened by Maud with a "butterfly kiss" (Anderson-Dargatz 86). Maud creates the butterfly as a gift for Beth: "It was made from petals of scarlet flax and my mother's fingers breathed life into it. This was a child's game; it made me angry" (86). Maud's sense of trauma and desire of healing is symbolised by the torn-winged butterfly that keeps flying in the scrapbook and in the gift. Although Maud shows her understanding of Beth's sexual abuse and attempts to comfort her with a child's game, she fails to save Beth from the lust of John, suffering from the helplessness of being a silence witness to it. However, it should be understood that nowhere in the text is there any clear mentioning of Maud witnessing the rape of her daughter; it just hints at the possibility of the presence of Maud, symbolising Beth's assumption that both of them must have known what has happened with her. Maud seems to speak about her trauma only when she mutters incomprehensibly to her dead mother who haunts her, and whose apparition seems to be addressed in the narrative. Beth says, "My dead grandmother had taken over the rocker; it went on rocking all through dinner" (200). Maud's ability to commune with her dead mother blurs the border between the dead and the living, and seems to suggest the comforting and guiding abilities of the dead. Again, the presence of the spectre of the grandmother suggests that Maud also suffered from sexual violence by her father. After her rape by her father, Beth leaves her room and sees the ghostly presence of her grandmother: "I followed my body, because I couldn't do otherwise, through the parlor and past my father, who slept in his chair by the gramophone as if he'd never entered my room. Over him, her face reflecting the dim light from my bedroom window, my grandmother watched him grimly" (166). The silent presence of the ghost refers to the family legacy of silence over sexual abuse.

To Maud, her scrapbook, apart from writing, is also a source of healing from trauma. The family saga of gendered violence is represented by nylons bought by John and later added by Maud to her scrapbook. Maud becomes enraged, knowing that her husband has purchased nylons for a "delighted and mortified" Beth since she never received any from him (Anderson-Dargatz 178). Being traumatised for some moments after learning about the nylons, Maud starts mumbling to her departed mother while rocking in her chair, "rocking and rocking, hanging on to her scrapbook, staring off at nothing" (184).

Beth's attempt to comfort her mother goes in vain as "[her mother] looked through [her], like a stubborn child punishing the parent that punished her" (185). The fact that it is Maud, and not Beth, who is traumatised, indicates that Maud has been re-traumatised by Beth's trauma to such a high level that she begins to reenact her past events. Through Maud's confession, "'My father gave me stockings too—silk stockings—while my mother went without'" (186), a shared experience of sexual abuse is expressed. The closeness between Beth's knowledge of the nylons and her privileges—the torn-winged butterfly and the lightning arm, representing metamorphosis and cure—implies that the narrative she is creating mainly focuses on her healing process, leaving her trauma on the scrapbook. Maud's scrapbook can be considered her "private place" which everybody needs in the time of distress: "Everybody needs a place to sort things out (fuck). You've got to know (shit) nobody's going to snoop around in it" (Anderson-Dargatz 196). Beth's novel and Maud's scrapbook externalise their traumatic experiences and thus possess therapeutic feature. However, the way the scrapbook reveals Maud's trauma, exactly the same way it separates Beth from the female community and hides her sexual abuse, giving her no chance to express it. She therefore needs another means to channel her trauma into expression for which Anderson-Dargatz provides her the magical means of lightning arm and the imaginary field of purple flax.

Beth's Lightning Arm and the Field of the Flax as Healing Mechanisms

Just like the way the butterfly in the scrapbook is associated with Maud's trauma and healing, the cure for death by lightning mirrors Beth's therapeutic journey: Beth's lightning arm is a magical weapon of voicing and curing trauma. Apart from being raped by her father, Beth is also sexually victimised by a group of her classmates who provoke her by naming her "Dirty Beth" and calling her mother a "witch" who "talks to the Devil" and her father crazy (Anderson-Dargatz 87). Her lightning arm goes dead, marking the escalation of her trauma. When Beth is finally let to go after being taken to a deserted house and stripped of her clothing, she has the weird feelings of being followed by someone: "The thing that had followed me that morning hopped up onto the road. I heard it first, scuffing behind me, and when I turned I saw its footprints, a man's footprints" (89). Beth takes shelter in her imagination:

> […] it seemed if I were to stay very still everything would stop. I lay down and held myself rigid on the bed and closed my eyes. After some time like that, the hand on my lightning arm began to expand, spread out like a balloon, take on proportions much too big for my arm, big enough to hit back. … I stared up at the blue forget-me-nots on the headboard of my bed and put myself there, in a stream full of them. (89)

As Beth does not have the physical strength to fight the boys who are bullying her, she imagines her lightning arm possesses the required strength to bounce back. In other words, Beth's imagination gives her some sort of strength which she unsuccessfully desires to have in her real life. Together with the calming blue flowers that give Beth comfort, her lightning arm extends imaginarily to save her from her attackers.

Not finding any comfortable environment at home, Beth runs into the velvet flax but her attempt to console herself is prevented by a storm, ultimately sending her back to home. Following Beth's failure to comfort herself through all real(istic) attempts, the story assumes a magical mood by changing the surroundings into violet flax:

> I pressed my face against the window and saw a rain begin to fall, so gently the raindrops seemed to float. Then I saw they weren't raindrops, they were flowers, violet flax, fluttering to the ground. In no time at all the rain covered the earth in flowers. I opened my window and crawled out onto the purple carpet, took my shoes off and paddled around in pools of flax. The fragrance was intoxicating. The clouds moved on, and still the violet flax drifted down from a blue sky. (Anderson-Dargatz 90)

Dropping of flowers from the sky instead of rain even when the cloud moves and the sky becomes blue is a magical realist phenomenon. The fact that Beth fails to get rid of her trauma through realistic means, and that she has to resort to magical means clearly emphasises the role of magical realist elements in giving comfort to people and healing their trauma by creating a magical world for them to take refuge. Anne Hegerfeldt argues that "literalization is behind much of magic realism's magic, for many of the apparently fantastic events are based on a making-real of figures of speech, mental concepts, or psychological mechanisms" (56). Michelle Coupal argues, "Here, Beth's psychological defense mechanism of dissociating into the flowers of her headboard and field of flax is literalized into a therapeutic imaginary of healing pools of flax in a transformed world of blue" (152). By transforming Beth's sordid material world into one that is comfortable, beautiful and way removed from the trauma of her abuse, the purple flax provides Beth with a magical relief. It is thus by creating a magical realist world through Beth's imagination that Anderson-Dargatz enables her to get rid of her trauma of asexual abuse by her classmates. As Beth asserts, "With blue flax in my cupped hands, blue flax on my hair, my face, my dress, I looked over a world that was blue and as strange as a dream. The shame of nakedness in front of the kids at school seemed so far from this blue world" (91). When Filthy Billy was assessing the damage of John's old car, Beth imagines that she can fly—a clear indication of her desire of freedom: "It occurred to me that if I ran down that hill, I could fly. I spread my arms and it felt like that: the air carried me" (92). Apart from the purple flax, animals that are victimised become symbols of transformation and healing. Beth describes the scene in which covered in blue, all the sheep turn blue: "They were a strange sight, sheep out of dreams. The blue flax had clung to their coats along with everything else. I sunk my hands into their blue wool and rubbed next to their skin, where the lanolin lay, to smooth away the dryness of my hands" (95).

One of Beth's primary ways of imaginative rewriting of her trauma of sexual abuse is through animals. The death of Sarah, who was apparently killed by a bear, is described in sexual terms by Beth's brother Dan that she was "pulled apart from the crotch up" and that her thighs and nipples were partially devoured (Anderson-Dargatz 33). Throughout the novel, animals are graphically and disturbingly linked to sex or sexual violence. The old cat lifting the kittens foreshadows Beth's trauma and future human acts of sexual violence. By attempting to hide the kittens from her father and the cat, Beth makes a connection between the sexually predacious cat and her father. The instance of traumatic detachment takes place when Beth fails to save the kittens and look at the dead bodies in the bucket: "Then I removed myself and watched my hands take up a shovel, make a hole in the manure pile, and empty the foul water and the bodies of the dead kittens into it. Their bodies slid from the bucket like fish. I covered them over with manure, then followed myself to the barn, like a child following her mother" (49). Here, Beth is clearly a traumatised subject who is following an invisible mother (read unsympathetic and uncaring). The entire traumatic scene which starts with the death of the kittens and reaches the climax with the rape of Beth is later repeated in other events, including the torture of Gertrude the cow, with the

increase of John's sexual appetite and depravity. Beth's forced involvement in John's brutal treatment of Gertrude, the cow, metaphorically displaces her own sexual abuse, highlighting the way sexual trauma is recurrently foretold by and fantasised through animals. John's act of performing the operation to remove Gertrude's ovaries becomes an act of sexual torture. John's remark to Beth after showing her the cow's ovaries—"You have these […]. This is what makes you female" (85)—suggests that Beth is featured in terms of her generative organs and that John can easily take from her the very thing that makes her female. The remark also strengthens the dehumanising and misogynistic side of sexual attack and suggests that Beth is more connected to animals than John is. The frequent sexualisation of animals together with the recurring violence on Beth disturbingly connects women with animals, representing Beth as some sort of meat to be consumed or an object to be sexually abused.

Whereas for Maud the scrapbook works as a silent mediator for her trauma, it is the coyotes which are Beth's ways to imagine and arbitrate her unvoiced trauma. However, in neither of the circumstances, trauma is articulated but is experienced or reconstructed metaphorically in the scrapbook. Beth therefore appositely emphasises healing through the script therapeutic act of turning her concealed experiences into narratives. Quite significantly, the construction of Beth's storyline is emphasised in the final pages where she finds the healing source(s). Although her book will differ from her mother's one—"It would be a book of words, my words" (Anderson-Dargatz 253)—it will be a secured place for her to unleash her emotion. She can now comprehend her mother's magical communication with her departed grandmother as a healing act: "It was craziness, talking to a dead woman, but she spoke the words, got them out of her mouth, and that was what mattered. As Billy said, if you could only get things out of yourself—speak them, or write them down, or paste bits of them into a scrapbook—then you could sort things out" (253). Beth is determined to write down her thoughts on paper in order to end the history of traumatic hauntings in her family. Beth's ability to put her thoughts in writing provides her with the sense of healing and some sort of agency, having the courage to face her abusive and sexually pervert father: "You never touch me again […]. Keep your goddamned hands off me. You're my father, for Christ's sake" (256).

The Role of Native Coyote Figure

The Cure for Death by Lightning represents traumatic imagination, in particular through the use of the Native Coyote figure. According to Michelle Coupal,

> Like the Native mythological figure of Coyote that the novel appropriates to displace Beth's sexual traumas, the text itself is a shape-shifter: specifically, in the switching between the subtle, scripto-therapeutic healing narrative (the autobiographical novel which Beth writes, as well as her mother's scrapbook) and the masculinised, grotesque, and traumatizing narrative of abuse (primarily represented through the Coyote figure). (155-156)

Beth's trauma of sexual abuse, which she cannot utter and which Maud refuses to listen to, finds written expression through Maud's scrapbook and the Native Coyote figure where Coyote is associated with the dichotomy between female victims and male victimisers. Fred Botting opines, "In keeping with Gothic conventions, Coyote's possession of the bush is initially aligned with the familiar binary opposition between helpless young women and male victimisers whose erotic and incestuous tendencies raise the spectre of complete social disintegration (5). When Beth is followed by a mysterious and threatening force, she states, "It could be anything: a man like the ones my mother's friend Mrs.

Bell warned of, who would catch a girl in the bush and do unspeakable things to her" (Anderson-Dargatz 16).

In the scenes that precede Beth's rape by John, both the real and the mystical are frequently mentioned. After being approached by a young man at a social gathering, Beth runs towards home for safety where she notices a dying sheep whose sex organs are devoured a coyote: "Coyotes go for the genitals and soft belly of a sick sheep" (Anderson-Dargatz 164). However, the real coyotes which have predicted the sexual violence of Beth by her father is metamorphosed into spectral coyotes: "Though my mother must have been awake, he came into my room, came to my bed as a black faceless thing, with only the form of a man" (166). In order to adjust with the brutality of the event, Beth gives full attention to the blue flowers on the headboard and attempts to take an imaginary sojourn there: "I removed myself into the forget-me-knots painted on the headboard of my bed, and watched from there, leaving all the fear and anger in my body" (166). Apart from taking the imaginary resort, Beth also retaliates with her lightning arm in order to defend her. In addition, Beth's experience of the shocking remembrance of the scene— "[…] coyotes put their claws over my mouth. They lifted my nightgown. They rubbed their wet tails between my legs and over my belly. … When they had their fill, the shadows sighed deeply, came together, and took the form of my father. He lifted his weight from my body and left the room" (233)—clearly shows her father's involvement in her being abused: coyotes thus metonymically symbolises John's sexual attack on Beth.

Magical realism emphasises multiple versions of reality and thus multiple ways of knowing the world and the novel *The Cure for Death by Lightning* is keen on presenting more than one version of every traumatic event that takes place. Whereas in the official version, it is the bear which is responsible for the death of Sarah, Bertha's daughter persistently offers a more magical and grotesque view that "'That was a man that done the killing. Coyote come and took him over'" (Anderson-Dargatz 73) or stresses on the mysterious Coyote figure whose "body flitted back and forth between man and coyote, then the coyote dropped on all fours and cowered away" (240). The unofficial version of traumatic events involves the reference to the Coyote myth; however, concerning the official version with coyote, Macpherson opines, "Coyote is both a shape-shifting spirit who controls damaged men's behaviour, and a real animal who kills the helpless and the vulnerable, animal and human alike" (94). In these multiple ways to know the reality or the world, magical realism thus functions to question reality. Just like magical realism, the discourse of trauma also disrupts the uncomplicated understanding of a uniform psychological experience or reality. Anderson-Dargatz uses coyote figure as the manifestation of traumatic imagination—a way of voicing the inexpressible trauma of sexual abuse which exceeds our imagination. As Hegerfeldt suggests, "In supernaturalizing cruel events, the texts express a stunned incredulity about the state of the world, implying that the idea of such things actually happening exceeds—or should exceed—the human imagination" (61). The novel thus exposes the inability of realist narrative to represent trauma in a graspable way and advocates the subversive and penetrative aspects of magical realist narrative to do so.

Magical Realism, Canadian Gothic and Female Strength

Anderson-Dargatz equates the challenges posed by Beth's lesbian friend Nora, a Native girl and the daughter of Bertha Moses, with the global threats to the Canadian nation-state. By constantly asking Beth to elope with her, Nora herself symbolises the possibility of women defying patriarchal

constraints and invokes the subversive power of lesbian relationship. As their relationship continues to develop, an interesting shift is observed in the threatening phantom-like force where the coyote is associated with Nora. Aligning Nora with coyotes turns her phantom-like probably because, as opined by Castle, "to love another woman is to lose one's solidity in the world, to evanesce, and fade into the spectral" (32). Castle seems to be saying that, a lesbian relationship might reduce the acceptance of women in the male-dominated society but it definitely provides them a magical bond by allowing them to go beyond the social restriction and poses a threat to the oppressors. In other words, a lesbian relationship provides women with agency and emancipation. The dual threat Nora poses to the patriarchy and the Canadian society is manifested through her uncommon eyes: "Each of her eyes was a different color, one blue and one green. She was a half-breed, then" (Anderson-Dargatz 24). Beth later says that Nora "was Indian enough to be an outcast in town and white enough to be an outcast on the reserve" (93). Apart from her split identity, a mixture of Native and white, Nora's two-coloured eyes also shows her potential homosexual tendency, referred by the Native North American as "two-spirit people" (72): "This close I could see that her eyes of two different colors, one green, one blue, were startling, the eyes of two women in one face" (72). Nora can be the embodiment of female empowerment because of possessing more than one woman in her and of blurring the dress differences between men and women. She is considered a threat to both Native and settler's community and thus is ridiculed and attacked by both communities.

The Cure for Death by Lightning draws an association between freakishness or the grotesque and female independence. Mary Russo considers the grotesque body as "the open, protruding, extended, secreting body, the body of becoming, process, and change. The grotesque body is opposed to the Classical body which is monumental, static, closed, and sleek, corresponding to the aspirations of bourgeois individualism; the grotesque body is connected to the rest of the world" (62-63). Regarding the grotesque's potential to challenge the dominant authority or ideology, Abdullah says,

> The grotesque body resists containment, rather strives for and welcomes change; indeed, it cannot but change. […] in the grotesque, one finds an avenue to challenge the norm, to establish meaningful social change, whether that be women's rights, gay rights, or the rights of other marginalized groups. It is confronting the hegemonic with the existence of the marginalized, often through somewhat fantastical means —it is for this reason that the grotesque fits snuggly within the multivalent category of magical realism. (115)

Beth notices that apart from Nora with two-coloured eye, several other women in Bertha's household are characterised by bodily grotesque. During the reader's first meeting with Bertha, Beth states that "Bertha had no husband and no son. Her house was a house of women" (Anderson-Dargatz 20). By demonstrating the female dominance in Bertha's house, the narrative poses a threat to the patriarchal notion of a family ruled by a man, providing agency to the Native women. Beth goes on observing that "One of the daughters' daughter was pregnant, another had webbed fingers" (20) and that Nora' mother possesses "a man's voice" (109) and "an extra finger on her right hand" (109). The bodily grotesque of Bertha's female family members alienates them from other people, causes some sort of fear in those people, assists them to assert female rights and ultimately results in female empowerment.

Both magical realism and the gothic can converge and form a unique world. Both modes challenge the rational approach to the reality presented in novels, contest a singular version of reality

and a linear narrative progression, and advocate multiple versions of truth or reality. Lucy Armitt argues over the cooperation between the gothic and magical realism, stressing on the way magical realist novels, particularly Canadian ones, quite regularly share gothic settings—haunted houses and natural scenarios—and quite often combine traditionally extensive and invasive landscapes with "inevitably claustrophobic" gothic landscapes (308). Armitt's one of the keys to the association between the gothic and magical realism is the uncanny as she opines that the both modes show "a surprising narrative similarity" in terms of the travel into the mysterious and unconscious (308). Armitt's another key is the idea of transgenerational trauma or haunting (315). She argues that when the gothic and magical realism combines with each other, "we find a perfect territory for cryptonymy, magic realism reminding us of the omnipresence of transgenerational haunting by giving it a shared cultural, political and mimetic sanction, while the Gothic continues to endow that presence with the sinister particularity of the nuclear family unit" (315). Armitt thus emphasises the political side of magical realism that, in association with the gothic, politicises "the unconscious through transgenerational haunting" (307). In *The Cure for Death by Lightning*, both Maud and Beth's experiences of sexual abuse at the hands of their own fathers shed light on a shared culture of incest in a male-dominated society. This issue clearly aligns with the transgenerational haunting, combining magical realism with gothic elements.

Conforming to Gothic tradition, the dystopian, patriarchal family structure makes Beth feel suffocated at her home: '"It's so dark in here, I feel like I'm suffocating"' (Anderson-Dargatz 116). On the other hand, the utopian potential of Beth and Nora's friendship is evident in their finding a hideout in the forest which was once owned by Bertha Moses as Nora explains, "This is Granny's old house […]. A winter house" (105). By clarifying that before belonging to her grandmother, the house was her "great-granny's house" (105), Nora indicates that the house has been owned by the family for generations. Again, by demonstrating that the house has belonged to many of her female ancestors, Noria sheds light on female possession of property and to some extent shows their empowerment. With its "opening into darkness at the center of [a] mound of dirt and weeds" (105), the layout of the house resembles female sex organ, emphasising female possession and control over their properties: house and genitalia. By telling Bertha that her mother "used to say the winter houses were safe like a mother's hug" (108), Nora makes a significant association between the house and the female body. Nora's act of discovering the Native house provides her the opportunity to escape and restructure the patriarchal society. The fact that the winter house is passing through the maternal lines and that it now belongs to Nora is a strong blow against patriarchy.

Conclusion

It is the combination of magical realism, the grotesque, Canadian gothic and the uncanny that allows Anderson-Dargatz to give her female characters the necessary strength to fight their gendered violence and, to some extent, ethnic marginalisation. Beth's lightning arm and the field of the flax provide her with imaginary healing. Again, it is through different animals, particularly female ones, that Beth comes up with an imaginative rewriting of her trauma of sexual abuse. Magical realism in the novel also provides the author the required scope to come up with alternative versions of events which starkly contrast the official, patriarchal version. Anderson-Dargatz also emphasises the bodily deformity of some female members of a Native family and the lesbian tendency of a Native girl, Nora, connects both phenomena with female independence, and advocates a female-oriented family and society, providing a

strong blow against a patriarchal and racist society. Last but not the least, the novel emphasises the role of deceased family members in healing female trauma of sexual violence which is evident from the communication between Maud and her dead mother.

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