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Chapter Sixteen:

The Post-Colonial Enterprise of *Trillium*: Maps, Language, Histories and Multilateral Consciousness

Jeff Lemire's *Trillium* (2014) is an 8-issue monthly mini-series from Vertigo that tells the story of Billy and Nika, who meet and fall in love across vast distances of time and space. In the year 3797AD, the human race numbers 4000, destroyed by a sentient virus, The Caul. There is only one cure, the blossom Trillium that grows on the planet Atabithi. Nika, a scientist, is sent on a mission to find the plant and arrange its harvesting even though it is sacred to the indigenous population of all-female aliens. In the alien settlement Nika discovers an Inca temple and, through a ritual sacrifice and ingesting Trillium, she meets Billy, an explorer of the Lost Inca Temple in Peru, in 1914. For the strange designs on the temple walls of Atibithi and in the Peruvian jungles are portals in time and space between their respective worlds. Together the two embark on a psychotropic voyage in time, space and their inner selves in which their histories are merged into alternative pasts and futures before they make the ultimate voyage through a black hole and experience fusion. Billy and Nika meet at times of apocalypse: World War I and the end of the British Empire; the advances of the Caul and the end of humanity. In both cases the encounter with alien races acts as a focal point to illustrate humanity's brutality but also its potential for growth.

A number of themes emerge in *Trillium* that are also pertinent to colonial and post-colonial discourses such as doubling, language, space and time. Colonial discourses developed from the sixteenth century when Europeans ventured to various part of the world in order to replenish resources and wealth. Encounters with the New World enriched European countries with gold, mineral resources and slaves. European Colonialism, beginning in the fifteenth

century, led to systemic shifts in both the colonizer and colonized nations, conflating racial, gendered and class identities. Colonialism was implicated in the ways certain ethnicities and masculinities were identified as superior to others.

European cultures used science as a tool to subject other peoples and places to a supposedly objective, empirical gaze. However, this scientific gaze aimed to prove the inequality of other ethnicities through anthropological, anthropometric, historical, evolutionary discourses and the concomitant belief in the superiority of the Caucasian male (Gould 1981). Racial ethnicities were classified according to spurious evolutionary claims in which the white Caucasian male was the top of a Chain of Being. Frantz Fanon, for instance, argues that in the colonial framework “the Negro is the link between monkey and man – meaning, of course, the white man” (Spurr , 30). Histories, languages and cultures of other peoples were either destroyed, discarded or overwritten in favor of a center of meaning based upon a European perspective (Spurr). The appropriation of language and the enforced adoption of the colonizer’s languages, re-imagined histories and spaces resulted in colonized people understanding of the world through colonizers’ perspectives resulting in, “...the sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (Du Bois 215). Colonized peoples were forced to articulate dual identities, seeing themselves through the eyes of the colonizer, through a double consciousness (Fanon 2007). Thus, colonized peoples were distanced spatially and symbolically, located on the margins of maps and represented as curiosities, interstitial monsters or human anomalies.

The colonial gaze also isolated the colonizer. Colonizers did not engage in the everyday experiences of the colonized. Rather, they subjected the colonized to a colonial or tourist gaze that studied the Other in a voyeuristic gaze, “a detached and curious manner” (Bartolome 109). However, this also put the colonizers at a disadvantage, for their lack of engagement meant they

did not understand the peoples and lands they conquered. White colonizers were further disadvantaged by the assumed invisibility of their ethnicity (Dyer; Yancy). Whiteness, as Yancy notes, “denies its potential to be Other” (13). The colonizers’ assumed normalcy resulted in their lack of understanding of the ways they are viewed by other peoples (Marcuse).

This chapter uses some of the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin to show how Lemire destabilizes colonialism with ideas of transgression, excess and disorder: the carnivalesque. The carnivalesque is a time of social disorder and anarchy, of upheaval, when societal hierarchies are turned upside down. In carnival time official language is disrupted and the world is turned upside down. It is a time of the grotesque body. The grotesque body is the unfinished, monstrous body, a site of becoming, where the body is opened to the world through eating, drinking, sex, birth and defecating. It is a time of many voices and languages, a concept Bakhtin (1981) writes about in relation to the novel. Some novels use a number of languages and voices, a polyphony, in which all are given equal preference, to challenge official languages. Using Bakhtin in relation to the encounter between colonizers and colonized, aliens, native and colonizers, Nika, Billy and technology, illustrates how the colonial encounter challenges social order and ruptures reality through fantasy.

As a colonized nation, Canada has problems with national identities that are more complex than most as it is located spatially and symbolically between several empires including the British, French and American. As a result, it operates “between old and new, historical and metaphorical empires, and operating within the conditions of incomplete modernity and economic and cultural dependency, the specific context and situation of Canada has generated a body of cultural criticism and theory that offers insights into the dynamics of *both* center and periphery” (Mookerjea 5). Nationhood is, therefore, a contested state with relationships between

geography, technology and communication. Unsurprisingly, Canadian national identity is more problematic than that of most nations as it is subject to differing linguistic divisions and cultural and regional identities. Canadian history is also difficult to validate because, as Grant (1916) suggests, Canadian identity is caught up with the histories of the empires that ruled the country in the past. Canadian identity is fractured, its nationhood “a contested construction” (Mookerjea 6).

Jeff Lemire is an independent creator and has worked for comics companies such as DC Comics, Valiant and Marvel. He won awards for his books *Lost Dogs* (2012), *Essex County* (2007) (nominated as one of “The Essential Canadian Novels of the Decade” in “Canada Reads,” a debate on the merits of the five best Canadian novels held annually by CBC), *Sweet Tooth* (2010) and *The Underwater Welder* (2012). Lemire incorporates Canadian politics and cultural observations in his work. *Essex County*, for instance, is set in the land of Can-Na-Da. Although superficially *Trillium* does not refer to Canada, it arguably is a story that begins from the position of the colonized, from one who understands the position of the colonized and is Lemire’s critique of this state.¹ Through *Trillium* Lemire articulates the desires of the colonized for empowerment and the unity of identity. In constructing an alien cultural and linguistic experience, and challenging assumptions of reader reception, I argue that Lemire encourages the reader to engage in the position of Otherness contingent with a multilateral consciousness.

Genre, Colonialism and the Comics Form

Mark Bould (2012) suggests that science fiction and cinema developed in the years 1870-1914, at the height of colonialism. It is also, coincidentally, a significant period in the development of the comics form which also evolved alongside cinema and with which there was a strong cross-pollination in formal structures and storytelling. Significantly, “both [cinema and science fiction]

are structured by and implicated in imperialist and colonialist practices and discourses, albeit in complex and contradictory ways” (Bould 149). Science fiction is the genre of philosophy, a genre that questions identities through imagining potential worlds and histories. Like science fiction, time travel¹ emerged from modernity. It was also constructed from entertainment, scientific, travel and temporal discourses of the late nineteenth early twentieth century. Both genres can potentially explore racial differences and cultural hierarchies, alternate histories and worlds in encounters between aliens and human, in which humanity seeks not the Other but a replication of itself.

Time travel presents the potential not only to explore space but also time and, more recently, alternate histories. This, argues David Wittenberg (2013), is related to new philosophies of time and the development of new media technologies. Wittenberg proposes that, from the 1950s, time travel is affected by quantum physics, string theory and notions of multiverses, an infinite number of possible, parallel or alternate universes. Alternate timeline fantasies feature the “ongoing *visualization* of parallel and multiplied lines of narrative” (Wittenberg 82). Central to these diverse notions of time is in the ways that each media platform uses time in a significantly different way and how this informs each platform’s representation of time. Of significance to this chapter is how the formal aspects of comics enable the creator to map out the narrative so as to direct the reader’s reception. *Trillium* makes use of the philosophical nature of science fiction and time travel genres and the plasticity of the comics form to allow Lemire to experiment with languages, histories and spatial elements of the narrative. In doing so, he challenges colonial strategies to destabilize the privileged voices of the colonial center and compel the reader to *assume* a position of corporeal Otherness.

Othering the Reader: Doubling and Language

The encounter with Otherness in science fiction, at core, refers back to the colonial roots of the genre. It is unsurprising how the genre therefore uses several science fiction elements such as fragmented identities, issues of language, space and time. These are all integral to *Trillium* and explored in the following sections. The most apparent on reading the story is the issue of fragmentation and language. As Fanon notes, “To take on a language is to take on a world, a culture” (38). Language forms the basis of cultural norms and can, therefore, form the basis for potential concord between alien cultures. However, *Trillium* is filled with peoples who either do not or will not communicate and Lemire relates this to Canada with its multi-lingual culture.

Use of language in *Trillium* becomes a means of expressing Billy and Nika’s respective points of view as median points between the extreme positions of the aliens, the Peruvian natives and their colonial masters. The diversity of languages and articulations within *Trillium* expresses notions of polyphony and what Bakhtin describes as heteroglossia, an ideologically constructed use of language, in which the narrative is told from various points of view, from official to disempowered, in which none is given preference. Bakhtin argues that the novel particularly is “multiform in style and variform in speech and voice” (*Dialogic Imagination* 261). Each type of language is located in different degrees of proximity to the authorial voice. The characters and the narrative, therefore, become the mouthpiece of the author. Bakhtin's ideas about polyphony and heteroglossia in the novel apply equally, if not more so, to the comic that has the potential to develop the meaning of many voices through its unique form, specifically the relationship between text and the image. These strategies can take the form of language but also the way language is represented through the visual containment of the speech bubbles, the fonts, and language on the page.

Heteroglossia in *Trillium* is illustrated through technology, imperial authority figures such as Pohl, Nika's line manager, and Clayton, Billy's brother, and the voices of the colonized peoples, the Atabithians and Peruvians. Through these diverse articulations, Lemire shows how one race inscribes its own ideologies, through language, over the race it conquers. The story is told through differing voices illustrated through fonts and speech bubbles [Fig. 16.1]. Figure 1 from "Chapter 1: 3797 The Scientist," illustrates in one panel the hierarchies of authority in Nika's world (pages are not numbered, so I reference by chapter). There is the black encrusted panel of Nika's report that also demonstrates her submission to Pohl, her commander. There is Essie's report to Nika whose response, "Yes, thanks Essie," indicates her authority over technology. Essie, Nika's computer, uses a smaller font than Nika's. The bubble describes the electronic nature of the voice through the lightning bolt leg and earlier in sound effects such as "KSSSSHHHHH" coming from the static screen. There is the simple font of white on black for the personal report contained within rectangles with rounded edges and Nika's handwritten diary in early twentieth century London, the bubbles irregular and as if torn from the journal. ("Chapter 5: Starcrossed") The shape of the bubble in each case ranges from the perfection of technological voices to the subjective nature of pre-technological humanity.

Although language is used to conquer, it is also the tool of colonial destruction. If colonizers make little or no effort to understand those they conquer it can be a catastrophe, for how can they understand the lands they have appropriated, the peoples they have subjugated? The narrative of *Trillium* is riddled with people and beings unable or unwilling to communicate with each other. When Nika enters the Atibithian village her translation programme is unable to completely translate the language. The phrase that seems important, "mouth of God," is misunderstood as a religious symbol without anyone realising its full significance as a literal

portal to another time and place. When they first meet, Nika and Billy do not understand each other. Lemire shifts the narrative to direct the reader from Billy's to Nika's point of view, the page acting as the shift from one voice to the other. Just as lack of linguistic understanding misdirects Nika in her exchange with the Atibithians, so when Nika and Billy meet they misrecognize each other. ("Chapter 2: Binary Systems") Nika thinks Billy is a colonist: "Are you from one of the Osler colonies? Is that where I am, the Osler system?" Billy thinks Nika is a Norwegian explorer: "Should have known the bloody Norwegians would beat us to this. Just like Amundsen" (Chapter 2). Both assumptions are based on expanding colonial frontiers; colonizing space or colonial exploration of the Antarctic. As in a binary system, their communication is founded on 'either/or,' not on 'and'. Language is shown as insignificant. The only way Billy and Nika can communicate is by drawing, an aspect of the story that becomes important at the climax as it could be regarded as a metaphor for Lemire's graphic narrative.

Of more significance is the language created by Lemire and Chris Ross to express alien and Peruvian culture, a language the British and Nika's people have no interest in learning. The language was envisaged as "very visual. Less like characters and more like glyphs" in Lemire and Ross's appendix to the novel (Lemire "*Trillium*: Jeff Lemire and Chris Ross on the Atabithian Font"). Ross suggests that the language and numeric systems were also based upon Atibithian physiology: "the Atabithians had three fingers, so I started with their language being a base six numbering language...[based upon] gestures, so the glyphs for their numbering reflects that. And like some cultures, their concept of zero would be representative of both 'nothing'" and 'everything.'"² However, although this is a linguistic system based upon a pictorial font, the characters correspond to the English alphabet. Although not a completely alien linguistic system of communication, meaning is dependent upon having the key to the characters so as to translate

the code. By this means Lemire takes the control from the colonial center, forcing the reader to adopt the alien position to gain better understanding of the story.

A website unravels this information (Shannon). Nika and Billy cannot understand each other until Nika's translation systems are online. None of the characters or the reader can understand the alien language and the possibilities for misunderstandings are often disastrous. For instance, the aliens kill people from Billy's exploration party. This seems a random act of brutality, but on translating the glyphs the statement becomes, "But there is great danger. One who was not chosen...One from your side who <was> not consecrated has crossed over. We tried to eliminate the intruders, but two escaped. We take responsibility. We deserve death for our failure." It seems the alien ritual was unknowingly profaned by the exploration party. In addition, the aliens are all female with no concept of gender and Billy is an unknown quantity. The aliens regard Nika as both the Great Mother and the daughter: "You are the daughter. You are the one who will undo all. You are the great destroyer. You are the voice of the mouth. You are the tongue" (Chapter 1: "3797 – The Scientist"). Nika is shown as the beginning and end of the story, the end of the universe. She ends the known universe by venturing into the Mouth of God with Billy, and she and Billy merge identities. In doing so she and Billy merge their histories and the spaces they occupy. The merging brings into being an alternate universe. It is, perhaps, in this merging that Lemire proposes the dual consciousness, an effect of colonialism, can be assuaged.

Consumption, Hybridity and the Comics Form

As noted above, colonialism results in the emergence of double consciousness when the colonized are forced to take on the language, histories and cultural norms of the colonizers. Du Bois and Fanon suggest this instills a sense of double consciousness in the colonized, "[the]

sense of looking at oneself through the eyes of others” (Du Bois 215). In this way, there is a fracturing of identity and the inability to become at one with each other. This disadvantages the colonized and also the colonizer, for it dehumanizes both. Fanon suggests that liberation from double consciousness might mean the colonizer adopting the position of the colonized. Thus, Marc Black argues that “multi-lateral double consciousness can affirm a form of critical interracial dialogue” (393). One way of adopting the multi lateral consciousness is by consumption. Again, I want to connect this with Bakhtin and his notion of the carnivalesque and the carnival feast. The act of eating is, in itself, a means of taking the world into the body. Consumption is central to Lemire’s concept of the solution to races living equitably, to a drawing together and mutual understanding and sharing of resources.

Initially, the only way Billy and Nika understand each other is by ingesting trillium. Through this they share mutual visions of their respective lifestories and worlds. Similarly, when Nika ingests trillium she understands the significance of what the aliens describe as the mouth of God, the center of their religious system. The mouth of god is shown in a drawing found by Nika and Billy in the Peruvian temple as a figure holding two temples. It has a great maw for a mouth [Fig. 16.2] and, in its belly, small, triangular structures. Nika recognizes it as a map, the basis for the Atabithian’s entire religious belief system, “I’d presumed it was in reference to some deity, but...but I think they are actually referring to Trottier 6. The black hole” (Chapter 4: “Entropy”). The black hole, however, is destroyed when Pohl bombs the temples. This causes a split in time and the displacement of Billy and Nika into alternate histories.

In time travel and science fiction stories, alternate histories challenge the official truth. In this context, alternate histories mimic the stories of the colonizers, parodying, mirroring and

subverting colonial practices with uncanny narratives, “both the same and different” (Reid 260).

The map can be a means of both directing and subverting meaning through the comic form.

Spatiality, Mapping, Reading

In the West, maps are assumed to be objects that are “accurate scale diagrams,” “source[s] of directions” (Ducza 8). Maps facilitate movement, the successful completion of the voyage. Maps are also regarded as instruments of power indicating ownership of land and cultural hierarchies.

However, this does not have to be so in the case of all mappings. For instance, Medieval maps contained a mixture of word and image but they were not about directions or providing an accurate depiction of the world about us. Rather, they were spiritual documents that indicated the move away from Classical to Christian values. So Jerusalem or the Garden of Eden could be located at the centre of these maps, indicating their centrality in the Medieval world. These pictorial maps told the story of the world’s spirituality. Medieval maps have previously been regarded as presenting an inaccurate picture of the world – a traveler using the Mappa Mundi as information would be unlikely to reach Jerusalem. However, as Robert T. Tally notes in *Spatiality*, in an age where few people were literate, travelers would reach their destination more effectively by getting directions from locals. So as Alessandro Scafi suggests, rather than accuracy of direction, Medieval maps aimed to direct their audiences to discover paradise and people have searched for paradise because they have “a universal nostalgia for perfect bliss remote in either time or space” (8). This has happened in modern times when, for instance, hippies travelled to the East for spiritual enlightenment.

Modern cartography emerged from the late fifteenth century and could be regarded as closely connected with colonialism and the voyages of discovery. It was necessary, for instance, for some maps such as those that recorded the lands discovered in the so called New World to

inform explorers and those in power back in Europe of the flora, fauna, territorial features, minerals and peoples of these new lands. The rise in this new perception of spatiality ran alongside the changes in “systemic space” (Egerton159) in print technology, linear perspective in art, both connected with the rise of capitalism in the West.

We can see how this works in *Trillium*. Billy visits an Exhibition at the Royal Geographic Society in which Sir Terrance Morgan claims to have discovered the Lost Temple of the Incas, “Marvel at the priceless treasures culled from the dangerous jungles...” (Chapter 2: “1921 – The Soldier”). Sir Terrance shows in his talk that colonial maps are a means of discovering locations for discovery or treasure. He points to the area in which the temple can be found. When Nika and Billy exchange information, Nika shows Billy a map of the star system, again used as an informative map.

Lemire spends the first four books in the series establishing Nika and Billy’s respective worlds. In book 4, “Entropy,” Nika and Billy finally meet and are conducted to the Temple by the Abithinians. There they encounter the map, which, as noted above Nika has come to believe does not represent a deity but instead the black hole Trottier 6. The mouth of God then is represented within its religious discourse: the map is an instrument of instruction and spirituality. This can be compared with the naming of the Mouth of God by Nika’s people based upon an ideological, scientific agenda, described as follows in Nika’s personal report: “One of the largest black holes in the galaxy. It hangs in the sky like a gaping mouth.” (Chapter 1: “3797 – The Scientist”) Trottier 6 is presumably named after its ‘discoverer’ and classified according to either the number of stellar objects in the system or the other objects discovered by Trottier. Spatiality is symbolic rather than an accurate rendition. That this is a black hole also implies elements of time because the black hole collapses time and space enabling the subject to travel to another

dimension or an alternate reality. The diagram in the bottom left is also an allusion to the shape of the narrative, which leads to another aspect of mapping within *Trillium*: geocriticism.

Geocriticism is a term coined by Tally (2013) to illustrate how literary texts replicate the map in their spatiality. He describes a spatial turn within literature inspired by Foucault's observation that "The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space...We are in the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed...our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein" (Foucault, 1986:22). The plurality of time is replicated in the plurality of spaces in the construction of the text.

The pictorial map can be aligned with the formal aspects of the comic, and Lemire uses his narrative with a similar motivation to that of the Medieval cartographers, to present a world view and overturn the ideological presumption of the colonial map. The text used on the page is an intimation of Lemire's agenda, for it can be read both ways—offering, in effect, a *laissez-faire* attitude to reading. However, in some cases, Lemire is clear in his construction of the text so as to emphasise its significant landmarks.

Literary cartography is the means by which the writer maps out the story giving certain parts of the plot more emphasis than others, "[revealing] the *real-and-imagined* spaces of the world" (Soja 57). The thirdspace opens up the world to renegotiate boundaries and cultural identities. In *Trillium*, the thirdspace is negotiated through text and image. Lemire uses three or more narrative components to map out the story. Lemire emphasises spatial aspects of the narrative throughout *Trillium* in his directions for the reader to read the story in a specific way in certain places but then allowing the reader the choice of how to read in others. But there are some places where he carefully directs the reader's thinking.

Trillium assumes the position of the ideal reader as one who reads within colonial and Western discourses. However, Lemire challenges this comfortable position through the very act of reading by compelling readers to rethink their assumed Western reading practices. Like many time travel texts Lemire's experiments with time, space and narration, providing a plethora of storyworlds and reading positions. In Chapter five, "Starcrossed," Lemire flips the story, prompting the reader to start reading the top two rows of each page until the end of the chapter in a planetary report command, "Earth Lab Planetary Report #6473-A. Note: Please Read Upper Section of Report First." Once readers complete the upper story, they have to turn the book upside down and read the story on the bottom two rows. In this chapter Nika and Billy change places in history and space. Nika is born into Billy's world and vice versa. Nika's London of 1921 is quite different from our knowledge of history for it is a London straight out of a steampunk novel with dirigibles and floating cars. In this world women are the dominant gender. They fight wars and are explorers. Meanwhile, Billy assumes Nika's place in a society run by men. The pages in the two narratives are identically constructed and the stories mirror each other. For instance, Billy and Nika retain the memories of their former life in flashbacks and they occur in mirror sequences on the same pages. Thus, they have two sets of memories, the real and the alternative: "I have a whole life here in my head. But I also have the other set of memories...my real life. Home on earth. In the past" (Chapter 6: "Escape Velocity"). In the final sequence of this chapter Billy and Nika meet again and their worlds merge to the pivotal moments of their lives.

These pivotal moments happen at the beginning of Chapter 6. Nika and her mother explore the Earthlab Starter Colony. Her mother reassures her it will be safe, "just as long as you never let go." Nika's mother tells her, "My father used to tell me we were all made of stars. That

we each had one inside us and when we die, that light goes up and mixes with all the other stars.

That way we never have to be alone. ‘Cause no matter what happens, we all end up together”

(Chapter 6). The speech happens just before Nika’s mother dies, killed by a shooting star.

Despite her earlier admonition to Nika never to let go, her mother orders her to let go to prevent

Nika from being carried away into space. But this moment is of more significance because it

alerts the reader to the ending of the story. Nika spends much of her life reflecting on this: “After

that I was alone and have been ever since” (Chapter 6). Similarly, a significant moment in Billy’s

life is his experience on the battlefield, experience he relives in flashbacks ever after. Billy and

Nika are broken and searching for each other, but they can never be together because they come

from different times and spaces. Trillium facilitates this merging.

The end of the story is signaled when Nika and Billy are faced with a choice: either to

have an hour of life left together or to travel into the black hole. Nika tells Billy, “We can either

go back inside, wait for our air to run out and die, or we can see what’s on the other side”

(Chapter 8: “Two Stars Become One”). To go into the black hole is certain death: “We will

experience a stretching of time and space...but most likely our brains will separate into their

component atoms...we’ll be torn apart...I think I’m supposed to go there.” In typical colonial

spirit, Billy tells her, “Well then...let’s go exploring.”

The experience of the black hole is a psychotropic experience whereby Billy and Nika

merge and are reborn. In a double page spread, in which each page mirrors the other, Nika is

manifest to Billy in the trenches, and Billy is manifest to Nika after her mother’s death. The

mirroring pages are precursors of their merging. A type of conciliation where each lifts the other

up. A map of the final six pages of the comic shows how Lemire directs the reader’s attention to

the key landmarks of the narrative **[Fig.16.3]**. Panel 1 reveals the choices that Nika and Billy

have to make. Panel 2 is about the voyage into the black hole and the first effects of Billy and Nika's atoms becoming destabilized. In panel three, Billy and Nika are stretched through time and space. Spatially they are stretched across the two pages diagonally making the double page one panel. Around them are scattered the temporal fragments of their respective climactic moments, Billy on the World War I battlefield, Nika as she is forced to leave go of her mother's hand, sending her to oblivion. Panel 4 shows the mirroring of two pages where Nika and Billy appear to each other at the moment of their greatest despair. Panel 5 shows them merging into one and then into a star. Panel six begins by showing the star being drawn by a child on a tepee and the child running off to her parents.

The significance of this page is that, whereas in much of the book the reader can choose which way to read the story, Lemire here directs the reader through a diagonal composition in which the eye is drawn towards the star at the bottom right corner. The star is replicated on the top panel of the next page which is a chalk drawing, pulling together Nika's mother's statement that we are all made of stars and go back to the stars in an endless recycling. Taking Lemire's statement that the numerical system of the Abithinians concept of zero is "representative of both 'nothing' and 'everything'" one is reminded of the mouth of god, described as "the source of everything," one might propose that life here is an endless recycling, a carnivalesque notion of time as cyclical. But the universe adjusts the previous cycle of life. This is signified in the map on the temple wall. The little girl runs towards the village and this parallels the image on the map with its tepees and the space ship feet in the background. **[Fig.16.4]** The map has shown the future where the remnants of humanity escape The Caul and are safe within an alternate reality, a paradise, uncluttered with the broken remnants of the past.

Like many time travel narratives, *Trillium* reflects ideas of colonialism in the appropriation of territory and time by Nika and Billy's respective cultures. Lemire obliges the reader to rethink history, notions of time, space and language, the foundations that underpin Western thought since the Enlightenment, in a post-colonial writing back to the centre. Lemire plays with the comic form and use of language to confront the reader's perceptions of reality, and proposes a multiplicity of realities. In doing so, he challenges the reader's sense of identity, compelling the reader to adopt a multilateral double consciousness and to challenge the reader's perceptions of realism. Even though the language created for the aliens is rather a code, the glyphs are based upon alien physiology which is incomprehensible to the attacking humans. Like Nika and Billy, the reader must embark on a voyage of discovery by translating the glyphs to understand the story and the alien culture. But *Trillium* goes beyond this. Lemire creates three storyworlds and through the exploration of the narrative, he explores the potential of the comic book format to merge these three diverse narratives into one. Just like the Medieval map, paradise is nowhere and everywhere. In other words, Lemire presents the reader with an alternative vision of the future. He maps out a return to paradise and shows how to get there. Using the comic form, Lemire maps out a postcolonial view of the world where we can never really be sure of the practices of reading and language.

Science fiction and time travel provide tools for critiquing colonialism. Mired as they are within colonial discourses, however, can these tools deconstruct colonialism and can postcolonial discourses shape these ideas? Michelle Reid, for instance, asks whether science fiction can be valid on its own terms because, as critical writing back to the colonial center, "do these cultural forms always refer back to the colonial center, or are they new perspectives in their own right?" (256) Through its manipulation of the comics form, Lemire's *Trillium* does indeed

present a new perspective in its own right through its use of language, space and alternative histories. However, it goes beyond this, coming as it does from a Canadian perspective. The fracturing and contested nature of Canada as a nation add a new dimension to this narrative, for the ending presents a merging of Billy and Nika, creating a hybrid existence and being.

Notes

1. Though often seen as science fiction, time travel stories in fact straddle the border of science fiction and fantasy. *Trillium* does have a science fiction component in Nika's story, but time travel happens through the largely unexplained function of the temples as portals.

(6265 words)

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¹ Trillium is the official blossom of Ontario and trillium flowers are protected against uprooting, damaging or destruction in the Ontario Trillium Protection Act (2009). One could argue, that Trillium, is a metaphor for the protection of indigenous Canadian natives.

² Using physiology on which to base the number system, known as the vigesimal system, has a precedent in several cultures including Gaelic, Mayan and Aztec. In the Vigesimal system the number 20, based on counting the toes and fingers, is the base for counting rather than 10. The duodecimal system uses 12 as its base and is used in several cultures including Janji and Vietnam. This is based upon the twelve finger bones in one hand.