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CONTENTS

FROM THE EDITOR

Han mitakuyepi, Greetings my relatives,

As we all reemerge and re-envision our lives in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, *SAIL* is finding its footing anew and enjoying a gradual uptick in submissions for our publication. This issue highlights work that came to the press during the pandemic. For these authors the process of review and revision took longer than usual, but each was able to engage deeply and thoughtfully in preparing the work that you will read here.

Lloyd Sy's "The Hermeneutics of Starvation: Fish in James Welch's *Winter in the Blood*" traces various forms of lack in Welch's novel's depiction of scarcity. This essay argues that the dearth of fish within a Blackfeet/Gros Ventre diet pushes characters to interpret their circumstances through a "hermeneutics of starvation." With attention to sexual violence and rhetorics of survivance Cortney Smith engages with a close reading of a novel by Louise Erdrich to reveal how the suspense genre and weaving in Ojibwe storytelling help to unearth issues Native women continue to face. In "Snake Eyes: Linda Hogan's Monumental Serpentine Embodiment of Justice," Catharine Kunce explores how Hogan's essay creates "sentence by sentence" and "word by word" an articulated representation of a snake to create both a physical and metaphysical "mound of insight." Moving from this earthwork and the knowledge it contains to the figure of Sacagawea, Melissa Adams-Campbell's article traces how three Native women authors, Monique Mojica (Kuna-Rappahonnock), Mary Kathryn Nagle (Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma), and Diane Glancy (Cherokee and German), challenge nationalist mythmaking around Sacajawea by amplifying Indigenous community concerns and archival found texts. Keeping with the theme of Native women's perspectives and stories is Lindsey Stephens's "As Long As It Gets Read: The

Lakota As-Told-To Genre, Authenticity, and Mediated Authorship in Mary Brave Bird's *Lakota Woman* and *Ohitika Woman*." In this essay, Stephens situates Mary Brave Bird's controversial text within Lakota activist literary traditions.

In addition to these scholarly works, this issue features several poems by Kimberly M. Blaeser and Kenzie Allen to highlight the enduring importance of creative works within *Studies in American Indian Literatures*.

Finally, this issue includes one posthumously published piece by Tadeusz Lewandowski titled: "The Intellectual Evolution of Sherman Coolidge, Red Progressivism's Neglected Voice." His wife communicated that Tadeusz was enthusiastic about being able to share this work with *SAIL*, where he compares Sherman Coolidge's leadership in the Society of American Indians with other Red Progressives. Tadeusz's work aims to highlight Coolidge's contributions to Native intellectual history by centering the personal history of this figure and different contributions of intertribal activists during the early twentieth century.

Wophida tanka for reading,

Kiara M. Vigil, Editor

The Hermeneutics of Starvation

Alienation, Reading, and Fish in James Welch's *Winter in the Blood*

LLOYD ALIMBOYAO SY

Abstract: This essay proposes that James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* (1974) considers what it might mean to perform interpretation in decrepit situations. To do this it traces various forms of lack in the novel and their conjunction with practices of reading or comprehension, but it especially focuses on the novel's depiction of scarcity with regards to an important part of the Blackfeet/Gros Ventre diet: fish. The essay argues that the novel's dearth of fish—among other destitute conditions—forces characters to interpret their situations through what I call the "hermeneutics of starvation." I suggest that this form of reading, which I base on the statements of the book's elder Yellow Calf, could characterize the literature of the Native American Renaissance more generally.

Keywords: James Welch, starvation, hermeneutics, reading, fish, interpretation, memory, miscomprehension

Near the end of James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* (1974), the Gros Ventre elder Yellow Calf muses on a harrowing winter decades earlier. During that season, the Blackfeet chief Standing Bear died during a period of conflict with the American military. Pursued by the army, the tribes were forced to move around their homelands, surrounding what would later become the Fort Belknap Reservation in Montana. Cold and bereft of nourishment, the Blackfeet and Gros Ventre died in large numbers. But Yellow Calf's depiction of the winter of starvation contains a surprising evaluation of the tribes' dire status and their handling of it: "You must understand how people think in desperate times. When their bellies are full, they can afford to be happy and generous with each other—the meat is shared, the women work and gossip, men gamble—it's a good time and you do not see things clearly. There is no need. But when the pot is empty and your guts are tight in your belly, you begin to look around. The hun-

ger sharpens your eye."[1] As he summarizes, "When you are starving, you look for signs. Each event becomes big in your mind."[2]

In the terrible conditions of food deprivation, Yellow Calf suggests one might read *more* assiduously into events and "signs." In times of hunger, signs come readily and demand intense attention; put another way, hermeneutic desire erupts amidst shortage. When nothing is left, interpretation becomes readily practiced, perhaps to make the best of whatever remains. As the Indigenous population shrinks, Yellow Calf implies, every vestige and fragment of life becomes more significant—that is, more likely to be interpreted.

This essay proposes that Yellow Calf's representation of the interpretive mode produced by starvation reveals a vital aspect of Welch's literary project. While the nameless narrator of *Winter in the Blood* does not suffer from starvation *per se*, he does suffer from a kind of psychological starvation. In the novel, the narrator's alienation from himself and from others is repeatedly represented through a lack of one of the most significant components of the traditional Blackfeet diet: fish.[3] Fish and fishing are leitmotifs throughout *Winter in the Blood*. Besides scenes of fishing and discussions about it, a medicine man is named Fish. By centering fish in this essay, I focus on the most significant and dynamic strand of food-related desolation in the novel.

I suggest that Welch's novel seeks both to display a hermeneutics of starvation (most notably in the memories of the medicine man Fish) and allow for its development in the narrator. A hermeneutics of starvation, to be precise, is a way of interpretation marked by its practitioners' existential fragility, especially bodily fragility, which has direct effects on critical perspectives and methodologies. Drawing from Yellow Calf's suggestive evaluation of the critical apparatus born out of Blackfeet starvation, I contend that sparsity in one's reading conditions—whatever form they may take—elicits a form of interpretation that in the face of paucity reads hyperbolically into signs while never quite losing sight of the bleak conditions of its practice.

Describing the hermeneutics of starvation falls into the danger of advancing what Daniel Heath Justice calls "the most corrosive" of all stories about Indigenous peoples: "Indigenous deficiency." [4] From the outset, then, I wish to state that starvation is not the marked condition of all Indigenous life at any period in American history but rather a specific historical condition of particular Indigenous tribes at particular

times—like the Blackfeet and Gros Ventre tribes as detailed in the flashback sections of *Winter in the Blood*. Although the conditions of starvation may give rise to a unique kind of aesthetic interpretation, they are not the only circumstances through which Indigenous literatures may arise, and certainly not a default marker of any Indigenous work. What the hermeneutics of starvation hopes to do is, in fact, to answer one of Justice's aims—to replace the story of Indigenous deficiency with a different story, of "complexity, hope, and possibility."[5] Welch's novel, I argue, shows how a hermeneutics—a creative comprehension—is possible *even amidst* starvation. One can read sparse texts; even the barest connection to the past can be gleaned for meaning.

Winter in the Blood, I advance, presents Fish as a model for reading within sparsity that the narrator gradually approaches. Justice complains of our disconnect "from one another, from the plants and animals and elements upon which our survival depends."[6] Early scenes and conversations in the novel exhibit this tendency through their presentations of failed fishing, which stand in for the narrator's inability to handle his traumatic memories more generally. By the end of the novel, however, the narrator's recognition of Yellow Calf as his grandfather through a correct interpretation of the past indicates his capacity to read even in his deprived psychological state. Importantly, the narrator recognizes Yellow Calf because the elder was a *hunter*. Yellow Calf's identity as the person who provides sustenance finds affirmation through the narrator's interpretations within the condition of psychological starvation.

Critical commentaries on *Winter in the Blood* have paid due attention to the various instantiations of fish in the novel, usually pointing out the supernatural and spiritual significance of fish in Indigenous contexts. According to Louise K. Barnett, fishing is one of the rituals helping the novel's characters "survive psychically" in the bleak Montana environment, which "offers . . . nothing positive and much that is threatening."[7] Paula Gunn Allen remarks upon the "perplexing" nature of fish in the novel that "magically appear and disappear from the filthy river."[8] As Allen sees, fish behave strangely in *Winter in the Blood*, variable in their existence and even more variable in their myriad appearances. Fish, as I will argue, connect the novel's disparate temporal and thematic elements; this essay expands upon and takes more seriously what Stephen Tatum calls the "inside joke" of the fish in *Winter in the Blood*.[9] Tatum sees the novel using fish as a node within a "logic of substitution," a tool

in making "equivalence[s]" between themes like gender and history, fighting against the novel's "dispersive features."[10] Fish are impressively mutable in *Winter in the Blood*, an *ad hoc* symbol, as these critics note. But I hope to show how fish—and their absence—drive the novel's characters and readers into a consideration of interpretation coming out of material lack. This essay centers on close readings of various moments concerning fish in *Winter in the Blood*, using the conditions presented in Yellow Calf's memory as a means of specifying the hermeneutic form at work during these piscine appearances. Welch uses fish to provide us with a guide to understanding how reading and comprehension might uniquely occur in a barren landscape.

Importantly, the book's transtemporal narrative shows us the transformation in the conditions of starvation within which Indigenous actors have operated. Yellow Calf and the narrator starve in different periods and different ways. Indigenous studies scholars have articulated the changing circumstances of deprivation for Indigenous peoples across American history. For example, Gerald Vizenor writes that while nineteenth-century Indigenous persons were subject to "[s]tarvation, disease, and soul death," they were also "liberated in the shadows of their natural meditations, memories, visions, and stories."[11] In the twentieth century there are contrastingly "new worries," without "narratives of regeneration" that have been murdered in the century's "radioactive ruins and chemical wastes."[12] If starvation persists into the twentieth century, it has morphed from a strict starvation of food into a more generalized starvation exemplified by *Winter in the Blood*'s narrator: fear, trauma, environmental deprivation, self-alienation. The narrator sits without much hope of regeneration—an "heir," but also the "orphan[]" of "dead tropes and narratives."[13] His starvation, suggestively revealed in the novel's bleak narration, is a starvation of identity.

Although Fionnghuala Sweeney argues that starvation "produces the ghost of a subject," whose imploring cries are the "final iteration of the subjugated body biologically divested of social and cultural capacity," *Winter in the Blood* offers a different thesis.[14] The novel suggests that starvation prompts the expansion of the interpretive function, spinning out Justice's wished-for narratives of "complexity, hope and possibility." The literary becomes hyperactive when the physical is threatened. In a land without fish (and without a sense of coherence with the past) everything becomes interpretable—indeed, everything can and must be

interpreted. Because of its sparse and difficult language, *Winter in the Blood* demands its reader also interpret from a position of relative scarcity, gleaning meaning from the signs given to us.[15] These signs, often vestigial and frequently confusing, may be guided by characters who must themselves read and interpret in a destitute landscape from which new stories might be told.

FISH INTERPRETING

Though many characters in *Winter in the Blood* fish and talk about fishing, fish themselves hardly appear in the book; as many of the Indigenous characters note, there are hardly any fish in the river, dooming would-be fishers. But Fish *does* show up prominently in the novel—as the name of the Blackfeet medicine man who appears in the memory of several elderly characters. Fish is hailed for saving the Blackfeet during the winter of starvation. The narrator introduces Fish in a memory of his grandmother's storytelling that is doubly removed: as a recollection of a recollection, it is stuck deep in the past. "The old lady," he remembers, had "related this story, many years ago." Nonetheless the story is strewn with the feeling of Indigenous success, rare in this novel: "the small black hands drew triumphant pictures in the air."[16]

Years ago, the grandmother recounts, two bands of the Blackfeet were wintering together, hiding from white soldiers. Her portrait is wistful, even idyllic: "The days remained hot . . . Fires dotted the campsite, and in the middle, around a larger fire, men sat and talked and played stick game . . . A feast celebrated their coming together." The grandmother is herself a picture of youth, "owl-danc[ing]" with the others.[17] Two days go by as the bands winter together, but "on the third morning . . . Fish made his prophetic announcement" that the white men were coming to their campsite. "Fish had warned them. Fish, the medicine man. The Long Knives will be coming soon, he said."[18]

The grandmother's temporal details provide Christological links: on the third day, Fish the medicine man makes a prediction renewing life for the Blackfeet. Because of his accurate prediction of coming white intrusion, the scouts "rode down from the butte, their horses lathered and out of breath," finding only an abandoned camp.[19] One of the few victorious scenes in *Winter in the Blood*, Fish's prophecy submits the possibility of Indigenous self-determination arrayed against white own-

ership: Fish avoids the white intrusion entirely, leaving them only "a few sticks which had been the racks that held the drying meat," a "barren scene."[20] Though he only has access to the barest environmental registers in the brutal wintry conditions in which he reads—conditions of starvation, as Yellow Calf will remind us—Fish outsmarts the white soldiers. The sparse signs that Fish reads include a "smell of steel" in the air, a description that speaks to how technology might permeate the environment while also punning on the word "steel," revealing how theft might be a stench imbricated with that technology.[21]

Fish's ability to seemingly interpret nature shows what the Blackfeet scholar Rosalyn LaPier describes as the tribe's perception of reality. Blackfeet tradition, according to LaPier, is marked by an emphasis on the intermingling of the natural and supernatural. What the Blackfeet might call "real stories" are in fact descriptions of the relationship between Blackfeet happenings and supernatural invisibilities.[22] Thus for the Blackfeet, reality is rooted *in conjunction* with the spiritual. For the tribe, the "invisible dimension was the real world and . . . the visible dimension was a partial expression of this world."[23] LaPier's characterization of the Blackfeet view of the material world shows how Fish's hermeneutics of starvation might arise. A connection with supernatural forces allows for the ability to "smell steel," to perceive hints that are, in truth, but synecdochal components of a broader picture of reality.

As LaPier explains, Blackfeet memory relies on objects which "serv[e] as mnemonic devices" for their stories. Chief among these entities is the landscape, which is both a "narrative" and an "ancient manuscript."[24] Compared to Western practices, Indigenous storytelling marks less of a boundary between land and language. Sidner Larson explains that Indigenous storytelling takes on an elevated position because "words make things and . . . changing words changes things."[25] Welch's novel holds the "attendant power to change the American Indian world."[26] The dispossession of Indigenous lands is at once a loss of Indigenous history and memory. Though that dual loss may be applied to most Indigenous tribes, the emphasis that the Blackfeet place on the relationship between nature and the supernatural expands the scope of the loss. Environmental loss concurrently strikes at the Blackfeet relationship with the divine. This goes some way to explain why Fish the medicine man was capable of reading in his condition of starvation while the narrator of *Winter*

in the Blood seems to fail at a coherent storytelling: environmental loss has multiplied, as we shall see, matching the narratorial loss of cultural memory.

Through Fish, Welch expands the temporal reach of the piscine symbol. The memory of the medicine man comes early in the novel so that the past and present are given narrative equality early in *Winter in the Blood*. More literal fish also receive mention in the novel, as I detail in the following sections; by having both fish *and* Fish show up early in his novel, Welch renders fishing a symbol of transtemporal persistence. Specifically, the conditions of Fish's prophecy—his reading—mark fish as a representation of the contentious relationship between settlers and the Indigenous more generally. Fishing might illustrate the traumatic history of exchange and war between the Blackfeet and the white settler military regime. Fish signify long-standing currents of dispossession, presaged by this prophetic spiritual antecedent. The medicine man's predictions live long, echoing contemporary acts of white deception and theft.

INTERPRETING FISH

Alienation rules the opening chapter of *Winter in the Blood*, emerging for the nameless narrator on multiple fronts. There is a lack of familial connection: "Coming home to a mother and an old lady who was my grandmother . . . none of them counted; not one meant anything to me. And for no reason. I felt no hatred, no love, no conscience, nothing but a distance that had grown throughout the years."[27] This familial lack is reflected in the area's environmental destitution: "The country had created a distance as deep as it was empty, and the people accepted and treated each other with distance."[28] But both of these forms of alienation are nothing compared to the narrator's alienation from himself: "But the distance I felt came not from country or people; it came from within me. I was as distant from myself as a hawk from the moon."[29] For the narrator, the personal and collective unite in negativity, both arenas for alienation. We might, by analogy, describe alienation as a kind of starvation—from social bonds, from emotional health. Indeed, as if to reveal the symbolic import of nourishment and its lack for the narrator, he ends the meditations on "distance" in the first chapter by remarking, "My throat ached with a terrible thirst."[30]

The narrator's comment underscores the connection between Welch's portrayal of themes like alienation and psychological lack and his descriptions of hunger, thirst, and food in the novel. These descriptors provide outposts in a novel that can be difficult to grasp, given its nonlinear plot structure and sudden temporal jumps. Critics have been apt to point out the book's evasions of meaning. Christopher Nelson, for instance, classes *Winter in the Blood* as a deliberately nonhermeneutic book, eluding interpretation because of the "narrator's flat descriptive style" and his "lack of inflection."[31] Like Nelson, Sidner Larson finds in *Winter in the Blood* a "failure of written discourse to provide resolution," a reflection of the "limitations of language in general." Larson wields the novel's setting in the American West to reappropriate the vexed concept of the frontier, arguing that the narrator exists in a place bereft of not only infrastructure but also of "language and understanding."[32] The desolation of the frontier zone is pronounced for Indigenous Americans, as it is the place where English, a "foreign language," has substituted Indigenous language and been used "primarily for deception."[33]

It is no wonder, per Larson, that the narrator finds "history, reality, and language" so far apart from each other. Since *Winter in the Blood* takes place in the mid-twentieth century, its narrator is "faced with the aftermath" of colonial dispossession rather than the actual process. This wasteland may flummox interpretation out of its sheer sparseness—but we ought not mistake sparseness for emptiness, as even Larson admits a "few subordinate signifiers" who have "managed to survive and who bother the margins of the new imposed order."[34] Larson lists Yellow Calf as the exemplar of those "subordinate signifiers" who I hope to center here. Yellow Calf's dictum validates and encourages the process of interpretation that I hope to embark upon here; it advocates for an interpretation *specifically* within the conditions of lack that the narrator admits in the opening pages and represents through his "terrible thirst." Given a taste of the narrator's detached style in the first chapter, we receive an exposition of it when the narrator goes fishing in the third chapter.

Against critical warnings of the narrator's impenetrability, the fishing scene is ripe with symbolic action suggestively juxtaposed with the narrator's memories. The fishing scene shows failed fishing alongside the narrator's lugubrious meditations on loss and dispossession. Fishing on the Milk River, the narrator recalls a sugarbeet factory that once operated downstream of his fishing site, causing indelible pollution.

Explaining the river's name through its appearance, he remarks, "Everybody had thought the factory caused the river to be milky but the river never cleared."[35] Efforts at restoration come to no good end, for in spite of attempts to restock the river with pike, it "ignored the fish and the fish ignored the river."[36] The river manifests the failure of white government and science to encompass and function on Indigenous territory, embodying how Indigeneity forms part of the "repressed knowledge of white Americans," as Catherine Albanese puts it.[37] Here "ignoring" loads the epistemological failure between fish and river—the implication of abject ignorance—with the verb's sexual undertones. The river and fish fail at miscegenation. The fish escape, "refus[ing] to die" in the river and "simply vanish."[38] These fish, seemingly able to perceive environmental change and subsequently leave their habitat, escape just as their nominal predecessor, the medicine man Fish, drove the Blackfeet away from the white soldiers upon perceiving a "smell of steel."

But humans cannot escape so easily, creating a problem for white efforts at brushing aside Indigenous existence. By remaining on the reservation, the narrator is practically abandoned, "ignored" as the fish were. That the factory whose operations ruined the river's fish has now closed combines the loss of nourishment with economic dispossession more generally. Welch cleverly points at the area's lack of economic activity in his summative statement about the repopulation efforts of the "white men from the fish department": "Nothing worked."[39] Pollution's aftermath brings only occupational starvation that falls exclusively on the Indigenous who remain on the reservation and is represented through the loss of potential sustenance: "The fish disappeared. Then the men from the fish department disappeared, and the Indians put away their new fishing poles."[40]

The economic conditions Welch presents allude to the long and wretched history of Indigenous and white squabbles over fishing. Treaties establishing reservations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries took care to specify tribal rights over fishing. As Jovanna J. Brown explains, when Indigenous tribes in the Pacific Northwest signed treaties with the federal government, they reserved the right to fish off of the reservation, in their historical fishing sites—the "usual and accustomed grounds and stations."[41] On the surface, then, the right to fish was a rare area in which Indigenous rights extended beyond the reservation. However, by the early twentieth century, Indigenous fishers had to com-

pete with white settlers who often possessed a technological advantage through their frequent ownership of mechanized boats. White fishing "squeezed" Indians "out of the fishery."[42]

During the 1960s, Indigenous fishers in Washington and Oregon organized and participated in a series of "fish-ins," demonstrations in which fishers who had refused to comply with fishing license standards and various game regulations occupied land and water while performing their technically illegal activities. The Blackfeet were among the tribes who sent representatives to Washington to help with the fish-ins. According to Bradley G. Shreve, their cooperation helped mark the event as a prime moment of pan-Indian identity and intertribal alliance.[43] These fish-ins, which attracted national attention, culminated in 1974's *United States v. Washington*. In what has come to be known as the Boldt Decision, District Court Judge George Hugo Boldt ruled that Indigenous tribes in Washington could claim fifty percent of the salmon harvested in the state and actively participate in the management of salmon fisheries.[44] Welch's novel was birthed in the same year in which fishing rights were the locus of Indigenous activism—in which the fight for Indigenous rights pursued the ability to acquire sustenance.

Welch's presentation of the river in the aftermath of dispossession showcases the reservation's dire economic straits, particularly in light of this dispute over fishing rights, as the novel is set decades before the 1970s fish-ins. But the narrator's dispossession is not only linked to the dire straits prevalent on the reservation. Indeed, if anything, his family's farm is relatively prosperous, and he seems able to move around with relative ease. His starvation, as he presents it in the opening chapter, is from himself. Specifically as we see in this fishing narrative, he has some ill-formed relationship with the memories of his past.

The actions of his fishing reflect this trauma, and alert us to the symbolic charge of his fishing. After noting the river's milkiness, the narrator reports, in its own paragraph: "I cast the spoon again, this time retrieving faster."[45] Once more Welch's verb choice is significant. Unlike, for instance, in hunting, where "retrieval" implies the successful acquisition of meat, in fishing "retrieval" may be done without a catch, as it does here. "Retrieval" in this case is part of the pursuit of fly fishing and is thus arguably a representation of the narrator's desire to find his history, to sort through his memory—especially when considering how "retrieval" also refers to the attempt, with marked intentionality,

to remember. The word may also hold a more general political significance. As Karla Holloway explains, for Black Americans retrieval might signify an "overthrow of power and a reinvestment in self-determination." But retrieval is simply "not possible" to some extent, performed only as an "act of spiritual memory."[46] Retrieval displays the horizon of necessary failure within the pursuit of an inaccessible past. It is a grasping within a fragmented history, a futile—though essential—attempt to squeeze understanding out of starved archives. The novel's various themes coalesce on the "retrieving" of the spoon while fishing, an act which comments on the problematics of the narrator's memory and the dispossession of the Blackfeet.

Upon "retrieving" the spoon the narrator reminisces upon his father First Raise, whose life was marked by a passivity in desire and incomplete striving, despite his easy integration with the multiracial community surrounding the reservation: "He drank with the white men . . . He made them laugh until the thirty-below morning ten years ago we found him sleeping in the borrow pit."[47] In construction, a borrow pit refers to the depression resulting when soil and dirt are extracted from the ground for usage elsewhere. First Raise's death in a borrow pit hints at the material dispossession of his impoverished life, while also illustrating a more general image of Indigenous American death—rotting in stolen land that specifically points at the absence of earth. These memories arise while fishing in a fish-deprived river; the mental resembles the environmental. We too, perhaps, are always in the borrow pit in this novel, surrounded by conditions of narrative lack.

Sliding between memory and materiality, the fishing scene ends with a convergence of the past and present, of the seen and spiritual worlds: "My lure caught a windfall trunk and the brittle nylon line snapped. A magpie squawked from deep in the woods on the other side of the river."[48] The breaking of the thin nylon line, alluding to the Greek Fates' enactment of death, catches onto another image of death—the fallen tree. This constellation of symbols, arrayed next to the magpie, the classic bird of theft, marks First Raise's death as a robbery of dreams and promises. The narrator's fishing activates, while also coming to represent, the precise imbrication of environmental degradation, Indigenous oppression, and grief that populates the novel. For now, in this early scene, the narrator's memories show the destitution of his psychological state, the "distance from" himself.

FISHING AND MISCOMPREHENSION

Thus far I have suggested that Fish displays a hermeneutics of starvation when outsmarting the invading white soldiers, drawing on a religious and supernatural wisdom that whites cannot perceive. On the other hand, the narrator of *Winter in the Blood* faces conditions of metaphorical starvation—psychological alienation, emotional distance from his family—that he cannot initially solve by reading his past or interpreting himself in the aftermath of trauma. This failure of hermeneutics, as I showed in the preceding section, is represented by the narrator's inability to fish. In this section, I show how the narrator's failed self-discourse extends out into a failure to discourse with white people in the novel, once again centering on failures to fish.

Lack of nourishment—verbal or piscine—marks the narrator's interactions throughout the middle of the novel. For example, while sitting in a bar, the narrator alerts another bargoer, a hopeful fisherman who the narrator calls the "airplane man," that the rivers nearby are empty. The conversation is repetitive, nearly circular:

> ". . . picked up my fishing gear and drove away!"
>
> "You won't have much luck here," I said.
>
> "What? Fish?"
>
> "You won't have much luck here."
>
> "Caught a mess of them yesterday."
>
> "But there are no fish around here."
>
> "Pike—three of them over five pounds. Caught one big northern in Minnesota that ran over thirty."
>
> "That was Minnesota. That wasn't here. You'd be lucky to catch a cold here."
>
> "Caught some nice little rainbows too. Pan size."
>
> "There aren't any rainbows."[49]

Twice, the narrator repeats the froward advice: "You won't have much luck here." On the surface, his statement elucidates the dismal environmental conditions that stand in for bleak life on the reservation. The inability to fish might represent an inability to do anything productive, to create value in the first place. If fishing indeed depends on "luck," that luck comes from an empty bank at Fort Belknap.

"Here" recurs in the narrator's admonitions, appearing in four con-

secutive statements. The repetition draws attention to the reservation's geographic singularities; Welch uses this discussion of fishing to represent comparative racial perspectives that, especially in the divide between Indigenous and white people, are geographically determined. The white fisherman's claims attempt to import Minnesotan circumstances into the Montana reservation. This is a transference the narrator denigrates, reminding us that circumstances, environmental or economic—readily represented by the act-cum-trope of fishing—are hyperlocal in the United States. Bounty somewhere in the country does not negate starvation elsewhere in it. Fishing *here* is unwieldy, whatever it may look like elsewhere—however near that elsewhere may be. Fishing, an easy metaphor for searching, striving, and economic pursuit, suffers from, and stands for, the general desolation of the reservation.

But importantly Welch has set up our reading to hearken back to the memory of Fish's prophecy. When the airplane man makes his first response to the narrator— "What? Fish?"—might he be summoning the medicine man? Welch's text lets us link this barroom conversation to that moment of Blackfeet history, and in the ensuing conversation the narrator offers a prophecy of his own: "You won't have much luck here." Like Fish's, his is a prophecy of doom (and also accurate, given the earlier fishing scene's failure). The airplane man's inadvertent (or failed) recognition identifies the narrator with Fish, who is verbally reincarnated, if only for a moment. Gleaning the currents of his spiritual predecessor, the narrator's prophetic ways catch the same sort of white ignorance that had led to the medicine man's triumph. Having once reincarnated Fish in his grandmother's memory, the narrator now embodies Fish's prophesying in the face of white hostility.

The airplane man's defense against the narrator's admonitions is simply the fact that he had caught fish yesterday. As the airplane man lists the fish he has caught in spite of the narrator's persistent insinuations, the conversation fails to arrive at any true system of exchange. The same dialogue repeats, the Indigenous narrator's efforts useless in the face of the white man's own ineffectual attempts at justification. This futility rehashes the failure of the fishing department's white men to spur renewal in the Milk River. A failure to move on—to move past harm—incarnates environmentally and in the narrator's traumatic stasis of memory, but it also occurs conversationally here. One might be stuck in communication, predicated upon a failure to listen.

As the interchange goes nowhere, what the narrator and airplane man settle upon is what the latter suspiciously refers to as a "deal":

> "Tell you what—" He snorted into his hand. "I'll take you out with me tomorrow and if we don't catch any fish, I'll buy you the biggest steak in—where are we?—Malta! You have an outfit?"
>
> "At home—but that's fifty miles away."
>
> "No problem. I've got a spinning rig you can use. Furthermore, I'll use my fly rod and if I don't catch more fish than you, you can have both outfits. Now you can't beat that deal."[50]

Deals between whites and Indigenous people have a wretched history in America. Deals about fishing especially have involved the harmful history of land exchange, resource extraction, and environmental degradation that fishing has signified throughout the novel. As mentioned above, the series of nineteenth-century treaties that the United States made with Native nations often included specific provisions about hunting and fishing on traditional lands. As Zoltán Grossman explains, throughout the twentieth century Indigenous tribes pursued sovereignty by invoking nineteenth-century treaties that "contained clauses for the continued use of the ceded lands . . . for cultural or economic sustenance uses."[51] Federal officials evidently knew that tribes "could not survive solely on reservation resources." Indigenous activists argued for conceptions of nationhood out of these "usufructuary rights."[52] Thus a deal about fishing is a deal about sovereignty and political rights.

And, in this context, though the deal looks free, its involvement of fishing means that the contract is being signed on an expired battlefield, on territory already long lost. The airplane man will not successfully catch fish, but only because white men before him have already razed the land and poisoned the river; what remains is only leisure, pure enjoyment, self-imposed challenge. The Indigenous narrator's sole refuge sits in the knowledge that the fish, indeed, have already departed from the river. There is no catching what has already died, and the narrator is destined to receive the mere scraps of the white man's deal, a pitiful handout in the wake of devastation, a one-time meal to a starving person. The bare statement of environmental devastation—"there are no fish"—washes over all other considerations. It is a summative utterance of the starvation characterizing the narrator's life and his perspective of the social and environmental conditions on the reservation.

FINDING FOOD

The narrator's inability to perform a hermeneutics of starvation *à la* Fish within the conditions of his social and personal alienation are reflected in his failed interactions with the airplane man. The narrator is unreadable to himself and to those around him. *Winter in the Blood* provides no grand conclusion, no finality to the narrator's troubles. But Welch does, near the end of the novel, provide a glimmer of hope in a moment that I will describe as an incipient reading within this traumatized alienation. In this concluding section, I show how the narrator makes strides towards a successful hermeneutics in his discovery of his true heritage at the end of the novel, an event marked once more with imagery and language about nourishment.

The event in question is the narrator's recognition of Yellow Calf as his real grandfather. Yellow Calf is the elder Gros Ventre whose comment about "signs" inaugurated my conception of the hermeneutics of starvation: "When you are starving, you look for signs. Each event becomes big in your mind." As I have argued, the narrator's alienation from himself, a psychological starvation, evades nourishment throughout the novel. But because the narrator's self-alienation is rooted in the trauma of his memories—most specifically the death of his brother Mose—a successful hermeneutics might involve a turn towards his ancestral past. The narrator knows his family history only sparsely: the memory involving Fish and the winter of starvation related by his grandmother is just about all he knows of her life.

Throughout the novel the narrator returns to one mystery about his grandmother's life: the identity of the narrator's grandfather. The confusion surrounding his grandfather gives the narrator something to muse upon; the grandfather's identity is a text to discern, but, appropriate for a hermeneutics of starvation, the grandmother leaves few clues. Underscoring the connection between Yellow Calf's depiction of the starving time and the grandmother's vagueness surrounding the father of Teresa (the narrator's mother) is the narrator's description of his grandmother's insinuations. When the narrator considers who his grandfather might truly be, he notes that his grandmother "made signs that" it wasn't Teresa's alleged father, the "half-white drifted" Doagie.[53]

These signs, notably, are not well defined, only obscurely mentioned before a "low rumble interrupt[s]" the narrator's stream of conscious-

ness.[54] They remain in the background, unread and unresolved, until the pivotal scene when, after his grandmother's death, the narrator asks Yellow Calf about the winter of starvation. In the course of answering the narrator's inquiries, Yellow Calf tells him about how his grandmother was shunned by her tribe in the wake of her husband Standing Bear's death. This leads the narrator to a question: "What did she do for food?"[55] In the process of learning about his past, the narrator fixates on the detail of nourishment— "It seemed important for me to know what she did for food. No woman, no man could live a winter like that alone without something."[56] The narrator, realizing that she had to have had someone hunting for her, pieces together that Yellow Calf was her sustainer:

> "Listen, old man," I said. "It was you—you were old enough to hunt!"
>
> But his white eyes were kneading the clouds.
>
> I began to laugh, at first quietly, with neither bitterness nor humor. It was the laughter of one who understands a moment in his life, of one who has been let in on the secret through luck and circumstance. "You . . . you're the one." I laughed, as the secret unfolded itself. "The only one . . . you, her hunter . . ." And the wave behind my eyes broke.
>
> Yellow Calf still looked off toward the east as though the wind could wash the wrinkles from his face. But the corners of his eyes wrinkled even more as his mouth fell open. Through my tears I could see his Adam's apple jerk.
>
> "The only one," I whispered, and the old man's head dropped between his knees. His back shook, the bony shoulders squared and hunched like the folded wings of a hawk.
>
> "And the half-breed, Doagie!" But the laughter again racked my throat. *He wasn't Teresa's father; it was you, Yellow Calf, the hunter!* [emphasis Welch's][57]

What finally leads to the narrator's positive identification, his successful determination of something in his past, is Yellow Calf's role as hunter. Yellow Calf's ability to provide sustenance helps the narrator fulfill the dictates of Fish's hermeneutics, an interpretive mode whose inaccessibility for the narrator has been marked by the paucity of fish. The past begins to make sense and become available for reading, through the rec-

ognition of a source of food. Yellow Calf himself is the reader for whom "hunger sharpens [the] eye."

And when the narrator does find out that Yellow Calf is his grandfather, the image restores health to the initial representation of lack in the novel: the "wave behind" his "eyes broke." This release of water stands in contrast to the empty stream at the book's beginning; against that sick water this torrent comes forth, an image of bounty and healing repurposing the very substance used to represent lack. The wave comes at the moment when the narrator, finally comprehending his grandmother's signs, begins to find a way to live with the past: "And so we shared this secret in the presence of ghosts, in wind that called forth the muttering tepees, the blowing snow, the white air of the horses' nostrils."[58] The symbolic import of water in this act of reclamation is reiterated in the closing paragraphs of the novel, at the narrator's grandmother's funeral. During it, the narrator reports, "The air was heavy with yesterday's rain. It would probably be good for fishing." Now possessing an understanding of his ancestral history, the narrator may retrieve more substantially, more fully.[59] Caught in a psychological state reflecting the starvation endured by the Blackfeet, the narrator reads into the few signs he has, finding what might be had when each thing becomes "big in your mind."

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NOTES

1. James Welch, *Winter in the Blood* (New York: Penguin, 2021), 116–17.

2. Welch, *Winter*, 117.

3. The tribes of the Northwest were known for doing "more fishing than fighting." Andrew Fisher, "The Pacific Northwest" in *The Oxford Handbook of American Indian History*, ed. Frederick E. Hoxie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 253. Tribes like the Blackfeet elude stereotypical conceptions of Indigenous people because they are not "the feathered braves on horseback." Even today, the Blackfeet gain significant revenue from a fish and wildlife program they set up in 1978.

4. Daniel Heath Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018), 2.

5. Justice, *Why Indigenous*, 4.

6. Justice, *Why Indigenous*, 5.

7. Louise K. Barnett, "Alienation and Ritual in *Winter in the Blood*," *American Indian Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (1978): 123

8. Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon, 1992), 92.

9. Stephen Tatum, "'Distance,' Desire, and The Ideological Matrix of *Winter in the Blood*," *Arizona Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (1990): 79.

10. Tatum, "'Distance,'" 80.

11. Gerald Vizenor, *Shadow Distance: A Gerald Vizenor Reader* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 195.

12. Vizenor, *Shadow Distance*, 195.

13. Vizenor, *Shadow Distance*, 195.

14. Fionnghuala Sweeney, "Common Ground: Positioning Ireland within Studies of Slavery, Anti-Slavery, and Empire," *Slavery & Abolition* 37, no. 3 (2016): 506.

15. Welch's style can be seen as typical of postmodern novels—Bronwen Thomas writes that postmodernist fiction uses dialogue to "distance themselves from the popular or the everyday" as part of its destabilization of the "grounds establishing what constitutes the 'real.'" Bronwen Thomas, *Fictional Dialogue: Speech and Conversation in the Modern and Postmodern Novel* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 9, 34. But a better way to understand the novel's language is provided by Sidner Larson, who argues that Welch's novelistic style draws on the Indigenous storytelling practice of "minimization," in which the "supreme skill of the storyteller . . . is knowing what to leave out." Paring down the signs may concoct the conditions for an Indigenous literature. Sidner Larson, "Multiple Perspectivism in James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* and *The Death of Jim Loney*," *American Indian Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 515.

16. Welch, *Winter*, 27.

17. Welch, *Winter*, 27.

18. Welch, *Winter*, 27.

19. Welch, *Winter*, 27. The historical events concerning Fish dramatically represent a period in the 1880s when the US government attempted to "civilize" the Blackfeet. Violence ensued as the Blackfeet were increasingly forced into "American concepts of law and order," according to historian Malcolm McFee. By the early twentieth century, the federal government aimed to end this transitory period of Blackfeet dependence, removing so-called "competent" Indians from trust status. Competent Indians—enumerated at about a thousand by 1920—were given land, but the overall result was to leave large numbers of Blackfeet landless. Malcolm McFee, *Modern Blackfeet: Montanans on a Reservation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972), 50, 53.

20. Welch, *Winter*, 27.

21. Welch, *Winter*, 27.

22. Rosalyn LaPier, *Invisible Reality: Storytellers, Storytakers, and the Supernatural World of the Blackfeet* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 24.

23. LaPier, *Invisible Reality*, 25.

24. LaPier, *Invisible Reality*, 29.

25. Larson, "Multiple," 519.

26. Larson, "Multiple," 519.

27. Welch, *Winter*, 2.

28. Welch, *Winter*, 2.

29. Welch, *Winter*, 2.

30. Welch, *Winter*, 2.

31. Christopher Nelson, "Embodying the Indian: Rethinking Blood, Culture, and Identity in James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* and *The Death of Jim Loney*," *Western American Literature* 41, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 303.

32. Sidner Larson, "Colonization as Subtext in James Welch's *Winter in the Blood*," *American Indian Quarterly* 29, no. 1/2 (Winter-Spring 2005): 274.

33. Larson, "Colonization," 275.

34. Larson, "Colonization," 277.

35. Welch, *Winter*, 4.

36. Welch, *Winter*, 4.

37. Catherine Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 346.

38. Welch, *Winter*, 4.

39. Welch, *Winter*, 5.

40. Welch, *Winter*, 5.

41. Jovanna J. Brown, "Fishing Rights and the First Salmon Ceremony," in *American Indian Religious Traditions: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Suzanne J. Crawford and Dennis F. Kelley (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 322.

42. Brown, "Fishing Rights," 322.

43. Bradley G. Shreve, "'From Time Immemorial': The Fish-in Movement and the Rise of Intertribal Activism," *Pacific Historical Review* 78, no. 3 (August 2009): 418.

44. *See* Brown, "Fishing Rights," 321–22.

45. Welch, *Winter*, 5.

46. Karla Holloway, *Moorings and Metaphors: Figures of Culture and Gender in Black Women's Literature* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 20.

47. Welch, *Winter*, 5.

48. Welch, *Winter*, 5.

49. Welch, *Winter*, 34–35.

50. Welch, *Winter*, 35.

51. Zoltán Grossman, *Unlikely Alliances: Native Nations and White Communities Join to Defend Rural Lands* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), 19.

52. Grossman, *Unlikely Alliances*, 19.

53. Welch, *Winter*, 28.

54. Welch, *Winter*, 28.

55. Welch, *Winter*, 118.

56. Welch, *Winter*, 118.

57. Welch, *Winter*, 120.

58. Welch, *Winter*, 120.

59. Welch, *Winter*, 132.

The Suspense Novel as Persuasion

Survivance and Subversion in Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*

CORTNEY SMITH

Abstract: In the best-selling and award-winning novel *The Round House* (2012), Louise Erdrich strategically uses the suspense novel genre to engage a wide audience to the sexual violence Native women face in the United States, including the jurisdictional maze those living on reservations experience when seeking justice. Through a close textual analysis (both format and content narrative features), I examine how the novel demonstrates Gerald Vizenor's theory of survivance. Specifically, how Erdrich's maneuvering within the suspense genre, by both adhering to certain tropes but also subverting the form by weaving Ojibwe storytelling to indigenize the text, demonstrates survivance and participates in consciousness-raising by exposing readers to the issues facing Native peoples.

Keywords: Survivance, Rhetoric, Suspense Genre, Subversion, Consciousness-raising, Sexual Violence

> There was a state trooper, an officer local to the town of Hoopdance, and Vince Madwsin, from the tribal police. My father had insisted that they each take a statement from my mother because it wasn't clear where the crime had been committed—on state or tribal land—or who had committed it—an Indian or a non-Indian (Erdrich 2012, 12)

This excerpt from Louise Erdrich's (Turtle Mountain Ojibwe) novel, *The Round House* (2012), exemplifies the jurisdictional maze the characters face in Indian country and how they must negotiate the colliding cultures and laws of their Native and non-Native worlds. The novel tells the story of Joe Coutts, a thirteen-year-old boy living with his family on an Ojibwe reservation in North Dakota in 1988. Joe's life, and that of his

family's, is forever altered when his mother, Geraldine, is brutally raped at the round house, a sacred space and place for the Ojibwe community. Readers follow Joe as he navigates the array of jurisdictional red tape his family faces when trying to seek justice.

Although the novel is fictional, the depiction of violence against Native women is based in fact. A National Institute of Justice report found that 56.1% of Native women have experienced sexual violence in their lifetimes (Rosay 2016). And for the majority of these women the perpetrators are non-Native, a staunch contrast to most sexual violence in America which is intra-racial (Deer 2015, 6). These "numbers indicate that Native women and girls are uniquely impacted by the violence of settler colonialism" (Wieskamp and Smith 2020, 6). Legal difficulty in adjudicating sexual assault on reservations exacerbates the problem of rape against Native women. According to Sarah Deer (Muscogee) (2005), "the high rate of [sexual] violence is directly related to the lack of resources and the jurisdictional problems faced by tribal governments, as well as a continuation of the colonization process" (463). Native women who live on reservations face a jurisdictional maze that often hinders justice. When a sexual assault occurs on the reservation, three elements determine who (federal or tribal officials) prosecutes the case. First, authorities determine if the survivor is a member of a federally recognized tribe. Second, they must determine if the attacker is a member of a federally recognized tribe. And third, determine if the rape took place on tribal land. With such an array of legal logistics, it is not surprising that so many sexual assault cases on reservations are either not reported or dismissed. There are various federal laws which limit the jurisdictional reach of tribal authorities. This lack of tribal agency creates an atmosphere where non-Native sexual predators are "attracted to Indian country as they perceive it as a location in which crimes can be committed with impunity" (Deer 2015, 41). This disregard of Native sovereignty represents the continued devaluing of Indigenous women's lives in a settler colonialist state.

Although *The Round House* represents horrific injustices, in the end, the novel (both through its use of genre and narrative content) demonstrates the theory of survivance. Gerald Vizenor (Minnesota Anishinaabe) (2008) defines survivance as "to remain alive or in existence'" (19), and details how by imbuing Native narratives of resistance into dominant discourses Indigenous writers demonstrate "an

active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion" (1). *The Round House* demonstrates how a rhetoric of survivance within the suspense genre can imbue a "Native perspective in a contested cultural space" (Bizzel 2006, 46l). As Kenneth Burke (1950) states "it is so clearly a matter of rhetoric to persuade a man by identifying your cause with his interests" (24). Burke argues that divisiveness (or division) is humanity's default condition and before a rhetor can persuade her audience, she must first create identification with them. It is through rhetoric's method of creating identification that we are encouraged to understand things from one another's perspectives (Ratcliffe 2005, 55). "Unfortunately, Native American issues are often unknown or misconceived by mainstream society and crime and detective fiction written by Native people can help elucidate and illuminate some of the specific issues facing Native American individuals and communities" (Stoecklein 2017, 9–10). By using the suspense genre strategically, Erdrich creates identification with a wide audience and simultaneously exposes non-Natives to Ojibwe culture. She also invites an attitude of criticism to the violence and injustice Native women face in the United States.

Through a close textual analysis of Erdrich's *The Round House*, I examine how a rhetoric of survivance by way of the suspense genre informs a wide audience to the issue of violence against Native women. The novel employs elements of Ojibwe and dominant (re: white mainstream) culture to create mutual understanding of time and space and to foster identification with a wider audience—both Native and non-Native. Yet, at the same time, audiences are never allowed to forget that for Indigenous peoples, even when engaging with a dominant culture, they come from a radically different history of oppression. This includes structural oppression that allows for continued violence against Native women. To analyze the possibilities of the suspense novel, as an indigenized text, to engage a wide audience and contribute to consciousness-raising, I first explore the relationship of survivance scholarship and the suspense novel. Next, I detail how Erdrich engages with a rhetoric of survivance in *The Round House* through two approaches: 1) Erdrich's embrace of the suspense genre to attract a wide audience to her cause which is to raise awareness of the rampant rates of sexual assault against Native women and the jurisdictional issues on reservations that prohibit justice; 2) An analysis of two character dichotomies found in the novel

that demonstrate Native survivance, or the active sense of presence over absence.

SURVIVANCE AND THE SUSPENSE NOVEL

The suspense novel is among the most widely read and acclaimed novels by readers (Sánchez-Verdejo Pérez 2021), and it makes up 20–22 percent of all books sold in the United States (Klein 1999). Genres, like the suspense novel, are grounded in "rhetorical communication with shared communicative purpose, purpose that is recognized and rationalized by a community" (Devitt 2015, 46). The relationship between the genre, as a form, and the audience means there are certain expectations. Suspense novel expectations often include: an event that destabilizes the daily reality of the characters (and the reader), a mystery that needs to be solved, clues and red herrings, and a trustworthy narrator.

The American suspense novel, as opposed to the British tradition, has "usually illuminated social justice questions, directly or indirectly" (Macdonald, Macdonald, and Sheridan 2000, 207). This makes the genre acutely useful for marginalized writers trying to attract a wider audience to causes and to "introduce mainstream readers to cultures and groups beyond their social experience" (Macdonald, Macdonald, and Sheridan 2000, 163). There has been a history of black writers working within the suspense genre as an act of consciousness-raising for decades. The most prominent being Chester Himes and his Harlem Detective series starting in 1957. Not until the late twentieth century, did Native American writers begin exploring the genre. And, in fact, some of the most popular Native detective stories were written by non-Indigenous authors (such as Tony Hillerman's Navajo series). However, as Ray Browne notes, the Native American detective when depicted by non-Native writers, "often exists as a symbol of exoticism, with 'Indian lands and cultures provid[ing] rich and complex background for authors who are interested merely in telling good stories and providing entertainment'" (as cited in Stoecklein 2017, 15). Instead, Native authors use the form to tell their own stories and educate non-Natives on issues impacting their communities—it is, in itself, an act of survivance to write within this mainstream genre. To take a form from the colonizer and make it your own. According to Andrew Macdonald, Gina Macdonald, and MaryAnn Sheridan (2000), "because the detective genre in no way parallels any Native American

oral or literary traditions, its occasional use by a few Native Americans is clearly aimed at a mainstream audience" (163).

The Round House uses a rhetoric of survivance in both its choice of form, the suspense novel, and in its storytelling approach to strategically resist "historical and ongoing legal and colonial impositions" (Blaeser 2013, 243). Vizenor makes it clear that "survivance is not merely an activity of the past, but a method by which tribal peoples actively engage with their contemporary circumstances" (Richotte 2013, 386). Survivance is about challenging the status quo, imbuing one's ideas/cultures into dominant discourses (i.e., the suspense genre), and asserting selfhood. It speaks to endurance and resistance. For a variety of Native communities, storytelling (whether in written or oral form) acts as "dialogic agents of change" (Blaser 2013, 245). Jill Doerfler (White Earth Anishinaabe) (2013) details how "written narratives have long been utilized by Anishinaabe to argue political agendas or subvert the colonial histories created by dominant society, and they are acts of survivance" (175). Erdrich's choice to maneuver within the suspense genre is an act of survivance that engages in socio-political issues of Native peoples and challenges broader society to address these concerns.

ERDRICH'S *THE ROUND HOUSE*

When *The Round House* won the National Book Award, Erdrich stated that this is a "book about a huge case of injustice ongoing on reservations" and thanked the panel of judges for "giving it a wider audience" (Carden 2018, 94). In the novel's afterword, Erdrich details her desire to use the work intentionally to bring attention to the violence Native women encounter in the United States and the jurisdictional maze they face when pursing their attackers. Frances Washburn (Lakota/Anishinaabe) (2006) writes that American Indian literature offers "a gateway for Native and non-Native people to understand the very issues that need to be exposed to wider public view, discussion, and resolve" (110). Erdrich carefully crafted *The Round House* to attract a diverse and wide audience to the issue, even stating that the book is a "suspense novel masking a crusade" (Tharp 2014, 25). Following John Sanchez and Mary Stuckey's (2000) argument that "American Indian rhetors seeking to influence policy in the national context must, through both form and content, educate non-American Indians . . ." (126), Erdrich

made a strategic decision to maneuver within a dominant discourse, the suspense novel genre, to attract a large and diverse audience to a Native perspective on the issue at hand, violence against Native women.

With *The Round House*, Erdrich engages with two prominent suspense genre expectations: the use of a single narrator and linear storytelling. First, the novel focuses on a single narrator, Joe. Noting Erdrich's intention to "masquerade" her crusade, this use of a single narrator is an intentional choice to make the novel accessible to many. In the suspense genre, the narrator is seen as a credible source. "We, as readers, assume that this authority and credibility will guide us to discover the truth" (Sánchez-Verdejo Pérez 2021, 4). This is in stark contrast to many of Erdrich's previous works that tended to use multiple narrators with shifting perspectives (Castor 2018). In fact, her approach of multiple narrators is one of her established unique storytelling strategies that was seen in her debut novel, *Love Medicine* (Peterson 2020).

The single narrator as detective in the suspense genre serves to champion "the values or the good of the larger community," "acts for society, finding the truth and facilitating justice," and is "usually one who is sympathetic enough for the reader to identify with to some degree" (Macdonald, Macdonald, and Sheridan, 2000, 161–162). We see all of these characteristics in Joe Coutts. It is in Joe's position as untrained investigator that order for the community is re-established. And it is through reader identification with Joe as the trustworthy narrator and devoted son that "the detective acts as a surrogate for the reader, sorting our society's disarray, righting wrongs, and ultimately reinforcing the idea that justice (in some form) and law (whether written or simply custom) can prevail" (Macdonald, Macdonald, and Sheridan, 2000, 162). Although the end form of justice in *The Round House* does not conform to the U.S. judicial system, it does bring some sense of order. When faced with the violent crime and lack of justice, what reader could not identify with Joe's desire to protect and preserve his family and his frustrations with an inept judicial system?

In addition to the use of single author that meets genre expectations, *The Round House* also maintains a linear storytelling approach in which events move forward step-by-step with a clear beginning, middle, and end. A linear (often read as Western) temporal sensibility has been linked to colonial rhetorics and dominant discourses—discourses that continue to oppress and marginalize Indigenous peoples (Lake 1991;

Deloria 1992; Mignolo 2011; Brigham and Mabrey 2018; Rifkin 2017). Although Erdrich used both linear and nonlinear storytelling in the past, she chose to use linear storytelling in *The Round House*. Again, by adhering to a storytelling technique that is dominant, and presumably familiar to non-Native readers, Erdrich makes a rhetorical choice to invite as large an audience to her novel as possible. Although she is using what some may deem as Western approaches, she imbues these storytelling techniques with Ojibwe culture, history, and experiences and purposely does not "explain them for the reader, just as these stories are not explained in real life" (Stoecklein 2017, 76). As Laura V. Castor (2018) states, Erdrich translates "Indigenous ways of knowing the world for readers from a variety of backgrounds" (34). And by using the suspense novel as a form of communication she is participating in a means of consciousness-raising (Macdonald, Macdonald, and Sheridan, 2002). "Because crime and detective fiction urges readers to imagine society in situations of upheaval and violence, American Indian-authored detective fiction has the power to inform and transform readers in regard to historical, legal, cultural, and contemporary issues in Indian Country" (Stoecklein 2017, 9).

While Erdrich does adhere to tropes of the suspense genre, she also indigenizes (and subverts) the text by incorporating storytelling elements that are culturally rooted. And she is following the footsteps of previous Native authors when doing this. For example, both Linda Hogan's (Chickasaw) *Mean Spirit* (1990) and Tom Holm's (Creek/Cherokee) *The Osage Rose* (2009) use cultural elements of restorative justice, traditional storytelling, and dreams in their fictional suspense novels about the 1920s Osage oil murders. As I detail later, Joe ends up taking justice in his own hands, with the help of a friend, and kills his mother's attacker. Both *Mean Spirit* and *The Osage Rose* also "end with retaliatory killings as a form of justice" (Stoecklein, 2017, 29). However, as with Joe, these killings do not lead to judicial reform. Instead, there is recognition of continued hardships. In particular, *Mean Spirits* "highlights the continued lack of justice for these grisly murders (Osage murders) and makes it clear that even though this is the end of the novel, this likely is not the end of the plight for the oil-rich Osage" (Stoecklein 2017, 54). Mary Stoecklein (2017) details how these killings from a Western viewpoint might appear as vigilante justice; however, from the cultural standpoint of each respective community (Osage in

Means Spirits and Cherokee in *The Osage Rose*) these are acts in an effort to restore harmony (55–57).

As with *The Round House*, both *Mean Spirits* and *The Osage Rose* incorporate traditional storytelling and dreams that guide their central characters. A Cherokee protagonist "is constantly reminded to remember the stories and to let those narratives guide him" in *The Osage Rose* (Stoecklein 2017, 47). Joe has a similar experience in *The Round House*. He is guided by the story of the "wiindigoo"—a man-eating beast, part of Algonquian mythology—as particularly provoking and it is continually mentioned throughout the novel.[1] We are first introduced to the wiindigoo myth when Joe's grandfather, Mooshum, tells him the tale of Akii and her son, Nanapush. Told by Mooshum in his sleep, the story is about how the young Nanapush saves his mother from their tribal community. As the novel's plot develops, it becomes clear that Joe identifies with Mooshum's story of the mother and son.

Mooshum's telling of the wiindigoo in his sleep state reflects another approach to indigenize the suspense genre—the use of dreams. According to Esther Fritsch and Marion Gymnich (2003), a "high status is conferred on dreams and dreaming is often considered a hallmark feature of Native American cultures" (204). Joe also has nightmares after the killing of the attacker. Nightmares that predict a looming doom. Both Hogan and Holm incorporate dreams into their novels and these dreams play a significant role in guiding the protagonist's decisions. These dreams, as used by Native authors in the suspense genre, "not only function in terms of the dreamer's identity formation, but the dreams are also closely tied to specific mystery and detective genre questions such as "Who committed the crime(s)? What is the motivation for actions related to the crime(s)? . . ." (Fritsch and Gymnich 2003, 204).

In addition to maneuvering in and around the structural conventions of the suspense, Erdrich presents survivance throughout the novel with character development and narrative choices. This includes demonstrating how Ojibwe culture and mainstream culture intersect, and collide, for her characters. To refine the analysis, I have chosen to focus on two specific character comparisons that demonstrate survivance. First, I examine how two biological twins, Linda Wishkob and Linden Lark, represent survivance or lack thereof. Next, I explore how Joe and his father's, Judge Coutts, relationship with justice demonstrates survivance when faced with insurmountable jurisdictional red tape.

The Twins: Linda Wishkob and Linden Lark

Two key characters in *The Round House* are the biological twins Linda Wishkob, born Linda Lark, and Linden Lark, the rapist and antagonist of the novel. By comparing these two characters, the text demonstrates survivance and how those who are attuned to their Ojibwe culture survive settler colonialism. The twins are born to Grace and George Lark, white storeowners. However, the Larks abandon Linda shortly after her birth, and Betty and Albert Wishkob, an Ojibwe family, raise her. Linda's upbringing with the Wishkob family affords her the skill set needed to survive and thrive, and her Native culture does not vanish, but endures as she continues to live on her Native parents' land and maintain Ojibwe traditions. In comparison, Linden Lark is unable to negotiate the world where Native and non-Native cultures collide. He does not have the tool set to engage with this world and, therefore, he cannot survive it. Although he is able to escape dominant society's form of justice, he is unable to escape Native traditional justice. And in a reversal of dominant narratives, Linden is the "Last of the Larks" and it is with his death that the white Lark family vanishes.

When Grace Lark gives birth to her twins, the parents are excited by the arrival of their son, but the birth of their daughter, Linda, was unexpected and ill received. At her birth, the baby girl was sick and appeared deformed; the Larks wanted no special treatment given to the child to keep her alive. However, Linda survived and was taken in by tribal members, Betty Wishkob (a night janitor at the hospital) and her husband, Albert. The Wishkobs already had two children, but Betty fell in love with Linda and began caring for her in the evenings with Native traditional healing. On the reservation, Linda is raised just as every other child. She "went to school as an Indian person would—first at the mission and later at the government school" (Erdrich 2012, 116). She is embraced by the Wishkobs and adopts the traditions and culture of her Ojibwe family, including Mrs. Wishkob's explanation of Linda's misshapen head. The mother tells her adoptive daughter that she was "gonna see things sometimes" because her "soft spot stayed open longer than most babies" and that's "how spirits get in" (116). Even though Linda lives a culturally Native life, her whiteness, and the privilege that comes with it, is never forgotten. When the Wishkob children disobey their mother, they often lie and blame Linda for their misbehavior.

Once when they were children, Sheryl Wishkob (Linda's adoptive sister) was twirling around the house and broke a vase. When Mrs. Wishkob began to scold Sheryl for breaking the vase, Sheryl blames Linda. Later, when she asks her sister why she blamed her, Sheryl gives "a hateful look, and said, because you're white" (118). Young Sheryl believes the punishment would be less severe for Linda due to her white privilege. And in fact, Linda is not punished for the vase and the answer of white privilege appears to appease Linda's unhappiness with the blame being placed upon her. Even though she is being raised just as her siblings, at a tender age Linda recognizes she is different in some way and that the difference affords her things in life. Linda's "place" with this Native family is so agreeable that upon the death of her adoptive parents, "the other children, who had moved off the reservation, agreed to let Linda continue living as she had in the home of Albert and Betty" (51). In the end, the "white" child of the Wishkobs is the only child to stay on their reservation land. It is through her life, as a white person who is raised Native, that Linda Lark is not only saved from her white biological parents but is raised by a loving Ojibwe family and becomes an integral member of her Native community.

In comparison, Linden's life is shaped by his unwillingness to accept cultural diversity and he is unable to survive. Although his life intersects with the Native community on the reservation, he does not attempt to embrace his Ojibwe neighbors; instead, he blames this community for his hardships in life. As a child, he is doted upon by his white parents and believes he is superior to his Ojibwe neighbors. This superiority complex continues into adulthood and includes his attempts (with his family) to sue and secure Linda's reservation land. Recognizing the absurdity of the Larks' claim, Judge Coutts dismisses the case. Soon after the court case, Mrs. Lark dies suddenly from an aneurysm. Linden demonstrates his rejection of Native culture by blaming the Wishkobs, his biological sister, and Judge Coutts for his mother's death and his financial ruin. In expressing his discontent with the Ojibwe community, Linden writes an editorial to the local newspaper in which he calls for dissolving reservations because "we beat them fair and square" (52). Lark, with his uncomplicated (re: privileged) understanding of the world, is unable to tolerate a world where Native and non-Native collide. Due to his ignorance and racism, Lark is unable to see the merit

in learning about the Ojibwe community he comes into contact with on a daily basis. He solely embraces his white culture as the only culture worth investing in.

In many ways, the story of Linda and Linden is reminiscent of the history of the European conquest of Native lands with each twin a stand-in for their respective cultural backgrounds. Linden, representing white society, continues to take things away from Linda. First, after years of having little to no contact from her biological family, the Larks approach Linda to donate her kidney to Linden because of his ill health. And she does just that—- feeling obligated to help her biological brother. Then, through his mother, Linden attempts to take Linda's land. Finally, Lark brutally murders one Indigenous woman and violently assaults Geraldine Coutts. Linden Lark represents the evils of settler colonialism in the flesh. He is consumed by a manifest destiny mentality. This mentality means, for him, he is entitled to Indigenous lands and Indigenous women. Furthermore, he imagines that all the ills of his life are because of the neighboring Ojibwe community.

In opposition, Linda's relationship with Linden represents a Native perspective. Just as many Native Americans helped early colonists acclimate to their new foreign habitat, Linda willingly gives her kidney to Linden because she feels it is the right thing to do. However, just as Native Americans would regret their decision to help the colonists survive and flourish, Linda regrets her decision to save her biological brother's life. As the biologically white child who grows up culturally Native, Linda represents survivance. It is through surviving that Linda's cultural resonance does not go by the wayside, but instead perseveres. The act of surviving creates a sense of Native presence over absence and represents resilience. This ending, including Lark's death, could also demonstrate an imaginative justice for Native peoples. While many, if not most, white perpetrators of crimes on reservation lands allude justice, Linden cannot escape it. Instead, this is possibly an effort for an imagined and just ending in which the colonizer is not the victor, but the colonized is.

What is Justice?

After the brutal attack on Geraldine Coutts, Joe and his father take two distinctly different approaches to seeking justice. Although Judge Coutts

is acutely aware of the injustices of the U.S. legal system, he continues to maneuver within this faulty system while Joe goes around the system and is inspired by traditional cultural understanding of justice. Neither system works on its own and both characters are not unscathed by their respective choices. In the end, it is through the mutual understanding of what can be afforded by both approaches that leads to survivance.

Throughout the novel, Judge Coutts details how the U.S. government's enactment of laws and policies led to precarious situations such as the jurisdictional issues presented in the novel. This lack of concern makes it difficult for Native Americans to achieve any sense of justice through the American court system. In many ways, the U.S. judicial system creates an environment in which Native peoples are subjected to laws and policies that make them second-class citizens. Throughout the novel Judge Coutts expresses his dismay about how federal court decisions from prior generations continue to lead to the dispossession of Native lands and destroy Native sovereignty:

> But what particularly galls the intelligent person now is that the language he [Chief Justice John Marshall] used survives in the law, that we were savages living off the forest, and to leave our land to us was to leave it useless wilderness, that our character and religion is of so inferior a stamp that the superior genius of Europe must certainly claim ascendancy and on and on (229).

Judge Coutts acknowledges his frustration with a legal system that considers Native Americans as not relevant to modernity who did not survive the onslaught of European progress. At another point in the novel, Judge Coutts decides to personally visit a U.S. attorney in Bismarck because "the problem with most Indian rape cases was that even after there was an indictment the U.S. attorney often declined to take the case to trial for one reason or another. Usually a raft of bigger cases" (41). In dismissing Native rape cases for "a raft of bigger cases," the U.S. judicial system is failing to seek justice for Native victims—victims who are often considered less important than their non-Native counterparts. In another example of acknowledging the inept judicial system found on the reservation, Joe reminds his father of the Judge's own words regarding FBI agents who "draw" Indian Country: "You said if they're assigned to Indian Country they are either rookies or have trouble with authority" (91). Again, we are confronted with the ineffectual system faced by

the Coutts and their community. They are not equipped with the FBI's best and brightest, but instead with inexperienced and disreputable officers. By recognizing the ineffectual justice offered on the reservation, the novel's characters are acknowledging Native invisibility in the eyes of justice. Even with acknowledging how the system is rigged against Native communities, Judge Coutts feels bound to finding justice within this system.

While his father tries to maneuver within the U.S. judicial system, Ojibwe justice inspires Joe. As mentioned previously, Joe finds inspiration in the story of the "wiindigoo." Joe envisions himself as a Nanapush figure that must rescue his mother from her own wiindigoo—her attacker. As the plot unfolds, Geraldine's attacker, Linden Lark, is arrested, and the Coutts begin adhering to a daily routine that resembles the normalcy of their lives before the attack. However, shortly after his arrest, Linden is released from custody due to the aforementioned jurisdiction issues. Joe concludes that since the criminal justice system has failed, he must kill his mother's attacker to save his family. He decides to seek wiindigoo justice. In the end, Joe and Cappy, Joe's best friend, kill Lark. However, the novel does not make the conclusion that this form of justice is without its own ramifications. After learning of Linden's death, Judge Coutts tells Joe that they are now safe; however, Joe knows better——"He [Judge Coutts] said I was now safe, but I was not exactly safe from Lark. Neither was Cappy. Every night he came after us in dreams" (307). Joe continues to have nightmares in which Linden Lark kills Cappy. And then shortly after Linden Lark's death, Joe and his friends are involved in a car accident. Cappy is killed. As Erdrich said on NPR's "All Things Considered" (2012), revenge "is a sorrow for the person who has to take it on, and the person rash enough to think it's going to help a situation, is always wrong." In contrast to his father, Joe's actions represent a break from the U.S. judicial system. Inspired by the tale of Nanapush and recognizing the possibility of never receiving justice in the American court system, Joe's decision to kill Lark has consequences for the young man and it does not necessarily make his family whole. Joe "realizes, as do his parents, that revenge on Linden Lark cannot compensate for the brutality of his mother's rape and near murder. Nor can it make up for the societal power imbalances that allowed it to happen" (Castor 2018, 40).

In comparing Joe and Judge Coutts' approaches to justice, Joe is

inspired by a Native traditional form of justice, as signified by the wiindigoo. On the other hand, even though Judge Coutts recognizes Native traditional justice, he relies on the U.S judicial system; however, Judge Coutts appears to develop a deeper appreciation for Native justice after the rapist's death. By the end of the novel, Judge Coutts decides that the attacker's death set a precedent, a "traditional precedent" (Erdrich 306). He states, it "could be argued that Lark [the rapist] met the definition of a wiindigoo, and that with no other recourse, his killing fulfilled the requirements of a very old law" (306). Judge Coutts' renewed appreciation of traditional Native justice allows for him to recognize how the death of Lark, even if it is seen as unlawful in terms of the U.S. judicial system, does provide justice to his Native family who could not obtain it any other way. In order to negotiate an unjust world, the Coutts rely upon their culture to survive and continue as a family. It is through the inclusion of an Ojibwe understanding of justice that the mainstream justice system is modified. And while the novel does not champion Joe's actions, it does acknowledge the inequity of the U.S. judicial system for Native Americans.

CONCLUSION

According to the novel's afterword, Erdrich's inspiration for the novel was to draw attention to sexual assault of Native women on reservations and "the tangle of laws that hinder prosecution" (319). *The Round House*, in both form and content, sheds light on Native experiences to broad audiences and demonstrates survivance. In an interview, Erdrich was asked, "For non-Native peoples, the injustice and jurisdictional tangles described in *The Round House* will come as astonishing news. How do Native people—for whom these are daily realities—react?" (Woodward 2012). Erdrich responded by relaying content from a letter she received from a tribal judge. The judge said, "she had worked all her life on issues of sovereignty that result in desperately unfair, unworkable, unlivable outcomes for victims of sexual violence . . . and it meant a great deal to her to be understood in that manner." The judge's response speaks to the novel's ability to "raise readers' consciousness by shedding light on issues facing Native peoples and communities" (Stoecklein 2017, 29).

In 2013, the stalled Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was reauthorized and included new protections for Native women.[2] Did the

success of *The Round House*, published in 2012, have an impact on this reauthorization? In *Fiction, Crime, and Empire: Clues to Modernity and Postmodernism* (1993), Jon Thompson argues "fictional narratives may not, in and of themselves, generate social change, but their form offers a model for narratives that, in their grasp of historical circumstances and forces could ultimately inspire social transformation" (179). While there cannot be a one-to-one correlation determined between the novel and the reauthorization of VAWA, it is important to recognize how Erdrich's novel, as an act of consciousness-raising, reaffirmed experiences for Native audiences and exposed these experiences to non-Native audiences. For Macdonald, Macdonald, and Sheridan (2000), the suspense novel, in particular, "is a uniquely appropriate medium for writers interested in social criticism, especially critiques of marginal or ignored groups being abused" (207).

By maneuvering in and around dominant discourses and genres, Erdrich recognizes complexity in the colonized lives of her characters and her novel serves as an example of survivance. We see this complexity with Joe Coutts' chosen career path—he becomes an attorney. Joe's "career path, which has brought him back to practice law on the reservation, suggests that the opposition between apparently 'old' Anishinaabe and 'new' ways of practicing law is a false one" (Castor 2018, 44). Joe has found himself in the same role as his father before him. He is a man between worlds in some ways. But he has chosen this path to aid his community in fighting for tribal sovereignty and recognizes the possibility of working within the legal system while also not forgetting his culture and different ways of thinking about justice. Because as Judge Coutts states in the novel "we want the right to prosecute criminals of all races on all lands within our original boundaries" (Erdrich 2012, 229–230). It is about survivance—challenging settler colonialism, maintaining agency, and asserting selfhood.

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NOTES

1. In the afterword, Erdrich thanks several Native scholars for helping her grasp an understanding of wiindigoo justice. This acknowledgment indicates the continued relevance of wiindigoo justice for Native communities.

2. Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) 2013 included restoring tribal authority to exercise criminal jurisdiction in some new cases of abuse; however, it did not include sexual assault. With the reauthorization of VAWA 2022, this did include tribal criminal jurisdiction of sexual assault.

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Snake Eyes

Linda Hogan's Monumental Serpentine Embodiment of Justice in "The Snake People"

CATHERINE KUNCE

Abstract: Chickasaw Linda Hogan's essay "The Snake People" contains innumerable references to snakes, pointing to the reptile's exquisite beauty, to its remarkable qualities, and to its representations throughout history. Seemingly parenthetically the essay also alludes to an earth monument in the form of a snake, over 1,200 feet long, constructed by American Indians in what is now Ohio. Catherine Kunce argues that the structure, form, and content of Hogan's essay itself creates a literary, serpentine monument that invites readers to move beyond abstraction and to become active antidotes to injustice.

Keywords: Linda Hogan, "The Snake People," Ohio Serpent Mound, Active Justice, American Indians' Monument, Earth Mound

INTRODUCTION

The elegant essay "The Snake People"[1] by Linda Hogan (Chickasaw) contains innumerable references to snakes, pointing to the reptile's exquisite beauty, to its remarkable qualities, and to its representations throughout history. Seemingly parenthetically Hogan refers to an earth monument in the form of a snake, over 1,200 feet long, the largest effigy mound in the world, and built by American Indians in what is now Ohio. While it appears that the reference to the earthen effigy might be merely one more citation of a snake image, the Serpent Mound can be considered something far more significant. The richly textured "Snake People" itself becomes a literary earthwork, structurally similar to the Indian Serpent Mound. Analogous to how Serpent Mound builders incrementally and ingeniously constructed their earthen monument, Hogan builds her enduring monument to the snake and to Indigenous people, word by

word, sentence by sentence, ultimately forming a paragraphed, "articulated" representation of a snake that unfolds down the page, each paragraph representing a rib of its previous section, creating both a physical and metaphysical, living and remembered mound of insight.

Hogan achieves her monumental aim first by connecting Indigenous peoples to snakes, even as she successfully navigates the challenges of paralleling nonhuman beings and Indigenous peoples. The essay then subtly calls attention to both the beneficial consequences of adhering to Indian epistemologies and to the disastrous results of ignoring those epistemologies. Ultimately the narrative structure of Hogan's winding essay replicates the snake's qualities, form, and movements. By "following" the essay's content and structure, just as we might follow the form of the Snake Mound were we to visit the sacred site, readers are invited to move beyond abstraction and to become active antidotes to injustice.

SNAKES AND INDIANS

Challenges of Connecting Indians with Nonhuman Beings

"The Snake People" posits a foundational precept: all beings are interconnected, and Hogan asserts the Indigenous awareness of this precept. As the title unqualifiedly insists, snakes are people. Throughout the essay, Hogan more specifically conjoins aspects of snakes to Indigenous peoples. Near the end of her essay, Hogan reminds readers of pairing the human with the reptilian: "I call [snakes] people . . . [because] [t]hat's what they are. They have been here inhabiting the same dens for thousands of generations. . . . They belong here. They love their freedom, their dwelling places, and often die of sadness when kept in captivity." Indigenous Americans, too, "inhabited the same dens for thousands of generations."[2] The not-so-veiled allusion to Indians' removal from their "dwelling places," their subsequent loss of freedom, and their resultant death by sadness speaks of whites' deplorable actions of aggression and avarice.

Hogan's allusion to Indigenous people's close relationship to "animals" is fraught with challenges, as Brian K. Hudson (Cherokee) notes:

> In thinking about first beings [animals], we might be tempted to center solely on the differences between Indian stories and non-Native narratives about nonhuman animals. But focusing merely

> on differences risks the possibility of homogenizing many distinct tribal cultures. We also run the risk of romanticizing Indigenous relationships with other animals. Worse still, we might unwittingly reify readings that can be seen as subscribing to notions of savagery (the Indian as animalistic).[3]

By employing several strategies, however, Hogan navigates the inherent difficulties Hudson mentions in paralleling snakes with Indigenous peoples. Hogan first calls attention to almost all ancient cultures' similar response to the snake before focusing on ancient American Indian cultures, noting, "In nearly *all* [emphasis added] ancient cultures the snake was the symbol of healing and wholeness."[4] According to Hudson, to avoid the problem regarding First Nations' linkage to First Beings, "it is important to note that the ethical and ontological inclusion of other animals is not absent before [modern times], nor is it restricted to tribal cultures." Hudson concludes that "the only way humans are categorically different from other sentient creatures is that we narrate ourselves as such—an idea aligned with many Indigenous narratives."[5] Hudson's argument, then, calls not for analysis of white versus Indian stories of animals, but of dominant cultures' historical success in dominating and/or silencing conversations about species equality. Hudson also directs us to another essay, Hogan's "First People."[6] In this piece Hogan instigates conversations about the attempted severance of First Nations' understanding that "what has happened to this land and the animals is the same thing as what has happened to us."[7] Denying the truth of all living beings' interconnectedness, Hogan intimates, leads to injustice and to atrocities against both First Beings and Indigenous people. "The Snake People" becomes what Hogan posits is the snake's symbol for almost all ancient people: a wellspring of "healing and wholeness."[8]

Diversity of Snakes and Indian Nations

While discussing common characteristics of all snakes and how almost all ancient cultures revered them, Hogan artfully avoids another pitfall that concerns Hudson: "homogenizing many distinct tribal cultures."[9] Avoiding this pitfall, Hogan not only describes the diversity within the snake species, both in their activities and their appearances, but she also shows the diverse ways Indigenous nations have of celebrating

the snake. Doing so reveals Hogan's skillful merging of two seemingly opposed notions: the unification of shared characteristics and the diversity of both snakes and Indian nations. While snakes as a species hold numerous characteristics in common with one another, there are some 150 different types of snakes in North America alone. Hogan's short essay indirectly references this diversity by mentioning many different types of snakes: golden racers, rattlers, water moccasins, blue racers, bull snakes, and black racers. Hogan furthermore depicts snakes in a remarkable array of circumstances: lying on roads, "flying," draping themselves in trees, swimming, being carried off by hawks and eagles, basking in the sun, being run over by cars, threatening to strike human people, attempting to escape people, being brutalized, being eaten by birds, eating birds, and (my favorite) looking like "women who know they are beautiful."[10] Hogan distinguishes most of the snakes and their actions in relation to their environments. Even while calling attention to the splendid diversity of snakes, from time to time Hogan chooses not to mention specifically the type of snake she notices, and this fact indicates an appreciation of the species in general while respecting differences among them.

Even while documenting the snake's unifying presence in ancient worlds, Hogan resists claiming that snakes mean the same thing to all Indigenous people. Hogan mentions, for instance, the treatment of snakes by the Hopi, who "for as long as anyone remembers . . . participate in a snake dance." After feeding the snakes with pollen, stroking them "with feathers" and placing them "on a circle of finely ground meal . . . [the snakes are] carried into the dance. Afterward, they are returned unharmed . . . to the dens they lived inside for thousands and thousands of generations."[11] The Hopi's distinct culture distinctly honors the snake. The Hopi honor the snake, and Hogan honors the Hopi. She does this by calling attention to the Hopi's longevity, which relates, seemingly only incidentally, to the snake's longevity. Hogan further drives home the point of the Hopi and snakes' matching ancientness by remarking, "Writer Frank Waters has noted that [the Hopi snake dance] is the oldest ceremony and ritual in the history of the continent."[12] By detailing the Hopi dance dedicated to the snake and by telling the meaning of the Hopi's tribal name, People of Peace, Hogan honors two closely related peoples.

In further honoring diversity among First Nations, Hogan notes her own personal responses to the snake and the Chickasaw nation's

responses to them, thereby connecting the personal to the communal. Remembering a dream, Hogan tells "of a woman who placed a fantastic snake over her face. The snake was green, and the woman merged with it, wearing it like a mask, her teeth filling inside its fangs, her face inside its green beaklike, smooth-scaled face. They became one."[13] The dream-snake woman starts to dance, and "other people . . . joined the snake woman in a dance, placing their hands on one another's waists the way Chickasaws, my tribe, sometimes do."[14] Demonstrating that Hopi and Chickasaw respond to the snake differently, Hogan suggests differences should be carefully noted, just as the innumerable references to different snakes in different situations tell different stories throughout her essay. It would be easy to miss, however, that even though both the Hopi and Chickasaw respond differently to the snake, Hogan creates a kind of alliance between the two nations by describing their appreciation of the snake, specifically through dancing.

Hogan's discussion of snakes' significance to the Hopi and the Chickasaw invites consideration about how other Nations respond to snakes. For instance LeAnne Howe (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma) speaks of her grandmother's "powerful spirit" and snakes. When Howe nearly died of rheumatic fever, Howe's grandmother's spirit visited the stricken girl, and Howe began to recover. Howe "fictionalized and combined the healing event with the story [her] grandmother told [her] of the Snake People,"[15] who, Howe notes, "were the Comanches."[16] Howe shows how discussion of snakes can spark insight into distinct Nations' stories even while grounding that discussion in a unified subject or a common ancestor, such as the snake. Additionally in discussing her original and thought-provoking novel *Shell Shaker*, Howe comments that "ancient [Indigenous] communities had vibrant intertribal relationships. That's what I think is most important."[17] Hogan seems to acknowledge the value of those "vibrant" relationships by alluding to other Nations' stories about snakes. Hogan's artfully simultaneous honoring of similarities and distinctions among and between Nations offers a sense of what it takes to value diversity while building unity.

Avoiding Romanticization

Besides addressing issues of diversity, Hogan's essay avoids another of Hudson's concerns inherent in comparing Indians to nonhuman beings—in this case, to snakes. According to Hudson, associat-

ing Indians with animals holds "the risk of romanticizing Indigenous relationships with other animals."[18] Hogan avoids "romanticizing" the connection between Indigenous people and snakes by presenting a vision of snakes born of empiricism and of remembered stories. Hogan, for example, recalls stories from her childhood in which snakes are "fearsome creatures: a rattlesnake curled up around a telephone, ready to strike an answering hand, a snake in a swamp cooler, or [one that] crawled into bed with one of the children. And there was the time [her] brother woke to feel the weight of a rattlesnake heavy between his knees."[19] Clearly Hogan does not present merely a romantic vision of the snake.

In further avoiding a romanticized view of snakes, Hogan reminds us that snakes are both predators and prey, recalling seeing "a snake swallowing a bird, the twiglike feet sticking out of the snake's wide mouth."[20] On the other side of the food chain, an eagle carries off a snake. Additionally Hogan and her family are presented as the predators, not the "victims" of snakes. She tells of when she and her father discovered a small snake near the surface of a well: a "blue racer [glided] into the newly lighted air, its tongue calculating the world . . . Quickly my father caught it. He held it just behind the head for a while, then put it in my hands . . . I was happy thinking what a big fish we would catch with it."[21] Hogan underscores her lack of concern for the snake by noting that her father held the snake "just behind the head for a while" before placing it in Hogan's hands. His gesture not only demonstrates the power he wields over the small being but also reveals the helpless position of a kitten being held by its mother who also might carry the kitten "just behind the head for a while." Even if snakes catch "helpless" creatures, they sometimes become helpless when caught by children like Hogan, who still "remember[s] . . . the [racer's] grayish blue color, like a heron, the slenderness and dry beauty that wound down toward the dusty ground, wanting to escape me." [22] Hogan reminds us that all creatures must eat to survive. Humans, as much as snakes, can become predators or prey, and the essay avoids the pitfall of romanticizing the relationship between snakes and Indigenous people.

Life's Interconnectedness

Even while presenting the true-to-life and the changeable relationships that Indigenous people have with snakes, Hogan notes that Indigenous

peoples have long considered human-animal connectivity. In "First People" Hogan writes that Indigenous people's creation stories frequently involved "first beings" or "animals," as some call them.[23] Luther Standing Bear (Oglala Lakota), for instance, noted in written form nearly ninety years ago the centrality of nature and animals to his nation: "We love the birds and beasts that grew with us on this soil. They drank the same water we did and breathed the same air. We are all one in nature."[24] In fact, according to Standing Bear, "The animals had rights—the right of man's protection, the right to live, the right to multiply, the right to freedom, and the right to man's indebtedness—and in recognition of these rights the Lakota never enslaved the animal."[25] In the twenty stories recounted in Standing Bear's *Stories of the Sioux*, fourteen contain various references to animals, and the stories disclose the Oglala Lakota's careful observation and appreciation of animals, told long before the stories were written down.

More recently in 2017, Melissa K. Nelson (Anishinaabe/Cree/Métis [Turtle Mountain Chippewa]) reminds us that "other beings are always inside us—[such as] bacteria [and] viruses."[26] Nelson, furthermore, seeks to recover Indigenous stories of interspecies sexuality, claiming that such stories can "embody . . . an ethic of kinship so needed in the world today to address ecological and cultural challenges."[27] Hogan notes that the snake bears structural relation to life, microcosmically, remarking that "the image of snakes twined about a tree of one another looks surprisingly like the double, twisted helix of DNA, the spiral arrangement of molecules that we share with every other living thing on earth, plant and animal, down to the basic stuff of ourselves."[28] Millenniums ago, Indigenous people told of life's interconnectedness, including the intimate connection we have with First Beings.

Hogan's essay connects First Peoples with First Beings, beings of some of the planet's longest living species, reptiles, which have existed for between ninety and one hundred million years. Indigenous people likewise lived in the Americas, their originary stories untold thousands of years prior to the European invasions. In considering LeAnne Howe's "The Story of America," Carter Meland (Anishinaabe) discerningly asserts, "We need to consider that the past milieu—that of Indian peoples—must be regarded as originary, and we need to recognize that those originary voices story America before America was America."[29] Hogan's essay anticipates Meland's call for regarding Indian people's voices as "originary"—both in the sense of giving voice to the

first human inhabitants of North and South America and in the sense of those voices being "original." From its title to its final word, Hogan's essay "embodies the ethic of kinship" that Nelson intimates is needed to face "ecological and cultural challenges."[30] Both First Beings and First People can instruct us in ways to better understand environmental and social injustices, and that understanding, Hogan implies, begins with understanding the interconnectedness *and* the diversity of life.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF EMBRACING OR IGNORING INDIAN EPISTEMOLOGIES

Connecting Ways of Knowing to Expand Awareness

Hogan both directly and indirectly alludes to the consequences of accepting or ignoring connections among living beings. The essay avoids privileging conscious awareness over the awareness gained through dreams, for example, thereby disclosing how the dream state can expand understanding. Hogan's above recounted dream describes an Edenic state before the coming of Europeans, when snakes and humans were one. Hogan later reflects upon the dream's meaning: "At first I thought this dream was about Indian tradition, how if each person retains part of a history, an entire culture . . . remains intact and alive."[31] Since the time of her first analyzing the dream's meaning, Hogan later considers, "Now, it seems that what needs to be saved, even in its broken pieces, is earth itself, the tradition of life, the beautiful blue-green world that lives in the coiling snake of the Milky Way."[32] For Hogan, preserving Indigenous cultures intersects the preservation of the planet. This significant realization came to Hogan in part through analysis of a dream.

Discussing the variety of snakes and the diversity of Indigenous nations models not only a respectful way to consider differing views of life but also suggests the importance of biodiversity. Joanne Barker (Lenape [Delaware Tribe of Indians]), alluding to Winona LaDuke (Anishinaabe [White Earth Reservation]), notes that for LaDuke, "the biodiversity of the territories that constitute the United States and Canada and the cultural diversity of Indigenous peoples are inseparable."[33] Hogan's essay, mentioning different Indigenous peoples' responses to the snake, sensitively honors tribal diversity. LaDuke's unifying notion that cultural and biodiversity "are inseparable" reminds

us that distinct cultures relate to distinct "bio diversities." Hogan's essay implies that those bio diversities, like the diverse characteristics of different snakes and Indigenous nations' responses to them, should be honored.

Today the pressing need to respect both the commonalities among all human people and other people and to honor their unique characteristics is tragically apparent. Individual species are becoming extinct, and invasions and wars take crushing tolls on Earth and all its inhabitants. Successful reconciliation of the apparent paradox of two truths—that we are all one *and* that all groups are distinct—can be better understood by paying attention to the wisdom contained in Indian epistemologies, such as those alluded to in Hogan's essay.

Lack of reverence for lifeforms other than our own, Hogan implies, will result in regret. When she recalls the day she and her father captured the small snake to use as fishing bait, she confesses, "Looking back to the blue racer of Oklahoma, that thin pipe of life, I believe that snake, too, must have met with its death in our discovery of it. But its graceful life, not its death, is what has remained in my memory. And down through the years, I have come to love the snakes and their long, many-ribbed bodies."[34] Much like reverence for life, Hogan's love for snakes is neither instantaneous nor static. Her unfolding appreciation of the reptile signals her commitment to lifelong observation and reflection, just as Standing Bear recommends we expand our observations and reflections regarding First Beings.

Shared Justification for Genocide and Maintaining Hierarchies

Hogan subtly notes one cause that precipitated the endangering of both snakes and Indigenous peoples. In calling out Genesis's demonization of snakes contained in the Garden of Eden story, Hogan encourages readers to reconsider the brutally unjust consequences of believing exclusively and literally in one creation story. Reminding us of the pre-Christian, pre-Columbian, pre-Garden of Eden story, Hogan claims, "Before Snake became the dark god of our underworld, burdened with human sin," it "carried a different weight [than sin] in our human bones; it was a being of holy inner earth."[35]

Because of some human people's belief in the Garden of Eden story, Hogan writes, the snake "became" (not "was believed to be") a "dark

god."[36] Refuting the story of the snake tempting Eve would call into question the legitimacy of creation stories in general. Hogan implies that the story is "true" for those who believe it, while keeping the door open to usher in other creation stories about the end of Edenic states. It is important to notice Hogan's acknowledgment of the power of storytelling here. In Genesis the snake becomes a "dark god," but a god, nonetheless. For Hogan the value in understanding the stories of Indigenous nations lies not in a binary and jejune response of whether we believe each story or not; the value of knowing multiple stories about one topic, in this case the topic of snakes, is to multiply understanding of our worlds. But for some the castigation of the snake as the primary cause of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden is the *one* story that "must" be believed, and that insistence can be ruinous both to the snake and to Indigenous people. Those who dared to tell different stories about the snake or human animals' currying the disfavor of gods were deemed "lesser" than those who held "superior" knowledge about the beginnings of human existence on the planet. Some used the "one" story of creation to justify both the reprehensible actions attendant to incarceration of Indian children in missionary schools and the thoughtless slaughter of snakes.

The snake was not the only being who suffered expulsion and degradation in the biblical creation story. As Robin Wall Kimmerer (Citizen Potawatomi Nation), in her breathtaking *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants* contends, "Look at the legacy of poor Eve's exile from Eden: the land shows the bruises of an abusive relationship. It's not just land that is broken, but more importantly, our relationship to land. As Gary Nebhan has written, we can't meaningfully proceed with healing, without restoration, with 're-story-ation.'"[37] Kimmerer further explains, "[O]ur relationship with land cannot heal until we hear its stories. But who will tell them?"[38] The snake, whose marvelous qualities and incredibly long history match aspects of Indigenous qualities and experiences, can be potent storytellers, as can Indigenous people.

To display the equality among gods, nonhumans, and humans, Hogan *seemingly* inverts a Christian hierarchy: the snake becomes the unifying presence in our "oldest knowledge" and in our heavens. In short the snake becomes godlike: omnipresent (present before and during our Edenic times and now), omniscient (its form returns to the oldest

knowledge), and omnipotent (in its symbolizing "healing and wholeness").[39] Replacing the anthropomorphic form of divinity with a reptilian form, Hogan effectively challenges a Christian hierarchy that posits the snake as evil and "lowly" and that the "highest" being is human and therefore, closer to anthropomorphic divinity.

Hogan insists, however, as we have seen, that snakes are people. Therefore inverting a European hierarchy by placing the snake at the top and some people at the bottom would be misguided, since this would construct another hierarchy. On this score Hogan maintains an admirable integrity—one species cannot take precedence over another because all species are interrelated. Neglecting knowledge that all of life is connected, the essay implies, brings about cataclysmic results, as suggested below.

Consequences of Ignoring the Rights of Early Ancestors and Indigenous People

Hogan's essay alludes to the cataclysmic results of believing in hierarchies and the concomitant belief in "evil" based on one creation story. While resisting direct references to the horrendous massacres Indians suffered at the hands of whites, Hogan points to the injustices snakes suffer at the hands of people. Since the essay connects snakes to American Indians, by extension the injustice suffered by snakes relates to the planned genocide suffered by Indians. After demonstrating how her family members peacefully coexisted with even highly venomous snakes, Hogan proclaims, "Most of the snakes of my childhood, even those without venom, were greeted by death held in human hands. They were killed with shovels, hoes, sticks, and sometimes with guns. Most people are uneasy about sharing territory with snakes."[40]

The diction here highlights white injustice: "territory" evokes Indian "territory" and the clearly defined areas of agreed upon demarcations through treaties, almost always broken by the US government. Hogan recalls, "Last year, hearing a gunshot, I went up the road to see what had happened. A neighbor, shaken, told me that he had just killed a rattlesnake. He'd heard it, he said, on his front porch. At first he thought it was some kind of a motor running, but then he spotted the snake curled up there, and he stole away in search of his rifle."[41] The neighbor did not have to shoot the snake since it was on his porch and presum-

ably the man was safely inside. Still, the being's proximity alone makes its slaughter seemingly justifiable. The fact that the man "stole away" to find his gun adds a grim reminder that whites with superior killing power would often surprise Indians. That the snake warns of its presence and agitation through its rattling is irrelevant to Hogan's neighbor. The snake and the neighbor's confrontation eerily parallel Indian and white confrontations.

The Sand Creek Massacre

Hogan recounts another deeply disturbing incident that references the unthinkable treatment of Indians at the hands of whites. "[T]his year," Hogan writes, "a seven-foot bull snake, not dangerous, was killed by another neighbor. The snake was dead. Its vulnerable, turned up stomach was metallic and yellow, the red wounds visible. This neighbor, a tough-looking Harley biker in black leather, watched the dead snake nervously, as if it might, at any moment, return to life."[42]

Reading the passage about the Harley biker is always difficult for me, for it recalls the Sand Creek massacre of Indians at the hands of a "tough-looking" cavalry, supposedly concerned about the defenseless community's attacking white settlements. Without directly alluding to the nauseating atrocity, Hogan's linguistic virtuosity jolts the reader into witnessing what history only impartially records. The murdering biker is a "neighbor," and his killing of the "not dangerous" seven-foot bull snake happened recently "this year."[43] The biker is a "neighbor," which draws him geographically close to Hogan and, therefore, to the reader. Additionally, knowing that the biker killed the snake recently, possibly quite recently since it was *sometime* "this year," extracts the murderer from the past and places him in temporal proximity to narrator and to reader. Collapsing time and space, Hogan induces readers to focus on the injustice of the biker's actions and to "see" what happened on November 29, 1864.

Hogan's essay makes renewed consideration of the massacre possible, indeed almost inevitable. Hogan likens snakes to Indigenous people, so the killing of the snake relates to Indigenous deaths. The "not dangerous" bull snake in fact benefits human people by helping to keep rodent populations down. The Cheyenne and Arapahoe women, children, and elderly men in the Sand Creek camp, too, were "not dangerous."

This leads Christopher Rein to question why "some white Coloradans attack[ed] an encampment that other whites had given assurances of safety."[44] Rein also questions "why, when [whites] attacked that camp . . . they act[ed] with such appalling brutality . . . that today, many accounts of the massacre still excise the details of the worst atrocities."[45]

Hogan's vivid description of the dead snake acts as a stand-in for a glimpse of the "atrocities": the snake's "vulnerable, turned-up stomach was metallic and yellow, the red wounds visible."[46] Hogan makes us view the slaughter of an innocent, its body turned in the most "vulnerable" position imaginable—its stomach facing upward. By all outward appearances a snake's body, outside of its head and tail, is all "stomach" so we might question the significance of Hogan's seemingly imprecise description of the snake's carcass. The effect of choosing "stomach" over "body" particularizes an area of the human anatomy, further drawing us into the horror perpetrated on human people.

Another way Hogan alludes to the Sand Creek massacre is through her description of the snake slaughterer, "a tough-looking Harley biker in black leather, [who] watches the dead snake nervously, as if it might, at any moment, return to life."[47] The killer of the snake, like the "calvary" of 1864, is defined by what he rides: a "bike," specifically a Harley Davidson "steed." Both the murderers of 1864 and the neighbor biker wear "uniforms," military uniforms in the case of horse-riding killers and a "black leather" uniform—the "uniform" of some Harley Davidson bike-riders—for the man who mounts a mechanically "horse-powered" bike.

History details the "reasons" why the Sand Creek massacre happened. But Hogan cuts more deeply into the "facts" in her reproduction of the massacre. She exhibits a profound awareness of the biker's motivations for his action: first, he wants to appear "tough-looking," (why else would his bike be a Harley?), and he also fears that the already dead snake—clearly dead—"might . . . at any moment, return to life."[48] Fear motivates his actions, and his complete ignorance of the natural world fuels that fear; he cannot even discern life from death. As we have seen, Hogan promotes precise and comprehensive examination of life and an embracing of diversity. The biker has not been taught the value of either process.

Hogan's selection of a Harley biker as a stand-in for the 1864 calvary appears appropriate, too, considering the murderer's likely sharing of

an ensconced racism. Carol A. Ireland, Jane Ireland, and Soren Henrich note that some violently criminal "organized motorcycle gangs," or "OMG's," "consist predominantly of white men who feel they do not fit mainstream society."[49] Such groups are frequently composed of white supremacists and former members of the military, another connection between calvary and biker. Kelly Weill discloses the requirements for entering one such OMG, the Gypsy Jokers: "Members must be male, 21, and own an American-made bike,"[50] such as a Harley Davidson, the kind the biker rides in Hogan's essay.

Evidence for Hogan's apt identification of a Harley biker as the killer of the "not dangerous" snake does not end with her connecting the specific brand of bike to his atrocity. I believe it is no accident that the size of the "not dangerous" snake the biker kills is enormous: it is seven-feet long.[51] Arluke, Lankford, and Madfis recently studied the often-observed connections between animal abuse and serial killers. Extending research findings about serial killers and animal abusers into making sense of mass shooters, their 2020 study concludes, "Given that [all] recent animal-abusing mass shooters . . . openly bragged about harming animals, it is worth investigating how their abusive behavior may interact with toxic [mostly white] masculinity . . . Ultimately, any *scientific* [emphasis added] progress that improves our ability to predict and prevent aggressive behavior—whether the targets are human or non-human animals—could help us to forge a healthier society."[52] We can only imagine the story the biker in Hogan's essay later might tell in order to "appear" tough. No doubt he would brag about the size of the snake, just as some of the 1864 cavalry later bragged about the number of people they had killed. The toxicity of valuing the "measurably more" of ignoring the intimate connections among all beings and of maintaining a belief in hierarchy, then as now, pollutes our moral streams.

Studying Hogan's essay and embodying it could offer a way to "help us forge a healthier society." Hogan's brave and brilliant design in "Snake People" is *not* to distance Indians from snakes, thereby *removing* a "justification of oppression," for such a "removal" of Hogan's extended analogy between snakes and Indigenous peoples would create yet one more Indigenous "removal," in this case a removal of Indigenous peoples from the "territory" of their own knowing. Rather than taking the safe and easy route of bypassing an acknowledgement of white atrocities committed against Indigenous peoples by only hinting of such atrocities

through metaphors, Hogan celebrates the virtues of snakes and, concomitantly, the excellences of Indians, thereby inviting readers to step out of their anthropocentricity *and* their inhumanity.

The Art of Survival of Snakes and Indigenous Peoples

Unlike the deadly consequences alluded to in the Harley biker passage, when people and snakes share spaces, the essay suggests, there are solutions in protecting lives, both human and reptilian. Hogan recalls that her Chickasaw grandfather, "riding his stocky-thick muscled horse, could smell the reptile odor from a distance, and thus keep his horses away from rattlers curled beneath rocks or stretched out in the warm sun."[53] Better to learn to maneuver around the snakes as Hogan's grandfather did, not only—incidentally—for his own sake but for his horse's sake. Additionally Hogan's "Aunt Louise had a reputation for swimming among water moccasins so smoothly that they did not take note of her."[54] Hogan and her family's careful observation of snakes and her family's resultant understanding of snakes' behavior in specific habitats, during specific conditions identify ways of cohabitation with the reptile. Hogan's essay models a way we might peacefully coexist with the beings with whom we share the planet.

Snakes in the essay gracefully deal with natural disasters. Hogan observes, "At flood time, the vulnerable snakes emerge from rocky ground and move upward, to hills and mounds, seeking refuge from the torrential waters that invade their homes. Silver with water, they wind about one another, slide over stones and through mud, and then rise up the rough trunks of trees where they wrap themselves around branches and wait out the storm."[55] The snakes' actions constitute efficient ways of dealing with natural "disasters," increasing the likelihood of survival.

Many have recorded how Indigenous people, too, employ a clean logic in the face of catastrophes, increasing the likelihood of survival. In "Atchafalaya," however, John McPhee shows how European colonizers devised ways to "tame" the rivers to protect "their" property along the Mississippi basin. Later, rather than resisting the foolhardy attempt to control nature, the US Army Corps of Engineers constructed a series of levies that, as many predicted, later broke. During Hurricane Katrina in 2005, over 1,800 human people perished in the flooding.[56]

The resiliency of Indigenous people is worthy of celebration, and

Hogan's essay culminates with a reflection on the resilience of snakes and by extension, the resilience of American Indians. Gerald Vizenore relates this resilience to "survivance," a term that combines "both survival and resistance . . . [and] emphasize[s] 'a renunciation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry.'"[57] Hogan recounts the story of a live snake being carried off by a hawk, caught in the bird's sharp talons, struggling to free itself. Another hawk comes by and attempts to wrest the snake from the other hawk, whereby "the snake came loose and began a steep descent to earth," where, "still twisting [it] landed in a thick canopy of trees . . . where it may have found shelter and survived."[58]

Even if the survival of the falling snake is uncertain, Hogan's telling the story of another snake in the essay is perhaps more hopeful. She sees a snake on the road, split open, obviously hit by a car, and then sees smaller snakes spilling out of the dead snake. At first Hogan thinks the smaller ones are unborn snakes, but she quickly realizes that snakes lay eggs rather than giving live birth. She writes, "Then—surprise—I see one of [the small snakes] move. It must not yet have passed from the gullet into the stomach's strong digestive fluids. The tiny snake darts away and vanishes into stones and grass. It leaves a winding, thin path in the road dust. Maybe it is writing a story of survival there on the road."[59] Against all odds the small snake survived after being eaten by the larger one. While Hogan refuses to sugarcoat the plight of snakes, the wilderness, or many species, she discerns that almost miraculously, both snakes and Indigenous people have survived.

Ultimately the Serpent Mound stands as a powerful emblem of both the snake's and First Nations' "survivance."

CONSTRUCTING A SNAKE MOUND

Laying the Serpent Mound's Foundation

Hogan creates an original work of art, re-forming subjects into embodiments of her essay's subject, the snake. A similar "re-forming" has been observed in a work by Deborah Miranda (Ohlone-Costanoan Esselen Nation). In "Surviving Catastrophe: Traveling with Coyote in *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*," Lydia M. Heberling contends that "as the storyteller who pieces together the narrative fragments in order to make a new world, [Deborah] Miranda *is herself a kind of Coyote figure*, both

trickster and cultural hero" (emphasis added).[60] Heberling intimates that Miranda does more than write about the coyote figure—she embodies Coyote in her writing. Heberling's insightful observation obliquely relates to Hogan's essay, the structure of which forms a kind of Serpent Mound.

In honoring the snake Hogan writes, "Even the old ones, like the Adena people who left no recorded history, left a tribute to the snake in one of the mounds near Chillicothe, Ohio. Over 1,200 feet in length, the mound is an earth sculpture of an open-mouthed serpent that clasps an egg."[61] A salient feature of the Snake Mound, of course, is that it images a snake. Not a human, not a geometric form, but a magnificent monument—the planet's largest existent animal effigy—the Snake Mound simultaneously honors First Beings and First Peoples. Another obvious feature of the Snake Mound is that it is made of earth—seemingly less permanent than the solid stone or metal statues that honor specific gods or human people. Of course, though, Earth predates the creation of both people and their beliefs. Putting first things first, the Mound reminds us of those first things—and the First People who constructed it. Composed of soil and small rocks and seemingly impermanent, the Serpent Mound endures, acknowledging what came before us, as does Hogan's essay. Were we to walk alongside the sacred effigy, we would, quite literally, be connected to the earth, which predates even the earliest "life" on the planet.[62]The Serpent Mound certainly qualifies as what Meland conceives of as "originary" in the "story of America."

The existence of snakes and other reptiles vastly predates the date of what was believed originally to be their appearance on the earth. Similarly, Indigenous peoples lived in North America far earlier than what was originally believed by whites. What amazes me is that the Serpent Mound likewise predates what was originally believed to be its creation date.

The Snake Mound has become *certifiably* more "originary" than previously thought. When Hogan first published "The Snake People" in 1995, the Mound was believed by many to be about nine hundred years old and constructed by the Adena people. More than twenty years later the Mound was discovered to have been constructed 1,400 years previously, in about 321 BCE. Geoffrey Sea explains that the previous belief about the Snake Mound being "only" nine hundred years old was because the samples for the first carbon dating of the mound were taken

from areas of the monument where, nine hundred years ago, the Adena were repairing the monument.[63] The Serpent Mound, then, additionally might be "originary" as the first monument in North America to have been repaired by Indigenous people.

Realization of another fact regarding the placement of the sacred Mound pushes back the "creation" of the mound's *site* to a tremendously earlier date. According to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the Serpent Mound falls within a crater, one of only twenty-eight such sites on Earth, formed by a meteor that fell somewhere between 256 and 330 million years ago.[64] Incredibly this is around the period that the first reptiles existed. (The first snakes would later evolve from their great reptile ancestors.)

Is it possible that the Indigenous people who built the mound sensed the age of the site? What we do know is that the Snake Mound's eye or the egg that it holds in its mouth aligns perfectly with the sun during the summer solstice. While to some it might seem far-fetched that Indigenous people who lived so long ago might have intuited the parallels between ancient knowledge, the antiquity of Earth, and our snake ancestors, Indigenous intuition seems completely comprehensible if we accept, as Hogan notes, that "Snake dwells at the zero of ourselves, takes us full circle in a return to the oldest knowledge, which says that the earth is alive. Our bodies, if not our minds, know that zero, that core, the constellation of life at our human beginnings."[65]

Carter Meland refers to "decolonized science." "Science . . ." Meland writes, "too often claims Native lives, experience and knowledge . . . [yet] science can be indigenized and help us generate new relations among the many stories we live. Science is, potentially, a tribalography, but only if it discards its colonialist blinders."[66]

By including "wisdom, compassion, and understanding" into her essay and by connecting snakes to Indigenous people, Hogan helps us to discard the colonial blinders, offering a space to contemplate the full implications of the notion that we are unequivocally connected to other beings and to the planet.

Weaving Motion

The essay's extended metaphor of snakes as Indigenous peoples has the consequence of replicating the movement of a snake. The graceful

movement from consideration of aspects of snakes, to consideration of similar circumstances and qualities found in First Peoples, and back again, crossing from one shared characteristic of ancient First Beings to ancient Human Beings, creates a kind of weaving, as the narrative moves from one idea to the other.

Hogan also recreates the side-to-side serpentine form by "moving" the snake through time via strategically placed repetitions. For instance, in discussing the Hopi's snake dance Hogan writes that the snakes, "For as long as anyone remembers, . . . have been fed with pollen, [and] stroked with feathers . . . Afterward, they are returned . . . to the dens they have lived inside for many thousands and thousands of generations."[67] The repetition of "thousands of generations" with "tens of thousands of generations" several lines *following* the Hopi reference ("[snakes] have been here . . . for tens of thousands of generations") suggests movement through time.[68] So too does the repetition of "pollen" in the above quoted Hopi reference, found a few pages previously—"Pollen is floating in the air"—when Hogan describes finding a snake in the road some years in the past.[69] Using the present tense in describing the movement of pollen, and then using the past tense a few pages subsequent when describing how the Hopi have fed snakes with "pollen" during their dances honoring the snakes, suggests a bending back of time, again creating a weaving movement akin to the windings of snakes.

The essay's form mimics the snake's movement additionally by the essay's ending returning to a similar point of origin. The essay begins with a story of Hogan and her father driving through the Oklahoma countryside. They see "something that looked like a long golden strand of light [leap] up, twist[. . .] in the wavering air, and [fly] lightning fast across the road."[70] Hogan and her father jump out of the car to try to find out what the miraculous being was, and they are just "in time to see the golden racer *vanish* [emphasis added] in the kingdom of roots and soil."[71] At the end of the essay, Hogan is again on a road, and she again views another seeming miracle. She sees, as mentioned above, a small snake, having been eaten by a larger one, move. The surviving small snake, like the golden racer at the beginning of the story, "vanishes": "The tiny snake darts away and *vanishes* [emphasis added] into stones and grass."[72] Like the Uroboros swallowing its tail, the essay begins again with its ending, recalling Earth's seasonal renewal. As Hogan writes,

the snake tells "us about the germinal beginnings of life and renewal, of infinity gone in a circle round itself."[73]

Flexibility and Healing the Mind and Body Split

Hogan demonstrates a remarkable multifaceted agility, emulating the flexibility of a snake's body throughout the essay's approximate (only!) six-page length. Beyond paralleling the snake's qualities with Indigenous people's attributes, Hogan, through her judicious use of qualifiers, eschews a crass insistence that only her own views are right, while simultaneously inverting another Eurocentric hierarchy, that of mind over body. She writes, "Perhaps Snake dwells at the zero of ourselves . . . Our bodies, if not our minds, know that zero, that core."[74] Hogan's use of "perhaps" ensures her expression remains judicious rather than bombastic, which indicates her flexibility of mind. With a serpent's graceful movement, Hogan's essay, like the Serpent Mound's form, connects us to first things. In *Earthworks Rising: Mound Building in Native Literature and Arts*, Chadwick Allen comprehensively and insightfully argues that "earthworks themselves might be understood as forms of Indigenous knowledge still relevant in the present and central to Indigenous futures." Hogan's essay witnesses the myriad connections between the form of the Snake Mound and Indian literature in assuring that "Indigenous knowledge [remains] . . . central to Indigenous futures." [75]

CONCLUSION

Hogan yokes her discussion of originary (Indigenous) connections to land and to First Beings by calling attention to a monument made of earth. In discussing the seminal ideas in Howe's "Story of America," Meland notes that "the best summation of Indigenous literature" is one that draws "all the elements together of the storyteller's tribe, . . . the people [and] the land . . . and connect[s] these in past, present, and future milieus."[76] Hogan's reference to the ancient representation of the snake certainly connects "land" with "people" and "snakes" to the past and to the present. Meland, moreover, cautions that "Tribalography is a process, not a theory; it is something you do more than something you name."[77] More than offering theory, Hogan's constructed monument to the snake, to the earth, and to Indigenous peoples embodies the precept

of "doing." Hogan does much more than theorize—she embodies her ideas through narrative structure.

But what of Meland's concern to include "future milieus" in Indian literatures? Hogan notes that within the serpent's mouth is "an egg . . . a new potential for life." The ancient mound extends itself from the past to the present and asks us to consider "what kinds of dialogue we must generate to reimagine and re-story what life in North America should become."[78] Hogan writes, "Snakes are the Old Ones, immortals who shed a milky skin to reveal the new and shining."[79] So too, the essay implies, descendants of the First People will generate a "new and shining" skin. In honoring the snake Hogan simultaneously "pieces together . . . narrative fragments" of Indian history, culture, and art, inviting participation in a reflection that fosters gratitude and humility for what came before us.[80] Hogan's essay can help us to "re-story what life in North America should become."[81]

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NOTES

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6. Linda Hogan, "First People" in *Intimate Nature: The Bond Between Women and Animals*, eds. Linda Hogan, Deena Metzger, and Brenda Peterson (New York: Fawcett, 1998).

7. Hogan, "First People," 18.

8. Hogan, "Snake People," 234.

9. Hudson, "Introduction," 5.

10. Hogan, "Snake People," 234.

11. Hogan, "Snake People," 235.

12. Hogan, "Snake People," 235.

13. Hogan, "Snake People," 232–33.

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31. Hogan, "Snake People," 233.

32. Hogan, "Snake People," 233.

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43. Hogan, "Snake People," 232.

44. Christopher Rein, "'Our First Duty Was to God and Our Next to Our Country': Religion, Violence, and the Sand Creek Massacre," *Great Plains Quarterly* 34, no. 3, (2014): 217.

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48. Hogan, "Snake People," 232.

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51. Hogan, "Snake People," 232.

52. Arnold Arluke, Adam Lankford, and Eric Madfis, "Harming Animals and Massacring Humans: Characteristics of Public Mass and Active Shooters Who Abused Animals," *Behavioral Science and the Law* 36 (2018): 748; While I appreciate what Arluke, Lankford, and Madfis are attempting to do, the issue here is a moral one, not one that can be "solved" by more "scientific" research. In any case, Hogan cautions that "knowledge without wisdom, compassion, or understanding has damned us as we have been stirring about in the origins of life," "The Snake People," 235. A chilling reminder of the results of the splitting of the atom follows the quotation.

53. Hogan, "Snake People," 231.

54. Hogan, "Snake People," 231.

55. Hogan, "Snake People," 234.

56. John McPhee, "Atchafalaya," in *The Control of Nature* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1989): 3–92. Many are grateful that serious conversations have commenced about removing all inhibiting structures to rivers' natural flow. Perhaps some Indian rationality has gotten through.

57. Nelson, "Getting Dirty," 257.

58. Hogan, "Snake People," 234.

59. Hogan, "Snake People," 236.

60. Lydia M. Heberling, "Surviving Catastrophe: Traveling with Coyote in *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 33, nos. 1–2 (2021): 3.

61. Hogan, "Snake People," 234.

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63. Geoffrey Sea, "History Got it Wrong: Scientists Now Say Serpent Mound as Old as Aristotle," *Indian Country Today: Digital. Indigenous. News.*, September 13, 2018, https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/history-got-it-wrong-scientists-now-say-serpent-mound-as-old-as-aristotle

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65. Hogan, "Snake People," 235.

66. Meland, "Talking Tribalography," 38.

67. Hogan, "Snake People," 235.
68. Hogan, "Snake People," 235.
69. Hogan, "Snake People," 233.
70. Hogan, "Snake People," 231.
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80. Heberling, "Surviving Catastrophe," 3.
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Locating Sacajawea

MELISSA ADAMS-CAMPBELL

Abstract: "Locating Sacajawea" traces how three Native women authors—Monique Mojica (Kuna-Rappahonnock), Mary Kathryn Nagle (Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma), and Diane Glancy (Cherokee and German descent)—incorporate archival found text and Indigenous community concerns to challenge US myths surrounding Sacajawea's participation in the Lewis and Clark expeditions. In retelling Sacajawea's story, these authors reconnect her to Native communities and concerns.

Keywords: Monique Mojica; *Birdwoman and the Suffragettes*; Mary Kathryn Nagle; *Crossing Mnisose*; Diane Glancy; *Stone Heart*; Sacajawea; Lewis and Clark; found text; compositional resistance

> How is it possible to rethink a subject who is at once overburdened with representations and invisible? Is it possible to rewrite a subject who is already so overproduced?
>
> —Pillow, "Searching for Sacajawea," 14

Sacajawea's story has been told in many forms.[1] She is a central character in the US celebration of westward expansion, a Native heroine whose fame as trail blazer, translator, and unofficial ambassador in Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery (1804–1806) far exceeds known biographical fact. Exemplifying her thorough incorporation into the triumphal story of US settlement, the North Dakota state legislature explains their gift of a Sacajawea statue to the National Statuary Hall collection: we "honor her as a 'traveler and guide, a translator, a diplomat, and a wife and mother' recognizing that 'her indomitable spirit was a decided factor in the success of Lewis and Clark's . . . expedition'" (Figure 1, "Sakakawea").

Fig. 1. Sakakawea statue in the US Capitol Building.

For many Sacajawea's name stands for a gendered and racialized myth of Native people's acquiescence to US claims of Indigenous lands.

In *The Return of the Vanishing American* Leslie Fiedler traces this sentiment to popular literary representations of "the legend of the redemptive Indian girl" (78) where Sacajawea acts as "apologist for her people's conquerors and mediator of their surrender" (74).[2] More recently Donna Kessler, also published using the name Donna Barbie, observes, "Sacagawea narratives have addressed the needs of Euro-American society" but do not "encompass native issues and concerns" (2). Wanda Pillow outlines the evolution of the Sacajawea myth, which includes symbolizing American Manifest Destiny ideology, early feminist concerns, and US multiculturalism. Considering recent filmic representation Chris Finley argues that Sacajawea continues to be uncritically depicted as "selflessly help[ing] white men conquer Native America" (194). Thus Sacajawea recirculates old stereotypes that "still thrive in the American imagination, still do harm to Indian women" (Bataille and Sands xvi). Writing about Laguna Pueblo poet Paula Gunn Allen's depiction, Pillow considers an "endarken[ed]" myth of Sacajawea, a representation that challenges popular notions of an obedient guide, a feminist or multicultural American icon for the US. "Claiming endarkened spaces," Pillow notes, "purposefully acknowledges the cracks in enlightened thinking and foregrounds knowledges that are neither readily visible nor contained: knowledges that are endarkened, hidden, and purposefully obscured" (14). Is an "endarkened" Sacajawea possible? Pillow wonders.

In response to evolving American mythologies of Sacajawea, a number of contemporary Native women writers have reconsidered her legacy.[3] This essay draws on Dean Rader's concept of "compositional resistance" to trace Native aesthetic activism in retellings of the Sacajawea story, specifically the CBC radio drama "Birdwoman and the Suffragettes: A Story of Sacajawea" (1991) by Monique Mojica (Kuna-Rappahonnock); the play "Crossing Mnisose" (2019) by Mary Kathryn Nagle (Cherokee

Nation of Oklahoma); and *Stone Heart: A Novel of Sacajawea* (2003) by Diane Glancy (Cherokee and German descent).[4] Deliberately including found text and reworking traditional literary forms, Mojica, Nagle, and Glancy counter Sacajawea's mythic status in the American imagination while acknowledging the harm such representations continue to cause Native peoples today.

Both hyper visible and nearly silenced within the historical record, Sacajawea is an obvious but challenging choice for Native literary authors to reclaim. The *Journals* of Lewis and Clark, commissioned by President Thomas Jefferson during the Corps of Discovery, offer scant information. Biographers generally agree that Sacajawea was Shoshone, captured around the age of twelve by a Hidatsa raiding party and, alongside another Hidatsa girl, purchased for sex and other labor demands by a French trapper Toussaint Charbonneau. She was around fifteen or sixteen years old at the time that Charbonneau acted as interpreter for the Corps. The *Journals* note Sacajawea's pregnancy and delivery of a son at Fort Mandan, that she gathered various articles of food along the trail, was abused by Charbonneau, and insisted on seeing the Pacific Ocean. They also record Sacajawea's return to the site of her childhood capture and her reunion with Shoshone family, including her brother Cameahwait, then a chief. Frequently she is rendered nameless, simply called "Indian Squar [*sic*]" or "Charbonneau's woman."[5] Even her death date remains uncertain.

The mythic Sacajawea, by contrast, is a product of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century settler reimaginings. Scholars such as Rebecca Jager, Kessler, Pillow, and others trace Sacajawea's circuitous fame from these few documented details. James Ronda notes, "In countless statues, poems, paintings, and books she is depicted as a westward-pointing pathfinder" (257). This is largely in part because progressive-era suffragettes used Sacajawea's story to "tell the story of American expansion through the eyes of a woman" (Jager 251). Suffragettes "used Sacajawea to argue that in the progress brought by Americans lay the prospect of progress for women as well" (Knowlton-Le Roux 57). Pillow observes how more recently Sacajawea "is present in the story of the Corps to represent the 'melting pot' of America and demonstrate to school children and adults that 'our' history was always multicultural" (8). In contrast to these myths, Mojica, Nagle, and Glancy locate Sacajawea within

complex and dynamic Native communities and concerns. In their texts Sacajawea is frustrated by settler ignorance, masculine pride, and white women's heroine-izing; they depict her as a survivor.

Mojica, Nagle, and Glancy disrupt mythic narratives of Sacajawea with their aesthetic choices, strategically calling attention to harmful attitudes, actions, and policies that continue to impact Native peoples today. Rader argues that such compositional resistance is "an assertion of Indian autonomy" (2). Creatively incorporating found text such as explorers' journals, government and family documents, suffragette communications, Native oral history, and contemporary activist rhetoric, these writers interrogate, critique, and, in the words of Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird, "reinvent the enemy's language" (24). Acclaimed writers such as N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa), Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), Layli Longsoldier (Lakota), and Deborah Miranda (Esselen) establish an important Native literary tradition of incorporating found text that confronts the limitations of one-sided US history. For instance Momaday's screenplay "The Moon in Two Windows" (2007) draws on archival accounts of a legendary football match between Carlisle Indian School and the United States Military Academy. Silko, in *Storyteller* (1981); and Miranda, in *Bad Indians* (2013), incorporate family photos alongside community oral history, memoir, and fiction to present the complexities of contemporary Native life. In *Whereas* (2017), Longsoldier draws together Lakota oral tradition, accounts of the mass hanging of thirty-eight Lakota men in 1862, and an official US apology to Native peoples as she grapples with her positionality as a Lakota woman among this fraught history. Even this brief consideration establishes writing with found text as a powerful literary tradition for Indigenous critique.[6] Mojica, Nagle, and Glancy use it to redirect Sacajawea's significance, writing her story in distinct and aesthetically innovative ways.

Monique Mojica is a stage, television, and film actor; playwright; and critic in Canada. Her 1991 CBC radio drama, "Birdwoman and the Suffragettes: A Story of Sacajawea" is published in *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots: Two Plays*. Mojica dedicates the text to Sacajawea, "whoever she may have been; and to all the unnamed women who share her story" (65). She blends original dialogue with direct quotes from suffragette materials and collected Native oral histories. In fourteen brief scenes "Birdwoman" deploys a nonlinear plot, moving between histor-

ical periods that include the expedition era, suffragette events in the early 1900s, and conversations at Wind River Shoshone Reservation in 1926. Shifting between these distinct periods and voices, listeners hear how different communities claim relationships to Sacajawea and comment on her meaning and value.

"Turning the colonizing gaze inside out makes me laugh," ("Interview" 2014) Mojica notes. In "Birdwoman" there is plenty of laughing at the suffragettes' myth-making efforts. Mojica's opening stage directions describe suffragettes singing in a "Howdy Doody" style as they chant a list of sites named for Sacajawea. This opening establishes an immediate distance between the historical person Sacajawea and the meaning she holds for those "honoring" her. The second scene shifts to a suffragette meeting where novelist Eva Emery Dye claims veracity by reciting her own historical novel *The Conquest: The True Story of Lewis and Clark*. Dye's truth claims are rendered absurd as readers absorb the stereotyped depictions in this work. Listeners also learn that suffragettes "will sell Sacajawea buttons and Sacajawea spoons" (68) to pay for a statue they have commissioned.

"Birdwoman" proves particularly effective and humorous when events are doubled, such as the separate tea parties held by suffragettes and Wind River elders who gossip and chat about Sacajawea. Suffragette spoons distributed at the reservation symbolize these different communities' perspectives. Shoshone grannies question the work of "these—women for suffering": "That woman on the spoon there, its supposed to be Sacajawea. (*laughs*). ALL GRANNIES: *Giggle. Clinking of stirring spoon under*. GRANNY #2: Stirs tea just the same—when there's sugar" (77). In contrast to the self-important suffragettes who commodify Sacajawea while excluding Native women from their movement, the elders at Wind River swap local stories of Sacajawea that Mojica quotes from collected oral histories.[7] Here Sacajawea escapes Charbonneau, marries a Comanche man, and mothers five children; introduces the Sun Dance to Shoshone peoples; and serves as advisor in treaty councils. In these stories she is a relative. Her meaning does not stem from Lewis and Clark. Granny #2 notes: "Well, we Shoshones never thought too much of her taking those white men over the mountains to the big waters. It never was important to us. It made her important to the white people, though. So they gave her a medal and some papers to prove that she was worth something" (77). How and why Sacajawea is valued in

different communities becomes a central concern. Günter Beck argues that these groups represent "two different conceptions of history" (178), the historical record versus the memories passed on via storytelling.

Mojica emphasizes Sacajawea's survivor status in lyrical, first-person monologues. Before she was called Tsakakawea (Birdwoman), Sacajawea recalls her previous name, Pohnaif (Grass Woman). However, on becoming a "slave girl," she loses this Shoshone name (69). Later Sacajawea expresses internalized horror as Charbonneau agrees, without consulting her, to give their son to Clark to educate. Echoing generations of grief felt by Native families whose children were removed to attend boarding schools, Sacajawea's pain is unspeakable: "Between my ribs a knife / stabs—and I cannot speak! / my heart drums: / MY child, MY child" (77). In settler narratives Sacajawea is not typically linked to such trauma; however, Mojica explicitly acknowledges a larger community history of hurt in her text.

Like "Birdwoman," "Crossing Mnisose" by Mary Kathryn Nagle, connects Sacajawea to contemporary issues affecting Native peoples. The play was produced from April 13 to May 5, 2019, by Portland Center Stage.[8] Nagle is the author of several plays and has staged readings at the United Nations, the World Conference on Indigenous People, and more. As a practicing lawyer, playwright, and activist, she works closely with the National Indigenous Women's Rights Council representing Native sexual assault survivors. She regularly intervenes in US law and public understandings of significant issues for Native nations. "Crossing Mnisose" uses a doubled plot to connect the Corps of Discovery to Standing Rock Reservation protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016, a move that demonstrates how American policies reverberate through Native communities, past and present. In this double-cast play, the same actors play characters in different timelines: the greedy fur trapper Charbonneau and Carl, a dishonest, violent "fixer" for the pipeline; Sacajawea and Carey, a Shoshone protester at Standing Rock; as well as clownishly patriotic Lewis and Clark doubled as present day Army Corps of Engineers employees. In each setting government representatives understand the threat that profiteers pose to Native peoples, particularly Native women, while ignoring these costs in favor of other interests.

Like Mojica, Nagle describes Sacajawea as a survivor "of abuse and kidnapping" ("Interview" 2019). She observes, "These are the

stories I seek to tell mostly because, in my line of work as an attorney representing Native women survivors, I see the connection between the silencing of Sacajawea's story and the incredibly high rates of violence our Native women continue to face today" ("Why"). Like Sacajawea, Carey and her friends respond to individual acts of settler violence ensconced within structural systems of greed and injustice, including a lack of respect for land and women. Opposing attitudes toward the land are evident in Sacajawea's plot but could just as easily come from the protesters': "To the Americans, the river is something to conquer. To [Charbonneau], the river's nothing more than a commodity. A trade route to be exploited. But to me, and my family, Mnisose is our home. All that we eat, all that we drink, comes from the river" (25A). Unlike other texts considered here Nagle's use of found text borrows more from contemporary Indigenous activist rhetoric than historical record, a strength when critiquing overly mythologized pasts. Above the stage the river flows in a ripple of blue fabric; on stage protest signs proclaim "Water is Life." The play's action reveals the river, past and present, as a scene of settler violence. "Crossing Mnisose" thoughtfully illustrates how Sacajawea's historical circumstances condition her choices and how similar circumstances shape Native communities today.

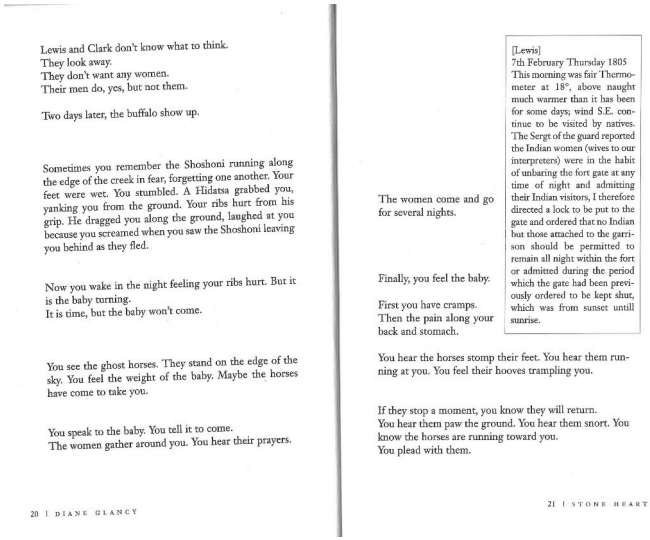
Both Mojica and Nagle offer characters agency and community. In the final scene of "Birdwoman" Mojica's Sacajawea quite literally frees herself from white women's feminist imprisonment. In defiance of the "statues, paintings, / lakes and rivers / mountains, peaks and ridges / poems made of fog and lies" that "caged" her name, Sacajawea "beats her wings, / sounds her voice, / soars, / and is free" (84). Exceeding her mythic isolation, Mojica's Sacajawea is a survivor; the dedication reminds listeners that her story is shared by many "unnamed women." In Nagle's concluding scene Carey explains her fastidious journal-keeping routine: "Everyone reads what Lewis and Clark wrote. I did. They made me. And I hated it. I wanted to read *her* words. I wanted to know *her* story. But I can't. It's been erased. . . . They erased her story. . . . We won't let them erase ours" (132). Carey earnestly records her participation in #NODAPL and, in telling her own story, she forges new community relationships. As Mojica and Nagle tell it, Sacajawea's story foregrounds issues relevant to contemporary Native audiences.

In reconsidering Sacajawea's legacy Diane Glancy's *Stone Heart* (2003) combines found text within a striking page layout and second-

person point of view.[9] Unlike Mojica's soaring Sacajawea or Nagle's contemporary activists, Glancy's Sacajawea is less heroic and more isolated from Native communities. Glancy's massive multigenre oeuvre encompasses poetry, short stories, novels, plays, nonfiction essays, mixed-genre writing, and film. The sheer volume of Glancy's work makes it difficult to succinctly assess, but with the recent exception of *The Salt Companion to Diane Glancy* (2010) and several articles and interviews, Glancy's work has received scant critical attention. Mackay attributes this lack of critical attention to Glancy's unenrolled status, distance from Cherokee communities, evangelical Christianity, and occasional right-leaning political statements ("Introduction" 7).[10] In "Esther in the Throne Room," Chadwick Allen questions whether Glancy's tenuous connection to Cherokee communities proves sufficient for the identity claims that she makes. Molly McGlennen observes that nearly all of Glancy's poetic work is taken up with questions of mixed blood identity and voice (130). Of the three texts considered here, Glancy's is perhaps the most aesthetically innovative; however, her goals are somewhat different. In her own words she seeks to dismantle the "myth of [Sacajawea's] leadership" (152).

Reviewers describe *Stone Heart's* formal qualities as puzzling, especially as Glancy uses the space of the page to visually contrast Sacajawea's stream of consciousness—written in second-person point of view—with direct found quotations from Lewis and Clark [See Figure 2]. Opinions vary on the "distracting layout" (*Kirkus* 1642); however, "the interest in this retelling lies in the contrast between the two parties" (Bogenschutz 154).[11] For another reviewer the layout proves the "most distinctive and difficult feature" of the novel, although "readerly dislocation is surely part of the point" (Myles 54). Given reviewers' responses, Glancy's aesthetic choices merit further consideration.

Sacajawea anchors the novel's opening pages, speaking before the arrival of the traditional male heroes. Figure 2 illustrates how Sacajawea's voice frequently occupies the whole space of a page, as it does on page 20. However, quotations from Lewis's or Clark's journals are occasionally wedged into bordered textboxes on the right side of the page, as seen on page twenty-one. Because readers of English read left to right, Sacajawea's position on the page continues to afford her primacy even when her thoughts are accompanied by found text from Lewis or Clark. On the surface this stylistic choice "perplex[es] normal reading," (Myles 54).



Lewis and Clark don't know what to think.
They look away.
They don't want any women.
Their men do, yes, but not them.

Two days later, the buffalo show up.

Sometimes you remember the Shoshoni running along the edge of the creek in fear, forgetting one another. Your feet were wet. You stumbled. A Hidatsa grabbed you, yanking you from the ground. Your ribs hurt from his grip. He dragged you along the ground, laughed at you because you screamed when you saw the Shoshoni leaving you behind as they fled.

Now you wake in the night feeling your ribs hurt. But it is the baby turning.
It is time, but the baby won't come.

You see the ghost horses. They stand on the edge of the sky. You feel the weight of the baby. Maybe the horses have come to take you.

You speak to the baby. You tell it to come.
The women gather around you. You hear their prayers.

20 | DIANE GLANCY

The women come and go for several nights.

[Lewis]
7th February Thursday 1805
This morning was fair Thermometer at 18°, above naught much warmer than it has been for some days, wind S.E. continue to be visited by natives. The Sergt of the guard reported the Indian women (wives to our interpreters) were in the habit of unbaring the fort gate at any time of night and admitting their Indian visitors, I therefore directed a lock to be put to the gate and ordered that no Indian but those attached to the garrison should be permitted to remain all night within the fort or admitted during the period which the gate had been previously ordered to be kept shut, which was from sunset untill sunrise.

Finally, you feel the baby.

First you have cramps.
Then the pain along your back and stomach.

You hear the horses stomp their feet. You hear them running at you. You feel their hooves trampling you.

If they stop a moment, you know they will return.
You hear them paw the ground. You hear them snort. You know the horses are running toward you.
You plead with them.

21 | STONE HEART

Fig. 2. Representative pages from *Stone Heart*

Less obviously the layout de-authorizes Lewis and Clark's accounts of the Corps of Discovery, suggesting other ways of knowing. The page's doubled voice symbolically stands for competing stories about or claims to the land. The effect is not only to unsettle the reader's typical approach to the page but the reader's confidence in myths of the American West. As events unfold, Sacajawea's stream of consciousness offers an alternate perspective on incidents barely described by Lewis and Clark. For instance, on page twenty-one of Figure 2, Glancy's Sacajawea introduces a motive for the unusual comings and goings of Native women at the fort: they are preparing for Sacajawea's labor. Placing the explorers' words in a bordered textbox visually illustrates their limited point of view on Native peoples and metaphorically ousts them from history's center stage. Where Lewis emphasizes security, Sacajawea appreciates the women's responsiveness to her difficult delivery. The subtle contrast of perspectives grants Glancy's Sacajawea greater humanity.

Stone Heart's page layout echoes Jacques Derrida's *Glas*—with its complex layering of critical commentary on Hegel and Genet—and reaches back to the Talmud with its centuries-long interpretive commentary added over generations. Glancy's deliberate page layout situates her work within varying traditions of exegesis.[12] In an interview

with James Mackay, Glancy notes, "It takes many pieces to give a picture of the whole . . . I know it is difficult to read, but that awkwardness, that mixing of voice and points of view is important to my writing" (190). Glancy's "awkward" form is intentionally jarring and central to her process of comprehending the past. In *The Dance Partner* (2005), a short story collection on the Ghost Dance, Glancy observes:

> What exactly happened? In these stories, I take the words of Native Americans such as Porcupine and Kicking Bear, along with the ethnologist James Mooney, and add imagined voices. Native American writing sometimes takes what is known and posits it alongside what could have been. In a culture where much has been erased or lost, the fragments of what is known are woven with the possibilities of what could have been. It is a technique called *ghosting*, which also is used at some historical sites in re-creating forts. It presents the image of what could have been, according to what is known of early architecture, or with descriptions or clues of some sort—though what actually existed is not known. *Ghosting* in writing presents a blueprint of voices that might have been, along with the structure of those voices that are known to have been. (x, original emphasis)

Glancy's emphasis on "what could have been" demands that readers recognize the fictionality of her historical representations as well as the research ("voices that are known to have been") informing those representations. Working from limited archival materials, Glancy "ghosts" a dialogic Sacajawea, imaginatively conversing with Lewis and Clark's journals. While John Wilson argues that Glancy's textual ghosts are connected to her Christianity, Mackay understands them as a "moral imperative to act with consciousness of the American colonial past that bears upon every reader" ("Ghosts" 260). Glancy's peculiar page layout shows the limitations of settler-produced sources as in the birth vs. security example mentioned above. Within this layout Sacajawea frequently "glosses" Lewis and Clark's commentary, suggesting other interpretations of recorded historical events. Moreover, in contrast to aggrandizing suffragette mythologies, Glancy continually invites readers to see Sacajawea as an ordinary Native woman struggling with individual and systemic burdens.

Glancy's compositional resistance prominently features second-

person narration, a choice that establishes a curious intimacy with the reader, and particularly deviating from the scientific reserve of the explorers. Matt DelConte describes second-person narration as "defined not by who is speaking, but who is listening (the narratee)" (204) and notes different modes of second-person narration based on the relationship between narrator, narratee, and protagonist. He terms the mode where these positions are aligned "completely co-incident narration," (211) that is, where the narrator, the narratee, and protagonist are the same. In *Stone Heart*, Sacajawea is the "you" who speaks, listens, and acts, generating maximum intimacy between the protagonist and readers. At times, though, such intimacy paradoxically makes readers aware of the differences between themselves and the protagonist. DelConte offers the example of Rumer Godden's blind protagonist in the short story "You Need to Go Upstairs": "You are not at all afraid of the stairs. Why? Because Mother has put signals there for you, under the rail where no one can find them, and they guide you all the way up; now your legs go up the stairs as quickly as notes up a piano—almost" (214). As DelConte explains, able-bodied readers are unexpectedly put in the position of the disabled protagonist in order to register their body's difference.

Godden and Glancy share a similar understanding of difference communicated through the "you" address. Readers attempt to see themselves in Sacajawea and in their repeated failures they come up against the limitations of race, gender, cultural difference, and historical distance. Try as one might one cannot imaginatively become Sacajawea. The reader is forever mediated by Lewis and Clark's account, the silence of the past, and Glancy's own fiction of Sacajawea. Readers of *Stone Heart* never lose that sense of mediation, and that is precisely the point. Locating Sacagawea is an act of the imagination, a fictional ghosting of the past, and, in Mackay's words, a "moral imperative" ("Ghosts" 260). This paradoxical second-person mode of recognizing one's difference through the "you" voice demands from readers—distanced by history—the reflexivity required to see history, as Alvin Josephy calls for, "through Indian eyes."[13] However where Mojica engages Native perspectives via Native oral history and Nagle connects audiences to contemporary Shoshone characters and issues, Glancy's ghosted Sacajawea is simultaneously more intimate and more isolated from Native communities and their concerns.

Native readers of American history regularly encounter an implicit settler "you" that erases Native peoples' distinct positionality vis-à-vis the US. Glancy's use of second-person narration draws readers' attention to the implicit settler "you" embedded in history when she positions readers as Indigenous. Here, "you" is not the hegemonic majority of US national history; instead, "you" see what colonizers do, "you" see how they think and feel about "you." This hurts "you." The burden of these experiences weighs heavily. This mode of writing upsets the affective structures in which settler colonial history is typically experienced, what Mark Rifkin terms "settler common sense . . . the ways the legal and political structures that enable nonnatives to access Indigenous territories come to be lived as given, as simply the unmarked, generic conditions of possibility for occupancy, association, history, and personhood" (xvi). This oppositional use of the second-person point of view deepens what Anne Myles observes as the central experience of dislocation in the novel (54).

Sacajawea's lyrical, second-person voice proves particularly effective in contrast with Lewis and Clark's concise, Enlightenment-era scientific observations. Stephanie Gray observes how *Stone Heart* works on an emotional register as well: "The scientific, factual, and unexpressive language that Lewis and Clark use to describe their trip is a stark contrast to the affecting and emotive journey that Sacagawea encounters, both physically and emotionally." (36). For instance, Sacajawea reflects on Lewis's drawing and measuring of a bird alongside Lewis's words:

Lewis makes the likeness
of a bird with his words.
You are called Bird Woman.
Does he write you on his page?

Why does he draw the
bird?
Not for power. Not to
honor.
But to copy its likeness?
To separate its parts? (Glancy 121)

[Lewis]
Friday June 6th 1806
. . . we met with a beautiful little bird in this neighborhood about the size and somewhat the shape of the large sparrow. it measures 7 inches from the extremity of the beek to that of the tail, the latter occupying 2 ½ inches. the beak is reather more than half an inch in length, and is formed much like the virginia nitingale; it is thick and large for a bird of its size; wide at the base, both chaps convex . . .

Here "you" critique Lewis's seemingly neutral scientific observations as "you" query Lewis's system of knowledge production: "Why does he draw the bird? Not for power. Not to honor" as Native artists might. What is the purpose of "separat[ing] its parts" (121)? Lewis's rhetoric, cultivated via neutral measurements, becomes culturally specific and colonizing. Sacajawea questions a Western scientific mode of rendering animals as specimens. Readers grasp that Lewis's way of seeing the bird is decidedly nonnative. Sacajawea notes how a bird with spiritual power and honor becomes a potential resource. From her worldview Enlightenment-era "discoveries" are anything but neutral (Pratt 35–37). These dual epistemologies, visualized on the page and rendered through distinct points of view, help readers see Lewis and Clark's writing as culturally specific rhetoric (The Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab), not a universal approach. This colonizing rhetoric enables Lewis and Clark and, through them, Jefferson and other US citizens to know, claim, and occupy Indigenous lands and ecosystems.

Sacajawea's questions provide alternate ways of knowing this bird, especially when she claims kinship with it via her name "Bird Woman." The possibility of such a relational stance is unthinkable in Lewis's journal. Here Glancy introduces an Indigenous epistemology, what "could have been" Sacajawea's approach to Lewis's work. While one can never recover the historic Sacajawea's thoughts, Glancy's Sacajawea renders Indigenous ways of knowing meaningful.[14] Sacajawea reflects, "They come to look at the land. But they do not see the spirits. They write in their journals. But they do not know the land. They give animals names that do not belong to them. That do not say what they are. That do not fit" (25). In such passages readers learn to appreciate what is missing in the explorers' worldview. Glancy denies Lewis and Clark the eminence of historical truth despite the journals' privileged status as primary source material. "You" see the world differently; "you" critically evaluate the settlers' worldview.

Lewis's callous racism is exposed when Sacajawea reunites with her Shoshone family. In the source material Lewis asserts that Sacajawea, a captive taken at the age of twelve or thirteen, shows no emotion on returning to the site of her kidnapping; with "enough to eat and a few trinkets to wear," she is "perfectly content anywhere" (66). However,

Glancy provides Sacajawea with an emotional second-person monologue that undercuts Lewis's limited perspective:

> The present camp is on the place where the Hidatsa took you. You are one-who-was-taken. You have returned. You dream your legs are oars. You are rowing from the Hidatsa. It's the ghost horses you see again. They take you from the Shoshoni. The horses are cutting you in half. You cry in a place the men cannot see (66).

Beside Lewis's insensitivity, Sacajawea's "cut in half" profoundly captures her loss (66). Sacajawea's stream of consciousness highlights the stakes of being vulnerable. What benefit accrues from exposing this pain? In this same moment Sacajawea conveys how, like Lewis and Clark, men in her Shoshone nation also dismiss women: "You remember you were nothing to them either. The women work. They do what they are told" (69). Sacajawea carries more than the men around her care to recognize. Far from "perfectly content," her stone heart is a source of survival.

Glancy develops the theme of Indigenous women's unrecognized burdens, describing how a Native woman drops her baggage as she slips down a steep mountain. Sacajawea notes, "Clark rushes to help her because he is at the front of the party. He tries to hold the load until the woman could get a foot hold but finds the load so heavy he can't hold it. It takes Clark and the husband of the woman to lower the load and give it again to the woman. There he sees what she carries. Maybe he will know" (102). Only when forced does Clark recognize Native women's contributions. To carry such weight requires strength of body, mind, and spirit.

Glancy's second-person narration provides insight into a survivor's burdens and strengths. Concerning Jay McInerney's second-person novel *Bright Lights, Big City*, DelConte argues that another rhetorical effect of second-person narration "manifests . . . the notion that someone or something outside yourself dictates your thoughts and actions" (205). In McInerney's novel, the "you" protagonist conveys a 1980s consumer culture fixated on luxury. McInerney's second-person point of view illustrates how the protagonist's desires are proscribed for him through advertising and other media-driven narratives. Glancy's second-person narration gives new purchase to the rhetorical effect of "someone or something outside yourself dictat[ing] your thoughts and actions." Glancy's "you" protagonist is the recipient of still-emerging

settler colonial logics of land acquisition, for instance, when Sacajawea narrates how "you" feel confused by the possibility that foreign kings could sell "your" land:

> Toussaint tells you, Napoleon Bonaparte sold the land for fifteen million dollars! Three cents an acre from Mississippi to the Rocky Mountains. . . . Toussaint tells you, you will lose too. . . . You think of someone owning your land, someone far away who has never seen it. You think of someone selling your land to someone who hasn't seen it either. (19)

Not only are "you" asked to see the outrageousness of "someone far away" selling and buying your land, "you" receive this information from a foreign abuser Toussaint. Beyond the Frenchman who violently imposes his will on "you," there are also French dictators and Americans who claim the right to buy and sell "your land." In this passage Glancy's narration highlights feelings of alienation resulting from settler colonial objectification of Native land and Native peoples.[15]

The power of others over "you" is most disturbing in revelations of Sacajawea's domestic abuse. Glancy chooses not to narrate the scene of abuse in Sacajawea's second-person voice, allowing Lewis to relay it. The scene unfolds shortly after Sacajawea recognizes the place where she was captured. As the party moves into Shoshone territory Sacajawea feels restless: "You don't want to wait. But you are left behind." (69). Below this, in two textboxes on the right side of the page, Lewis reports that they see a Shoshone man on horseback and "this evening Charbono struck his indian Woman for which Capt C. gave him a severe repremand" (69). Sacajawea's space on the page is blank. "You" are silent. This violence leaves "you" speechless. This page—with its contrasting silence and matter-of-fact reporting—accumulates a deeply affecting, multisituated account of Sacajawea's experiences of patriarchal and colonial power structures; first, as a member of Lewis and Clark's expedition she must wait for orders before she can meet her Shoshone relatives; second, as an estranged Shoshone woman ("you were nothing to them either") she has little power in these interactions; and, third, as a survivor of domestic violence in a patriarchal, interracial relationship Sacajawea has little recourse. She absorbs multiple forms of uneven power on a single page. Her silence, rendered by the blank space to the left and directly across from her reported abuse, speaks volumes.

In contrast to the many Cherokee narrators in Glancy's better known *Pushing the Bear*, *Stone Heart* places "you" in a hypothetical Indigenous frame of reference.[16] "You" question the explorer's actions, motivations, and epistemology, filling the emotional gaps in the myth/story with meaningful connection. Glancy's use of found text forces "you" to see *with* Lewis and Clark and to see the *strangeness* of Lewis and Clark. The second-person narration demands that "you" wrestle with these problems empathetically. Glancy moves contrapuntally from colonized to colonizer worldviews, continuously prioritizing an Indigenous "you." Remarkably readers recognize Glancy's Sacajawea as an imperfect reconstruction, and in grasping this, they understand history itself as constructed, malleable, and determined by point of view. Glancy's historical novel illuminates the past by showing readers what they can never truly know.

As Jager notes, Progressive-era feminist writers such as Eva Emery Dye and Grace Raymond Hebard "estranged [Sacajawea] from her Native culture" (251). Using found text and Native community concerns, Mojica, Nagle, and Glancy insist that we recognize Sacajawea's Indigeneity. While Mojica and Nagle more effectively connect Sacajawea to contemporary Native issues, all three writers re-story Sacajawea's legacy for today. Audiences are richer for their endeavors.

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NOTES

1. Many thanks to *SAIL* editors, staff, and reviewers for your patience, care, and helpful suggestions. Mojica, Nagle, and Glancy use the spelling "Sacajawea" while recognizing other spellings, pronunciations, and meanings of the name. On issues of pronunciation and spelling, *see* Anderson and Schroer. For biographical information *see* Ronda.

2. Although dated, Fiedler outlines a history of the "Indian maid" in American literature. Green explores representations of Native women in American cultural objects. Kidwell describes "Indian women as cultural mediators." Faery notes the cultural work of Pocahontas, "the welcoming Native woman." On Sacajawea's mythic

status *see* Barbie, Donaldson, Finley, Heffernan and Medlicot, Kessler, Knowlton-Le Roux, Phillips, and Pillow. On Manifest Destiny approaches to the West, *see* Richter. On the logic and theory of settler colonialism, *see* Wolfe and Veracini.

3. Although not addressed here, Brooks details Mourning Dove's early reclaiming of the Sacajawea story. *See also* Gunn Allen's poem "How to Skin a Cat" and Alexie's short essay "Sacajawea."

4. Glancy's novel was also produced as a play, "Stone Heart," at The Autry Museum of the American West from February 17 to March 12, 2006. https://theautry.org/explore/native-voices/past-productions

5. *See* Ronda.

6. Wisecup notes an even earlier tradition of "compilation" writing used as critique.

7. This essay does not consider the veracity of Sacajawea-related oral traditions. *See* McBeth. Nagle notes, "All of my research for this play comes directly from the greatest experts on historical events impacting Native people—the descendants of the Native people who experienced the impacts directly" ("Interview").

8. Many thanks to Nagle and Portland Center Stage for providing the unpublished script for "Crossing Mnisose" and permission to quote it. In plays such as "Manahatta" and *Sovereignty*, Nagle similarly doubles the plot, moving between past and present.

9. *See* Alberts on Glancy's use of voice and archives; also Lederman on Howe's use of archives in *Miko Kings*.

10. Glancy addresses her family's omission from the Dawes rolls in "Walking Precariously."

11. Unlike other reviewers, Zaleski describes Glancy's Sacajawea as "predictable."

12. I am grateful to James Mackay for tracing this textual lineage for me.

13. This phrase references Josephy's *Lewis and Clark through Indian Eyes* (2006) in which he describes the lack of historical attention to Native perspectives on the Lewis and Clark journey.

14. Bryd calls for an Indigenous critical theory that "centers itself within indigenous epistemologies and the specificities of the communities and cultures from which it emerges and then looks outward to engage European philosophical, legal, and cultural traditions" (xxix–xxx).

15. In dissociative disorders the second-person voice can function as a defense mechanism to incomprehensible trauma. "You" experience situations over which you have little control, and "you" may project these experiences out and away from yourself. The loss may be so unfathomable as to require significant emotional distance. I do not seek here to "diagnose" Glancy's Sacajawea. Rather I note simply that second-person can be a form of self defense.

16. Justice and Fitzgerald separately argue that *Pushing the Bear* centers Cherokee-specific political rhetoric and a variety of Cherokee points of view on land dispossession.

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"As Long as it Gets Read"

The Lakota As-Told-To Genre, Authenticity, and Mediated Authorship in Mary Brave Bird's *Lakota Woman* and *Ohitika Woman*

LINDSAY STEPHENS

Abstract: This essay examines Mary Brave Bird's controversial as-told-to autobiographies *Lakota Woman* and *Ohitika Woman* and situates them within the rich catalog of Lakota activist literature. Like most texts in the Lakota as-told-to genre, Brave Bird's books, co-authored with Richard Erdoes, have long been denigrated and dismissed by scholars because of their collaborative roots; many critics challenge their authenticity and the nature of the stories being told. The first section of this essay interrogates the validity of those critics' complaints, and the latter half counters those complaints by offering an alternative, updated reading of the texts that deploys two reading strategies proposed by Channette Romero: orality and discursive characterization. Through those lenses, we find that Mary Brave Bird's stories, though they may be mediated to some degree through Richard Erdoes, serve as crucial artifacts of conditions in the American settler state in the twentieth century.

Keywords: as-told-to, authenticity, activist, Brave Bird, Erdoes, Lakota, autobiographies

In this essay, I consider Mary Brave Bird's as-told-to texts *Lakota Woman* (1990) and *Ohitika Woman* (1993) and the controversy surrounding them in the contexts of authenticity and Lakota resistance literature. Both of Brave Bird's books were co-authored with (and by some accounts, ghost written by) Richard Erdoes. The Lakota as-told-to genre, of which *Black Elk Speaks* (1932) is the most widely known, reached full flower in the 1990s as American Indian Movement (AIM) activists decided to share their stories with the world. Nearly two decades after the AIM standoff at Wounded Knee in 1973, Brave Bird's books appeared, followed by *Crow Dog* (1995), a collaboration between Erdoes and her former husband Leonard Crow Dog, as well as Russell Means's *Where*

White Men Fear to Tread (1995), cowritten with Marvin J. Wolf.[1] I focus upon Brave Bird's books for numerous reasons, and the first is that they remain, with the possible exception of *Black Elk Speaks*, the most popular and accessible of the Lakota as-told-to books. Also Brave Bird's texts pose compelling critical questions because Brave Bird, unlike Black Elk and Leonard Crow Dog, was literate in English and capable of writing her story herself, and in addition, her books notably offer the sole woman's perspective in the Lakota as-told-to genre.[2] Moreover, although her books have generated quite a bit of critical ire, including charges of inauthenticity and pandering to white readers, useful scholarship has appeared in the last decade, particularly Channette Romero's *Activism and the American Novel* (2012), which offers several "alternative reading strategies" that I deploy to offer fresh readings of Brave Bird's collaborative memoirs.[3] And finally by dint of her work with Erdoes, Brave Bird's books present compelling challenges in terms of textual authenticity. In some respects it seems as if Brave Bird's detractors demand unsullied, authentic texts and that they clamor for an authentic purity or a literary blood quantum. On the other hand we might ask whether the books truly are compromised because of Erdoes's participation, yielding mediated biographies that could be classified as, to use Gerald Vizenor's phrase, the "literature of dominance."[4] I contend that these books by Mary Brave Bird and Richard Erdoes, though they may be questioned in terms of authenticity, still have valuable, urgent knowledge about contemporary Native issues to impart to readers and to future generations, and these books can be read as valuable narratives of Indigenous resistance.

Although Brave Bird's books, particularly *Lakota Woman*, are fairly well known, I want to open with some brief synopses and biographical background for context. Mary Brave Bird (1954–2013), also known as Mary Crow Dog, was a Sicangu (Brulé) Lakota activist who was born on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. *Lakota Woman* is a Native activist *bildungsroman* of sorts, chronicling Brave Bird's formative, boarding school experiences as well as her involvement with AIM. In the distressing chapter "Civilize Them with a Stick," for instance, we learn that she attended the Catholic boarding school for Native youths in St. Francis, South Dakota, where she bristled against authority and got into trouble for starting a muckraking newsletter about the school's injustices. After leaving school Brave Bird began to drift and slowly descend into alcoholism, and in the chapter "We AIM Not to Please,"

she credits the burgeoning American Indian Movement with saving her life and helping her to find a more productive path. The book's action peaks in the chapters "The Siege" and "Birth Giving," her retelling of her experiences at the standoff at Wounded Knee in 1973, where she eventually gave birth to her son Pedro amid a constant barrage of gunfire from federal agents. After the Wounded Knee occupation Brave Bird married Leonard Crow Dog, an AIM spiritual leader, and she becomes even more connected to Lakota traditions and ceremonies.

Brave Bird's lesser known, more contemplative sequel *Ohitika Woman* describes her time at Leonard's ceremonial gathering place Crow Dog's Paradise, traditional Lakota ceremonies, the Native American Church, her views on peyote, her gradual breakup with Leonard, her subsequent remarrying, and her version of Lakota feminism. The heart of *Ohitika Woman* is the long, searing, elegiac chapter "Bleeding Always Stops If You Press Down Hard Enough," which laments settler invasion and the decline of Lakota culture and memorializes her missing and murdered Indigenous friends, including her fellow AIM member Annie Mae Aquash who was found dead along Highway 73 on the Pine Ridge Reservation, a bullet hole in her skull. Both books adopt a somewhat casual tone to tell this multitude of heartbreakingly grim stories about major events like the Wounded Knee occupation but also the particularities of Brave Bird's difficult, everyday life on the Rosebud Reservation.

Though John G. Neihardt made the Lakota as-told-to genre famous with *Black Elk Speaks*, Brave Bird's co-author Richard Erdoes (1912–2008) perfected it, typing and editing Brave Bird's two books as well as John (Fire) Lame Deer's narrative *Lame Deer: Seeker of Visions* and Leonard Crow Dog's autobiography *Crow Dog*; in addition, Erdoes also cowrote AIM leader Dennis Banks's story *Ojibwa Warrior* (2004).[5] Erdoes led a long and fascinating life; born in Germany, he fled the Nazis and relocated to the United States in 1939. Erdoes's interest in and advocacy for the Lakota people began with an assignment for the publication *Life* in the 1960s, which in turn would ignite a long-standing allyship with the American Indian Movement. This magazine assignment altered the trajectory of his life, becoming not only the impetus for his burgeoning allyship with the Lakotas but also inspiring a change in artistic medium. Originally a visual artist Erdoes became a writer by default after this magazine assignment to South Dakota where he met

John Lame Deer. According to the introduction to *Lame Deer: Seeker of Visions*:

> When *Life* magazine sent him to do a photo essay on Indian reservations, he was befriended "by an old and almost totally illiterate Sioux medicine man." This was Lame Deer . . . Lame Deer wanted Erdoes to write his life story. Although the artist protested that he was not a writer, he finally yielded to Lame Deer's insistence . . . Erdoes gives credit to Lame Deer's powerful "medicine" for having turned him into an author of more than a dozen books, saying that "it was John [Lame Deer] who actually made me a writer, originally almost against my will."[6]

That "more than a dozen books" mentioned in this 1994 introduction expanded to a grand total of twenty-three books prior to his death in 2008. An ardent supporter of AIM, Erdoes offered his spare room to Mary Brave Bird so she could stay with him during Leonard's incarceration in Pennsylvania following Wounded Knee. She stayed for nearly a year, and during that time she taped the stories that Erdoes transformed into the *Lakota Woman* manuscript.

Although taping and typing a houseguest's oral stories might seem rather innocuous, the debate over and dismissal of Brave Bird's books continues, hampered by the fraught notion of *authenticity*, a concept overly laden with supposed importance in Western and Native American literature. In Native literature authenticity—widely considered to be an exclusionary mode of literary gatekeeping in Western American literature—becomes even more complicated since it adds layers of temporality, cultural appropriation, and settler colonial perception to the mix. For Susan Bernardin authenticity has ominous implications, both in contemporary Native culture and in its literature, functioning, for one thing, as a benchmark for determining tribal exclusion by the US government. As Bernardin points out in "The Authenticity Game" (2004), "authenticity has long been wielded as a mode of containment. For example, the fiction of blood quantum enacted by the federal government . . . sought to replace indigenous conceptions of tribal membership with racialized and exclusionary ones."[7] Historically Bernardin asserts that the United States' settler colonial government imposed their authenticity criteria upon Indigenous peoples to

determine distribution of goods promised by treaties, land titles, tribal enrollment cards, and more. This valuation of pedigreed authenticity has leached into studies of Native literature as well, and Bernardin blames not only the exploitative fraudsters posing as Indigenous writers but the American historical pattern of appropriation:

> It is precisely because of the dominant culture's pervasive and deeply entrenched pattern of what Philip Deloria calls "playing Indian,"—by taking ownership of Native land, history, culture, and now spiritual traditions—that such literary fakes are so insidious. In recent years, writers and editors in Indian Country have "outed" an array of authorial frauds who have generated self-help books, seminars, and novels for eager audiences.[8]

The problem of Native authenticity in literature, according to Bernardin, is widespread and mirrors settler colonial appropriation and theft.

Another key strand of the authenticity debate in Native works has to do with temporality and representation. David L. Moore approaches authenticity a bit more optimistically than Bernardin, arguing in *That Dream Shall Have a Name* (2014) that authenticity in Native literature usually has to do with popular perceptions of pre-Contact, prelapsarian aborigines, their cultures, and the absurd notion that Natives have vanished, nowhere to be found in contemporary American life. He explains, "Instead of a dull and tiresome topic, authenticity—as it actually functions in many Indigenous narratives—works toward a summary of the discussion. It goes to the heart of America's binary thinking in space (manifest) and time (destiny), which would set 'authentic Indians' as past and vanished from *the land*."[9] Here Moore points out the folly and dangers of judging Native literature by whether the reader deems a text authentic, or to put it more succinctly, whether the text represents indigeneity as perpetually vanishing noble savagery. One reason that authenticity continues to constitute literary quicksand, he posits, is the performative nature of authenticity, and another is readers' expectations and biases. Mary Brave Bird's books, as we shall see, have garnered plenty of critical wrath from several directions, and part of the problem is that her books don't fulfill her audience's expectations for authenticity.

Moore's observations regarding temporality, however, allow us a different way to think about Brave Bird's books, particularly given her recounting of Wounded Knee II and her experiences with contempo-

rary Native issues and more recent traumas including poverty, rape, police brutality, anti-Native sentiment in South Dakota, and forced sterilization of Lakota women in the 1970s. These books, though cowritten, certainly trend toward literary activism not only because they chronicle AIM's occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973 but also since they bring contemporary Native issues to a wider audience. As Moore asserts, "With an activist agenda, Native writers have struggled to redefine America from the start, because America is built on the vanishing of Indians."[10] Publishing books, then, is tantamount to an act of resistance in that it asserts sovereignty and refutes the misperception of the vanishing Indian. Moore explains, "When Native writers publish, they pose the fundamental question of what would change if America were to accept the fact that Indians never vanished and never will."[11] Native works that assert Indigenous presences in contemporary American life thus constitute resistance literature and function as a necessary testament to sovereignty and to *survivance*, Gerald Vizenor's term for Native works that rebuke settler colonial structures and which Vizenor defines in *Manifest Manners* (1999) as "an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry."[12]

Brave Bird's books assert that the Lakota people have not vanished and chronicle her resistance against settler domination; we can therefore read her books as powerful and perhaps even authentic pieces of Lakota activist literature, stories of survivance rather than of manifest manners. But at the same time, those questions of authenticity—particularly a set of charges levied by Elizabeth Cook-Lynn against the entire Lakota as-told-to genre—continue to dog Brave Bird's works because of her white collaborator Richard Erdoes. Brave Bird herself seemed unbothered by Erdoes's role in her books' publication, declaring in a 1998 interview that her main concern involved not book sales or fame but the opportunity to tell her story *at all*. She told interviewers Christopher Wise and R. Todd Wise in 1998 that she didn't mind Erdoes's help but in fact welcomed it: "Like I said, it's all right, just as long as it gets read."[13] Brave Bird implies with this statement that her story is urgent and absolutely must be told, no matter the hit her authenticity might take, and that by telling it, *Lakota Woman* can do its crucial activist work and perhaps reach a wide-ranging audience who might in turn enact change.

Working with Erdoes was an authorial choice Brave Bird felt she must make to put her stories into the world. As Christopher Pexa explains, other L/Dakota writers in the early twentieth century such as Ella Deloria and Charles Eastman had used other literary forms like novels, pageants, and children's books to preserve their culture, "playing to liberal regimes of legibility while honoring and remaking tribal ties . . . negotiating the possibilities and violences of what up to that point had been settler framings, ideologies, and social forms."[14] For Brave Bird, however, collaborating with Erdoes on her autobiographies was the most logical choice. She considered him an ally, explaining to Wise and Wise in that same interview that "he's just got a lot of heart, and he has worked with Indian people. He has been a strong supporter for many years. So he is a radical from the turn of the century almost."[15]

Lakota and Dakota literature has a long, proud history of activist authors, and authors such as Zitkala-Ša, Ella Deloria, Vine Deloria, Jr., Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Nick Estes, and Layli Long Soldier all exemplify this rich tradition—without resorting to collaborating with a white co-author. Yet the Lakota as-told-to genre constitutes a sizable chunk of Lakota literature and appeals to a very wide audience, who in turn might rethink the dominant settler paradigm, and thus these books, too, might potentially function as activist texts. Though these as-told-to books, or mass-marketed "Native American personal narratives written with a non-Native collaborator," which are then "categorized as autobiography," as Lenora Ledwon puts it, comprise an exceptionally weird and complex genre, they are not without value.[16]

However, the list of grievances against the "as-told-to" genre and, by extension, Brave Bird's books is long and varied. Some of the as-told-to books' detractors pose fairly flimsy arguments since they lean so heavily upon static notions of authenticity to set up their flawed syllogisms, as we see in Julian Rice's essay "A Ventriliquy of Anthros" (1994), in which he levies direct charges against Erdoes, Brave Bird, and Lame Deer, carping that Erdoes's representations of Brave Bird's and of John Fire Lame Deer's contemporary views and attitudes do not align with strict Lakota cultural traditions and are thus inauthentic. Other complainants' palpable disgust with the as-told-to genre at large seems more justifiable, given the unequal balance of power in a settler state. In her essay "Native Life Stories and 'Authorship': Legal and Ethical Issues" (1997), Ledwon points out that "when such a life story is, as often happens,

written in collaboration with a non-Native editor, translator, or transcriber, the commodification and objectification of the Other becomes a real possibility. This hazard of appropriation is always present when a text is the product of two unequally powerful cultures."[17] The danger here, according to Ledwon, is that as-told-to texts could potentially reify Native Otherness to non-Native readers rather than humanize Native subjects.

Dakota scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn takes a different tack, dismissing the significance of the as-told-to genre entirely. For Cook-Lynn authenticity is not the problem; rather, she claims, the as-told-to genre causes harm by means of the very nature of the stories being told. Although Cook-Lynn does not attack Brave Bird and Erdoes directly, she does assert that white editor-writers and Native informants generate not autobiographies or biographies but hagiographies, which recount, almost invariably, "how the white man took over the land and how the Indians themselves, alas, fell to drinking great quantities of booze, committing debaucheries of various kinds, and emerging from such a hapless condition, rhetorically at least, redeemed and at the edge of self-knowledge."[18] While *Black Elk Speaks* does not model this particular, boozy formula, Cook-Lynn's observation tidily sums up the plots of many later "hagiographies," especially those coauthored by American Indian Movement (AIM) participants such as Dennis Banks, Russell Means, Leonard Crow Dog, and Mary Brave Bird. Furthermore, these books, according to Cook-Lynn, offer little in the way of practical solutions to contemporary Native issues:

> After "a good read" in the Indian-based hagiography milieu, there is little real understanding of the political pathology which is at the heart of American Indian experience. The seeds of continuing crises in our Indian communities, while laid bare and exposed, are given little cause-and-effect analysis, thus, no problem-solving model will emerge from these fields of inquiry. The meticulous, heart-rending examination of Indian failure by writers who may or may not know they are from the world of colonial masters is depressing and distasteful.[19]

To make matters worse, these "depressing and distasteful," analysis- and solution-free books, of course, are written in English—the settlers' language.

Despite this litany of complaints, Mary Brave Bird's books *do* function in complex ways as activist texts with implications stretching far beyond her participation in the American Indian Movement. For the remainder of this essay, I offer a reading of Brave Bird's books through the lenses of two of the five "alternative reading strategies" Channette Romero offers in *Activism and the American Novel*: orality and discursive characterization.[20] Romero's alternative reading strategies don't merely apply singularly to fiction; they can also help us think about Brave Bird's collaborative (auto)biographies in new and interesting ways. As Romero explains, recent literary offerings by women of color are "not only trying to broaden our notions of identity" but "also trying to address a much more traumatic gap between the promise of democracy and the lived reality of oppression," which aligns with Brave Bird's project.[21] Romero's reading strategies, though intended for reading contemporary fiction, thus offer particularly useful scaffolding for reconsidering Brave Bird's nonfiction.

In the context of the as-told-to genre's problems, I first want to consider Romero's orality as a reading strategy, since Brave Bird and Erdoes's recording and writing process, though under fire by Cook-Lynn and others, could be considered a contemporary—not necessarily bastardized—twist on the oral tradition. Brave Bird's oral narratives, though frozen in time by Erdoes and the written word, ensure that her stories, her memories of Wounded Knee II, and the effects of settler colonialism will be remembered. Her recounting of boarding school, her sister's forced sterilization, beatings, rape, racism, alcohol abuse, and living conditions on Rosebud and Pine Ridge, to name a few of the issues she addresses, paint a troubling picture of life for the Lakota people in the mid- and later- twentieth century and serves as a valuable literary artifact, a sobering reminder of the settler colonial project in South Dakota.

And for those skeptics who might object to Brave Bird's inclusion in the oral tradition, I want to examine Erdoes's role in the production of these books and the firm degree of control over the narrative that Brave Bird maintained. In *Activism and the American Novel* Romero points out that one of Toni Morrison's aims in her fiction is, as Morrison puts it, "to make the story appear oral, meandering, effortless, spoken."[22] In Brave Bird's texts, particularly in *Ohitika Woman*, we can discern qualities of orality, untampered with by Erdoes. One of the ways *Ohitika Woman*

retains orality has to do with Brave Bird's very approachable, decidedly 1970s casual speech, as we see in her description of the disappearance of Roque Duanes, an associate of Leonard Peltier. Brave Bird remembers "when some brothers got suspicious and went through his billfold and found a list of the serial numbers of guns, word went out that Roque was working for the Man, that he was an informer."[23] This sort of casual speech crops up frequently throughout the text, suggesting that Erdoes did not tamper with her voice as much as she insinuates in her interview with Wise and Wise when she recounts her first response to Erdoes's draft: "Gee whiz, I don't talk like this."[24] Yet Erdoes did not even correct Brave Bird's grammatical mistakes, as we see in the moment when she gives birth to her second son Ahwah in a Washington, DC hospital: "It was the first time I had been among black people and they treated me really good, like a family member."[25] Erdoes could easily have replaced "really good" with "really well" but did not. Moreover Brave Bird's casual speech even affects the book's temporal positioning occasionally, as we see in her recollection of her car crash and recovery from it: "My friend Debbie, who I had the talk with after I wrecked, had a son about thirteen years old who died in a wreck. There's a lot of tragedies like that. This year a lot of young people died in wrecks. There's usually alcohol or drugs involved."[26] This passage, too, retains elements of orality since she doesn't specify *which* year, and it reads as if she is right there, telling the story and situating it in the present day for context and as a warning.

And while *Lakota Woman*'s chapters are neatly organized and the storytelling is mostly chronological, its sequel *Ohitika Woman* occasionally meanders, backtracks, and circles around, which further evokes an oral quality. For example the chapter "A Little Backtracking" opens with the line "I have to backtrack a little bit" and then launches into a very compressed, five-page-long version of the standoff at Wounded Knee.[27] This chapter gives new readers context and *Lakota Woman* readers a brief review of her having given birth during the 1973 siege at Wounded Knee and how she came to marry Leonard Crow Dog, AIM's medicine man, after their time at "the Knee" ended. This chapter, though out of chronological order, has the "oral, meandering, effortless, [and] spoken" qualities Morrison valorizes. And in a more blatant example of orality, Brave Bird's narrative meanders a bit at the end of the "Skin Art" chapter on tattooing in *Ohitika Woman*: "He [her second husband Rudi] has been working for over a year on my brother-in-law's stomach . . . It's a

very ambitious project—eagles, and tipis, and Sitting Bull, and whatnot. I wonder if he'll ever finish it, call it part of an Indian, Chicano-biker-prison tradition. Well, this was just a little wandering off the track of my story."[28] While this swerve is unique to this otherwise focused if nonlinear text, this passage, too, exemplifies the qualities outlined by Morrison and illustrates the dynamic nature of oral storytelling, although her digression is frozen on the page for all time.

Now that I have situated Brave Bird within the oral tradition, it follows that Romero's theorization of orality as a reading strategy would offer a fresh way to read Brave Bird, particularly as a means to approach her occasional, scathing asides about South Dakota in *Lakota Woman*. Romero values but does not limit orality to the qualities suggested by Morrison; Romero presses further and asserts that Morrison and others put the onus on readers of fiction to learn more about the issues plaguing their respective characters. As Romero explains, "By giving their readers knowledge of social problems, yet refusing to offer specific remedies, Morrison and other contemporary writers of color encourage and empower their readers to produce political knowledge."[29] According to Romero, Morrison notes that in her fiction, she attempts to "have something in it that enlightens, something in it that opens the door and points the way. Something in it that suggests what the conflicts are, what the problems are. But it need not solve those problems because it is not a case study, it is not a recipe."[30] Although Brave Bird's books are nonfiction, Romero's observation offers a very different way to interpret *Lakota Woman* and its sequel, considering Cook-Lynn's complaint that the Native "hagiography" genre offers no solutions, as "the seeds of continuing crises in our Indian communities, while laid bare and exposed, are given little cause-and effect analysis" and so "no problem-solving model will emerge from these fields of inquiry."[31] Perhaps encouraging and empowering the reader to think about the enormous tangle of settler colonial relationships and issues in South Dakota is closer to Brave Bird's point.

Take, for instance, Brave Bird's multitude of withering statements about South Dakota. Throughout *Lakota Woman* she occasionally zooms out from personal narrative to deliver biting observations about the state and its white inhabitants, and it is true that she offers no immediate solutions to these enormous issues she raises. Her claims sometimes lead into a story but often follow her very detailed stories as a

bitter summation. For instance in the chapter "Invisible Fathers," she introduces a brief, childhood tale of injustice with the assertion that "in South Dakota, white kids learn to be racists almost before they learn to walk," and then she launches into the paragraph-long story itself in the next sentence, informing the reader that "when I was about seven or eight years old, I fought with the school principal's daughter," and continuing on from there.[32] Brave Bird thus supports her claim about South Dakota with this anecdotal evidence, but she offers no solution to this complicated problem of socialization and systemic racism. I concede that a tidy and satisfactory solution to these very complex issues is an elusive proposition, but her not offering one, though precisely one of Cook-Lynn's primary complaints in her skewering of Lakota "hagiographies," works in a way Cook-Lynn might not anticipate: *Brave Bird places the onus upon the reader to actively question these paradigms*. In that way, Brave Bird's litany of observations about South Dakota asks the reader to engage with the legacy of settler colonialism.

To further exemplify Brave Bird's encouragement of readers' agency—and to refute that such solutionless moments are indeed merely "depressing and distasteful," as Cook-Lynn might suggest, I want to point to another of *Lakota Woman's* powerful passages a few pages later in the same chapter: the close of Brave Bird's remembrances of her Aunt Elsie Flood. As Brave Bird explains, her auntie was found dead, beaten to a pulp, and as Brave Bird puts it, "Her death has never been investigated. The life of an Indian is not held in great value in the State of South Dakota. There is no woman like her anymore."[33] Brave Bird then pivots to a more general discussion of how her friends and relatives who meant the most to her have been killed or died inexplicable deaths, and she offers no solutions about what could be done about the State of South Dakota's anti-Native sentiment. In both cases her solutionless South Dakota statements "encourage and empower their readers to produce political knowledge," as Romero says oral (and written approximations of oral) storytelling should do.[34] Readers might ask how South Dakota came to be this way, which treaties were broken and which pieces of legislation encouraged this paradigm, why this anti-Native sentiment persists in social, cultural, and political realms, what the current state of affairs is, and what can be done about it, to name a few possible avenues of reconciliation and reparation. Brave Bird's claims about South Dakota call on her readers to ask difficult questions in historical

as well as contemporary contexts, seek solutions to the myriad problems with this settler state, and go about the arduous task of decolonization and returning unceded treaty lands to the Lakota people.

Another of Romero's alternative reading strategies, discursive characterization, can also help us think about Brave Bird's nonfiction books in productive ways. Discursive characterization, according to Romero, emphasizes communities rather than individuals, and in the American canon, "traditional realist novels work to limit democratic positioning of the reader through characterization."[35] In fiction classical realism in the American canon has lauded the individual and his exhibition of the traits Nina Baym refers to collectively as Americanness: a white male taming a wilderness and transforming himself in the process seems to be the general formula. But contemporary fiction by women of color, as Romero puts it,

> alerts us to the need to reconceive our concept of characterization by refusing the focus on the private individual that characterizes the traditional novel. Instead of an individual protagonist, novels by contemporary women of color often focus on communities . . . [which in turn] highlights how individuals and communities are affected and transformed by larger discourses, such as race, class, gender, and nation.[36]

Romero's discursive characterization as a reading strategy, if we expand it to encompass nonfictional representations, offers productive insights into Brave Bird's nonfictional representations of community. Consider, in this context, the sociopolitical implications of Brave Bird's frequent laments of her best friend Annie Mae Aquash, her fellow AIM member and close friend who was found dead on Pine Ridge in 1975. Brave Bird not only grieves publicly and ensures that readers will remember Annie Mae's name but also potentially lays the foundation for political community by anticipating a crucial, twenty-first century social justice movement concerned with the enormous number of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) in the United States. Brave Bird's persistent melancholia and repetition of Annie Mae's name throughout her books suggest a less overt but still powerful iteration of activism that Cook-Lynn seems to disregard in Brave Bird's books. According to Judith Butler,

> Many people think that grief is privatizing, that it returns us to a solitary situation and is, in that sense, depoliticizing. But I think it furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order, and it does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility.[37]

In this light Brave Bird's haunting repetitions of her best friend Annie Mae Aquash's name throughout her books thus becomes a radical act of grief. I concede that Annie Mae has been memorialized in other works by Native writers, most notably Joy Harjo's spoken word piece "For Anna Mae Pictou Aquash" (1997), but Brave Bird's close friendship with Annie Mae and her seemingly bottomless stash of poignant stories about her illustrate the deep "relational ties" and "dependency" which Butler suggests can foster "political community." While Harjo's beautiful poem elegizes Annie Mae and the circumstances surrounding her murder in broader terms, as we see in her lines "You are the shimmering young woman / Who found her voice, / When you were warned to be silent, or have your body cut away / From you like an elegant weed," Brave Bird memorializes her friend much more intimately, telling very personal and detailed stories and anecdotes, including quotidian and sometimes humorous details that could nearly make readers feel as if we knew Aquash personally.[38] Brave Bird's and Erdoes's Annie Mae is very much alive, powerful and ebullient throughout most of *Lakota Woman*: "She never walked into my home, she always burst in, full of energy" and "She stayed on and off with us at Crow Dog's Paradise. She got very high up in the councils of AIM, to the extent of helping set movement policies. She had no luck with men."[39] Representationally, then, her death becomes all the more searing when her body is found. Brave Bird grieves, and readers, after getting to know Annie Mae so well by proxy, likely do as well.

Brave Bird's approach to memorializing her murdered friend was ahead of its time; sadly, the need to remember and say the names of MMIW has only recently been recognized as necessary. In a South Dakota Public Broadcasting article entitled "To Say Their Names" (2019), Nikkole Bostnar, a student at Oglala Lakota College and a cofounder of the MMIW He Sapa [Black Hills] organization, explains, "The issue of MMIW has been happening over centuries ever since

the colonizers came to this country. All the way back to the boarding schools, it's always been swept under the rug."[40] On the Northern Plains for well over a century, cases of missing and murdered Native women were rarely perceived as worthy of news reporting or investigation by the authorities, Annie Mae included. Brave Bird's frequent inclusions of her reject the dominant paradigm of community-shattering, settler colonial silencing.

Discursive characterization as a reading strategy can also help us think about building alternative communities that reject settler colonial paradigms, such as the one Mary Brave Bird found within AIM. Early in *Lakota Woman* Brave Bird explains to her readers the concept of the *tiospaye*, or traditional Lakota hunting clan or extended family.[41] Although she doesn't name it outright, Brave Bird gestures toward the Dawes Act of 1887 as the United States government's way of breaking up the tiospaye; this Act divided reservation land into allotments and forced Natives into nuclear families rather than traditional, extended families. Brave Bird explains, "The whites destroyed the tiospaye, not accidentally, but as a matter of policy. The close-knit clan, set in its old ways, was a stumbling block in the path of the missionary and government agent, its traditions and customs a barrier to what the white man called 'progress' and 'civilization.'"[42] The disintegration of the tiospaye is yet another tragedy wrought by the federal government's systemic and slow violence aimed at Native Americans in general and the Lakota people in particular.

But in the early 1970s Lakotas wanting to take action found another sort of community by joining forces with Dakota and Ojibwa activists in the American Indian Movement, and Brave Bird's storytelling in the middle section of *Lakota Woman* shifts primarily to using first person plural pronouns, ostensibly to suggest that at long last, Brave Bird has found a community of kindred souls. The chapters "We AIM Not to Please" and "The Siege" are positively riddled with usages of "we," with the exception of her very personal memories of giving birth to her son Pedro at Wounded Knee in 1973. Brave Bird's newfound sense of community culminates not in the siege itself but in her response to Black Elk in her later chapter "The Ghosts Return." At the close of *Black Elk Speaks* Black Elk despairs, "And I, to whom so great a vision was given in my youth,—you see me now a pitiful old man who has done nothing, for the nation's hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any lon-

ger, and the sacred tree is dead."[43] The sacred hoop has multiple meanings, according to Black Elk and Neihardt scholars, but most of them agree that the sacred hoop symbolizes the community of the Lakota nation, as Black Elk suggests during his recounting of his great vision. A "great Voice" tells him to "behold the circle of the nation's hoop, for it is holy, being endless, and thus all powers shall be one power in the people without end."[44] The breaking of the hoop, then, represents the grim realities of settler colonialism in terms of the Lakota people facing genocide: the forced removal to reservations, the broken Fort Laramie Treaties, the loss of the sacred Black Hills, the Wounded Knee Massacre, and on and on—and on.

But Brave Bird, after recounting stories of the Ghost Dance coming to the Lakota and the subsequent Wounded Knee massacre of 1890 in her "The Ghosts Return" chapter of *Lakota Woman*, responds by triumphantly correcting Black Elk, who did not anticipate the rise of AIM: "In that ravine, at Cankpe Opi, we gathered up the pieces of the sacred hoop and put them together again. All who were at Wounded Knee, Buddy Lamont, Clearwater, and our medicine men, we mended the nation's hoop. The sacred tree *is not dead!*"[45] In this moment Brave Bird's sense of community stretches beyond her fellow AIM members to all Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota people, and she repudiates the popular misconception of the vanishing Indian in the American cultural imaginary by asserting not only sovereignty but healing.

In this essay, I have explored the controversy surrounding Mary Brave Bird's as-told-to books *Lakota Woman* and *Ohitika Woman* and have attempted to situate these collaborative works into the rich genre of Lakota activist literature. As we have seen, Brave Bird herself had no qualms about working with Erdoes; although he tinkered with her phrasing a little, she felt it far more important that her stories of boarding school, the American Indian Movement, her missing and murdered friends, traditional ceremonies that have endured despite the best efforts of the American settler colonial government, and her life on the Rosebud Reservation be told—and as she insisted to Wise and Wise, *read*. Brave Bird's stories, though they may be mediated to some degree through Richard Erdoes, serve as crucial artifacts of conditions in the American settler state in the twentieth century, and they invite both Native and non-Native readers to think about the durable structures of settler colonialism and perhaps reimagine a more peaceful future free of

oppression and brutality. Though Bernadin seems to suggest that Brave Bird and Erdoes pander to white readers in her acknowledgement of as-told-to books' "continued market appeal" in "The Authenticity Game," she also notes that "The 'all-American' genre of autobiography has furnished Native writers both past and present with a powerful form of testimonial and resistance literature."[46] Brave Bird's two texts, as I have shown, function exactly in that way, though Western American readers and critics with unmeetable criteria for authenticity might remain disappointed with these books. Yet just as we do not dismiss Mary Prince and other early Transatlantic storytellers for their mediated accounts of chattel slavery, the Lakota as-told-to genre, too, has inherent value and should not be waved away so easily.[47] Insisting upon authenticity as a mode of judging texts remains a fraught and faulty practice; as Moore reminds us, "When critics address authenticity, they might do so most productively in ways that question that question."[48] Though the debate over their authenticity may rage on regardless, Brave Bird's desire that they be read will be fulfilled.

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NOTES

1. While *Black Elk Speaks* (1932) was not the first D/Lakota autobiography, it remains, perhaps, the best known and is certainly the most anthologized and mass marketed. Please see H. David Brumble's *American Indian Autobiography* (1988), particularly chapters 2 and 7, for a thorough discussion of D/Lakota texts by White Bull, Charles Eastman, and others, which preceded *Black Elk Speaks* by decades. In the case of preliterate texts, direct translation between D/Lakota and English was an utter impossibility, given their intensely disparate linguistic systems. To complicate matters of translation further, as Brumble notes, ontological notions of self, too, constituted a difficult cultural impasse in those early texts.

2. Imelda Martín Junquera, "From *Black Elk Speaks* to *Lakota Woman*: Reflections upon Modern Collaborative Native American Autobiography," *Litteraria Pragensia* 15, no. 30 (2005): 58–64. See especially pages 60–61. The Dakota writers Zitkala-Ša and Ella Cara Deloria, of course, preceded Brave Bird by decades, but their works lie well outside of the Lakota as-told-to genre. Junquera points out the uniqueness of Brave Bird's texts: "Mary Brave Bird is writing her own story and making history at the same time, retelling Wounded Knee from a feminine and contemporary point

of view: from her position as a mother giving birth at the time of the siege. She is focusing on the meaning of activism and AIM for Lakotas and especially for Native American women, and she is becoming the active author and protagonist of the events. Gender gets blurred in the fight for equality, in religious spiritual ceremonies, although not forgotten, just put behind the importance of the struggle for survival."

3. Channette Romero, *Activism and the American Novel: Religion and Resistance in Fiction by Women of Color* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press), 2012.

4. Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln, NE: Bison, 1999), 29.

5. As the book title suggests, Banks was Ojibwa and not Lakota. Banks cofounded AIM in Minneapolis in 1968 originally to protect Natives from police brutality. Banks was present at the most notorious AIM actions in South Dakota, including the 1971 occupation of Mt. Rushmore, the attempted 1973 takeover of the courthouse in Custer following the murder of Wesley Bad Heart Bull, and the seventy-one-day Wounded Knee occupation just two weeks following the action in Custer.

6. John (Fire) Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes, *Lame Deer: Seeker of Visions* (1972; reprint, New York: Pocket Books, 1994), ix–x.

7. Susan Bernadin, "The Authenticity Game: 'Getting Real' in Contemporary American Indian Literature" in *True West: Authenticity and the American West*, eds. William R. Handley and Nathaniel Lewis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 155–75. See page 160.

8. Bernardin, "The Authenticity Game," 161.

9. David L. Moore, *That Dream Shall Have a Name: Native Americans Rewriting America* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 225.

10. Moore, *That Dream*, 4.

11. Moore, *That Dream,* 20.

12. Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, vi.

13. Christopher Wise and R. Todd Wise, "Mary Brave Bird Speaks: A Brief Interview," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 10, no. 4 (1998): 1–8, https://www.jstor.org.stable/20739469. See page 7.

14. Christopher Pexa, *Translated Nation: Rewriting the Dakhóta Oyáte* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 3.

15. Wise and Wise, "Mary Brave Bird Speaks," 7.

16. Lenora Ledwon, "Native American Life Stories and 'Authorship': Legal and Ethical Issues," *American Indian Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (1997): 579–93, https://doi.org/10.2307/1185713. See page 580.

17. Ledwon, "Native American Life Stories," 579.

18. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, "Review: Life and Death in the Mainstream of American Indian Biography," *Wicazo Sa Review* 11, no. 2 (1995): 90–93, https://doi.org/10.2307/1409107. See page 90.

19. Cook-Lynn, "Review: Life and Death," 92.

20. Romero, *Activism and the American Novel*, 31.

21. Romero, *Activism,* 7–8.

22. Romero, *Activism,* 32.

23. Mary Brave Bird and Richard Erdoes, *Ohitika Woman* (New York: Grove, 1993), 46.

24. Wise and Wise, "Mary Brave Bird Speaks," 7.

25. Brave Bird and Erdoes, *Ohitika Woman*, 55.

26. Brave Bird and Erdoes, *Ohitika Woman*, 269.

27. Brave Bird and Erdoes, *Ohitika Woman*, 4.

28. Brave Bird and Erdoes, *Ohitika Woman*, 264.

29. Romero, *Activism*, 32.

30. Romero, *Activism,* 32.

31. Cook-Lynn, "Review: Life and Death," 92.

32. Mary Brave Bird and Richard Erdoes, *Lakota Woman* (New York: Grove, 1990), 22.

33. Brave Bird and Erdoes, *Lakota Woman,* 25.

34. Romero, *Activism*, 32.

35. Romero, *Activism,* 33.

36. Romero, *Activism,* 34–5.

37. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006), 22.

38. Joy Harjo and Poetic Justice, "For Anna Mae Pictou Aquash," recorded 2002, track 7 on *Letter from the End of the Twentieth Century*, Mekko Productions.

39. Brave Bird and Erdoes, *Lakota Woman*, 186, 190–91.

40. Katy Beem, "To Say Their Names," *South Dakota Public Broadcasting*, November 13, 2019, https://www.sdpb.org/blogs/arts-and-culture/to-say-their-names.

41. The concept of a *tiospaye* is grounded in the Lakota belief that all living beings are related to each other, captured in the phrase *Mitakuye Oyasin*. Brave Bird and Erdoes close *Ohitika Woman* with the words "MITAKUYE OYASIN—ALL MY RELATIONS," in all caps for emphasis.

42. Brave Bird and Erdoes, *Lakota Woman*, 13.

43. John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*. (1932; reprint, Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 270.

44. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks,* 35.

45. Brave Bird and Erdoes, *Lakota Woman*, 155.

46. Bernadin, "The Authenticity Game," 157.

47. While a handful of early Black British authors, including Ignatius Sancho and Olaudah Equiano, were literate in English, many others were not and thus they produced collaborative texts, most notably Mary Prince, John Jea, and Ukawsaw Gronniosaw. While Ottobah Cugoano was literate, his skills were "rough," according to Alan Richardson and Debbie Lee, and his work, too, may possibly be collaborative; Richardson and Lee aren't entirely sure, though they do note that he may have received help only from Equiano. While I have followed the lead of other American critics and taken up the phrase "as-told-to" as a descriptor for this genre of Lakota texts, the perhaps more elegant phrase "as related by" in the titles of many of these Transatlantic works subtly hints that many of these works are mediated, as we see in

Gronniosaw's title *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince, as Related by Himself*, and Prince's *The History of Mary Prince, a West-Indian Slave: Related by Herself*. But unlike the mediated texts by Brave Bird and other collaborative Lakota authors, these writers' collaborative works are highly respected and greatly valued as literary and historical artifacts. Please see Alan Richardson and Debbie Lee's excellent collection *Early Black British Writing: Olaudah Equiano, Mary Prince, and Others* (2004) for further reading.

48. Moore, *That Dream Shall Have a Name*, 238.

Five Poems

KIMBERLY BLAESER

THE KNIFE MY FATHER GAVE ME AT EIGHT

One inch longer than my empty ring finger,
no field master multi-function wonder,
a single blade Case slimline trapper
pocket knife my brother would teach me
to thumb—*open closed open closed open* again
until I could slide it out quick and smooth
until I could point it, flick my wrist,
throw and sink it every time blade first
in the sweet summer White Earth clay,
respect it, wipe it clean on my jeans.
The knife my father gave me at eight
whispered to me the things he left unsaid.
Small, sharp, and pearl-handled pretty—
it does the work of any man's blade.

Previously published in *In Other Words:*
Poems by Wisconsin Poets in English and Chinese

PLEAD THE BLOOD

Now search for stories they have buried
like bodies—
silence of hidden graves.

How we unearth night-crawler truths:

children and words (they whispered

cot to cot)

where dark rituals

found them— devoured.

Oh, holy edifice where robe-blessed led,
schooled in terror brown charges,

how claim the
unnamed
from Wiindigoo

territories. Bargain in language of tabernacle

for sifted earth remnants,

lost futures.

Our stolen—restolen.

Previously published in *The Poets' Republic* (Scotland)

QUIESCENCE

I.

Soft pampas grass. We bed down like deer, rest after the dying. Spirits all walk towards horizon. Transform against the evening chrysalis of sky.

II.

You feed me your dark-eyed loneliness, wisdom from Dr. Fauci, and sectors of tangerine small as my thumb. Scent the air. Everything is shrunken or overblown now.

I am undressing. Blue jeans, flannel. My polished toes naked in the damp tickling fronds. The bottom of my feet tender as story.

III.

Soon we are turning to B & W. 100 years ago. Just before Betty White was born. Just before that other dying time. Those epidemic faces—framed like myth in our eyes.

Everybody sainted but us.

IV.

We tether ourselves, but things grow out of control. Network images on repeat—guns and knees, shattered windows, and black death. Plague upon plague.

V.

I keep seeing the picture of the elk, its antlers turned to tree. Bare black branches silhouetted against a stormy sky. In that tangle, a singing bird.

VI.

Let us stand now where the grass is tall, settle our legs there among the growing. Listen like all forlorn for the least crackle of air. Until the nocturnal bats hum our names.

Perhaps then we shall feel. Edges. Splintering. How soon a bough, a stem, a tributary? How soon we too shall antler like deer woman.

VII.

Yes, rise now—after the dying. Thick-necked and sturdy. Russet with hope—await the perch of bird.

BENEATH THE BERRY MOON

Nii bas giizis, oh Night Sun,
what mischief have you made?
Ode'iminikewi-giizis—Oh heart moon,
when berries the size of your fingernail
bloom and ripen, fragrant and dangerous
as night under June summer sky. Oh globe
of perfect greed, midnight *giizis* who watches
how sweetly they entice and fill us. On tongues
their glib red holy satisfying as kisses.
But oh, Strawberry Moon, you also feed us hunger
for more days of copper sun and loon nights.
Under your tickling light lovers call like owls:
Who whoo? Oh you yoooou, only you!
When our strawberry hearts stretch in languid air
the wayward fruit of your longing ours,
see how full moon eyes of sweethearts glimmer—
how fleeting, the jealous glow of summer.

FOUND RECIPE, *MIKINAAK DIBAAJIMOWIN*

I.

A tiny woman who'd slept with hunger, my grandma dreamed always of warm food. Wild rice, flavored with berries and venison fat. Fresh fish, coated and cooked on an open fire. Turtle soup, above all else.
Even into old age, Nookomis could never resist any food that wandered across her path. Always with a bag for gathering nuts, a sharp pocket knife for wild asparagus, she padded along, kerchiefed and bent like a letter C.

Poor snapper. *Mikinaak*. Who would have expected it? He grabbed the long oak branch, hung on just as she said he would.
His shell already a rattle in her brown hands.

II.

You cut the turtle into pieces, she instructs. (Never ask how you extract it from the shell.) *Brown it in the oven uncovered. Keep the heat at 400 to 425*.

Carrying wood is the easy part. She lets me do this. Meanwhile she is humming under her breath as she collects things: a crock from the cloth-covered cupboards, root vegetables from the damp earth of the cellar. *For extra flavor, add some veal knuckles*. She sighs at this. *Trade something, it will be worth it*.

What does one trade for veal knuckles?

I start to ask, but she has moved on to *tender green onions. Mushrooms in cream—pour that over the turtle. Salt and pepper. Paprika*. My grandma was always one for paprika. I thought it odd, to measure from the tin, when other herbs came fresh, tied in bundles, or sometimes right from her apron.

Let the fire go down a bit now, my girl. 325. 350. I peer in the little glass door at the logs turning to ash. Try to gauge degrees from the sweat that trickles on my brow. *The turtle don't mind*, she laughs. I think she means the extra heat. Means the recipe isn't particular.

But then I see her pat the vacant shell. *Nope, it don't mind*.

III.

We clean up while wood crackles softly, like a voice making a promise. Nakoomis makes no easy promises. *It takes some time. Dibaajimowin. We wait until it's tender*. Tender story?

We still have time. Always had more time than money.

My stomach is rumbling now and I want to ask how long. But I'm suddenly uncertain—is this still turtle talk? With the old ones you never know. Some following has no recipe. That *mikinaak* on my Grandma's stick. Me on the braid end of her quick hands.

Naboobiins, she says. *This little soup. Three to four hours.*

Story soup. Tender meat. Just as I latch on, she's off again. *Depends upon the size. And age, of course*. She gives me a nudge now with the broom. *Young is better*. She laughs then and repeats herself. *Young is better. But when you're hungry, old will do.*

I hear sap pop in the cook fire, like a turtle rattle, like the tobacco break in my Grandma's laugh.

IV.

My job is to watch. Every twenty minutes or so I poke the little chunks swimming in the savory sauce. My grandma has fallen asleep, the scent of dinner working like a lullaby.

I imagine she still dreams of old hungers. And odd moments of fullness. The meal we wait for. The making of it.

Previously published in slightly
different form in *Yellow Medicine Review*

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Four Poems

KENZIE ALLEN

LOVE SONG TO THE MAN ANNOUNCING POW WOWS AND RODEOS

How your voice over salted flanks
licks tender, and when you say *young ones*,
our future, hitches left like making room,
and when you name the horses, booms low,
storms a kick-up moan, chases them down,
as spotted silverfish in a round pen quarrel
then shoot back out the entrance,
spot-lit and away in a shuddering.
Name me a jingle dress in neon and gold leaf,
bespeak moccasins for my turning feet—
with my mother's best beading—
paint her having sewn those seeds
onto leather backing all of my life.
Welcome the crowd to my birth
and the language to my ears, early,
my name, early, *wampum* and
the good spirits everywhere and early.
Don't send me home without a round of applause
if not a title, if not a good ride and a fast time.

Previously published in *Narrative Magazine*

WITH THIRTEEN MOONS ON YOUR BACK

For the Desert Tortoise

like tree bark curled into whirlpools of stone,
burrowed under earth while the sun burned down

and Coyote roamed the sand—do we, too, return
each to our burrows in the shivering dark,

wear armor as a shelter we can carry,
don't we, on your back, touch earth?

Sometimes, ever so slowly, we learn of the sweetness
of cactus fruit, mesquite grass, the arid wind

as the sound of an ocean rustling in creosote,
what the long-awaited rain can yet resurrect.

Coyote watches. He marvels; what small wisdom,
your survival, in this rising heat,

in this strange home you have made.

Previously published in *Alphabeast: a book of poems.*

EVEN THE WORD *ONEIDA* / CAN'T BE WRITTEN IN ONEIDA[1]

What ails the nation's lies
unseats the sustenant. At least,
it tilts halos, allies loss,
attunes statues to skeletal white noon,

an oilskin title, a tesselate ease
I salute. I, the tithe, I
the hesitant (no) saint (no) unholy.
I, in the nuns' salon.
Thus, they anoint
the (un)hostile entity—

the we who talk less; sweat less;
listen heat-less, sans teeth.
All alleles, all eons,

all heathen shell unsewn
shakes whole

a lethal sienna,
a toll to hasten want.
An unlikely whetstone,
this State without yoke
outhunts its own lie,
lawless skyline in awe
at the likeness, the kiln,
the hush, how it shines.

Previously published in *Bellingham Review*

RED WOMAN

If I am blood-ruled, let it be
as every pinch of tobacco taken

from medicine pouches and forcibly tucked
under the white shirt

of a thirteen-year-old girl, now empty
even of prayer, or a girl

whose last sight is the river,
or a girl whose last sight

is the river, or a woman
whose last sight is

the anger even before the river,
or a boy, who grabs a knife

and calls the cops and tells them
his own description; I tell you, that's despair

I know well. I'm cuter with my mouth
shut. Sexy, with two black braids.

The words sound better when I don't
speak them at all, so they tell me,

I'm *all anger* and *bad giver, a riot waiting to happen
in that short little skirt*, they say.

They ask me to wash my hair
in the river. To see what it would have been like.

Smile, they say. *Those braids are dangerous*. They say
where are you walking so late at night.

Previously published in
Embodied: An Intersectional Feminist Comics Poetry Anthology.

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NOTES

1. A lipogram using only the 13 letters which correspond between English, latinized Oneida, and moons on a turtle's back

The Intellectual Evolution of Sherman Coolidge, Red Progressivism's Neglected Voice

TADEUSZ LEWANDOWSKI

Abstract: Compared with his Red Progressive contemporaries, the Arapaho Episcopal priest and long-term president of the Society of American Indians, Sherman Coolidge (ca. 1860s–1932) has often been neglected in scholarly literature. This essay seeks to recover his important legacy as a thinker and intertribal activist through his writings, speeches, and statements while arguing against incomplete assessments of his work as assimilationist. A survey of his output from the 1880s to 1920s—which includes archival works never before discussed—instead reveals Coolidge's transformation from a Christian proselytizer convinced of white society's preeminence into a robust pluralist who forcefully defended Native cultures, values, religions, and heritage—and at times argued for their superiority. The presentation of this intellectual evolution is situated within Coolidge's own personal history and an interpretive framework that distinguishes three key periods in his output as he developed his critique of Euro-American society and colonialism.

Keywords: Sherman Coolidge, Arapaho, Society of American Indians, Red Progressive, intertribal activist, assimilationist, pluralist, colonialism

In a 2013 combined issue of *Studies in American Indian Literatures* and *American Indian Quarterly* titled *The Society of American Indians and Its Legacies*, a host of noted scholars reflected on the intertribal Native rights organizing of the early twentieth century and the reformers known today as the Red Progressives. This collective act of recognition for the Society of American Indians (SAI) can be seen as an expression of growing sympathy for a generation of activists once derogatorily characterized as "assimilationist" in the 1990s.[1] Cristina Stanciu and Kristina Ackley offered essays on the Wisconsin Oneida organizer Laura Cornelius Kellogg and her designs for tribal sovereignty, while Julianne Newmark and David Martínez penned pieces on the Yavapai physician

Carlos Montezuma, his journal *Wassaja*, and his struggle to abolish the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).[2] Other articles focusing on particular members included Renya K. Ramirez's appreciation of her grandfather, Ho Chunk educator Henry Roe Cloud, and his efforts to aid the Apache, P. Jane Hafen's discussion of Yankton Dakota writer and activist Gertrude Bonnin (Zitkála-Šá), and Cathleen D. Cahill's account of the suffragette and BIA employee Marie Baldwin's life and career.[3] Other essays by K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Robert Warrior explored issues of citizenship and sovereignty and how the Red Progressives saw their place in the history of North American Native peoples, respectively.[4] One important figure who did not feature in a full-length article, however, was the man who arguably played *the* central role in the intertribal activism of the Progressive era: the Arapaho Episcopal missionary and SAI cofounder Sherman Coolidge, who acted as the organization's president from 1912 to 1916. And though his work did receive some attention (particularly from Warrior and Lomawaima), Coolidge's relegation to the relative margins of scholarly investigations into Progressive-era intertribal organizing has long been the norm.

Over the last two decades the recovery and reevaluation undertaken in *The Society of American Indians and Its Legacies* has also taken place in a series of biographies and edited volumes that have appeared with increasing frequency. Those SAI activists who have been treated include Bonnin, Kellogg, Montezuma, and Roe Cloud, as well as Winnebago artist Angel De Cora Dietz, Seneca museum director Arthur C. Parker, Ojibwe Catholic priest Philip Gordon, and Santee Dakota physician and writer Charles Eastman. Even the Sičhą́ǧú Lakota educator Chauncey Yellow Robe—a minor player to be sure—has been the subject of an extensive biography.[5] Meanwhile, works such as Kiara Vigil's *Indigenous Intellectuals* and Lucy Maddox's *Citizen Indians* have examined many of these figures and their critiques of Euro-American society at length, offering new insights into the thinking of a crucial cohort of early Native reformers.[6]

A wide discussion of Sherman Coolidge's life and work, in contrast, is hopefully only now set to begin. Recently he has emerged as the subject of a full-length biography (by me), *The Life of Sherman Coolidge, Arapaho Activist*, published by University of Nebraska Press in December 2022.[7] Until then the single secondary source (also by me) that existed on his life was a short popular article from 2020, "Sherman Coolidge:

Arapaho Priest in a Changing World," on WyoHistory.org, an online encyclopedia published by the Wyoming State Historical Society.[8]

Indeed the claim that Coolidge has therefore previously been understudied is difficult to refute. His many contributions to the Society of American Indians, recorded in annual reports, the *SAI Quarterly Journal*, and the *American Indian Magazine*, have for decades failed to make an impression on scholars. Only two of his works appear in anthologies and, perhaps most remarkable, searches in the online repositories JSTOR and Project MUSE reveal that Coolidge has not merited a single scholarly paper devoted exclusively to his life or writings.[9]

Sherman Coolidge, then, has long been Red Progressivism's neglected voice, and as a result remains little understood as a thinker, activist, and person. This essay seeks to recover his important legacy through his writings, speeches, and statements, offering a framework to understand and trace his intellectual evolution as he formed a sweeping critical assessment of white society and Euro-American colonialism equal to any of his generation. This critique is doubly compelling because of the journey behind it. As a young Episcopal missionary on Wind River Reservation, Wyoming, Coolidge, then utterly convinced of white culture's preeminence, acted as a staunch supporter of Indian bureau assimilationist policy. In time, however, he transformed into a robust pluralist who publicly and vigorously defended Native cultures, values, religions, and heritage—so much so that near the end of his life he even argued for their superiority in some respects. The project of explicating this philosophical transition begins by laying out the events and context of Coolidge's life, whose often dramatic contours may be obscure to some.

Born in the early 1860s into a band of Northern Arapaho in present-day Wyoming, Sherman Coolidge, as a boy named Des-che-wa-wah (Runs On Top), experienced a succession of calamities against the violent backdrop of the nineteenth-century Indian wars.[10] In short reminiscences dictated in the 1920s, Coolidge sometimes spoke fondly of his memories from this time, such as his father returning from an eagle hunt and the gift of his first horse.[11] The stability of this traditional life, however, began to break down severely as the Arapaho became drawn into deadly conflicts with US troops. Coolidge's grandmother and aunt were killed by American soldiers in the 1865 Battle of the Tongue River, but the severest blow to his family came two years later with his father's murder. While camping by a stream one evening in the spring

of 1867, Runs On Top's family was set upon by Bannock horse thieves. While he, his mother, and younger brother fled, his father stayed behind to fight off two dozen warriors, hoping to give his family precious time to escape. Runs On Top, his mother, and younger brother then walked for days to find safety among the larger Arapaho band. The small family fell victim to more violence in 1870 when they were captured by Shoshone warriors in a morning raid. Runs On Top survived thanks to the intervention of a Shoshone army scout, only to be given up (along with his brother) by his starving mother to US officers days later.[12] A sympathetic army lieutenant, Charles Austin Coolidge and his wife Sofie adopted Runs On Top soon after encountering him on a march through Wyoming Territory, radically changing his life.

Over the next fourteen years the young boy, renamed Sherman Coolidge, attended school in New York City, trained at Shattuck Military Academy, and studied for the Episcopal priesthood at Seabury Divinity School in Faribault, Minnesota, becoming the protégé of Benjamin Henry Whipple, the state's famous bishop.[13] The effects of this education and the influence of his new family and surroundings were profound. Having been removed from a life of deep trauma and immersed in Euro-American society at a crucial formative stage, Coolidge's conception of Native peoples transformed dramatically. As a young man he largely depicted his tender years on the Great Plains as a whirlwind of "savage hostilities," and it was not until his fifties that he spoke of his Arapaho childhood in anything but negative terms.[14] Meanwhile Coolidge imbibed all the assumptions of Euro-American cultural superiority and the merits of white ways and governance that his adoptive parents, devoted Episcopalians and militant patriots, implanted within him. His new father, Charles Coolidge, even insisted that Sherman embark on a career in the military and aid in the settlement of the West. Charles spent much of the late 1870s fighting to subdue the Lakota and Nez Perce, and Sherman sometimes accompanied him.[15] Sherman resisted, however, deciding instead that becoming a missionary to the Arapaho was the best course for his life.[16] In a prime example of his learned ethnocentrism, sixteen-year-old Sherman wrote Sofie Coolidge of his "pity" for Indians' "ignorance of God and of the Bible," simultaneously hoping that one day he could "teach and preach the Gospel to them."[17]

In 1884, following his graduation from Seabury, Sherman Coolidge returned to Wyoming as a missionary on the Wind River Reserva-

tion, home to the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho. There he became a part of the US government's "peace policy" of assimilation and Christianization inaugurated by President Grant in 1869.[18] Thus ensued a stormy twenty-six-year period in which Coolidge incurred the displeasure of his fellow Arapaho by seeking to implement Indian bureau policy, encouraging conversion to Christianity, and discouraging Indigenous religious rituals such as the Sun Dance. During the 1900s Coolidge brazenly helped push through unpopular policies such as the 1887 Dawes Severalty Act and a massive land cession, cooperating with reservation authorities to negate the will of his tribesmen and at one point pitting the younger more "progressive" men against the older generation to force a vote on allotment.[19] In the midst of these controversies Coolidge entered into a mixed-race marriage with an idealistic New York heiress and missionary, Grace Darling Wetherbee, then residing at Wind River. The union, consecrated in 1902, resulted in national headlines.[20] In "Society Girl's Heart and Hand Captured by an Indian," the *Denver Post* explained to its readers—in all seriousness—how Coolidge, a "full-blooded Arapahoe," had abandoned his teepee for a modern home at his bride's request.[21] After this sensationalist coverage had died down, the Coolidges did their utmost to spread Christianity among their Arapaho neighbors, who increasingly found such interference onerous. In 1907 Arapaho warriors, discontented by the bureau's ban on the Sun Dance and failure to honor payments for ceded lands, even attempted to assassinate Coolidge's missionary colleague John Roberts.[22] In the face of such resistance Coolidge eventually came to feel that his work at Wind River was futile. The Episcopal hierarchy, also unhappy with his results, transferred him to a mission among the Cheyenne in Oklahoma in 1910.[23]

Fortuitously, leaving Wyoming presented new opportunities. In 1911 Coolidge helped launch the Society of American Indians, the most important Native-run rights group of the early twentieth century. As the organization's president and main representative from 1912 to 1916, he became one of the most famous Indians in the United States, giving interviews to newspapers and meeting with officials in Washington, DC, to discuss policy matters.[24] After the SAI's implosion in the 1920s due to fissures over the Peyote Religion and the question of whether the Bureau of Indian Affairs should be abolished, Coolidge made a very brief return to activism in 1923 as a member of the Committee of

One Hundred, tasked with surveying reservation conditions by the US Secretary of the Interior. The committee's resolutions, which called for better schooling; the creation of a court of tribal claims; and a lifting of bans on religious practices, paved the way for the 1928 Meriam Report's much harsher criticisms of the Indian bureau, and the significant reforms of the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), which terminated the policy of strict assimilation, halted Dawes Act allotment; ceded two million acres back to reservations; offered low interest government loans; protected Indigenous cultural and religious rituals; and reformed Indian education.[25] In December 1923, Sherman Coolidge, accompanied by the Cherokee poet and activist Ruth Muskrat Bronson, presented a book to President Calvin Coolidge in a public ceremony.[26] Sherman Coolidge then largely retired, living out the remainder of his life quietly in Colorado Springs, Colorado, as canon of a local church. His death in 1932, around age seventy, was mourned within the local community and the Episcopal church.[27]

How Coolidge is remembered in scholarly literature and at Wind River is another question. Unfortunately characterizations of him and his work have been either incomplete or unflattering. His presence in Hazel Hertzberg's seminal study of Progressive-era intertribal organizing, *The Search for an American Indian Identity* (1971), is light given his leadership role. When discussed he comes off as a "phlegmatic" figure known for his moderate stances on the Indian bureau.[28] The more recent history of the SAI, Thomas Maroukis's *We Are Not a Vanishing People* (2021) sheds little additional light on Coolidge's four-year tenure as president. An outright damning portrait of Coolidge is meanwhile presented in Loretta Fowler's *Arapaho Politics* (1982). Drawing on firsthand research among Arapaho elders at Wind River, Fowler records how Coolidge, in his support for Indian bureau policy and Christianization, "increasingly lost the goodwill of his tribesmen" and in turn developed a "seeming hostility" to those he sought to convert. Fowler also writes of how "Coolidge often rebuked Arapahoes for allowing him to be captured."[29] The tribe's oral history likewise records that many Arapahos regretted how Coolidge, once one of their own, "became a white man but still had skin like an Indian."[30] This is not to suggest that either Fowler or the oral histories are in error. Like discussions of Coolidge in Hertzberg and Maroukis, they merely do not tell the whole story.

In fact, one could argue that it is the deep and blinding ethnocentrism

of Coolidge's early perspective on the Arapaho and Indian peoples in general—as well as his failures as a missionary—that make his story so compelling. Upon examination of his entire output we find that rather than hold firmly to the cultural dogmas of "civilized" Euro-America learned as a teenager and perpetuated as a young man, he gradually underwent an intellectual evolution so considerable that by its end he had almost reversed his beliefs. In light of this transformation, Coolidge's corpus can be divided into three periods dating from 1885 to 1899 (no published writings seem to exist from 1900 to 1910); 1911 to 1919; and 1920 to his death in 1932. The first, encompassing the time Coolidge labored at Wind River, is Christian assimilationist in that his statements overwhelmingly evince the belief that a successful future for Native peoples depends on their rejecting old ways and adopting Christianity and white modes of living. The second period, spent living in cities across the Midwest, sees Coolidge forcefully question the nature of Euro-American expansionism and defend the integrity of Indian societies, arguing, essentially, for a pluralism that respects cultural differences. Finally, in his third period Coolidge concludes that hypermaterialistic Euro-America has disregarded Christian principles and that in crucial ways Indians have shown themselves greater exemplars of spirituality and morality. This intellectual arc can be traced over a near half-century of texts, which, contextualized, allow us to understand how Coolidge reacted to conditions at Wind River, developments within the Society of American Indians, global events such as World War I, and changes in federal Indian policy.

Coolidge's first writings—the starting point of his evolution—are found in a handful of periodicals following his return to Wyoming in October 1884. As a church employee he was under obligation to send dispatches to the Episcopal bulletin *Spirit of Missions*. These sporadic, brief reports were of course meant for an audience that donated to the missionary cause; any discouraging facts appear to have been excised. On full display is instead a reassuring representation of Coolidge's missionary work among the Arapaho and Shoshone, infused with sentiments akin to what Warrior calls a "blinding progressivistic optimism" in his critique of Charles Eastman.[31] Throughout, Coolidge maintains that government schooling is doing wonders and efforts to steer Wind River's "poor uncivilized heathens" toward "civilization" and Christianity have been gratefully received.[32] Other reports comment on

how Indians have "the reputation of being warlike, and ferocious," but at heart are a "peace-loving people."[33] Under prolonged contact with "education and pure religion," any remnants of "ignorance and injurious superstition" will inevitably evaporate in the march toward a bright future.[34]

Coolidge's claim that those on Wind River were fervently "in favor of civilization and Christianity" held little truth.[35] As documented by Fowler, the Arapaho generally resisted attempts by the Indian bureau and missionaries to re-educate their children and alter long-held cultural practices.[36] Nonetheless Coolidge's early writings establish several major themes: Native peoples were culturally degraded and shared a bellicose past; but as human beings they could "progress" to a higher stage of existence through education and "civilization"—a key universalist belief based on the Enlightenment thinking that produced the US Constitution and informed the views of those such as Carlisle Indian Industrial School superintendent Richard Henry Pratt.[37] There was little use for traditional practices in this paradigm. Like one of his clerical colleagues in the Society of American Indians, Philip Gordon, Coolidge felt Indian salvation denoted not only the acceptance of Christ but the abandonment of old ways.[38] Yet at the same time—much like happened with Gordon—Coolidge's experience as a reservation missionary quickly engendered a deep skepticism of the primary organ responsible for assimilation: the Indian bureau.

This crucial shift is of little surprise when one looks at the economic situation then prevailing at Wind River, which had been thrown into chaos by the government's haphazard imposition of a farming regime. Even younger Arapaho men who graduated from the boarding school's agricultural curriculum and wanted to take up farming found much of the soil unsuitable for crop yields without the use of heavy equipment, a rarity on the reservation. This deficiency left the Arapaho dependent on the ever diminishing rations offered on issue days. When Coolidge arrived at Wind River in the mid-1880s, the agent supplied each adult with four pounds of beef a week. Six years later it had been reduced to one pound, creating near starvation.[39] Coolidge kept these awful revelations from the readers of the *Spirit of Missions* and instead shared them in private letters to his adoptive parents. In one, he reported how the provisions given the Arapaho "are sufficient to keep them alive for only half a week." In some cases Coolidge had even seen fathers "sell their

own daughters to wicked men" for "a mouthful of something to eat"—a tragic downfall for "a noble people endowed with every capacity and capability," now "starving to death inch by inch, in sight of the American flag" as "helpless and despised wards."[40]

In 1887 Coolidge expressed his growing distrust of the bureau in "Education of Indians," published in the *Churchman*. He opens by admitting "a large majority" of Wind River's children sent to Pratt's Carlisle have perished from disease. Yet the main problem is not student mortality itself but that deaths discourage Indian parents with "a limited range of thought" from sending away their sons and daughters. On-reservation government schooling would seem the natural solution were it not overseen by the Indian bureau, whose "piles and bundles of imperious orders" amount to "nonsense in their relation to the real nature and state of affairs of their destination," and whose "careworn and tormented" employees struggle with "the duty of overseeing starving human beings." The true answer is therefore Christian education administered by missionaries, who alone can propel Indians from a "barbarian" to a "progressive" state. There are those, however, still unconvinced of Indians' adaptability to modern life. "Can Indians be civilized or Christianized?" Coolidge queries rhetorically in his universalist vein, "You might as well ask, are they human beings?"[41]

As he continued to live at Wind River, Coolidge also began to rethink his assumptions about the Native societies slated for elimination under the policy of assimilation. Having been immersed in Arapaho culture for the first time since early childhood, he was—in somewhat of a reversal of the typical Indian boarding school experience—rediscovering his own roots. In doing so he realized that many Arapaho ways were worthy of praise. The Arapaho, for instance, were fiercely egalitarian, eschewing accumulated wealth and putting the good of the tribe before all else—a radical contrast to the individualistic, economically polarized Euro-America of toiling masses and rapacious robber barons.[42] In fact, Coolidge's interest in the culture of his people became so great that in 1886 he began planning a handbook of Arapaho-English conversation and another work on Arapaho "manners and customs."[43] (Neither idea came to fruition.) But perhaps most significant to Coolidge as a priest and missionary, he started to perceive similarities between Arapaho and Christian belief systems.

These discoveries were given public expression in an 1890

government census report on the Indian population (published in 1894). Coolidge's contribution "Indians in Wyoming" encapsulates Arapaho history, language, customs, and oral traditions, and takes care to stress how Arapaho spiritual beliefs in some respects match those of "civilized" people. Like Christians, the Arapaho speak of a "good and omnipotent spirit," or "supreme being," and an opposing "evil spirit," or "worker of evil." They also believe that "the good and bad on earth will be rewarded and punished beyond the grave." The Sun Dance ceremony, however, has "no religious character"—meaning that it cannot be considered legitimate worship. As such, the Arapahos' "standard of right and wrong" remains "far inferior to that of civilized people." Still, by inference the existence of a universal moral basis showed that "with time and proper management [the Arapaho] can become intelligent and self-supporting Christian citizens." This was of course a standard trope; but what is new about "Indians in Wyoming" is Coolidge's apparent nostalgia for the precontact past, couched within another condemnation of the bureau. He notes how the Arapaho once happily thrived in "the bosom of mother earth" on a healthy diet of "wild meat and fruit," unaware of disease. Now forced to reside on mismanaged reservations, they are "oftentimes compelled to eat such dead horses, cows, and calves" and suffer greatly from consumption and other ailments.[44]

As "Indians in Wyoming" demonstrates, Coolidge had come to recognize fully the problems of colonialism. But true to his learned ethnocentrism, he was unwilling to abandon assimilation as a solution. Coolidge instead believed fervently that despite the bureau's failures, efforts along these lines should be accelerated and extended. In the 1880s he complained to his adoptive parents that boarding school students returning to Wind River appeared "only half-educated and half civilized" and therefore tended to "relapse into the old ways of wild and barbarous Indian life." Only "eight or twelve years of real social and religious training," he felt, could counter "native influence" once and for all.[45] Coolidge also shared this belief at a meeting of the Indian Rights Association in 1889, stating that problems often arise when "Indians are only allowed to stay a few years in the East" and then return to the reservation with "only a smattering of education."[46] So while Coolidge defended, in part, the integrity of Arapaho beliefs in "Indians in Wyoming," he had not jettisoned his assimilationist philosophy. The Indian bureau was not ideal, but the larger United States—as he was certainly taught by his adoptive

parents—remained a democracy distinct from all other nations. Adopting Euro-American ways was hence the only route "forward" for Native peoples caught in the limbo of the reservations system.

Coolidge's "The Indian of To-Day," published in the *Colorado Magazine* in 1893, iterates these stances in yet another display of "progressivistic optimism." Save an apparent reference to what he calls, quite euphemistically, historical "blunders" (likely an allusion to the Wounded Knee massacre), Coolidge characterizes the US government as both "princely" and wholly concerned with doing the "fair thing" in the "advancement" of Indians. His former life, he recalls, was blighted by the "horrors of savage hostilities" in which his grandmother, aunt, and father perished. The goals of ceasing such warfare and integrating Indians into Christian society are therefore contingent on educating "the weaker race of the inferior language, life, and religion into the better language, life and religion of the stronger race"—a crucial summation of Coolidge's ethnocentrism at the time. Here he advocates a new method to "conquer the barbarian" and his "par-excellence laziness": the recruitment of older Indian warriors into the US Army. More stereotypes follow. Military service, Coolidge argues, is a natural vocation for "the wild camp savage," whose "undisciplined valor" can be channeled into worthy ends through "intelligent management." Missionary work is likewise "imperative" in this pursuit of peace because only under the universalist umbrella of Christianity can Indian Nations reconcile with one another, and with whites—all of whom must one day "worship the true God together at the Christian altar."[47]

"The Indian of To-day" is Coolidge's last substantial statement from his early period outside of a few brief reports to the *Spirit of Missions*. His last, dating from January 1899, contains the usual refrain of "aggressive and progressive" missionary work at Wind River uplifting the Arapaho and Shoshone, "hereditary foes" who now "live side by side in peace and harmony" thanks to the salve of Christianity.[48] A little over a decade later Coolidge departed the reservation for good, defeated in his efforts to remake the spiritual life of the Arapaho, and disliked by many who saw him as a "white man" with "skin like an Indian."[49] Relocating to Enid, Oklahoma, in 1910, and then Faribault, Minnesota, in 1912, however, allowed Coolidge to fill another, much more beneficial role in the Native rights movement with his ascendance to the presidency of the Society of American Indians in 1912, after which he significantly

reformulated his intellectual stances on assimilation, Native cultures, and the nature of Euro-American society. Indeed, from the moment of his involvement with the SAI, Coolidge appeared emboldened in advancing a new, more expansive critique, inspired, no doubt, by the membership's collective mission of asserting the importance of Native values to improving modern America and the vital goal of preserving distinct Native identities. No longer constrained by the ideas of his adoptive parents or his residence on a reservation under the bureau, he had attained a new freedom to alter his attitudes and opinions amidst colleagues who celebrated Native heritage.

Though Coolidge added much to his repertory during this second period, these writings, speeches, and interviews present what we could term a limited scope of ideas. For example he often talked of granting Indians citizenship in order to ensure their rights and end their status, as he put it in the 1880s, of "helpless and despised wards."[50] This issue was particularly dear to him due to his own chaotic legal situation that changed whenever he moved across the country and became subject to differing state laws that defined him either as a natural-born citizen, noncitizen, or ward, and either protected or denied his right to vote.[51] When discussing citizenship, some of Coolidge's statements sound much like those of Carlos Montezuma and Philip Gordon in suggesting that Indians, when finally invested with equal political rights, should be integrated into white citizen society outside reservation boundaries; however, unlike these colleagues Coolidge never stated that reservations should be eliminated.[52] Once, he commented that reservations were "not the best place" for Indians,[53] but in one of his letters he even hoped that the Arapaho would capitalize on the discovery of oil on Wind River and manage the profits collectively.[54] And while other contemporaries such as Laura Cornelius Kellogg and Gertrude Bonnin conceived plans for tribal "regeneration" on well-managed, sovereign reservations, Coolidge offered no program of the sort, or even any conception of tribal sovereignty or self-determination might entail.[55] In 1916 he even came out against the Johnson bill, which proposed the democratic election of reservation superintendents by men over eighteen, fearing that "the very worst elements will seek to control Indian tribes."[56]

But if Coolidge's vision remained underdeveloped, he nonetheless consistently presented certain ideas and principles. His first major statement as SAI president, "The Indian American," delivered at

the second annual conference in Columbus, Ohio, in 1912, serves as an excellent introduction to his revised stances. Though Coolidge discusses "Christian citizenship" as "the highest type known," he as well condemns white society's view that "the dead Indian is the only good Indian," adding vehemently, "but so is the *live* one!" [emphasis in original]. In a powerful passage that reflects the growing forcefulness of his perspective, Coolidge asks his audience:

> Who is this Indian? What is he? Where does he live? Above all, why is he a problem? If these questions were asked of the average white man, the answers would be both inaccurate and confusing. In our early school-days, the Indian was defined as a savage who lived by hunting and fishing; who lived in a wigwam or tepee. He was a fierce, ferocious, cruel, crafty, treacherous, blood-thirsty red devil! Exterminate him! Exterminate him! Again, he has been described as a dirty, lazy, shiftless loafer, beggar and drunkard. No wonder "the only good Indian is the dead one!"

The basis for this belief in white society, Coolidge argues, lies in the violent Indian resistance to the US government's "policy of war and extermination." Yes, the Indian warrior had "killed" and "scalped," fighting "like a fiend" when pressed. But—Coolidge rhetorically enquires—"What else could he have done?" Acting in defense of "his lands, his people and his tepee home" was no cause for blame. Blame was to be found in white attitudes to Indians and in a society that saw them not through a universalist framework as "God's handiwork" but as beings slated for erasure, whether physically or culturally. Euro-American ethnocentrism had imposed "alien control by alien methods, morals, and religion," all of which had "eaten deeply" into the collective spirit of Native peoples. Now living under changed circumstances, the Indian had been forced to "*adjust himself to the new order* of things," a "struggle" made all the more difficult "in the face of greed, self-interest, deceit, scandal, cruelty, ambition and lust" [emphasis in original]. Whites needed to recognize how Indians had "noble traits" already in service to "every phase of the national life." When finally granted "every right and privilege" by an American people awakened to the responsibility they have to the continent's first inhabitants, Indians will state with pride, "*Civis Americanus sum*."[57]

In "The Indian American" we see a new incarnation of Coolidge in

his shifting of blame for the situation of Native peoples from his former target, the Indian bureau, onto larger Euro-America. Once characterized as the transformative and "princely" fount of "civilization,"[58] the United States in Coolidge's second period suddenly becomes a hoard of "white invaders"[59] motivated by cupidity and determined to carry out the "ignominious extinction" of the Indian. This Indian is no longer a "savage" but "a mighty hunter, a brave warrior and a noble patriot" who has rightfully defended his ancestral lands and cultural traditions. From this point onward Coolidge consistently argues against negative Indian stereotypes, criticizes the imposing of white culture on Indians, upholds the value of Indian cultures and the glories of the precontact past, and urges white Americans to see their nation's expansion from the perspective of Native peoples, who had been subjected to what was essentially an ongoing theft that has left them dispossessed wards vulnerable to the whims of a colonial government. The endgame is the granting of full citizenship rights to a population unjustly shackled by the "alien control" of the Indian bureau.[60] Responsibility for seeing through this legislative revolution should be shared by Indians and whites alike, and the distilled message that reverberates throughout, ultimately, is that of an expansive pluralism.

Coolidge skillfully stressed these points and deliberately toned others down depending on his audience, negotiating carefully as he moved through both sympathetic racially diverse reform spheres and exclusively white spaces. Among the SAI membership he pleaded for "harmony" in presenting a unified front to the public.[61] In print for the *SAI Quarterly Journal*, he could be entirely reproving of Euro-American expansionism. Before white audiences, he was consciously cajoling and uncontroversial; and though he was not a fiery speaker like Kellogg or Montezuma, he could communicate issues in a methodically calm but underlyingly forceful manner.

His speech for the 1913 SAI conference in Denver, "The American Indian of Today," provides a cogent example. Speaking to an auditorium of white, male university students, Coolidge clearly tailors his rhetoric to create a sense of shared history framed in instances of cooperation rather than conflict. Encouraging his listeners to be more receptive to counter-perspectives, he provides a key anecdote. At a Fourth of July celebration in Wyoming, he hears another man named Coolidge give a patriotic speech—the Coolidge name being descended from John

Coolidge, one of the original Pilgrim settlers. After the event Sherman Coolidge approaches the visiting Coolidge and some of his friends. One among them wonders why the two men share the same name. The visitor, a tad ruffled, answers, "Why, it is all right. We have the same name. That is not strange. But . . . of course, I'm a real Coolidge; my ancestors came over in the Mayflower." "Yes," his Arapaho counterpart quips, "but mine were on the reception committee when they arrived." Coolidge builds on this gentle yet effective assertion of primacy by discussing how Indians and whites have cooperated over the past centuries. Indians aided the United States' creation by fighting in the Revolutionary War and have served in the military ever since in various capacities. Even now, Coolidge insists, the Indian will "shoulder the musket for the service of his country [and] loyally offer his life upon the altar of the Constitution" if called to duty. Regrettably this dedication has not been reciprocated. Whites had to change their policies and attitudes toward Native people and accept the fact that they are all "banded together . . . for the honor of the race and for the good of the country"—a goal to which "everything must be subservient."[62]

Cooperation between Natives and whites became a central message of Coolidge's in putting forth SAI policy. In "The Function of the Society of American Indians," from 1914, he lays out the organization's "progressive" goals—such as gaining citizenship and legal recognition—and discusses the need to work "in harmony" with the United States government, which holds hundreds of millions of dollars of Indian properties in trust. It is the "mutual supreme duty" of both the Indian bureau and the SAI to ensure that these monies and resources on reservations benefit residents and do not end up in the hands of capitalistic private interests. As well, the SAI should act as a watchdog over the millions appropriated by congress for Indian education and determine whether they produce "a proportionate good." In seeking these ends, Native peoples have to reckon with the fact that the precontact past cannot be resurrected. Yet simultaneously they must acknowledge that present circumstances offer an opportunity to "plan a new day for the Indian American." This "new day" does not suggest the relinquishing of Native identities; a paramount aim is "the revival of the natural pride of origin, the pride of race," and the necessity to respect the desire of Indians to remain Indians. As such the SAI must ensure that the government reform Indian education so it is no longer "decultural" (based

on the elimination of Native languages and cultures) but "constructive." Advocating this anti-ethnocidal change was another distinct shift from Coolidge's strict assimilationism of the late 1800s—and can be seen as the kind of evolution in thinking that informed the later 1934 Indian Reorganization Act. To Coolidge government education had once been a means to remake Indians; now he viewed it as a way to prepare the young for inclusion in mainstream society while keeping Indian identities and traditions intact. Natives, he writes, should not be blamed for rejecting the idea that "the white man is the ultimate model of the best citizenship or of noblest manhood." This final point indicates a vision of what we could call a pluralistic America that respects the differences among the many that make one.[63]

The publication of "The Function of the Society of American Indians" coincided with the SAI's 1914 annual meeting in Madison, Wisconsin. Unfortunately the gathering laid bare the fact that overtures by the SAI to the government had mostly failed since the organization's founding. Efforts to promote passage of the Carter Code bill, meant to define Indians' legal status, and the Stephens bill, meant to open an Indian court of claims for treaty redress, had utterly failed.[64] Coolidge's wish to work "in harmony" with the bureau and larger government had therefore been one-sided. This lack of progress caused a frustration that erupted at the 1915 annual conference in Lawrence, Kansas, where Carlos Montezuma, in his famous speech "Let My People Go," called for the immediate liquidation of the Indian bureau, whose "slimy clutches of horrid greed" had virtually enslaved Native peoples under wardship.[65] The radical idea of bureau abolition caught on with several members, such as Philip Gordon, establishing an antibureau faction that Coolidge and Parker viewed as dangerous to relations with Washington.[66] As Parker explained to Coolidge in a letter, a well-connected friend had mentioned that the Indian bureau was displeased with the criticisms of some SAI members like the Omaha attorney Thomas Sloan, who supported the growing Peyote Religion. The friend warned that "if the present management of the Society was destroyed it was: 'Good Bye to the power of the SAI.'"[67]

This budding conflict came to a head at the 1916 SAI conference in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. In his "Opening Address" Coolidge pleaded with those assembled to shun "destructive criticism, muck-raking or abolishing" and "co-operate in all movements tending to the uplift of the

race"—to no effect.[68] The conference quickly devolved into a tense discussion initiated by Montezuma's declaration that "Indian employees in the service of the Indian Bureau could not be loyal to the Indian race." Though Coolidge was a consistent critic of the bureau, he knew that without its support the SAI would be cut off from the corridors of power. Coolidge also understood, like Marie Baldwin and Gertrude Bonnin, that bureau employees, many of them Indians, worked "in favor of the race" under difficult conditions. The debate, which included Baldwin and Bonnin, also saw Philip Gordon controversially insist that no Indian could be employed by the government and be "at the same time loyal to this Society." In response, Baldwin, Bonnin, and Coolidge stressed the contributions made by bureau employees and the need to build up conditions until the bureau could someday be abolished. [69]

The argument concluded with an incident written into SAI lore: Montezuma leaped from his chair, shouting at Coolidge, "I am an Apache . . . and you are an Arapahoe. I can lick you. My tribe has licked your tribe before." Coolidge, a much larger man than Montezuma, nonchalantly replied, "Well, I am from Missouri"—perhaps the quote for which he is best known.[70] Obviously Coolidge was not from Missouri. His retort was an allusion to Missouri's slogan, the "Show-Me" state—as if to say to Montezuma, "Let's see you try and lick me." The joke defused the tension, but the fact remained that Coolidge's conciliatory stance on the Indian bureau had lost support among crucial members. Apparently realizing that his time had passed and that the SAI had gone, in his mind, astray, he abdicated his presidency.[71] A month later Montezuma wrote in his journal *Wassaja*: "Ex-President Coolidge of the Society of American Indians says that he can be loyal to the Indian race and at the same time serve the Indian Bureau. *Wassaja* wonders if he serves God and the Devil in the same way."[72] True to his creed of presenting a harmonious, unified front, Coolidge did not retaliate publicly.

The tussle between Coolidge and Montezuma naturally paled in comparison to the Great War then raging in Europe. When the United States joined the conflict in April 1917, a new controversy within the SAI erupted. Soon after the imposition of a national draft, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Cato Sells began an aggressive recruitment drive on reservations. Few in the SAI questioned US intervention or the idea that Indians should serve. The issue in question instead revolved around the Board of Indian Commissioners' recommendation that Native peo-

ples serve in segregated units.[73] While some, like Parker and Bonnin, vociferously opposed the policy (which was ultimately abandoned by the War Department), Coolidge reacted differently.[74] During his time at Wind River, he had advocated for the incorporation of Indian men into the US military in the *Colorado Magazine*. At the 1913 SAI conference in Denver, he had told a group of male university students that were war to occur, any Indian would "loyally offer his life upon the altar of the Constitution."[75] Now faced with this reality Coolidge came out in favor of what he called a "Noble Red Man Regiment." In an interview on the subject, he even lapsed into his stereotypical characterizations from the 1800s, stating that Indians are "naturally warriors" and that "a volunteer regiment of Indian braves [would] add glory to our history."[76] He may have later regretted these statements, as well as Indian participation in the First World War more generally.

In the years following the armistice of 1918, Coolidge (as well as millions of other Americans) slowly began to realize how the immense loss of life had not remade the world or improved society domestically, resulting in a wave of isolationism.[77] Casualties had been greatest among Native American communities, whose soldiers suffered a five percent mortality rate—compared to one percent for the entirety of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF). Coolidge must have been somewhat aware of this fact, just as he must have been frustrated that two Indian citizenship bills introduced during the war failed to pass through Congress. This frustration no doubt turned into disillusionment in the early 1920s, when no legislative action on Indian citizenship was taken—even for veterans. Only six years after the war, in 1924, did President Calvin Coolidge finally sign the Indian Citizenship Act (ICA) into law—spurred, in part, by Native participation in the AEF.[78] By then, however, the Great War had clearly become a turning point for Coolidge, commencing a sparse third period made up of two short but highly significant statements.

In his only surviving sermon, "Ye Cannot Serve God and Mammon," Coolidge condemns white society for its contradicting of Christian morality, expressing strongest revulsion for how the "proudest militaristic nations in the world took a pacifist Jewish peasant for their guide and easily reconciled His teachings with bombs, poison gas, secret treaties, and all the lies of official propaganda." And the flaws of Euro-American society run even deeper than this infamous lapse into

all-consuming warfare. Citing the maxim "there is no compromise between the love for God and love for riches," Coolidge declares that "materialistic" America loves only the latter in its "Europeanized method of life," based on a "cut throat principle." The consequence is "cruel strife among men with its intendant greed"—greed so great that white men "steal and rob and murder" for financial gain. In a crucial comparison Coolidge writes that while the "Red Man" might have killed "from anger, for revenge, in battle," he never killed for riches, and in a sense, he has suffered for his lack of avarice. Not understanding materialism—or being "stingy like the white man"—makes it unnatural for him to live in capitalist society. Native peoples instead exhibit an inherent communal generosity that flows from the centrality of religion to existence. "The Indian *lived* his religion," Coolidge explains, "He believed that religion is *vital* and must have an *immediate application*" [emphasis in original].[79]

In 1927 Coolidge iterated this defining difference between Indians and whites in a public forum at the Colorado Springs' courthouse, recorded in the *Colorado Springs Gazette*. His speech, occurring three years after the 1924 ICA had become law, demonstrates that he still felt that not enough was being done to ameliorate the situation of Native peoples at the federal and societal levels. Here Coolidge denounces how "most of the American people" give no serious consideration to either religion or the original inhabitants of the continent, "for they are so engrossed, in material things." Yet, ironically, Indians—"peace-loving, hospitable, generous and deeply religious"—are called "Red Devils." Coolidge, for the first time on record, even defends the Sun Dance as "a deeply religious observance," rather than the pagan worship thought by whites, the Indian bureau, and, formerly, himself. Further proof of such religiosity rests in how Indigenous languages contain no profanity, meaning their speakers never take "the name of God in vain." And finally, Coolidge notes that despite the heroic efforts of Native peoples in the Great War, the United States government still exerts undue control over their lives, unjustly holding fast to "millions of dollars belonging to the Indians" that could be used for the meaningful expansion of education.[80]

The dominant theme of Coolidge's third period, then, is the contrast between the spiritual bankruptcy and individualistic materialism of Euro-Americans and the devout and communal nature of Indians. Having reversed aspects of his missionary creed, he was now defending

the very Indigenous traditions that he had earlier sought to eradicate and holding up Native values as a model for white society. As such, the overarching point of Coolidge's intellectual evolution is that after having spent his early life arguing that Indians, "the weaker race of the inferior language, life, and religion," must learn from whites, he ultimately felt that Indians in some crucial instances exhibited superior values and had fundamental lessons to teach Euro-American society.[81] Still, there are some caveats. It is important to note that Coolidge remained an Episcopal priest. In "Ye Cannot Serve God and Mammon" he speaks of using the "good and natural foundation" of Indian morality to convert them.[82] But even if he had not given up the idea that Christianity was paramount among religions, he had softened his early ethnocentric stances on strict assimilation and the degradation of Indian cultures almost beyond recognition; and though such contradictions appear in his statements, Coolidge's middle and final periods consistently argue that the United States should take steps toward creating an improved, pluralistic civilization better aware of its Native peoples' legitimate traditions and rejecting ruinous commercialism and individualism.

Sherman Coolidge died in January 1932 and therefore did not live to see the passage of the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act. Judging from his statements post-1911, one assumes that he would have approved of the return of the two million acres of land to reservations, the new loan schemes, the protection of cultural and religious practices, and the revamping of Indian education. Perhaps the IRA would have represented to him the final product of his and other reformers' efforts on behalf of Native rights in the 1910s. They had, of course, begun a very important and long-lasting discussion that highlighted the necessity of serious policy changes. Whatever the case, a full survey of Coolidge's life and work reveals that despite decades of acculturation into white society, he—much like his more celebrated SAI colleagues—ended his life a critic of Euro-American society and a defender of his own Native heritage.

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NOTES

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