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# Reimagining Time and Narrative: Indigenous Temporalities and Social Critique in Rebecca Roanhorse's Trail of Lightning

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narrative disruption, temporal narratives, speculative fiction, environmental crisis and media, Indigenous studies, colonialism and media, cyclical time, deep time, environmental degradation.

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores how Rebecca Roanhorse's Trail of Lightning reimagines time from an Indigenous perspective, offering a counter-narrative to the linear, clock-driven concept of time prevalent in Western thought. Through a close analysis of the novel mentioned above, the study examines Roanhorse's integration of cyclical time, mainly through narrative techniques like flashbacks, oral storytelling, and depictions of deep time. These elements disrupt conventional linear storytelling and emphasise the interconnectedness of time, history, and the environment as seen from an Indigenous worldview.

Moreover, the paper discusses how these Indigenous temporalities intersect with crucial themes in the novel, such as colonialism and environmental degradation. This intersection provides a nuanced perspective on the dystopian realities Roanhorse portrays, encouraging readers to question and rethink the dominant temporal frameworks that often contribute to environmental and social crises. By challenging these frameworks, Trail of Lightning invites us to consider a more holistic and sustainable approach to time—one that acknowledges the continuous flow of stories and events that shape our past, present, and future. In terms of methodology, the paper draws on insights from Indigenous studies scholars, including Kyle Whyte, and research from the environmental humanities to frame its analysis.

## Introduction

In Nature's Broken Clocks, Paul Huebner (2020) argues that the current environmental crisis is deeply connected to how humans perceive and understand time. He points out several aspects of this crisis: the rapid depletion of natural resources compared to the much slower regeneration of ecosystems, the long-lasting effects of technological advancements that continue to impact the environment for centuries, and the rising frequency of extreme weather events. These examples highlight a profound temporal conflict: the urgent need for immediate environmental action contrasts with the slow pace of natural ecological processes and the enduring consequences of human-induced changes

Barbara Adam, a time theorist, contributes to this discussion by describing Western temporality as a fundamental factor in the environmental degradation wrought by industrialised lifestyles. According to Adam (1994), the linear, clock-driven conception of time that dominates Western thought is intricately linked to today's environmental harm (pp. 503-26). This perspective prioritises efficiency, speed, and short-term gains, often at the expense of long-term ecological health and sustainability. To potentially reverse the environmental damage, it is imperative to challenge and rethink humans' relationship with time, particularly the notion of clock time, which has become a symbol of modernity (Huebner, 2020). This re-evaluation calls for a shift from a linear, clock-driven approach to one more attuned to the cyclical, gradual rhythms of the natural world. By aligning our understanding and management of time with ecological processes, we can foster a more sustainable interaction with our environment.

The role of narratives in shaping humans' perception of time is crucial in this context. As noted by literature scholar Mark Currie (2007), every story encountered imparts a certain understanding of time, subtly embedding a cultural rhythm and a set of expectations about how time unfolds (p. 22). Often operating below conscious awareness, these narratives can influence human perception in ways that might not align with ecological realities. They can either obscure the urgent need for environmental action or oversimplify ecological processes' complex, long-term nature. However, actively engaging with literature and other creative forms makes it possible to develop a more critical and nuanced understanding of these temporal narratives. This critical literacy allows for questioning and reframing temporal assumptions, equipping individuals to comprehend better and address the multifaceted nature of the environmental crisis.

This paper expands the investigation of temporal narratives by exploring their connection to the ecological crisis. In the context of climate change, narratives about the passage of time in the natural world

have assumed unprecedented significance. Current frameworks often prove insufficient, as they fail to capture both the gradual yet impactful accumulation of processes like carbon emissions and the abrupt onset of climate-related disasters. The misinterpretation of environmental time as merely cyclical frequently leads to underestimating its potential for linear progression toward irreversible damage. Pamela Banting (2018), a scholar in environmental humanities, emphasises that conventional narrative structures—primarily linear and centred on cause and effect—are inadequate in addressing the complexities of the Anthropocene. In this era, the environment is not merely a passive backdrop to human activities but an active, unpredictable agent in shaping global events.

This paper examines how Indigenous temporalities, particularly as portrayed in Rebecca Roanhorse's novel Trail of Lightning, provide a counter-narrative to the linear, clock-driven concept of time dominant in Western thought. As a writer of Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo and African American descent, Roanhorse reimagines time through a holistic and cyclical perspective that is deeply intertwined with the natural world. This approach challenges the temporal frameworks that contribute to environmental degradation and offers a new lens for understanding the dystopian realities that emerge from these temporal conflicts.

The analysis incorporates insights from environmental humanities scholars and Indigenous studies scholars, including Kyle Whyte, and draws on traditional knowledge such as those of Niitsitapi scholar Leroy Little Bear. By exploring the contrast between the linear temporal narratives prevalent in Western culture and the cyclical, interconnected temporalities found in Indigenous narratives, this paper aims to shed light on the ways time is reimagined in the Trail of Lightning. This reimagining is crucial for understanding the dystopian realities depicted in the novel, which reflect the environmental and social challenges of the contemporary world.

This paper analyses how Roanhorse incorporates cyclical temporality into her narrative through flashbacks and oral storytelling. It explores the intersections of cyclical time with colonial legacies and environmental themes, emphasising the deep understanding Indigenous perspectives bring to ecological and historical cycles. Furthermore, the study discusses how these Indigenous temporalities challenge linear historical accounts and suggest new ways to understand time and history.

By reimagining time through Indigenous lenses, this study seeks to contribute to broader discussions on dystopian realities and environmental crises. It advocates for embracing diverse temporal narratives to comprehend and effectively respond to environmental challenges. As a non-Indigenous scholar, I approach this topic respectfully and humbly, acknowledging my outsider perspective and potential biases and valuing feedback from Indigenous voices.

## Contrasting Indigenous and Western perspectives on time

The Western perception of time, deeply embedded in its cultural and intellectual traditions, is predominantly linear (Huebner, 2020). Often visualised as a straight, unidirectional line from the past through the present and into the future, it has been significantly shaped by historical developments. The foundation for this linear view can be traced back to classical philosophy, where Aristotle's interpretation of time as a sequence of events occurring in a "before and after" manner set the stage for this understanding. This interpretation closely aligns with the scientific view of time as a measurable and continuous sequence (Urry, 2000, p. 419). The linear conception of time gained further prominence during the Enlightenment, resonating with emerging ideas about progress and rationality. The Industrial Revolution marked a turning point in the Western understanding of time, transforming it into a quantifiable entity essential for the organisation, coordination, and regulation of industrial society (Adam, 1995, p. 131). The introduction of standardised time, time zones, and the widespread use of clocks during this period solidified time as a linear progression intricately linked to economic and technological advancement.

Though the linear concept of time is deeply embedded in Western culture, it has been criticised for being overly simplistic. Often referred to as "lifeless time," it reduces time to a series of discrete moments, like points strung along a line (Huebner, 2020). This critique points to how individuals in Western societies are conditioned to view and manage time in a way that emphasises constant movement from one task to the next. While this perspective encourages efficiency, it often comes at the cost of a fuller understanding of life's richness and interconnectedness. Critics argue that this linear approach limits our capacity to appreciate the depth and complexity of human experiences, reducing them to a mere sequence of events rather than a meaningful whole.

In contrast to this linear perspective prevalent in Western culture, many Native American traditions, despite their diversity, share common themes related to time. Indigenous temporalities encompass cyclical

patterns and ecological rhythms marked by significant calendrical events and life-cycle rituals. Donald Lee Fixico, an American Indian Distinguished Professor of History, explains that "Indian Thinking" involves seeing the world as a series of interconnected circles and cycles, emphasising the relationships within the universe (2013, 1-2). This way of thinking, deeply rooted in observing nature, has led to tribal philosophies based on the circle, aligning life with the natural flow of the environment rather than mechanical timekeeping. In this view, history is seen as a continuum, integrating the past with the present.

The circular philosophy is evident in the daily norms and patterns of various American Indian groups, from the Muscogee Creek to the Navajo and Crow traditions. For centuries, these societies have organised their lives around circular structures, such as camps built around a central fire for ceremonies like the Green Corn harvest (Fixico, 2013, p. 43). Cherokee elder Dhyani Ywahoo (1987) notes that in the Tsalagi (Cherokee) worldview, life, death, and all forms of existence are part of a spiralling circle, expanding through various dimensions (p. xiii). This perspective is echoed by Black Elk of the Oglala Sioux, who observed that everything in the world, from the sky to the seasons, operates in circles, reflecting the circular power of the universe (Hill, 1994, xi).

The circular ordering of space is closely tied to the temporal dimension in Indigenous cultures (Norton-Smith 2010, 121). Events like harvests and hunts are both spatial and temporal, with rituals and ceremonies often held in gratitude to the Creator for natural bounty. These practices underscore the Indigenous belief in the interconnectedness of all life, forming what is often referred to as the "Natural Democracy" (Fixico, 2013, p. 101). In this worldview, as stated by Onondaga scholar Oren Lyons (1980), all life is equal, encompassing everything from animals to plants (p. 173).

Extending this perspective, Niitsitapi scholar Leroy Little Bear, along with Ryan Heavy Head (2004), describe the Blackfoot conception of reality as producing experiences of fluid event manifestation, which arise from and return to a holistic state of constant flux. This view sees past, present, and future as temporal dancers, interacting and responding to each other in sometimes unexpected ways. Similarly, Apalech scholar Tyson Yunkaporta (2020) explains that Aboriginal peoples of Australia perceive time as a stable system always in flux, akin to the laws of thermodynamics where "nothing is created or destroyed; it just moves and changes" (p. 39).

In summary, Indigenous temporalities present a dynamic, interconnected, and cyclical understanding of time. This perspective, emphasising the interconnectedness of all life and the importance of environmental stewardship, contrasts the linear, segmented view of time prevalent in Western cultures.

## The Sixth World's time: Reimagining temporality in Trail of Lightning

Indigenous authors such as Rebecca Roanhorse[1] have skilfully woven spiral temporality into their narratives, offering readers a novel lens through which to interpret events. Her novel Trail of Lightning is an example of a work incorporating Indigenous temporalities, challenging the linear time narratives prevalent in Western science fiction.

The novel is set in a post-apocalyptic world termed the "Sixth World," a concept directly drawn from Navajo (Diné) cosmology, which envisions the existence of multiple sequential worlds. This setting is not just a backdrop for the narrative but a critical embodiment of the Indigenous understanding of time as cyclical and transformative. In Diné cosmology, the progression through different worlds is marked by both creation and destruction, renewal and transformation. Each world represents a distinct era in the spiritual and physical journey of the people, with its own lessons, challenges, and eventual transition to the next (Begay, 2014). This cyclical view of time, as depicted in Roanhorse's novel, contrasts sharply with the linear progression of time typically seen in Western narratives, where events are often portrayed as a straight line from past to future, with a clear beginning and end contributes to a broader

1. Rebecca Roanhorse is an Indigenous American speculative fiction writer of Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo and of African American descent, residing in Northern New Mexico. Born in 1971 in Conway, Arkansas, and raised in Texas, Roanhorse is notable for her Nebula and Hugo-winning short story "Welcome to Your Authentic Indian Experience" (2017). Her acclaimed debut novel, Trail of Lightning (2018), set in a post-apocalyptic America, weaves in elements of Navajo (Diné) culture and stories, reflecting her daughter's Navajo heritage. Roanhorse's engagement with Navajo cultural consultants for linguistic and cultural accuracy in her novel proves her commitment to authentic representation. However, Roanhorse's work has sparked debate within the Diné community. Some members, noting her lack of Diné ancestry, have critiqued her for cultural appropriation and misrepresenting sacred stories (Reese 2018; Diné Writers Collective 2018). Despite these critiques, Trail of Lightning significantly contributes to the discourse on decolonised Indigenous futures and challenges conventional Western science fiction narratives, showcasing the resilience of North American Indigenous cultures.

understanding of Indigenous worldviews and their critical relevance in contemporary discourse.

In Roanhorse's narrative, the past is not merely a static backdrop but a dynamic force influencing the present. The plot focuses on the protagonist, Maggie Hoskie, a trained and talented monster-slayer who is an apprentice of the immortal monster-slayer, Neizghání. Roanhorse employs the character of Maggie Hoskie to disrupt the traditional linear narrative through the use of recurring flashbacks. This technique deepens Maggie's character and reflects the Indigenous concept of time as a non-linear, interconnected continuum. Her traumatic past heavily influences her journey, and these memories act as temporal anchors, pulling her back to pivotal moments. Maggie's flashbacks provide insights into her personal history and her community's broader history and traditions. It is revealed that Maggie's extraordinary clan abilities emerge from a traumatic confrontation with a sinister Sixth World witch and his monstrous cohorts (Roanhorse, 2018, pp. 106-111). In a brutal encounter, Maggie is manipulated by the witch to kill her grandmother and then faces a horrifying attempt at rape. The harrowing memory of her assault is a recurring theme: "I fight a wave of memory. The remembered feel of a man's weight holding my own body down, blood thick and choking in my mouth as powerful fingers grip my skull and slam my head into the floor. A strong smell of wrongness in my nose" (Roanhorse, 2018, p. 9). The trauma of this event etches a deep scar in Maggie's psyche, haunted by vivid memories of overpowering violence. This intrusion of the past into the present disrupts the linear flow of the narrative, illustrating how trauma can make past events feel immediate and persistent.

The novel's structure, characterised by its non-linear progression and flashbacks, or "coming-to-stories," serves as a powerful medium for both characters to share, listen, and heal. Roanhorse intricately weaves the process of healing through the act of storytelling, particularly in the interactions between Maggie and Kai Arviso, who plays a crucial role in helping Maggie reconcile with her past and embrace her Indigenous identity. Through oral storytelling, Kai imparts wisdom and perspective to Maggie, helping her see her clan powers not as a curse but as a potential for growth. He shares the story of his grandfather and the nature of clan powers as "gifts from the Diyin Dine'é [the Holy People]" (Roanhorse, 2018, p. 57), manifesting in times of great need. This oral transmission of knowledge shows the importance of storytelling in Indigenous cultures as a means of understanding the world and oneself. Maggie's sceptical perspective had previously hindered her from recognising the value and strength of her Indigenous heritage. She initially saw traditional knowledge as "noble savage shit" (p. 57), which reflects the influence of Western colonialist discourse that often romanticises Indigenous people as being 'closer to nature.' Kai's stories and guidance challenge these Western perceptions and encourage Maggie to reconnect with her community and its traditions. Thus, storytelling in Trail of Lightning goes beyond mere narration; it becomes a therapeutic process.

Thus, in the novel, oral storytelling bridges Maggie's personal journey and the broader Indigenous temporalities. It allows her to navigate her past traumas, understand her present, and shape her future. Through the oral narratives shared by characters like Kai, Roanhorse illustrates the enduring power of orally transmitted texts in preserving Indigenous knowledge, fostering community bonds, and empowering individuals. This narrative technique enriches the story and pays homage to the oral traditions that are a cornerstone of Indigenous cultures.

## Cyclical time and colonial legacies

In Trail of Lightning, the Native Apocalypse, known as the Big Water, is intricately linked to themes of colonial exploitation and the environmentally destructive actions of capitalist extractive industries. The protagonist, a skilled monster-slayer, Maggie Hoskie, observes the climatic upheavals preceding the Big Water, including hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes (Roanhorse, 2018). She attributes these disasters to the reckless exploitation of the Earth by multinational corporations: "the oil companies ripping up sacred grounds for their pipelines, the natural gas companies buying up fee land for fracking when they could get it, literally shaking the bedrock with their greed" (p. 23). This portrayal points to the ongoing impact of extractive industries on Indigenous communities, leading to environmental harm, forced displacement, loss of cultural identity, and violations of human rights, including the infringement of Indigenous peoples' rights to their lands and self-determination in economic, cultural, and social development.

In her narrative, Rebecca Roanhorse depicts the current ecological crisis as an extension of colonialism, perpetuated through advanced capitalism. The protagonist, Maggie, reflects on this

continuity, noting, "the Diné had already suffered their apocalypse over a century before" (Roanhorse, 2018, p. 23). This statement connects the Native Apocalypse in the story to the historical experiences of displacement faced by Indigenous peoples. In Roanhorse's depiction, Indigenous communities face the loss of their land for a second time, not only through dispossession but also due to an ecological disaster caused by settler actions. This portrayal aligns with Kyle Whyte's perspective on the repetitive nature of climate injustice against Indigenous peoples. Whyte (2016) emphasises that:

"Thinking about climate injustice against Indigenous peoples is less about envisioning a new future and more like the experience of déjà vu. This is because climate injustice is part of a cyclical history situated within the larger struggle of anthropogenic environmental change catalysed by colonialism, industrialism and capitalism – not three unfortunately converging courses of history." (p. 12)

In "Our Ancestors' Dystopia Now," Kyle Powys Whyte (2017) emphasises how industrial settler activities have historically devastated ecosystems and impeded Indigenous adaptation capabilities. Roanhorse's story intertwines the Indigenous experience of time with environmental and historical events, illustrating how past actions and present consequences are part of a continuous cycle.

In Trail of Lightning, Roanhorse portrays the Fifth World as a mirror to contemporary times, potentially foreshadowing near future. The novel features a group committed to environmental protection, actively protesting against a Transcontinental Pipeline project. This narrative parallels real-world Indigenous movements opposing pipeline constructions, such as the Water Protectors at Standing Rock, who resisted the Dakota Access Pipeline (Estes, 2019). In the novel, conflicts over oil and natural gas control and widespread protests against extractive industries lead to instability and violence in the former United States (Roanhorse, 2018).

Maggie's perception of the Earth as a living, responsive entity aligns with Indigenous temporalities, where time is understood as a cyclical and interconnected process. The Earth's reaction to human exploitation, resulting in the Big Water, is not just a singular event but part of a larger cycle of cause and effect, deeply rooted in Indigenous worldviews: "The Earth herself stepped in and drowned [everyone] all regardless of personal politics" (Roanhorse, 2018, p. 54). This narrative intersection resonates with ecofeminist critiques by Gaard and Murphy (1998), reflecting the overlapping oppressions Indigenous peoples face.

## Reimagining history

It is also worth noting that Roanhorse's narrative changes the historical trajectory of the Navajo people, or Dinétah, by depicting them as an independent nation-state in a post-apocalyptic world. This alternative history deviates from the colonial narrative of Indigenous subjugation and marginalisation. In the novel, the United States, as known in our current history, has been drastically altered by ecological disasters, with the rising sea levels erasing its West and East Coasts. The collapse of the U.S., described as having "crashed and burned" (Roanhorse, 2018, p. 69), leads to the emergence of independent city-states like Burque, formerly Albuquerque.

In this reimagined history, Roanhorse (2018) portrays a decolonised space where the Navajo territories are free from colonial domination. The narrative transcends the historical context of the United States as a settler country, offering a vision of a future where Indigenous sovereignty is restored and respected. The novel's post-apocalyptic setting serves as a backdrop to explore themes of resource exploitation, environmental degradation, and the resilience of Indigenous communities. A significant element in this alternative history is the construction of a Wall around the Dinétah. Unlike the divisive and exclusionary walls proposed or erected in contemporary politics, the Wall in Roanhorse's narrative is a symbol of protection, cultural preservation, and reclaimed agency. It is built with songs and blessings, embodying the spiritual and communal values of the Dinétah people. The Wall not only safeguards against environmental catastrophes but also represents a physical and metaphorical barrier against the incursions of a colonial past and a capitalist present (Wieczorek, 2023).

In Trail of Lightning, Roanhorse creates an alternative history that challenges the linear narratives of Western historiography. By envisioning a future where Indigenous peoples have reclaimed their sovereignty and agency, Roanhorse not only offers a critique of past and present injustices but also presents a hopeful vision of resilience and empowerment. This concept aligns with the ideas presented in Nick Estes' Our History Is Our Future, where the Indigenous perspective of time blurs the separation between past and present. As Estes (2019) states, "there is no separation between past

and present, meaning that an alternative future is also determined by our understanding of the past. Our history is the future" (p. 14). This perspective is evident in Roanhorse's narrative, which intertwines the re-examination of history with a reimagined future. Estes' and Roanhorse's works present the importance of challenging dominant historical narratives and demonstrate how such re-evaluations can lead to a future that acknowledges and empowers Indigenous sovereignty and resilience. They show how shared experiences of the past, when critically assessed and "re-storied" (Absolon and Dion, 2017, pp. 82-3), can transform the collective understanding and reshape future possibilities.

## Deep time and living landscapes in Trail of Lightning

Roanhorse extends her portrayal of natural elements beyond mere symbolism, endowing them with agency and spiritual significance. In Trail of Lightning, Maggie, the protagonist, uses sacred materials like corn pollen and obsidian as ammunition against monsters: "I load my shotgun with shells full of corn pollen and obsidian shot, both sacred to the Diné" (Roanhorse, 2018, p. 9). This narrative choice transforms these elements from being perceived as inert substances into vibrant, active agents within the story. This change echoes Jeffrey J. Cohen's concept of "an aeonic companionship," which suggests a profound and enduring bond between humans and natural elements (2015, p. 17). This approach not only challenges the traditional life-death dichotomy but also invites us to embrace a broader understanding of time that far surpasses human history.

Cohen's notion that "a rock […] opens an adventure in deep time and inhuman forces of slow sedimentation" (2015, p. 4) is also particularly relevant here. The concept of deep time refers to the vast, almost incomprehensible spans of geological history that far exceed human lifespans. As products of these immense timescales, rocks and minerals, including obsidian formed from the rapid cooling of volcanic lava, serve as living archives of Earth's history. They record and embody the slow processes of formation, erosion, and transformation that have taken place over millions, even billions, of years. These geological layers tell the story of the Earth's past and challenge the conventional understanding of time as linear and human-centred.

Roanhorse further expands on this connection to deep time through the portrayal of the Wall constructed by the Diné. Unlike the concrete barriers envisioned by the U.S. government, the Wall in Trail of Lightning is a living entity built from sacred, living rocks. These rocks, adorned with white shells, turquoise, abalone, and black jets, are not merely static building materials; they are infused with the songs and blessings of the Diné people, embodying the spiritual and temporal connection between the community and their land (Roanhorse, 2018, p. 23). Each rock in the Wall embodies the deep time of its geological formation, and through the rituals of the Diné, they are brought to life, becoming protectors and symbols of resilience. This living Wall, constructed from rocks that have witnessed the Earth's ancient history, stands as a testament to the enduring relationship between the Diné and their environment, merging deep time with the ongoing narrative of the people. Thus, in the novel, the use of rocks like obsidian and the construction of the Wall from these living, sacred stones connect the characters and the readers to deep time.

The notion of ecosystems as guides to rethinking cultural clocks suggests that altering our time measurements can shift humans' approach toward ecological problems. Humans' understanding of time can be changed through critical engagement with narratives that present alternative temporalities, such as the deep time embodied in rocks. This approach extends beyond viewing matter as a mere resource, fostering a more entangled understanding of human-matter relations and extending compassion as well as respect beyond the life-nonlife boundary. Instead of seeing rocks as static, lifeless objects, the narrative encourages the readers to view them as dynamic entities that have witnessed the vastness of Earth's history. Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman (2017), in their work "Stone Walks", describe rocks as "queer archives" (p. 852), highlighting their inherent liveliness manifested through natural processes like melting, erosion, and collapsing. These changes, while profound, often remain unseen from a human perspective. This idea also resonates with Jane Bennett's concept that seemingly inert objects possess a vibrant matter, a liveliness that exists below the threshold of human perception (2010, pp. 3-4). Like other forms of "vibrant matter," rocks have their own agency and temporalities, contributing to a world in constant flux, even if these changes occur too slowly for humans to notice. By engaging with this idea, Roanhorse challenges readers to rethink their relationship with the natural environment.

## Conclusion

In Trail of Lightning, Rebecca Roanhorse combines Indigenous temporalities with dystopian realities, presenting an alternative to the linear, clock-driven concept of time that dominates Western thought. Through this narrative, Roanhorse critiques industrialised societies' environmental and social impacts while highlighting a cyclical, interconnected temporal structure closely aligned with the natural world. This perspective challenges the dominant time frameworks contributing to environmental degradation and encourages readers to consider more sustainable and holistic ways of understanding time and our relationship with the environment.

Roanhorse disrupts traditional linear storytelling by employing a non-linear narrative style, including cyclical temporality, flashbacks, and oral traditions, illustrating how past traumas continue to influence the present. These techniques emphasise the importance of viewing time not as a straightforward sequence but as a complex, relational process. Thus, the temporal perspective appears to be more in tune with natural rhythms and ecological realities rather than imposing rigid, artificial timelines on the world around us.

Moreover, Roanhorse explores the enduring impacts of colonialism and capitalism on Indigenous communities, demonstrating how these forces have disrupted traditional temporalities and contributed to ongoing environmental and social injustices. By envisioning a future where Indigenous sovereignty is restored and environmental stewardship is central, the novel presents a vision of resilience and renewal, challenging readers to reconsider their assumptions about time, history, and the future. This narrative form aligns with the Indigenous perspective of time, where history and future coexist and influence each other, as outlined in Nick Estes's Our History Is Our Future.

The dystopian realities depicted in Trail of Lightning serve as a powerful reminder of the consequences of ignoring the interconnectedness of time, history, and nature. Roanhorse's narrative encourages an understanding of events and stories beyond the limited scope of human-scale thinking, urging recognition of the immense continuum of narratives that resonate across different epochs. These narratives are a testament to the power of storytelling in reimagining history as a spiralic continuum, where the past is always present, shaping our understanding of the future.

Thus, Trail of Lightning offers a profound examination of how different conceptions of time influence our interactions with the environment and each other. Roanhorse's work invites readers to rethink their relationship with time, urging them to adopt a more cyclical and interconnected understanding that respects Indigenous perspectives and fosters sustainability. This analysis has aimed to highlight these themes, contributing to broader discussions on how we can better address contemporary challenges by embracing diverse temporal frameworks and recognising the deep connections between all life forms.

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